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# Haskalah and Esotericism

## *The Strange Case of Elyakim Getzel Hamilzahgi (1780–1854)*

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### Abstract

The Haskalah, or “Jewish Enlightenment,” is often considered to be a secularizing trend within modern European Judaism. Yet as recent studies have begun to show, this characterization ignores the Romantic and religious attitudes of many Haskalah authors (maskilim). This article reassesses the Haskalah’s relationship to esotericism and Kabbalah by analyzing the life and work of Elyakim Getzel Hamilzahgi (1780–1854), a Galician maskil with a deep commitment to Kabbalistic study. Hamilzahgi’s pioneering textual criticism of Kabbalistic texts, particularly the *Zohar*, countered the attitudes of Western European scholars and Eastern European Hasidim alike. His scholarship aimed to purify Kabbalah from corruption and to render it a source for a renewal of Jewish religious culture.

### Keywords

Jewish Mysticism – Kabbalah – Haskalah – Enlightenment – esotericism – Eastern Europe

The views of proponents of the Haskalah (the so-called “Jewish enlightenment”) regarding various esoteric phenomena, in particular Kabbalah, still require a thorough examination.<sup>1</sup> Although there has been significant growth

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<sup>1</sup> The Haskalah refers both to the Jewish Enlightenment in Berlin which centered around Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786), as well as later forms of the movement in Eastern Europe. Known as maskilim (adj. maskilic), these intellectuals advocated for educational and religious reforms in the Jewish community, although most, at least in Eastern Europe, still adhered to traditional Jewish law. For recent debates over the relationship between Haskalah

in academic scholarship regarding Kabbalah in recent years, widening the historical scope of the field considerably, maskilic attitudes to Jewish mysticism have been largely neglected. Likewise, few scholars of the Haskalah discuss this topic in any detail. Still, the tendency to portray the Haskalah as the Jewish equivalent of the European Enlightenment or as an exemplar of secularism—and thus opposed in principle to all esoteric phenomena—appears to be changing. According to previous studies (for the most part focusing on maskilic attitudes towards Hasidism), maskilic literature had little positive to say on the subject of esotericism. In the eyes of the maskilic intelligentsia, so scholars claimed, esotericism was a demonic creature, an expression of religious illusions which ought to be obliterated from a world progressing towards enlightenment.<sup>2</sup> Although this was indeed a prominent opinion shared by many maskilim, a more thorough reading of maskilic literature, in particular texts originating in Eastern Europe, reveals a decidedly different picture or, at the very least, one that is far more multifaceted. Even if we accept that the Haskalah was a Jewish version of the European Enlightenment—an assumption which is highly questionable—studies published in recent years have completely re-painted the portrait of the relationship between the European Enlightenment and esotericism.<sup>3</sup> These new findings have significant ramifications for the study of the nineteenth-century Jewish Haskalah. Yet this is not all: scholars must approach the Jewish Haskalah not only as a continuation of pre-existing European trends but with a new outlook and within a fresh context. An examination of the Jewish Haskalah from a new perspective and, in particular, within the context of, or as a reaction to, phenomena closer to it than the European Enlightenment—for example European Romanticism—is likely to yield new and fascinating insights. However it is not sufficient merely to locate the Jewish Haskalah within the context of contemporary European movements. Rather, the maskilic literary corpus requires review and those texts which have yet to be sufficiently studied must be explored. These lines of enquiry have a number of significant implications for our understanding of the maskilic attitude toward esotericism in general and Kabbalistic litera-

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and Enlightenment on the one hand, and European Romanticism on the other, see Olga Litvak's *Haskalah: The Romantic Movement in Judaism*, and Bartal, 'Review', 396–398.

- 2 The following broad surveys offer a description of the Haskalah's negative attitude to esotericism, and the Hasidic movement in particular: Werses, *Joseph Perl*, 9–29; idem, 'Magic and Demonology', 353–384; Etkes, 'Magic and Miracle-Workers', 113–127; Meir, *Imagined Hasidism*.
- 3 See, for example, the following collections of articles: *Aufklärung und Esoterik* (2008); *Aufklärung und Esoterik* (2013); and the critical notes in Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 411–425; idem, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 218–222.

ture in particular. For example, an examination of Kabbalistic writings alone is not sufficient in order to understand the circulation of the various forms of Kabbalah in Eastern Europe. Rather, much relevant and informative material is also to be found buried in the skewed and romantic approaches to the topic in maskilic works. Maskilic texts alternately offered hostile depictions of Kabbalah, exhibited romantic yearnings for hidden truth, reflected the first buds of philological-historical research, or combined these approaches. Other maskilic texts applied a range of methods in an attempt to integrate Haskalah with Kabbalah or a range of esoteric phenomena: such works did not only offer a one-sided, antagonistic perspective. A notable number of maskilim attempted to mold the Kabbalah in the new spirit of the age or sought to understand it in light of the latest scientific and cultural movements. The complex picture of maskilic attitudes towards esotericism arising from a re-examination of the maskilic literary corpus requires a separate monograph. This article focuses on one specific case: that of Elyakim Getzel Hamilzahgi from Galicia, whose works presented a broader and somewhat surprising characterization of Kabbalistic texts and their meaning, and who forwarded an exceptional program: the integration of Haskalah and Kabbalah in the spirit of philology.

### Two Central Trends

Galician maskilim took great interest in Kabbalah, some as stark opponents to it and others as innovative interpreters of Kabbalistic literature. Their evaluation must be distinguished from that of 18th-century Berlin maskilim of Eastern European origin who interpreted Jewish esotericism along modern philosophical and scientific lines, such as Salomon Maimon and Isaac Satanow.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the approaches of the later generation of maskilim toward Kabbalah were very different than those of their predecessors. It is possible to detect two major trends among the Eastern European maskilim at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century. One of these was espoused by Menachem Mendel Lefin, who viewed Kabbalah as alien to Judaism and argued that it should be eliminated from Jewish literature; likewise all those that adhere to it should be obliterated from the Jewish people.<sup>5</sup> Joseph Perl embraced this approach with great vigor, giving it even more radical expressions in his German work *Über*

4 See, among others, Kilcher, *Die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala als ästhetisches Paradigma*, 195–327; Schulte, 'Haskala und Kabbala', 335–354; idem, *Die jüdische Aufklärung*, 119–137; Idel, *Hasidism*, 37–41; Horwitz, *Yahadut Rabat Panim*, 11–40.

5 Gelber, 'Mendel Lefin', 271–308; Sinkoff, *Out of the Shtetl*.

*das Wesen der Sekte Chassidim* (On the Essence of the Hasidic Sect; 1816) and his Hebrew satires *Sefer Megale Temirin* (The Revealer of Secrets; 1819) and *Sefer Bochen Tzadik* (The Test of the Righteous; 1838);<sup>6</sup> as did Judah Leib Meises in his polemic *Kinat haEmet* (The Zeal for Truth; 1826).<sup>7</sup> The second trend, no less widespread, was advocated by Nachman Krochmal, who described Kabbalah in his greatest work *More Nevuchei haZeman* (Guide for the Perplexed of the Time; 1851) as “mysterious wisdom”, “the ancient wisdom of Israel” or as a philosophy damaged by its most recent proponents, “who began with sense but ended up using fiction alone”.<sup>8</sup> Krochmal’s approach was adopted by Isaac Ber Levinsohn, who developed it in a most detailed manner in a number of his works, although without Krochmal’s philosophical depth, and by other maskilim in Eastern Europe throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Among them a number attempted to propose an extremely complex synthesis of Haskalah and Kabbalah: for the most part these were simply efforts to return the “pure” Kabbalah to the bosom of philosophy. There were a number of well-known polemics among these maskilim concerning the essence of Kabbalah: first and foremost was the argument surrounding the authorship of the medieval kabbalistic classic, the *Zohar*, which led to the first printing of *Ari Nohem* (The Lion’s Roar) by Leon Modena on the basis of the author’s manuscript (1840).<sup>10</sup> There was even one maskil, Moses Kunitz, who fervently argued for the authenticity of the Kabbalah and the early composition of the *Zohar*.<sup>11</sup> This intensive activity surrounding the subject deeply affected the subsequent study of Kabbalah. It appears that those Western European scholars who later examined Kabbalistic literature, and who are considered by many to be the “pioneers” of Kabbalistic scholarship, drew in no small part on this earlier Eastern European discourse.

