SCHOLEM, Gershom (Gerhard) (1897-1982)

Gershom Scholem was born in Berlin to Arthur and Betty Hirsch Scholem. Though raised in an assimilated Jewish and German nationalist household, Gerhard Scholem grew to espouse Zionism and, at the age of 25, immigrated to Palestine in 1923, where he changed his name to Gershom. There, he became a librarian at the National Library, which would later become part of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He became the twentieth century’s greatest Jewish historian and scholar of Jewish mysticism, known as Kabbala, and a member of the prominent group of German-Jewish intellectuals living in Palestine between the World Wars.

Before Scholem, most popular works on Kabbala were not by Jewish authors but by nineteenth-century hermeticists, who had little interest in its historical and cultural context. Scholem’s research treated medieval Judaism as the historical context of Kabala. Of his hundreds of publications, Scholem’s most influential is *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, written as a series of lectures delivered at the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York in the late 1930s. His work established Jewish mystical, philosophical and cultural history as a major field of academic study.

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