

תוכן העניינים

5	'סתור סורגיא מן עזרתא': כ"ג במרחשוון במגילת תענית ויקרא רבה, פרשה כח, הפתיחתא הראשונה (פסקאות א-ג): עיונים בנוסח, בעריכה ובזיקתה למקבילה בפסיקתא דרב כהנא	עוזי ליבנר חיים מיליקובסקי
19	בין יוסף ליוסף: לזהות מחברו של יוצר קדום	שולמית אליצור
67	'כאלו החכמים והיודעים נמשכים אחר הענין הזה ברצון האלוהי': על תפיסת המשל ב'מורה הנבוכים'	יאיר לורברבוים
87	מוות, חטא, חוק וגאולה במשנת הרמב"ן	משה הלברטל
133	'ואני לא הייתי שם?!': קובלנותיו של רשב"י על פי סיפור זוהרי בלתי ידוע	רונית מרוז
163	צדיק ובינוני בתורתו של ר' שניאור זלמן מלאדי וזיקתם לשאלת היחס בין חיי העיון לחיי המעשה	לאה אורנט
195	פירושו הדיאלוגי של מרטין בובר לתורת הצמצום	ישראל קורן
		הארות ותגובות
249	תרומת יוון לאמונת אברהם	יהודה ליבס
265	הבריאה, המשכן ומשה הדרשן	אופיר מינץ-מנור
269	המרות דת ומעשי קידוש השם בשנת קנ"א: הערכה מחדשת מרטרולוגיה יהודית והמרות דת בספרד ובאשכנז בימי הביניים: הערכת ה'הערכה המחדשת'	אברהם גרוס רם בן-שלום
279	המוטיב האודיסאי ב'תמול שלשום'	יוסף גייגר
301		ביקורת ספרים
309	תורת היצירה של 'ספר יצירה'	סיריל אסלנוב
317	ספרים שנתקבלו במערכת	
v	תקצירים באנגלית	

CONTENTS

Uzi Leibner	The 23rd Day of Heshvan in <i>Megillat Ta'anit</i>	5
Chaim Milikowsky	<i>Vayyiqra Rabba</i> , Chapter 28, Sections 1-3: Questions of Text, Redaction and Affinity to <i>Pesiqta d'Rav Kahana</i>	19
Shulamit Elizur	Between Joseph and Joseph: The Author of an Early <i>Yotser</i>	67
Yair Lorberboim	'The Men of Knowledge and the Sages are Drawn, as it were, toward this Purpose by the Divine Will' (<i>The Guide of the Perplexed</i> , Introduction): On Maimonides' Conception of Parables	87
Moshe Halbertal	Nachmanides' Conception of Death, Sin, Law and Redemption	133
Ronit Meroz	'And I Was Not There?': The Complaints of Rabbi Simeon bar Yoḥai according to an Unknown Zoharic Story	163
Leah Orent	The Righteous Man (<i>Tsaddik</i>), and the Intermediate Man (<i>Benoni</i>) in the Teaching of R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi	195
Israel Koren	Martin Buber's Dialogistic Interpretation of the Doctrine of <i>Tsimtsum</i>	225
<i>Notes and Comments</i>		
Yehuda Liebes	A Greek Contribution to the Faith of Abraham: A Response to B. Bar-Kochva (<i>Tarbiz</i> , 70 [2001], pp. 327-352)	249

Ophir Mintz-Manor	Creation, The <i>Mishkan</i> and Moshe HaDarshan: A Response to Sh. Ladermann (<i>Tarbiz</i> , 70 [2001], pp. 189–226)	265
Abraham Gross	Conversions and Martyrdom in Spain in 1391: A Reassessment of Ram Ben-Shalom (<i>Tarbiz</i> , 70 [2001], pp. 227–282)	269
Ram Ben-Shalom	Jewish Martyrdom and Conversion in Sepharad and Ashkenaz in the Middle Ages: An Assessment of the Reassessment	279
Joseph Geiger	The Odysseus Motif in Agnon's 'Only Yesterday'	301
<i>Book Review</i>		
Cyril Aslanoff	<i>Ars Poetica</i> in <i>Sefer Yetsira</i>	309
	<i>Books Received</i>	317
	<i>English Abstracts</i>	v

