



Circumcision and the Divine Name: A Study in the Transmission of Esoteric Doctrine

Author(s): Elliot R. Wolfson

Source: *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, Vol. 78, No. 1/2, (Jul. - Oct., 1987), pp. 77-112

Published by: University of Pennsylvania Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1454085>

Accessed: 15/08/2008 01:15

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=upenn>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

CIRCUMCISION AND THE DIVINE NAME:
A STUDY IN THE TRANSMISSION
OF ESOTERIC DOCTRINE

By ELLIOT R. WOLFSON, New York University

I

THE CORRELATION BETWEEN circumcision and the divine name is first alluded to in the *Midrash Tanḥuma*, where it is stated that God sealed his name *Shaddai* in the children of Israel.¹ There are two passages in *Tanḥuma* which make reference to this notion, one in *parashat Šav*, section 14,² and the other in *parashat Shemini*, section 8. From a careful examination of the two contexts it is clear that the former serves as the basis for the latter.³ It

¹ Cf. Baḥya ben Asher, *Be'ur 'al ha-Torah*, Gen. 2:7 (ed. Chavel [Jerusalem, 1981], p. 62). Drawing upon this older midrashic motif, Abraham Abulafia asserted that at the time of circumcision the name *Shaddai* is inscribed upon the infant's body; see M. Idel, *Kitve R. 'Avraham 'Abul'afiyah u-Mishnato* (Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University, 1976), 1:146 and references on p. 154, n. 29. The specific connection between the name *Shaddai* and circumcision is biblical in origin; see Gen. 17:1. The connection between the *Tanḥuma* passage and the use of *Shaddai* in the biblical context is made by the thirteenth century kabbalist Joseph Hamadan in his *Sefer Ta'ame ha-Mišwot*, ed. M. Meier (Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1974), p. 242: "'Walk before Me and be blameless' (Gen. 17:1). What is [the meaning of] 'blameless' (תמים)? In the nose is the form of a *shin* and in the hand the form of a *dalet*, thus there are found [the letters which make up the name] דש [demon] . . . When the *yod*, which is the supernal form, is revealed, the name is completed, and that is the name דש. Thus the verse says, 'I am אלשי; walk before Me and be blameless.'" For a similar use of the *Tanḥuma* passage see *Zohar* 1:95a-b. According to yet another thirteenth century mystical tradition, first expressed by kabbalists like Moses de León, David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid and the anonymous author of *Tiqqune Zohar*, the Tetragrammaton is inscribed or engraved upon a person's face; see Scholem, "Physiognomy and Chiromancy" [Hebrew] *Sefer Assaf*, ed. Cassuto et al. (Jerusalem, 1953), p. 493, n. 55.

² This passage is repeated verbatim in some of the printed editions of *Tanḥuma*, *Tazri'a*, 5. See, however, the editio princeps (Mantua, 1563), p. 59c, where the occurrence of this passage in *Tazri'a* is lacking.

³ Specifically, in the passage from *Tanḥuma*, *Shemini*, 8, the tradition concerning the sealing of the name *Shaddai* on the three parts of the body is cited as

will therefore be sufficient for the purposes of this analysis to cite only the former:

All of Israel who are circumcised [upon death] enter the Garden of Eden, for the Holy One, blessed be He, has placed His name in Israel so that they will enter the Garden of Eden. And what is the name and the seal (השם והחותם) which He placed in them? It is [the name] שרי. He placed the *shin* in the nose, the *dalet* in the hand, and the *yod* on the [place of] circumcision. Therefore when a Jew dies there is an appointed angel in the Garden of Eden, who receives every circumcised Jew and brings him into the Garden of Eden.

The conception of the sealing of the name *Shaddai* on the physical human body is based in the first instance on the supposed morphological correspondence between the Hebrew letters which make up the divine name and the given parts of the human anatomy to which they refer.⁴ We see, moreover, that in this

