Medieval Christian Views of Hebrew as the Language of Magic

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Abstract: *The view of Hebrew as a language of magic, for which precedents can be discerned in the Bible and in rabbinic tradition, spilled over into early and medieval Christianity. Andrew Skinner adroitly explores the material and theological history of this trajectory, showing how this contributed to the emergence of Christian Kabbalah in the sixteenth century.*

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The study of the Hebrew language by Christians during the Middle Ages is a field yet to be fully explored.[1] One of the most fascinating

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1   There has been a lot of work done on the Christian study of the Hebrew language after the Middle Ages, from the Renaissance onward, and a lot done on the study of Hebrew by Jews in the Middle Ages. But medieval Christian Hebraica from say AD 300 to 1300 (the dates usually regarded as encompassing the Middle Ages) is still a field not yet fully cultivated. Some scholars seem to conflate the study of Hebrew by Christians in different periods into a single topic.

aspects of medieval Christian Hebraism is the reputation Hebrew acquired as a preeminent language of magic in some circles. This brief essay seeks to survey this aspect of the history of the Hebrew language. We find that while most medieval Christians eschewed the Jews, some believed that their traditional language, Hebrew, possessed special power to manipulate cosmic or supernatural forces to bring about desired personal results. The medieval Christian belief in the supernatural power of the Hebrew language itself led directly to the study of Kabbalah by Christians in the Renaissance and beyond.

The Historical Setting

Undoubtedly, the greatest name associated with early medieval Christian Hebrew studies is Eusebius Hieronymus Sophronius — St. Jerome (circa 340–420 CE).[2] Between AD 390 and 406 he produced the *Vulgate*, introductory prefaces to biblical books and explanatory notes on Hebrew, two works on Hebrew etymologies, and numerous other commentaries and treatises.[3] Jerome indicates he gave himself over to the study of Hebrew unrelentingly. His initial contribution to the study of Hebrew among Christians is not easily overstated. He spoke often of the *Veritas Hebraica* — "Hebrew truth" — and earned for himself the epithet *Doctor Maximus sacris Scripturis explanandis*, "supreme doctor in interpretation of sacred scripture."[4]

Jerome's own description of his initial motivation for undertaking the study of Hebrew is a bit surprising, perhaps even titillating, and, for our purposes, quite telling. From a passage in his *Letters*[5] we read:

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2   See practically any one of the studies on medieval Christian Hebraists, especially Raphael Lowe, "The Medieval Christian Hebraists of England: Herbert of Bosham and Earlier Scholars," *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 17 (1953): 226. He says that if it were not for the writings of St. Jerome, "one might well wonder whether any knowledge of Hebraica and Judaica would have existed in Western Christendom at all."

3   Francis X. Murphy, ed., *A Monument to Saint Jerome* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1952), 43 notes: "…from 391 to 406, formed the most productive period in the industrious life of Jerome." For a sampling of some of Jerome's most important works from this period see J.P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completes, Series latina*, 221 vols. (Paris: 1844–1864) 23:771–928, 935–1010 which comprises his *Liber Hebraicarum Quaestionum in Genesim, Liber de Nominibus Hebraica, and Liber de Situ et Nominibus Locorum Hebraicorum.*

4   Murphy, *A Monument to Saint Jerome*, 37.

5   Jerome's Letters are collected in Migne, *Patrologia latina* vol. 22. Selected letters are found in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. VI: *St. Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds.,W. H. Fremantle, trans. (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1893).

As a youth, even while I was hemmed in by the solitude of the desert, I could not bear the stimulation of the passions and nature's ardor. Though I tried to overcome it by frequent fasts, my imagination was still aflame with impure thoughts. So, in order to bring my mind into control, I made myself the pupil of a certain fellow monk who had been converted from Judaism to Christianity. And thus, after studying the acumen of Quintilian, the eloquence of Cicero, the majesty of Fronto, and the suavity of Pliny, I learnt the Hebrew alphabet and exercised myself in its hissing and aspirate words. What labor I then underwent! What difficulties I had to bear! How often I quit in despair, and how often I began again through my ambition to learn!…But I thank the Lord that from this bitter seed of study I can now gather the sweet fruits.[6]

Whether or not Jerome was here given to hyperbole makes little difference for our purpose. This autobiographical note still tells us something of the early medieval Christian attitude toward Hebrew. It was thought to be a most difficult language to learn, requiring so much concentration in Jerome's view as to be able to rid the mind of all other thoughts.

The study of Hebrew was looked upon as a true test of one's ability. It seems almost as though a medieval scholar's reputation was at once confirmed if he could be linked to that language. For example, Cassiodorus—himself no mean intellectual—described Jerome as "a most outstanding propagandist of the Latin tongue, who so greatly excelled us in the translation of the divine Scripture since we could scarcely approach the Hebrew source…it is well known that he overwhelmed us with the great richness of his learning."[7] Even Augustine, whose preference for the Greek text of the Old Testament is manifest,[8] indicates his admiration for Jerome's erudition, based in large

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6 Murphy, *A Monument to Saint Jerome*, 56. See also Schaff and Wace, eds., *St. Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, 248.

7 Cassiodorus, *Divine Lectures*, 21 "…latinae linguae dilatator eximius, qui nobis in translatione divinae Scripturae tantum praestitit, ut ad Hebraium fontem pene non egeamus accedere, quando nos facuundiae suae multa cognoscitur ubertate satiasse, plurimis libris copiosis epistolis fecit beatos…"

8 "Even as late as the time of the *De Civitate Dei*, St. Augustine still maintained his position as to the primary authority of the Septuagint." Herman Hailperin's review of Beryl Smalley, "Hebrew Scholarship Among Christians in XIIIth Century England as Illustrated by Some Hebrew Latin Psalters" in *Historia Judaica* II (1940): 124.

measure on his facility with Hebrew: "for [he was] well versed in Greek and Latin, and above all in Hebrew eloquence."[9]

The view that Hebrew study was an arduous task, that it was a difficult language to learn for Christians with no Jewish background, was prevalent in the early Middle Ages. It is a view that continued to exist through the end of the medieval period, but it is not the only view.

Conditions requisite for serious scholarship of any kind in Christian Europe during the Middle Ages could only be found in monasteries.[10] Serious study of the Hebrew language was fairly well relegated to the purview of churchmen—and not great numbers of them at that. But interest in Hebrew among Christians was spreading. There were increasing attempts by scholars to learn at least some elements of the Hebrew alphabet[11] even though, for the most part, that alphabet and the language itself "stood for something odd, strange, and difficult."[12] Alongside those interested in Hebrew scholarship were scholars who chose not to study Hebrew at all for the very reason that it was odd, strange and difficult. But by the same token, some people, not motivated by serious scholarship, had been attracted to Hebrew precisely because it was strange and mysterious and generated a perceived connection with what has been termed "white magic."[13]

It should be acknowledged, as scholars have pointed out, that relatively little effort has been expended in formulating a clear definition of the term magic.[14] The study of medieval Christian Hebraica highlights the challenge in defining magic in contradistinction to religion. However, it may be said that many scholars seem to agree that magic is not different in essence from religion. Rather, magic is a "form of religious deviance…alternate to those [activities] normally sanctioned by the

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9   St. Augustine, Contra *Julianum* I, 7, 34, cited in Murphy, *A Monument to Saint Jerome*, vi. "…qui Graeco et Latino insuper et Hebraeo eruditus eloquio…"

10   Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), 29.

11   Ibid., 43.

12   Charles Singer, "Hebrew Scholarship in the Middle Ages Among Latin Christians," in *The Legacy of Israel*, ed. Edwyn R. Brevan and Charles Singer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), 287.

13   See Theodore Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets* (New York: Behrman House, 1983); see also, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Charles Hebermann et al. (1911), v. s.v. "Occult Art, Occultism."

14   Stephen D. Ricks and Daniel C. Peterson, "Joseph Smith and 'Magic': Methodological Reflections on the Use of a Term," in *To Be Learned Is Good If…*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 130.

dominant religious institution."[15] To members of the dominant religious institution—the "insiders"—their sanctioned beliefs and practices constituted religion. Magic was what was practiced by "outsiders"; it was unsanctioned but not ineffective.[16]

Most people in the Middle Ages generally differentiated between mischievous, evil, destructive black magic, and beneficent, acceptable white magic, whose purpose was to protect against the harm of evil magic and the powers of darkness it employed. White magic often made use of objects or amulets which possessed or invoked special protective powers. But, at the heart of the matter was the power inherent in certain words and special verbal formulas which could be and often were inscribed on objects or amulets, or which might be used in independent oaths.[17] The belief in the power of language—or more particularly the Hebrew language—to create or destroy, to help or hinder, even to shape life or change history, dates back to ancient biblical times.[18]

Israelite and Rabbinic Backgrounds

From certain prohibitions found in the Bible (see for example Exod. 22:18, Deut. 18:10–11; 2 Kings 21:1–2, 6) it may be inferred that magic of various types had gained a foothold in ancient Israel early on. In a famous episode, Israel's first king, Saul, consulted the witch of Endor toward the end of his life (1 Sam. 28:5–20). Repeated bans testify to how deeply-rooted was the belief in the efficacy of magical practices, separate and distinct from Yahweh worship. When, for example, the prophet Isaiah[19] placed the "diviner," the "smart magician," and the "wise charmer" on a par with "the mighty man, the man of war, the judge, and the prophet," he was testifying to the recognized existence of all these professions in the life of Israel's people. Despite the continued denigration of magic (and its practitioners) throughout the biblical period by religious leaders,[20] the practice persisted.

