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Kabbalistic Afterlives: Copies, Reproductions, and Textual Circulation in the Making of Postmedieval Kabbalah in Eastern and Central Europe (Ashkenaz)

Kabbalistische Nachleben: Kopien, Reproduktionen und Textzirkulation bei dem Aufkommen der nachmittelalterlichen Kabbala in Ost- und Mitteleuropa (Aschkenas)

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Considerable scholarly attention has been paid in recent years to the significance of esotericism and kabbalah for Jewish cultural and intellectual history in the renaissance and modern periods, yet with regard to the early modern Ashkenaz (Eastern-Central Europe) the spectrum of Jewish esoteric theories and practices remains largely unexplored, often considered unoriginal or peripheral to the study of Jewish knowledge and to the European history of ideas.¹ The current volume aims to challenge these notions hitherto prevalent in scholarship. It focuses on the multiple forms of exchanges of esoteric knowledge and practices among Jews in

¹ See, e. g., GERSHOM SCHOLEM: Lurianic Kabbalah in Poland before the Rise of Sabbateanism. In: Lurianic Kabbalah. Collected Studies by Gershom Scholem. Ed. by DANIEL ABRAMS. Los Angeles 2008, p. 365 [Hebrew], which opens with the statement: »The mystical currents among Polish Jews are not original: they neither originated nor initially developed there.«

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the early modern period, with special reference to the formation and circulation of textual traditions reflective of esoteric ideas in the so-called Ashkenaz. Through eight in-depth case studies, this special issue sets out to explore the wealth of the postmedieval literary corpus of esoteric and kabbalistic texts available in the Ashkenazi cultural area and place it within the wider context of early modern history of knowledge.

As a methodological challenge, this volume seeks to interrogate the forms of textual manifestations and kabbalistic expressions that appeared in reaction to prior texts and artefacts, from the vantage point of text technologies, media, and materiality of kabbalistic knowledge in postmedieval (i. e., post-1500) Eastern-Central Europe. As textual production of the so-called Ashkenazi kabbalah has been characterised in early scholarship as unoriginal, repetitive, or simply receptive of the innovations that originated outside of the Ashkenazi world, this volume posited to question the interpretations of kabbalistic textual and cultural dynamics beyond the binaries of the ostensible »authentic/original« and »copy/reproduction«. Instead, contributors to this volume critically re-evaluate the practices of copying, imitation, reproduction, transmission, recurrence, or translation in the history of the kabbalistic textuality in Eastern-Central Europe, with an eye to the transformative qualities and broader conditions of these textual and cultural processes.

This volume extends the understanding of »copy«, and its synonyms, to all textual instances which at least in part assume features of texts known beforehand and are thus closely related yet temporally distinct from the preceding artefacts and traditions.² In probing the processes of textual circulations with and within Ashkenaz, articles included in the volume pay attention to the many actors engaged in the practices of copying, understood as transcribing, adapting, publishing, repurposing, translating, or dismissing of texts and traditions whose cultural lives extend throughout the history of mystical and kabbalistic textual expression in Eastern-Central Europe. This approach both questions and reassesses the dynamic perceptions of the »copy« and its related concepts, conditions, and potentials that ultimately lead to the shifts in the meanings of kabbalistic texts, objects, and practices across chronological and geo-cultural spaces. To frame the main methodological thread of the volume, Aby Warburg's concept of *Nachleben*—loosely translated as both »afterlife« and »survival«—serves to probe the processes of textual circulation and the multiple moves of textual and interpretive transmissions within and

² Following PHILIPP W. STOCKHAMMER and CORINNA FORBERG: Introduction. In: *The Transformative Power of the Copy. A Transcultural and Interdisciplinary Approach*. Ed. by CORINNA FORBERG and PHILIPP W. STOCKHAMMER. Heidelberg 2017 (Heidelberg Studies on Transculturality; 2), p. 4.

in contact with Ashkenazi cultural zone in the postmedieval period.³ The concept of *Nachleben* allows us to think beyond the categorical binaries of authenticity and reaction or copy, extending toward continuity, afterlife, metamorphosis, and adaptation of traditions in their textual motifs, concepts, or images—rather than their replacement by radical or »original« innovations. Warburg's »afterlife« provides a model for thinking about the historicity of culture, allowing for focus on the many actors and trajectories engaged in the processes of »survival«, as well as to media and materialities upon which their afterlives depend. Through these lenses, *kabbalah* appears as an ongoing process of reengagement with things that have already been brought to life more than once, a dialogue of the textual present with its textualized past.