### The Strange Case of Hamilzahgi

This sets the scene for the entry of Elyakim Getzel Hamilzahgi. Hamilzahgi (1780–1854), an exceptional figure with a complex relationship with Kabbalah,

6 Perl, *Über das Wesen der Sekte Chassidim*. See Meir, *Imagined Hasidism*.

7 Meises, *Kinat haEmet*; idem, ‘Letter’, 124–134. See Friedlander, ‘Hasidism as the Image of Demonism’, 159–177.

8 Lachover, *On the Border*, 86–185, 211–263; Biale, ‘The Kabbalah’, 85–97.

9 For a more detailed discussion see Meir, ‘Appropriating Authenticity’.

10 Dweck, *The Scandal of Kabbalah*, 203–230; Huss, *Like the Radiance of the Sky*, 345–347.

11 Regarding the Kunitz episode see Fahn, *Selected Writings*, 70–99; Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. 1, 50, 83, 86; Werses, *Haskalah and Sabbatianism*, 95–96, 115–116.

lived for most of his life in Brody and Lvov, Galicia.<sup>12</sup> He was closely associated with maskilic circles, although his views on the essence of the Haskalah differed quite significantly from those held by many of his peers; indeed some perceived Hamilzahgi as a conservative. We know with certainty that his father was a rabbi, and that he was related to the established rabbinic scholars Ephraim Zalman Margaliot and Jacob of Lissa. He studied with contemporary Galician rabbis, among them Israel Harif, the head of the Rabbinical court in Satanow.<sup>13</sup> His attempts to carve out a path which combined scholarly inquiry, Kabbalah and various scientific disciplines evidently drew on internal developments within the Galician rabbinical world and was not only a result of his encounter with the Berlin Haskalah. He made use of the collections of books available to him and appears to have travelled to Vienna, Warsaw and other cities, where he exerted great efforts in his searches for rare books. In his youth he visited the library of Prince Adam Czartoryski.<sup>14</sup> He read scientific and philosophical texts in German and Polish, and extracts from such works are scattered throughout his own compositions, in particular in connection to the relationship between science and Kabbalah. According to his own testimony, he took a great interest in medical and surgical procedures, and on one occasion even watched doctors in Lvov perform an operation on internal organs in order to improve his understanding of the descriptions of the human body provided by kabbalists.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, it is not clear to what extent he was familiar with the writings of contemporary Christian mystics or occultists, even if his views were relatively similar to theirs.

Hamilzahgi had great difficulty in earning a living and was forced to work relentlessly, yet in spite of this he seems to have spent great sums of money in his quest to obtain the rare books needed for his multifaceted research.<sup>16</sup> At some stage it appears that he lived respectably as the rabbi of a small town, yet for unknown reasons he soon fell from grace and Galician Jews began to refer to him as “The Rabbi from Samila”, alluding to his place of birth and his former

12 For an initial survey of Hamilzahgi see Kressel, ‘Hamilzahgi’, 87–94; idem, ‘The Critic’, 3–4; idem, *Encyclopedia of Modern Hebrew Literature*, vol. 2, 349; Ya’ari, ‘More on Hamilzahgi’, 18; Zinberg, *History*, vol. 6, 61–63–344–345; Gelber, *History*, 202–203; Wunder, *Meorei Galicia*, vol. 3, 833–834.

13 These biographical details are scattered throughout his works. See, for example, Hamilzahgi, *Zoharei Rabiah* (MS), Introduction, 2, 72b; idem, *Rabiah*, 2, 17b; idem, *Notes* (MS), 95a.

14 Hamilzahgi, *Zoharei Rabiah* (MS), 23b.

15 Ibid., 63b–64a.

16 Ibid., 5a; Hamilzahgi, *Raziel* (MS), 1; idem, *Rabiah*, 29a.

rabbinical position.<sup>17</sup> At any rate, he clearly felt a close association with Galician rabbinical circles and groups of maskilim or reformers alike. He served as a teacher and merchant in Brody and Lvov for lengthy periods. By the end of his life, according to one late description provided by a Galician writer, his external appearance gave the impression of a pauper or even an alcoholic.<sup>18</sup>

### *Sefer Rabiah* and Hamilzahgi's Critique of Leopold Zunz (1794–1886)

Hamilzahgi wrote close to 72 books, although the only one of these which is relatively well known is *Sefer Rabiah* (the title is composed of the first letter of each word in Hamilzahgi's full Hebrew name), most of which was published in 1834, and which was completely printed by 1837.<sup>19</sup> The subtitle of the book describes its contents as "Critiques concerning the book by the wise, knowledgeable and famous Rabbi, our Rabbi and teacher Lipman [Leopold] Zunz from Berlin, and regarding the wise, sharp Rabbi, the famous critic, our Rabbi and teacher Solomon Judah Leib Hacoheh Rapoport from Lvov".<sup>20</sup>

17 Goldenberg, *Ohel Yosef*, 14; Levinsohn, *Shorshei Levanon*, 285; Natahson, *Sefer haZichronot*, 40; Gottlober, *The History of Kabbalah and Hasidism*, 85.

18 Landau, 'Brodyer Jugenderinnerungen', 595; Sadan, *Memoirs*, 65–66.

19 The work was printed with the financial support of the maskil and merchant Issachar Berish Blumenfeld of Brody, who added a short foreword to the book. Not all copies of this book are identical: differences between the versions can be discerned in the text of the title page, in those sections relating to Rapoport, which were added by the writer and inserted into the book at a later stage, and in further short additions to the last page. Regarding the first stage of the printing see Castiglioni, *Igrot leShadal*, 47. The censor's approval (Joam Carol Kohlmann) dates from 1837. Yet Hamilzahgi added to it later and the book was only circulated at the end of 1838. Only from this year onwards did he receive angry responses from Solomon Judah Rapoport, Samuel David Luzzatto and others. See Levinsohn, *Izrael*, 120. Notices of the book's publication began to appear only in 1840 in German-Jewish journals, for example *Israelitische Annalen* 24, no. 4 (1840), 40.

20 Regarding some of the typographical changes see Roest, *Catalog der Hebraica und Judaica*, 353; Wachstein, 'Die Ofener Hebräischen Drucke', 156; Kressel, 'Hamilzahgi', 87–89. A copy of the book with two cover pages may be found in the library at Princeton University. One of these dates from 1834 and only mentions Zunz in the title, while the second dates from 1837 and refers to both Zunz and Rapoport; I am in possession of a copy with two cover pages both dated to 1837. Yet while one only includes Zunz's name, the other also adds that of Rapoport. Thus it appears that Hamilzahgi printed at least three different cover pages for his work over the years.

*Sefer Rabiah* is a fascinating text which launches a strident attack on one of the foundational works of the academic study of Judaism, Zunz's well-known work on Jewish liturgy and homiletics, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden: historisch entwickelt* (The Sermons of the Jews: Historical Development; 1832) and also lambasts Rapoport's studies, upon which Zunz's work was based. *Sefer Rabiah* includes more than 220 critical comments on the texts by Zunz and Rapoport. According to the eminent 19th-century Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz, Hamilzahgi's work contained lofty ideas alongside the ravings of a madman.<sup>21</sup> We will return to these so-called ravings, i.e. his discussions of Kabbalah, later. Subsequent scholars have accepted that many of Hamilzahgi's criticisms offered a significant contribution to Jewish studies and changed the face of modern Jewish scholarship.<sup>22</sup> He called attention to dozens, even hundreds, of errors in Zunz's remarks and his understanding of rabbinical literature, and highlighted his lack of knowledge and his mistakes in the identification of rabbinic texts and manuscripts. Hamilzahgi likewise claimed that Zunz ignored many books, quoted from others without referencing them, that at times he had allowed others to do his work for him and that he erred in philological and historical matters.<sup>23</sup> *Sefer Rabiah* is rather disorderly, as is characteristic of the scholarly writing among Galician maskilim, and its significance lies not only in the criticisms of Zunz therein, but in the writer's impressive command of Jewish literature and his attempt to present an alternative to Zunz's path.

Hamilzahgi devoted particular attention in *Sefer Rabiah* to the liturgical poems (*piyutim*) by the liturgical poet Eleazar Hakalir (Ben Killir) and the use of *gematriya* (pl. *gematriyot*) to identify the authors of a number of anonymous liturgical poems (all of which total 1164: the sum of the letters in Hakalir's name according to the numerical values of the letters in the system of *gematria*) by Rapoport and, in his wake, Zunz and Moses Landau.<sup>24</sup> He quoted Zunz and Rapoport at length, rejected their claims one after the other and concluding that "the logic of both was badly damaged" in "their ravenous hunger for *gematriyot*".<sup>25</sup> The power of imagination led them to deal with these mat-

21 Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, vol. 9, note 9, lxxi.

22 Rabinowitz, *Zunz*, 108; Berliner, *Names of Hebrew Books*, 8.

23 Hamilzahgi, *Rabiah*, 2b–3a, 4a–b, 10a, 12a.

24 Rapoport, 'HaKalir', 95–123; idem, 'Additions', 93–94. Moses Landau's comments on the topic appear in the prayer book for Rosh Hashanah which he printed in Prague (in particular in the liturgical poem entitled "Ansicha").