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15   David Aune quoted in Ricks and Peterson, "Joseph Smith and 'Magic'," 130.

16   Ricks and Peterson, "Joseph Smith and 'Magic'," 129-47.

17   Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, v.

18   See, for example, Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965), 2:81–82. See also *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Name" by R. Abba, and "God, Names of" by B. W. Anderson.

19   Isa. 3:2–3.

20   See *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Magic" by I. Mendelsohn which contains a substantial list of passages. See, for example, Exod. 22:18; Lev. 19:26; Isa. 44:25; Zech. 10:2, etc.

By the post-biblical period, Israelite religion had become Judaism, per se. The kind of magic emphasized during this period was "defensive," which sought to protect one against evil and sickness, and was, with some exceptions, generally intended not to harm persons but, rather, demonic forces—so called "white magic."[21] By the Talmudic age (AD 200–500) this same kind of magic was employed not only for the benefit and protection of people against demonic powers but also against destructive illnesses. The Talmudic tractate Pesahim 112a, for instance, recommends reducing the force or severity of an ailment by a verbal formula which subdues the invoked spirit of the ailment. Joshua Trachtenberg believes that by the Middle Ages (roughly AD 330 to 1300) Jewish magic was entirely free of Satanic elements, and demons appear as evil influences to be fought off, not as agents of magicians.[22]

Protective magical powers are often described in the Talmud.[23] One of the most interesting and instructive statements is found in the tractate Sabbath 61 and concerns amulets (Hebrew *qemī ʿot*, קמיעות). We are told that a person is not to go forth carrying an amulet that is not obtained from an expert. Such an amulet is one that has cured on three occasions or has been issued by an expert magician. Hence, proven performance is an important key and one which presupposes widespread use of the magical art.

As to why the rabbis permitted such activity to exist when it had been so resoundingly forbidden in the Torah, Saul Liebermann has said: "The Babylonian Rabbis…kept the rule that there is no need to fight the superstition of the people when it is possible to transform it into true religion…The Rabbis did their utmost to combat superstitions which were forbidden by the Written Law, to eliminate the magic which smacked of idolatry, but they had to accept those charms which were sanctioned by the 'scientists' of that time."[24]

Furthermore, the rabbis well understood the basic human need for any little bit of psychological security—especially in particularly oppressive times, as the years following AD 70 proved to be. This is confirmed in an insightful statement found in the Babylonian Talmud, tractate Pesahim 110b: "When one is concerned about demons, the demons concern themselves with that person, but if one is not concerned

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21   *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Occult Art, Occultism."

22   Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), 59.

23   See Rabbi Manual Gold in Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, v.

24   Saul Liebermann, *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1941), 103, 110.

about demons, then the demons are not concerned with that person. In any event one must be cautious."

Among almost all Jews, Hebrew carried special power and thus gave extra authority to magic formulae. The Talmud speaks of the special status of Hebrew. It was the original language of sacred scripture. It was God's language (a concept accepted by many Christians as well). It was the holy tongue. Tractate Abodah Zarah 44b reports: "Abaye said 'It is permitted to discuss secular subjects in the holy tongue but it is forbidden to discuss holy subjects in the vernacular.'"

Talmudic rabbis used the Hebrew language as a device by which to compare humankind to heavenly beings. Hebrew was believed to be the sole language understood by angels (see Sotah 33a). Hagigah 16a tells us that one of the three ways men and angels are alike is the capacity of both to speak "the holy tongue."

The belief in the monolingual nature of angels was used to explain why Aramaic prayers are found in Jewish ritual; namely, rituals were couched in Aramaic so as to remain purposely unintelligible to angels and not annoy or arouse them.[25] More importantly, the belief in Hebrew as the official language of God, Heaven, and angels "made necessary the bestowal of a Hebrew name upon every Jew, in addition to his secular name, and the use exclusively of the Hebrew name in the course of a religious rite, for the angels certainly could not be expected to recognize an individual by any other."[26] By extension, to call upon the celestial court (especially angels) for special help — healing, protection, or whatever — by any means other than Hebrew would be futile.

The rabbinic approach to supernatural protection centered on the power of language. The magic described in the Talmud depended largely upon the potency possessed by the words of an incantation or phrase.[27] The forces inherent in written words — particularly *shemoth* or names — was especially powerful.[28] Eventually even the individual letters of the Hebrew alphabet came to be regarded as possessing viable, creative power. This principle is confirmed in the *Zohar*: "The world was created by the help of the Hebrew letters." A similar thought is expressed in the Jewish text, *Sefer Yetzirah*: "He [God] created His Universe by three

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25   Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (New York: Behrman's Jewish Book House Publishers, 1939), 74.

26   Ibid.

27   Ibid., 88.

28   Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, 9.

forms of expression, numbers, letters, and words."[29] It is little wonder then that the Hebrew language was considered an especially effective magical medium.

The popularity of Hebrew as the prime language for supernatural rites can be seen among almost all non-Jewish sorcerers from late antiquity through Talmudic times. Because Hebrew was an exotic and unintelligible tongue it was capable of lending extra power and effectiveness to existing religious devotions.[30] This is apparent from a variety of sources. For example, magicians of the synchronistic Hellenistic period favored words and names from the Hebrew language, as is evident from magical papyri dated to this period.[31] This tradition was even manifest later among Moslem magicians and practitioners in an interesting way. "Since the Jewish population in Arab lands have resided there for many centuries and since the Arabs themselves are known to be great believers in the efficacy of amulets, this characteristic being known from time immemorial, it is not surprising that amulets with inscriptions both in Arabic and in Hebrew should be found."[32]

Christian Veneration of Hebrew

Against the backdrop of this environment we may now consider in greater detail Christian use of Hebrew as the language of magic. From a very early time in their history many Christians believed that the Jews were, among other things, a people possessing special mystical or supernatural powers — especially the powers of healing and protection.[33] Goodenough and Simon indicate that Jewish magic is characterized by three features: first, a great respect for Hebrew phrases; second, a belief in the power of special names which, when invoked, would bring desired

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29   Zohar 1:204, II:411; and in Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph, *The Book of Formation (Sepher Yetzirah)*, ed. and trans. Knut Stenring, (London, 1923), 21. This became a popular "handbook" for Jewish amulet makers.

30   Trachtenberg, *Devil and the Jews*, 61. For Coptic evidence see W. H. Worrell, "A Coptic Wizard's Hoard," *American Journal of Semitic Languages* 46 (1929–30): 239–62.

31   Karl L. Preisendanz, ed., *Papyri graecae magicae*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1928). This point is also driven home by Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science* 1:450, "It is even possible for persons who are not true Christians to make use of the name of Jesus to work wonders just as magicians use the Hebrew names."

32   Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, 72.

33   For instance, one Jewish sect during the intertestamental period, the Essenes living at Qumran (circa 140 BC – AD 68), were known for performing healings as part of their cadre of religious practices.

results; and third an overwhelming regard for angels and demons which could, respectively, intercede or interfere in one's life.[34]

All three of these features fit into the theological framework of early Christianity. Hence, while sorcery was condemned in the Apostolic and post-Apostolic Church,[35] some Christians perpetually turned to the magic of the Jews and held the Hebrew language in special repute as a key to unlock extraordinary powers of the supernatural world. Of this we have many interesting examples.

We read of those Christians in the second century who, submitting themselves "to the incantations of a Jew" to cure gout, were chided by Lucius of Samosate.[36] One is almost certainly correct in assuming that at least a share of such "incantations" were performed in Hebrew owing to the comments of Origen, as well as those found in the Talmud (to which we have made reference). Origen, who boasted a wide knowledge of Hebrew literature, testifies that this kind of adjuration of demons or spirits was specifically "Jewish" and that such adjurations and incantations *had to be made in Hebrew*.[37] Among some Christians it was believed that Hebrew words themselves conveyed power, and if they were "translated into another language they [would] lose their operative force."[38]

However this was not universally true. From documents of the late Roman world we learn that the power behind mere mention of the Hebrew language in general in demonic adjurations and incantations was recognized.[39] In other words, instead of performing elaborate

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34   Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, 13 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 2:161 ff. See also Marcel Simon, *Versus Israel, Etude sur les relations entre chrétiens et juifs dans l'empire romain* (Paris: E. De Boccard, 1964), 407.

35   See Acts, 13:10 (the magician Bar-Jesus is called an enemy of all righteousness); Gal. 5:19-21 and 2 Tim. 3:8 (sorcery is comparable to immorality and idolatry); and Rev. 9:21, 18:23, 21:8, 22:15 (sorcerers are on the same plane as liars and murderers).

36   Theodore Reinach, *Textes d'auteurs grecs et romains relatifs au Judaisme* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1895), 165.

