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Rabbinization and the Making of Early Jewish Mysticism

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INTRODUCTION

HEKHALOT LITERATURE, the earliest systematic collection of Jewish "mystical" sources, testifies to the heterogeneous nature of Jewish religious practice and authority in Late Antiquity.[1] This essay considers the role that the rabbinization of Jewish culture and society at the end of antiquity (ca. 500–900 C.E.) played in the formation of the distinctive registers of discourse found in Hekhalot literature. The increasing acknowledgment among scholars of the continuing diversity of Jewish culture well into the early Islamic period has made the task of determining the relationship between Hekhalot and rabbinic literatures more rather than less complicated. In my view, however, Hekhalot and rabbinic literatures do not reflect two wholly discrete forms of Judaism, nor are they merely complementary facets of a single, coherent religious system. Both of these options oversimplify the complex relationship between these rapidly evolving sites of Jewish literary culture.

1. Hekhalot literature is most fully accessible in Peter Schäfer, ed., *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, in collaboration with M. Schlüter and H. G. von Mutius (Tübingen, 1981), which, however, should not be reified as a final or definitive "edition" of these texts. A number of Hekhalot fragments found in the Cairo Geniza are collected in Peter Schäfer, ed., *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen, 1984).

Hekhalot and rabbinic literatures bear clear signs of direct mutual interaction, sharing a common pool of rabbinic heroes and exhibiting important linguistic similarities that set them apart from earlier Hebrew sources from the Second Temple period.[2] It is thus evident that the social groups that produced Hekhalot literature were subject to many of the same institutional, technological, linguistic, and demographic transformations that reshaped Jewish society in this period.[3] At the same time, these textual corpora exhibit significant differences in literary form, thematic content, and conceptions of religious piety and practice. Not only do Hekhalot texts eschew the dominant forms of rabbinic literary culture (mishnah, midrash, and gemara) but they are also distinctively preoccupied with ritual-liturgical techniques for achieving power and knowledge through heavenly ascent and angelic adjuration.

The complexity of these patterns of similarity and difference, contact and divergence, should not be viewed merely as "noise" obscuring the realities of clear-cut social, cultural, and institutional divisions within Jewish society. Nor does the intensifying impact of rabbinic authority throughout Jewish literary culture suggest that we should merely fold the plurality of sites of Jewish textual production into an overarching religious system under the name "rabbinic Judaism." Instead, I wish to argue that a more nuanced mapping of the imperfectly intersecting terrains of Hekhalot and rabbinic literatures will open up new avenues for understanding both the extension of rabbinic hegemony and the enduring heterogeneity of Jewish culture during the transitional period at the end of Late Antiquity that saw the empires of the ancient European, Mediterranean, and Near Eastern world evolve into what Garth Fowden has called the "commonwealths" of the early Middle Ages.[4]

The pervasive evidence of literary contact between rabbinic and Hek-

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2. On the use of rabbinic pseudepigraphy in Hekhalot literature, see Ra'anan S. Boustan, "The Emergence of Pseudonymous Attribution in Heikhalot Literature: Empirical Evidence from the Jewish 'Magical' Corpora," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 13 (2006): 1–21. On the proximity of the Hebrew of Hekhalot literature to rabbinic Hebrew and its relative lexical and conceptual distance from the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls, see Noam Mizrahi, "The Supposed Relationship between the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice and Hekhalot Literature: Linguistic and Stylistic Aspects" (Hebrew), *Meghilot 7* (2009): 263–98.

3. See now the discussion of the impact of the growth of the rabbinic academies of Sasanian and early Islamic Iraq on Hekhalot literature in Moulie Vidas, "Tradition and the Formation of the Talmud" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2009), 193–242.

4. Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, N.J., 1993).

halot literatures might render this proposition uncontroversial. Neverthe-
less, a powerful impulse within Jewish studies scholarship persists in
treating Hekhalot literature as a reflection of a wholly autonomous "mys-
tical Judaism," a kind of Jewish *philosophia perennis*, which was tempo-
rally prior and, indeed, developed in opposition to "mainstream" rabbinic
Judaism.[5] This binary view of Judaism in Late Antiquity seems to have
eclipsed the once dominant framework for the study of early Jewish mys-
ticism advanced by Gershom Scholem; in Scholem's view, Hekhalot liter-
ature constituted the ecstatic-esoteric dimension of rabbinic tradition and
thus served as the dynamic beating heart of a law-centered rabbinism.[6]
These seemingly contradictory interpretative frameworks—one binary,
one dialectical—in fact represent the flip-sides of the same coin. In both
cases, Hekhalot literature, as the foremost extant witness to this ancient
Jewish mysticism, represents a timeless domain of Jewish religiosity
driven by transhistorical desire for unmediated "religious experience."[7]

My general orientation takes its cue from a review penned by Morton
Smith in response to the publication of the final volume of Erwin R.
Goodenough's *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*.[8] Smith's essay cri-
tiques Goodenough's reduction of the plurality of Jewish cultural and
religious forms in Late Antiquity to two discrete and opposing Judaisms,

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5. For recent attempts to posit a stark contrast between "mainstream rabbinic
sources" and a preexisting and thus fundamentally independent "mystical" Juda-
ism, see especially Rachel Elior, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mys-
ticism* (Oxford, 2004); Elior, "*Hekhalot* and *Merkavah* Literature: Its Relation to
the Temple, the Heavenly Temple, and the 'Diminished Temple'" (Hebrew), in
Continuity and Renewal: Jews and Judaism in Byzantine-Christian Palestine, ed. L. I.
Levine (Jerusalem, 2004), 107–42; Jodi Magness, "Heaven on Earth: Helios and
the Zodiac Cycle in Ancient Palestinian Synagogues" Dumbarton Oaks Papers
59 (2007): 1–52. See also Philip Alexander, *Mystical Texts* (London, 2006), 121–
36, which, while offering a considerably more nuanced account of the relationship
between Second Temple sources, the rabbis, and Hekhalot literature, affirms the
existence of a largely discrete and continuous mode of mystical practice and expe-
rience within early Judaism.

