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Shedding Light on Metatron – Recently Discovered Fragments of Mystical Writings in Germany

Abstract: Texts with mystical contents are very rare among the Hebrew binding fragments discovered in German libraries and archives. One newly discovered fragment in the Gotha Research Library contains part of an unknown mystical composition. The text consists of mystical speculations about the Hebrew alphabet and allusions to the *Book of Creation (Sefer Yesira)* and its mystical interpretation of letters. The anonymous author also depicts the role of the angels en passant, especially the function of Metatron. This unknown text may have been written by the followers of the German Pietists (*ḥaside ashkenaz*) at the end of the 14th century.

1 Introduction

A great number of fragments of bindings from mediaeval works in Hebrew have been brought to light in recent decades – mainly in Austria, Hungary, Italy, Poland, the Czech Republic and France, but also in other European countries as well. In Germany,¹ one of the most important regions in Europe regarding this kind of manuscript research, mediaeval and early-modern bookbinders also reused parchment from mediaeval manuscripts for profane purposes, including manuscripts written in Hebrew.² Despite many attempts by scholars, mainly from Germany and Israel, however, no substantial, systematic effort was made to search for and identify these hidden remnants of Jewish writing in public institutions such as archives and libraries for many years. After the reunification

A first draft of this paper was presented at a recent conference entitled ‘Judaism in Transition’, which was held in Berlin in 2013. Further versions of it were read at the conference of the European Association of Jewish Studies (EJS) in Paris in 2014 and at CSMC, the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures at Hamburg University, in 2015. I am grateful for all the remarks and comments made on my presentations.

1 See Lehnardt 2010.

2 For earlier research on the phenomenon, see Campanini 2014.

of Germany in 1990, though, many libraries and archives were opened anew and new cataloguing projects were started involving manuscripts penned in Latin, German and Arabic. Some of these are still going on. Most of them have brought a considerable amount of new and unexplored material to light. In view of these projects and the task of searching for and identifying a large number of newly discovered fragments of Hebrew parchments, there now seems to be an urgent need for a systematic approach to be taken to this kind of work.

2 ‘Genizat Germania’

Since the start of the research project nicknamed ‘Genizat Germania’ in 2007 (financed by the German Research Foundation), we have brought to light a considerable number of important Hebrew manuscript fragments that are not just of statistical relevance: hundreds of previously unknown fragments have been described and catalogued, some of which were found in libraries and archives in small towns and other places. Most of these newly found pieces contain parts of well-known texts and compositions such as *maḥzorim*, biblical books, Talmudic literature, and Halakhic compendia.³ Very few fragments that have come to light in recent years actually include unknown material, like an unidentified *maqama* I published in another volume.⁴ One of the other rare fragments that were discovered is a page of a seemingly lost Geonic work on money-lending, a fragment written in 12th-century handwriting and discovered in a Latin host volume kept on the shelves of the Diocesan Library of Mainz.⁵ The text mentions the names of the late 9th-century Ge’onim Rav Naḥshon and Moshe Ga’on, thereby defining the earliest possible time for this Hebrew manuscript to be preserved in book bindings in Germany.

Other important fragments published as part of the ‘Genizat Germania’ project include a leaf of a mediaeval commentary on the Books of Chronicles⁶ and an illuminated page from a *maḥzor* with the special *piyyuṭim* for Purim depicting a Haman tree, one of the few fragments that preserve coloured illuminations. This parchment leaf was discovered on a wooden book cover.⁷

³ For a statistical overview with typical results, see Lehnardt/Ottermann 2014, 27.

⁴ See Lehnardt 2013a.

⁵ See Lehnardt 2012a.

⁶ See Lehnardt 2013b.

⁷ See Lehnardt 2012b.

The Hebrew parchment fragment that I wish to present in the following article comes from an unknown and seemingly lost composition on mystical philosophy. Some of its characteristics are shared with several other works from the Middle Ages, but are not absolutely identical to any of them. The parchment was discovered in a host volume from the 14th century kept at the Gotha Research Library (Forschungsbibliothek Gotha), which is now one of the joint libraries of the University of Erfurt.⁸ Despite my having had many conversations about this Hebrew text with colleagues and research assistants, it is still something of a mystery to me. Who was its author? And when was it compiled?

In seeking to answer these questions, I am aware of the fact that the following article relates to an exceptional case in which the new tools of modern fragment research such as web-based open access research machines (Google books, Hebrew books.org or the Bar Ilan Responsa project [version 20+]) are unable to provide enough information to identify an unknown Hebrew text.

3 Mystical writings represented in the fragments

Mystical texts are rarely found among the fragments discovered in the European Geniza; with one notable exception in Italy, almost no fragments with mystical or Kabbalistic contents have been identified to date.⁹ This outcome of the project surely indicates that manuscripts reflecting these thoughts were copied and produced to a much lesser extent than biblical or rabbinical manuscripts. In addition to that, most of these texts might have been composed and most of the manuscripts transmitting them might have been copied at a much later point in time than the bulk of the other texts identifiable among the book-binding fragments. We can also learn from complete manuscripts containing mystical texts that these writings were much more frequently copied on pieces of parchment of a smaller format that were unsuitable for the secondary usage of binding books. In the findings of the Cairo Geniza, the number of pieces attesting the spread of mystical writings is also relatively small,¹⁰ therefore any discovery of a fragment from this genre of Jewish mediaeval literature in the European Geniza deserves particular attention.

⁸ On the history of this collection and the institution which houses many more Hebrew and Samaritan manuscripts, see, e.g. Persch 1893; *Orientalische Buchkunst in Gotha* 1997, 17–40; 221–222; Richler 2014, 84–85.

