Chapter 9

Jewish Magic in the Middle Ages

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For students of medieval Christian magic, the most striking feature of medieval Jewish magic is that within the Jewish community it was never considered heretical or diabolical.* Some medieval rabbis frowned upon it, others practiced it with zeal, and most members of the Jewish elite utilized some magical practices but ignored or rejected others. But no one ever tried to persecute its practitioners, burn its handbooks, or punish its users, and only a handful of rabbis saw it as inherently "un-Jewish." In some places, Jewish practitioners of magic could run into trouble with the non-Jewish authorities, but of their fellow Jews they had little to fear, save for the condescending rebuke or mocking sneers of a few die-hard Maimonideans. And when debates about the legitimacy of certain magical activities did erupt, the issues involved had little to do with the legitimacy of magic per se and more to do with the legitimacy of practices that verged on idolatry, and thus could be classified as forbidden. Moreover, in many cases, the practice of Jewish magic was complementary to the practice of mainstream Judaism, as codified in Judaism's elaborate law-codes.[1]

The implications of this peculiar feature for the historian of Jewish magic cannot be exaggerated. First and foremost, it means that the evidence for the study of medieval Jewish magic is extremely detailed and comes in many different types of sources. Looking at the "insider" evidence (i.e., the texts and objects produced by the magicians themselves), we may note many hundreds of manuscripts of Jewish magic, usually copied by individual practitioners for their own use and often providing their copyists' names without any attempt at self-censorship or disguise. In some cases, we even find these copyists inserting their own names into the magical recipes themselves (instead of the generic formula of "so-and-so son of so-and-so"), especially in recipes for protection and those for charm and grace in the eyes of others.[2] We may also note magical recipes written on the margins of non-magical manuscripts – including, in fact, the margins of the most important talmudic manuscript

from the Middle Ages.[3] And when we turn to the "outsider" evidence (i.e., that produced by persons who did not practice magic themselves, at least not in a professional manner), we note many hundreds of references to, and detailed discussions of, magical texts and activities. Some of these are polemical in nature, but many others are matter-of-fact discussions of amulets, exorcisms, apotropaic and medical magic, astral-talismanic magic, and numerous forms of divination, all adduced within biblical commentaries, philosophical tracts, religious responsa, popular stories, mystical writings, secular poetry, and even personal letters.[4] Assembling all of the evidence from these two types of sources and reconstructing a detailed and nuanced picture of medieval Jewish magic remain scholarly desiderata, in spite of some important contributions by earlier scholars.[5] In what follows, we shall make no attempt to offer such a reconstruction, but instead attempt to sketch the basic contours of this overall picture of medieval Jewish magic.[6]

The following discussion shall be divided in three sections. First, we shall look at the medieval Jewish discourse of magic by focusing on four specific examples of rabbinic discussions of magic and magic-related practices. Then, we shall look at some of the texts and technologies that may be grouped under the heading of "medieval Jewish magic," with special emphasis on their origins, transmission, and adaptation in different times and places. We shall then turn, in the third section of this chapter, to a brief examination of the rise of Kabbalah and its contribution to medieval Jewish magic.

The Discourse of Magic in Medieval Jewish Culture

Magic and divination are repeatedly forbidden by the Hebrew Bible, and their practitioners are condemned to death (Ex. 22:17; Lev. 19:26, 20:6; Dt. 18:9–18:15). But the Bible never really explains which practices are forbidden and instead provides a list of prohibited practitioners, including the *mekhasheph*, the *qosem*, the *ba'al 'ov*, and many others, without offering any specific details about what it is that they do and why it is that they are forbidden. Moreover, the Bible sometimes depicts legitimate Jewish leaders performing feats of magic and divination, be it Moses and Aaron beating the Egyptian magicians at their own game (Ex. 7–11), Joshua crossing the Jordan River (Josh. 3–4) and conquering Jericho (Josh. 6), Elijah and Elisha producing food ex nihilo (1 Ki. 17:10–17:16; 2 Ki. 4:1–4:7), reviving the dead (1 Ki. 17:17–17:24; 2 Ki. 4:18–4:37; 2 Ki. 13:20–13:21) and harming offensive children (2 Ki. 2:23–2:25), or Joshua, Saul, and David consulting the oracular *Urim and Thummim* (e.g., Num. 27:21; 1 Sam. 23:9–23:12; 1 Sam. 28:6). Thus, Jewish readers of the Hebrew Bible were confronted with

a very inconsistent set of attitudes toward magic and its practitioners and had no overarching criteria with which to decide where to draw the line between what is acceptable in the realms of magic and divination and what lies beyond the pale.[7]

Among these readers, the rabbis of Late Antique Palestine and Babylonia, who between the first and fifth centuries CE developed the kind of Judaism that has survived until our own time, are remarkable for their even greater flexibility on this issue. They, too, noted that the *mekhasheph* should be put to death (*Mishna*, Sanhedrin 7.4), but they also noted that this applied only to one who performs an actual deed, whereas a mere sleight of hand is exempt from punishment (*Mishna*, Sanhedrin 7.11). Moreover, they permitted numerous magical practices that were deemed to have apotropaic and medical value (including, for example, the production and use of amulets), provided their hearers and readers with numerous magical spells and recipes for apotropaic and healing purposes, told stories of famous rabbis who practiced magic in order to fight magicians, and insisted that studying magic was not only legitimate but also desirable. Perhaps most surprising, they explicitly developed a category of licit magic when they noted that whereas some types of *keshaphim* are forbidden and deserving of the death penalty, others are forbidden but entail no punishment, and yet others are a priori permitted. As an example of the latter category, they told a story of two rabbis who created a calf ex nihilo and then ate it, clearly admitting that this was magic, and that rabbis too practice such magic, but insisting that this was a legitimate type of magic (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 67b, cf. also 65b). Thus, although they opposed some specific magical practices (especially healing in the name of Jesus) and occasionally frowned upon others (such as the magical use of Torah scrolls and biblical verses), the rabbis' overall discourse of magic took for granted that magic is effective and that in most cases it could be practiced, unless the praxis itself entailed a gross violation of their religious sensibilities. And as rabbinic literature became the starting point and yardstick for later Jewish culture, its lenient discourse of magic became the norm in later Judaism.[8]

There were, however, two major exceptions. The first was the challenge posed by the Karaites, a medieval Jewish group that broke away from the Rabbanites and their *halakha* (religious law) and sought to bring their own behavior in line with the biblical legislation. One major aspect of their anti-Rabbanite polemic was their claim that both rabbinic literature and the Rabbanite leadership of their own days were shot through with magic.[9] To the modern historian, their polemics are an excellent source for the study of medieval Jewish magic, especially their references to specific magical texts and

practices popular among the rabbis of their own days, references that often are corroborated by the other evidence at our disposal.

The Karaite polemics made little difference to the practitioners of Jewish magic, because these attacks came from the outside and were a part of an all-out assault against all aspects of rabbinic culture. But a second challenge, which was influenced partly by the Karaite polemics and partly by Greek philosophy (as transmitted to the Jews through Arabic channels), was far more significant. This was the rationalists' war on magic, especially on linguistic and ritual magic and on the belief in the magical power of words, names, signs, and symbolic actions, often conducted within specific time frames. The most outspoken opponent of Jewish magic on this score was Moses Maimonides, whose attempt to utterly reform Judaism and rid it of all its magical beliefs and practices proved extremely controversial (as we shall see later in this section). And although Maimonides' injunctions proved successful in some cases, his anti-magic crusade as a whole may only be seen as a glorious failure: some Jewish leaders and thinkers accepted his views, but many others, including some of the leading rabbis of the Middle Ages, flatly rejected them as contradicting both the Hebrew Bible and classical rabbinic literature. Thus, magic and divination were not only widely practiced by Jews in the Middle Ages, but they were also often seen as utterly acceptable within the Jewish religious legislation. The only practices that aroused sustained and heated resistance were those that smacked of idolatry, or of Christianity, and even in such cases, exceptions could always be made.

To get a sense of some of the dynamics of these debates, let us look at four specific examples, each of which will illuminate different aspects of the medieval Jewish discourse of magic.

(a) Around the year 1000 CE, the rabbis of Kairouan, in North Africa, asked the Babylonian Gaon (head of the *yeshivah*, the rabbinic academy) Hai (939–1038) about the effectiveness and permissibility of the use of powerful names to achieve various mundane aims and about the scope of forbidden magical practices. Dissatisfied by his response, which apparently dismissed the stories of marvelous deeds performed by manipulating secret names and limited the scope of forbidden magic to the offering of incense to demons, they reformulated their question in greater detail. He responded once again, and this second exchange was copied down by later scribes and is currently preserved in several different manuscripts.[10] A full analysis of this fascinating document, which runs to some twenty pages, is out of the question here, but several points that emerge from this exchange are relevant to our discussion. First, both the rabbis of Kairouan and the Babylonian Gaon display

their familiarity with numerous magical techniques, most of which are well documented in the "insider" sources.[11] The Babylonian rabbi even mentions three well-known books of magic – *Sepher ha-Yashar* (*The Book of the Upright*), *Harba de-Moshe* (*The Sword of Moses*), and *Raza Rabba* (*The Great Secret*) – as well as numerous booklets and smaller textual units.[12] As both the Kairouan rabbis' question and Hai's response make clear, most of these magical texts consisted of long sequences of magical recipes of the type "If you want to achieve X, do Y," which was the most common basic structure of Late Antique and medieval Jewish magical literature.[13] Second, although Hai Gaon generally denies the claims that "masters of the name" can work great deeds by following the instructions found in these texts, he also admits that rabbis too (not perhaps in his own *yeshivah* of Pumbedita, but those in the one in Sura, which was not far from there) also dabbled in such practices. He also admits that God's sacred name, when uttered or written down, can work great wonders, as was narrated in several celebrated talmudic stories.[14] Third, his attempt to re-explain what exactly is included under the rubric of forbidden magic is neither very clear nor too consistent, but its bottom line seems to be that some types of spells recited for demons, and often accompanied by the offering of incense, are forbidden under Jewish law.[15] Finally, he emphatically insists that the deeds performed by magicians are utterly different from the miracles performed by the biblical prophets, because the former do things that are humanly possible, whereas the latter performed miracles that no other human being could have accomplished, such as turning the water of the Nile into blood.[16]