6. See especially Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New
York, 1954), 40–79; Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic
Tradition* (New York, 1965).

7. For a lucid critique of "religious experience" as an analytical concept and
its tendentious use for delineating religion as a *sui generis* object of study, see
Robert H. Sharf, "Experience," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. M. Taylor
(Chicago, 1998), 94–116, which builds especially upon the work of Wayne
Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley, Calif., 1985).

8. Morton Smith, "Goodenough's *Jewish Symbols* in Retrospect," *Journal of
Biblical Literature* 86 (1967): 53–68.

one a religion of conformity and obedience to law promulgated by the rabbis and one a ubiquitous, if poorly attested, Hellenized Judaism of mystico-sacramental communion. In his characteristically trenchant prose, Smith wrote that

> Goodenough's theory falsifies the situation by substituting a single, antirabbinic, mystical Judaism for the enormous variety of personal, doctrinal, political, and cultural divergencies [*sic*] which the rabbinic and other evidence reveals, and by supposing a sharp division between rabbinic and antirabbinic Judaism, whereas actually there seems to have been a confused gradation.[9]

Recognition of both the limits of rabbinic hegemony and the sheer diversity of Jewish practice and belief that existed throughout Late Antiquity must be balanced with unromantic consideration of the impact of rabbinization on Jewish culture, especially toward the end of the period in question.[10] As rabbinic literary culture gradually emerged as a hegemonic force in Jewish life, it both constrained and enabled ongoing cultural and religious creativity.

In calling for a historicizing approach to Hekhalot literature, I join a host of scholars who have begun to emphasize the heuristic power of situating Jewish mysticism and magic within their specific historical parameters rather than relegating these domains of Jewish cultural expression to either phenomenological or folkloric approaches. Gideon Bohak has, for example, traced the significant transformations in both ritual practice and written form that occurred within the domain of Jew-

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9. Smith, "Goodenough's *Jewish Symbols*," 65, cited in Magness, "Heaven on Earth," 2. Magness, however, opts not to heed Smith's advice, writing instead: "I suggest that Goodenough's interpretation was closer to the target: the images that decorate ancient Palestinian synagogues should be understood in relation to a mystical and nonrabbinic form (or forms) of Judaism" (2). Indeed, despite Magness's invocation of the plural "forms" as an analytical or historiographic option, the remainder of her article assimilates a massive amount of diverse literary evidence and material remains to a single "mystical Judaism."

10. The precise timing and causes of rabbinization are beyond the scope of this essay. I am, however, persuaded by Seth Swartz's assessment both of the limited scope of rabbinic authority within the wider Jewish society for much of the Roman period (second to fifth centuries) *and* its palpable, if gradual, consolidation beginning in the sixth century. See Seth Schwartz, "Rabbinization in the Sixth Century," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture III*, ed. P. Schäfer (Tübingen, 2002), 55–69, and *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton, N.J., 2001), esp. 103–28.

ish magic over the course of the Second Temple period, Late Antiquity, and the early Middle Ages.[11] In a similar spirit, a number of recent studies—for example, Matt Goldish's interpretation of Sabbateanism within the wider context of Christian and Muslim prophetic-millenarian movements of the seventeenth century or Moshe Rosman's analysis of the institutional and economic circumstances that conditioned the career of the Ba'al Shem Tov and thus the growth of Hasidism in Eastern Europe—have likewise demonstrated the importance of grounding the study of Jewish mystical ideas and practices in their particular historical contexts.[12] In each case, the vertical silo created by internalist interpretations of the Jewish mystical tradition—no matter how dialectical—has begun to give way to a horizontal orientation in the study of Jewish history. Rather than seek the "roots" of Jewish mystical and magical discourses within a hermetically sealed Jewish culture and documenting their linear, even teleological development through successive stages of Judaism, many scholars are increasingly taking up the challenge of tracing the crisscrossing "routes" of conceptual and material exchange at and across the boundaries of religious community and tradition.[13]

Yet, unlike the study of early modern or modern Jewish mystical or messianic movements, scholarship on Hekhalot literature must contend with a total absence of physical textual remains from the period in which its literary traditions were first formulated as well as with especially fluid transmission and reception histories.[14] Still, scholars of early Jewish mysticism have in recent years made great progress in reembedding Hekhalot literature within its shifting sociocultural contexts. Building upon the outcomes of this still emergent trend in scholarship, I argue that a nuanced understanding of the process of rabbinization is essential for proper appreciation of the place of Hekhalot literature within the wider Jewish

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11. Gideon Bohak, "Prolegomena to the Study of the Jewish Magical Tradition," *Currents in Biblical Research* 8 (2009): 107–50, esp. 110–12; and, more fully, Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge, 2008).

12. Matt Goldish, *The Sabbatean Prophets* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004); Moshe Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism: A Quest for the Historical Ba'al Shem Tov* (Berkeley, Calif., 1996). See now also Pawel Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude: Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement, 1755–1816* (Philadelphia, 2011).

13. Cf., James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997).

14. For synthetic discussion of the material evidence for Hekhalot literature and the interpretative problems (and opportunities) it represents, see Klaus Herrmann, "Re-Written Mystical Texts: The Transmission of the Heikhalot Literature in the Middle Ages," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 75 (1993): 97–116.

culture. This approach is not intended to discourage comparative study of Hekhalot literature within the broader Greco-Roman, Christian, and Islamic contexts in which it emerged but to ensure that such analyses proceed without the tendency—either apologetic or romantic—to discover the "Jewish counterpart to" or the "Jewish background of" this or that religious idea or practice.

In what follows, I first consider and criticize what I call the "perennialist" tradition in the study of Hekhalot literature. This tradition characterizes the work of scholars who may otherwise approach the material from widely divergent disciplinary and historiographic perspectives. But what binds them together is not only their dichotomous view of rabbinic and "mystical" forms of early Judaism but also their emphasis on rabbinic agency, which functions as the historical force that alters an otherwise static and profoundly ancient form of Jewish religiosity. I then consider an alternative branch of scholarship that has offered more sociologically and historically nuanced accounts of the relationship between rabbinic institutions and modes of authority and Hekhalot literature. Finally, I demonstrate that rabbinic and Hekhalot literature belonged to overlapping, though not identical, domains of Jewish literary culture. This tension between distance and proximity left powerful traces on the thematic emphases and rhetoric of authority that characterizes Hekhalot literature.