proof of the teaching that the various precepts are connected to the human limbs. Hence the *shin* in the nose teaches us that one should not receive pleasure from something stolen, the *dalet* in the hand teaches that one should not do business by stealing, and the *yod* in the phallus teaches that one should not sin in sexual matters. Clearly this passage is a later reworking of an earlier aggadic conception concerning the correspondence of the 248 positive precepts to the 248 limbs; see B. Mak. 23b. It is also of interest to note that in the same context in *Tanḥuma* the injunction to circumcise the flesh (Gen. 17:1) is set in opposition to the prohibition of cutting gashes on one's flesh in mourning for the dead (Lev. 19:28), implying thereby that the sign of circumcision is a legitimate mark to denote the consecration of the Jew to God, in contrast with other stigmata which may have been employed in pagan rituals (cf. W. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, trans. by J. E. Steely [Nashville, 1970], p. 296, n. 186). See also *Lev. Rabbah* 19.6, where the sin of epispasm (שמרושך לו ערלה) is cited together with that of tattooing the flesh, and *Exod. Rabbah* 19.5, where the seal of Abraham (חותמו של אברהם), circumcision, is paralleled to the σημάντηρ (סימנטר), i.e., the mark of belonging, of an earthly king. Cf. S. Lieberman, "After Life in Early Rabbinic Literature," *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem, 1965), 2:526, n. 91; Betz, Στίγμα, in Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 7:662. See also P. Berakhot 1.4 and *Pesiḳta de-Rav Kahana, Beshallah*, ed. B. Mandelbaum (New York, 1962), p. 181, where *hotam* is paralleled to סימנטרין, σημάντηρον.

⁴ That this is the original intent of the comment is made clear in a later reworking of this midrash in I. Al-Naqawa, *Menorat ha-Ma'or*, ed. by H. Enelow (New York, 1932), 3:470 (and see I. Abuhab, *Menorat ha-Ma'or* [Jerusalem, 1961], p. 183): "Great is circumcision, for by means of it [God] sealed in the flesh

passage the idea of God placing his name or seal, *Shaddai*, in Israel is connected with the view that each circumcised Jew upon death will gain entry to the Garden of Eden. Although the name *Shaddai* encompasses three limbs, the nose, the hand, and the phallus, it is clear that the point of the midrash is to emphasize the imprinting of the divine name, or a letter thereof, upon the male organ, for it is by virtue of circumcision alone that the Jew is ushered by an appointed angel into the Garden of Eden.⁵

Two points related to this text are especially noteworthy. First, the claim that circumcision guarantees the Jew's entry into the Garden of Eden is but the positive expression of the negative

of Israel his name *Shaddai*, the image of the *shin* in the nostrils, the image of the *dalet* in the arm, and the image of the *yod* in [the place of] circumcision." See D. Kaufmann, *Die Sinne* (Budapest, 1884), p. 156, n. 25. Concerning the reflection of the letter *shin* in the nose, see Eleazar of Worms, *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh* (Jerusalem, 1968), p. 31b. Cf. also the following comment in Menahem Šiyoni, *Sefer Šiyoni* (Jerusalem, 1964), p. 10a: "I have found in the *Megillat Setarim* a reason why we recite the benediction 'with the sign of the holy covenant' [on this benediction, see below, n. 7]. Know that [the name] *Shaddai* is the seal (חותמו) of the Holy One, blessed be He. When the head of a man and his two arms are outstretched above, it appears as the likeness of a *shin*; when his left arm is extended and his right is resting [at his side], it appears as the likeness of a *dalet*; and [the place of] the covenant of circumcision is [the likeness of] a *yod*. Thus [is formed the name] *Shaddai*." On the sign of circumcision as the likeness of the letter *yod* see the sources cited below, nn. 21–22.

⁵ Cf. the tradition reported by M. Grossberg, *Haši Menasheh* (London, 1801), p. 19, in the name of R. Naḥshon Gaon (flourished 9th century) concerning the custom of circumcising an infant who died within the first eight days of his life, so that "he will not go to the world [to come] without the seal from below." And cf. Joshua ibn Shu'āib, *Derashot 'al ha-Torah* (Cracow, 1573; reprinted Jerusalem, 1969), p. 7a, who reports a similar geonic tradition of circumcising the infant who died within the first eight days, so "that he may bring the seal with him." (For the fuller context of ibn Shu'āib's remarks see below, n. 30.) The purported geonic tradition must be seen in the context of the apotropaic function of the seal of circumcision, particularly as it is described in *Tanḥuma*. See, however, S. Lieberman, "After Life in Early Rabbinic Literature," p. 526, n. 97, who concludes that the formulation of "bringing the seal" is of late origin. Lieberman notes a similarity between the use of the seal here and the Christian use of σφραγις to denote the "seal of salvation . . . with the signet which enables the deceased to be admitted to certain regions in the other world." He does not specify any dates or sources, and it is therefore difficult to determine whether he thought that the use of the seal in the texts attributed to the geonic period should be construed as a later (medieval) addition influenced by Christological ideas.