Although this brief summary does not do full justice to Hai's detailed response, it does highlight the fact that here we see a medieval Jewish rabbi who is extremely knowledgeable about magical texts and practices, even though he insists that he never studied magic.[17] Moreover, even though he expresses his derision at those who take the magicians' claims seriously (and quotes Prov. 14:15, "a fool will believe anything!"),[18] he also admits that rabbis too use this supposedly useless technology and finds it virtually impossible to draw a clear line between licit and illicit magic. If this was the view of the most prominent rabbi of the early eleventh century, it is no wonder that there are hundreds of fragments of magical recipe books (including both *Sepher ha-Yashar* and *The Sword of Moses*), as well as numerous amulets, curses, dream requests, and erotic spells, in the Cairo Genizah, the used-paper storeroom of a medieval synagogue, most of whose manuscripts date from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries.[19]

(b) From Kairouan and Babylonia of the early eleventh century we move to Southern Italy and the year 1054. There, the writer Ahimaaz son of Paltiel produced a family chronicle, in rhymed prose, recounting his ancestors' history from the mid-ninth century onward.[20] His account is full of stories of miracles, magic, and the uses of the power inherent in God's name, of which we may focus on one specific example. The *Chronicle* relates how Ahimaaz's ninth-century forefathers, R. Shephatiah, R. Hananel, and R. Eleazar, all dwelling in Oria (in the "heel" of the Italian peninsula), displayed a great interest in Jewish esoteric knowledge, including a close study of the *Sepher ha-Yashar* described in the previous paragraphs.[21] Ahimaaz then dwells at some length on the figure of Rabbi Aharon, or Abu Aharon, of Baghdad, a miracle-working maverick who was exiled by his father after he harnessed to his mill a lion that had killed the donkey that had been harnessed there first. He then set sail to Italy, where he performed many more such feats, and, the poet notes, when he came to Oria he settled there,

> and his wisdom poured forth, and his teaching was implanted,
> and he demonstrated his powers, and the judgment of legal cases,
> as in the times of the *Urim* and the days of the Sanhedrin.
> And the law of the *sotah* he there set up and enacted,
> and instead of "dust of . . . the earth of the Tabernacle" (Num. 5:17),
> the dust from below the Torah-ark was taken.[22]

In other, more prosaic, words, this Abu Aharon is said to have revived the old *sotah* ritual for detecting whether a woman had committed adultery (Num. 5:11–5:31), a ritual that, according to rabbinic literature, went out of use already in the Second Temple period (*Mishna*, Sotah 9.9). And as the original ritual had to be carried out in the Desert Tabernacle or in the Jerusalem Temple, Abu Aharon used the synagogue as a substitute and replaced the requisite dust from the floor of the Tabernacle or the Temple with dust from the floor of the synagogue – from right under the ark of the Torah. The rest of his ritual reenactment of this ancient ordeal must have followed the biblical model, including the mixing of the dust into pure water, the writing of a special text, and the "erasing" of its ink in the water, as well as the presentation of this concoction to the woman suspected of adultery, who would be forced to drink it. If she was innocent, nothing would happen, but if she was guilty, her thigh would fall and her belly would swell (in line with Num. 5:21–5:22, 5:27–5:28), thus proving her guilt.

Ahimaaz's account thus provides us with an interesting example of the revival of an old Jewish ritual after a hiatus of eight hundred years or more, but its most interesting feature is the fact that this "outsider" account is

corroborated by "insider" evidence. Two Genizah fragments with magical recipes provide instructions for precisely the kind of praxis supposedly carried out by Abu Aharon (including the taking of the dust from under the Torah ark of the synagogue), thus confirming the revival of the *sotah* ordeal in the early Middle Ages and its circulation among Oriental Jews.[23] Ahimaaz's chronicle may be full of fantasy, but he did not make up this ritual in his own imagination, for it apparently was quite widely known, regardless of whether it was still being practiced in Italy in the mid-eleventh century.

A second point that is worth noting here is that the Abu Aharon whose exploits are celebrated in the *Scroll of Ahimaaz* is mentioned in later Ashkenazi sources as a major conduit of esoteric knowledge from the Orient to Italy, from where it then traveled across the Alps and reached the Jews of northern France and Germany (the so-called *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, or Ashkenazi pietists). And although the scholarly attempts to "rediscover" the exact nature of the secrets transmitted by this shady figure have not yet been successful, his historicity seems to be beyond any reasonable doubt.[24] As we see throughout the *Scroll of Ahimaaz*, as well as in Hai Gaon's responsum, firsthand knowledge of the mechanics of magic and divination was quite common among medieval rabbis. In this case, we also see that stories of some rabbis' successful exploits could be recited with great pride by their descendants and followers even several centuries later. Moreover, here too we see how the efficacy of such rituals was taken for granted by most medieval Jews and how their legitimacy could hardly be questioned in light of the biblical (or, in other cases, talmudic) precedents.[25] And once again, we see how the "outsider" evidence, this time in a family chronicle written by a poet with an interest in magic, matches well with what we find in the "insider" evidence, namely the handbooks copied and utilized by the medieval practitioners of Jewish magic.

(c) From southern Italy we move to Spain, North Africa, and especially Cairo, where the great Jewish philosopher, physician, and leader Moses Maimonides (the Rambam, d. 1204) finally settled and wrote his great works, especially the *Mishne Torah* (his encyclopedic summation of Jewish law) and the *Guide of the Perplexed*. In all of his works, including these two, Maimonides' war on magic is repeatedly manifested, and – as he assures his readers – it is a war based on his intimate familiarity with the magical texts themselves. Looking at his reading list (*Guide* 3.29–3.30), we find none of the works mentioned by Hai Gaon or the Karaites, but rather a whole range of works of astral-talismanic magic, some of which were falsely attributed to Hermes or Aristotle, and all of which Maimonides attributed to the so-called Sabeans.[26] This difference between the two rabbis' magical libraries accurately reflects the transformation of the

Jewish magical tradition in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, with the massive entry, through Arabic channels of transmission, of new magical technologies, an issue to which we shall return in the next section of this chapter. But it is especially a result of Maimonides' own interests, which lay squarely in the realm of learned magic, as opposed to the popular magical practices discussed in Hai's responsum, and of his wider philosophical agenda throughout the *Guide*. From his perspective, these Sabean books and the practices prescribed in them offered an illustration of the kind of "paganism" against which the Hebrew Bible was fighting, both with its prohibitions of magic and divination in Dt. 18:9–18:15 and with its recurrent prohibitions of idolatry (*Guide* 3.37).

We shall return to the issue of astral-talismanic magic and to its extensive use by medieval Jews later in this chapter, but for the time being, we must note that Maimonides' objections to what he found in the Sabean books he had read, and to other forms of magic and divination, run on two parallel tracks. On the one hand, he insists that magical practices – especially those that involve the use of supposedly potent words and names and are accompanied by ritual actions conducted at specific times – are sheer nonsense and a complete waste of their followers' time (and, just like Hai Gaon, he too quotes Prov. 14:15 in this context). On the other hand, he insists that most of these magical practices are included under the rubric of illicit magic and are thus forbidden to all God-fearing Jews in any case.[27]

Maimonides' two-pronged attack on magic has often been studied, not least because it was deemed extremely suitable for the needs of modern Jewish rationalists, especially those of the *Haskalah* of the eighteenth century, the *Wissenschaft des Judenthums* of the nineteenth century, and the Jewish Studies of the twentieth century.[28] What has less often been noted is how futile this huge effort eventually proved to be, because both contemporary and later Jewish practitioners of magic either argued vehemently against Maimonides' views (and we shall see one such example later in the chapter) or politely ignored them, and the Jewish magical tradition proudly sailed onward.[29] There were, however, some cases in which his rebukes proved more successful. For example, his vehement objection to the addition of "magic words," angel names, and magic signs to the *mezuzah* (the scroll with specified biblical verses that Jews affix to their doorposts) in an effort to enhance its apotropaic value did not bring about the complete demise of this practice, which is well attested in the Cairo Genizah. But it did set off a fierce debate, in which many different rabbis expressed their divergent opinions, and at some point this practice indeed petered out.[30] But other practices that Maimonides disliked, including the adjuration of demons with spells and incense offerings, continued to be

practiced extensively among the Jews of later generations, and in many cases, they are still being practiced today.