⁹ For a definition of the term ‘mysticism’ and the adjective ‘mystical’, see Schäfer 2009, 1–9.

¹⁰ See *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, Schäfer (ed.) 1984.

3.1 Italy

A brief overview and comparison with the evidence in the Italian Geniza might help us to understand these observations better. Saverio Campanini, writing in a survey article based on findings in Emilia Romagna, said in 1988 that all in all, nearly 30 fragments with mystical contents had been identified;¹¹ twenty-four of them belong to the works of the Italian Kabbalist Menaḥem Recanati (1250–1310).¹² Other pieces of parchment contain Moshe ben Naḥman's *Commentary on the Tora* (Ramban; 1194–1270).¹³

None of these fragments belong to the genre of 'pure' Kabbalistic literature, however, even though they transmit mystical interpretations of biblical phrases and narratives.¹⁴ Originally, they were Bible commentaries. With the exception of Recanati's writings, only a few lines of other Kabbalistic works have come to light in binding fragments so far, one being the commentary by 'Azriel of Gerona (1160–c. 1238) on the *Sefer Yešira*.¹⁵ Other works of Kabbala such as the *Sefer ha-Bahir* or the *Zohar* are absent among the fragments in Italy, as in the whole European Geniza, even bits of pieces of major magical compositions such as *Sefer ha-Razim*.

Campanini concluded his remarks on the Kabbala in the Italian Geniza by summarising: 'We have legitimate reason to hope that we will find additional fragments of completely unknown works'.¹⁶ As far as I know, however, no further Kabbalistic writings have been identified among the fragments in Italy since then. Additional evidence of the scarcity of mystical writings in the European Geniza now comes from Germany.

3.2 Germany

The number of Hebrew fragments with Kabbalistic or mystical contents is quite small in this country. First of all, a fragment of the aforementioned commentary on the Tora written by Moshe ben Naḥman has been identified among bindings of

11 Campanini 1988.

12 On his life and works, see, e.g. Idel 2011, 106–138.

13 See *Perush ha-Ramban 'al ha-Tora*, Chavel (ed.) 2005; *Nachmanides' Commentary on the Tora*, Chavel (transl.) 1973–1999.

14 On this point, see Dan 2012, 330–370.

15 Campanini 1988, 43–44. On this commentary and related commentaries, see Scholem 1962, 330; Dan 2012, 303–329.

16 Campanini 1988, 42.

a file at the State Archives in Karlsruhe.¹⁷ This fragment has been detached from its host file, so both sides of the parchment can be read. The Hebrew text, however, only contains portions of Moshe's commentary on the Exodus of Ramban. It is written in a small, 15th-century, semi-cursive script and looks more like a reader's digest than a complete copy of the known work. In the web-based catalogue of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in Jerusalem, the fragment has been catalogued under the title of *Sodot ha-Tora*, i.e. 'Secrets of the Tora'.¹⁸

Up to now, only one fragment of a manuscript of *Sefer Ḥasidim* has been identified among the binding fragments found in Germany. This fragment was discovered in the 1960s and has been described by Ernst Róth¹⁹ but without identifying its contents or author. It was only described correctly later, presumably at the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in Jerusalem, and could therefore be included in the *Princeton University Sefer Hasidim Database (PUSHD)* of this important handbook of the *ḥaside ashkenaz*.²⁰

What might be of greater interest in this context is the fact that I have also discovered several new, previously unknown leaves with commentaries on numerous *piyyuṭim*, some of which transmit early mystical interpretations of well-known festive prayers. I do not wish to go into any detail here, though, as there are other research projects going on at the moment that deal with the sources of these commentaries. It should be noted, however, that these liturgical fragments certainly need further research.

Another fragment that was detached from the outer cover of an account book entitled 'Seheimer Ampts Rechnung' is now kept by the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (Berlin State Library).²¹ This fragment contains unknown parts of a commentary on the Hebrew Bible called *Midrash Sekhel Ṭov*, compiled by Menaḥem ben Rabbi Shlomo (12th century).²² The text mentions explanations of the Hebrew

17 Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe 69 von Helmstatt A 2295. See the Archives' online catalogue: <https://www2.landesarchiv-bw.de/ofs21/suche/ergebnis1.php> (last accessed 19 September 2017). According to this entry, the fragment might have belonged to a file from Neckarbischofsheim, where the von Helmstatt family kept an aristocratic estate.

18 A similar manuscript is known in Italy: see Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Plut. 89. sup. 118. The script and size of this manuscript are not identical to the fragment in Karlsruhe, however.

19 See *Hebräische Handschriften*, vol. 2, Striedl/Róth/Tetzner 1965, 66 (Hs. 483,29, III).

20 See https://etc.princeton.edu/sefer_hasidim/ (last accessed 20 February 2016).

21 Steinschneider Nr. 34 – Ms. Or. Fol. 707 Nr. 6.

22 See Buber 1900–1901. Regarding this work, also see Stemberger 2011, 395–396. Another fragment of the same manuscript was identified by Simha Emanuel (Jerusalem) in Rüsselsheim's Municipal Archive. This fragment had already been published by Ernst Róth in 1981/82, although its author was not identified. My thanks to Simha Emanuel, who shared his research on these

alphabet, and several macro-forms of Hekhalot literature and related works are even mentioned on folio 1 recto:²³ *Alfabeta de-Rabbi 'Aqiva, Ma'ase Merkava* and *Sefer Hekhalot*.²⁴ As remarkable as it may seem, however, this observation adds weight to my claim that mystical works like the ones mentioned above were not very widespread.