37   J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completes, Series graeca*, 161 vols. (Paris, 1844–1964), 13:1757. See Origen's "Commentary on Matthew," xxvi, 63. Also Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 1:437 and Trachtenberg, *Devil and the Jews*, 229 note 7.

38   Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 6 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 1:450.

39   Robert Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 85. Also Judah Goldin, "The Magic of Magic and Superstition," in *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 123–24.

rites in Hebrew, sometimes simple reference to the language itself, as an independent force of great efficacy, was enough to accomplish the task. Hence, the phrase "I exorcise you in the Hebrew language,"[40] was a familiar magical formula of early medieval times.

A Coptic Text

One of the most interesting attestations of this theme is found among the magical papyri of what appears to have been "the humble literary stock of a Coptic magician."[41] The text is an apparent adaptation from Judaism made by a Coptic Christian, though it purports to have been made by Sethian Gnostics. It is preserved only in seventh century (or later) Coptic copies. Explicit stress is laid upon the special and potent power of the Hebrew language in general — "the language of heaven" — as a magical tool. The complete text is quite long. We quote several lines to present the context of the significant parts, noted in italics, relevant to our study:

> O God, O Lord, O Lord, O Omnipotent
>
> Whose body is the color of fire
>
> Who is light in the hidden
>
> Whose name no flesh-born man knoweth
>
> Save only himself…
>
> Perform for me every labor pertaining to this spell
>
> And every operation which I shall undertake…
>
> Give ear to our authority…
>
> All your ministrants who are proclaimed by those all above them
>
> And these great archangels which are great in their power
>
> These whose names were first announced to them
>
> Namely: the angels that call all the appellations that are *written in Hebrew, in the language of heaven*
>
> That they give ear to every man who shall perform in purity, and chastity of deed
>
> I am Seth the son of Adam
>
> I have purified myself forty days

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40   Preisendanz, *Papyri graecae magicae*, 1:38.
41   Worrell, "A Coptic Wizard's Hoard," 239.

Till its power (i.e., the power of the spell) is manifest

And the *power of its Hebrew and all its executions*

That it may assist in every task which I shall undertake[42]

The text continues for many lines in the same general vein but finally ends with what the text's modern translator, W. H. Worell, calls "a terrible ragout of Gnostic invocation, no longer understood by anyone."[43] Though they are called Hebrew magic formulae in the text, Worrell believes they could not have been pronounced but were "pure hocus pocus to the magician [though] he calls it Hebrew."[44]

Actually, among this series of unusual "magic" syllables we find some genuinely Semitic terms (Hebrew and Aramaic).[45] For example, ᴍᴀʀ is probably from Aramaic *mār*, "lord." The syllable ⲉⲗ, *ēl*, is the common ending for names of angels and the general Hebrew (as well as Semitic) term for God. Likewise ʙⲏⲗ, *bēl*, is the Hebrew term for a foreign deity (see Isa. 46:1). Also included are ʀᴀʙ, *rab*, Hebrew and Aramaic for "great"; ⲓⲁⲱ, *Iaō*, is the shortened Hebrew form for Yahweh or Lord; ⲁⲇⲟⲛⲏ ⲉⲗⲱⲉⲓ is the Hebrew *adōnāi elōhāi* for "my Lord, my God"; ʙⲁⳜⲙ represents the Hebrew *bash-shēm*, meaning "in the Name [of God]"; ⲥⲁʙⲁⲱⲑ is the translated Hebrew word, *saba'oth* meaning "[Lord of] hosts"; and ⲁʙⲟⲩⲏⲗ, *Abouēl* represents the Hebrew word for "God-Father."[46] A series of other vowel combinations are found (ⲓⲏ, ⲉⲓⲉ, ⲁⲓ, etc.) and look suspiciously like permutations of the Divine Name ⲓⲁⲱ, *Iaō*, for Yahweh. Of significance is the fact that these terms were thought to convey extra special power in and of themselves, and add one more witness to the special place accorded Hebrew in magic spells.

This Coptic text harmonizes with other evidence that shows that several Hebrew words were regarded by Christians and Jews alike as effective purveyors of magical forces derived from the Bible. (Bibliomancy was a form of magic found among many people holding a belief in sacred scripture.)[47] This Coptic Text also shows that since traditional opinion among Jews and Christians held that because the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) was God-given, and thus words and sentences

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42   Ibid., 255, 256.

43   Ibid., 255.

44   Ibid.

45   Ibid., 262, a list made by Worrell. The Coptic terms have been copied in their own script.

46   Worrell sees ⲁⲟⲩⲏⲗ as an Arabic-Hebrew combination, "A Coptic Wizard's Hoard," 262. Goodenough treats it as Hebrew in *Jewish Symbols*, 2:166.

47   Goldin, "Magic of Magic and Superstition," 123-24.

of scripture derived their magical power directly from the Divine Source, it was not even necessary to make use of whole sentences; abbreviations became common and were considered to be quite effective.[48]

In particular, the use of the terms *Iaō* and *Adōnāi* are noteworthy carriers of magical power, especially among certain Gnostic-like sects; *Iaō*, being a transliteration of the shortened form of the Hebrew Yahweh, and *Adōnāi* being the Hebrew word for Lord as we saw above. In his discussion on Christian magical charms Erwin Goodenough mentions this phenomenon, noting that where Christian elements in these medieval incantations are slight, such elements are recognizable intrusions or additions to formulas which "…appear to be very old Jewish forms."[49]

A Syriac Text

One such formula, written in Syriac (Eastern Aramaic), opens with an invocation of the Trinity, goes on to quote the introductory verses of the Gospel of John and then changes to what Goodenough calls "a purely Jewish invocation."[50] The last portion reads:

> By the power of those ten holy words of the Lord God, by the Name, I am that I am, God Almighty, Adonai, Lord of Hosts, I bind, excommunicate, and destroy, I ward off, cause to vanish, all evil, accursed, and maddening pains and sicknesses, adversaries, demons, rebellious devils, also the spirits of lunacy, the spirit of the stomach, the spirits of the heart, the spirits of the head, the spirits of the eyes, the ills of the stomach, the spirit of the teeth, also the evil and envious eye, the eye that smiteth and pitieth not, the green coloured eye, the eye of every kind, the eye of all spirits of pain in the head, pain on one side of the head, sweet and soft (doleful) pulsations, seventy-two such sweet and mournful noises, also the fever, cold and hot, visions fearful and false dreams, as are by night and by day also Lilith, Malvita, and Zarduch, the dissembling (or "compelling") demon, and all evil pains, sicknesses, and devils, bound by spell, from off the body and soul, the house, the sons and daughters of him who beareth these writs, Amen, Amen![51]

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48   Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, 100-03.
49   Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, 2:164.
50   Ibid.
51   Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, 2:164.

Some of the elements of this invocation are recognizable. The opening phrase, which summons the "power of those ten holy words of Lord God," possibly has reference to the ten commandments issued on Mount Sinai. However, it seems more likely that the phrase is alluding to the ten attributes of God or ten *sefiroth* (signs, manifestations) by which deity reveals himself and through which his creative power is manifest.[52] This is a mystical concept which plays a major role in Kabbalistic doctrine.

In Kabbalah the *sefiroth* are known as ten holy words of power, which are their names. They form layers of divine power[53] and are "the names which He [God] gave to himself."[54] By invoking them in his spell, the magician is simply adding one more set of divine names and words of power to his incantation in order to achieve his purposes. This is a standard principle of medieval Christian magic. One can and should use as many of the most effective words of power as possible. In this charm, of course, Christian forms are simply added to existing Jewish ones.

The next phrase "by the Name, I am that I am" simply denotes one of the divine names which God revealed to Moses as recorded in Exodus 3:13–15. We need to remember that from Old Testament times on, the names of God were thought to carry special power.[55] In the Middle Ages, out of concerns for brevity and the sanctity of the names of God, the abridged phrase "in the name" (Hebrew *bash-shēm*) or "by the name" was often used in texts to infer that the power of the divine name was being invoked without having to repeat the rest of the phrase "I am that I am." We see this formula, for example, in the list of those Hebrew magic terms at the end of the seventh century Coptic-Gnostic text discussed above. It is also typical of Jewish amulets which often begin with the invocation "in the name of…". In the present Syriac text, however, the entire phrase "in the name, I am that I am" is used.

Some of the most fascinating elements of this charm are those terms not so readily recognized, such as "Lilith," Malvita," and "Zarduk." These constitute specific Hebrew names of demons which sometimes appear in Jewish magical and healing texts and in Christian incantations

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52 *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1972 ed., s.v. "Kabbalah" by Gershom Scholem. See especially the section "Sefirot" cols. 563–79. For a more detailed discussion in the whole context of mysticism see Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 212–22 and passim.

53 Scholem, *Jewish Mysticism*, 214.

54 Ibid., 215-16.

55 *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 1962 ed., s.v. "God, Names of" by B. W. Anderson.

displaying heavy Jewish influence. They derive from Jewish Midrashic literature.[56]

Lilith (Hebrew, לילית) is one of the best known of these evil spirits. The popular derivation of the name, which gives us a clue as to the nature of this demon in Jewish tradition, held the term to be from the Hebrew root-word for night (*Layil*, ליל) with a feminine adjectival suffix *ith*. The concept of Lilith becomes more fully developed in post-biblical and medieval times. According to the later rabbis this "nocturnal spectre," in the form of a beautiful woman, lay in wait for victims (especially children) at night.[57] The Talmud (Sabbath 151b) issues a precaution that can be taken in order to deflect and obstruct the evil activities of Lilith: one is to refrain from sleeping in a house alone.