(d) From Maimonides' Cairo we move to Barcelona and to the world of Rabbi Shlomo ben Abraham ibn Adret (the Rashba, 1235–1310) who lived roughly one century after Maimonides. Of his many references to magic, we may focus on a single responsum, dating from the early fourteenth century.[31] As in the case of Hai's responsum, here too we are reading a second exchange of letters, which followed a first round of questions and answers.[32] In that first round, the Rashba had been asked whether making a metal image (i.e., a talisman) of a lion for medicinal purposes is permitted, and he responded that it is. As a precedent, he adduced the mishnaic permission to wear a coin on a gouty limb and the talmudic admission that it is the image on the coin that does some of the healing.[33] He also noted that although making the image of a lion might seem especially problematic, given that this is one of the four faces of the "animals" that carry God's chariot (as in Ezek. 1:10) and rabbinic literature explicitly forbids making images of God's servants, a major talmudic authority limited that prohibition to the making of all four faces side by side (Babylonian Talmud, Rosh ha-Shana 24b), and therefore making a self-standing image of a lion is permitted. Finally, as a third and concluding argument, the Rashba claimed that his revered teacher, the great Rabbi Moses ben Nahman (the Ramban), both permitted the use of such images and even used them himself.

Rashba's first response apparently failed to satisfy the rabbis of Montpellier, who kept on flooding him with angry refutations of his arguments and providing more details of the praxis involved in the making of such images, including the offering of incense and fumigations, which clearly fall under the rabbinic definitions of idolatry and therefore had to be strictly forbidden.[34] In his long response, the Rashba does not really answer these questions directly, but he does embark on a long diatribe in which he seeks (a) to show that Maimonides' objections to various magical practices are far from consistent, given that he too insisted that if something *really* heals it cannot be forbidden, and especially (b) to provide an almost endless series of talmudic examples that prove that the rabbis of old had permitted numerous magical practices, especially those practiced for apotropaic and healing purposes. Analyzing all of his examples would take us too far afield, but his bottom line is important – namely, that making metal talismans in line with the instructions of astral magic is fine, as long as one does not offer incense to the image itself, nor worship the angel in charge of the day or hour on which the image is to be made, because both these actions would be considered idolatrous.[35] When one of the main opponents of astral magic insisted that the Rashba's responsum was

far from satisfactory, the revered rabbi responded by complaining about the Aristotelian Jews, whose views (including the derisive citation of Prov. 15:14 against whomever believes in the reality of the biblical and talmudic stories!) both he and his opponent found offensive, and by curtly dismissing all objections to the permissibility of astral magic.[36]

The image that emerges from all of this is quite clear – magic was widely practiced by the rabbinic elite in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Spain, and medical magic was the easiest to justify. Even astral magic, including the making of talismanic images, was deemed acceptable to many rabbis, and only the offering of incense, or other practices that could be seen as worshipping an object or a power other than God, were considered beyond the pale. And although Maimonides' views were greatly respected, they so blatantly contradicted everything that was found in the Hebrew Bible or in classical rabbinic literature that they could easily be refuted.[37] To put things in more modern terms, we may conclude that for many rabbis in the Middle Ages, magic was very "Jewish," and the objection to its efficacy or legitimacy was very "un-Jewish." The end of this debate, we may add, was the famous ban promulgated by the Rashba against the study of philosophy by anyone who had not yet reached the age of twenty-five, a ban that was fiercely opposed by philosophy's many Jewish supporters.[38]

The Cultural Makeup of Medieval Jewish Magic

Looking at the history of the Jewish magical tradition (and of Jewish culture as a whole), one may visualize it as a stream, into which more and more fountains and tributaries keep on flowing, but whose water is constantly evaporating because of the heat of the sun. When looking at medieval Jewish magic, one may see four streams flowing into it – (a) that of Late Antique Jewish magic, which was transmitted into the Middle Ages in written manuscripts that were continuously copied, redacted, and adapted for more than one thousand years; (b) that of medieval Muslim magic, which made a lasting impression on medieval Jewish magic; (c) that of Christian magic, whose impact on medieval Jewish magic was much less significant; and (d) that of medieval Kabbalah, the Jewish mystical-esoteric tradition. In what follows, we shall first examine the survival of Late Antique Jewish magic into the Middle Ages, and then turn to the Muslim and Christian influences on medieval Jewish magic. We shall then turn, in the third and final section of this chapter, to a brief examination of the relations between the Jewish magical tradition and Kabbalistic ideas and practices.[39]

(a) The Transmission of the Jewish Magical Tradition from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages

Looking at the history of the Jewish magical tradition, one may note some modest and poorly documented beginnings already in the Second Temple period and an impressive growth in Late Antiquity, roughly from the third and fourth centuries CE to the rise of Islam. This sudden growth may also be the result of the "scribalization" of the Jewish magical tradition – that is, the shift to magical practices that often were transmitted in written form and whose execution often entailed the production of written objects – a shift that helped secure the survival of numerous written objects of Jewish magic from Late Antiquity, and thus enabled their detailed study.[40] This "scribalization" of ancient Jewish magic, especially in Palestine and in the Greek-speaking Jewish diaspora, also ensured the smooth transmission of much Late Antique Jewish magical lore into the Middle Ages, especially in the form of recipe books and manuals of Jewish magic, most of which were written in Aramaic and in Hebrew.[41] In Sasanian Babylonia, on the other hand, Jewish magical spells seem to have been transmitted mostly in oral form, even when they were written down on hundreds of clay bowls, a praxis that makes them partly accessible to the modern historian.[42] The result of this process of oral transmission is that whereas medieval Jewish magic displays many signs of continuity from the older, "Western" branch of Late Antique Jewish magic, continuities from the "Eastern" branch, that of the Jews of Sasanian Babylonia, are not as prevalent.[43]

The smooth flow of Late Antique Palestinian Jewish magic into the Middle Ages has several important implications. First and foremost, the older Jewish magical texts were characterized by their deep exposure to the Greco-Egyptian magical tradition and by their selective borrowings and adaptations from that tradition. To put things rather crudely, one may note that the "pagan" gods were mostly left out of the Jewish magical tradition, but less offensive elements, such as the magic signs and magic names strewn throughout the Greco-Egyptian magical tradition, were warmly adopted by the Jewish magicians. This is why in Late Antique Jewish magical texts, and in medieval ones as well, one often finds the *charaktêres*, those mysterious-looking ring-letters, or the name Abrasax, or word-triangles made up of gradually diminishing words, "magic words," and powerful names.[44] This also is one more reason why medieval Jewish magic differs from medieval Christian magic: whereas the *charaktêres*, for example, were frowned upon by Augustine and therefore were deemed problematic in medieval Christian culture (where the tainted term often was replaced by less offensive terms, such as *figurae*), in the Jewish

Letter	Alphabet A	Alphabet B	Alphabet C	Alphabet D
א				
ב				
ג				
ד				
ה				
ו				
ז				
ח				
ט				
י				
כ				
ל				
מ				
נ				
ס				
ע				
פ				
צ				
ק				
ר				
ש				
ת				

FIGURE 9.1. Angelic Alphabets. Alphabet A is taken from T-S K 12.60; B is from NYPL Heb. 190 (olim Sassoon 56), 181; C is from NYPL Heb. 190, 182; D is from Geneva 145 (olim Sassoon 290), 186. There are many more alphabets in these and other manuscripts.

magical tradition, they were fully naturalized already in Late Antiquity and therefore aroused no objections.[45] In Jewish magical texts, they appear either as powerful signs devoid of any "pagan" or diabolical connotations or as secret "seals" used by the angels in heaven. In the Middle Ages there were many attempts by Jewish magicians and mystics to "decipher" the meaning of these mysterious signs and to decode the "angelic alphabets" that supposedly lay behind them (see Figure 9.1).[46] Such speculations facilitated the reentry of some of these magic signs into the Christian magical tradition and their adoption by the likes of Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim.

The smooth flow of Late Antique Jewish magic into the Middle Ages assured the continuous transmission and use of many magical texts, including the Late Antique Palestinian *Sepher ha-Razim* (*The Book of the Mysteries*), the *Sepher ha-Yashar* and *The Sword of Moses* mentioned earlier in the chapter, and a plethora of similar, but mostly shorter, magical texts.[47] It also assured the transmission, adaptation, translation, and use of individual magical recipes, including one magical recipe whose transmission history may even be traced in a continuous manner from the fifth or sixth century all the way to the twentieth century.[48] It also assured the transmission of the basic techniques of the Jewish magical tradition, namely, the recitation and/or inscription of spells, often accompanied by the manipulation of readily available mineral, vegetal, animal, or human substances, in order to achieve various apotropaic, medical, divinatory, aggressive, erotic, or other aims.[49] But as we shall see in the next two subsections, medieval Jewish magic was not merely the reheated remains of older Jewish magic; it was deeply enriched by the entry of new, and unprecedented, magical technologies borrowed from the Jews' new neighbors in the Middle Ages.

(b) The Impact of Muslim Magic on Medieval Jewish Magic

Looking at Oriental Jewish manuscripts that transmit magical texts and recipes, such as those found in the Cairo Genizah and those in many other collections, we find copious documentation of Oriental Jewish magic from the tenth to the twentieth centuries. One of the most striking features of this branch of medieval Jewish magic is its enthusiastic adoption of Islamic magical technologies borrowed from the Jews' Arabic-speaking neighbors. This is a small part of a much wider phenomenon, namely, the deep cultural impact of Arabic-Muslim culture on medieval Judaism. This process was greatly facilitated by the use of a shared language, Arabic (which the Jews often wrote in Hebrew letters, a form known as Judaeo-Arabic), and by the fact that the Jews never denied Islam's deep commitment to monotheism and therefore were less fearful of borrowing some Muslim practices and of participating in the cultural exchange of the Muslim intellectual elite. This process is apparent in all spheres of Jewish cultural activity in the lands of Islam, from philosophy and medicine to *belles-lettres* and poetry, and it has often been described in the past.[50] Focusing solely on magic, we may note that in this field, too, we can speak of Judaeo-Arabic culture as a true "hyphen culture" – so much so that when we read some Judaeo-Arabic magical texts from the Cairo Genizah, we might be tempted to classify them as "Muslim" and "Jewish" at the same time,

given that the process of "Judaizing" them consisted mostly of transliterating them from one alphabet to another, often with very little censorship and very few modifications.[51] The best sign of this cultural openness is the appearance in the Jewish world of completely new types of magical texts and technologies, which would have been quite unthinkable to the Jewish magicians of a few centuries earlier.[52] Of these, the two novel magical technologies that had the greatest impact on the later course of the Jewish magical tradition were the rituals for summoning demons, on the one hand, and the practice of talismanic, or astral, magic, on the other hand. Let us briefly examine each of these.