claim, stated in a host of rabbinic texts,⁶ that circumcision provides the Jew with protection from Gehenna. These rabbinic notions, in turn, must be seen as weakened forms of an ancient Near Eastern mythological conception which regarded circumcision as an apotropaic rite.⁷ Significantly, however, in the *Tanḥuma* passage the positive entry into the Garden of Eden, and not simply the protection from Gehenna, is made dependent on the name *Shaddai* which is imprinted or sealed within the flesh of

⁶ See B. ^cEr. 19a; *Gen. Rabbah*, 21.9 (ed. Theodor and Albeck [Jerusalem, 1965], p. 204), 48.8 (p. 483); *Tanḥuma, Lekh Lekha*, 20; *Ṣav* 14 (= *Tazri'a* 5); *Exod. Rabbah*, 19.4; *Midrash Tehillim*, 6.1 (ed. S. Buber [Jerusalem, 1967], p. 58). The idea had a widespread influence in subsequent Jewish literature. Cf. *Mahzor Vitri*, ed. S. Hurwitz (Nurnberg, 1923), p. 627; *Arugat ha-Bošem*, ed. E. Urbach (Jerusalem, 1939), 1:133; the commentary of Baḥya ben Asher on Gen. 17:13 (ed. Chavel, 1:161), and his *Kad ha-Qemah*, ed. Chavel, p. 248; *Ṭur Yoreh De'ah*, §260.

⁷ Evidence of such a belief amongst the ancient Israelites may be gathered from the *ḥatan damim* episode in Exod. 4:24–26. The apotropaic function of circumcision is operative in several rabbinic contexts as well, including the benediction to be uttered at the circumcision ritual as it has been transmitted, with slight textual variations, in Tos. Ber. 7.13, and in the Palestinian (Ber. 9.3) and Babylonian (Shab. 137b) Talmuds: “Blessed be He who has sanctified His beloved from his mother’s womb, who has given a law for his flesh, and has sealed his progeny with the sign of the holy covenant (חַתָּם בְּאֹרֶת בְּרִית קֹדֶשׁ). Thus by virtue of this [circumcision] the living God, our strength, has commanded that we deliver the beloved of our flesh from destruction.” For a discussion of this motif in ancient Near Eastern literature and its development in Second Temple and rabbinic texts, see D. Flusser and S. Safrai, “Who Sanctifies the Beloved from the Womb,” *Studies in Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 329–336 [in Hebrew]. It is of interest to note that medieval halakhic authorities interpreted the word שַׁחַת in the benediction, which I have translated as “destruction,” as a reference to Gehenna, thus understanding the benediction as an affirmation of the aggadic theme that circumcision saves one from Gehenna. Cf. Rashi to B. Shab. 173b, ad loc.; *Abudarham ha-Shalem* (Jerusalem, 1963), p. 351; Aaron ha-Kohen of Lunel, ²*Orhot Hayyim*, ed. M. Schlesinger (Berlin, 1902), 2:10; *Kol Bo*, 42d; R. Ya^caqov ha-Gozer, *Sefer Zikhron Berit la-Rishonim*, ed. J. Glassberg (Berlin, 1892), p. 91. This interpretation is based, of course, on the rabbinic claim (see B. ^cEr. 19a), that שַׁחַת is one of the seven names for Gehenna. Cf. D. Flusser and S. Safrai, “Who Sanctifies the Beloved from the Womb,” pp. 333–34. The apotropaic power of circumcision to avert danger is brought into clear focus also in *Pirque Rabbi Eli'ezer*, chap. 10, 26a (and cf. *Midrash Yonah in Bet ha-Midrash*, ed. A. Jellinek [Jerusalem, 1967], 1:98) in a passage dealing with the confrontation between Jonah and Leviathan: “[Jonah] showed him [Leviathan] the seal of Abraham (חַתָּמוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם) and said, ‘Look at the covenant [of circumcision].’ Leviathan saw it and ran away from Jonah a distance of two days.”

every Jew. The full import of this claim may be gathered from the fact that this name, as we know particularly from Geonic sources, was conceived of as possessing a special potency to ward off evil or demonic beings. By virtue of this function as a protective name, *Shaddai* was connected with specific rituals, most notably tefillin⁸ and mezuzah,⁹ thereby infusing the religious object with