3.3 Fragments in Erfurt/Gotha

The most exciting find concerning our topic was made recently in the cover of a host volume preserved at the Gotha Research Library (Forschungsbibliothek Gotha) near Erfurt. The existence of Hebrew parchment fragments at this renowned library was made public a long time ago,²⁵ but so far, no systematic attempt has been made to search for and identify all the Hebrew fragments known to us at this public institution in Thuringia.²⁶ Many new fragments were identified here between 2012 and 2014, mainly containing texts from *maḥzorim*, pages from several Masoretic Bible manuscripts and a few Talmudic fragments. Only one fragment contains unknown or unrecognisable bits of text; its Hebrew text is different to any of the edited and searchable texts we currently know of from mediaeval Ashkenaz. Some of the expressions in it indicate it was written during a certain period and by a certain author, at least. Although I am unable to name its author or identify its contents with any confidence yet, this piece seems worthy of further study, especially in view of the fact that texts on mystical philosophy are so rare among the finds that have been made in book bindings so far.

fragments with me. A new edition of these lost parts of *Midrash Šekhel Tov* will be published by Emanuel shortly.

23 I owe this observation to Saskia Dönitz (Berlin).

24 Regarding these writings and their contents, see Schäfer 1992, 7f.; Schäfer 2009, 242. On *Alfabeta de-Rabbi 'Aqiva*, also see Dönitz 2003, 149–179.

25 See Michaelis 1772, 196–209; Michaelis 1773, 239–252; Michaelis 1773, 244–247; Michaelis 1774, 238–244; Michaelis 1789, 240–244; also see Diederichs 1775.

26 See Jaraczewsky 1868, 116. For a recent overview of all the known fragments in Erfurt up to 2014, see Lehnardt 2014, 142–165.

4 A fragment of an unknown mystical text

The manuscript fragment mentioned above was part of a bifolio that was reused as a wrapper on the inner spine of a file. The parchment is 30.5 × 16 cm in size and each column has nearly 25 lines of text in it. The width of each column is 18.8 cm, and the left-hand edges of the column are straight. Only 12 cm of the upper half of the columns still exist. Some lines have been crimped into the host volume's spine, causing several words to become illegible. The parchment was damaged during the binding process, it seems, as a sharp, vertical cut runs through more than half of it. On the verso page, only a small strip of the second column of the text remains. The Ashkenazic semi-cursive script that is used resembles similar scripts of the 13th and early 14th century. Several correction marks and a gloss on the outer margin (verso) were added by the same scribe who wrote the manuscript, as these are in the same hand; the corrections were possibly introduced during the copying process or soon after it. Additional corrections and additions to the text were made between the lines of the Hebrew text as well. Thus, it seems likely that the fragment is a copy of a lost *Vorlage*. The copy does not seem to have been made very carefully, however.

4.1 The contents of the fragment

The fragment has preserved the beginning of an original work that is no longer known and/or is now lost. It starts with the doubled phrases *athil da'*, 'I will start this', and the abbreviations עמ"י עש"י ('*am'y 'as"v*) for the biblical verse in Psalm 121:2 ('*Ezri me- 'im adonai 'ose shamayim wa- 'ares*). These phrases are known from other works and were often used to express the acknowledgement of God's assistance at the beginning of a text.²⁷ The fragment then continues with a benediction of 'the hidden God' (האל המסתתר מכל דעת) and a quote from the book of Job 12:22, a famous verse often cited in philosophical and mystical literature, for example. Interestingly, the author adds that God 'hides Himself from all reason' here (line 2), an expression which resembles Se'adya Ga'on's (d. in 942) intro-

²⁷ These phrases were used quite often, not only by Ashkenazic writers and copyists. They often appeared at the beginning of mystical writings. We do not know when these abbreviations were introduced or by whom. See, for example, *Sefer Gematriot of R. Judah the Pious. Facsimile of a Unique Manuscript*, Abrams/Ta-Shema (eds) 1998, unnumbered front page of the facsimile, or later Kabbalistic works.

duction to his commentary on the *Sefer Yeşira*, where the same verse from Job is cited.²⁸

The text then progresses, describing how God has faith in his people and showing how he revealed His secrets to the righteous. He founded his covenant with Abraham and gave his Tora to his sons, thereby providing them with ‘the path of his wisdom’ (נתיב חכמתו), again a well-known phrase from the *Sefer Yeşira*.²⁹ His sons can be close to him and serve as ‘contemplators of his name’ (חושבי שמו), the text states.

Further on, it describes two ways to gain full understanding: exegesis (or pounding) of scripture, and observation of God’s revelation in nature, which is applicable to rational thinking. Man’s condition, however, is one of being ‘a species among species and a messenger’ (אנו מין בין המינים ובעלי המסרים), which makes God incomprehensible to mankind.³⁰ God can only be described by language, but language can only differentiate and abstract certain phenomena (lines 15–16). Inasmuch as men are creatures and objects to be changed, they cannot fully grasp his essence (line 18).

The fragment then goes on to present an example (*mashal*), which the reader is supposed to keep in mind (line 19): fire can reveal the one power in heaven, and it provides insights into the distinction between essence and the attributes of its effect. This power, which is comparable to fire or light, be it in the form of a candle or a lamp, cannot be touched or conceived. There is a different power, which does not change itself. This *mashal* seems to be a reflection on a passage in Se’adya Ga’on’s philosophical magnum opus, *Sefer Emunot we-De’ot*, in the Hebrew translation by Yehuda ibn Tibbon.³¹

What follows seems to be a digression from this well-known argument, although due to the poor condition of this part of the fragment, it is not entirely clear what the author wants to stress. The effect of the power can only be compared with the relationship between a lender and a borrower, the author says (verso line 1). The author then goes on to provide some insights into the hidden

²⁸ See *Sefer Yetzirah [Kitāb al-mabadi] ‘im Perush ha-Gaon Rabbenu Se’adya bar Yosef Fayyumi*, Kafah (ed.) 1974, 18. On this commentary, see Brody 2013, 48; see also Dan 2009, 56.