Turning first to demonology, we may note that the Jewish infatuation with demons goes back a long way, at least to the third century BCE and probably much earlier, and it is extremely well attested in the centuries preceding the rise of Islam.[53] But whereas the Jews of the Second Temple period and of Late Antiquity were mostly occupied with trying to keep demons at bay, exorcizing them out of the persons whom they had entered, or (less frequently) sending them back upon the magicians who had set them on their evil mission, in later periods we also find Jews actively trying to attract demons.[54] This new magical technology often consisted of long and elaborate rituals for gathering demons to a single place (the Hebrew term for such a gathering is *qevitzah*), interrogating them, and subduing them so as to be able to use them for various tasks. In many cases, the ritual necessitated the drawing of a large circle or a square, inside of which the magician would stand, the offering of incense (a practice that, as we noted earlier in the chapter, was forbidden even by Hai Gaon, not to mention Maimonides), and the recitation of long spells. In some cases, the detailed instructions were accompanied by images of the demons themselves (see Figure 9.2), and especially those of the "seals" of the different demons, which had to be produced (usually in bronze or other metals) and shown to them as a part of the ritual (see Figure 9.3). The instructions for such rituals often were transmitted in Judaeo-Arabic, but Hebrew translations and adaptations were quick to follow, and these were spread far and wide, including to the Jews of Christian Europe.[55] There, the new technology even gave rise to the medieval image of the demon-summoning Jew (an image that unfortunately corroborated the Christian anti-Jewish stereotype of the Jews' pact with the Devil) and to Hebrew as a preferred language for such practices.[56]

A second type of magical activity that became very popular among Jews in the Middle Ages, and that was entirely unattested in earlier periods, is the use of talismanic, or astral, magic. This was a technology that was based on the astrological assumption that the planets and the stars have a great impact on

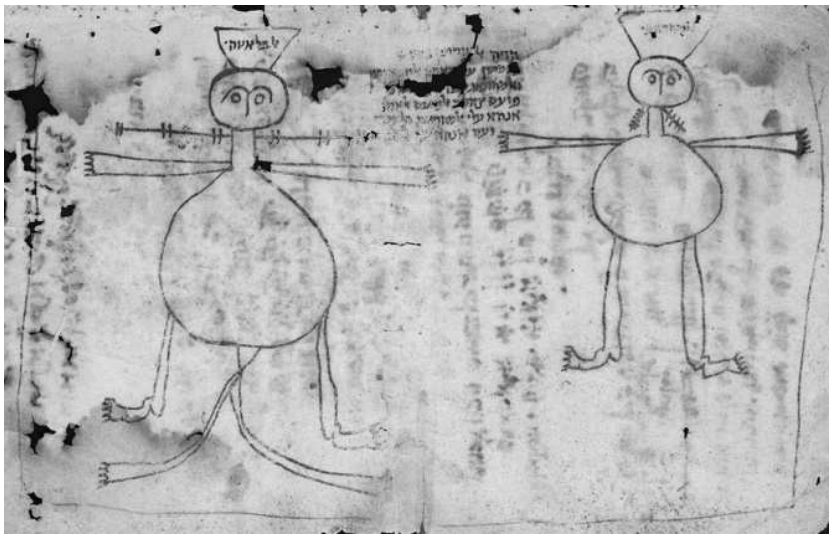
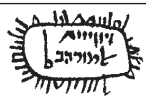


FIGURE 9.2. Images of demons from the Cairo Genizah. Taylor-Schechter Ar. 51.95. Reprinted by courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

	Sunday
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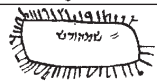
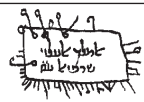
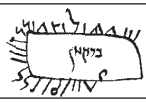
	Thursday
	Friday
	Saturday

FIGURE 9.3. The seals of the seven kings of the demons ruling over the days of the week. Based on ms. NYPL Heb. 190, 156.

everything that happens on earth and the conviction that these powers could be harnessed through ritual techniques. The praxis consisted of choosing an astrologically suitable moment, preparing an appropriate talisman, placing it in an appropriate position, and performing elaborate rituals, including the offering of incense and the recitation of special prayers and adjurations, all of which were intended to "charge" the talisman with the astral powers. Once "charged," the talisman could be used to achieve the usual aims of the magical practices – for love, for hate, to fend off evil forces, to heal the sick, to destroy a city wall, and so on. This technology – which in the Middle Ages was avidly used by Muslim, Christian, and Jewish magicians and physicians alike – was transmitted in special handbooks, with detailed instructions on how to produce each of the talismans and how to use them. Such handbooks circulated in the Jewish world both in Judaeo-Arabic versions transliterated from Arabic sources and in Hebrew translations made from Arabic or Latin originals.[57] Their great popularity in medieval Jewish culture and the impact of astral magic on Jewish physicians, philosophers, and Bible commentators have often been noted by earlier scholars and need not detain us here.[58]

Side by side with these two new magical technologies, many more elements of medieval Jewish magic can be shown to have been borrowed from the Arabs, including the use of (numeric) magic squares, the citation of Qurʾānic verses and Muslim blessing formulae, the use of Arabic magic signs, and so on. Even the so-called "Star of David" was borrowed from the Muslim magical tradition by the Jewish one, and it thus began its long and tortuous road from a magical design to a Jewish national symbol.[59] The same holds true in the realm of divination, where the Jewish contact with Arabic culture entailed the adoption of new divinatory techniques, such as geomancy or treasure hunting, and the great expansion of others, such as dream interpretation.[60] Thus, one may safely conclude that the contact with Arabic magic and divination greatly enriched the Jewish magical tradition, with new textual sources and new magical techniques joining and supplementing the old ones and spreading not only to the Arabic-speaking Jews of the lands of Islam but also to the Hebrew-speaking Jews of Christian Europe.

(c) The Impact of Christian Magic on Medieval Jewish Magic

Having briefly examined the Muslim-Arabic contributions to the Jewish magical tradition, we now turn to the Christian ones. In the medieval Christian world, there never was a cultural middle ground between Christians and Jews, both because very few Jews knew Latin – the vehicle of learned discourse

in medieval Europe – and because Jews saw Christians and their culture as a threat and therefore were wary of the overt absorption of Christian texts and traditions.[61] Moreover, the relative absence of social circles in which Jews and Christians could exchange manuscripts and practices, and the dangerous status of magic within Christian society, all made Christian magic less accessible to Jews. We therefore find many specific Christian magical practices that entered the Jewish magical tradition, and even some Latin magical texts in Hebrew translation or transliteration, but we do not find the systemic and pervasive entry of foreign magical technologies into the Jewish world that we find in the lands of Islam.

Looking at Jewish magical texts and practices from medieval Europe, we may easily note items that were borrowed from the Christian magical tradition, including the ubiquitous appearance of the famous palindromic square, SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS, or the recurrence of the magic word "Abracadabra," which is first attested in Latin literature in the third century CE and becomes extremely popular in the Middle Ages, first in Christian magical texts and then in Jewish ones, as well.[62] We even find more specifically Christian names, such as Lucifer and Beelzebub or the three Magi who had once adored the baby Jesus, namely, Gaspar, Melchior and Belthazar, and specifically Christian terms, such as *nigromancia* (in many different spellings).[63] We also find elements borrowed from European folk beliefs, such as the evil demoness Striga or magical signs resembling those of the *Ars notoria*, whose shapes differ both from those of the earlier *charaktêres* and from those of the Arabic ones.[64] Sometimes we even find whole recipes that clearly came from Christian sources and were translated by the Jewish magicians from Latin or Greek, usually with some modifications.[65] And, in what is perhaps the most interesting phenomenon, we find several examples of Christian Latin spells and prayers that were transcribed by the Jewish practitioners in Hebrew letters and may thus be viewed as "Judaeo-Latin" magical spells (see Figure 9.4).[66]

Such examples of the Jewish borrowing of Christian magical spells, signs, and practices are of great importance, and they deserve a closer study. However, one should not forget that such examples are few and far between, and they are the exception rather than the rule. The one area in which this kind of cross-cultural borrowing was more common was the realm of medicine and "experimental science" (in its medieval version), where technical knowledge flowed more smoothly from the Christian to the Jewish world. In this area, we also find some of the clearest examples of the Jewish borrowing and translation of Latin Christian texts.[67] One such example is the so-called *Experimenta duodecim Johannes Paulini*, which begins with the instruction to