⁸ It would appear from one talmudic source, B. Shab. 62a, that Abaye (4th century Babylonian amora) has already affirmed an intrinsic link between the name *Shaddai* and the phylacteries, for he speaks here about the letters *shin*, *dalet*, and *yod* of the phylacteries as being a law given to Moses at Mount Sinai. That there is some difficulty with this reading, however, is attested by the fact that the reference to the *dalet* and *yod* is missing in many of the medieval commentaries, such as those of R. Isaac Alfasi and R. Asher b. Yeḥiel. Cf. Isaac b. Abba Mari, *Sefer ha-ʿIttur* (New York, 1955), *Hilkhot Tefillin*, p. 117; Isaac b. Moses of Vienna, *ʿOr Zaruʿa* (Zhitomir, 1862), *Hilkhot Tefillin*, §566, 77b. These words are also lacking in MS Munich 95 of the Talmud; see R. N. Rabinowitz, *Diqduqe Soferim* (Münich, 1873), to B. Shab. ad loc. Moreover, the other parallel sources attributed to Abaye the tradition concerning the letter *shin* without mentioning the *dalet* and *yod*; see B. Shab. 28b, Men. 35a; P. Meg. 1.9. Indeed, the specific determination of the *dalet* and *yod* are never given in talmudic or classical midrashic literature. See Michael Levi Rodkinson, *Tefillah le-Mosheh* (Pressburg, 1883), pp. 20, 67, 120. Cf. also Judah b. Elijah Hadassi, *Sefer ʿEshkol ha-Kofer* (1836), p. 35c-d, who in mentioning the various customs related to tefillin mentions only the knot of the head phylacteries which is in the form of a *shin*. For a different view regarding the authenticity of the reading of *dalet* and *yod*, see Solomon ibn Adret, *Novellae* (New York, 1961), to B. Shab. 28b and 62a. We learn only from geonic sources that these refer to the respective knots in the straps of the phylacteries for the head and arm. Cf. *Sefer Halakhot Gedolot*, ed. E. Hildesheimer (Jerusalem, 1971), p. 492; *Shimusha ʿRabbah*, cited by Isaac b. Abba Mari, *Sefer ha-ʿIttur*, *Hilkhot Tefillin*, p. 117; B. Lewin, *ʿOzar ha-Geonim* (Jerusalem, 1928), 2:33; Sedeqiah b. Abraham ha-Rofe, *Shibbole ha-Leqet ha-Shalem*, ed. S. Buber (Vilna, 1886), p. 192a (in the name of R. Natronai Gaon); Rashi to B. Men. 35b, s.v. קשר של תפילין, B. Shab. 28b, s.v. שין של תפילין; Ḥul. 9a, s.v. קשר של תפילין; Abraham b. Isaac of Narbonne, *Sefer ha-ʿEshkol*, ed. Ch. Albeck (Jerusalem, 1980), p. 228; Maimonides, *Hilkhot Tefillin*, 3.13; *Tur*, *ʿOrah Ḥayyim*, 32. To be sure, the knot of the phylacteries itself is mentioned several times in the Talmud (cf. B. Ber. 7a; Men. 35b; ʿEr. 97a; and see P. Meg. 1.9 where the knots of the phylacteries are spoken of in the plural) but never with any specification. Thus cf. Isaac b. Abba Mari, *Sefer ha-ʿIttur*, *ibid.*; *Tosafot*, B. Ber. 6a and Men. 35b, s.v. אלו תפילין שבראש; R. Moses b. Jacob of Coucy, *Sefer Mišvot Gedolot* (Jerusalem, 1983), 2:14b; R. Asher b. Yeḥiel, *Pisqe ha-Rosh* on R. Isaac Alfasi, *Hilkhot Tefillin* (corresponding to B. Men. 35b); Isaac b. Moses of Vienna, *ʿOr Zaruʿa*, ad loc.; *Bet Yosef*, *Tur*, *ʿOrah Ḥayyim*, 32, s.v. יעשה קשר קטן.

⁹ On the magical implications of the name *Shaddai* in conjunction with mezuzah see V. Aptowitz, "Les noms de Dieu et des anges dans la mezuza," *REJ* 60

magical significance.¹⁰ The claim in *Tanḥuma* that *Shaddai* is sealed on the flesh must likewise, I submit, be seen in the context of such a magical conception.