²⁹ On this phrase, see section 1 of *Sefer Yeşira*, see Hayman (ed.) 2004, 49, 52; see also Herrmann (ed.) 2008, 10–11.

³⁰ The terms used in this part of the fragment are not entirely clear, and they are not familiar from other sources either.

³¹ See Se’adya ben Yosef Fayyumi, *Sefer ha-nivḥar be-’emunot u-we-de’ot (Ha-’emunot we-ha-de’ot)*, Kafah (ed.) 2005, 22; *Saadia Gaon*, Rosenblatt (transl.) 1948, 21. On using fire as a philosophical example, also see *More nevuḥim*, Schwarz (ed.) 2002, vol. 1, 125; *Der Führer der Unschlüssigen*, Weiss (ed.) 1995, 171, note 9; *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Pines (transl.) 1963, 120 (I 53).

meaning of the letter *alef*, the letter at the start of the famous phrase in Exodus 3:14: *Ehye-asher-Ehye* (line 3). In the word *El*, the letter stands for *eḥad*. In this context, the fragment mentions an earlier commentary written by the same author. It remains unclear which commentary is meant, however, and whether this remark refers to another work or a commentary on the same text. Since the fragment alludes to the *Sefer Yešira* here, one might also guess that he is referring to a commentary on that book, presumably the commentary attributed to El‘azar ben Yehuda of Worms (who died in 1238).³²

The author then continues, explaining that every word with an *alef* is empowered by the hidden force of God, the first power (*koah rishon*) (line 19). He subsequently mentions the six angels of death known from earlier rabbinic traditions³³ and alludes to the power of angels.³⁴ In this context, he also refers to the angel Uri‘el, who sheds light on Metatron, *Sar ha-Panim*. The famous angel Metatron,³⁵ a close companion to God, is depicted here as the sole messenger of God’s essence. It remains unclear whether the light of Uri‘el (lit. ‘God is my light’)³⁶ shines on Metatron or if the light of Metatron reflects the light he receives from God, however. In rabbinic tradition, Uri‘el is an angel who stands on one side of the godhead. Judging by the philosophical wording of the initial text, it seems likely that Metatron serves as a transmitter of the power that shines from the hidden face of God.

The next part of the fragment clearly refers to the third chapter of the *Sefer Yešira*.³⁷ The letter *alef* rules (*himlikh*) the air/wind and He made him a crown. In a short passage on the letters *alef*, *mem* and *shin* (שמ"א), the author seems to allude to the commentary on the *Sefer Yešira* attributed to Moshe ben Naḥman.³⁸ This section, however, has also been integrated into a similar version of the commentary on the alphabet in *Sefer Sode Razaya* compiled by El‘azar of Worms.³⁹

³² Regarding this work, see *Sefer Sode Razaya le-Rabbenu El‘azar mi-Germaiza*, Weiss (ed.) 1991, 11. Also see *Sefer Ješirah*, Goldschmidt (ed.) 1894, 39. Also see Dan 2011, 511–519.

³³ In early mystical literature, this was often מלאכי הבלה. See *Alfabeta de-Rabbi ‘Aqiva, Nusah bet*, in *Bet ha-Midrash*, Jellinek (ed.) 1967, 50; also see the Targum Pseudo-Jonatan Ex 12:23; מ"א in the right-hand margin. On the term in rabbinic literature, see Schäfer 1975, 65–67.

³⁴ On angels in early mystical literature, see Schäfer 1988, 266. On rabbinic concepts of angels, see Rebigier 2007.

³⁵ Regarding the vast literature on Metatron, see the more recent contributions by Orlov 2005, especially the summary of early former research on pp. 92–96; Schäfer 2013.

³⁶ See Margalio 1988, 5–10.

³⁷ Section 32 of the *Sefer Yešira*, see Hayman (ed.) 2004, 121, and Herrmann (ed.) 2008, 42–43.

³⁸ Actually, this commentary was written by Azri‘el of Gerona. See Scholem 1962, 330.

³⁹ See *Sode Razaya ha-Shalem*, Elimelekh (ed.) 2004, 16.

This may be an important clue to the provenance of the person who wrote the fragment.

In sum, the content of the fragment clearly forms a kind of prolegomenon to a longer composition on mystical philosophy. It refers to earlier works such as the *Sefer Yeşira* and its commentaries. This work and its early philosophical interpretation stimulated *ḥaside ashkenaz* to write and compose further explanations. The newly discovered fragment therefore clearly belongs to what Joseph Dan once called ‘the third phase in its reception history’.⁴⁰

4.2 Preliminary conclusions about the fragment

Even though there are no identical texts, its structure and context are comparable to other works, especially commentaries on the Pentateuch culled from Northern French and Ashkenazic exegetes. One striking example is a complete manuscript now kept at the Vatican Library under the shelfmark ebr 48, called *Pa’aneah Raza*.⁴¹ This unedited text shares some characteristics with our fragment: it starts with the same phrases, *athil da’* and *’ami asu*, and even some of the above-mentioned Bible verses are cited in this compilation. The specific relation to other complete texts such as the commentaries on the *Sefer Yeşira* from the school of Rabbi El’azar of Worms and other longer mystical tractates from the 14th century still needs to be investigated, however. In the meantime, one can only summarise by saying that the author of our new fragment absorbed and transferred earlier thoughts and motifs. He reinterpreted older – perhaps even ancient – concepts mainly grasped from the *Sefer Yeşira* and its commentaries, largely stemming from Se’adya Ga’on, El’azar of Worms and the circle of the *ḥaside ashkenaz*.⁴² He also adapted philosophical concepts on the significance of the Hebrew alphabet and tried to make them applicable to his own ethics of God’s hidden presence. None of his thoughts are expressed in the same way, however, as we know it from other writings. And we do not know of similar works that have been published or edited yet.