Lilith's connection to the night-time is further elaborated in the Zohar[58] where we learn that she is the mother of all demons and was Adam's first wife for 130 years. Because she demanded certain rights, was refused them by Adam, she pronounced God's Ineffable name and retreated to her own kingdom near the Dead Sea where she established her abode and mated with other demons. The creation of Eve and the happy union between her and Adam aroused in Lilith feelings of jealousy and spite and thus she has been plaguing Adam's posterity ever since. She appears to the sons of man in their dreams and causes them to have nocturnal emissions from which other spectres — *lillin* — are produced so that the propagation of the demonic species is continued and ensured by the union of spirits with mortal men while they are sleeping.[59] Since nocturnal emissions are a source of ritual or ceremonial defilement (according to rabbinic interpretation of Lev. 15:2) such tradition may be a way of obviating some of the personal responsibility and guilt felt by strict observers of Jewish ritual.

While it is unlikely that many Christians were familiar with the details of the Jewish traditions surrounding Lilith, it is certain that they knew of the numerous malevolent demons and spirits of Jewish tradition which were bent on afflicting and tormenting mankind. The overall

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56   See Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, 112-20, which is a concise discussion on Midrashic *Shemoth*.

57   For the popular etymology see Samuel P. Tregelles, trans., *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdman Publishing Co., 1974), 438. The more recent scholarly view is found in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 1962 ed. s.v. "Lilith" by T. H. Gaster.

58   The *Zohar* or "Book of Splendor" is the greatest thirteenth century work of Jewish mysticism and Kabbalistic doctrine written sometime after 1275.

59   See Schrire's discussion in *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, 114–17.

intent of this Syriac text which we have been discussing is quite clear. It aims at providing its owner or recipient with physical *and* psychological protection by warding off any and all dangers and banishing or even destroying those evil spirits and demonic forces which may be the cause of pains and bodily ills. It is only natural that they be intimately connected with magic texts using the special power of Hebrew words and phrases. After all, the Talmud itself explains to us that demons, like angels, speak Hebrew (see Hagigah 16a).

Christian Amulets

Syriac amulets used in protective and healing magic have been found in the Christian city of Antioch dating from the fifth and sixth centuries. In John Chrysostom's time (c.a. 347-407) we know that Christians were wearing gospel texts around their necks, encased in small boxes as good-luck charms. They used amulets and charms to ward off demons, to protect themselves from harm, and to heal their ills.[60] Chrysostom, church father and patriarch of Constantinople, held a strong disdain for Judaizing Christians as well as for Jewish magic and the Hebrew language due, in part, to its connection with that magic. Yet, the Christians of Antioch continued to visit the Jews and practice their magic because, as even Chrysostom admits, Christians were being healed.[61]

It may be added in passing that this same kind of circumstance (Christians putting more stock in Jewish healers than Christian ones) continued throughout the Middle Ages. A tale of Franco Sacchetti, a friend of Boccaccio (d. 1375), about two women swindled by a Jewish peddler of fertility potions, ends with the remark: "It is remarkable that Christians, men and women, will put more trust in one Jew than in one hundred Christians, yet will repose no trust at all in a single Christian."[62] In a similar story he repeats the claim: "It is something new, to seek healing in Jewish machinations. It happens quite often nowadays that one trusts a single Jew more than a thousand Christians."[63] In fact Sacchetti was wrong—it was nothing new at all, as Chrysostom would have told him.

An important example of Hebraic influence on Syriac Christian magic comes from a medieval charm which is clearly attributable to

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60   Wilkin, *Chrysostom and the Jews*, 84.
61   They ran to the Jews to be healed by charms, incantations and amulets and were healed. Migne, *Patrologia graeca*, 47:935, 937–38.
62   Quoted in Trachtenberg, *Devil and the Jews*, 94.
63   Ibid.

Christian authorship.[64] It opens with an invocation of Christ and an appeal to the Trinity, but with Kabbalistic overtones: "Through the power of the Lord Jesus Christ.…By the power of these ten holy words of the glorious Godhead…" The Jewish influence is unmistakable, as is the special role and influence of Hebrew in this magical text. It invites special power to attend the practitioner by invoking the "ten holy words," a Jewish Kabbalistic phrase we have encountered before, but not of God but of the Godhead. And something new is introduced—*Shaddai* or *El Shaddai* (Hebrew, "Almighty" or "God Almighty").[65] This is a common Hebrew epithet for deity and was thought to be especially effective in Jewish magic formulae, though here it is included with names of strictly Christian importance:

> By the power of these ten holy words of the glorious Godhead, and in the name [of] אהיה אשר אהיה ["I am that I am"], *El-Shaddai, Adonai,* Lord *Sabāōth* [and] by the power and by the command of the Lord Jesus Christ, I bind and I expel and I objurgate the evil and bewitching eye…and I bind wounds [?and] the stroke of rupture and all sicknesses, and all diseases and all plagues…of demons and of rebellious devils and satans…by the prayer of my lady, Mary the blessed, and of Mar John the Baptist, and of Rabban Phetion, greatest of masters, and of Mar Abd-Ishu'…[66]

Undoubtedly it was the author's intention to strengthen the force of this magic spell or incantation by connecting the godhead with those Hebrew names for deity found in the Old Testament as well as Kabbalah. A collection of similar magical texts shows a number of such phenomena.[67]

European Evidence

Christian interest in Hebrew as the language of magic was not localized nor was the Christian use of Hebrew words and expressions restricted to Syriac or Coptic texts. There exists a peculiar set of what has been termed

64   Willis H. Hazard, "A Syriac Charm," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 15 (1893): 284–96.

65   Hazard, "A Syriac Charm," 285; See Trachtenberg, "Jewish Magic," 158.

66   Hazard, "A Syriac Charm," 285–86. Mar Abd-Ishu', "the anchorite and monk of God" was evidently the author of this charm. Several lines later he again testifies to how thoroughly Jewish tradition was bound up with magic when he says an evil spirit appeared to him by the name of *Lilitha*!

67   Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, 164.

"semi-magical documents" originating in the British Isles, written in Latin, and dating from the sixth and seventh centuries.[68] There are also a few magical formulae dating to about the ninth or tenth century from England which exhibit Hebrew elements. These compositions are referred to by scholars as "Hisperic Literature."[69] They tend to show us the rather widespread and continuing belief that Hebrew, above all others, was the language of magical power.

In the late eleventh to early twelfth century, Archbishop Gerard of York had a definite interest in Hebrew. He was found to be the owner of at least two Hebrew psalters. But the focus of his interest is fascinating. Aside from any theological concerns, Gerard enjoyed a reputation for the practice of magical arts, as well as for learning.[70] In the eleventh century it was established among churchmen that Hebrew letters might be used for casting spells.[71] It seems that the Archbishop's interest in the language was due to quasi-magical fascination rather than pure biblical studies.

Along these lines we have the curious confession of a Westphalian priest, Johannes of Scheven, who authored a manuscript entitled *Margarita exorcistarum*. Unfortunately the only copy of this was destroyed in World War II. However, Bernhard Bischoff has commented on part of its contents.[72] Johannes reported that he took some Hebrew lessons from a Jew in order to pronounce correctly—in his exorcisms—the names of the tormenting demons, that names mainly sounded Hebrew. Whether or not the names were, in fact, Hebrew is of little matter to us. What is significant is the association of the Hebrew language with demons and magical rites that was so prevalent in the Middle Ages.

Magic was a preoccupation of the age. "The revival of classical learning and of humanistic studies in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were accompanied by an unparalleled and almost universal addiction to magic."[73] The fact that Hebrew was regarded by some Christians of the High Middle Ages (12th–14th centuries) as a key to unlocking the most potent forces and powers of magic is attested by a number of late

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68 Singer, "Hebrew Scholarship in the Middle Ages," 286-87.

69 Ibid., 287.

70 Raphael Loewe, "The Medieval Christian Hebraists of England: Herbert of Basham and Earlier Scholars," *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 17 (1953): 234.

71 Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 81.

72 Bernhard Bischoff, "The Study of Foreign Languages in the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 36 (1961): 209.

73 Trachtenberg, *Devil and the Jews*, 59.

medieval amulets which were formerly thought to be of Jewish origin, for Jewish use, because of their Hebrew inscriptions, but which are now known to have been exclusively for and, in some cases, by Christians.[74]

Amulets, in general, have a long and varied history. They have been found in increasing numbers from Neolithic times on, and have always had as their primary objective the influencing of the course of events by the occult control of nature or the protection of the wearer against evil or the Evil Eye (a phenomenon going back to the Egyptians and Sumerians of the Bronze Age).[75]

During the later Middle Ages the reputation of Jews as manufacturers and peddlers of magic amulets was widespread, so much so that it had become satirized by the time of Martin Luther, as evidenced from an anecdote recounted by the Reformer himself: "A Jew brought to Count Albrecht of Saxony an amulet which would make him immune to all weapons of attack; Albrecht forced the Jew to take his own medicine: to test the efficacy of the amulet he hung it about his owner's neck and ran him through with his sword."[76] Such a story, whether true or not, implicitly testifies of the continued importance attached to the use of magic by Christians.

