33.6. Kabbalistic Exegesis

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1. Kabbalistic Types of Exegesis

In medieval Judaism a strong process of arcanization, namely of understanding of the Jewish canonical texts as replete with secrets, took place. Arcanization is shared by both Jewish mysticism and Jewish philosophy, and it invited the emergence and the development of a long series of exegetical strategies that allow the 'extraction' of a variety of secrets from the canonical writings. Insofar as the Jewish mystical literatures are concerned, there are four main categories of exegetical device:

(a) The monadic understanding of the Hebrew language and implicitly of the Bible; according to this view, which has ancient sources and became, by the intermediary of the kabbalistic material, prevalent in Hasidism, each and every letter was conceived of as a universe in itself. The atomization of the semantic units into letters conceived as designating divine names, the entire system of *sefirot* and the whole alphabet, diminished the importance of the specific sequel of the letters in the Bible, in favor of the immersion of the Kabbalists and, later on, by the Hasidim into the inner world of the letters. It is as if the interpreter was contemplating the text using a microscope.

(b) The hieroglyphic, iconic or ideogrammic understanding of the whole text as the picture of the supernal divine system. This view is closely related to the anthropomorphic view of God in the Heikhalot literature and its metamorphoses in the kabbalistic view of the ten *sefirot* as constituting an anthropomorphic structure. It is as if the exegete was using a telescope in order to see the whole text as one unit. Somewhat related to this hieroglyphic view is the kabbalistic understanding of the white forms of the letters as pointing to a higher reality, in comparison to that symbolized by the black forms of the letter.

(c) A variety of mathematical approaches to the text which consist of methods like *notarikon*, acronym, *gematria*, which deals with the numerical values of the letters of a certain word, the *temurah* or the changes of letters for other letters according to a certain pattern, and *tzerufei 'otiot*, permutations of letters, or other variations of these exegetical techniques.

(d) Last, but not least, the symbolical-narrative exegesis, which transformed the biblical text into a fabric of symbols pointing to the interaction between the divine attributes, or *sefirot*. This is one of the most widespread exegetical techniques, which permeates all the main trends of Kabbalah.

2. Pardes: the Fourfold Kabbalistic Exegesis

Centered on the details of the biblical text more than the Christian mystics, and perhaps more even than the Sufis, the medieval Kabbalah offered a *plethora* of mystical interpretations whose relationship to the already existing corpora of traditional non-mystical interpretations of the Scriptures had yet to be clarified in detail. The major expression of the Kabbalists' attempts to establish an explicit scheme which can explicate the hierarchical relationship between the different types of Jewish exegesis is known by the acronym *PaRDeS*. Originally meaning an orchard, this term is mentioned as part of an ancient rabbinic legend about four sages who entered a state of mystical contemplation of a supernal, and dangerous realm named *Pardes*. As an acronym, it designates however, a fourfold system of exegesis, used mostly in kabbalistic writings. *PaRDeS* stands for *P*[*eshat*], plain sense, *R*[*emez*] or hint, sometimes designating allegorical explanations, *D*[*erash*] or homiletic expositions and finally *S*[*od*] or secret, namely symbolic, interpretations.

There are two main theories attempting to explain the emergence of the *PaRDeS* type of exegesis among the Kabbalists at the end of the thirteenth century: that of W. Bacher who maintained that the Kabbalists adopted and adapted the Christian fourfold theory of interpretation, and the view of P. Sandler, who claims that this exegetical system emerged, as the result of an inner development starting with twelfth century Jewish exegesis. At the beginning, Gershom Scholem adopted the theory of Bacher, though later on he did not reject explicitly the view of Sandler. On the other hand, it is rather difficult simply to accept the Bacher-Scholem thesis because of the simple fact, pointed out already by Sandler, and reiterated by Frank Talmage and van der Heide, that the kabbalistic fourfold method does not correspond in some crucial details to the Christian fourfold method. Though it is always possible that one individual Kabbalist will accept an alien type of exegesis, either Chris-

tian or Muslim, it seems to me implausible to assume that several Kabbalists accepted, exactly at the same time and apparently independently, a very similar exegetical method. We must look for a common factor that can explain the concomitant resort of several Jewish authors to these exegetical methods. Can we accept as reasonable the explanation that independent Kabbalists would accept, at roughly the same time, an alien type of exegesis, without having in common more substantial unifying factors? It seems that the obvious fact the Kabbalists, and not the Jewish philosophers, were those who developed such a fourfold method, is highly significant.