PERENNIALIST APPROACHES TO HEKHALOT LITERATURE

Before we can appreciate the challenge of providing an adequate account of the relationship of Hekhalot literature to rabbinic literary culture, it is important to reflect on the parameters that Gershom Scholem established for this scholarly debate and their persistence in many quarters. Research on this topic has rightly focused on two interrelated questions: First, do the Hekhalot and rabbinic literatures reflect the same, different, or perhaps complementary forms of religious practice and belief? Second, what are the specific institutional frameworks or social contexts that produced these literatures and, if they are distinct for the two, what is their relationship?

I argue in this section that this diverse group of scholars remains beholden to the basic interpretative framework laid down by Scholem more than half a century ago. I show that, ironically, Scholem's understanding of the inner dialectic between the mystical and the halakhic-normative dimensions *within* a single but multifaceted Judaism has unwittingly encouraged a binary view of the Jewish tradition, in which the mystical and the rabbinic represent two diametrically opposed forms of Judaism.

Scholem—and others in his wake—situated Hekhalot literature squarely within the main currents of rabbinic Judaism, at times even tracing its origins back to the second-century circles of R. Akiva and the other students of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai.[15] Others have mounted precisely the opposite argument, finding in this literature the voices of non-or anti-rabbinic Jews. Most significantly, David Halperin has argued that Hekhalot literature advocates a religious ideology directly at odds with the conception of knowledge and authority characteristic of classic rabbinic literature. He has, therefore, suggested that the Hekhalot corpus was produced by the Jewish "masses" (*'ame ha-arets*) who, finding themselves dispossessed by the emergent rabbinic dispensation, longed to acquire mastery of Torah-knowledge through more immediate "magical" means.[16] Ironically, despite the diametrically opposed conclusions that Scholem and Halperin draw, what is missing in both their accounts is sufficient appreciation of the radical transformation that occurred over the course of Late Antiquity in the form, scope, and standing of rabbinic culture.

The recent writings of Rachel Elior exemplify the analytical conundrum generated by overly static—and, indeed, a priori—conceptions of "rabbinism" and "mysticism." I consider her work in some detail here because I believe it typifies this common scholarly orientation and thus illustrates the need for more nuanced and concrete modes of analysis.

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15. In his original formulation, Scholem associated Hekhalot literature and its characteristic form of mystical praxis with the amoraic rabbis of the fourth and fifth centuries (*Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 40–79) but later revised his view and offered a more radical assessment that they reached back to the tannaitic circles of second-century Palestine (*Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* [New York, 1965], esp. 80). The latter position continues to be advocated, more or less unchanged, by Christopher Rowland and Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones, *The Mysteries of God: Early Jewish Mysticism and the New Testament* (Leiden, 2009), esp. 219–498; Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones, *A Transparent Illusion: The Dangerous Vision of Water in Hekhalot Mysticism* (Leiden, 2002); Morray-Jones, "Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1–12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate, Part 1: The Jewish Sources," *Harvard Theological Review* 86 (1993): 177–217; Morray-Jones, "Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1–12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate, Part 2: Paul's Heavenly Ascent and Its Significance," *Harvard Theological Review* 86 (1993): 265–92; also, earlier, in Ithamar Gruenwald, "Priests, Prophets, Apocalyptic Visionaries, and Mystics," in *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism: Studies in Apocalypticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Gnosticism* (Frankfurt, 1988) 125–44; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden, 1980).

16. David J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Reponses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tübingen, 1988).

Elior has consistently championed the claim that there existed in antiquity an unbroken tradition of Jewish ecstatic mysticism that preceded the rise of the rabbinic movement and persisted in stark tension with it throughout Late Antiquity.[17] While modeling her theory of the evolution of Jewish mysticism on Scholem's three-phase history, Elior in fact departs markedly from his view that Hekhalot literature arose within the rabbinic movement.[18] Instead, Elior holds that the literary representations of the heavenly temple and its ritual-liturgical drama that fill Hekhalot texts reflect the religious orientation and social identity of actual priestly groups that persisted after the destruction of the Second Temple. Hekhalot literature thus continues and gives renewed expression to the very priestly tradition that the rabbis of Late Antiquity would seem to have worked to supplant.

Elior's narrative regarding the priestly origins of all forms of ancient Jewish mysticism glosses over the complex textual histories of the literary evidence. Most surprising is Elior's near exclusive reliance on a single unit of text from *Hekhalot rabati* to construct her thesis regarding the indebtedness of Hekhalot literature to a continuous priestly tradition within ancient Judaism (i.e., *Synopse* §151). This key passage, which Elior cites again and again in her work,[19] describes the encounter between R. Ishmael and Akatri'el Yah, Lord of Hosts, in the Jerusalem Temple.

> R. Ishmael said:[20] "Once I was offering an *'olah* sacrifice on the altar[21] and I saw Akatri'el, Yah Lord of Hosts,[22] sitting on a high and exalted throne. He said to me: "Ishmael, my son, bless me." I said before him:

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17. See n. 5 above.

18. For astute analysis of the similarities and differences between Scholem and Elior's evolutionary schemes, see Martha Himmelfarb, "Merkavah Mysticism since Scholem: Rachel Elior's *The Three Temples*," in *Mystical Approaches to God: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. P. Schäfer (Munich, 2006), 19–36, esp. 23.

19. At Elior, *Three Temples*, 231, n. 2; 237, n. 13; 240, n. 29; and 244, n. 40.

20. The version in bBer 7a (in both printed and manuscript witnesses) marks this unit as a tannaitic tradition (*baraita*) and identifies the speaker more fully as R. Ishmael ben Elisha.

21. This phrase here in MS New York 8182 corresponds most closely to the version in MS Oxford (366) Opp. Add. fol. 23, which reads: אמ״ר ישמעאל פעם אחת היתי מעלה עולה על גבי המזבח. Other printed and manuscript witnesses of tractate *Berakhot* identify the offering made by R. Ishmael as an "an incense offering" (נכנסתי להקטיר קטרת).