25 Hamilzahgi, *Rabiah*, 15b–17b.

ters, which are nothing but “idle prattle”.<sup>26</sup> These sections are more than simple “critiques” and Hamilzahgi evidently sought to mock Rapoport’s predilection for *gematriyot*. Following the printing of *Sefer Rabiah* the author added a number of further pages in order to demonstrate that *gematriyot* are completely coincidental, and were previously relied upon both by those fools who had gone astray and those heretics who deliberately misled the former; he cited Sabbateans as an example of the latter.<sup>27</sup> In the same way that the figure 1164 may allude to Hakalir’s name in *gematria*, this same number can refer to dozens of other things and a number of other poets, including even the names of Rapoport, Zunz and Landau (the total of “I am Eliezer son of Rabbi Jacob Kalir” in *gematria* is equal to “I am Solomon Judah Leib haCohen Rapoport” as well as “I am Lipman Doctor Zunz of Berlin” or “The Small Moses Halevy Landau the Printer from Prague”, all of which amount to the number 1164).<sup>28</sup>

There are a number of surveys regarding the polemics over the *gematria* but, for the most part, they completely ignore other aspects of *Sefer Rabiah*.<sup>29</sup> Although Hamilzahgi’s discussion of this topic is worded rather sharply, it accounts for less than one third of the book. The remainder of the work contains Hamilzahgi’s views on Kabbalistic literature, which will be discussed below. In addition to critiques of *gematriyot*, *Sefer Rabiah* attempts to offer an alternative to the ideological program which Zunz presented in the introduction and last chapter of his book—to the Germano-centric picture of the enlightenment and reform. Hamilzahgi sought to demonstrate that the power of the Eastern European scholars was no less than that of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in the West, and that in fact they presented a more faithful picture of Jewish literature, history and the development of religious sects.

At the same time, Hamilzahgi’s book was an example of the polemical literature attacking Rapoport which was penned by various maskilim (among them the so-called “*Roim*”—Nachman Isaac haCohen Fishman, Menachem Mendel Maher, Jacob Bodek and Jacob Mentsh). These authors sought not only to

26 Ibid., 16b, 17b.

27 Ibid., 17b–21b. Following this page the pagination begins anew from 19a. Hamilzahgi added four more pages after the printing and the pagination was thus confused, creating a situation in which there are two pages bearing the same number.

28 Ibid., 19b. In this spirit he added similar words at the end of the book, see 32b.

29 For example, Levinsohn, *Shorshei Levanon*, 285; Jost, *Culturgeschichte der Israeliten*, 111; Goldenthal, ‘Die neueste historische Schule’, 316–218; Landshut, *Amudei haAvoda*, 28–30; Steinschneider, *Hebräische Bibliographie*, 66–67; Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, vol. 3, 102, 282; Klausner, *History*, vol. 2, 244–246.



endanger Rapoport's chances of being appointed as the rabbi of any major city (at first Tarnopol and later Prague) but also to prove that his command of Jewish knowledge was mediocre at best.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, Zunz extolled Rapoport with hyperbolic praise at the beginning of his book, and quoted him at length throughout its pages. When Hamilzahgi pointed out the frequent mistakes in these quotations from Rapoport, he was intervening in a pitched battle between scholars who straddled the Galician rabbinate, the Haskalah and *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. This debate among Jewish scholars traversed the boundaries of East and West. As we shall see, *Sefer Rabiah* placed Kabbalistic literature at the center of a proposal for a rabbinic-maskilic alternative to the various intellectual circles of Galicia and Germany alike.

Hamilzahgi sent a manuscript of one version of his work to Zunz and Rapoport as early as 1834, together with threatening letters calling upon them both to publicly acknowledge the mistakes in their works. He received no noteworthy reply from either of them.<sup>31</sup> However, once the book was published they were forced to respond. When the printed work reached Zunz in 1839, he immediately changed his mind concerning some of his suppositions; more precisely, he made hand-written notes in the margins of his book which were later integrated into the second edition of *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden*.<sup>32</sup> In a letter written in the same year, Zunz wrote that he regretted the entire matter and that he had "lost faith in the *gematriyot*".<sup>33</sup> In contrast, Rapoport responded with a complete dismissal and emphasized that his view had not changed: in fact his belief in the use of *gematriyot* had grown stronger. When a printed copy of *Sefer Rabiah* reached him, Rapoport wrote an impassioned letter to Solomon Rosenthal stating that the work is "full of lies".<sup>34</sup> Rapoport quickly proceeded to fill a volume of the journal *Kerem Chemed* with seven long letters

30 On polemics regarding Rapoport at this time see, for example, Barzilay, *Shlomo Yehuda Rapoport*, 85–92.

31 Hamilzahgi, 'Letters to Zunz' (MS). See also idem, *Rabiah*, 1b, 18b–19a; Rapoport, 'Letter 8', 106.

32 Regarding the fact that the book only reached him in 1839 see Goldenberg, 'Letter to Zunz' (Manuscript). On changes in the second edition, which was printed in 1896 by Nehemia Brüll, see Ulmer, 'Introduction', xxi, xxvi–xxvii. The book was translated into Hebrew, under the name *Kneset Yisrael*, by David Karo and was ready in 1837, following Zunz's corrections. See Fürst, *Bibliotheca judaica*, vol. 3, 556. Zunz made hundreds of notes in the margins of his copy. This copy, along with another containing notes by Solomon Buber, was kept: Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen* (MS).

33 Zunz, 'Letter', 8. See also Graber, *Igrot Shadal*, vol. 4, 569, 602; Berliner, 'Aus dem Briefwechsel', 59; Hamilzahgi, *Raziel* (MS), 37.

34 Rapoport, 'Letter 3', 26, 37; Bichler, *Shay laMoreh*, 31.

which included harsh polemics directed at all those attacking him at that time; one letter was devoted to Hamilzahgi.<sup>35</sup> Rapoport claimed that Hamilzahgi—and in his footsteps the “*Roim*”—had besmirched his name among the Jewish people. He described Hamilzahgi as “inciting fights”, as “a fraud”, as one who “dresses up in the clothes of piety, wraps himself in a rabbi’s robe and a prayer shawl woven entirely from devoutness in order to excoriate the wise man Zunz” and as one who employs criticism in his quest to become a famed scholar.<sup>36</sup> In Rapoport’s words, Hamilzahgi was nothing more than a swindler “who sits in the corner of his room and laughs at everything—in his hands everything is the work of deception, not wisdom and not truth, because he is not familiar with the latter”. Thus it comes as no surprise that Rapoport viewed *Sefer Rabiah* as a compilation of “dreams, lies and falsities”.<sup>37</sup> Yet at the same time he endeavored to clarify at great length a number of points relating to the critiques and his studies. He emphasized repeatedly that he had no regrets concerning the *gematriyot* and that the words of criticism had even served to reinforce his faith in his initial conjectures.<sup>38</sup> On every page it is evident that Hamilzahgi’s words plunged deep into Rapoport’s heart and rocked the foundations of his studies.

Hamilzahgi’s pointed comments in *Sefer Rabiah* served as an anchor for others who desired to mock Rapoport at various different stages, such as Samuel David Luzzatto, or those who criticized the conservative path Rapoport trod, among them Joshua Heshel Schorr, owner of the journal *heChaluts*, and the founder of Reform Judaism, Abraham Geiger.<sup>39</sup> However, some defended Rapoport’s honor; Isaac Ber Levinsohn wrote a special pamphlet for this very purpose.<sup>40</sup> Without a doubt *Sefer Rabiah* was Hamilzahgi’s most significant printed work and it left a powerful literary legacy.

35 Rapoport, ‘Letters 8–14’, 93–259. Letter 8 (93–112) is for the most part devoted to Hamilzahgi and the remainder of the letters to Elyakim Karmoli, the “*Roim*” and Tsevi Hirsh Hayot. Rapoport sent a draft of the printed letter concerning Hamilzahgi to Zunz: Rapoport, ‘Letters to Zunz’ (MS).

36 Rapoport, ‘Letter 8’, 93, 95, 96.

37 *Ibid.*, 103, 105.

38 *Ibid.*, 107.

39 Graber, *Igrot Shadal*, vol. 4, 549, 602, 618–619; Hamilzahgi, *Raziel* (MS), 33a–35a; Carmoly, ‘Notes’, 384; Papirne, *A New Jug Filled with the Old*, 2–3; Berenfeld, ‘Eliezer Landshut’, 26–27; Schorr, ‘Behind the Screen’, 12; *idem*, ‘Broken Tablets’, 54, 56, 59. On one occasion Hamilzahgi attacked Luzzatto for insulting Maimonides’ honor. See Hamilzahgi, ‘Letter to the *Roim*’ (MS).

40 Levinsohn, *Izrael*, 119–134.

Hamilzahgi referred on numerous occasions to the many books that he had written, even referencing them as though they were readily available. According to his own testimony he penned 72 works, most of which remained in manuscript form. He made a list of these texts and their content in the catalogue volume entitled *Otzar haRabiah*, which unfortunately has not survived, but which is mentioned repeatedly in his writings.<sup>41</sup> Even if in reality the number of books he wrote was considerably smaller, and if some of these compositions were only a few dozen pages in length, it appears that close to ten manuscripts were ready for publication. These included philological, historical and scientific treatises as well as commentaries on the Talmud, midrashim and other books.<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately, only a few of them are in our possession today.