In the late medieval period the Jewish *mezuzah* (Hebrew, "doorpost") was regarded as a magical device by Christians — being both an object of suspicion and desire. The *mezuzah*, of course, is a small container holding four passages of the Hebrew Bible written on parchment and attached to the doorposts of Jewish dwellings.[77] Though many argue that to consider the mezuzah — an object of profound religious veneration — in the same breath with amulets and articles of magical potency is sacrilege, we have evidence that it was regarded as an object of supernatural power by both some medieval Jews and Christians.[78] In the thirteenth century Jews of the Rhineland had to cover or hide their *mezuzoth* because, as one contemporary writer reported, "The Christians out of malice and to annoy us stick knives into the *mezuzah* openings and cut up the parchment."[79] Though the author blames this action on the desires of Christians to annoy the Jews, one suspects that it was motivated, at least

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74   Ibid., 61.

75   See the general discussion in E. A. Wallis Budge, *Amulets and Talismans* (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 1–27.

76   Martin Luther, *Werke* (Erlangen, 1854), LXII, 375.

77   *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1972 ed., s.v. "Mezuzah" by Louis T. Rabinowitz.

78   Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic*, 146.

79   Trachtenberg, *Devil and the Jews*, 91.

in part, by a desire to weaken or destroy the magical powers believed to be inherent in the *mezuzah* Hebrew texts, themselves.

On the other hand, some medieval Christians respected this Jewish symbol as a receptacle of desirable supernatural power, as attested by other evidence. For example, toward the end of the fourteenth century the Archbishop of Salzburg asked a Jew to give him a *mezuzah* to attach to the gate of his castle. Upon checking rabbinic authority, however, the request was refused by the Jew. In the fifteenth century Christians were encouraged by a certain writer to attach a *mezuzah* to their doorpost for magical protection.[80] The Hebrew writing contained within the *mezuzah* was in large part regarded as being responsible for this power. Among Jews the *mezuzah* was intended to be a constant reminder of the Divine Presence. This aspect of its usage was not lost on Christians seeking the protection and watchful care of forces from another world. Some Christians seem to have regarded the *mezuzah* as another kind of amulet.

The King Solomon Connection

Tradition reports that King Solomon himself was a powerful and wise magician who was in possession of the Ineffable Name—the single greatest Hebrew name of God.[81] In Jewish religious thought and lore the Ineffable Name held tremendous power, enabling its possessor (and utterer) to exercise great supernatural control over man and, indeed, all of creation. The general belief in the magical efficacy of that proper name became dominant as early as the first millennium BC in Canaan.[82] Layers of Jewish tradition strengthened and expanded this notion to include a firm belief in the tremendous power of all the written names of God, of angels, and of various biblical quotations. This formed the basis for the mystics' faith in the power of words and specific words of power.

According to Jewish mystical beliefs it was by means of the power of the Ineffable Name Solomon erected the Temple in Jerusalem, could understand the language of all animals, and acquired his all-comprehensive wisdom. This name was passed down as a secret rite to

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80   These two episodes are from Moses ben Eliezer, *Sefer Hasidim Tinyana* (Piotrkov, 1910), 7a. Recounted in Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, 71.

81   Thorndike, *Magic and Experimental Science*, 2:279–89; Trachtenberg, *Devil and the Jews*, 63–64; and Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, 2:227–35. Goodenough adds new insights.

82   For an excellent brief discussion on the Divine Name (יהוה), the loss of the correct pronunciation, and its relationship to magic, see Elias Bickerman, *From Ezra to the Last of the Maccabees* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 65–71.

those priests serving the Temple, but was uttered only once a year by the High Priest officiating in the Holy of Holies on *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement). As the name was lost after AD 70 (the final destruction of the Second Temple), a meticulous and ongoing search of ancient literature and mystical tradition was carried out in order to re-capture the Ineffable name or at least find satisfactory substitutes to re-garner the greater powers and supernatural forces once held by Solomon and others. The Solomonic legends exerted a strong influence over the medieval Christian imagination precisely because the age seemed to be preoccupied with magical concerns and Solomon had been regarded as the archetypal magician since late Roman-Christian times, as artifacts and literature from late antiquity and the medieval period attest.[83]

We have already mentioned Origen who, in his "Commentary on Matthew," asserted that Jews were adept in the adjuration of demons and employed charms in the Hebrew language drawn from the books of Solomon.[84] Perhaps some of the more interesting evidence connecting King Solomon to magical power is found in the form of early medieval Christian amulets which either mention the name of Solomon or depict him as a warrior, sometimes mounted, sometimes without a horse. The inscription on one such amulet written in Hebrew reads: "Seal of the living God, guard him who wears this, Holy, holy, holy, Lord Sabaoth, heaven and earth are full of thy glory." On the reverse side, "Get out, hated one. Araaph the angel and Solomon drive you away from him who wears this."[85]

Often such amulets bear formulas which are entirely Hebraic except for square crosses commonly found on one side. Thus, "a new religion may take over the old magic, signs, names, mottoes; the Christian wanted to keep what was effective in the old age, but to add the new Christian potency to it."[86] Certainly this is true regarding special Hebrew words and names. In fact, the legends regarding Solomon as foremost magician seem to be a far more important feature of Christian rather than Jewish medieval magic.

Solomon played only a minor role in Jewish magic of the period. Certain conjuring books ascribed to Solomon by the church were condemned by the recognized authorities of rabbinic Judaism.[87] Hence,

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83 Thorndike, *Magic and Experimental Science*, 2:279.
84 Migne, *Patrologia graeca*, 13:1757.
85 Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, 2:231.
86 Ibid.
87 Trachtenberg, *Devil and the Jews*, 231 note 16.

as the regard for "Solomon the Magician" seems to have decreased in Jewish thought his status increased in Christian thinking during the Middle Ages. Solomonic legends possessed two main elements: the wise monarch's dominion over devil and demons and his utilization of this power for magical ends. This latter theme was so highly developed with different kinds of variations that Solomon came to be regarded both as the archetypical sorcerer and the originator of occult science. "So deeply did the belief in [Solomon's] magical supremacy enter into medieval thought that nothing more was required to authenticate the worth of a formula or an amulet than to trace it to him, and the most popular magical works drew their authority from his reputation."[88]

In this regard Peter Comestor (d. 1179), biblical scholar, Dean of the Notre Dame Cathedral at Troyes, and teacher at the University of Paris, authored one of the most popular Christian books of the Middle Ages. Entitled *Historia Scholastica* (though the twelfth century masters called it simply *The Histories*), the work was a great "summary of biblical history."[89] In it Comestor ascribes *all* the magic and magical paraphernalia of his own time to Solomon. This is particularly significant in light of Comestor's own interest in Hebrew as well as the interest in biblical studies that his *Histories* helped to generate among Stephen Langton and others.[90]

Two Oxford manuscript copies of the work display a knowledge of Hebrew on the part of their owners and/or glossators. One of the copies, which early-on belonged to the Dominican Friars, had in it a Hebrew text of the description of the porch of Solomon's Temple.[91]

Other medieval Christian magical compositions also regarded King Solomon as the foremost magician of the ages. The "Golden Flowers of Apollonius," an early fourteenth century mystical work, for example, mentions Solomon in almost every other sentence.[92] A treatise on palmistry is attributed to him, as is a composition entitled "Philosophy of Solomon" in a late twelfth century text.[93] Certain other magical and semi-magical works are ascribed to Solomon in medieval manuscripts. By far the most interesting work of this category, which not only informs us about medieval magic but the use of Hebrew as a tool of that art, is the *Liber Sacratus*, as William of Auvergne (d. 1249) entitled it, or *Liber sacer*

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88 Ibid., 63.
89 Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 178–79.
90 Ibid., 178–82, 199.
91 Ibid., 339.
92 Thorndike, *Magic and Experimental Science*, 2:282.
93 Ibid.

or *Liber juratus* as it is also called in different manuscripts.[94] It is a work immediately associated with the name of Solomon.

The preface of *Liber Sacratus*, as it is found in a fourteenth century Latin edition, denigrates the pope and cardinals as themselves being under the influence of *evil* spirits when they passed a decree condemning the magic arts and magicians because magicians and necromancers injure everyone, transgress the statutes of the Holy Mother Church, and make innovations and sacrifices to demons. *Liber Sacratus* denies the latter charges, argues that only pure men can work by the magic arts and compel spirits against their will, and then recounts something of the story behind *Liber Sacratus*.[95]

Accordingly, an assembly of 89 masters of the magical arts from Naples, Athens, Toledo, and elsewhere chose one Honorius to reduce all their magic books (going all the way back to Solomon) to one volume, which could be more readily concealed and preserved. The followers of the magic arts then took an oath not to give this volume to anyone until its owner was on his death-bed, never to have more than three copies of it in existence at one time, and never allow it to pass into the hands of those who were not of proven maturity and fidelity. Each new recipient of the sacred volume was to take this oath; hence the name *juratus* (from the Latin *jurare* "to swear"). Its other titles *Sacer* or *Sacratus* most probably refer to the sacred names of God which make up a good portion of the actual text. After the presentation of introductory material, the work itself opens with the first statement of its author or editor: "In the name of almighty God and Jesus Christ, one and true God, I, Honorius, have thus ordered the works of Solomon in my book."[96]

Without question, *Liber Sacratus (Juratus)* is an important Christian work on medieval magic. A manuscript copy said to have belonged to Ben Jonson[97] has the term "Theurgia" written across the flyleaves before the beginning and after the close of the text.[98] ("Theurgia" is derived from a Greek word meaning "work of divination.") But, more significantly, the text itself is full of names of spirits, prayers in strange words, and a series of letters supposedly derived from Hebrew or Chaldaic (Aramaic), as well

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94   Ibid., 2:283–84.