The term *PaRDeS* stands in some kabbalistic texts from late thirteenth century for the four methods of exegesis. However, in the period when this exegetical system emerged, it designated methods which were already applied, separately, in different types of Jewish literature. The plain sense was the main subject of the rich exegetical literature produced by the Northern French school of exegetes during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Homiletical literature, the Midrash, was already a voluminous literature produced between the third century and the early Middle Ages. Since the eleventh century, Jewish philosophers like Solomon ibn Gabirol, Abraham ibn Ezra and Maimonides, had often resorted to allegorical interpretation; its *floruit* can be established in the thirteenth century. Finally, kabbalistic – mainly symbolical-theosophical – interpretations of the Bible and other canonic Jewish writings were already known at the middle of the thirteenth century. The *PaRDeS* fourfold exegetical method incorporated a variety of types of Jewish literature that had been already in existence when the first formulations of this exegetical method were articulated. The latest type of exegetical literature was Kabbalah, and it is no matter of accident that the exponents of this mystical lore were those who first developed the method of *PaRDeS*. There is sufficient evidence to show that some of the Kabbalists who proposed the *PaRDeS* or other systematic exegetical methods underwent a particular spiritual development, before they became Kabbalists. They became acquainted with the three other forms of interpretation before resorting to the various forms of kabbalistic exegesis.

The kabbalistic, onto-hermeneutics of the Torah leads the mystic to the divine world of emanation. The *PaRDeS*-system involves a certain version of *scala mentis ad Deum*; gradually immersing himself into the various aspects of the text, the Kabbalist is, at the same time, fathoming the depths of reality; the Bible became a tool for metaphysical exploration. At the core of this text stands the divinity, or one of its manifestations, and the dynamism of the divine life can be extracted by the explication of the rich secret meanings of the infinite divine text. The hermeneutic enterprise of the Kabbalist brings him, according to the above ontological concord, to an experience of the Divine; exploring the text, the Kabbalist enters another, higher, spiritual domain. A kabbalistic reading of the Torah apparently meant, at least for some of the Jewish mystics, more than a determination of a certain potential meaning of the text; by creating, or extrapolating, this significance, the Kabbalist also experienced it. In other words, some of the important stages of Jewish mysticism envisioned mystical exegesis not only as a manner of extracting novel meanings from a text by propelling some theological or theosophical views into it, but also as a

way of encountering deeper levels of reality. In some cases this was perhaps the main purpose of the enterprise. Accordingly the experiential aspects of kabbalistic hermeneutics is a subject that still deserve a detailed study; some of its facets are reminiscent of the modern phenomenological type of reading, which emphasizes the experiential understanding over the analytical 'objective' approach.

In the writings of R. Abraham Abulafia (1240–1291), the founder of the ecstatic Kabbalah, a sevenfold exegetical system was proposed, which combines three non-mystical types of exegesis with allegorical exegesis and, on the top, three numerical forms of exegesis.

3. Kabbalistic Symbolic Exegesis

Symbolic exegesis as cultivated in the theosophical Kabbalah does not supersede the importance of the material reality or of the interpreted text; it only adds a new layer of significance. So, for example, the real city of Jerusalem is holy in itself and also because it represents a higher entity of female nature, in the lower world.

A variety of symbolic systems, which differ from each other both in detail and in principle are found in many of the kabbalistic books. Recurrent as it may be, symbolism is however not ubiquitous in kabbalistic literature. There are whole kabbalistic corpora which are not symbolic, as for example, the ecstatic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia and the linguistic Kabbalah of the early Joseph Gikatilla. Nevertheless, the recurrence of symbols in some important kabbalistic corpora has convinced, together with other factors, some of the scholars of Kabbalah to formulate what I would designate a 'pansymbolic' understanding of Kabbalah, namely an assumption that Kabbalah cannot be imagined without the symbolic perception of reality as a whole.