ENGLISH ABSTRACTS

THE 23rd DAY OF HESHVAN IN *MEGILLAT TA'ANIT*

by Uzi Leibner

Megillat Ta'anit (The Scroll of Fasting) is a Pharisaic document written in Aramaic and dates to the final decades of the Second Temple period. It contains a list of days on which fasting (תענית) was forbidden due to the good fortune that befell the Jews on those days. The 'Scholion', a commentary to *Megillat Ta'anit*, was apparently composed in the generations following the destruction of the Second Temple; it explains the reasons for forbidding fasting on these dates. *Megillat Ta'anit* and its commentary, the 'Scholion', were transmitted as a combined document.

This paper examines the determination of the 23rd of Heshvan as a day on which fasting is forbidden because 'the grill work in the 'Azara-court was destroyed', as well as the explanation given in the Scholion, and comes to the conclusion that the true reason this day was considered unsuitable for fasting was unknown to the author/s of this commentary. The author/s in his/their attempt to understand the prohibition probably drew on a tradition from *I Macabbees*.

The possibility that the prohibition was associated with the destruction of the divider that King Alexander Yannai [Jannaeus] had erected in the Temple court (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* XIII, 372) is examined. This divider was probably erected to prevent the people from viewing, and symbolically participating in, the Temple service. The destruction of the divider probably took place after the death of King Alexander Yannai in 76 BCE.

VAYYIQRA RABBA, CHAPTER 28, SECTIONS 1–3: QUESTIONS OF TEXT, REDACTION AND AFFINITY TO *PESIQTA D'RAV KAHANA*

by Chaim Milikowsky

Five chapters of *Vayyiqra Rabba* and *Pesiqta d'Rav Kahana* are very similar to each other. Indeed, they are so similar that some scholars have suggested that the variants between them should be considered as no different than the variants between manuscripts of one text. It is the argument of this paper that this perspective is incorrect, and that we have to distinguish clearly between the redactional moment at which the large midrashic unit we call *Vayyiqra Rabba*, Chapter 28, was created and the redactional moment at which the large midrashic unit we call *Pesiqta d'Rav Kahana*, 'Omer, was created. The relationship of these texts is thus not comparable to the relationship between the parallel texts of *Pesiqta d'Rav Kahana* and *Pesiqta Rabbati*.

It is further claimed that a close reading of these parallel passages in *Vayyiqra Rabba* and *Pesiqta d'Rav Kahana* leads us to the conclusion that the former has often preserved a more pristine form of the tradition-unit than the latter. Given the extensive dimensions of the passages that are paralleled in the two texts, this conclusion leads us to the further conclusion that *Vayyiqra Rabba*, Chapter 28 was used by the editor of *Pesiqta d'Rav Kahana*, 'Omer.

BETWEEN JOSEPH AND JOSEPH: THE AUTHOR OF AN EARLY *YOTSER*

by Shulamit Elizur

The purpose of this article is to identify the author of a well-known *yotser*, *A'amir Mistatter bi-Me'on Hevyon*, which appears in numerous Ashkenazic *maḥzorim* as a *yotser* for the Sabbath before Passover and is signed with the name Joseph. This is an exceptional *yotser*, which for its entire length systematically compares the creation of the world, the exodus from Egypt and the future redemption. A scholarly consensus of many years attributes this poem to the 11th-century French poet, R. Joseph Tov Elem. It now transpires that much of this poem appears in an early manuscript from the Cairo Genizah in which it is attributed to R. Joseph Ibn Avitur, a Spanish poet who left his native land at the end of the tenth century CE and was active for many years in the East, primarily in Egypt. A close study of the *yotser* in its two versions provides support for the latter attribution: linguistic usages characteristic of Ibn Avitur, found in the Genizah version, have been eliminated in the Ashkenazic version. Even a detail which at first glance appears to locate the poet in central Europe, the failure to use anadiplosis at the beginning of the non-refrain *qadosh* strophe, conforms to Ibn Avitur's practice in other *yotserot*. On the other hand, a close analysis of the attribution to R. Joseph Tov Elem reveals that this has no basis in fact. It is suggested that the two versions were composed by Ibn Avitur himself, as suggested especially by comparison with other poems by the same author.