95   Ibid., 2:284–85. Thorndike quotes much of the introduction of the work.

96   Ibid., 2:285.

97   Ibid., 2:284. Sloane manuscript 313 in the British Library entitled *Opus de arte magica, ba Honorio ordinatum.*

98   Thorndike, *Magic and Experimental Science*, 2:286. The manuscript is also said to have Jonson's motto inscribed on it, "Tanquam Explorator."

as other gibberish. Indeed, the first chapter deals with the composition of what is called the great 72-syllable name of God.

This latter epithet consists of seventy-two syllables, each of three Hebrew letters. The construction is based on the three verses of Exodus 14:19–21, each of which is composed of seventy-two letters. In this regard one scholar has explained that,

> The first letter of the first verse, the last letter of the second verse and the first letter of the third verse constitute the first syllable of the name. The second letter of the first verse, the penultimate letter of the second verse and the second letter of the third verse constitute the second syllable and so on until 72 syllables, each consisting of three letters are formed. The total number of letters [216] makes this name a particularly bulky and difficult one.[99]

Other items of note in the *Liber Sacratus* include the names of important and well known angels including Raphael, Michael, and others, and the names of various spirits (especially those associated with the planet Saturn), all of which have the typical Hebrew ending *el* or *iel*. By contrast, very few of the names of demons in the work end in *el* or *iel*.[100] Hence, it seems that an important psychological principle is at work. The demons are viewed as pagans and damned, while all angels and spirits with Hebrew-sounding names are viewed as good!

It is well known that the pseudo-science of astrology—made up mostly of magic with some bit of true astronomy—was an important part of the medieval world, even "the fundamental doctrine of the medieval Weltanschauung."[101] It is, therefore, not surprising to find the Hebrew language connected with astrology, as we see demonstrated in *Liber Sacratus.*

Another example of Hebrew's connection with medieval astrology occurs in a tenth century Latin manuscript dealing with "the science of astronomy,"[102] and which is full of Hebrew words written in the Hebrew script. Entitled *Mathematica Alcandrii* the text purports to be the work of one Alcandrius or Alhandreus, supreme astrologer in ancient times, who aims at treating "the order of the planets according to nature and

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99   Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, 98.

100   For Saturn these include *Bohel*, *Casziel*, and *Daedel*. See Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, 2:233.

101   Trachtenberg, *Devil and the Jews*, 72.

102   Thorndike, *Magic and Experimental Science*, 1:710. Also Singer, "Hebrew Scholarship," 289.

their names according to the Hebrews."[103] The twelve signs of the zodiac are given by their Hebrew and Latin names as are the Hebrew names for certain planets and constellations known to the author. The author's astrological system is largely based on the numerical values of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, a concept which became very important to later Kabbalists.[104]

Though angelology generally seems to have played a lesser role in medieval Christian thought than in Jewish theology (the Archangel Michael being the only individual angel honored in liturgical feasts in the Church before the ninth century),[105] nevertheless the names of angels appear in Christian magical texts often in borrowed form from Judaism, as in the *Liber Sacratus*. Yigael Yadin informs us that Jewish angelology emerged as a complete and complex doctrine in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (which is to say by circa 200 BC) and reached its climax in Jewish circles in later Kabbalistic writings.[106]

We know that more than a few Christians of the Middle Ages put great stock in the occult powers possessed by angels as taught in Hebrew magical works. An anonymous Hebrew book of magic, received as authentic by Christians as well as Jews, was mentioned in the thirteenth century with regard to a formula for exorcizing demons. William of Auvergne, for example, regarded it as authoritative and said that this Hebrew work expressly stated that "one of the holy angels said the top of the heart of a certain fish placed on live coals would drive out demons from men or women."[107]

Many names of angels consist of two parts: a word depicting a particular attribute (sometimes written in Hebrew, sometimes in Aramaic or another language), plus the theophoric Hebraic element *'el* as a suffix. (The two radicals *'l* comprise the general Semitic root meaning God.) Most angels were believed to have wide ranging powers and be able to protect against a variety of troubles and difficulties. Because a number of attributes could be depicted in Hebrew adjectival form and combined with the theophoric element *'el*, innumerable hosts of heaven and innumerable powers were available by name to the supplicant or practitioner and could be used on an amulet or in an incantation. Indeed,

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103   Thorndike, *Magic and Experimental Science*, 1:711. Also Singer, "Hebrew Scholarship," 289.

104   Singer, "Hebrew Scholarship," 289-90.

105   *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2007 ed., s.v. "Angels" by A. A. Bialas.

106   Yigael Yadin, *The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 229.

107   Thorndike, *Magic and Experimental Science*, 2:363.

Hebrew magic amulets often have the names of at least one or two angels inscribed on them, in addition to whatever else is found on them.

> This was the background of thirteenth-century Jewish name-magic, which improved upon its antecedents by multiplying the number of names, both of God and of the angels, available to the enterprising sorcerer…Medieval Christendom, under the influence of the same Gnostic and Hellenistic tendencies, was equally well acquainted with the virtues and effects of name-invocation. The Hebrew names of God and of the angels…proved especially popular, undoubtedly because of their strangeness.[108]

Provence Amulet

While many names of angelic ministrants were available for supernatural invocations it is more than likely that, by the later Middle Ages, the Hebrew names of certain angels became the somewhat stock-in-trade terms of Christian occult healers and practitioners of magic. One amulet excavated from Provence, France, made of cast lead, displays the image of a bearded Jesus, and is an excellent example of Christian occult use of Jewish angelology and recognizable Hebrew formulas. On the side opposite the one bearing the image of Christ we find Hebrew writing of a distinctive quality, including the twelve-letter name of God, as well as the names of the four most commonly implored angels on magic amulets: Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, and Uriel.

This selection of names is certainly influenced by Jewish tradition. The *Zohar* lists ten classes of angels in descending order of rank.[109] The first class consists of only two angels, Metatron — the translated Enoch — and Sandalphon, who is said to have been known on earth as Elijah of fiery chariot fame. In the next highest group we find none other than the four archangels whose names appear on the Provence amulet.

Michael is the greatest of these angels. He prays for the souls of the wicked and, like Gabriel, he is a guardian of Israel. Raphael is especially called upon when health is the object of concern. Gabriel is the angel of strength, and Uriel is an angel of light (knowledge?) who is supposed to have wrestled with Jacob in one strand of Jewish thought.[110] Such a list as this gives us an idea of the forces often sought after in medieval

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108 Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic*, 89.
109 Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, 104. See *Zohar* Exodus 43a.
110 Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, 108–09.

Christian magical texts. One assumes that some care was employed by Christian magicians as to which names from among all the heavenly hosts were desired on their amulets.

The Provence amulet is one of the most distinctive dating from the Middle Ages. The side holding the image of the face of Jesus is enclosed in a pentagon-shaped border with the various Hebrew forms of the name "Jesus" (ישו, ישוע, יהשוע) placed around the border. Other Hebrew writing is placed inside the border around the image of the bearded face, but is not legible.[111] The Christian character of the amulet is beyond question, but so is the great regard for Hebrew as a facilitator of magical power which it displays.

The names of the four archangels were placed on the amulet in a configuration around the outside edges of a square, which in turn circumscribed the twelve letter name of God plus four additional lines of Hebrew writing. These lines read:[112]

In the Name (Bash-shem) of He who lives forever

בשם ש חי לעולם

The Lord God of Hosts he is Shaddai

יהוה צבאות הוא שדי

(line three undecipherable)

Father God he is

אבי יהוה הוא

Again we note the similar formulas and invocations of god as found in previous magical texts: *Bash-shem, YHWH, Shaddai* and *Sabaoth*. They, too, have become standardized formulas for Christians as well as Jews. Even the square configuration, around which the angels' names appear and inside of which the invocation is written, is not an ordinary figure but a powerful traditional symbol of magical and mystical power as well.[113]

Evidence from Africa

Sometimes the content of the text of certain amulets is so typically Jewish that it would be impossible to designate them as being for Christian use

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111 See Schrire's whole discussion on "Hebrew Christian Amulets," in *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, 69–132, 144–45, 165.

112 Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, 165 and plate numbers 42 and 43. We are given both the photographs of the amulets and Shrire's transcription.