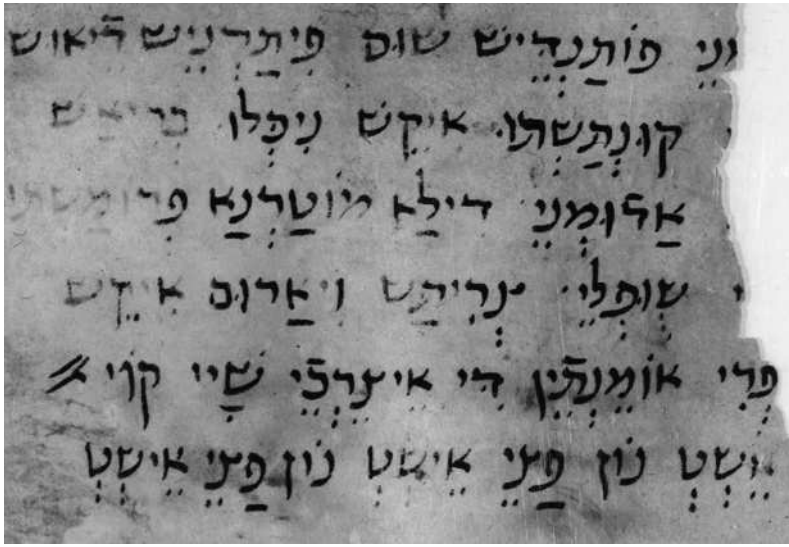


FIGURE 9.4. A thirteenth-century "Judaeo-Latin" prayer from the Cairo Genizah. Taylor-Schechter K 1.115. Reprinted by courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

burn the skin of a snake when the moon is waxing in the first degree of Aries and then lists twelve uses of the resulting powder, from healing head wounds to winning scientific disputations.[68] This well-known Latin text is said to have been translated from an Arabic text called *Salus vitae*, and although the Arabic original has not yet been identified, its name, "The Health of Life," makes perfect sense, given that in Arabic the word for "life" and the word for "snake" are almost identical. This text was translated into Hebrew on several different occasions, and although one of the translations may have been directly from the Arabic original, the others probably were based on the Latin version.[69]

To summarize what we have seen, we may note that although a systematic survey of all the Jewish magical manuscripts of medieval Europe – not just the Hebrew ones, but also those written in Yiddish and in Ladino – has yet to be carried out, it seems clear that the systemic and pervasive influences on the Jewish magical tradition that we find in the Arabic-speaking Muslim world are not paralleled in the Latin- or Greek-speaking Christian world. There, too, Jewish magicians borrowed words of power, magic signs, and even whole spells from their non-Jewish neighbors, but they rarely borrowed new magical technologies, and even when they borrowed Christian prayers, they often censured all of those elements that they found religiously offensive.[70]

Jewish Magic and Kabbalah in the Middle Ages

In the previous section, we focused mainly on the enrichment of medieval Jewish magic by external influences, and this might give the impression that the Jewish magical tradition is nothing but the mixture of older Jewish magic with newer, foreign magical technologies. This, however, is not the case; the Jewish magical tradition was greatly enriched by internal Jewish developments as well, and especially by the rise of the so-called Kabbalah, the Jewish mystical-esoteric tradition.

The full relations between Jewish magic and the early Kabbalah are an enormous topic that still awaits a full scholarly treatment.[71] On the one hand, there is much evidence for some Kabbalists' great interest in magical techniques – including, for example, dream requests or techniques of automatic writing – and their use of such techniques in their search for the attainment of celestial secrets.[72] On the other hand, there is much evidence for the contribution of the Kabbalah, especially the so-called "Kabbalah of the names" (as opposed to the "Kabbalah of the (Divine) Sephirot," which is today often referred to as the theosophic branch of Kabbalah), to the growth of the Jewish magical tradition in the Middle Ages.[73] From the point of view of the Jewish magical tradition, this contribution consisted of an ever-growing stream of powerful names and their uses, often at the expense of more elaborate magical rituals.[74]

The obsession with powerful names is evident already in Late Antique Jewish magic, where it was shaped by two complementary processes. On the one hand, the biblical infatuation with powerful verbal utterances (as in Gen. 1), with secret names (e.g., Judg. 13:18), and especially with the powerful name of God, which no one may utter (e.g., Lev. 24:11, 24:16), gave rise to some traditions of esoteric names and their great powers.[75] On the other hand, the Greco-Egyptian magical tradition provided an endless variety of "magic words" and displayed its own infatuation with the power of such words, an infatuation that is common in many other magical traditions.[76] The Jewish interest in such issues is also manifest in the Hekhalot literature, which is one of the earliest stages of the Jewish mystical tradition, where meaningless "words" and powerful names are a major theme. It is even visible in rabbinic literature, especially in the discussion of God's esoteric names of four, twelve, and forty-two letters, and the strict rules of secrecy under which they were transmitted (Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 71a). Furthermore, Hai Gaon, in the responsum that we analyzed in the first section of this chapter, refers to this issue and notes that the exact pronunciation of God's name of forty-two letters was transmitted in his days *be-kabbalah*, that is, by word of mouth from one tradent to another, and this is the

earliest known use of the word *kabbalah* in this specific sense.[77] Moreover, as we noted in our analysis earlier in the chapter, much of his responsum deals with the issue of the efficacy of such names and the permissibility of their use, and such issues continued to trouble the Jewish elite, especially the philosophers and the Kabbalists, throughout the Middle Ages. The Jewish magicians, on the other hand, were less bothered by the theory and more troubled by the praxis, and thus they found in the Kabbalists' contributions much that was suitable for their own needs.[78] In what follows, we shall not try to disentangle all of these different threads but merely note two examples of the influence of Kabbalistic name speculations on the Jewish magical tradition.[79]

(a) One of the earliest and most common practices of the "Kabbalah of the names" was the addition of powerful names to existing Jewish prayers in an effort to enhance their effectiveness. This practice is well attested in Hai Gaon's responsum, because it was a part of the question sent by the sages of Kairouan to the Babylonian rabbi. If, they ask, one is innocent, is old, is humble, and fulfills all of the other criteria for the transmission of God's names as specified in the Babylonian Talmud and he wishes to use the name – how should he do it? Should he insert it into the usual supplicatory prayers, mention his specific need, and then recite the secret name wherever the prayer uses the Tetragrammaton (which is written YHWH but would normally be pronounced "Adonai")? Or should he use it in the Eighteen Benedictions prayer, which is the standard Jewish daily prayer and use its benedictions to ask for something that is related to the benediction's contents (e.g., asking in "Blessed are thou, who heals the sick" for health for someone who is sick), but inserting the secret name at the end of the blessing where the Tetragrammaton would usually be found? Such were their questions.[80] Hai's response is complex. At first, he insists that for reasons of sanctity, God's name may only be recited in the Holy Land – that is, neither in Kairouan nor in Babylonia. Moreover, because no one really knows its exact pronunciation, one may make a mistake in pronouncing it, and this would be a great sin. This would have been an elegant way out of the whole crux, given that it renders the whole question moot, but Hai immediately adds that even in places where one may recite the name, one should not simply insert it into a blessing, but instead first recite the name, then recite praises and glorifications along the lines of the Throne hymns (known to us from Hekhalot literature), and then ask God whatever he wishes.[81] Thus, in a single sentence, Hai has made it clear that, in his opinion, and within strict limitations on who may conduct the ritual and on where and how it may be conducted, one may use God's esoteric name(s) to beg for one's specific needs.

The practice of adding special names to the standard prayers is, of course, a close parallel to the addition of angel names and powerful signs to the *mezuzah*, a practice to which we already devoted some attention. As noted in the first section of this chapter, the Cairo Genizah furnishes us with several examples of such *mezuzot*, but it also provides interesting evidence of the addition of magical names to the regular prayers, presumably of the type known to the rabbis of Kairouan and to Hai Gaon.[82] Thus, in one Genizah fragment, we find the Eighteen Benedictions prayer turned into a set of magical spells.[83] For each Benediction, an aim is specified ("If you wish to raise the dead from the grave . . . if you wish to talk to the sun," etc.), as well as a list of "magic words," but no ritual instructions whatsoever. It is, of course, possible that the meaningless "words" in fact are ritual instructions, which have been encrypted by way of some yet undeciphered code. It seems more likely, however, that here we have an example of the addition of powerful "words" to the daily prayer, which turn each of its constituent Benedictions into a powerful spell recited in order to achieve a specific aim.

Examples such as these could be multiplied, especially because the "magicalization" of the standard Jewish prayers is a recurrent phenomenon in the history of the Kabbalah and of the Jewish magical tradition.[84] But rather than adducing more such texts, we should pause for a moment to consider their wider implications. First, we may note that the practice of adding God's esoteric names to the regular prayers was not seen by the rabbis of Kairouan or by Hai Gaon as directly related to magic. In fact, we may assume that for many of their developers and users, the names were seen as a *substitute* for the magical rituals found in the magicians' handbooks. Thus, if you wish to speak to the sun (which travels around the whole world and therefore is extremely knowledgeable), you need perform neither the elaborate ritual for this purpose that is set out in *Sepher ha-Razim*, nor the simpler magical ritual suggested by *The Sword of Moses*, but merely recite one of the Benedictions of the standard daily prayer along with its secret name and the sun will reveal its secrets to you.[85] Thus, it is quite possible that this and many other practices associated with the use of powerful names were developed by "masters of the name," who were rather suspicious, or who thought that their clients or followers might be rather suspicious, of the fanciful rituals found in the Jewish magical texts. We shall return to this possibility later in the chapter, when we see yet another example of this process.