### Hamilzahgi and Kabbalistic Literature

Intense concern with the various branches of Kabbalistic literature is evident in all of the works by Hamilzahgi available to us, both printed books and manuscripts. His comments on Zunz's treatment of Jewish mystical literature in the published edition of *Sefer Rabiah* necessitated a lengthy discussion of Kabbalistic matters and the topic of Kabbalah recurs throughout his extensive works. Hamilzahgi reported that he began to study Kabbalistic literature even though his rabbis were not greatly occupied with it and did not teach it to their students. Thus he noted on one occasion: "I felt that I will be silent, I will refrain from learning the works of the kabbalists, for in the homes of my father, my grandfather and my uncle the rabbis of the holy community of Lubartow (close to Berdichev) and in the home of my teachers, the rabbis of the generation, I did not see that they held lessons in the wisdom of the Kabbalah or that they would speak of it with their students". When a copy of the Cremona edition of the *Zohar* came into his possession and he noticed the differences between this copy and the Mantua edition, he was roused to study Kabbalistic texts, even though his rabbis mocked him for this strange occupation.<sup>43</sup> But by then he was already driven to study Kabbalistic literature and to produce annotated and refined editions of these texts. He soon began to systematically read every Kabbalistic text that came into his possession and expended

41 Hamilzahgi, *Zoharei Rabiah* (MS), 2a, 3a.

42 Kressel attempted to recreate the list of Hamilzahgi's works, see Kressel, 'Hamilzahgi', 91–94. On missing manuscripts see Berliner, *Aus dem Schriftlichen*, vi; Deutsch, 'Samiler', 684; Holdheim, 'Schwerin', 697–698.

43 Hamilzahgi, *Zoharei Rabiah* (MS), introduction, 2a.

great efforts in obtaining the manuscripts of others. Many of these he located in the private libraries of Galician rabbis but he was not satisfied with what they offered him. He attempted to persuade wealthy Galicians Jews—without much success—to purchase collections of Hebrew manuscripts hidden away across Europe, so as to concentrate them in one library.<sup>44</sup> Hamilzahgi relates that he conducted an extensive study of the manuscripts by *Hassidei Ashkenaz* (the medieval German Pietists); purchased manuscripts by the Spanish mystic Abraham Abulafia (1240–c. 1290); perused dozens of manuscripts relating to the Lurianic Kabbalah; saw more than 20 Kabbalistic *Ilanot* (Kabbalistic divinity maps); and pored over 300 manuscripts previously owned by Isaac Samuel Reggio of Gorizia (YaShaR) which were in the possession of Joshua Heshel Schorr, among them many Kabbalistic texts.<sup>45</sup> He even made a hobby of deciphering amulets, as is evident from a number of remarks in his compositions.<sup>46</sup> He did not keep his knowledge to himself; he helped others to identify manuscripts which came into their possession, and even taught Kabbalah to a number of students. Thus, for example, he wrote that he gave general instruction in Kabbalah, and regarding the *Zohar* in particular, to Betzael Stern (a student of the prominent maskil Joseph Perl who later served as the principal of the modern Jewish school in Odessa).<sup>47</sup> However these philological and pedagogical pursuits were not the full extent of his accomplishments; quite exceptionally, he charted a unique Kabbalistic path for himself.

### Kabbalistic Matters in *Sefer Rabiah*

In the printed version of *Sefer Rabiah*, Hamilzahgi devoted lengthy passages to the printing history of the *Zohar* and the work's literary structure.<sup>48</sup> These sections were a response to Zunz's detached remarks concerning Kabbalah throughout *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden*.<sup>49</sup> Zunz claimed that this literature appeared rather late in Jewish history—in his opinion the *Zohar* was

44 Hamilzahgi, *Raziel* (MS). Regarding similar activities in the same period see Meir, 'The Origins', 33–45.

45 Hamilzahgi, *Raziel* (MS), 2; idem, *Zoharei Rabiah* (MS), 6a, 62a. He sent the list of manuscripts to Rapoport and Zunz. See Reggio, 'List' (MS).

46 Hamilzahgi, *Raziel* (MS), 8, 17–19, 28–30.

47 Ibid., 35. Later in life Stern sharply attacked Kabbalah and Hasidism, see Wodziński, *Haskalah and Hasidism*, 86–94, 260–263.

48 Hamilzahgi, *Rabiah*, 3b–4a, 19b–21b, 26b–29b, 30b–32b.

49 See especially Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden*, 402–409. Julius Fürst pub-

composed at the beginning of the 14th century. Zunz even added a handwritten comment in the margins of the book stating that “evidence [for the late date of the *Zohar*] is to be found in *Mitpachat Sefarim* [The Book Shroud, by Jacob Emden], *Bechinat haDat* [The Examination of Religion, by Elijah Delmedigo], the manuscript of *Ari Nohem* [by Leon Modena], Reggio (at the end of *Bechinat haDat* and the manuscript of *Ari Nohem*), but the strongest proofs are still concealed by Rapoport and myself”.<sup>50</sup> This hints that he possessed some kind of text concerning the *Zohar* and that such a work was also to be found in Rapoport’s possession, although it had never been printed.<sup>51</sup> Clearly his attitude towards Jewish mystical literature was negative. Indeed, on another occasion he noted that all the Kabbalistic works were nothing more than “deviant and misleading books which garble the mind”.<sup>52</sup>

As a kind of mirror image, in his *Sefer Rabiah* Hamilzahgi presented a short description of how the *Zohar* came into being and the criticism of its antiquity. The work touches upon the differences between the various editions of the *Zohar* (particularly between the Cremona and Mantua editions); discusses the strange character of the introduction to the printed *Zohar*; offers a detailed analysis of the testimony of *Sefer Yuhasim* (a chronicle by Abraham Zacut) regarding the *Zohar* and its attribution to Rabbi Moses de Leon (c. 1240–1305); includes a lengthy discussion of the antiquity of the vocalization and accents of the *Zohar*; and raises additional issues, some of which will be discussed in detail below.<sup>53</sup> It also incorporates a number of important remarks relating to the spread of Sabbateanism and the identification of works containing allusions to this sect.<sup>54</sup> The main innovation of *Sefer Rabiah* with regard to Kabbalah is the thesis that there are layers to the text of the *Zohar*, and that we must distinguish between “the original *Zohar*” and later additions to the text.

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lished a free and poetic translation of Zunz’s comments on the Kabbalah in 1840 as a foreword to the anti-Kabbalistic polemic by Leon of Modena, *Ari Nohem*, iv–xvi.

50 This remark was integrated into the second edition of the book. The words appear in handwriting on p. 405. *Sefer Bechinat haDat* was reprinted by Reggio in 1833 and *Ari Nohem* in 1840. Zunz mentioned later also the anti-Kabbalistic work by Meises, *Kinat haEmet* (1828).

51 It appears that this refers to a book attacking Kunitz which was printed many years later: Rapoport, *Nachalat Yehuda*.

52 Zunz, ‘Letter to Shadal’ (MS).

53 Regarding his analysis of the introduction to the *Zohar* and its editions see Abrams, ‘The Introduction’, 211–216.

54 Hamilzahgi, *Rabiah*, 27b, 28b. It would seem that he wanted to add special appendices devoted to *Sefer Yetzirah* and *Sefer Raziel*, *Ibid.*, 12b. See *Navorscher*, 4 (1854), 7.

Here Hamilzahgi drew on the thesis proposed by Jacob Emden before him, but developed it in a different, much more impressive, manner and created the foundations for what he saw as “the ancient” and “pure” *Zohar*.<sup>55</sup>

Hamilzahgi's comments on these matters received much attention in scholarly and polemical literature in later years, even though scholars were not acquainted with his unpublished works. From 1849 onwards bibliographical lists emphasized that *Sefer Rabiah* also discusses Kabbalistic topics, even though the title page of the work does not state this. Many writers began to depend upon Hamilzahgi's short statements, developing them and giving them a wider, more comprehensive application.<sup>56</sup> Thus, for example, throughout his studies the Austrian Reform rabbi and scholar Adolf Jellinek quoted Hamilzahgi's comments on the *Zohar*, at times arguing with his conclusions and on other occasions copying his mistakes.<sup>57</sup> A number of kabbalists were also in possession of *Sefer Rabiah* and drew upon it in various ways.<sup>58</sup> Yet for all its influence, only a few concise pages in *Sefer Rabiah* treat Kabbalistic literature and the *Zohar*. While these discussions are of great importance, they must be examined in light of the remainder of Hamilzahgi's unpublished works.

### The Manuscript of *Zoharei Rabiah* and the Translation of the *Zohar*

Hamilzahgi's brief comments in his printed book were part of a much wider and exceptional account of the Kabbalah that he was not able to publish. This account was particularly developed in one of his longer works which remained in manuscript form. A total of 74 pages of Hamilzahgi's work *Zoharei Rabiah*, have survived in the archives of the National Library in Jerusalem.<sup>59</sup> This manuscript, which was written over the course of many years, was completed sometime after the year 1838, although a number of sections were clearly written well before this. Hamilzahgi intended it to serve as a kind of key and

55 For a summary of Emden's outlook see Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. 1, 38–43; Huss, *Like the Radiance of the Sky*, 282, 313–326.