It is in a tense spiritual ambiance, created by the appearance of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, which exposed a strongly allegorical approach to the Bible, and the controversies around them, that more comprehensive kabbalistic symbolism had emerged. Its greater vagueness is the result of a more flexible attitude to the exegesis of the texts – a position anchored already in midrashic hermeneutics – and in its establishing a nexus between them and theology that was much more dynamic than the Aristotelian one embraced by Maimonides. Though in part a reaction to his hermeneutics, the kabbalistic view of the symbol is not a complete innovation, but much more an elaboration on fragmentary and obscure *mythologoumena* found in Jewish writings and traditions that preceded the emergence of Kabbalah. The symbolic hermeneutics of the Kabbalists can be better understood as an attempt to counteract the allegorical monosemic code, historically of an alien source, which was conceived as subverting the plain sense of the sacred texts. This seems to be the situation already at the beginning of Kabbalah, and it continued to be a factor in its later development.

The crystallization of the symbolic mode in Kabbalah is, if this explanation is adequate, part of a comprehensive conflict between Aristotelian noetics ap-

plied to Scripture, and a growing theosophical system stemming from earlier Jewish sources and neo-Platonic ontology, which invited a different noetics, more neo-Platonic in its propensity, and a more nebulous and polysemic approach to the canonic texts. The most important kabbalistic corpus resorting to symbols, the book of the *Zohar*, composed at the end of the thirteenth century, was described by scholars as a reaction to Maimonides. This general observation is pertinent also insofar as the symbolic hermeneutics is involved. In order to better understand the scriptural nature of the symbolic code, let me introduce some remarks of their nature, resorting to modern semiotics.

In many forms of Kabbalah the symbol may be defined as a word that stands for an absent thing, and in some cases, even for an entity no more existent in this world. The absence is crucial in a system that is exegetical, unlike the symbols as understood in a variety of negative theologies which are concerned more with hidden, though existent, divine realities. The prevalent scholarly views of the symbol in Kabbalah assume that the symbols reflect the hidden divine realities, unknown otherwise. The present theory assumes the opposite: the theosophical system was known to the Kabbalist and he used the sefirotic and sometimes angelic and demonic structures, in order to make sense of the quandaries of the canonic texts. Thus, the very linguistic unit should be understood as a combination of *ratio difficilis* and *ratio facilis*, two categories found in Umberto Eco's semiotics. As *ratio facilis* the kabbalistic symbol points to what the Kabbalist believed to be an ontological entity, a divine attribute, whose nature he studied when it was introduced in Kabbalah. However, the fragmentary and obscure nature of the theosophical system invited a more complex situation: the transformation of a biblical word into a symbol for a *sefirah* means not only infusing a certain figurative meaning in that word, but also a transfer of meaning from the word to the imaginary entity on high, and thus we are closer to the concept of *ratio difficilis*. Even more so if the scholarly assumption is that the sefirotic realm is recreated and modified each time someone enriches it by the semiotic process connected to it. In other terms, the more the theosophical system is articulated and the interpretation of the biblical linguistic material is rendered automatic, we face a *ratio facilis*, which brings the kabbalistic symbols closer to philosophical allegory. Historically speaking, kabbalistic symbolism moves from a semiotic phenomenon closer to *ratio difficilis* to one more typical of *ratio facilis*. Indeed, if this suggestion can be corroborated by further research, the widespread opposition between symbol and allegory, which permeates the scholarly treatments of figurative language in Kabbalah, should be transcended by an assumption that the two forms of ratio are describing fluctuations within the kabbalistic semiotics, which better describe what happened in the field. Indeed, if earlier Kabbalah is closer to the *ratio difficilis*, we may speak, using an expression coined by Martin Buber in order to describe Kabbalah *in toto*, of a schematization of the mystery in later Kabbalah, when the semiosis of *ratio facilis* is much more evident.