A second implication of the magical uses of the prayers is just as intriguing. Assuming that not all copyists and readers of the Genizah fragments in which these prayers are found were pious and humble elders, who were worthy

of using the secret names, we may note here one recurrent feature of the Kabbalah of the names, namely, the "trickle down" effect apparent in its transmission and application. In theory, God's secret names were inserted into the prayers only by those worthy of doing so, and as long as such names were transmitted *be-kabbalah*, by word of mouth, such elitist monopolization could still be secured.[86] But once the texts were written down, they started circulating far and wide, and they were available for all to use. This is a recurrent phenomenon in the history of the Kabbalah and its relations with the Jewish magical tradition, namely, the development by the "masters of the name" of new names and their uses, which were in some cases aimed as alternatives to the magicians' elaborate rituals, but once these names and uses were written down, they ended up joining all of the other magical practices found in the magicians' handbooks.

(b) As a second example of the impact of the "Kabbalah of the names" on the development of Jewish magic, we may compare two different texts – *The Sword of Moses*, which was mentioned earlier in the chapter, and the text known as *Shimmush(e) Torah* (*The Use(s) of the Torah*). The former, and older, text consists of an introductory section, a "sword" (basically a long list of "magic words"), and a list of around 140 recipes that describe how to use different sections of this "sword." The recipes are quite short and usually involve the uttering or the writing down of a specific sequence of powerful "words" (as found in the "sword" itself) as well as additional ritual activities, such as reciting these "words" over oil and rubbing a demoniac with that oil, reciting them over dust and throwing that dust at the enemy, and even preparing a "voodoo doll" and shooting it with palm-thorn arrows.[87] All of these practices are extremely common in Late Antique and medieval Jewish magic, and in this respect, *The Sword of Moses* offers a typical example of the logocentric nature of much of Jewish magic, with its firm belief that words have the power to create, to destroy, and to change whatever needs changing, coupled with its assumption that rituals too are efficacious and that the manipulation of various objects and substances also has its own great powers. This combination of "words" and "deeds," transmitted in the form of practical recipes ("to achieve X, do Y and say/write Z") is highly typical of Jewish magic in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, and it is common to most of the texts and practices that have been mentioned thus far, with some texts laying more stress on the ritual actions and others focusing more on the words to be spoken or written down.

Seen from this perspective, the *Shimmush(e) Torah* (*The Use(s) of the Torah*) seems like a very unusual text.[88] It is preceded by a long and detailed introduction, which also circulated separately under the title of *Maayan ha-Hokhma*

(*The Fountain of Wisdom*).[89] *Maayan ha-Hokhma* relates the story of Moses' encounters with various angels as he ascended to heaven to receive the Torah and the secrets that they passed on to him. In the version that served as the introduction to *Shimmush(e) Torah*, this knowledge includes the secret name associated with every *parasha* (lectionary portion) of the Torah, as well as its magical uses.[90] This esoteric lore is then detailed at some length in the *Shimmush(e) Torah* itself, which is arranged according to the Torah portions, from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Deuteronomy. For each portion, and sometimes even for individual verses, it lists the secret name associated with it, often adding an explanation of how this name is derived from that specific portion or verse through elaborate letter permutations. For many of the Torah portions, it also describes for which (magical) uses the portion and its secret name can be employed – for charm and grace, to avoid evil dreams, for a newlywed couple, against robbers, to have a beautiful voice, and so on. The date and provenance of this text are far from clear – Gershom Scholem thought that it belonged in Late Antiquity or the early Middle Ages and was of Oriental Jewish origins, and this assumption has been shared by most subsequent scholars.[91] However, this assumption has recently been challenged in favor of a twelfth- or thirteenth-century European provenance.[92] But be that as it may, what we have here is a book of magic that is entirely different from the likes of *The Sword of Moses* or most other Jewish and non-Jewish magical texts of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Here, the structure of the book is determined by the order of the biblical portions, and the main focus is on the names to be derived from them; the magical uses are presented as a sort of a by-product to the text's main interest. Moreover, although the aims of the magical uses are quite similar to those found in *The Sword of Moses* and other Jewish magical texts, the praxis certainly is not. In fact, the use of the names and the verses surveyed by *Shimmush Torah* requires very little ritual – in almost all cases, it is the mere *uttering* of the name or the verse that is supposed to be effective for a given purpose. Much less frequent is the injunction to *write* the names or the verses, and more complex rituals of the kind that is so common in other Jewish magical texts are almost entirely absent.[93] In short, the producers and users of such a text may rightly be called "masters of the name," because it is their knowledge of the secret names associated with each Torah portion that gives them their special powers. Of course, once the book was written down, it could be used by other Jewish magicians, as well, and the names found therein could travel to other magical recipe books and join the main stream of the Jewish magical tradition.[94] But in its "pure" form, this text represents a separate, and much more Kabbalistic, tributary that flowed into

the wider stream of the Jewish magical tradition, joining the Late Antique, the Muslim, and the Christian tributaries that we surveyed in the preceding sections. In passing, we may note that in the Renaissance, this text was translated into Latin and joined the rich world of the so-called "Christian Kabbalah," which lies outside the scope of the present chapter.[95]

Summary

As noted throughout the chapter, medieval Jewish magic was widely and openly studied and practiced by many learned Jews.[96] To be sure, some philosophically minded Jews objected to almost all magical practices, and many rabbis objected to specific magical practices, especially those that smacked of idolatry. But although such objections helped filter some magical practices out of the Jewish magical tradition and prevented the entry of others (especially in Christian Europe), they neither eradicated the Jewish magical tradition nor drove it underground. Widely practiced, transmitted in thousands of manuscripts, and constantly absorbing and developing new techniques and practices, the Jewish magical tradition grew in Late Antiquity and thrived in the Middle Ages. But in spite of many important contributions to the study of medieval Jewish magic, its full story has yet to be told; the survey in this chapter is but a preliminary sketch of some of its salient features and a modest attempt to encourage further research in this richly documented but poorly studied field.

Notes

* I am grateful to Ortal-Paz Saar, Katelyn Mesler and Yuval Harari for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter and to Yasmin Bohak for her help in preparing the figures.

1. See also Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 12–19.
2. For some of the earliest examples of this phenomenon, see Saar, "Success, Protection and Grace," 101–135.
3. See Veltri, "'Watermarks' in the MS Munich, Hebr. 95," 255–268; Shoham-Steiner, "'This Should Not Be Shown to a Gentile,'" 53–59.
4. This evidence has never been collected in a systematic manner, but useful starting points may be found in Zimmels, *Magicians, Theologians and Doctors*; Kanarfogel, *"Peering through the Lattices."* And cf. Chajes, "Rabbis and Their (In)Famous Magic," 58–79, 349–358, which makes extensive use of such evidence for the reconstruction of Jewish magic in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.

5. See especially Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*.
6. For a broader outline of the desiderata in the study of Jewish magic, see Bohak, "Prolegomena to the Study of the Jewish Magical Tradition," 107–150.
7. For a detailed substantiation of this claim, see Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 11–35.
8. For detailed discussions of the rabbinic discourse on magic, see Harari, "The Sages and the Occult," 521–564; and Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 357–386.
9. For these polemics, see Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*, vol. 2, 55–57, 75–83; Harari, "Leadership, Authority, and the 'Other,'" 79–101.
10. For this responsum, see Emanuel, *Newly Discovered Geonic Responsa*, 124–146 (Heb.). For the manuscript evidence, see ibid., 121–123. The first set of letters has not been preserved, but its contents may roughly be reconstructed from the Kairouan rabbis' second question (ibid., 124–127) and from Hai Gaon's second response (ibid., 127–146). For earlier analyses of this responsum and of related responsa attributed to Hai Gaon, see Joël, *Der Aberglaube und die Stellung des Judenthums*, vol. 2, 30–56; Hildesheimer, "Mystik und Agada im Urteile," 259–286; Dan, *History of Jewish Mysticism and Esotericism*, vol. 4, 143–195 (Heb.); Harari, "Leadership, Authority, and the 'Other,'" 87–90. However, a fuller analysis of this important text and an adequate English translation remain scholarly desiderata.
11. Note, for example, the detailed descriptions (Emanuel, *Newly Discovered Geonic Responsa*, 126, 137–138) of the practice of "dream request" (for summoning a revelatory dream) and the evidence for that practice assembled by Bellusci, "Dream Requests from the Cairo Genizah."
12. Emanuel, *Newly Discovered Geonic Responsa*, 131–132. For *Sepher ha-Yashar*, see Wandrey, *"Das Buch des Gewandes,"* 183–314; for *The Sword of Moses*, see Gaster, *The Sword of Moses*, vol. 1, 288–337, vol. 3, 69–103; Harari, *Harba de-Moshe (The Sword of Moses)* (Heb.); Harari, "The Sword of Moses (*Harba de-Moshe*)," 58–98. The *Raza Rabba*, a Babylonian Jewish work of magic, has yet to be identified in our "insider" sources.
13. Emanuel, *Newly Discovered Geonic Responsa*, 125, 131.
14. For "masters of the name," see Emanuel, *Newly Discovered Geonic Responsa*, 124; for the claims about Sura, see ibid., 130: "And in the *yeshivah* at Sura these things were widespread, since they are close to the city of Babylon and to the house of Nebuchadnezzar, but we are far away from there." For this assertion, see also Assaf, *The Gaonic Period and Its Literature*, 261–264 (Heb.). For the power of God's name, see Emanuel, *Newly Discovered Geonic Responsa*, 133–134.
15. Emanuel, *Newly Discovered Geonic Responsa*, esp. 140–141.
16. Ibid., 145.
17. See ibid., 138, where Hai comments on a magical praxis mentioned in the Talmud, noting that "magic (*keshaphim*) is only permitted to be taught to

members of the Sanhedrin (the supreme court) who pass judgments on matters of life and death, but we did not study *keshaphim*, and this thing is a matter of *keshaphim*," whence his ignorance of the exact nature of this specific praxis.