⁴⁰ See Dan 1997, 236.

⁴¹ For a description, see Hebrew Manuscripts in the Vatican Library, Richler/Beit-Arié/Pasternak 2008, 34.

⁴² Although there are similar thoughts and philosophical speculations in other texts from the time of the *ḥaside ashkenaz*, none of them are absolutely identical. The fragment text, for example, cannot be identified with any of the commentaries on the seventy names of Metatron, a more philosophical speculation on the power of angels. On this matter, see Idel 2005, 183–196; Idel 2007, 255–264.

In conclusion, the newly discovered fragment from Gotha is remarkable evidence of the reception of ancient mystical thought in mediaeval Germany. Although its author has not yet been identified, it looks likely that the fragment is related to the *ḥaside ashkenaz* movement or its followers. Many other comparable texts might exist, some of them even in complete manuscripts containing a colophon. These still await further research, however, and may shed some more light on Metatron one day.

Let me conclude with another reference to Campanini's preliminary observations on the fragments from Italy. Like him, it is my hope that further research on Hebrew binding fragments in Germany will make a contribution to the study of the diffusion of Jewish mystical thought and the Kabbala. Even if it is too early to draw any far-reaching conclusions, a comparison between regions and the different countries of Europe sheds light on the history of the reception and development of mystical thought in Ashkenaz and beyond.

5 Edition of fragment *Forschungsbibliothek Erfurt-Gotha, Memb. I 201, fol. 15*

Critical symbols:

?	doubtful or illegible letter
< >	lacuna, addition or correction
[]	addition from a biblical quotation
/~	graphic filler

Recto:

1 עמ"י עש"ו עמ"י עש"ו אתחיל דא אתחיל דא בטור []
 2 ב"א א' אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו האל המסתתר⁴³ מכל דעת המהלך על כנפי רוח (תה' קד ג)
 ומגלה עמוקות מני
 3 חושך (איוב יב כב) והמאמין בקדושיו והנדרש לשואליו והכורת ברית לבחיריו אשר כרת
 את אברהם (תה' קה ט; דברי הימים א טז טז)

⁴³ See Isaiah 45:15; also see line 9 below.

- 4 להנחיל תורת אמת לבניו לתת להם נתיב חכמתו⁴⁴ ולהיותם קרובים אליו וחושבי שמו כי
 5 ידע דרך עמו ככת' כי ידעתי^[ו] למען גו' (בר' יח יט) ושמרו דרך יי (בר' יח יט) ממנו ידעו
 ויכירו לעשות צדקה ומשפט (בר' יח יט) על /הת"ד
 6 התמימות אשר הם שני דרכים מתחלפים מצד שהצדק יתר במעלה יתר מן המשפט והדרך
 הזו
 7 משתטף לשני עיניינים והדרך האחד לבקש את דבר השם כעניין שכתוב הורני יי' דרך
 חוקיך (תה' קיט לג)
 8 והשיני נ' הוא דרכו של עצמו כיצד הוא כעניין שכתוב יי כסופה וסערה (ישעיה כט ו) דרכו
 פי' דרכו למהר את
 9 סופת כל ברייה ובשערה להסתתר ככת' אכן אתה אל (ישעיה מה טו) יעיר לתלות שערה
 בשערה זיו הדרו בשר
 10 פניו וממנו אחת לאחת ושב אמיתת המצאו אשר נוכל בטבע השכל להשיג ממנו ונודע
 מדרכי ~/
 11 עצמו בכל הכתוב והודיעני נא את דרכיך (שמות לג יג) ודרכי יי שבעה אלה.
 עיני יי המה משוטטים בכל הארץ (זכריה ד י'
 12 ומקור אחד להם. שאין שבר התהפ(ו)כות אליהם בהיותם בכח עד התגלגלם אל המקרים.
 והם
 13 דרך אחד להם וכל אחת פועלת בפעולת חבירתה וכולו ישנו כבורא ית' דבר אחר. ואולם
 אנחנו
 14 אשר אנו מין בין המינים ובעלי המסרים לא נוכל להשיגו כי אם על דרכי המקרים
 המפורדים.
 15 כאשר יארע בכח הדיבור. והדיבור הוא כאילו התכוונת בלבך אחת התכוונות וכחיותה בכח
 ת?/
 16 המחשבה תהיה דבר אחר מופרט ופשוט. ואם כאתה להזכירו בדבור שהוא לו מקרה
 תצטרך
 17 להזכירו בכמה תיבות או בכמה אותיו' שאינם דוקות זו לזו. וגם כן הבורא התברך הוא
 דרכיו ~
 18 להנהגתו ונהיה לעצמו אחד. אלא שאנחנו בעלי מקרים ולא נוכל להשיגו. ואלינו השינוי
 ולא
 19 לו. ועוד אמשול לך משל למה הדבר דומה והוא שכבר ידעת מהאש כי הוא כח אחד
 20 לעצמו זהו אין עליו דרך שם. עד הגיע לנוח על המקרים המתהפכים. ועל פי טבעים
 21 ההם נראה מושש ומיכש מלכיו ומשחיר ומאיר ויצא עליו שנשתנה לכמה עיניינים והוא כח

44 See section 1 of the *Sefer Yetzirah*, Hayman (ed.) 2004, 49.

22 אחר ולא נשתנה. מאש שהוא עליו וגם כן הבורא הוא הכל ויודע עצמו. ויש פועל לכהו
זולת

23 ??? ??? ??? ??? ??? ??? ??? ??? ??? ???