56 Fürst, *Bibliotheca judaica*, vol. 1, 379; Scholem, *Bibliographia Kabbalaistica*, 107.

57 Franck, *Die Kabbala*, xii, 68, 293–294; Jellinek, 'Die Namen des Sohar', 391; idem., *Moses ben Schem-Tob de Leon*, 5; idem., *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Kabbala*, vol. 1, 23; vol. 2, 63.

58 For example see Shneur Zalman Duber Anoshiski, *Matsav haYashar*, vol. 1, 1a–2a, 2b, 5a; vol. 2, 33b; Benamozegh, *Torat Hashem, Devarim*, 125b.

59 Hamilzahgi, *Zoharei Rabiah* (MS). For an initial description of the book see Scholem, *Catalogus Codicum Cabbalisticorum*, 40; Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. 1, 46–47, 89–90, 102.

tool to understanding the *Zohar*, “an introduction to the wisdom of the Kabbalah” or, in his words, a book which will explain the Kabbalistic text so that “all those who study Mishnah and Talmud will be able to understand its words and study the *Zohar* as though they were learning the Bible or Mishnah and everyone will understand according to his capability and his mind”.<sup>60</sup> Hamilzahgi was motivated to write the text by his recognition that Kabbalistic texts lacked lucidity, by what he perceived as the ignorance of the kabbalists of his time, and by the maskilic tendency to recoil from Kabbalistic works. Thus he wrote: “I said to myself, is not the *Zohar* a source for all the works of the kabbalists” and “we will not be prevented from expounding it in a manner that people will understand its sayings”.<sup>61</sup> *Zoharei Rabiah* is an outstanding apologetic for the antiquity of parts of the *Zohar*. Even though the author relied to a significant degree on early works of criticism regarding the *Zohar*, in many places he significantly departed from them, noting that he had found “a path not known to the scribe’s pen until the present day” and that he was able “to clarify the hidden and the revealed” in all the books of the Kabbalah.<sup>62</sup> Hamilzahgi’s text is made up of long chapters which include an introduction to the Kabbalistic corpus, an attempt to distinguish the various stages of the composition of Zoharistic literature, an analysis of the differences between a range of editions of the *Zohar*, an outline of the book’s main ideas, a detailed examination of Emden’s comments, a philological analysis of the *Zohar*’s divisions and a discussion of their contents.

The guiding principle of this work was the revelation of different layers of the text (those parts which Hamilzahgi perceived as the body of the *Zohar* on the one hand and later additions on the other, or in his words “the concealed and embedded”). The *Zohar*, as he phrased it, “at first was not arranged as it is now”, that is “it had another order”, not according to the Torah portions.<sup>63</sup> He suggested a kind of development similar to the process of the editing of the Talmud. The main core of the *Zohar* is ancient, written before the time of the late antique Gaonim, with its source in orally transmitted stories about the 2nd-century sage Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and his circle. Only later were these traditions written down in tractates according to the order of events as remembered, and over the generations other layers were added, some of which only served to confuse the source.<sup>64</sup> Thus, in his opinion, the tractates of the *Zohar*

60 Hamilzahgi, *Zoharei Rabiah* (MS), introduction, 4a, 37b.

61 Ibid., 2a.

62 Ibid., introduction, 3a.

63 Ibid.

64 Hamilzahgi, *Zoharei Rabiah* (MS), 8a–10a, 13a–15a, 19a, 20a, 20b.

were arranged and edited no less than seven times on seven different occasions. On each of these occasions they were given a different order, until the work was printed, at which stage the printers made further additions and produced one standard, fixed version.<sup>65</sup> Hamilzahgi elucidated the corruptions and different printed versions which testify to the existence of these layers. He also devoted significant attention to the linguistic and theological changes which point to the early or late date of various tractates.<sup>66</sup> These matters are phrased pointedly and unequivocally, even when his evidence is rather flimsy or his assertions easily refuted. On one occasion he emphasized that Moses de Leon certainly did not write the “main, early Zohar”; neither did Hamilzahgi view him as a central figure in the writing or editing of the Zoharistic literature or as responsible for late additions (including the *Raya Mehemna* and *Tikunei Zohar*).<sup>67</sup> Hamilzahgi ruled out the possibility of attributing sections of the *Zohar* to Moses de Leon offhandedly with the use of philological casuistry, in fact failing to address a question which most of his contemporaries deliberated over and which, to this day, constitutes one of the central issues in the study of literature of the *Zohar* in the eyes of many scholars.<sup>68</sup>

In light of these statements, Hamilzahgi suggested a detailed exposition of the *Zohar's* divisions. In his words, “The holy *Zohar*, as it is today in our hands, I have found in it more than 30 different notebooks and separate books by different writers, each of which has a name in its own right”.<sup>69</sup> This important proposal preceded that of other scholars, such as Adolf Jellinek (in his additions to the French scholar Adolphe Franck’s book), Ignaz Stern and later Gershom Scholem and Isaiah Tishby.<sup>70</sup> According to Hamilzahgi’s view, the literature of the *Zohar* is made up of various books composed in different periods. These must be identified and their character understood—in particular they should be separated from the early texts that form the “body of the *Zohar*” (the *Safra deTzniuta*, or “Book of Concealment,” and the *Idrot*, the “gatherings” at which Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai revealed divine mysteries).

In contrast to other maskilim and scholars who drew on Emden’s textual criticism—which for the most part dismantled the text in order to highlight

65 Ibid., 16a, 20b, 21a–22b.

66 Ibid., 22b–27a.

67 Ibid., 19a.

68 See Hamilzahgi’s discussion of Emden’s statements regarding Moses de Leon, Ibid., 27a–32a.

69 Ibid., 16a, 18a–27a; Hamilzahgi, *Rabiah*, 20b, 21a.

70 Regarding these other attempts at division see Abrams, *Kabbalistic Manuscripts and Textual Theory*, 266–269, 297; idem., ‘Nineteenth-Century Precedents’, 7–25.



the late date of the *Zohar's* composition or last editing, Hamilzahgi attempted to identify the pure and early *Zohar* that lay behind the later accretions.<sup>71</sup> It was not sufficient for him to describe the “great difference between the main body of the *Zohar* and the additions and texts which were added to it.” Rather, he sought to reveal the “secrets of the main *Zohar*”, the “nuts and bolts” which “are themselves holy”, “to reveal from the secrets of the *Zohar*, the ornaments concealed in the main body of the *Zohar*” and also “to bring evidence [for the *Zohar*] from the words of the Tanaim and Amora'im (the Rabbinic sages who wrote the Mishnah and Talmud)”.<sup>72</sup> This was an attempt to refine the *Zohar* and unveil its early and holiest layer, even though he did not have access to manuscripts of the text and his discussions were entirely based on philological clarifications relying on the first printed editions. Likewise, in opposition to other scholars of his generation (for example Nachman Krochmal, Adolphe Franck, Adolf Jellinek and Solomon Munk) he did not reveal any interest in comparative theological discussions or in uncovering the philosophical sources supposedly buried in the work.

*Sefer Zoharei Rabiah* was in fact an introduction to a far more comprehensive work which was never printed—entitled *Zohar Sefarad*—which was to be a commentary on the *Zohar* and a Hebrew translation of the text.<sup>73</sup> It is to be presumed that he chose not to include here sections of the *Zohar* such as “*Tikunei Zohar*” and “*Zohar Chadash*”, which he considered, as did many others, to be later works. The translation was to be accompanied by four commentaries according to the hermeneutical system of *Sefard* or *Pardes: Sod* (Secret: clarification of the deeper meaning and intention of the text), *Peshat* (Literal: clarification of the language), *Rabiah* (sources and parallels in traditional Jewish literature) and *Derech Emet* (The way of truth: textual emendations based on variant readings).<sup>74</sup> This anthology or reconstruction included only what he termed the “main body of the *Zohar*” and he omitted anything that he perceived as a later addition. In the author’s words, “All those who read without understanding and contemplate it [the *Zohar*] know nothing of its purpose and goal” and thus he will be the one to open the door, enabling “any understanding

71 Examples of maskilic appropriations of Emden include comments by Rapoport throughout his writings, Judah Leib Meises' *Kinat haEmet* and Abraham Ber Gottlober's *The History of Kabbalah and Hasidism*.

72 Hamilzahgi, *Zoharei Rabiah* (MS), introduction, 3a–4a.

73 Ibid., introduction, 3a, 4a, 30a–b. Most of this work was already prepared in 1821. It is also mentioned in the foreword of Issachar Ber Blumenfeld.