The kabbalistic resort to a *ratio difficilis* at the beginning of Kabbalah is the result of the absence of a crystallized kabbalistic theosophy on the one hand, and the effort to maintain as strong a role to the plain sense as possible for the

Hebrew original of the Bible on the other. Allegorical exegesis was adopted by thinkers with a propensity toward a conventional theory of language. The *ratio difficilis* confers on language a greater importance, and in the case of many of the Kabbalists who emphasized the vision of Hebrew as a natural or divine language, a symbolic approach was more evident. Language was not a means to convey a message, which is found also in other forms of literature, like medieval philosophy, but also part of the message itself. This is conspicuously the case of R. Joseph Gikatilla, who emphasized the divine nature of Hebrew on one hand, and wrote an influential book on kabbalistic symbolism, *Sefer Sha'arei 'Orah*. This nexus between symbolic interpretation and the vision of language as non-conventional is part of a broader phenomenon in Jewish mysticism, that of relating the unlimited semiosis to the special nature of Hebrew.

So, for example David, Abraham or any biblical figures, were understood as symbols of the various divine powers, known as *sefirot*. Thus, in order to move from the *signifiant* to the *signifié*, a kabbalist has to rely either on a word, which will point alone toward the higher entity it symbolizes, or upon a concept that emerges from the various contexts of this word. In some cases the concrete entity exists no more, and therefore its significative function as a representative, here below, of the supernal *sefirah* was conceived of as taken over by the word that pointed to it. So, for example, the persona of David the king, who was conceived of as a representative of the last *sefirah*, the kingship, *malkhut*, is no more approachable as an entity here below. Thus, solely the word 'David' is the possible conduit of the meaning which points to the last *sefirah*. However, at least for most of the stages of the development of Kabbalah, the theosophical Kabbalist knew what is the significance of the last *sefirah*, and he determined accordingly the symbolic valence of the biblical word, whose real reference was no more available. In other words, a whole literary universe, mostly a biblical one, compounded of dead persons, destroyed cities, shattered temples or often times no more performed rituals, like the sacrifices for example. These were conceived as once signifying symbolically the supernal theosophical powers and processes, but were now approachable only by means of their linguistic designators, whose valence was determined by the theosophical knowledge of the Kabbalist. Much more than revealing the nature of the deity, the kabbalistic symbols decoded what was conceived as the symbolic meaning of the scriptures.

The theosophical Kabbalists are not to be understood as striving for a comprehensive symbolism of reality, but much more for a comprehensive symbolization of their canonic writings and actions. By and large, outside the canon, there is no need for symbolic valences. Indeed, when dealing with the symbolism of evil, Kabbalists were more creative, inventing demonic names which are hard to be detected in the extant traditions. However, even this modest inventiveness may well be part of our ignorance of the magical and demonic sources which might have inspired the kabbalists.

4. Sexual Polarization as a Kabbalistic Hermeneutical Device

The biblical literature constitutes a fabric of complex crosscurrents, which consist in both efforts at the demythologization of earlier traditions and proposals of another myth, that of the divine will. Demythologization however, was never complete; even when attempts have been made to obliterate the mythical contents of some traditions, vestiges of the mythical imagery are still evident. These vestiges served as starting points for the mythopoeic imagination of the *Zohar*, which created, and sometimes perhaps even recreated, out of the biblical verses and phrases, new myths.

One of the most outstanding characteristics of the kabbalistic exegesis of the Bible is the exploitation of stylistic phenomena of parallelism between the different parts of a verse, in order to introduce a polar reading, which is in many case the polarity between male and female. This approach is related to the comprehensive arcanization of the biblical text, as it implies that mere repetition of synonymous terms would diminish the semantic content of the text. By reading a dual vision into the parallels in the verse, which are synonyms in the biblical style, the *Zohar* creates a drama, often implying a sexual or erotic mythical event occurring in the sefirotic realm. However, central as this exegetical device is for the hermeneutics of the *Zohar*, it is not new with it; it is already found in the early thirtheeth century theosophical Kabbalah, for example R. Ezra of Gerona's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. The *Zohar* exploits possibilities opened much earlier. Let me give an example of zoharic symbolic exegesis, on Psalm 48:

> "Great is the Lord and highly to be praised, in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness." When is the Lord called 'great'? When *Knesset Yisrael* is to be found with Him, as it is written, "In the city of our God is He great". "In the city of our God" means "with the city of our God" … and we learn that a king without a queen is not a [real] king, and is neither great nor praised. Thus, so long as the male is without a female, all his excellency is removed from him and he is not in the category of Adam, and moreover he is not worthy of being blessed … "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth: mount Zion, the side of the North, the city of the great King". The meaning of "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth" stands for the excellency of their [sexual] intercourse. "Beautiful for situation" [stands] for he Holy, blessed be He, who is the Righteous, [who is] "the joy of the whole earth" and then it is the delight of All, and *Knesset Yisrael* is blessed[1].