24 [דבר כי הוא ככל לראתו הכל. ואם נפרטן דרכיו חי? על]

25 ??? מ?שה הכסא יצא ??? ???

Verso

1 בין האור ובין הנר כמלוה כלוה ואיתם דרך כלל זה עצמו וזה דרכו כי זה לא נקרא נר כי אם
לעלות/ה~

2 האור. וביניהם כבין האור העומד זולתו לכח העצום הזה אומי נביאנו ע"ה האל הגדול
הגיבור והנורא (דב' י יז)

3 והנה לך מילת האל בפירוש היכל להמצאות בו. ואל"ף של אהיה (שמ' ג יד) ויוד של
השם מצד שהוא בכל

4 ואוריאל אשר לפני השכינה ככת' לפני לא יראו (שמ' לג כג) רוצה לומר שלוהו וכחו
וזר?חת אורו על מטטרון אשר הוא

5 שר פניו והתבונן פירוש או פניהם. דע כי מילת אל משמש '? לשוי אחד מהם לשוי כח
נ(י)סתר

6 עצום עומד בעצומו כאשר פירשנו. והוא מילש' יש לאל ידי (בר' לא כט) והוא חיותו ויען
כל דבר הוא. יש בו

7 דין כלם. נאמ' בו חכם והשיני הוא {לדין} לדין כגון אלהים נצב בעדת אל (תה' פב א)
והוא שנקרא חפץ. לבלתי אמור ~

8 בו ובה עשותו חפץ בו נקרא יוכל כי דרכו ושבילו בכל היסוד כנר המס?יק לכל משיגיו ואין
לך שיש בו

9 שכל שלא תוכל לומר כי ייי בקרבו כי ירא על כנפי רוח ומהשגת גלגל הש[כל] לשמש
בעולם התחתון נאמר

10 ?? מלאך בין במות בין בקיים. והכן ממה שנאמ' רבותינו ששה מלאכי המות וכו' והל'
השלישי לשוי גאולה

11 [מ]עלה על הכל. כגון אל גויי וכן הא' הגדול אשר אמרתי לך א' של אהיה (שמ' ג יד)
רצ[ו]ני לומי שכל שם שתחילתו א' פועל

12 בכח ראשון אלא אם הסתירו הנביאים החליפו באותיות והדין הזה כשמתחיל
כל שם בשאר אותיות.

- 13 ואשר אמרתי לך אל"ף של אמש 45 רצוני לומר כי כשתמצא בספר יצ(י)רה המליך אות פלוני וקשר לו 46 אינו
- 14 אומ' שכח האות ברא אלא בכח ראשון או בשיני אשר כנגד האות ההוא הנזכר כאשר בסדר
- 15 הרוחות על דרך האותיות אם גוזר האל ותתבונן שתפיש לשו' והמוליך מכלל שעצמו בכר היה וקשר לו
- 16 כתר 47 ולא אומ' והכתיר ופירושו מי שקשר שעה ובשעה יצא לו שם מלכות על אותו פועל ולא
- 17 אומ' הכתיר שמורה על ש(ו)ם קידוש ואשר אמרתי לך יוד של השם דין חכמ' רוצה לומר אי איפשר
- 18 שלא כח על כלום ושאינן נופל על שום דבר והנה חשיכה הראשונה [מ]סב?? אחרון עלל לה וסופו
- 19 נקשרים בו כי הוא אינו חסר מסיבתם כאשר האל"ף לא חסר מסיבת החשבונות ולא הוסיף וכולם
- 20 תלויין בו ולסוף אחר {??} העשרות והדבר המיתה שחוזר השכל ומתעלה במעלות אשר ירך כי צד
- 21 הכח המדריך (ר"ל כללי השכל) חוזר ממלאך לגדול ממלאך ולא הנשמה הכ? מית פי' ???
- 22 []
- 32 []

45 See *Sefer Yešira*, sections 23, 24, 26–36, Hayman (ed.) 2004, 110–111; Herrmann (ed.) 2008, 37.

46 See *Sefer Yešira*, sections 32–34, 41, 52, Hayman (ed.) 2004, 121; Herrmann (ed.) 2008, 43–44. The word כחר is missing. See lines 15–16 below.

47 *Sefer Yešira*, sections 32–34, 41, 52, Hayman (ed.) 2004, 121–123, 160; Herrmann (ed.) 2008, 42–44, 68.