The latter part of the article surveys the influences which led Ibn Avitur to compose this unique poem. A possible source for some of the unusual structural and thematic elements of this poem may be found in Italian *yotserot* written shortly before Ibn Avitur's time. It seems that the Spanish poet wrote his composition under the influence of Italian models, and his poem later reached central Europe, entered local *maḥzorim* and even influenced a local poet who wrote an imitation of it. The study of this poem thus sheds light on the mutual influences of Italian-German and Spanish Jewish cultures in the Middle Ages.

‘THE MEN OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE SAGES ARE DRAWN, AS IT WERE,
TOWARD THIS PURPOSE BY THE DIVINE WILL’ (*THE GUIDE OF THE
PERPLEXED*, INTRODUCTION): ON MAIMONIDES’ CONCEPTION OF PARABLES

by Yair Lorberboim

One of Maimonides' main purposes in his *Guide of the Perplexed* was ‘the explanation of very obscure parables occurring in the books of the prophets’. Before he attempts to fulfill this aim, Maimonides offers, in the ‘Introduction’ to the *Guide*, a theory of parables in which he explains their place in philosophical discourse. According to the common understanding of Maimonides' discussion, the role of parables in philosophy is either didactic or political: the didactic parable directs the beginner towards the matter at hand, but after he advances in his studies it is to be replaced by concepts and logical arguments, while the political parable conceals heterodox views from the multitude. Against this approach, this article suggests a third, philosophical-epistemological purpose for parables in philosophical discourse. The philosophical-epistemological parable is based on the view that certain philosophical sub-

jects – indeed the most profound ideas of physics and especially, metaphysics – cannot be conveyed nor comprehended through arguments and abstract conceptions, but only through parables and metaphors. The author argues that Maimonides, in the ‘Introduction’ to the *Guide* and in other places in this treatise, posits the philosophical-epistemological parable as the central device in philosophical discourse and, hence, the Torah and the books of the prophets as *the* philosophical compositions. Included is an analysis of the epistemology that stands, according to Maimonides, at the basis of this approach to philosophical parables in general and to the parables of the prophets in particular.

NACHMANIDES’ CONCEPTION OF DEATH, SIN, LAW AND REDEMPTION

by Moshe Halbertal

This article traces Nachmanides’ attitude towards death, sin, law and redemption. Nachmanides was of the opinion that death is not an inevitable fact of human fate, and he argued that in their primary essential nature, humans are eternal even in their corporeal existence. The article analyses the intimate connection between death and sin in Nachmanides’ thought, pointing to his idea that sin in its fundamental nature is individuation and death is an event that occurs to individuals. According to Nachmanides the sin of Adam and Eve separated them from their primordial cleaving to the divine, and that separation was caused by the emergence of autonomous human will. The price of autonomy, which individuates humans as distinct free agents, is death. Redemption is a return to the primary state of humanity before sin, and humans in that stage will become eternal as a result of their ongoing cleaving to the divine. The article explores the connection between sin, autonomy and death, and deals as well with the implications of the loss of autonomy in redemption and the status of the law in the messianic era. Among other issues investigated is the nature of corporeal eternity as it relates to mystical experience. The last sections of the article establish a connection in Nachmanides’ thought between the primary sinful individuation of humans and a crisis in the inner divine process of the emanation and individuation of the *Sephirot*.