22. אכתריאל יה יהוה צבאות.

"Master of the world,[23] YHWY,[24] Master of the world,[25] may it be your will, YY my God, that your mercy overcome your anger and that your mercy prevail over your (other) attributes, so that you might act toward your children in keeping with your attribute of mercy and thus judge within the boundary of the law (*ve-tikanes la-hem lifnim mi-shurat ha-∂in*; i.e., refrain from exacting the permitted penalty for a transgression)."[26] He nodded his head to me (in assent).[27]

Much about this brief, dramatic scene remains obscure, especially its precise spatial and temporal setting.[28] But for present purposes, what is most significant about this unit is its ambiguous standing as a "Hekhalot text"; indeed, this passage is difficult to locate in relationship to rabbinic and Hekhalot literatures in an analytically coherent way. Should it be designated as "rabbinic" because it appears in the Babylonian Talmud, uses distinctive rabbinic conceptual vocabulary (*le-hikanes lifnim mi-shurat ha-∂in*),[29] and features the well-known rabbinic figure R. Ishmael ben Elisha? Or does its use of the angelic or divine epithet Akatri'el and its characterization of R. Ishmael in visionary-cultic terms attest to its origins in the mystical circles that produced Hekhalot literature?[30] Or are these

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23. ריבונו של עולם. These words are crossed out in MS New York 8128.

24. This word is found in a scribal gloss.

25. ריבון העולמים.

26. My translation follows the recent discussion of this phrase in Tzvi Novick, "Naming and Normativity: The Early History of the Terms *ŝûrat ha-∂în* and *liftnîm miŝ-ŝûrat ha-∂în*," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 55 (2010): 391–406.

27. This version does not include the ending of the unit in bBer 7a: "We learn from this that one should not treat lightly the blessing of a common priest (*he∂yot*)." This comment belongs to the redactional framework of the *sugya*.

28. On this much discussed passage, its place within rabbinic theology, and its reception in later Jewish thought, see Ra'anan S. Boustan, *From Martyr to Mystic: Rabbinic Martyrology and the Making of Merkavah Mysticism* (Tübingen, 2005), 102–6; Arthur Green, *Keter: The Crown of God in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, N.J., 1997), 62–65; Daniel Abrams, "From Divine Shape to Angelic Being: The Career of Akatriel in Jewish Literature," *Journal of Religion* 76 (1996): 43–63; Yehuda Liebes, "*De Natura Dei*: On the Development of Jewish Myth," in *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism*, trans. B. Stein (Albany, N.Y., 1993), 10–27; Jacob Neusner, *The Incarnation of God: The Character of Divinity in Formative Judaism* (Philadelphia, 1988), 192–94.

29. On the linguistic evolution of this distinctively rabbinic locution and its appearance only in the later strata of rabbinic literature, see Novick, "Naming and Normativity."

30. In addition to *Synopse* §151, the name Akatri'el occurs as either an angelic or divine name in Hekhalot literature at §130; §138; §§309–310; §501; §597; §667; *Geniza-Fragmente* G19 1b/17. On R. Ishmael's priestly identity in Hekhalot

really in fact the same, as Scholem suggested, against the view expressed in nineteenth-century rationalist scholarship, that the unit is a medieval (geonic) interpolation?[31] Or perhaps Ephraim Urbach was correct that the amoraic rabbis of the third to fifth centuries formulated this and other similar traditions under the influence of contemporaneous developments in Jewish speculative-mystical thought and that, in turn, these traditions were further elaborated within Hekhalot literature.[32]

Yet the matter is more complicated still: this pericope is not in fact found in most manuscripts of *Hekhalot rabati*, whereas it appears as a stable element in bBer 7a. More striking still, among the seven manuscripts included in the *Synopse*, this pericope is found in only the late and highly atypical MS New York 8128, written in an Ashkenzi cursive hand most likely in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century.[33] As Klaus Herrmann and Claudia Rohrbacher-Sticker have convincingly shown, this particular manuscript represents a novel, supercollection of Hekhalot traditions that integrates both rabbinic and magical sources not otherwise found in the dominant and indeed earlier manuscripts of the Hekhalot corpus.[34] While New York 8128 may, of course, attest some early variants of specific units, we must assume that, where it radically departs from the dominant manuscript tradition, we are observing the creative interventions of late medieval or early modern scribe-scholars.

Whatever the origins of this account of the encounter of R. Ishmael and Akatri'el Yah, its complex transmission history is typical of the inter-

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literature, see Ra'anan S. Boustan, "Competing Attitudes toward Rabbi Ishmael's Priestly Genealogy in Heikhalot Literature," in *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism*, ed. A. DeConick (Atlanta, 2006), 127–41.

31. Scholem, *Major Trends*, 356 n. 3. Compare Wilhelm Bacher, *Die Agada der Tannaiten*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1965–66), 1:267, and Leopold Zunz, *Die Gottesdiestlichen Vorträge der Juden* (Frankfurt am Main, 1892), 173, n. "e."

32. Ephraim E. Urbach, "The Traditions about Merkabah Mysticism in the Tannaitic Period" (Hebrew), in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem*, ed. E. E. Urbach, J. Z. Werblowsky, and Ch. Wirszubski (Jerusalem, 1967), 20–23. Note, however, that Urbach's analysis retains a problematic distinction between normative rabbinic teachings and esoteric mysticism and maps these onto discrete social groups.

33. For basic description of the manuscript, see Schäfer, *Synopse*, ix. This unit is not found in any of the Geniza fragments of Hekhalot literature.