113 On the symbol of the square see Budge, *Amulets and Talismans*, 45-46.

were it not for some unusual configuration or symbol on the amulet. Such is the case with one interesting example from Morocco where the commonly found names of Gabriel and Michael appear, as do the names *Shaddai, Yah* (for Yahweh) and *Lillin*. What makes the amulet distinctive is the cruciform image on its obverse side which circumscribes part of the text.[114] During the Middle Ages the image of a cross was abhorrent to almost every Jew.

As usual, the purpose of the amulet was to provide a special mantle of safety for its owner. To this end it invokes God, by some of his various names, as well as the angels to "protect the wearer from demons, spirits, Lillin and everything evil."[115]

Amulets similar to this Moroccan one have been found in the region of Northeastern Africa, the area known as Abyssinia. Up to the beginning of the fourth century AD, the Ethiopians were pagans, even though Hebrew traders who settled in the country brought with them their language and their Yahwist religion. In the first half of the fourth century the famous king Ezana (Greek "Aizanes") renounced paganism and made Christianity the official religion of his empire. The crescent and the star, symbols of authority, were then replaced by the Christian cross at the beginning of all inscriptions. The cross also became the first and greatest of protective symbols and amulets.[116]

Most such amulets have inscriptions written in Ge'ez, the old Ethiopic literary language of the land. But their potency derives from the special letters of the inscriptions. Wallace Budge has categorized the types of inscriptions found on these amulets.[117] Often they reveal the same Hebrew words and names seen over and over in medieval magical texts. And as with other Christian amulets, the Hebrew words often have been mingled with specifically Christian magic formulae and words of power. This pattern displays the same kind of syncretistic arrangement seen in various magical texts of the Greco-Roman and early medieval periods. Hebrew formulae could be and often were consistently added to existing religious and magical rites (whether Christian, Greek, or Egyptian) in order to supply greater potency to charms and spells in various languages.

The general categories for terms found on the Ethiopian amulets include the various names of God, e.g., Adonai, Elohim, Yah, El-Shaddai;

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114   Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, 72 and 145 plus plate number 7.
115   Ibid., 145.
116   Budge, *Amulets and Talismans*, 178–79.
117   Ibid., 180–81.

the names of archangels, e.g., Michael and Gabriel; the magical names of Christ; the names of the fiends and devils (sometimes recognizable from Jewish tradition) which produce sicknesses and diseases in the human body; strings of letters arranged singly or in groups of three — spells which cannot be translated; words of power thought to be used by Christ, "Asparaspes" and "Askoraskis" and those by Solomon, "Lofham" and "Mahfelon."

Like others, the Ethiopians and their descendants wore amulets for the physical benefits which they believed would come to them. Women wore amulets with inscriptions of power to give fertility and immunity from miscarriage. They expected that amulets would protect their children from the Evil eye. Men wore them for virility and strength; and both men and women expected the amulets to preserve them from attacks of demons which cause sickness and disease.[118]

It is abundantly clear that the underlying principle of protection for every soul who believed in the efficacy of incantations and charms — both Jew and Christian alike — were those words of power found inscribed on the amulet. Moses Gaster has provided us with directions which were to be followed by makers of amulets when the texts of those amulets were written on parchment. The most important aspect of the ritual to be followed by the manufacturer was the utterance of a special blessing which focused on the power of the language displayed by the amulet. Since that language was invariably Hebrew, it is only natural that Christians would associate the real power behind the amulet with the power of the Hebrew language.

> When the writer dips his pen into properly prepared ink he must say: "In the Name of Shaddai who created Heaven and Earth, I, N the son of M writes this *Kamea* [amulet] for A the son of B to heal him of every kind of fever" and he must then say the blessing of the *Kamea* as follows "Blessed are Thou O Lord who hast sanctified Thy great Name and has revealed it to Thy pious ones to show its power and might in the language, in the writing of it, and in the utterance of the mouth."[119]

Theodore Schrire has further commented on the Christian desire for the great protection afforded by amulets of the later Middle Ages written in Hebrew. He says the demand for Hebrew inscriptions on Christian

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118   Migne, *Patrologia graeca*, 47:935–38; as did most Christians.

119   *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, 1911 ed., s.v., "Amulets, Jewish" by E. von Dobschütz.

amulets was *so great* that "they were made in vast quantities and cast in lead so that numbers of them have been unearthed from time to time."[120] Amulets of this kind were particularly made for the protection of Christian travelers leaving Europe from the ports of Southern France as crusaders or pilgrims embarking on dangerous sea-journeys to the Holy Land and elsewhere.[121]

Vilification of the Jews

The foregoing is important testimony to the great respect accorded Hebrew as *the* language of beneficial magic and supernatural power in many quarters. But not everyone in medieval society, of course, held the Hebrew language in high esteem—precisely because it was regarded as the language of magic and supernatural power! Several bits of evidence show us that in some Christian circles Hebrew was closely allied with the Devil himself. This is an extension of the belief that the Jews were the Devil's offspring or henchmen, at the very least.[122] Consequently, their language—which was clearly presumed to be Hebrew—was closely connected with Satan.

We see this reflected in various types of literature from the early Christian age onward. Beginning with the founding documents of Christianity—the New Testament Gospels—Jews are portrayed as devilish and Satanic. The very words of Jesus promoted this perception: "Ye [Jews] are of your father the devil…*When he speaketh* a lie, he speaketh *of his own*: for he is a liar, and the father of it…He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God" (John 8:44, 47).

Taking their cue here from what they regarded as explicit statements of well deserved condemnation, some Christians no doubt began associating the language of the Jews with the speech of the Devil (the father of lies). After all, the Jews were the children of the Devil; and children naturally speak the language of their parents.

That this kind of reasoning is not hypothetical but was actually promulgated can be seen from the fact that there have come down to us several parodies from the Middle Ages originating from Christian sources, which purport to be Jewish prayers directed to the Devil and

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120   Schrire, *Hebrew Magic Amulets*, 71.
121   Ibid.
122   This is well documented by Trachtenberg, *Devil and the Jews*, 11–31 and throughout the work.

which mimic the Hebrew words of those prayers.[123] Also, the Jews are portrayed in certain medieval mystery plays and religious dramas as summoning their demonic compatriots in some kind of unintelligible gibberish intended to represent Hebrew.[124] The French play *Le Miracle de Théophile*, composed around 1261 by the Parisian trouvère known simply as Rutebeuf, is a case in point. A Jewish magician named Salatin attempts his Satanic conjuration in the following words:

> Bagahi laca bachahe
>
> Lamac cahi achabahe
>
> > Karrelyos
>
> Lamac lamec bachalyos
>
> Cabahagi sabalyos
>
> > Baryolas
>
> Lagozatha cabyolas
>
> Samahac et famyolas
>
> > Harrahya.[125]

The Devil, after he has been conjured, says to Salatin, "You spoke the proper formula well—Your teacher forgot no part of the spell."[126] Thus it is implied that this supposedly Hebrew spell had been passed down from one generation of Jewish magicians to the next; and though the influence of the Hebrew language on medieval drama as a whole may have been only slight,[127] the attitude projected by certain Christian samples of that drama toward Hebrew was enough to add to Christian repulsion of the Jews.

Even the great Dante, a liberal scholar who extolled the virtues of Hebrew, may have succumbed to these influences which promoted the magical and satanic basis of the language. A couple of passages of

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123   Ibid., 26.

124   Ibid., 61. Also, so say Richard Axton and John Stevens, eds. and trans., *Medieval French Plays* (Oxford: Basic Blackwell, 1971), 309. Sometimes Arabic is intended, as in the play "Le Jeu De Saint Nicolas." But both Arabic and Hebrew are the languages of the enemies of Christendom!

125   Cited in Axton and Stevens, *Medieval French Plays*, 175.

126   Ibid.

127   M. J. Landa, *The Jew in Drama* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1927), 23. The author says the influence of Hebrew literature on drama, as a whole was great, that "that of the language is slight."

mysterious gibberish in *The Inferno*, the first part of his trilogy, *The Divine Comedy*, are believed to have been intended to represent Hebrew.

> Pape Satan, pape Satan Aleppe (*Inferno* 7:1)

> Rafel mai amech zabi et almi (*Inferno* 31:67)

According to the Jewish historian Cecil Roth, these lines disclose no satisfactory interpretation when considered as Hebrew.[128]

Montague Summers aptly expressed one of the lamentable currents of the medieval Christian ethos when he said that the Jews were persecuted not so much for the observance of their rituals and ceremonies "but for the practice of the dark and hideous traditions of Hebrew magic."[129] This is all the more saddening and ironic because some Christians had no qualms about consulting their own magicians who used Hebrew, even for the express purpose of harming the Jews—the very ones from whom they learned Hebrew and whom they accused of black magic. The *Emek Habacha (Vale of Tears)* recounts such an episode in France under Henry I (1031-1060) when certain Christians of the realm consulted with a magician in order to drive the Jews from Normandy.[130]

So ingrained was the association between magic and the Hebrew language (or anything reported to have sounded like it) in the medieval mind that its usage in spells and charms was enough to brand the users as adept magicians; and mere attempts by Christians to learn any Hebrew were regarded with suspicion in certain circles, not to mention outright fear of cavorting with Satan. Guibert, Abbot of Nogent, was much concerned about the prevalence of sorcery among the clergy of his time and laid the blame for this condition at the feet of the Jews who were in company with the Devil, the villainous Prince.[131]

Unquestionably, the hatred of the Jews, the fear of Jewish magic as Satan's tool, and the perception that Hebrew was the medium of that magic all worked to dissuade some from studying the Hebrew language or having anything whatsoever to do with it. There is no better example of how these beliefs were combined and propagated in the anti-Jewish legends of Christendom than the tale about a locket-like amulet which

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128 Cecil Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965), 86.