This leads me to the second point. It is possible that the specific language of *Tanḥuma* reflects a joining of the older aggadic view with a theurgical conception of the divine names known to us from *merkavah* mysticism. This is suggested to me by the use of the word *ḥotam*, seal, in apposition to the word *shem*, name. To be sure, the root חתם was used in connection with circumcision from a very early period, dating in fact to the second century B.C.E., as is attested by an Aramaic fragment of the Testament of Levi.¹¹ Moreover, the conceptual link between a name and the root חתם is evident in a host of talmudic contexts where various forms of that root are used in connection with the signing of a contract or document.¹² What is novel in the *Tanḥuma* passage,

(1910): 41, n. 5; Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (New York, 1939), pp. 148, 158.

¹⁰ To be sure, the rituals of mezuzah (for sources see Aptowitz, "Les noms de Dieu," p. 39, n. 1) and tefillin (see Rodkinson, *Tefillah le-Mosheh*, p. 22) were both viewed from a very early period as protective charms, but it is only later, in the geonic period, perhaps under the influence of Jewish mystical trends, that the magical dimension was associated specifically with the name *Shaddai*.

¹¹ See R. H. Charles, *The Greek Versions of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Oxford, 1908), p. 245, cited by D. Flusser and S. Safrai, "Who Sanctifies the Beloved from the Womb," p. 333, n. 14. Cf. also its Greek counterpart, σφραγίς, used by Paul to refer to circumcision in Rom. 4:11; the usage is found also in *Barnabas* 9:6. Cf. *Exod. Rabbah* 19.5 (cited above, n. 4); a fragment from *Midrash Yelammedenu* cited in *Bet ha-Midrash*, ed. A. Jellinek, 5:162: "God loves naught but circumcision, for it is the seal of the Holy One, blessed be He (חֹתֶמֶת שֶׁל קַב"ה)"; Targum to Cant. 3:8: "Each and every one of them had the seal of circumcision [חֹתֶמֶת מִלֵּיה] on their flesh as it was sealed in the flesh of Abraham." Mention should also be made of the language of the second benediction in Grace after meals, which acknowledges the gift of circumcision as the covenant which God "has sealed in our flesh." Cf. B. Ber. 49a; P. Ber. 1.6. See Fritzer, Σφραγίς, in Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 7:947-48; F. J. Dölger, *Sphragis: eine altchristliche Taufbezeichnung in ihren Beziehungen zur profanen und religiösen Kultur des Altertums* (Paderborn, 1911), p. 80. Finally, it is of interest to note in this connection that in the Qumran scroll 4Q 185, col. II, l. 4 (published in John M. Allegro, *Qumran Cave IV* [Oxford, 1968], p. 85) we read: חֹתֶמֶת חֶקֶק לִישָׁחֶק. (I thank Professor Lawrence Schiffman for calling my attention to this passage.) Allegro, op. cit., p. 86, renders this "the formula he inscribed for Isaac." Is it possible that we have here a reference to circumcision in the word חֹתֶמֶת?

¹² See, e.g., B. Giṭ. 9b, 19b, Ket. 55a, San. 29b, BB 136a.

however, is the combination of the term *hotam* with a name of God, for indeed according to this source the seal which God places in the Jew is his very name.¹³ The notion of a magical seal composed of the letters of a divine name which protects the mystic from potential harm is well known from the *merkavah* texts.¹⁴ In addition, one occasionally finds in these writings, such as the *Merkavah Rabbah*¹⁵ and the text published by Scholem under the name *Ma'aseh Merkavah*,¹⁶ the notion that the letters

¹³ See the passage from *Ṣiyyoni* cited above, n. 4. The notion that the divine name, presumably the Tetragrammaton, is written on each Israelite is affirmed in *Exod. Rabbah* 15.17: "The great ones of the nations will see the smallest one in Israel and will desire to bow down before him because the name is written on each and every one (השם כתוב על כל אחד ואחד)." According to the parable that is given to illustrate the point, the name written on the Jew is comparable to the figure (פרוטומה, προτομή) of the king engraved upon a stick.