34. For detailed study of the manuscript, see Klaus Herrmann and Claudia Rohrbacher-Sticker, "Magische Traditionen der New Yorker Hekhalot-Handschrift JTS 8128 im Kontext ihrer Gesamtredaktion," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 17 (1989): 101–49; also Herrmann and Rohrbacher-Sticker, "Magische Traditionen der Oxforder Hekhalot-Handschrift Michael 9 in ihrem Verhältnis zu MS New York JTS 8128," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 19 (1992): 169–83.

secting literary trajectories of Hekhalot and rabbinic texts. This brief textual unit thus illustrates the problematic nature of the distinction between what we mean in the first place by a "Hekhalot" versus a "rabbinic" tradition. At minimum, we can say that the Babylonian Talmud provides an external barometer for developments within Hekhalot-style discourse, even if not for Hekhalot literature itself. By sidestepping such fundamental and concrete historical-philological questions, Elior has built her claim regarding the priestly and indeed anti-rabbinic content and orientation of Hekhalot literature on dubious empirical and methodological grounds.

The insistence of Elior and others on the independence of Hekhalot literature from rabbinic literary culture finds striking parallels in recent trends in the study of Jewish piyyut and targum.[35] It is both productive and I think correct to bring these literatures out from under the shadow of the rabbinic corpus, not to mention rabbinic authority. We should rightly question the orthodoxy of the Fleischer school of piyyut studies for its a priori assumption that Jewish hymnology is derivative, both religiously and literarily, of rabbinic tradition, thereby cordoning it off from various religious currents among "non-rabbinic" Jews and especially Christians in Late Antiquity. Indeed, the historiographic consensus regarding the severe limits to rabbinic authority in Jewish life has also played a salutary role in helping scholars imagine a more complex late antique Judaism. All this is well and good. But, as Steven Fraade has recently argued in his work on the language of targum, it is deeply problematic to cast these "non-rabbinic" forms as untainted reflections of a "popular" Judaism hermetically sealed from the world of the rabbis.[36]

Elior represents only a particularly obvious example of the persistence of the idealist legacy that Scholem inherited from his nineteenth-century

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35. On origins of piyyut in the "priestly class" of Roman-Byzantine Palestine, see the influential statement in Joseph Yahalom, *Poetry and Society in Jewish Galilee of Late Antiquity* (Hebrew; Tel Aviv, 1999), 107–36. For criticism of this scholarly trend, see Steven Fine, "Between Liturgy and Social History: Priestly Power in Late Antique Palestinian Synagogues?" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 56 (2005): 1–9, and the literature reviewed there. On the priestly origins of some strands of targumic literature, especially Pseudo-Jonathan, see Paul V. M. Flesher, "The Literary Legacy of the Priests? The Pentateuchal Targums of Israel in their Social and Linguistic Context," in *The Ancient Synagogue from its Origins to 200 CE*, ed. B. Olsson and M. Zetterholm (Stockholm, 2003), 467–508, and, more fully, in Beverly P. Mortensen, *The Priesthood in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Renewing the Profession* (Leiden, 2006).

36. Steven D. Fraade, "Locating Targum in the Textual Polysystem of Rabbinic Pedagogy," *Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies* 39 (2006): 69–92.

German Jewish forebears in the face of a growing scholarly conviction that the sources for "Jewish mysticism" cannot be interpreted—or even made textually accessible—without due consideration of processes of material production and transmission and the sociohistorical and technological contexts in which this activity occurred.[37] Yet, as we will see below, a number of important scholars who would in no way subscribe to Elior's essentialist and transhistorical approach nevertheless continue to approach the evidence as so many abstract ideas that can be sorted into neat binaries and then mapped onto Jewish social and cultural history.

HEKHALOT LITERATURE, THE RABBINIC CORPUS, AND JEWISH LITERARY CULTURE IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Despite the tenacious hold that Scholem's writings continue to exert on the field of early Jewish mysticism, recent scholarship has produced a number of significant insights and, I think, advances regarding the historical location and ideological profile of Hekhalot literature vis-à-vis rabbinic literary culture. Most notable are studies by Michael Swartz and Moulie Vidas that seek to identify with greater precision the sociohistorical and institutional contexts out of which the "Angelic Prince of the Torah" (*Sar ha-Torah*) materials in the Hekhalot corpus grew.[38] Swartz argues that the promise of Torah mastery in these texts reflects the aspirations of "secondary elites" who served Jewish communities in Late Antiquity as minor ritual functionaries.[39] The position of these relatively low-status scribes at the margins of the rabbinic movement would thus account for the palpable tension within Hekhalot literature between its

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37. See now the sustained and compelling statement in Daniel Abrams, *Kabbalistic Manuscripts and Textual Theory: Methodologies of Textual Scholarship and Editorial Practice in the Study of Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem, 2010); also Ra'anan S. Boustan, "The Study of Heikhalot Literature—Between Religious Experience and Textual Artifact," *Currents in Biblical Research* 6 (2007): 135–67.

38. Vidas, "Tradition and the Formation of the Talmud," 193–242; Michael D. Swartz, *Scholastic Magic: Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, N.J., 1996); also Swartz, "Like the Ministering Angels: Ritual and Purity in Early Jewish Mysticism and Magic," *AJS Review* 19 (1994): 135–67; Swartz, "Books and Tradition in Hekhalot Literature," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3 (1994): 189–229.

39. Swartz's view aligns closely with the proposition advanced in various articles and books by Moshe Idel that "secondary elites" served as a recurrent creative force at multiple junctures throughout the history of Jewish mysticism. See especially Moshe Idel, "On Judaism, Jewish Mysticism, and Magic," in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, ed. P. Schäfer and H. G. Kippenberg (Leiden, 1997), 195–214.

embrace of the scholastic values of the rabbis and its very non-rabbinic emphasis on the revelatory power of ritual-liturgical practice. By contrast, Vidas identifies the authors behind the *Sar ha-Torah* texts with the "reciters of tradition" (*tanaim*), known from the Babylonian Talmud and geonic writings, who memorized and transmitted oral traditions within the large-scale scholastic institutions of Jewish learning that formed in late Sasanian and early Islamic Iraq.[40] Vidas thus traces the pointed polemic within this genre of Hekhalot texts against rabbinic dialectic and the concomitant valorization of recitation to the ideological tension between the rabbinic sages and "reciters" who competed with each other for authority and prestige within a common institutional setting.[41] Despite the significant differences between these two reconstructions—Swartz has in view primarily the world of the synagogue of Roman Byzantine Palestine, while Vidas explicitly claims for these texts a Babylonian provenance—both offer concrete social and institutional mechanisms for explaining the porous literary boundaries between rabbinic and Hekhalot textual corpora.