129 Montague Summers, *The History of Witchcraft and Demonology* (London, 1926), 195.

130 Harry S. May, trans., *The Vale of Tears (Emek Habacha)* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 18–19.

131 Bernard Monod, "Juifs, sorciers et Hérétiques au moyen age," *Revue des Éstudes Juives* 46 (1903): 237–245.

a Jew had provided for a Christian to calm his troublesome horse. After having worked well for many years, the amulet was finally opened, and much to the horror of those present was found to contain the following inscription in Hebrew: "The master of the horse shall belong to the devil so long as the horse stand still when it is struck."[132]

One of the fascinating ironies connected with this attitude of "Hebrew-phobia" concerns the oaths Jews were required to take before civil authorities in certain areas of Europe (parts of what later became Germany and France) during the Middle Ages, which were intended to serve as sworn depositions regarding their own as well as others' activities and loyalties. These oaths, generally known under the rubric of *more Judaico*[133] ("Jewish custom"), were really conceived by Christians as magically coercive formulae put back on the heads of those who were perceived as being the masters of sorcery. They were designed to incorporate Jewish components of magic — among them being some of the most potent Hebrew words of power — so as to bind the Jew.

Generally the Jew was required to swear by the Hebrew term for God, *Adonai*, and sometimes by "the seventy names of God" or the names of angels plus other Hebrew epithets.[134] Of note is the late fourteenth century formula from Mainz wherein a Jewish attestant was also made to swear by the law which God himself created and wrote, all the while standing "on a sow's skin [with] the five books of Master Moses [lying] before him."[135] Thus magical formulae (especially Hebrew words of power) which originated with the presumed masters of magic (the Jews) in Europe were being used to disadvantage supposed sorcerers themselves.

In the late Middle Ages the connection between evil and Hebrew — as the language of the Father of Evil — may have been brought home to certain minds in another fascinating way. Fraudulent beggars, imposters, hucksters, and riff-raff who crowded around church porches and places of pilgrimage proved a tremendous nuisance in this period. One characteristic of the argot or special jargon of this group (as well as other

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132 Johann Jacob Schudt, *Jüdische Merckwürdigkeiten*, 4 vols. (Frankfurt und Leipzig, 1714–1718), 2:393.

133 *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1971 ed., s.v. "Oath More Judaico." Also Jacob R. Marcus, *The Jews in the Medieval World, A Sourcebook: 315–1791* (New York: Atheneum, 1975), 49–50.

134 Trachtenberg, *Devil and the Jews*, 69.

135 Marcus, *Jew in the Medieval World*, 50. That the requirements of this oath varied from place to place is also seen in a law of Breslau which demanded that Jews stand bareheaded and swear by the Ineffable Name—YHWH!

criminals) appears to have been a strong mixture of words derived from Hebrew.[136] Such a circumstance can hardly have engendered favorable feelings toward the Hebrew language.

The indisputable tradition of Hebrew as the predominant language of the sorcerer may help to explain, in part, the well-known medieval Christian animosity toward the Jews and their principle text, the Talmud, since it was written in Hebrew and Aramaic (which, to most Europeans, looked and sounded like one and the same). Agobard of Lyons, in his work *De judaicis superstitionibus*, said the Talmud contained magical elements.[137] In the fourteenth century, a certain Bishop of Wurzburg and some of his Christian followers who had learned something of the Talmud and its teachings were condemned since its teachings were considered nothing less than necromancy—the study which Satan aids![138] In the sixteenth century the Roman Church took care of all the problems it felt were caused by the Talmud and other writings by simply proscribing Hebrew works.[139]

Conclusion: Moving to the Renaissance

In the Middle Ages the connection between the belief in the special and magical power inherent in the Hebrew language and those religious currents known collectively as mysticism was a close one. Medieval Jewish mysticism and medieval magic were allies. At the heart of both was a belief in the supernatural power of the Hebrew language—the official language of the celestial court, an idea at home in early Christian as well as Jewish theology. Medieval magic was intertwined with, and in some sense a catalyst spurring the development of, Jewish mysticism. Hebrew magic lore "involved a close acquaintance with…essentially beneficent magic…" whose "primary principle was an implicit reliance upon the powers of good: the angels and the manifold differentiated and personalized attributes of God, which were invoked by a complicated

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136   In the German lands this type of language was called Rotwelsch. See Bishoff, "Foreign Languages in the Middle Ages," 36:222 who calls this a "bastard among languages."

137   Trachtenberg, *Devil*, 68.

138   Rochus von Liliencron, *Die historischen Volkslieder der Deutschen vom 13. bis 16. Jahrhundert*, 4 vols. (Leipzig: F. C. W. Vogel, 1965–1969), I:173. "Etliche mit grawen har lernten erst den talmut die heilig schrift ducht sie nit gut…Sie heten al gelernet wol, ir kunst heist nigromanci Satanas was auch darbi, wane sie die rede geteten."

139   The Talmud had already been condemned in the thirteenth century as well as burned publicly. See Marcus, *Jew in the Medieval Inquisition in the Middle Ages*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1888), 1:554.

technique or permutation and combination of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet."[140]

Beliefs about the special nature of Hebrew influenced not only medieval Christian magic (and ideas about magic) but also medieval Jewish mysticism. In Christian circles these streams of thought fully converged in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, culminating in a profound interest in Hebraica, generally, and Christian Kabbalah, specifically, after the centuries of medieval developments. The prime example of this convergence is to be found in the writings of Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522), "father of Hebrew philology among Christians"[141] and a foremost exponent of Christian Kabbalah.

Kabbalism is distinguished by an unusually positive attitude toward the Hebrew language.[142] Indeed, Kabbalism was based on the belief that every Hebrew word, letter, number, and even accent contained mysteries interpretable by those who know their secrets. Kabbalists also believed the names of God contained miraculous power and that each letter was potent. Gershom Scholem has said that to the medieval Kabbalists Hebrew, the holy tongue, was not simply a means of expressing thoughts, but had mystical power and was a reflection of God's creative power. All life was an expression of God's language.[143]

In Reuchlin the beliefs of the magician and the mystic concerning Hebrew come together. He is the one in whom many of the salient features of Christian views about, and attitudes toward, the Hebrew language during the previous thousand years find their fullest expression. He took up the study of Kabbalah and published the first Latin works ever written by a non-Jew on the subject, *De Verbo Mirifico* ("On the Miracle-Working Word," 1494) and *De Arte Cabalistica* ("On the Science of Kabbalah," 1517).[144]

For Reuchlin, as for those before him (from Origen onward), Hebrew was God's language; and, like the medieval mystics who preceded him, he believed that Kabbalah was God's grammar. In 1508 Reuchlin wrote that Hebrew was important because "God wished His secrets to be

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140   Trachtenberg, *Devil*, 59.

141   E. Kauzsch and A. E. Cowley, eds., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1976), 20.

142   Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 17.

143   Ibid.

144   *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "Kabbalah." A new edition of *De Arte Cabalistica* has been published with Latin facsimiles and English translation: Johannes Reuchlin, *De Arte Cabalistica*, trans. Martin and Sarah Goodman (New York: Abaris Books, 1983). They translate "Arte" as "Art" as opposed to E. J. "science."

known to man through Hebrew."[145] Again, in 1510, he said, "For when reading Hebrew I seem to see God Himself speaking when I think that this is the language in which God and the angels have told their minds to man from on high."[146]

In his *De Arte* Cabbalistica, Reuchlin shows that his interest in Hebrew is mystical: "This alone is the field of true contemplation; the single words which are single mysteries, and the single utterances, syllables, the apexes of the letters and the vowels are full of secret meanings."[147] But like the magicians of the Middle Ages, who respected the power inherent in the Hebrew language, Reuchlin had a special interest in the power of Hebrew names, especially the varied names for God. In *De Verbo Mirifico* he wrote: "The holy names of the Hebrews are more sacred than those of the Egyptians both because they are older and because they apply to the worship of the one supreme God."[148] Even though other special names might bring some insight into magical power, "no names…have the same power as those in Hebrew or those closely derived from Hebrew because of them all, they are the first formed by God."[149]

In sum, when we trace the development of medieval Christian beliefs and views about Hebrew as the language of magic, we are led, eventually, to the emergence of Christian Kabbalah in the sixteenth century. Christian Kabbalah was the result of an evolutionary process involving the combination of an early belief in the special and supernatural power of Hebrew, which belief was held by Christians as well as Jews, with the principles of Jewish mysticism—which, itself, was influenced by medieval Hebrew magic.

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145 A letter of 1508 translated in Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1983), 73. I prefer his translation over most others.
146 Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*, 73.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid., 74.
149 Ibid.

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