As the studies collected in this special issue all aim to showcase, various reinterpretations of esoteric and kabbalistic ideas were widely circulated—transcribed, read, edited, adapted, modified, and reconstructed—in early modern Eastern-Central Europe by local readers and practitioners. From the late sixteenth century on, kabbalah—both theoretical and practical in its character—was attracting numerous local followers who sought to gain and systematize knowledge of the metaphysical world and to harness its power to effect changes in the physical world. Gershom Scholem, the founder of the modern academic discipline of Jewish mysticism, had treated kabbalah as a distinct and rather uniform trend within Jewish mystical tradition, locating its origins primarily in Southern France and the Iberian Peninsula, where it assumed coherence and dominance in the course of the thirteenth century.⁴ More recent scholarship has broadened this definition and emphasized the variegated nature of kabbalah, incorporating in it the influence of earlier mystical, pietistic, and magical traditions. It recognizes that premodern practitioners, kabbalists, and readers drew on multiple sources, beyond any clear-cut division between »Sefardi«, understood as Spanish, and »Ashkenazi«, understood as Franco-German in origin.⁵ In order to provide a comprehensive portrayal of early modern

3 On the understandings of the term *Nachleben*, see recently ULRICH RAULFF: *Nachleben. A Warburgian Concept and its Origins. Followed by a Letter from Georges Didi-Huberman: La survivance nous divise-t-elle?* In: *Aby Warburg 150. Work, Legacy, Promise*. Ed. by DAVID FREEDBERG and CLAUDIA WEDEPOHL. Berlin 2024, pp. 58–67.

4 E. g., GERSHOM SCHOLEM: *Origins of the Kabbalah*. Ed. by R. J. ZWI WERBLOWSKY. Trans. by Allan Arkush. Princeton 1987.

5 See, for instance, the essays collected in the volume edited by Karl Erich Grözinger and Joseph Dan as: *Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism*. International Symposium held in Frankfurt a. M. 1991. Ed. by K. E. GRÖZINGER and J. DAN. Berlin 1995. See also MOSHE IDEL: *Defining Kabbalah. The Kabbalah of Divine Names*. In: *Mystics of the Book. Themes, Topics and Topologies*. Ed. by ROBERT A. HERRERA. New York 1993, pp. 97–122; MOSHE IDEL: *On Judaism, Jewish Mysticism and Magic*. In: *Envisioning Magic. A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*. Ed. by PETER SCHÄFER and

Ashkenazi approaches to esoteric and kabbalistic ideas and practices, this volume acknowledges the absence of a unified source or single channel of transmission shaping these intellectual traditions in postmedieval Eastern-Central Europe.

Following recent scholarship, the articles collected in this volume recognize that kabbalah in the regions termed Ashkenaz had emerged in the Renaissance out of various ancient and medieval esoteric, philosophical, and magical traditions.⁶ Although it was inspired by the theosophical universe of the medieval Spanish kabbalists, it also preserved and explored elements that stemmed from various other traditions which did not seem to the Ashkenazi kabbalists to be inconsistent with the classical or »canonical« lore of the Spanish kabbalah. Their integrative approach to textual traditions suggests that Ashkenazi kabbalists accorded such status to all the esoteric, kabbalistic, and magical texts at their disposal that facilitated dynamic rereading and readaptations of multiple traditions in a variety of ways and genres. Moshe Idel's article exemplifies this approach by showcasing the long afterlife of *Sefer Razi'el ha-Malakh*, a heterogeneous compilation of esoteric texts that influenced Ashkenazi readers from eighteenth-century Eastern European Hasidism to twentieth-century Romania. Daniel Abrams discusses the adaptations of *Shushan Sodot*, a collection of esoteric »secrets« reflective of Spanish and Byzantine traditions, arguing that its Ashkenazi reworkings appropriated the texts to the cultural zone of Ashkenazi textual practices. In a similar vein, Roe Goldschmidt locates the dynamic processes of rewriting and editing of *Sefer ha-Temunah* in the early modern Eastern Europe, where this presumably Byzantine text assumed a