Thus, while significant questions remain unresolved—and likely always will—regarding the precise origins and developmental trajectory of Hekhalot literature, the study of early Jewish mysticism must take into account the circulation, reappropriation, and reception of textual materials. In what follows, I catalog passages that demonstrate a robust pattern of mutual literary appropriation across the permeable boundaries of rabbinic and Hekhalot literatures. In a number of cases, scholars have yet to describe adequately the channels that generated this pattern of overlapping literary domains or the cultural motivations behind this process. But I will suggest that other cases, such as the relationship between Bavli *Hagigah* and *3 Enoch*, can best be understood as examples of ideological convergence that illuminates the continuing diversity of Jewish literary culture in the sixth to eighth centuries, precisely during the period of accelerating rabbinization. There is a fascinating story to be told here, but one that has little to do with a millennium-old form of heterodox or mystical-priestly Judaism free from or resistant to an aspiring rabbinic hegemony.

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40. For assessment of recent scholarship on the rise of scholastic institutions in late antique Mesopotamia, both Jewish and non-Jewish, see especially Adam H. Becker, "The Comparative Study of 'Scholasticism' in Late Antique Mesopotamia: Rabbis and East Syrians," *AJS Review* 34 (2010): 91–113, and the literature cited there.

41. Vidas explains how his position differs from Swartz's at "Tradition and the Formation of the Talmud," 226–28.

I find myself persuaded by those scholars who have argued that the very specific configuration of ideas, themes, imagery, and practices that defines the "Merkavah mysticism" of the Hekhalot corpus—in its narrow technical sense—is absent from rabbinic sources from the third and fourth centuries (i.e., Mishnah, Tosefta, tannaitic midrashim, and Palestinian Talmud).[42] This is not to deny early generations of rabbinic sages engagement with issues of cosmology, cosmogony, and Ezekiel's vision of the *merkavah*. But these themes are framed in terms of the primarily legal, ethical, and especially exegetical-scholastic project of the rabbis.

Something changed quite palpably from the late fifth to eighth centuries. The catalog of passages that originate within the context of what we might call Hekhalot-style discourse but somehow made their way into rabbinic writings, both Palestinian and Babylonian, from this period is rather impressive. I will briefly review the most important of these passages, before drawing larger conclusions about this pattern of literary interaction.

Late Palestinian midrash registers the intensifying impact of Hekhalot literature on rabbinic literary culture and its ultimate integration or normalization within the rabbinic curriculum. The most unequivocal case is the so-called rabbinic curriculum found in the eighth- or ninth-century *Midrash on Proverbs (Midrash mishle)*.[43] This extensive passage culminates with a series of direct references to several of the core thematic elements or generic forms that characterize Hekhalot literature, from merkavah-throne speculation to cosmology to the *Shi'ur komah* traditions regarding the gargantuan body of God.[44] Because of the length and complexity of this passage, I cite it in abbreviated form:[45]

> If the person who comes has [knowledge of] the Talmud in hand, God says to him, "My son, having studied Talmud, have you also gazed at

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42. See most recently and comprehensively, Peter Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* (Tübingen, 2009), 175–242, which builds upon the seminal contributions of Halperin, *Merkavah in Rabbinic Literature*, and Urbach, "Traditions about Merkabah Mysticism."

43. On the dating of this midrash, see Burton L. Visotzky, trans., *The Midrash on Proverbs: Translated from the Hebrew with an Introduction and Annotations* (New Haven, Conn., 1992), 8–12.

44. For parallels within Hekhalot literature to the themes alluded to in this passage, see Burton L. Visotzky, ed., *Midrash mishle* (New York, 1990), 84–86, commentary.

45. *Midrash mishle*, chap. 10. The full passage in which the Hekhalot curriculum is embedded appears at Visotzky, *Midrash mishle*, 81–87; the Hekhalot portion of the curriculum is found at Visotzky, *Midrash mishle*, 84–86. I have slightly modified the translation in Visotzky, *Midrash on Proverbs*, 57–58.

the chariot-throne, have you gazed with exultation (*tsafita ba-merkavah tsafita be-ge'avah*)?[46] I derive no greater pleasure from the world that I created than when the disciples of the sages (*talmide ḥakhamim*) sit and behold and look and see and contemplate the recitation of all this great teaching (*kol ha-talmud ha-gadol ha-ze*). What is [the nature of] my throne of glory? How does the first leg [of the throne] function? How does the second leg function? How does the third leg function? How does the fourth leg function? How does the electrum stand? [. . .] Greater than all (*gedulah mi-kulam*), how does Rigyon beneath my throne of glory stand? Is it round? Is it like a well-formed brick? How many bridges are upon it? What is the distance between one bridge and another? When I cross over, which bridge shall I use? Which bridge do the [angelic] wheels use? Which bridge do the wheels of the chariot use? More important than these, how do I stand, from my [toe]nails to the top of my head? What is the measure (*kamah shi'ur*) of my hand's span? What is the measure of my foot? Most important of all, how was my Throne of Glory [used during creation] on the Sabbath? In what direction did it function on the first day of the week [of creation]? In what direction did it function on the second day of the week [of creation]? [. . .] Is this not my glory? Is this [not] my greatness? Is this [not] my might? Is this not the splendor of my beauty that my children recognize my glory by this measurement? Of this David said, *How many are the things you have made, O Lord* (Ps 104.24)!

Because of its relatively late date, *Midrash on Proverbs* cannot be used to fix the origins of Hekhalot writings, which likely reach back in some form into fifth- or sixth-century Palestine.[47] On the one hand, this inventory of themes presents Hekhalot ideas and practices as a bounded and coherent discursive domain.[48] On the other, the redactors of this midrash have

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46. I deviate here from Visotzky's printed text and translate according to the variant readings in MSS Escorial G IV 11 (נ); Vatican Ebr. 76,2 (ה); and Paris 152,3 (מ).