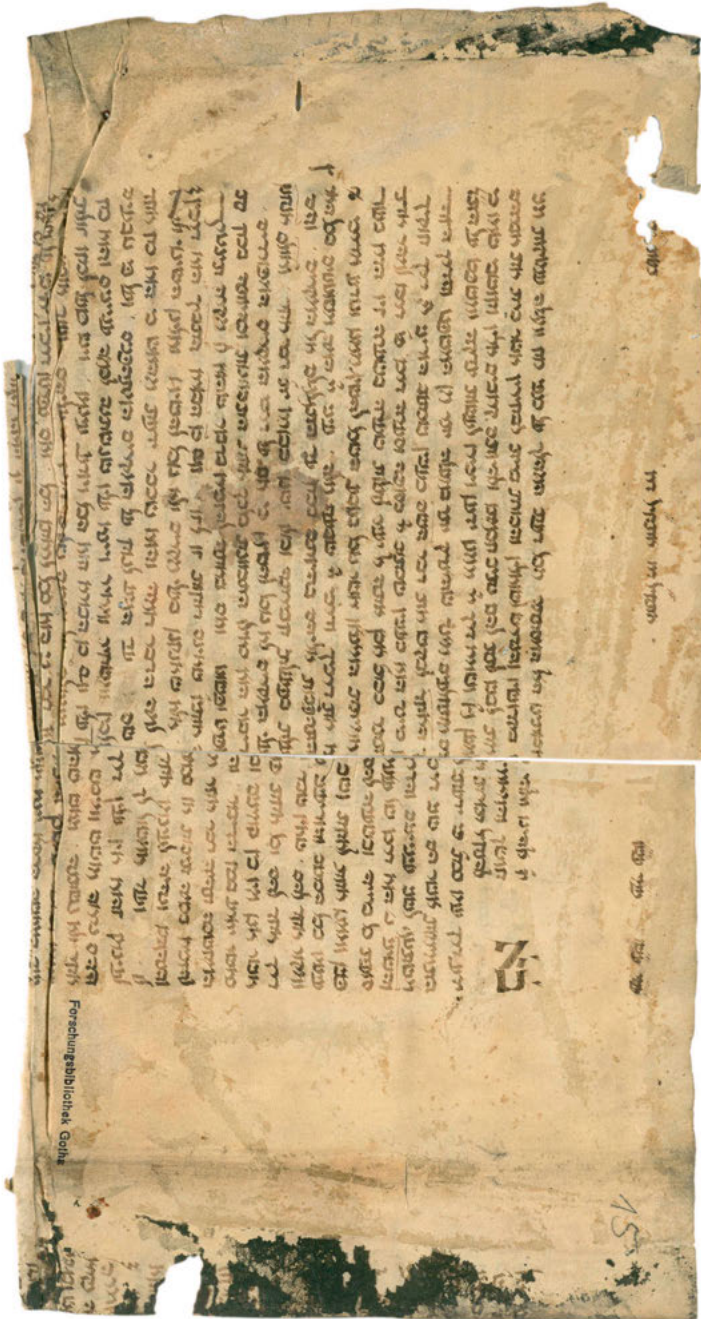


Fig. 1: Forschungsbibliothek Erfurt-Gotha, Memb. I 201, fol. 15, recto. © Bibliothek Erfurt-Gotha.

Handwritten text in a medieval script, likely Gothic or similar, on a parchment page. The text is arranged in several columns, with some lines written in a larger, bolder script. The parchment shows signs of age, including discoloration and some damage, particularly a large hole on the right side. The text is written in a dense, cursive style. At the bottom of the page, there is a small, faint drawing or diagram, possibly a geometric figure or a simple architectural plan, with some accompanying text or labels. The overall appearance is that of an old, well-used manuscript page.

Fig. 2: Forschungsbibliothek Erfurt-Gotha, Memb. I 201, fol. 15, verso. © Bibliothek Erfurt-Gotha.

6 Translation

Recto

1. *My help comes from the Lord, maker of heaven and earth. My help comes from the Lord, maker of heaven and earth* (Psalm 121:2). I will start this; I will start this. In the column []⁴⁸
2. Blessed are You, Lord our God, and God of our Fathers, *the God who hides Himself*⁴⁹ from all reason, *moves on the wings of the wind* (Psalm 104:3) and *who draws mysteries out of*
3. *the darkness* (Job 12:22); who has faith in His holy people, answers their requests, who made a covenant with His followers *that He made with Abraham* (Psalm 105:1 ;9 Chronicles 161:6).
4. to bequeath His true Tora to his children,⁵⁰ to provide them with a path to His wisdom, to be close to Him and contemplate His name, because
5. he knows the way of his people, as it is written: *For I have known him*, etc. (Genesis 18:19) *and to keep the way of the Lord* (Genesis 18:19), from him they learn *how to do what is just and right* (Genesis 18:19). To (attain)
6. perfection there are two different ways, because righteousness prevails over justice, and this way
7. includes two concerns: the first, expounding God's word according to its meaning, as it is written: *Give me understanding of the ways of your commandments* (Psalm 119:34).
8. And the second, as mentioned, is the way of Himself, how He reveals Himself, as in *storm and tempest* (Isaiah 29:6) – His way, which means that
9. the storm moves all creatures and the tempest conceals Him, as it is written: *You are indeed a God* (Isaiah 45:16). He rouses storm by storm, splendour and glory among His *Sare*
10. *ha-Panim*. And from this, item by item,⁵¹ the truth behind these things reveals Him [to us], which we can understand by rational thinking, and we recognise His ways

⁴⁸ Something is missing from the first line of the text here.

⁴⁹ See Isaiah 45:15. Also see *Sefer Sode Razaya*, Weiss (ed.) (1991), 168.

⁵⁰ See *Midrash Mishle* 19:1, Visotzky (ed.) 1990, 136.

⁵¹ See *Kohelet* 7:27.