HANS G. KIPPENBERG: *Leiden 1997 (Studies in the History of Religions)*, pp. 195–215; MOSHE IDEL: *From Italy to Ashkenaz and Back. On the Circulation of Jewish Mystical Traditions*. In: *Kabbalah* 14 (2006), pp. 47–94; MOSHE IDEL: *Differing Conceptions of Kabbalah*. In: *Jewish Thought in 17th Century*. Ed. by I. TWERSKY. Cambridge/MA 1987, pp. 137–200; ELLIOT R. WOLFSON: *Through the Speculum That Shines. Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*. Princeton 1994; AMOS GOLDREICH: *Automatic Writing in Zoharic Literature and Modernism*. Los Angeles 2010; DANIEL ABRAMS: *Ma'aseh Merkabah as a Literary Work. The Reception of Hekhalot Traditions by the German Pietists and Kabbalistic Reinterpretation*. In: *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 5 (1998), pp. 329–345; cf. the essay of Moshe Idel in this volume and the comprehensive bibliography on the topic gathered there.

⁶ See HEIDI LAURA: *The Ashkenazi Kabbalah of R. Menahem Ziyoni*. Ph. D. Thesis. University of Copenhagen 2005; AGATA PALUCH: *The Ashkenazi Profile of Kabbalah. Some Aspects of Megalleh 'Amuqot ReNaV Ofanim 'al Va-Ethanan of Nathan Shapira of Kraków*. In: *Kabbalah* 25 (2011), pp. 109–130; ELEAZAR BAUMGARTEN: *Notes on R. Naftali Bachrach's Treatment of Pre-Lurianic Sources*. In: *AJS Review* 37 (2013), no. 2, pp. 1–23 [Hebrew]; ANNA SIERKA: *Between Tradition and Innovation. Images of the Divine Chariot (»merkavah«) in Early Modern Ashkenazi Kabbalah*. Ph. D. Dissertation. Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich 2018; JOSEPH CITRON: *Isaiah Horowitz's Shnei Luhot Ha-Berit and the Pietistic Transformation of Jewish Theology. Revealing a Concealed Covenant*. Leiden 2022 (*Studies in Musar Series*; 1).

distinct Ashkenazi identity due to the way in which it was adapted by local scribes and publishers.

Scholars of the early modern Eastern-Central European Jewry have suggested that by the late sixteenth century, speculative theosophical kabbalah became integral to the educational curriculum of the Jewish intellectual elite, even among those of its members who were antagonistic to this esoteric lore, but whose critique of it often revealed extensive knowledge of the subject.⁷ This popularization of kabbalah has often been attributed to the flourishing of Jewish publishing houses, especially in Central Europe.⁸ Avraham Oriah Kelman's article in this volume discusses the subtle and often unobvious ways in which print as a new medium of textual reproduction affected Ashkenazi readers and scholars in the sixteenth century, emphasizing that it was not just the speed or scale of this technique that brought meaningful cultural shifts within the textual horizons of early modernity. At the same time, and especially in the seventeenth century, the so-called »practical kabbalah« associated with magic and a talismanic approach to religious ritual, gained substantial popularity.⁹ Not only its occult or apotropaic functions, but also its integration into everyday liturgical rituals impacted the early modern Ashkenazi audiences, as Jean Baumgarten's article posits. Consequently, the two strands of the kabbalistic tradition permeated early modern Eastern-Central Europe, but while

7 See JACOB ELBAUM: *Openness and Insularity. Late Sixteenth-Century Jewish Literature in Poland and Ashkenaz*. Jerusalem 1990 [Hebrew], pp. 208–222; MOSHE ROSMAN: *Innovative Tradition. Jewish Culture in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*. In: *Cultures of the Jews. A New History*. Ed. by DAVID BIALE. New York 2002, pp. 519–570; DAVID RUDERMAN: *Early Modern Jewry. A New Cultural History*. Princeton 2010, pp. 99–103; ANTHONY POLONSKY: *The Jews in Poland and Russia: 1350–1881*. Oxford 2008 (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization), pp. 125–136; for the later period, cf. PAWEŁ MACIEJKO: *The Mixed Multitude. Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement, 1755–1816*. Philadelphia 2011, pp. 77–86; GERSHON DAVID HUNDERT: *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century. A Genealogy of Modernity*. Berkeley 2004, pp. 119–130.