Yefe nof (Ps 48:3) which means literally, a 'beautiful view', is understood as a symbol for Divinity, more precisely the ninth *sefirah*, that of *yesod*, that is the male divine power *par excellence*, identified with the *membrum virile*. This limb, which is to be used only in holiness – an imperative recurring often in the *Zohar*, is representative in the zoharic symbolism of the righteous, both the divine, or the ninth *sefirah*, and the human one. This sexual reading has been fostered by the occurrence of the term *masos* in 48:3, translated here as 'joy and delight', which occurs in several texts in the context of the desire of the bridegroom for the bride. Indeed, the reading of *yefe nof* as a bridegroom has been inspired by the Aramaic translation of this verse, where it is written: "Beautiful

[1] *Zohar*, III, fol. 5 a.

– like a bridegroom, who is the delight of the inhabitants of the whole earth". The biblical *masos* has been translated as *hedwetah* which is followed by the term *kol*, 'all', a fact that inspired the emergence of the zoharic phrase *hedwetah de-kullah*. The term 'earth', *ha-'aretz*, has been understood by the *Zohar* as a symbol for the last or the tenth *sefirah*, namely *malkhut*, which is synonymous to *Knesset Yisrael*, all of them serving as symbols for the feminine divine manifestation. Also in the case of 48:2 the sexual polarity is involved. This time, the pattern of this interpretation, similar to many other passages in the Kabbalah, involves a differentiation between the meaning of two divine names: the Tetragrammaton YHWH, signifying the Lord – standing for *sefirah* of *tiferet* or the male divine attribute – and *Elohenu*, referring to *malkhut* or the female attribute. However, the novelty here is not to be found in this widespread distinction in Kabbalah; the focus of the exegetical effort is rather on the word 'great', which articulates the relationship between these attributes. Greatness is not an inherent quality of the male, but is acquired through his relation to the female; only by the act of intercourse, as hinted in our discussion, is the quality of 'great' and 'praised' made applicable to the male, whereby he becomes 'man'. The sexualization of the relationship between the divine attributes is a well-known kabbalistic exegetical device, which presupposes a special concern with a duality within the divine world, to be discovered even in those places in the Bible where synonyms were misinterpreted as pointing to different entities. However, beyond the investment of divine names with sexual qualities, common in the Kabbalah, this passage of the *Zohar* adds something more specific: how the greatness and excellency of the male is attained, both in the human and divine realm. The gist of this exegetical endeavor is the appearance of a quality through the establishment of a certain relationship between two entities. The ultimate message of the *Zohar* is not the mere understanding of the condition for perfection; while its symbolism may indeed invite someone to contemplation, his awareness of certain theosophical and anthropological ideas does not change man. In order to attain both his perfection and that of Divinity, he must also act appropriately; otherwise, the very purpose of the exegetical process is not fulfilled. The experiential aspect of apprehending the zoharic exegesis is, therefore, only the first step toward the ultimate goal; understanding is, for the Kabbalist, an inescapable invitation to act, as otherwise the male does not reach the status of 'man', and moreover cannot perform the theurgic activity intended to influence the supernal syzygies. Symbolism is to be viewed as part of an effort toward deepening both the significance of the biblical text and, at the same time, the understanding of human activity. It was understood as theurgical and thus oriented towards the higher world, and not only to the disclosure of a static meaning implemented through certain words.

We may distinguish three distinct steps constituting the inner structure of the zoharic text: (a) 'gnostic' perfection, which stands for the understanding of the theosophical and theurgical significance of the verse; (b) an operative achievement, namely the acquisition of the status of 'man' – i.e., an ongoing way of life together with his wife, just as above two *sefirot* are to be brought together by the kabbalistic way of life; (c) finally, as a perfect man, the Kabbalist induces Divine harmony through the performance of the commandments.