18. Ibid., 131.
19. For the magical texts from the Cairo Genizah, see Schäfer, "Jewish Magic Literature in Late Antiquity," 75–91; and Bohak, "Towards a Catalogue of the Magical, Astrological, Divinatory and Alchemical Fragments," 53–79, with an extensive bibliography.
20. For the *Scroll of Ahimaaz*, see Klar, ed., *Megillat Ahimaaz* (Heb.); for a new critical edition, with an English translation and a full commentary, see Bonfil, *History and Folklore*. For its stories of magic and miracles, see Benin, "The Chronicle of Ahimaaz," 237–250 (Heb.); Harari, "The *Scroll of Ahimaaz*," 185–202 (Heb.); Dan, *History of Jewish Mysticism and Esotericism*, vol. 4, 222–242 (Heb.).
21. See Bonfil, *History and Folklore*, 234–237.
22. For the Hebrew text, see Bonfil, *History and Folklore*, 255; the English translation is my own.
23. For the Genizah fragments, see Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte*, vol. 1, no. 1 (=JTSL ENA 3635.17), and no. 2 (=T-S K 1.56), and Veltri, "'*Inyan Sota*," 23–48. For their connection with the story in the *Scroll of Ahimaaz*, see Harari, "The *Scroll of Ahimaaz*," (Heb.). Note that the *Scroll* itself relates that Abu Aharon boarded a boat to Egypt on his way back to his native Babylonia (Bonfil, *History and Folklore*, 279).
24. See Weinstock, "Discovered Legacy of Mystic Writings," 153–159 (Heb.); Scholem, "Has A Legacy Been Discovered," 252–265 (Heb.).
25. This issue was further compounded by the fact that many medieval magical texts were pseudepigraphically attributed to biblical or rabbinic figures (for example, to King Solomon), and as these attributions often were taken by medieval rabbis at face value (cf. Maimonides, *Commentary on the Mishna*, Pessahim 4.10), claiming that such books were "un-Jewish" became even more difficult.
26. For Maimonides' Sabeans, see esp. Hjärpe, *Analyse critique des traditions arabes*; and Stroumsa, "Sabéens de Harrân et Sabéens de Maïmonide," 335–352. In the same volume, see also Paul B. Fenton, "Maïmonide et l'*Agriculture nabatéenne*," 303–333.
27. See esp. *Guide* 1.61–1.62, 3.37; *Mishne Torah*, Avodat Kokhavim 11.4–11.18. For detailed analyses of Maimonides' anti-magic crusade, see Lewis, "Maimonides on Superstition," 475–488; Schwartz, *Studies on Astral Magic*, esp. 27–54; Halbertal, *Maimonides*, 189–194 (Heb.); Ravitzky, "'The Ravings of Amulet Writers,'" 93–130. See also Schwartz, "Magic, Philosophy and Kabbalah," 99–132 (Heb.), which notes that even some medieval followers of Maimonides found in his writings a bit of leeway for the practice of magic.

28. See Harris, "The Image of Maimonides," 117–139; for the overevaluation of Maimonides in the academic study of "Jewish philosophy," see Sirat, "Should We Stop Teaching Maimonides?" 136–144. The number of scholarly monographs devoted to Maimonides that were published since Sirat's paper was written proves that her call has yet to be heeded.
29. For a refreshing exception to this scholarly silence, see Kellner, *Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism*, esp. 17–18, 286–296.
30. See Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, Hilkhot Mezuzah 5.4, and Aptowitzer, "Les noms de Dieu et des anges dans la mezouza"; Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 145–152; Bohak, "Mezuzoth with Magical Additions from the Cairo Genizah," 387–403 (Heb.).
31. This responsum (no. 413 in his collected responsa) forms part of a dossier, *Minhat Qena'ot* (*An Offering of Zeal*), compiled by Abba Mari of Lunel, a major player in the whole affair. In what follows, I have used the edition by Dimitrovsky, *Teshuvot ha-Rashba*, 281–308 (Heb.). For Adret's view of magic, see also Klein-Braslavy, "The Concept of Magic," 105–129; Davidson, "Perceptions of Medicine and Magic," 104–141 (Heb.). For the whole controversy, see Schwartz, *Studies on Astral Magic*, 123–165.
32. The first response is mentioned both by the Rashba himself (Schwartz, *Studies on Astral Magic*, 281–283) and by Abba Mari (ibid., 273–274), whose objection to Rashba's permissiveness generated the more detailed response. That Abba Mari was not the only French rabbi to object to the Spanish rabbi's leniency is made clear by the Rashba himself (ibid., 283).
33. *Mishna*, Shabbat 6.6, and Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 65a. For the wider context of these practices, see Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 383.
34. For the "Book of Figures" in which these instructions were found, see Shatzmiller, "In Search of the 'Book of Figures,'" 383–407; Shatzmiller, "The Forms of the Twelve Constellations," 397–408 (Heb.); Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica*, 310–316. See also Leicht, "Le chapitre II,12," 295–330.
35. For these two limitations, see Leicht, "Le chapitre II,12," 283, 303.
36. For Abba Mari's objections, see ibid., esp. 319–325. For the Rashba's response, see ibid., esp. 342, 347–348.
37. And cf. Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 20: "In short, the Talmudic classification plagued the efforts of medieval codifiers to bring the law into relation with contemporary procedures. Yet, from a practical standpoint, they succeeded in effectively excluding from the proscribed 'magic' all the forms current among Jews."
38. For a lucid survey of these events, see Stern, "Philosophy in Southern France," 281–303.
39. A full-fledged history of the Jewish magical tradition has never been attempted, but see the preliminary sketches by Vajda, "La magie en Israël," 127–153; Idel, "On Judaism, Jewish Mysticism and Magic," 195–214; the illustrated catalogue

in Vukosavović, ed., *Angels and Demons*; and especially the recent survey by Yuval Harari, "Jewish Magic: An Annotated Overview," 13–85 (Heb.).

40. For detailed surveys of this evidence, see Alexander, "Incantations and Books of Magic," 342–379; Swartz, "Jewish Magic in Late Antiquity," 699–720; Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 143–226; Harari, *Early Jewish Magic*, 159–228 (Heb.).
41. For a fuller discussion of this point, see Bohak, "The Jewish Magical Tradition," 324–339; for a more specific example, see Bohak, "From Qumran to Cairo," 31–52. Many other examples may be found in Leicht, "Some Observations on the Diffusion of Jewish Magical Texts," 213–231; and in Saar, "Jewish Love Magic" (Heb.).
42. For a useful introduction to the Sasanian Jewish incantation bowls, with much further bibliography, see Levene, *Curse or Blessing, What's in the Magical Bowl?*.
43. There are, however, some important exceptions, such as the *Pishra de-Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa* (ed. Michelini Tocci, "Note e documenti di letterature religiosa," 101–108); the *Havdala de-Rabbi Akiba* (ed. Scholem, "Havdala de-Rabbi Aqiva," 243–281 (Heb.); and the *get* formula analyzed by Levene and Bohak, "Divorcing Lilith," 197–217.
44. For a fuller discussion, see Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 247–278.
45. For the medieval Christian discourse of the *charaktêres*, see Véronèse and Grévin, "Les 'caractères' magiques au Moyen Âge," 305–379; for Augustine's condemnations of the *charaktêres*, see ibid., 309–317.
46. And see, for example, Weinstock, "The Alphabet of Metatron and Its Interpretation," 51–76 (Heb.); Idel, "The Anonymous *Commentary on the Alphabet of Metatron*," 255–264 (Heb.); Bohak, "The *Charaktêres* in Ancient and Medieval Jewish Magic," 25–44.
47. For *Sepher ha-Razim*, probably the most influential book of ancient Jewish magic, see Margalioth, *Sepher ha-Razim* (Heb.); Morgan, *Sepher ha-Razim*; Rebiger and Schäfer, *Sefer ha-Razim I und II*.
48. For this specific example, see Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 156–158.
49. For the aims and techniques of ancient Jewish magic, see Harari, "Early Jewish Magic," 136–226 (Heb.).
50. See, for example, Drory, *The Emergence of Jewish-Arabic Literary Contacts* (Heb.); Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*.
51. For a case in point, see Friedländer, "A Muhammedan Book on Augury," 84–103; many other examples remain unpublished.
52. See Shaked, "Between Judaism and Islam," 4–19 (Heb.); Shaked, "Medieval Jewish Magic in Relation to Islam," 97–109; Zoran, "Magic, Theurgy and the Knowledge of Letters," 19–62 (Heb.). The following passages are partly based on my forthcoming chapter on medieval Oriental Jewish magic in Rustow and Chazan, eds., *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 5, *Jews and Judaism in the Islamic World*.