74 Ibid., introduction, 4a.

person [...] to achieve the aim he desires”.<sup>75</sup> The existing commentaries on the *Zohar* were sealed and inaccessible in his eyes, as most of them were based on Lurianic Kabbalah. Thus, he noted, “Since the time that the *Zohar* began circulating in the world until today, a text still has not been printed that explains the words of the *Zohar* in a manner that those who study Talmud and Mishnah can understand it, since the famous commentaries and explanations all concern the writings of the *Ari* [Isaac Luria, 1534–1572] of blessed memory, that were written by his students. After reading them and studying the commentators on the *Zohar*, I saw that all of them as one explained the hidden things in the *Zohar* with secrets yet more encoded and hidden, and they even made secrets out of the revealed matters”.<sup>76</sup> Therefore he decided to offer “an explanation and commentary as is fitting, in a manner that all the students of Mishnah and Torah will understand it”, “as though studying Bible or Mishnah”.<sup>77</sup> Hamilzahgi even showed the manuscript to “Torah scholars who, from their youth until their old age distanced themselves from studying the *Zohar* and the wisdom of the Kabbalah. When they read this book and came into its gates, they began to like this wisdom”.<sup>78</sup> He believed that the commentary he offered, alongside *Zoharei Rabiah*, would not only initiate change in the understanding of Kabbalah but also in the methods of studying it and disseminating it to the masses.

This general picture, a brief summary of which appears in the published work *Sefer Rabiah*, was mocked by various maskilim who did not delve into the depths of Hamilzahgi’s text and its intentions. Thus, for example, Levinsohn stated that “with all his efforts to return the holiness of the book [i.e. the *Zohar*] to its fitting place and to reassure all the weak who doubt its holiness, with all the toil and labor of counting and calculating expressions, it still appears that he too attributes the *Zohar* to the later sages, and with all the effort he expended in this he shows only his proficiency in the *Zohar* and nothing else”.<sup>79</sup> In Levinsohn’s opinion the picture was quite simple: “general agreement apparently is, clearly to all wise men and scholars, that the *Zohar* was written by Moses de Leon. All this discussion of the body of the *Zohar* and the additions which were made to it afterwards in fact concerns worthless things, and every wisdom and ruse in it are lies”.<sup>80</sup> However, Hamilzahgi viewed these “worthless matters” as the heart of the entire matter.

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75 Ibid., 3a.

76 Ibid., 6a.

77 Ibid., introduction, 3a, 37b.

78 Ibid., 5a.

79 Levinsohn, *Izrael*, 124–125.

80 Ibid., 128.

The passage of time since this polemic and the changes which Kabbalistic scholarship has undergone have revealed new faces of Hamilzahgi's endeavors, although this has not resulted in the publication of his works which remain in manuscript. Gershom Scholem noted, concerning the manuscript of *Zoharei Rabiah* which came into his possession in the 1920s, that "there can be no doubt that this is the most important book written concerning the *Zohar* by Jewish scholars in the last century. And had it been printed at the right time, it would have guided the scientific arguments towards a more fruitful direction". He continued, commenting that the book "is still meaningful in the modern day and delves deep into clarifying the literal meanings of the *Zohar* and the remainder of the investigations of its literary parts etc," and that it is a shame that "it was not published at the time, for it contains a blessing".<sup>81</sup> On another occasion, Scholem described Hamilzahgi "as an ironic footnote" to Kabbalistic scholarship in the nineteenth century, noting that "his extremely comprehensive studies, those of a scholar who goes into great detail in discussing early Kabbalistic literature from a critical perspective, were never printed, and for the most part completely disappeared".<sup>82</sup> Yet this was not the sum total of Hamilzahgi's innovation, or more precisely, this was not the most unique aspect of Hamilzahgi's work. Both his critics and his supporters failed to focus on Hamilzahgi's main motivation in composing works concerning Kabbalah, and in particular regarding the *Zohar*. This motivation places his studies in a totally different light: they were not only an attempt—irrespective of their success or failure—to understand the sources of the *Zohar* in an objective and balanced manner and to answer the question of its authorship.

Clearly, Hamilzahgi's relationship with the *Zohar* was not only of a scholarly character; he exaggerated the value of the book and the knowledge secreted therein in the manner of a true kabbalist. In his opinion, the *Zohar* was "unlike any other" book; it was a work "the greatness and elevated holiness of which are known at all the ends of the earth".<sup>83</sup> Study of Kabbalah contains a higher purpose and a "terrifying truth"—distancing oneself from materialism—and

81 Scholem, *Catalogus Codicum Cabalisticorum*, 40. He briefly included similar statements in the following encyclopedia entries: idem, 'Kabbala' (*EJ*), 730; idem., *Kabbalah*, 202, 220, 240, 242.

82 Scholem, *Explications and Implications*, 319; idem, *Judaica*, vol. 3, 261. In light of these comments a number of researchers have presented Hamilzahgi as an "objective" scholar, a predecessor of modern study of the Kabbalah. See for example Biale, *Gershom Scholem*, 25, 116, 255; Abrams, 'Defining Modern Academic Scholarship', 294–295, 297; Sadan, *Ways and Paths*, 273.

83 Hamilzahgi, *Zoharei Rabiah* (MS), introduction, 3a, 6a; idem, *Rabiah*, 27a.

therefore its study should be encouraged.<sup>84</sup> In this spirit he claimed that all the words of “heresy” (referring to the sections used extensively by the Sabbateans) stand out as late additions and that only a tiny percentage of them are from what he referred to as “the early, main body of the *Zohar*.”<sup>85</sup> This model was already to be found in the writings of Emden, who also suggested guidelines for uncovering the “true *Zohar*”. However Hamilzahgi approached this task with the utmost seriousness; he proposed philological guidelines for an analysis of this kind and began to implement it. A further unique aspect of Hamilzahgi’s path relates to the interests of the Jewish Haskalah in Eastern Europe. Hamilzahgi clearly stated that he sought to bring the words of the kabbalists closer to “Reason”, so that anyone would be able to read the text, understand it and discern its qualities, even if he was not inclined to follow the customs of contemporary Hasidim and kabbalists.<sup>86</sup> He repeatedly claimed that science and Kabbalah are not incongruous, that the disciplines of medicine and surgery authenticate the words of the kabbalists and that even the secrets of Mesmerism and the discovery of “the wisdom of magnetism” (Justinus Kerner’s version of Mesmerism’s visions), verify Jewish mysticism.<sup>87</sup> In a similar manner, he explained “rationally” the existence of mystical experiences (and even relates his own mystical experience), again emphasizing the need to bring Kabbalah closer to ‘Reason’.<sup>88</sup>

This leads us to Hamilzahgi’s central motivation in re-mapping Kabbalistic literature. He did not only trace the text’s historical development, consistent with the methods of maskilim and other contemporary scholars, nor did he utilize the kabbalists’ method of commentary, which explained away the contradictions within the work; rather, he used a method of textual clarification which attempted to discern different layers of the Kabbalistic texts. This was the way by which Hamilzahgi sought to uncover the early, clean and clear-cut text in its untainted form. For Hamilzahgi, sifting and refining the Kabbalistic text by removing later additions would strip away the heresy that had developed around and become affixed to the work in the wake of these embellishments. In so doing, he would be able to paint a picture of the true Jewish esotericism that reflects pure science and refined philosophy. The keys to these latter forms of wisdom, of course, were in his possession.

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84 Hamilzahgi, *Zoharei Rabiah* (MS), 35b, 36a.

85 Ibid., 13a.

86 Ibid., 6a, 10a.

87 Ibid., 60a, 62b, 63a, 69b, 74. For a more detailed discussion see Meir, ‘Haskalah and Mesmerism’.

88 Hamilzahgi, *Zoharei Rabiah* (MS), 57a–b; idem, *Notes* (MS), 95a.

### The Writings of Rabbi Isaac Luria Ashkenazi (the *Ari*)

Hamilzahgi appears to have pursued a similar project with regards to the writings of Rabbi Isaac Luria Ashkenazi (the *Ari*). Similarly to Emden, Hamilzahgi perceived Luria's works as especially problematic, not only due to their defective editing but also because Sabbatean commentaries had ostensibly become an integral part of the text and, in addition, followers of Shabbtai Zevi (1626–c. 1676) had penned Lurianic forgeries.<sup>89</sup> Hamilzahgi included in *Zoharei Rabiah* a stinging comment regarding Isaac Satanow's printed edition of Luria's texts, noting that they should not be relied upon as a result of the dubious manner in which the manuscripts were edited.<sup>90</sup> This remark, and others like it, were made following Hamilzahgi's examination of the texts themselves, in both printed and manuscript form: he claims to have looked at over 30 manuscripts of *Sefer Etz Chayim* and *Sefer Pri Etz Chayim* and "one is not like the other". He described Luria's writings, which had been printed and circulated widely, as mere "novels, booklets without order or style", texts that had not been sufficiently examined and could not be trusted.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, he criticized the Lurianic prayer books, which in his opinion were conceived by his students and not the invention of Isaac Luria himself.<sup>92</sup> It was clear to Hamilzahgi that most of the writings attributed to Luria were not in fact penned by him. He argued that they should be re-examined and, in so doing, proposed a kind of study which preceded those of both modern-day researchers and kabbalists.<sup>93</sup>