47. On the use of themes and concepts native to Hekhalot literature within preclassical piyyut from fifth- or sixth-century Palestine, see Michael Rand, "More on the Seder *Beriyot*," Jewish Studies Quarterly 16 (2009): 189–206.

48. See Scholem, *Major Trends*, 70–73, which characterizes such passages as the "codification of pure throne mysticism" (70) and argues that, in them, "the imaginative description of objects which were originally really visualized, but are now treated at great length purely for the purpose of edification, has already reached baroque proportions" (71). Scholem's evolutionary—or, better, devolutionary—framework presumes that "real" Hekhalot sources reflect earlier and less mediated forms of mystical praxis and experience. Strikingly, however, just as in *Midrash mishle*, Hekhalot literature frequently objectifies itself as textualized

positioned the traditions of Hekhalot literature as a continuation—and indeed a culmination—of the rabbinic curriculum. This passage thus reflects the gradual amalgamation of rabbinic and Hekhalot traditions and their attendant modes of authority. This process of harmonization is also mirrored within Hekhalot literature itself, where certain compositions present mastery of rabbinic tradition as either a prerequisite for or the outcome of the ritual praxes they are advocating.[49] Both rabbinic and Hekhalot literatures thus bear witness to the relatively early integration of what may appear, on phenomenological grounds, to be mutually exclusive modes of religious piety and authority.

Indeed, a couple of centuries before the redactors of *Midrash on Proverbs* integrated Hekhalot traditions directly into the rabbinic curriculum, rabbinic literature already began to register a growing interest in the theme of heavenly ascent and angelic opposition to the human penetration of the divine sphere. Most significant are the Moses-ascent narratives that are found in various sixth- and seventh-century Palestinian midrashim.[50] David Halperin has suggested that the affinities between these texts and Hekhalot literature reflect their common roots in non-rabbinic homiletical traditions associated with synagogue lectionary practice for the holiday of Pentecost (*Shavu'ot*); these traditions, Halperin argues, already began to develop in third-century Palestine, in cities like Caesarea, which was home both to rabbis and Church fathers like Origen.[51] The problem with Halperin's reconstruction is that, unlike the homilies of Origen, the sources on which his argument depends are found exclusively in midrashic collections produced in Byzantine Palestine in the fifth century and later.

Instead, I think it far more plausible that the parallels signal a growing preoccupation in this period with the theme of heavenly ascent across the full range of Jewish literary subcultures. I have elsewhere suggested that a comparison of the ascent narratives of Moses, of R. Ishmael the martyr,

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tradition intended for recitation—and not as ritual instruction or description of mystical experience. See especially Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York, 1993), 108–13.

49. See, e.g., *Synopse*, §303. See Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 107–8.

50. Versions of this narrative are found at: bShab 88a–89a; *Pesik. Rbti* 20; *PRE* 46; *Midrash ha-Gadol* to Ex 19.20; *Ma'ayan ḥokhmah* (Adolf Jellinek, ed., *Bet ha-midrash*, 6 vols. [Leipzig, 1853–1877; repr. Jerusalem, 1967], 1:58–61); *Hagadat shema' Yisra'el* (Jellinek, *Bet ha-midrash*, 5:165–66; MS Oxford Or. 135, 357a–358a (printed in Karl-Erich Grözinger, *Ich bin der Herr, dein Gott! Eine rabbinische Homilie zum Ersten Gebot [PesR 20]* [Bern, 1976], 12*–16*); T-S K 21.95.A, 1a–2a (G21 in Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente*, 171–81).

51. David Halperin, *Face of the Chariot*, 289–322.

and of R. Ishmael the "Merkavah mystic" reflect various competing models for which (type of) human beings might gain access to the heaven realms and how and why they might do so.[52] Despite the deployment of a common set of literary motifs in a wide range of sources, the discourse of heavenly ascent could accommodate a range of distinct and even contradictory ideological perspectives. These narratives should not be made to conform to a linear historical trajectory, with early Moses material giving way to later Hekhalot texts. Rather, these largely contemporaneous sources provide evidence for the intensity with which Jewish writers in the fifth to seventh centuries deliberated about the means for ascending to heaven and the ends that such a journey was meant to achieve.

Let us now turn to the Jewish literary culture of Sasanian Iran. It is significant that it is the Babylonian Talmud that provides us with our earliest unequivocal evidence that rabbinic authors were familiar with and made active use of Hekhalot materials. Predictably, such traditions are clustered in the distinctive and highly expanded version of the so-called mystical collection in Bavli *Ḥagigah* (11b–16a), although we have seen that they could be found elsewhere as well. The sugya in tractate *Ḥagigah* incorporates and indeed domesticates various Hekhalot-style traditions regarding the angelic denizens and topography of the seventh heaven, ʿAravot (bḤag 12b).[53] It also embeds the famous "water water" motif, drawn from Hekhalot literature, within its idiosyncratic version of the equally famous episode of the "Four who entered the pardes."[54] The brief narrative about R. Akiva's heavenly ascent and his encounter there with angels of destruction (bḤag 15b) likewise appears to be an adaptation of the fuller version in Hekhalot literature.[55] Finally, the account of Elisha ben Abuya's vision of the angel Metatron and his subsequent apostasy and punishment demonstrates the fluid boundaries between the Babylonian Talmud and Hekhalot literature. I will return below to this last case of literary overlap. In all of these cases, Peter Schäfer is certainly

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52. Boustan, *From Martyr to Mystic*, 113–21.

53. Peter Schäfer, "From Cosmology to Theology: The Rabbinic Appropriation of Apocalyptic Cosmology," in *Creation and Re-Creation in Jewish Thought: Festschrift in Honor of Joseph Dan on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. R. Elior and P. Schäfer (Tübingen, 2009), 39–58.

54. See especially Peter Schäfer, "The New Testament and Hekhalot Literature: The Journey into Heaven in Paul and in Merkavah Mysticism," in *Hekhalot-Studien* (Tübingen, 1988), 234–49. First published in *Journal for Jewish Studies* 35 (1984): 19–35.