53. And see Eshel, "Demonology in Palestine" (Heb.).
54. Such practices are already attested in the Greek magical papyri (e.g., PGM I.1–I.195); see also Ciraolo, "Supernatural Assistants in the Greek Magical Papyri," 279–295. Although such techniques may have been known to Jews in Late Antiquity, they seem to have entered the Jewish magical tradition only in their Arabic versions, which are far more elaborate than the earlier Greek ones were.
55. For some pertinent examples, see Scholem, "Bilar the King of Devils," 112–127 (Heb.); and Scholem, "Some Sources of Jewish-Arabic Demonology," 1–13; Golb, "Aspects of the Historical Background of Jewish Life," 12–18; Patai, "The Love Factor in a Hebrew-Arabic Conjuration," 239–253; Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte*, vol. 1, no. 5 (=JTSL ENA 2643.6–2643.7), 6a/5, vol. 1, no. 6 (=T-S K 1.1), vol. 3, no. 62 (=T-S K 1.3), 1a/1–1b/8, vol. 3, no. 66 (=T-S AS 142.15 + T-S NS 246.14), 1b.
56. For pertinent examples, see the *qevitzah*-type ritual performed by two Jews described in a mystery play of 1541 in Schwab, "Mots hébreux dans les Mystères du Moyen Âge," 148; and Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 61, which also refers to Benvenuto Cellini's celebrated account of a demon-summoning ritual performed by a Sicilian priest in the Colosseum in 1533 or 1534: "Now the necromancer began to utter those awful invocations, calling by name on multitudes of demons who are captains of their legions, and these he summoned by the virtue and potency of God, the Uncreated, Living, and Eternal, in phrases of the Hebrew, and also of the Greek and Latin tongues." (Symonds, trans., *The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini*, 118).
57. For astral magic in the Middle Ages, see Weill-Parot, *Les "images astrologiques" au Moyen Âge*; for the Judaeo-Arabic texts, see Burnett and Bohak, "A Judaeo-Arabic Version of Thābit ibn Qurra's *De imaginibus*," 179–200; for the Hebrew texts, see the detailed survey by Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica*, 295–359.
58. See esp. Schwartz, *Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Heb.); Schwartz, *Amulets, Properties and Rationalism* (Heb.); and Schwartz, *Studies on Astral Magic*.
59. And see Scholem, "The Star of David: History of a Symbol," in *Haaretz Almanac 1948–1949*, 148–163 (Heb.); for an English version, see Scholem, "The Star of David: History of a Symbol," in Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 257–281; Idel, "R. Nehemia ben Shlomo the Prophet," vol. 1, 1–76 (Heb.). A fuller survey of all the Genizah evidence on the six-pointed star will add much to their discussion.
60. For geomancy, see Villuendas Sabaté, "La geomancia judía." For treasure hunting, see Golb, "The Esoteric Practices of the Jews of Fatimid Egypt," 533–535. For dream interpretation, see Lamoreaux, *The Early Muslim Tradition*

of Dream Interpretation, 166, who rightly notes that this topic demands much further research.

61. This issue has been discussed by numerous scholars; see also Freudenthal, "Arabic and Latin Cultures as Resources," 74–105, with further bibliography.
62. For Sator Arepo, see Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 201–202, and Barkai, *A History of Jewish Gynaecological Texts*, 183; for Abracadabra, see Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 266.
63. For the three Magi, see Mesler, "The Three Magi,"161–218; for *nigromancia*, see Leicht, "Nahmanides on Necromancy," 251–264.
64. For the demons, see Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 37–43. For magic signs, see Bohak, "The *Charaktêres*," and for the *Ars notoria*, see Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica*, 369–370.
65. For two specific examples, see Leicht, "The Legend of St. Eustachius (Eustathius)," 325–330; Saar, "A Genizah Magical Fragment and Its European Parallels."
66. See Güdemann, *Geschichte des Erziehungswesens*, vol. 1, 218, vol. 2, 333–337; Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 102–103; Loewe, "A Mediaeval Latin-German Magical Text," 345–368; and Bohak, "Catching a Thief," 344–362; in the future, I hope to edit more such texts.
67. See, for example, García-Ballester, Ferre, and Feliu, "Jewish Appreciation of Fourteenth-Century Scholastic Medicine," 85–117; Barkai, *A History of Jewish Gynaecological Texts*; Mesler, "The Three Magi"; Caballero-Navas, *The Book of Women's Love*; Bos and Zwink, *Berakhyah Ben Natronai ha-Nakdan, Sefer Ko'ah ha-Avanim (On the Virtue of the Stones)*; Ferre, "The Incorporation of Foreign Medical Literature into the Medieval Jewish Corpus," 171–183; Mesler, "The Medieval Lapidary of Techel/Azareus."
68. The Latin text was edited by Schibby Johnsson, "Les 'Experimenta duodecim Johannes Paulini,'" 257–267, who also mentions two of the Hebrew manuscripts in which it appears. For its place in the history of Western "experimental" literature, see Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 2, 794–796.
69. See Zonta, "Medieval Hebrew Translations of Philosophical and Scientific Texts," 17–73, 58, no. 424. For a fuller survey of the manuscript evidence, see Bohak, "Rabbanite Magical Texts in Karaite Manuscripts," 26–27.
70. For such self-censorship, see Bohak, "Catching a Thief," 358.
71. For the time being, see Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. 8, 3–54, 273–295; Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 182–189; Idel, "Between the Magic of the Holy Names and the Kabbalah," 79–96 (Heb.); Garb, "Mysticism and Magic," 97–109 (Heb.).
72. See Idel, *Nocturnal Kabbalists* (Heb.), and Goldreich, *Automatic Writing in Zoharic Literature and Modernism* (Heb.), respectively.

73. For the Kabbalists' own distinction between these two types of Kabbalah, see Idel, "Defining Kabbalah," 97–122.
74. For the importance of the distinction in medieval Jewish magic between "name magic" and "ritual magic," see also Harari, "Jewish Magic: An Annotated Overview," 44–49, with further references to Moshe Idel's emphasis of this distinction. And cf. Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 86–89.
75. See, for example, Harari, "Moses, the Sword, and *The Sword of Moses*," 293–329, with further bibliography.
76. For examples from Greco-Roman and Greco-Egyptian magic, see Versnel, "The Poetics of the Magical Charm," 105–158; for a wider anthropological perspective, see Tambiah, "The Magical Power of Words," 175–208.
77. See Hai's responsum (in Emanuel, *Newly Discovered Geonic Responsa*), 135, where he also explains how this oral transmission was carried out. The importance of the word *kabbalah* in this context was highlighted by Idel, "Defining Kabbalah," 100–101.
78. Let me add, in passing, that the question of whether the traditions studied later in this chapter should be labeled "Kabbalistic" (contrary to Scholem's famous decision to identify the beginnings of Kabbalah proper with *Sepher ha-Bahir*) or "proto-Kabbalistic" (as was done, for example, by Kellner, *Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism*, 18–25), seems to me more semantic than substantial, and it need not detain us here.
79. Another important example is provided by Moshe Idel's attempts to identify within a vast body of anonymous short Kabbalistic treatises and magical texts the "fingerprints" of Nehemiah ben Shlomo, the thirteenth-century mystic-prophet-magician of Erfurt. For the most pertinent of these studies, see Idel, "Between Ashkenaz and Castille in the Thirteenth Century," 475–554 (Heb.), with further bibliography.
80. See Hai's responsum (in Emanuel, *Newly Discovered Geonic Responsa*), 126.
81. Ibid., 137.
82. For what follows, see also Schäfer, "Jewish Liturgy and Magic," vol. 1, 541–556.
83. Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte*, vol. 2, no. 26 (=T.-S. K 1.35 + T.-S. K 1.48), 1a/11–2a/26.
84. See also the pertinent examples in Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte*, vol. 2, nos. 22–30, with references to the appearance of some of these texts not only in the Cairo Genizah but also in European Jewish manuscripts.
85. For *Sepher ha-Razim*'s famous adjuration of the sun, see Morgan, *Sepher ha-Razim*, 69–72; for *The Sword of Moses*, see Harari, "The Sword of Moses," 86–87; see also *Sepher Raziel* (Amsterdam: Moses b. Abraham Mendes Coutinho, 1701), fol. 6b.
86. Hai's own responsum is a case in point – when discussing God's esoteric names (in Emanuel, *Newly Discovered Geonic Responsa*, 134–135), he provides some data

about their actual contents, but he never divulges the entire name, even when it is clear that he himself knows it!

87. See Harari, "The Sword of Moses," 83, 86, 89, respectively.
88. My citations from this text are based on the popular edition, *Sepher Shimmush Torah* (Jerusalem: n.p., 2001) (Heb.). A critical edition and a detailed study of the manuscript evidence for this work, which clearly was very popular throughout the Middle Ages, remain scholarly desiderata.
89. Ed. Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrasch*, vol. 1, 58–61.
90. See *Shimmush Torah*, 5 = *Maayan ha-Hokhma*, 61: "And all the angels of service became his [Moses'] friends, and each one of them transmitted to him a word of healing and the secret of the names that are derived from each Torah-portion in all their uses."
91. For Scholem's view, see, for example, *Kabbalah*, 20, 170: "The magical uses of the Torah are discussed in the book *Shimmushei Torah*, which dates at the very latest from the geonic period."
92. See Rebiger, "Bildung magischer Namen im *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim*," 7–24; and especially Rebiger, *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim*, 29, 39–40.
93. Out of sixty-nine magical uses listed in the printed text, only fourteen require writing (found on pp. 17, 20, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34 [two cases], 36 [two cases], 37, and 38). In this respect, even the book *Shimmush Tehillim* (*The Use of the Psalms*), recently edited by Bill Rebiger, displays a far greater emphasis on ritual actions than the *Shimmush(e) Torah*.
94. And I note, for example, that in the fifteenth-century manuscript of Jewish magic, New York Public Library Heb. 190, of which I am now preparing a critical edition, one may find several examples of recipes known from the *Shimmush(e) Torah* – e.g., 103, ll. 6–8, and 240, l. 1.
95. For the Latin version, made by Flavius Mithridates, see Buzzetta, "Aspetti della magia naturalis e della scientia cabalae," 680–681.
96. This holds true for later periods, as well; see, for example, Idel, "Jewish Magic from the Renaissance Period to Early Hasidism," 82–117; Etkes, "The Role of Magic and *Ba'alei Shem* in Ashkenazic Society," 69–104 (Heb.); and Chajes, "Rabbis and Their (In)Famous Magic."

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