8 ZEEV GRIES: *The Book in the Jewish World, 1700–1900*. Oxford 2007 (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization), esp. pp. 69–86; ANDREA GONDOS: *Kabbalah in Print. The Study and Popularization of Jewish Mysticism in Early Modernity*. Albany 2020, esp. pp. 25–77; AVINOAM J. STILLMAN: *A Printed Primer of Kabbalistic Knowledge. Sha'arei Orah in East-Central Europe*. In: *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 16 (2022), no. 1, pp. 170–182.

9 NIMROD ZINGER: *The Ba'al Shem and the Doctor. Medicine and Magic among German Jews in the Early Modern Period*. Rishon le-Zion 2017 [Hebrew]; GEDALIAH NIGAL: *Magic, Mysticism and Hasidism. The Supernatural in Jewish Thought*. Northvale/NJ 1994, pp. 7–31; MOSHE ROSMAN: *Founder of Hasidism. A Quest for the Historical Ba'al Shem Tov*. Oxford, Portland 2013, pp. 13–26; IMMANUEL ETKES: *The Besht: Magician, Mystic, and Leader*. Hanover/NH 2012, pp. 7–45; AGATA PALUCH: *Intentionality and Kabbalistic Practices in Early Modern East-Central Europe*. In: *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 19 (2019), no. 1, pp. 83–111, and the review of bibliography on the subject there.

the speculative kabbalah of the learned elites might have exerted limited influence on the wider Jewish audience, kabbalistic traditions in the vernacular did infiltrate the written corpus of learned kabbalah and fashioned the experience of Ashkenazi daily life to a large extent.

Indeed, Ashkenazi intellectual creativity has often been cast between the poles of the elite and learned, and the popular and magical. David Ruderman has suggested that by the middle of the seventeenth century, religious wars and political instability in Eastern-Central Europe (especially Bohemia) may well have led to the decline and isolation of Jewish cultural life in the region, where it had previously flourished for at least two centuries. Ruderman contrasted this situation with the intellectual openness of Western European Jews, whose integration of kabbalah and Neo-Platonism resulted in a productive intensification of intellectual exchanges between Jews and Christians.¹⁰ Other scholars, on the other hand, have acknowledged that Eastern-Central European practical knowledge and medicine, including therapeutic magic, constituted a field of intense cultural exchange between Jews and Christians, and contributed to the rise of the local Jewish subculture of ascetic itinerant healers.¹¹ Drawing from the existence of a significant corpus of kabbalistic manuscripts and printed texts produced and circulated in Ashkenaz in Jewish and non-Jewish languages, this volume recognizes that from the sixteenth century onward, various interpretations of esoteric teachings and kabbalah not only facilitated cross-cultural interactions between Jews and Christians in Eastern-Central Europe (explored below in the articles of Lusdemar Jacquez Rivera and Emma Abate), but also underpinned much of the intellectual and practical knowledge exchanges between different social layers of Jewish society in Ashkenaz (studied here by Jean Baumgarten, Avraham Oriah Kelman, and Moshe Idel), as well as across the Jewish diaspora in contact with Ashkenaz (examined in the articles of Daniel Abrams, Roe Goldschmidt, and Eugene D. Matanky).

The role of manuscript circulation and early printing of books has been duly acknowledged in the spread of kabbalistic ideas, also in the context of Eastern-Central Europe. However, the printing of Jewish books of kabbalah have been so far dis-

10 DAVID RUDERMAN: *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe*. New Haven 1995, pp. 133–134; cf. HAVA TIROSH-SAMUELSON: *Kabbalah and Science*. In: *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*. Ed. by GAD FREUDENTHAL. New York 2011, pp. 509–511. See also BRIAN COPENHAVER and DANIEL STEIN KOKIN: *Egidio da Viterbo's Book on Hebrew Letters*. *Christian Kabbalah in Papal Rome*. In: *Renaissance Quarterly* 67 (2014), no. 1, pp. 1–42.