### Additional Books Relating to Kabbalah

Hamilzahgi noted that he wrote a number of other comprehensive books devoted to kabbalah. Some of these constitute the completion of his *Zohar* project. Getzel Kressel lists 36 books which Hamilzahgi mentioned by name, of the 72 he claimed to have written.<sup>94</sup> It is possible to discern 19 of his works which directly relate to Kabbalah: (1) *Darchei haMekubalim*, a history of the

89 Hamilzahgi, *Rabiah* (MS), 27b, 29a; idem, *Zoharei Rabiah* (MS), 4a, 6a, 8a.

90 Ibid., 6a. Others make similar comments, see for example Levinsohn, *Shorshei Levanon*, 246.

91 Hamilzahgi, *Rabiah*, 6a. See also idem, *Notes* (MS), 90a, 91a.

92 Hamilzahgi, *Ketav Elyakim* (MS), 55.

93 Meir, 'The Boundaries of the Kabbalah', 163–180.

94 Kressel, 'Hamilzahgi', 92–94.

varieties of Kabbalah;<sup>95</sup> (2) *Gilgul Neshamot*—a comprehensive work regarding various approaches to the transmigration of souls;<sup>96</sup> (3) A commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah*;<sup>97</sup> (4) a comprehensive work regarding the *Bahir* and its sources;<sup>98</sup> (5) *Sefer Razei haKanaḥ* concerning *Sefer Brit Menuḥah*;<sup>99</sup> (6) *Maaneh Elyakim*, an answer to Emden’s work *Mitpachat Sefarim* on the *Zohar*;<sup>100</sup> (7) *Hasagot Al Sefer Ben Yochai*—criticism of Moshe Kunitz’s work;<sup>101</sup> (8) *Pitaron Lashon Kasdi*—a dictionary of the *Zohar* and “clarification of foreign words in all parts of the *Zohar*”;<sup>102</sup> (9) *Kuntres Petichat haZohar*, regarding the introduction to the *Zohar*;<sup>103</sup> (10) a special text concerning the sections of the *Zohar* titled *Raya Mehemna* and *Tikunei Zohar*—following Emden, he perceived these works as late additions and argued that their hyperbole was far removed from the main, early *Zohar* and that therefore the Sabbateans, and in particular the Frankists, had come to depend upon them; (11) *Yalkut Rabiah*—an examination of the kabbalists’ methods from the days of Luria onwards;<sup>104</sup> (12) finally a short composition regarding *Sefer Raziel* and its sources, which will be discussed below. Hamilzahgi mentioned a further seven books which, according to him, were part of his wider aim to achieve a deep understanding of the Kabbalah, but their content is unknown and not detailed on his lists. These works are *Razei Rabiah*, *Orot me-Ofel*, *Sefer Yetzirat haAdam* (to be distinguished from his commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah*), *Sefer Kitrei Otiyot*, *Sefer Nikud Rabiah* (regarding the vocalization and accents in the *Zohar*, in relation to the issue of the text’s antiquity), *Maayanot haChokhmah*, and *Ginzei Rabiah*.<sup>105</sup> Kabbalistic concerns also appear to have recurred throughout his other works, yet until further manuscripts are discovered it remains difficult to estimate the full extent of Hamilzahgi’s studies in this field.

95 Hamilzahgi, *Zoharei Rabiah* (MS), 3a, 6a.

96 Hamilzahgi, *Notes* (MS), 93a–b; idem, *Zoharei Rabiah* (MS), 3a, 17b.

97 Ibid., 9a.

98 Ibid., 56b.

99 Hamilzahgi, *Notes* (MS), 93a.

100 Hamilzahgi, *Zoharei Rabiah* (MS), 3a, 11a.

101 Ibid., 3a; Hamilzahgi, *Notes* (MS), 93a.

102 Hamilzahgi, *Zoharei Rabiah* (MS), 5a.

103 Ibid., 23a, 25a, 40b.

104 Hamilzahgi, *Zoharei Rabiah* (MS), 3a.

105 Hamilzahgi, *Zoharei Rabiah* (MS), 3a.

### Hamilzahgi's Manuscript regarding the Sources of *Sefer Raziel*

Among the long list of Hamilzahgi's archived works concerning Kabbalah one further manuscript (in addition to *Zoharei Rabiah*) has survived, a short text discussing the sources of *Sefer Raziel*.<sup>106</sup> This work, which was completed around the year 1847, was certainly written as part of a polemic, since *Sefer Raziel* was relatively widespread among the Hasidim, who discerned within it fanciful allusions. It is notable that the names of Rabbi Leib ben Sara and Rabbi David ben Zlata (two well-known Hasidic figures) appear in the first edition of *Sefer Raziel*, in the texts of a prayer and an amulet, as opposed to the more commonly found anonymous designation "so-and-so son of so-and-so". The Hasidim perceived in this a miraculous proof that an ancient book had predicted the emergence of late Hasidim, and believed that these pages had the power to serve as a special charm (*segulah*). Hamilzahgi argued that these names were merely those of the first edition's proofreaders, who added their names to the book, and claimed that they had no connection whatsoever to Hasidism.<sup>107</sup> He continued, saying that the anonymous editor of *Sefer Raziel* omitted his name so that the work would be considered to have emanated from the "mouth of an angel" and so that "all the people will respond, holy, holy." This was indeed the case among the contemporary Hasidim who printed many editions of the work and transformed the pages bearing names of the *Tzadikim* into amulets.<sup>108</sup> *Sefer Raziel* and the texts within it (including a section from *Chayei Olam haBa* by Abraham Abulafia) were not only used as amulets but were also utilized by the Hasidim for theological purposes.<sup>109</sup> It appears that these were the main factors motivating Hamilzahgi's examination of *Sefer Raziel*; at the very least they provide a clear picture of the historical context in which his studies were written.

It was as a result of the printing and dissemination of "forged" Kabbalistic works that the "true Kabbalah" had come to be dismissed and thus it was necessary for Hamilzahgi to refine and distill this literature. If the *Zohar*, which "had been circulated throughout all the diaspora of Israel and was used by everyone", was full of mistakes, this was even more true of *Sefer Raziel*, which "in all

106 Hamilzahgi, *Raziel* (MS). For a short description of the manuscript see Scholem, *Catalogus Codicum Cabbalisticorum*, 7, 24–25, 40; idem, 'Einige kabbalistische Handschriften', 63, 69.

107 Hamilzahgi, *Raziel* (MS), 13–14. He was not the only one to notice the presence of these names in this book which had been sanctified by the Hasidim. For a full discussion see Meir, 'Marketing Demons', 35–66.

108 Hamilzahgi, *Raziel* (MS), 2.

109 Idel, 'On Prophecy', 65–70.

these lands is not used, only placed at the birthing bed to provide protection, and the printing of which was entrusted to ignorant people". In light of this, Hamilzahgi asked, "how can there not be an infinite number of mistakes [in it]?"<sup>110</sup> Therefore it was essential to sift and refine the text, not only in order to present an untainted version of it, in the same manner as the *Zohar*, but also in order to reveal to the masses that this was none other than a forged Kabbalistic text made up of seven divisions, each one by a different writer. Hamilzahgi identified among the sources of this work the writings of the German Pietists and *Sefer Chayei Olam* by Abraham Abulafia provided a detailed analysis of the sections which draw on these sources, and explained the *gematriyot* and names which appear in these texts.<sup>111</sup> His was the first comprehensive study of the sources of *Sefer Raziel* and the manuscripts that constitute it, even if Hamilzahgi's theories were not always correct. His comments are in a sense a reaction to Zunz's remarks regarding *Sefer Raziel*, an attempt to offer a more multifaceted picture of this Kabbalistic work and its sections.<sup>112</sup> Yet Hamilzahgi's specific goal in disassembling the text and refuting the myth of its holiness was to reveal the true Kabbalah. This is the unique aspect which characterizes his works concerning Kabbalah, all of which in effect sought to achieve one, single aim: to unveil the concealed as truly revealed or, in other words, to present the pure Kabbalah and to wipe away the dust of forgery which had settled over the pure marble.