‘AND I WAS NOT THERE?’: THE COMPLAINTS OF RABBI SIMEON BAR YOḤAI ACCORDING TO AN UNKNOWN ZOHARIC STORY

by Ronit Meroz

This article discusses a hitherto unknown Zoharic story which has survived only in a single manuscript (MS Ginzburg 262). The text discusses the term *Nephilim* (mentioned in Gen 6:4) in the context of the lack of proper spiritual leadership in the world. One of the interpretations mentioned identifies the *Nephilim* as Adam and Eve. According to one reading, these homilies seem to discuss only their moral fall; according to another, it turns out that due to their sin Adam and Eve fell from the realm of the *Sephirot* to this world.

The narrative aspect of the story is unusual within the Zoharic literature. Rabbi Simeon bar Yoḥai does not display his well-known character: he is not the group’s leader who masters all worlds, but a minor figure within the group who is spiritually dependent on the others. Here

the group's leader is called 'the king'. 'The king' teaches new knowledge, but since R. Simeon lives in the desert (which seems to be a metaphor for marginality), he is not aware of it and comes to feel that it has been concealed from him. He is even worried that he might not enter paradise because of this lack of knowledge. R. Isaac comforts him and promises to make him enter paradise.

The article analyzes the many strategies that the story uses in order to diminish R. Simeon's figure and suggests that the contradiction between his status here and the usual description accorded to him can be explained by assuming that the Zohar was produced by several writers with conflicting interests.

THE RIGHTEOUS MAN (*TSADDIK*) AND THE INTERMEDIATE MAN (*BENONI*)
IN THE TEACHING OF R. SHNEUR ZALMAN OF LIADI

by Leah Orent

This article deals with one of the main themes in the *Tanya*, by R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi (Rashaz), namely the distinction between the righteous man (*tsaddik*), and the intermediate man (*benoni*). This distinction is discussed in relation to the typological question of the relationship between the contemplative life (*vita contemplativa*) and the active life (*vita activa*). It is also discussed as pertaining to the question of the relationship between the teachings of Rashaz and the teachings of his predecessor and teacher, the Maggid of Mezritch. The two questions are related, for emphasis on the centrality of the *tsaddik* implies a preference for self-abnegation in a contemplative life as taught by the Maggid, while the centrality of the *benoni* implies a preference for the active life and a departure from the teachings of the Maggid.

The author surveys the variety of attitudes and opinions on these questions expressed in the scholarly literature. There are unequivocal statements viewing Rashaz as an ardent disciple of the Magid and an advocate of the contemplative life, or as an opponent and a promoter of traditional ritual and moral performance. There are, on the other hand, nuanced views describing Rashaz's teachings as both adhering to previous Hasidic doctrines and expressing an independent approach, maintaining a subtle balance between the contemplative life, personified in the *tsaddik*, and the active life of the *benoni*. Which pattern of understanding is better able to convey the complexity of the relationship between the two poles?

The article seeks to apply the Platonic pattern of the relationship between ideas and phenomena as a pattern of understanding. There is an ontological gap between the *tsaddik* who has eradicated the evil in his own soul and achieved closeness to God, and the *benoni* whose mind is immersed in the struggle between good and evil. However, the *benoni* is portrayed as a dynamic person who strives heroically to imitate the *tsaddik* and participate in the contemplative life. He endeavors to achieve moral perfection and awareness of God. Like the Platonic phenomenon, which is a reflection of the ideal world, he is able to achieve his goals only partially and temporarily. Therefore, in spite of the essential ontological difference, the *benoni* reflects the ideal of contemplative life as taught by early Hasidic masters and practiced by the *tsaddik*.

MARTIN BUBER'S DIALOGISTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE
DOCTRINE OF *TSIMTSUM*

by Israel Koren

This article focuses on two main issues: (a) an examination of Buber's interpretations of the kabbalistic and hasidic doctrines of *tsimtsum* (contraction); (b) an analysis of the instances in which Buber's interpretations were internalized into his own philosophy and the ways in which they became fundamental paradigms at different stages of his work.