11 ZINGER, *The Ba'al Shem and the Doctor* (cf. n. 9); YOHANAN PETROVSKY-SHTERN: »You will find it in the pharmacy«. *Practical Kabbalah and Natural Medicine in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, 1690–1750*. In: *Holy Dissent: Jewish and Christian Mystics in Eastern Europe*. Ed. by GLENN DYNER. Detroit 2011, pp. 13–54; cf. PALUCH, *Intentionality and Kabbalistic Practices* (cf. n. 9).

cussed mainly in the context of the »print revolution« of early modern era, which according to scholars caused dramatic changes in the organization of Jewish society by destabilising former Jewish intellectual and cultural structures.¹² According to this view, the printed book as the »agent of culture« significantly contributed to the dissemination of kabbalistic texts, exerting the formative influence on Jewish Eastern European life described as »lived in a kabbalistic vein«. ¹³ The cumulative character of early modern kabbalah, with a tendency to compile diachronically distinct strands of tradition, may reflect this new historical situation, marked by the intensified dissemination of ideas and the gradual dissolution of boundaries between diverse Jewish literary communities, not least those in which there was an interest in the transmission of esoteric lore. This situation expedited the gradual internalization of the potential brought by the printed book, such as its wider accessibility among the Jewish reading public, especially its wealthy strata, as well as its availability for further hand-copying. These points are further considered in this volume in the articles by Abate, Kelman, Matanky and Rivera, who discuss various aspects of Jewish intellectual interactions between Italy and Eastern-Central Europe, all mediated by the circulation of kabbalistic books in manuscript and print.

While recognizing the social and cultural effects of print, this special issue integrates other text technologies in considering the early modern circulation of kabbalistic ideas and practices in Ashkenaz. Following substantial methodological changes that occurred in the field of manuscript studies, scholars have emphasised the positioning and contextualizing of manuscripts as material objects within their social and cultural milieus, calling to rediscover the network of »manuscript cultures«, i. e., »the urban micro-cultures« which also moulded the contemporary reading and writing practices.¹⁴ The focus on the corporeality of kabbalistic writ-

12 RUDERMAN, *Early Modern Jewry* (cf. n. 7), pp. 101–103; GRIES, *The Book in the Jewish World* (cf. n. 8), pp. 69–86; AMNON RAZ-KRAKOTZKIN: *Print and Jewish Culture Development*. In: *Encyclopaedia of the Renaissance*. Ed. By P. GRENDLER et al. New York 1999, no. 3, pp. 344–346; ELHANAN REINER: *The Ashkenazi Elite at the Beginning of the Modern Era. Manuscript versus Printed Book*. In: *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry* 10 (1997), pp. 85–98; ELHANAN REINER: *A Biography of an Agent of Culture: Eleazar Altschul of Prague and his Literary Activity*. In: *Schöpferische Momente des europäischen Judentums in der frühen Neuzeit*. Ed. by MICHAEL GRAETZ. Heidelberg 2002, pp. 229–247.

13 ROSMAN, *Innovative Tradition* (cf. n. 7), pp. 539–545.

14 MATTHEW J. DRISCOLL: *Words on the Page. Thoughts on Philology, Old and New*. In: *Creating the Medieval Saga: Versions, Variability and Editorial Interpretations of Old Norse Saga Literature*. Ed. by J. QUINN and E. LETHBRIDGE. Odense 2010, pp. 85–102; cf. THOMAS R. ADAMS and NICOLAS BARKER: *A New Model for the Study of the Book*. In: *A Potency of Life. Books in Society*. Ed. by NICOLAS BARKER. London 1993, pp. 5–43; *Manuscript Cultures. Mapping the Field*. Ed. by JAN-ULRICH SOBISCH, DMITRY BONDAREV and JÖRG QUENZER. Berlin 2014; HUGO LUNDHAUG and LIV I. LIED: *Studying*

ings, as manifested in their manuscript form, further emphasizes that any given »textual unit« of which there is no approved autograph copy might not be easily regarded as the end-product of textual creativity.¹⁵ The studies in this volume highlight the significance of the variety of textual copies and a necessity to examine hermeneutic implications of the formal instability of any given text in its multiple manifestations. Eugene Matanky emphasizes this point in his discussion of kabbalistic prayer books and the Ashkenazi adaptations and customizations of books made for practice. Moving beyond the fragmentation of the field between various text technologies, the articles included in this special issue aim to demonstrate that a thorough examination of the history of kabbalistic textual traditions, especially those postmedieval, necessitates interpreting texts as units of knowledge situated within their specific material and historical setting across all available media—whether print, manuscript, or oral recitation.