### The Poor Painter and the Breaking of Boundaries

Modern academics such as Getzel Kressel, Avraham Meir Haberman, Dov Sadan, Gershom Scholem, Isaiah Tishby and Daniel Abrams have depicted Hamilzahgi as a scholar shrouded in the mists of history—had he been well known in his own time, Jewish Studies would have profited and even had quite different results. Hamilzahgi indeed presented himself as a faithful propagator of this tradition (or more precisely as a distinguished scholar). Thus, for example, in two of his works he included an allegory about a painter in order to emphasize his attempt to remain neutral (once in *Sefer Raziel*, at the beginning of the chapter concerning *segulot*, incantations and amulets, and once

110 Hamilzahgi, *Raziel* (MS), 22.

111 Ibid., 2–8.

112 Ibid., 1. Zunz's comments on *Sefer Raziel* are extremely brief. He noted that the work "does not offer us almost anything aside from its own inventions, which it places in the mouth of the angel Raziel", Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden*, 167.



in *Sefer Rabiah*, at the outset of his comments on the disagreement between philosophers and kabbalists):

I am merely a painter who sees beautiful forms which please the eye of every beholder, and who also gazes at dreadful figures which startle souls, and who arranges these together. At one edge he paints a king, adorned in glory, taking mercy on the poor and acting compassionately towards his servants, and at the other [the king's] judgment of a cruel murderer, who stabbed his mother and father. All this is to achieve the one goal that the painter has set, without arousing himself to joy or mourning. So it is with the topic before us.<sup>113</sup>

Such comments appear to place Hamilzahgi alongside Kabbalistic scholars of the present generation—they are mere observers, describing the world of the Kabbalah historically and philologically (as an integral part of Jewish history), without entering into the complexities of the ideological polemic surrounding dissemination of esoteric literature by the Hasidim of the period. However, Hamilzahgi's method differed in many ways from those utilized by other scholars, from both East and West, who were inclined to *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and applied historical and philosophical tools in their studies. “The poor painter” in fact breaks down boundaries, clearly demonstrating his interests. Before us is not only an “objective” researcher but moreover a scholar pursuing the purity of Kabbalah and philosophy in opposition to those who would destroy it. In this sense, Hamilzahgi was close to some Christian occultists, although the purpose and conclusions of their studies differed from his, and none of Hamilzahgi's surviving writings refer to a concept of “universal Kabbalah”. Hamilzahgi did not claim that the early sources of esoteric literature were to be found in non-Jewish literature. In contrast to other maskilim, he did not grasp at a historical clarification of this kind in order to undermine the connection between Kabbalah and rabbinic Judaism. In his opinion, “pure Kabbalah” was refined Judaism and the way to reach this ideal was by sifting out the late additions.

This approach is clearly evident in the final chapters of the printed version of *Sefer Rabiah*, in which Hamilzahgi outlined his general perspective on the development of the various streams in Jewish history until his day: rabbis, kabbalists (Hasidim) and philosophers (maskilim).<sup>114</sup> These chapters were

113 Hamilzahgi, *Raziel* (MS), 8. A similar parable is also found in *Rabiah*, 29b.

114 *Ibid.*, 28b–29b.

designed to mirror the last chapter of Zunz's *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden* (entitled "Die Gegenwart"—"The Present"), in which Zunz offered a picture of the impressive progress that had taken place since the days of Moses Mendelssohn.<sup>115</sup> Zunz described the awakening of science as a kind of power slumbering within the Jewish people and rising from the "dust of barbarism" to a new life in the spirit of "general culture", on the threshold of which the Jewish people was standing at that moment.<sup>116</sup> Progress "in the true spirit of the day" would certainly lead to emancipation: this vision necessitated reforms of Jewish life, including reorganization of the Rabbinate, religious studies and prayers, to the resentment of "those fighting against progress".<sup>117</sup> Although the situation of the Jews in Poland was dreadful and it was still impossible to speak of reform in that country—despite the existence of some "people with knowledge and lucid minds"—this picture differed greatly from that of Germany, from where the impulse for great improvement must arise.<sup>118</sup> "The light must come forth from here and move onwards, not from Babylon but from Germany", and "a blessing" will come "to the nation of Israel which will go forth to freedom and pleasure, to a peaceful Europe".<sup>119</sup> Zunz clearly revealed his ideological vision in the margins of his great work, a vision which justified the labor of writing.

In contrast to Zunz, who painted a picture of progress in the spirit of the western European Enlightenment, Hamilzahgi offered a rather forlorn portrait, suggesting a solution which seeks to produce change in pursuit of a different purpose. He depicts at length the battles between three sects (philosophers, kabbalists and rabbis) throughout Jewish history, describing the various re-incarnations of these sects until the modern day (maskilim, Hasidim and rabbis). The last incarnation, after the crisis generated by Sabbateanism and the controversy of the rabbis concerning the amulets of Rabbi Jonathan Eybschutz, reflects the downward spiral of the generations. These sects have reduced Judaism to its lowest level: to reform, to contempt for the religious precepts and to ignorance. Thus he described the philosophers:

In this, our generation, an orphaned generation, everything has changed: values and opinions and new customs that forefathers knew not. Oh

115 Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden*, 448–481. Similar statements appear briefly also in the introduction to the work, iii–xv.

116 Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden*, 449.

117 *Ibid.*, 468–470.

118 *Ibid.*

119 *Ibid.*, 475, 481.

reader, rise up, read out loud again the matters of the argument among these aforementioned sects, which I have mentioned before, for those that support the philosophers and write works proving, based on the words of our rabbis, that it is a commandment to pray bareheaded in the Synagogue, and to transfer the holiness of the Sabbath to Sunday, and to cancel the commandments for which there is no rationalization, and they are contemptuous of the prophets and say that the holy writings are a fraud and many other such things.<sup>120</sup>

This is the way of the philosophers, who have become the religious reformers. Standing in opposition to them are the kabbalists—the Hasidim—yet they are no better:

Of those who support the kabbalists and the secrets, there are those among them who decided that the main purpose of the divine service is in the heart and mind alone and not in carrying out the commandments and they do not move their lips or mouth when praying but only think about the prayers and the blessings and direct their minds to the mystical intentions of the prayers and the holy matters, etc. There are those that do not pray in public at all and do not even say the words in private, but only sway their head with elevated thoughts, which they call contemplation. There are those that say that every commandment which is not for the body and the soul together should not be performed, and they likewise [practice] strange customs and spiritual things arising from them. In general, they mainly study the allusions and secrets of the later sages, while the Torah of the early sages has become secondary and temporary.<sup>121</sup>

If this were not enough, the rabbis who occupy the middle ground dedicate their days to futile casuistry, forgetting wisdom and losing sight of the wider context.<sup>122</sup> The truth has been lost and “the true sages” left powerless: “it causes great anguish to all men of understanding that amidst the sects supporting philosophers and the masters of secrets and allusions in the present day”, “the true philosophers and kabbalists cry their hearts out in secret”. Nothing remains to be done but to hope that the “true sages” will rise up and put a stop to this deluge, “to turn back the anger of these sects, [preventing them]

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120 Hamilzahgi, *Rabiah* (MS), 29b.

121 Ibid.

122 Ibid., 28b–29a.

from destroying the portion of the nation of Jeshurun".<sup>123</sup> These "true sages" who will return the crown to its former glory are none other than synthesizers of the three sects. Hamilzahgi's proposed path, tinged with romanticism, is to refine the classic textual corpus using historical and philological methods, and in so doing to transform these works into living texts. He attempted, similarly to many other romantics and occultists, to free the "pure Kabbalah" from the claws of those claspings at the defective texts and their twisted interpretations—kabbalists and philosophers both. He suggested redemption through the text and as the basis for a vision of renewed Jewish unity.<sup>124</sup>

This picture was perhaps Hamilzahgi's greatest "criticism" of Zunz's work. Hamilzahgi understood the essence of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in a manner at odds with that of Zunz; likewise, he took a completely different approach to the meaning of Kabbalistic texts in the new world and to the question of modernity in general. In contrast to Zunz, he suggested a new alternative, taking into account the unique developments blooming in the East. Hamilzahgi's study of the *Zohar* suggests an exemplary new path—a sifting and refining of the true *Zohar*, which would reveal the untainted Kabbalah without the distortions wrought upon it over the generations. Redemption of the text would bring redemption through the text and this, eventually, would provide a solution to the struggles among the various sects within the Jewish people. While Rapoport thundered against the sexual symbolism appearing in the *Zohar*, arguing that on account of this alone "it would be sufficient to place the *Zohar* in a prison cell", Hamilzahgi suggests a renaissance of the text, viewing it as the basis for Jewish renewal in the modern age.<sup>125</sup> The spirit of his works is similar to that of Adolphe Franck. Although Franck too perceived the Kabbalah as the heart and soul of Judaism, Hamilzahgi was clearer in many of his aims, more conservative in his methods and suggested a rather original way to revive the same literature as part of modern Judaism.<sup>126</sup> He was not only a scholar long before his time, or a maskil who strayed into the fields of the Kabbalah, but rather an esoteric-maskil, born into Galician rabbinical circles, who proposed

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123 Ibid., 29b.

124 Gershom Scholem made similar comments a century later in a short article on approaches to the study of Kabbalah in Jerusalem. See Scholem, 'The Kabbalah at the Hebrew University', 9; idem, 'The Study of Kabbalah', 14.

125 Gräber, *Igrot Shir leShadal*, vol. 1, 6.

126 See Franck's remarks and the disagreement voiced by Jelinek (who translated Franck's work): Franck, *Die Kabbala*, 283. For further discussion of Franck and Kabbalah see Idel, *Kabbalah*, 8–10; Hanegraaff, 'The Beginnings of Occultist Kabbalah', 107–128; Fenton, 'La contribution d' Adolphe Franck', 81–97.

a unique romantic vision. This phenomenon is not especially surprising in light of the complex history of Jewish life in Eastern Europe. Indeed, it seems that a new examination of Hamilzahgi and other similar figures will complicate and enrich the widely accepted, one-dimensional portrait of the Eastern European Haskalah.

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