The examination reveals that the doctrines of *tsimtsum* served as essential models in shaping his philosophy of dialogue, and supported it by providing ideological background in various realms. It shows that Buber repeatedly emphasized the deep interrelationship between the existential states of human life and the primordial events of contraction-distancing and of establishing relations.

The discussion is presented in four stages: The first examines the way in which Buber gave the doctrine of *tsimtsum* a dialogistic interpretation; the second analyzes how Buber set up *tsimtsum* as a necessary condition in enabling interrelationship between man and God; the third shows how this interpretation has been shifted to the domain of the inter-human relationship of 'I and Thou'; and the fourth shows how the *homo dialogicus* replaces God by performing *tsimtsum* himself, thus opening the way to the establishment of inter-human relations.

A GREEK CONTRIBUTION TO THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM:
A RESPONSE TO B. BAR-KOCHVA (*TARBIZ*, 70 [2001], pp. 327–352)

by Yehuda Liebes

Bar-Kochva takes issue with the present author who claimed (in my *Ars Poetica in Sefer Yetsira*), against the consensus of researchers, that *On Abraham and the Egyptians* is indeed the work of Hecataeus of Abdera, as it is attributed by all ancient authorities. For this reason the authenticity of the monotheistic passage cited in *On Abraham* as being by Sophocles is defended. Parallels for the monotheistic views of the passage can be adduced from contemporaries, and Sophocles cannot be a 'pious polytheist' (as he is labeled by Bar-Kochva), because ideological polytheism did not exist in his time. The claim that Sophocles could not be so impious as to attack polytheism on the festival of Dionysus (the time when plays were staged) is refuted by examples from other plays of the same period.

Late linguistic usages found in this passage are not evidence for a later date, because they can be documented earlier. A passage which contains one of these usages, and which was also suspected as a Jewish forgery, is here traced to its Orphic origin.

Bar-Kochva maintains that other writings by Hecataeus of Abdera dealing with non-Jewish peoples prove that he was not a monotheist. This argument is refuted by taking into consideration the context of these writings. Another claim by Bar-Kochva, that the 'Jewish excursus' of Hecataeus (preserved by Diodorus Siculus) does not express a sympathetic attitude towards Judaism, is incorrect. In addition, this 'excursus' may not be by the same Hecataeus, because in all manuscripts it goes under the name of Hecataeus of Miletus.

My discussion was also based on an epistle of the Spartan king Areus addressed to the high priest in Jerusalem, in which Areus mentions a text which taught him that Abraham was the common ancestor of the Spartans and the Jews. Bar-Kochva's argument against the authenticity of this epistle is also invalid. All difficulties may be explained by identifying Areus' aim and source, and by taking into account that the text we possess is a translation from the Hebrew. Bar Kochva further argues that 'Hecataeus the Sophist' mentioned (by Plutarch) as staying in Sparta is not Hecataeus of Abdera. But this can hardly be the case, since Plutarch refers to him as a well-known person, and we do not know of any other literary figure of this name active at that time.

CREATION, THE *MISHKAN* AND MOSHE HADARSHAN:
A RESPONSE TO SH. LADERMANN (*TARBIZ*, 70 [2001], pp. 189–226)

by Ophir Mintz-Manor

Sh. Ladermann claimed that concepts of the Second Temple period regarding the symbolic relationship between the *Mishkan* and the creation of the world were transmitted via a 6th-century Byzantine Christian work to some medieval Midrashim attributed to Moshe HaDarshan. However, these ancient concepts are also known from *piyyuṭ* traditions of Late Antiquity. These traditions were known in the time and place of Moshe HaDarshan, whose use of *piyyuṭ* has already been demonstrated. Given this, it is most likely that the *piyyuṭ* tradition is the source from which Moshe HaDarshan drew his conception of the relationship between the *Mishkan* and the creation.