55. Compare *Synopse* §346 (*Hekhalot zutarti*); *Synopse* §673 (*Merkavah rabah*). For discussion, see Schäfer, *Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 237–38.

correct that, while the rabbis often worked to domesticate these Hekhalot materials, they did not wish—or feel at liberty—to ignore them outright.[56]

The direction of literary contact went the other way as well, from rabbinic literature to the Hekhalot corpus. As in much late antique Jewish literature, including rabbinic, the authorial voice of Hekhalot literature is anonymous and collective, consisting largely of reported speech in the name of one rabbinic authority or another. Hekhalot texts employ figures from the by now legendary rabbinic past as their primary protagonists and spokesmen—most commonly, R. Ishmael, R. Akiva, and R. Neḥunya ben ha-Kanah (second century C.E.). These rabbinic authorities not only serve as the main characters in the narrative portions of this literature; Hekhalot texts directly attribute to these rabbis their instructional content as well. This scaffolding of pseudonymous attribution both constitutes the primary organizational structure of Hekhalot texts and serves as their central authorizing strategy, anchoring them to what can best be characterized as an emergent rabbinic hegemony.[57]

Perhaps the most well-known case of deployment of rabbinic source material within Hekhalot literature is the encounter of the figure of Aḥer (= Elisha ben Abuya) with Metatron in *3 (Hebrew) Enoch*.[58] This passage exemplifies the fluidity of the movement of concrete units of literary tradition across the boundaries of distinct textual corpora. *3 Enoch* is almost certainly one of the latest of the major Hekhalot macroforms.[59] The precise direction of literary influence—from Hekhalot to Bavli, from Bavli to Hekhalot, or possibly in both directions—remains disputed.[60] More-

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56. Schäfer, *Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 241–42: "The Bavli editor clearly knew such material from other sources, and it seems as if he tried (or felt compelled?) to incorporate it, to flavor his exposition of the Merkavah with a sprinkling of Merkavah 'mysticism' in the technical sense of the word. Yet apparently he made every effort to neutralize this—in his view—even more dangerous and rather unwelcome stuff by adapting it to this rabbinic mindset, in other words, by thoroughly rabbinizing it."

57. Boustan, "Pseudonymous Attribution in Heikhalot Literature," 1–21.

58. *Synopse* §20; cf. bḤag 15a.

59. For a summary of earlier scholarship and an argument for the late dating of *3 Enoch* relative to other Hekhalot macroforms, see Peter Schäfer and Klaus Herrmann, trans., *Übersetzung der Hekhalot-Literatur*, vol. 1: *§§1–80*, (Tübingen, 1995), l–lv.

60. For the priority of the Talmud, see especially Philip S. Alexander, "3 Enoch and the Talmud," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 18 (1987): 40–68. For the priority of *3 Enoch*, see Daniel Boyarin, "Beyond Judaisms: Metatron and the Divine Polymorphy of Ancient Judaism," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 41 (2010): 323–65; Boyarin, "Two Powers in Heaven; or, The Making of a Heresy," in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays for James Kugel*, ed. H. Najman and

over, we must also bear in mind that *3 Enoch* does not represent a straightforward narration celebrating the elevation of Enoch and his transformation into Metatron. Rather, the text uses the scene of the punishment of this greatest of angels as a means for subtly clarifying—but not negating!—the notion that a transformed human being serves as an eternal mediator between God and Israel. The careful integration of pro- and anti-Metatron material within *3 Enoch* suggests that its authors held a nuanced position about the nature of the divine, one formed through careful theological negotiation with—and apparently formulated through—rabbinic literary tradition.[61]

Here again, in what is likely to be an active dialogue within Babylonian Jewish culture, we have a case of ideological and literary convergence. Narrow source-critical analysis of the relationship between the Bavli and *3 Enoch*—especially if it is in the service of the claim that *3 Enoch* is not only the source-text but also preserves Second Temple traditions unaffected by the previous seven centuries of literary, cultural, and indeed theological developments—is a dead-end. Hekhalot and rabbinic literatures tend to deviate on very important matters of emphasis and even what we might call ideology. The two may also reflect tensions within Jewish society between groups with different sociological profiles. But these literatures are also bound together throughout the second half of the first millennium by some central, common preoccupations, such as acquisition of Torah-knowledge and the value of rabbinic authority. Their intense engagement with shared concerns and materials highlights the permeability of the boundaries of what might be called "rabbinic Judaism." These were not fixed and stable, but sites of contestation.

At the end of a decade in which scholars have rightly and relentlessly questioned the utility of treating such binaries as "Judaism" and "Christianity" as transhistorical entities, it would be strange to erect a new boundary *within* Judaism between the rabbis and a primordial and essentially static Jewish binitarianism. Instead, if I were to tell this story in narrative terms, I would simply say that the spread of rabbinic hegemony was gradual and remained incomplete throughout Late Antiquity; but, however gradual and incomplete, its success also entailed willy-nilly both its diversification and its appropriation within other branches of Jewish literary culture—among synagogue poets and preachers, among magicians, and among mystics.

J. H. Newman (Leiden, 2004), 331–70; C. R. A. Morray-Jones, "Hekhalot Literature and Talmudic Tradition: Alexander's Three Text Cases," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 22 (1991): 1–39.
	61. Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 318–27.

CONCLUSION

My aim in this essay has been to navigate between the two regnant options for conceptualizing the relationship between rabbinic and Hekhalot literatures: on the one hand, collapsing the two into a common Judaism in which the rabbis figure as both the primary religious authorities and a spiritual vanguard and, on the other, pigeon-holing them into two discrete sociocultural trajectories. This is a messy proposition. But it may, I hope, produce a suitably complex portrait of late antique Jewish literary culture, especially as the process of rabbinization reconfigured Jewish life during the penumbral age of the fifth to eighth centuries.

Attention to dynamics of literary adoption and adaptation can never fully displace our desire to locate the origins of Hekhalot literature. But the high degree of literary permeability that I have here only begun to sketch can help us appreciate the world of porous groups—both within Jewish communities and between Jew and non-Jew—with which we are dealing. From the sixth century on, rabbinic forms, themes, and modes of authority increasingly inflect even those genres or corpora that seem to have existed at the boundaries of rabbinic literary culture. It would seem that rabbinic culture was itself transformed in the process.