Within the multiply determined processes of textual transmission and transformation, translating textual material into Jewish vernacular languages played a key role in democratizing access to learned layers of religious knowledge, formerly interpreted as elite and socially exclusive, as argued in the articles by Baumgarten and Idel below. On the other hand, the acts of translation also allowed kabbalistic knowledge to permeate elite philosophical rhetoric and expertise, as demonstrated by Rivera and Abate. Close reading of textual translations in manuscript and print, as both material and cultural objects, helps critically assess how kabbalistic textuality was positioned into both expert and lowbrow contexts in the early modern Ashkenaz. At that, our volume underscores the fluctuating uses of Hebrew, Jewish and non-Jewish vernaculars in the fundamentally transnational early modern kabbalistic culture of Eastern-Central Europe. In so doing, it contributes to reassessing the largely unstable categories of »elite« and »popular« kabbalistic forms of knowledge.

Visual representations and graphic genres in esoteric and kabbalistic traditions account for another form of knowledge transformation that enhanced access for practitioners from all walks of life to the more complex and performative layers of learned kabbalistic expertise. These visualizations both recorded and structured

Snapshots. On Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology. In: *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscripts Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology*. Ed. by H. LUNDHAUG and L. I. LIED. Berlin, Boston 2017, pp. 1–12.

15 DANIEL ABRAMS: *Kabbalistic Manuscripts and Textual Theory. Methodologies of Textual Scholarship and Editorial Practice in the Study of Jewish Mysticism*. Jerusalem, Los Angeles 2010; AGATA PALUCH: On Practical Uses of Ten *Sefirot*. Material Readings in an Early Modern Kabbalistic *Collectaneum* (Oxford-Bodleian MS Michael 473). In: *Harvard Theological Review* 116 (2023), no. 2, pp. 276–301; *Editing Kabbalistic Texts*. Ed. by GEROLD NECKER and BILL REBIGER. Wiesbaden 2024.

thinking, providing an epistemic format that combined philosophical inquiry with practical problem-solving. Following recent scholarship on visualizations of kabbalistic knowledge,¹⁶ the articles in this volume foreground early modern compiling strategies and textual production in Eastern-Central European kabbalistic culture. This culture is noted for its degree of complexity and specific patterns of thematic and structural preferences, even if based on reclaiming and redeploying earlier traditions, well-established in other cultural milieus, as the article of Idel demonstrates. A contextualized reading of formal, material, and graphic elements within the Ashkenazi manuscript and print culture recognizes their role as carriers of meanings specific to the historical setting of their copyists, compilers, editors, and readers. The articles by Matanky, Rivera, and Goldschmidt thus situate non-textual features of early modern Eastern-Central European compilations of handwritten and printed kabbalistic texts as analytical tools to explore material contexts and epistemic frameworks in which they were put to action and circulated.

In light of recent methodological advances, this volume considers textual objects as coherent materials—physical and tangible—that provide evidence of conscious decisions made by those involved in their dissemination and subsequent transmission in Jewish Eastern-Central Europe. Drawing from the growing field of the history of knowledge,¹⁷ the articles in this volume focus on both the theoretical and practical aspects of kabbalah involved in the formation and materialization of the historical, cultural, and social milieu of Ashkenaz. Kabbalah, often defined as a form of Jewish mysticism, it thus construed as a set of theosophical, at times esoteric doctrines, but even more so as a historically embedded theoretical and practical form of knowledge. As a distinctive type of knowledge, kabbalah historically circulated in multiple moves of transmission and reception which took place in distinct linguistic, cultural, and material contexts.¹⁸ The notion of circulation or knowledge movement is embedded in the very term kabbalah, which in Hebrew denotes »reception«, »transmission«. The circulation of knowledge, including kabbalistic and esoteric, both depends on specific cultural practises and material cir-

16 J. H. CHAJES: *The Kabbalistic Tree*. University Park/PA 2022; J. H. CHAJES: *The Kabbalistic Tree as Material Text*. In: *Henoch* 3 (2021), pp. 162–196.