CONVERSIONS AND MARTYRDOM IN SPAIN IN 1391: A REASSESSMENT OF
RAM BEN-SHALOM (*TARBIZ*, 70 [2001], pp. 227–282)

by Abraham Gross

This is an evaluation of R. Ben-Shalom's reassessment of the results of the persecutions directed against the Jews in Spain in 1391. This response attempts to show that the author fails to change current historiographical views on all major points reconsidered. Our main conclusions are: (a) the number of converts to Christianity cannot be reduced significantly; (b) the number of converts during the persecutions in Ashkenaz was much lower; (c) one cannot speak about a Sephardic martyrological tradition and consciousness independent of the Ashkenazic influence, especially not with regard to active martyrdom. All this is shown primarily by analyzing the same sources used by the author and pointing to what we consider to be serious methodological flaws in his analysis.

JEWISH MARTYRDOM AND CONVERSION IN SEPHARAD AND ASHKENAZ
IN THE MIDDLE AGES: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE REASSESSMENT

by Ram Ben-Shalom

This article is a response to the critique of my original article, '*Kiddush Ha-Shem* and Jewish Martyrdom in Aragon and Castile in 1391: Between Spain and Ashkenaz', by Abraham Gross. I argue once again, this time including additional sources not cited in the original article, that the phenomenon of *kiddush ha-shem* amongst Spanish Jews should be understood within the context of Christian martyrdom as practiced in the Iberian peninsula. In light of the position taken by Judah Halevi concerning this question, and the considerable influence Halevi had over the Jews of Spain, it is significant that a number of Halevi's odes and verses of mourning speak clearly in favor of martyrdom. The Spanish historical background for Halevi's dirges is also explored here. Meanwhile, claims of Ashkenazic inspiration on him are thoroughly refuted.

Next, the article examines the social world of Jewish courtiers. Included in this group was the poet Todros ben Judah Halevi Abulafia whose works gave expression to views favoring martyrdom, and who was himself prepared to be a martyr. This group served the *infante* Don Juan Manuel, who presented a military and ethical program of martyrdom to the soldiers of the *Reconquista* in Castile. Views favoring martyrdom were common within this same social circle of Christians and Jews in Castile.

The article next addresses the question of the conversions of Ashkenazic Jews, both in 1096 and during the pogroms that took place in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It is once again shown that conversions in significant numbers occurred within Ashkenazic Jewish society but that this phenomenon constituted a less severe problem in this period than it did in Castile and Aragon after 1391, among other reasons because Ashkenazic *'Anusim* were permitted to return to Judaism.

In conclusion, each of Gross' arguments is analyzed and rejected. It is shown that his claims rest largely on a mistaken reading of my own interpretation of *kiddush ha-shem*, and a similarly misguided reading of the historical sources, both Jewish and Spanish, from the Middle Ages. These misreadings include Gross' description of the *kiddush ha-shem* that supposedly took place amongst the Jews of Saragossa in 1391. Gross' interpretation is based on a decree issued by the king of Aragon, Juan I. While indeed promulgated in Saragossa, the decree was actually addressed to the regions of Catalonia and Valencia, and so is relevant only to instances of Jewish martyrdom in these latter regions. There are also problems with Gross' interpretation of the work of the poet Solomon Bonafed. In contrast to Gross' claim that Bonafed's writings express opposition to philosophy, they actually show that the Jews were eager to learn philosophy in order to better manage their ongoing polemics against the Christians. Gross' suggestion that Asher Lemlin learned the phrase, 'The leaders and the magistrates have been the chief offenders', from Solomon Alami's *Iggeret Musar* is also problematic, as this is a well-known biblical passage (Ezra 9:2).

Gross' version was first presented in an article on the Ashkenazic practice of *kiddush ha-shem* in Portugal, in which he argued that the first distinct Iberian expression of *kiddush ha-shem* occurred in Portugal, and was rooted in the halachic influence of Ashkenazic Jews and, notably, in a few cases of martyrdom in Toledo in 1391 which involved the (Ashkenazic?) descendants of Rabbi Asher ben Yehiel (ha-Rosh). However, this interpretation is based on a

narrow historical methodology that fails to grasp the complex reality of Castile and Aragon and ignores the influences that were at work in Spain among both Christians and Jews.