According to the *Zohar* even the fathoming of the depths of the biblical text has an experiential aspect; the second step here, that of becoming a complete 'man', is to be seen, not as the attainment of a static perfection, but as a dynamic activity to be cultivated in relation to the wife. To return to the aforecited passage: the plain sense of Ps 48:2 is apparently simple and obvious – that the Lord is great and, as a separate assertion, that His mountain is located in His holy city. The former is a theological assessment, unconditional and absolute; the latter indicates that the sacred mountain is located geographically in the sacred city. The relationship between God's greatness and the sacredness of the Mountain is not even alluded to; these two theological statements can easily be understood separately, and so there is no intention of describing any peculiar dynamic relationship between God and His city. Even though the biblical conception of the holy city as the city of God is quite explicit, no changing pattern of relationship is implied by this assertion: it is chosen forever. The pattern of relationship is a 'vertical' one; divine holiness, stemming from the supernal world, is imposed upon a material entity, which is metamorphosed thereby into a sacred center. The *Zohar* radically changes this pattern: the 'vertical' relationship is transposed on the divine plan, where it can now be viewed as 'horizontal' – that of two sexually-differentiated entities, which are both divine attributes. In order to determine the relationship between the two parts of the verse, the Hebrew prefix *be*, 'in', is interpreted as meaning 'with'; the dynamics which emerges from the sexualization and the interrelation of the two divine names found in the biblical verse creates the specific quality of kabbalistic exegesis, in comparison with other types of Jewish exegesis. Theosophical Kabbalah alone could put into relief divine attributes, whose affinity with one another gradually turns, at times into semi-myths and at others even into full-fledged myth. The transformation of the vertical relationship into an intradivine polarity does not obliterate the previous vertical understanding of the relation of God to the city. As we have already noted, the corporeal reality is not ignored by the zoharic Kabbalist, but was interpreted so that it will not detract from its substantiality.

5. Kabbalistic Visions of the Text

One of the views characteristic of some of the kabbalistic systems – designated in the following as innovative Kabbalah – is the claim that the Torah, being a divine text, is infinite and thus it is possible to extract from it numberless meanings. This view, whose roots can be detected at the turn of the mid-thirteenth century, was not accepted by the conservative Kabbalists, namely those persons who did not adopt the method of *PaRDeS*. Nevertheless, it is recurrent in the writings of the kabbalistic innovative interpreters. Through the mediation of Christian Kabbalah, this view could have influenced modern theories on the open text.

The central assumption of the kabbalistic understanding of the divine text, namely that it is, like its author, infinite, could be supported better if it were

possible to return to the text and reinterpret it mystically time and again. Some of the innovative Kabbalists assumed that it is possible to apply, at the same time, more than one kabbalistic type of interpretation, and implicitly it means that the text was understood to offer a whole range of mystical meanings at the same time. In other words, mystical interpretation is not to be understood as explicating the infinite meanings of the texts as part of an evolving historical process which assumes the accommodation theory of revelation or related types of adaptationist theories. Though indeed the Torah was sometimes described by Kabbalists using theories of accommodation, as it has recently been shown by S. D. Benin, even the lower, mundane manifestation of the Torah was conceived as being pregnant with an infinity of meanings. Regularly, the assumption that the divine message is accommodated to the peculiar period of time, or level of evolution, points to the revelation of one hidden type of meaning implicitly excluding the concomitant existence of other similar types of meanings. In the case of the kabbalistic theory, even in the cases when the theory of accommodation was indeed adopted for one reason or another, this fact did not vitally affect the coexistence of a plurality of symbolic and non-symbolic messages in the same text for the same person. Moreover, the general impression is that innovative Kabbalists, though using sometimes accommodationist formulations, were not eager to acknowledge a lowering of the status of the Torah by attributing to it only one significance which alone will inform the religious life of a particular generation. I would say that Kabbalah preferred the assumption that an infinity of meanings is latent in the *Gestalt* of the divine text, over the view, found in several Christian texts, that the process of interpretation alone is infinite. According to the latter, each and every exegete is able to contribute his view to the exegetical tradition, whereas the text *per se* is only very rarely regarded as infinite in its significances. Indeed it would be much more representative to describe the conception of the Kabbalists regarding the relationship between Torah and man as involving the requirement for the Kabbalist to be assimilated to the Torah rather than vice-versa. It is man that must accommodate himself to the infinite Torah rather than Torah to man. One example will suffice in order to describe the infinity of meanings in the biblical text:

> The worlds change each and every hour, and there is no hour which is similar to another. And whoever contemplates the movement of the planets and stars, and the changes of their position and constellation and how their stand changes in a moment, and whoever is born in this moment will undergo different things from those which happen to one who was born in the preceding moment; hence, one can look and contemplate what is [going on] in the supernal infinite, and numberless worlds … and so you will understand the changes of the constellation and the position of the worlds, which are the garments of *'Eyn Sof*; these changes are taking place at each and every moment, and in accordance with these changes are the aspects of the sayings of the book of the *Zohar* changing, and all are words of the Living God[2].

[2] R. Hayyim Vital, *Sefer 'Etz Hayyim*, I. I. 5, fol. 15 a.

6. The Status of the Interpreter

The arcanization of the text not only encouraged the emergence of complex exegetical systems, but inspired new visions by the kabbalistic exegetes, which explain why and how they were able to offer a large plurality of mystical interpretations. The basic assumption, which emerged in the sixteenth century, is that each soul possesses a special interpretation unique to it alone. So, for example, we learn from an early seventeenth century Kabbalist:

> The issue is that the Torah, "its measure is longer than the hearth, and broader than the sea" [Job 11:9], and just as there is an infinite number of worlds, so is the depth of the Torah infinite. Because in each and every world, the Torah is read in accordance with its [to the respective world's] subtlety and spirituality, namely that there is no end to the degrees of its interpretations. And each and every one of the Tannaites and the Amoraites in this world, understands and interprets the Torah in accordance with the world from which his soul has emanated. This is why some say [so] and others say [otherwise] and the saying of these and these are the words of the Living God. This is why R. Meir apprehended in the Torah something that was not apprehended by someone else, and it was appropriate for him [to interpret this] more than for another sage, because his name was Meir, which means light, and the stored light is good[3].

[3] Jacob Hayyim Tzemah of Jerusalem, *Sefer Meqor Hayyim*, Ms. New York, JTS 2205, fol. 16b.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

The School of St. Victor in Paris

By RAINER BERNDT, Frankfurt/M

Sources: HUGH OF ST. VICTOR: *Opera omnia* (PL 175–77); *Didascalicon-De studio legendi* (ed. C. H. Buttimer; Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Latin 10; Washington 1939); complete critical edition of Hugh's works by the Frankfurt Hugo von Sankt Viktor-Institute within the *Corpus victorinum*: I. *Expositiones in Octateuchum et in libros Regum* (ed. R. Berndt / R. Stammberger; Berlin: Akademie Verlag; [forthcoming]). RICHARD OF ST. VICTOR: *Opera omnia* (PL 196); *Liber exceptionum* (ed. J. Châtillon; Paris 1958). ANDREW OF ST. VICTOR: *Expositio in Heptateuchum* (ed. C. Lohr / R. Berndt; CChr. CM 53; Turnhout 1986); *Expositio hystorica in librum Regum* (ed. F. A. van Liere; CChr. CM 53A; Turnhout 1996); *Expositiones historicae in libros Salomonis* (ed. R. Berndt; CChr. CM 53B; Turnhout 1991); *Expositio in Ezechielem* (ed. M. A. Signer; CChr. CM 53E; Turnhout 1991); *Expositio super Danielem* (ed. M. Zier; CChr. CM 53F; Turnhout 1990). THOMAS GALLUS: "Commentaire sur Isaïe de Thomas de Saint-Victor" (ed. by G. Théry, Vie spirituelle. Supplément 47 [1936] 146–62); *Commentaires du Cantique des Cantiques* (texte critique avec introduction, notes et tables par J. Barbet; Paris 1967).

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The Canons Regular house of St. Victor, situated on the left bank of the Seine, a short distance from the gates of Paris, went through a rapid growth after being recognized as an abbey in 1113.[1] The reason for this was the initiative of

[1] Cf. R.-H. BAUTIER, "Les origines et les premiers développements de l'abbaye de Saint-Victor

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