17 See PETER BURKE: *A Social History of Knowledge*. Cambridge/MA 2011; SIMONE LÄSSIG: *The History of Knowledge and the Expansion of the Historical Research Agenda*. In: *Bulletin of the GHI Washington* 59 (2016), pp. 29–58; LORRAINE DASTON: *The History of Science and the History of Knowledge*. In: *KNOW: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 1 (2017), no. 1 (Reflections on Disciplinary Knowledge), pp. 131–154; SVEN DUPRÉ: *The History of Knowledge and the Future of Knowledge Societies*. In: *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 42 (2019), nos. 2–3, pp. 1–14; SVEN DUPRÉ and GEERT SOMSEN: *Forum. What is the »History of Knowledge«?* In: *Journal for the History of Knowledge* 1 (2020), pp. 1–2.

18 Cf. IDEL, *From Italy to Ashkenaz and Back* (cf. n. 5), pp. 47–94.

cumstances and is shaped and transformed by them.¹⁹ The embeddedness of kabbalistic knowledge within the material and historical dynamics of its transmission may hamper efforts to ever establish its fixed origins. Therefore, a situated study of kabbalah calls for philological research that foregrounds the processes and materialities through which it has passed down through centuries as a complex system of textual and practical traditions, ever reinterpreted, adapted, and in motion. Methodologically, this volume posits that a granular focus on linguistically, historically, and geographically defined corpus of texts conditions such an approach. Early modern Europe witnessed a rapid emergence of novel textual formats and new modes of organizing knowledge, largely stimulated by the expansion of print, which did not replace but deeply affected and reshaped the continuing manuscript culture. Early modern handwritten and printed books—the main sources for historical research on kabbalah—did not merely copy and excerpt existing sources or conventions. Rather, each extant book represents a particular reader's or community's appropriation of textually transmitted knowledge. Each act of transcription and compilation can thus be interpreted as a new act of writing, while the transmission or rearrangement of prior textual knowledge generates and crafts its new forms.

With this special issue, we hope to invite further research on Ashkenazi kabbalistic textuality, engaging in discussions on the dynamics of text reproduction and intercultural encounters with Jewish Eastern-Central Europe post-1500. In that, future research on local text conventions may enhance our understanding of how kabbalistic ideas and practices emerged and were shaped in Ashkenaz. It may also reconsider the role of migrating texts, individuals, and varying text technologies in integrating and disseminating textual knowledge within the discourse of kabbalistic »authenticity« and »legitimacy« post-1500. The materiality of copies and copying, when historically and culturally contextualized, has already proven to be a useful methodological perspective in rewriting the history of kabbalah.²⁰ We

19 On the concept of knowledge circulation see, e. g., JOHAN ÖSTLING: Circulation, Arenas, and the Quest of Public Knowledge. Historiographical Currents and Analytical Frameworks. In: *History and Theory* 58 (2020), pp. 111–126; KAPIL RAJ: Beyond Postcolonialism ... and Postpositivism. Circulation and the Global History of Science. In: *Isis* 104 (2013), no. 2, pp. 337–347.

20 See, e. g., AVI KALLENBACH: The Life of a Manuscript. A Copy of R. Isaac Luria's *Peirush Sifra Detzni'uta*. The Story of Its Production in Safed and Its Annotation in Italy by R. Menahem Azariah da Fano. Study and Edition. Los Angeles 2020 [Hebrew]; EUGENE D. MATANKY: Identifying Solomon Alqabes's and Moses Cordovero's Autographs. A Preliminary Catalog of Safedian Kabbalistic Manuscripts. In: *Kabbalah* 57 (2024), pp. 103–191; AVINOAM J. STILLMAN: The Safed Genizah. Buried Manuscripts and Kabbalistic Philology in Seventeenth-Century Palestine. In: *Philological Encounters* (2024), pp. 1–40. See further AGATA PALUCH: On Loss and Recovery. Manuscript Remediations, Digital Simulacra, and the Conditions of Kabbalistic Material Text. In: NECKER and REBGER (ed.), *Editing Kabbalistic Texts* (cf. n. 15), pp. 221–248.

hope that our focus on textual media and the processes of textual circulation in the regions of Ashkenaz will invite further studies that forefront kabbalistic patronage, the conditions of textual control, and the social capital of text production in examining the destabilising political power of »new copies« and textual canons of kabbalah writ large. As this volume collectively posits, the fashioning of new kabbalistic literary formats and genres through the adaptations of earlier written (and oral) texts emphasizes the multiple temporalities of kabbalistic traditions and urges a new assessment of the periodization of kabbalistic textual and literary history.

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