THE ODYSSEUS MOTIF IN AGNON'S 'ONLY YESTERDAY'

by Joseph Geiger

Agnon's 'Only Yesterday' (*Temol shilshom*) is a highly complicated work of epic proportions containing a multiplicity of themes and meanings. It is the contention of the present paper that some of the adventures and travails of Yitzhak Kummer consciously recall those of Odysseus. This motif adds to, rather than displaces previously proposed interpretations. Moreover, the most difficult hermeneutic problem of the novel is the double, intertwined narrative in its second half, that of Yitzhak's story and that of the events of the dog Balak. It is submitted that this satirically recalls the structure of the classical epos of the Odyssey, divided as it is between causally connected actions on the divine and on the human plane. That the similarities between Agnon's novel and the Odyssey are not coincidental is demonstrated by a number of indications that clearly illustrate that at the time of its composition Agnon was highly conscious of Homer and especially of the Odyssey.

ARS POETICA IN SEFER YETSIRA

by Cyril Aslanoff

Review of Yehuda Liebes, Ars Poetica in 'Sefer Yetsira', Tel-Aviv: Schocken Publishing House Ltd., 2000, 375 pp. (in Hebrew)

Yehuda Liebes' book is an attempt to relocate the *Sefer Yetsira* in the context of the ancient world, without any interference from the later interpretation of this text in medieval mysticism. Liebes finds interesting parallels between *Sefer Yetsira* and several Jewish texts from the Hellenistic period, especially Flavius Josephus and Philo of Alexandria. Liebes shows that *Sefer Yetsira* and Philo display a common tendency to reduce the multiple to the unity, unlike the sages of the Talmud and the Midrash who tried to extrapolate a host of commentaries from almost every verse of the Law. While Liebes tries to detect in *Sefer Yetsira* the echoes of forgotten polemics against the Pythagorean school, he pinpoints a certain affinity between the theory of unity displayed in *Sefer Yetsira* and the ideas of a moderate Pythagorean, Philolaos of Crotona (5th century BCE). However, Philolaos seems to have meant not the unity but rather the perfect number 'seven'. Lastly, Liebes suggests that there are striking parallels between the oracular style of *Sefer Yetsira* and Parmenides' poem *Peri Physeos*.

Liebes' focus on the Hellenistic background of *Sefer Yetsira* is quite convincing, though the basic assumption that the book was written during the Hellenistic period relies on an *argumentum ex silentio*, namely the lack of any reference to the destruction of the Temple. The mention of *Sefer Yetsira* in BT *Sanhedrin* 65b does not constitute sufficient evidence for an early dating of the mystical treatise. It only provides a *terminus ad quem*, which is the 4th century CE. Despite its highly speculative nature, Liebes' early dating of *Sefer Yetsira* is quite

appealing, if not completely convincing. Indeed, the Hellenistic-oriented reading of the text bestows a stronger coherence on it than the positivist attempts at perceiving some vague echoes from Gnostic lore. Liebes' assumption makes sense but remains merely a hypothesis.

In the same spirit of fascinating speculation, Liebes suggests locating the composition of *Sefer Yetsira* in northern Mesopotamia (Dura Europos). The reason that he adduces for such a localization is quite farfetched: since Liebes wants to attribute the taxonomy of the Hebrew consonants found in *Sefer Yetsira* to Indian influence, he believes that the treatise was written not too far away from India, but still in a deeply Hellenized area. This brings Liebes to the northern part of Mesopotamia. This explains why the spirantization of the plosive stops (the shift known as *beqed-kefat*) has already taken place in the variety of Hebrew described in *Sefer Yetsira*. According to Liebes, such an early attestation for this shift is due to the influence of Syriac, the language spoken in the area of Adiabene and the upper Euphrates.

Liebes' stimulating study casts a new light not only on *Sefer Yetsira*, but also on the interaction between Judaism and Hellenism in the ancient world. From this point of view, it will be of interest to a readership that is much wider than that of Jewish studies, and should, therefore, be translated into English.