11. from Himself, as it is written: *Let me know your ways* (Exodus 33:14); and the ways of the Lord: *Those seven are the eyes of the Lord, ranging over the whole world* (Zechariah 4:10).
12. And they (all) have one source. But the vicissitudes did not come to an end, while still being an option until they became specific cases for themselves. And this
13. is one of their conditions: that every reason causes another reason. And like the creator – may He be praised! – they all have a different reason. But we,
14. as far as we are a species among species and transmitter, cannot comprehend Him, unless by the way of different phenomena.
15. It can (only) happen by the power of language. And language is only like an indicator in your heart. This indicator, as long as it is in force, /?
16. can direct the imagination to differentiate and to abstract the phenomena. And in case you remember a certain incident during communication, you must
17. remember certain words or certain letters, which are not connected to each other. And so the creator – may He be praised! – in His way
18. of ruling, but He is for Himself one. But we are [merely] creatures and cannot comprehend Him. And we are objects to change, but
19. He is not. And further on, I will give you a parable as to what things He can be compared with: And you already became aware of the fire, that it is one power⁵²
20. by itself, which means that there is nothing above it, until it rests from the changing circumstances. And on the basis of these elements
21. it looks burning and biting during its way, blackening and enlightening, and it flares up in many attributes, but He is
22. a different power that does not change. Different than fire, upon which He is set, and He, too, is creator of all and knows of it all Himself. And there is one creator of its power alone
23. ??? ??? ??? ??? ??? ??? ??? ??? ??? ??? ??? above. And also or?? ???
24. [] matter because He sees it all. And if His ways differentiate []
25. ??? the throne goes ??? ??? ???

52 An original power or potency.

Verso

26. [...] between the light and the candle (exists a relation) similar to that between a lender and a borrower. And in principle they exist by themselves. But this is also His way. Because of this, it is called 'candle', because it creates
27. light. And their relationship is like one between the light, which stands for itself alone. About this power of substance, our prophet – peace be upon him – says: *the great, the mighty and the awesome God* (Deuteronomy 10:17).
28. And look, you have the word 'God' (*ha-'El*), which directs you to the palace where He can be found. And the *alef* in *eheye* (Exodus 3:14) and the *yod* in the name (of God)⁵³ are on either side.
29. As with Uri'el, who (stands) before the *Shekhina*, as it is written: *but my face must not be seen* (Exodus 33:23), which means His essence and His power and His light shines on *Metatron*, who serves as
30. *Sar Panim*; this means he looks at Him or at His (face). Know that the word *El* stands for the expression 'one of them'; the expression 'hidden power'
31. refers to a substance which exists by itself, as we have already explained. And it can be derived from the expression: *God has it in his power* (Genesis 31:29), and He in His existence, as a result, everything else comes into being. In Him
32. exists the determination of everything. It says about one wise [thing], and the second [adjective] determines it, as (indicated) for example in (the verse): *God stands in the divine assembly* (Psalm 82:1), and this is what is called 'will' (*hefes*), without having determined
33. by him. And by doing this they do His will, because His way and His path are like the principle, like a candle which lights up anyone who reaches out for it. And there is nobody with
34. intellect who would not confirm that the Lord is *in its midst*,⁵⁴ for one who fears the wings of spirit and the sphere of intellect,⁵⁵ to utilise them in the netherworld, as it is said
35. ?? angel, be it for death or be it for existence/life. But where from? From what our masters/Rabbis said: 'Six angels of death', etc.⁵⁶ And the third meaning is an expression of redemption,

53 The Tetragrammaton.

54 See, e.g. Exodus 34:10.

55 See Klatzkin 1968, vol. 1, 115.

56 See *Alfabet de-Rabbi 'Aqiva, Nusah bet*, in *Bet ha-Midrash*, Jellinek (ed.) 1967, vol. 3, 50.

36. (which) stands above everything else.⁵⁷ Such as *I will raise (my hands) to the nations* (Isaiah 49:22). And likewise in: *the great, (the mighty and the awesome) God* (Deuteronomy 10:17), which I explained to you; *alef* in *ehey* (Exodus 3:14). I want to say that every word which begins with *alef* is inspired
37. by the first power, even though the prophets concealed them and permuted letters. And this is the rule when a word starts with one of the other letters.
38. As I have told you, *alef* from the (mother) letters *alef, mem* and *shin (emesh)*.⁵⁸ I want to say that you will find it in the *Sefer Yeşira*, that He made a certain letter rule over another and bound (a crown) to it. It is not
39. said that the power of the letter created, but that (it was created) by the initial or the second power, which was combined with a particular letter, according to the order
40. of the winds following the arrangement of the mother letters that God has determined. And consider that He adopted the phrase ‘and He bound’ on the assumption that His substance was given priority, and He bound to it
41. a crown. And He does not say ‘and He crowned (the letter)’. And this means that the one who combines hair (assumption) with hair (assumption) will get a definition that determines its function. And it is not
42. said ‘He crowned (the letter)’, not to direct to sanctification. As I have told you, the *yod* in the name (of God) is the rule of wisdom. This means it is impossible
43. that (the letter) has no power about anything, that the [letter] does not mean anything. And look, the first darkness encompasses the last; rising and its conclusion
44. are bound together in it. Because it does not diminish its effect when the *alef* does not delete or add something from the rationale of the accounts. And all
45. (other letters) are subject to Him. And to another outcome {?} the ten and the event of death, which the mind remembers and concludes that the flank is the side of
46. the power who is instructing (which means the principles of reason). It returns from one angel to the assistance of another angel. And the soul ... which means ??? ??? ???
47. []
48. []

⁵⁷ See *Alfabeta de-Rabbi 'Aqiva*, op cit.

⁵⁸ See Lehnardt/Ottermann 2014.

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