¹⁴ Cf. G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1956), p. 50; I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden, 1980), pp. 106–07. The notion of the seal as a name of God is evident as well in the *Odes of Solomon* 4:8; see Dölger, *Sphragis*, pp. 88–89; G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York, 1960), p. 133. An exact linguistic parallel to this notion is found in non-Jewish Gnostic sources of the second and third centuries, although in the latter the magical seal protects the individual from demonic beings and not simply hostile angels as in the more orthodox Judaized form. See sources cited by Fritzer, Σφραγίς, in Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 7:953. Of particular interest for our purposes is a tradition found in Mandaean texts, where the process of sealing (*ḥatamta*), accomplished through anointing with oil rather than cutting of flesh, is said to protect the initiate against demonic and evil forces. The Mandaeans, in line with a process well attested in early Christian sources, whereby the term "seal," (σφραγίς) came to refer primarily to baptism and not to circumcision (see Fritzer, *op. cit.*, 7:952), viewed the act of sealing as part of the baptismal ritual. See K. Rudolph, *Die Mandaer* (Göttingen, 1961), 2:155–74, 198–201; idem, *Gnosis*, tr. and ed. by R. McL. Wilson (San Francisco, 1983), pp. 228, 361; G. Stroumsa, "Seal of the Prophets: The Nature of a Manichaean Metaphor," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7 (1986): 65. See also *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, ed. H. Betz (Chicago, 1986), p. 134.

¹⁵ Cf. M. Mossayef, *Merkavah Shelemah* (Jerusalem, 1971), p. 5b, and the various manuscript readings in P. Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen, 1981), §708. Concerning this text see Schäfer, "Prolegomena zu einer kritischen Edition und Analyse der Merkava Rabba," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 5 (1977): 65–99.

¹⁶ See G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York, 1960), §15, p. 109: "R. Ishmael said: I have sealed myself (חתמת) with seven seals (חתימות)." As the text continues, the incomprehensible names are attached to the various bodily limbs, the feet, heart, right and left arms,

of a divine name or names are sealed on the limbs of the mystic's body.¹⁷ Finally, the *Tanḥuma* passage concludes by stating that it is an angel who receives the circumcised individual and brings him into the Garden of Eden, a motif which parallels that of the celestial tour guide known from both the apocalyptic and *merkavah* materials. In the *Hekhalot Zuṭarti*¹⁸ and *Hekhalot Rabbati*,¹⁹ for instance, the one who ascends to the celestial realm must present the appropriate seals to each of the angelic guardians stationed at the various palaces and by so doing is allowed to enter that palace. Analogously, in the *Tanḥuma* passage the individual must have the seal of *Shaddai* in order to enter Paradise. Hence the identification of the seal as the name *Shaddai*, on the one hand, and the apotropaic function which that seal or name plays, on the other, brings this passage into close proximity with the theurgical-magical world of *merkavah* mysticism. Whether or not there is an actual historical connection between the mid-rashic text and the mystical tradition, it is abundantly clear that

neck, and so on. According to the reading of MS Munich 22 in Schäfer, *Synopse*, §566, the text concludes with the statement "the seven seals that R. Ishmael sealed on his heart." Cf. also Schäfer, op. cit., §625: "he sealed (חתם) himself with the name of the forty-two letters."

¹⁷ A related tradition is the assignment of names to the divine limbs, as we find it in certain sections of *Shi'ur Qomah*. See M. Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* (Lanham, 1983), p. 103 and texts on pp. 197–99, 216. However, I am unaware of the usage of the root חתם in these contexts. The connection between these merkavah texts and the *Shi'ur Qomah* tradition has already been noted by M. Idel, "Olam ha-Mal'akhim bi-demut 'Adam," *Studies in Jewish Mysticism, Philosophy, and Ethical Literature Presented to Isaiah Tishby on his Seventy-fifth Birthday* (Jerusalem, 1986), p. 5, n. 14. Mention should also be made of the fact that in the physiognomic and chiromantic texts of the merkavah mystics shapes of certain letters are said to be inscribed on parts of the body. See the article by Scholem referred to above, n. 1, and see also I. Gruenwald, "Qeṭa'im ḥadashim me-sifrut hakkarat panim vesidre sirtuṭin," *Tarbiz* 40 (1971): 301–19; idem, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, p. 222. For the development of this motif in Zoharic sources see my forthcoming paper, "Dimmuy 'antropomorfiyyut ve-simboliqah shel ha-'otiyot be-Sefer ha-Zohar," to be published in the "Proceedings of the Third International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism." The use of this material in Lurianic kabbalah has been studied by L. Fine, "The Art of Metoposcopy: A Study in Isaac Luria's Charismatic Knowledge," *AJS Review* 11 (1986): 79–101.

¹⁸ See *Hekhalot Zuṭarti*, ed. R. Elijor, *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, Supplement 1 (1982): 32–33 (in Schäfer, *Synopse*, §§413–17).

¹⁹ See in particular *Hekhalot Rabbati*, chaps. 19–21, ed. Wertheimer, *Batte Midrashot* (Jerusalem, 1980), 1:95–99 (in Schäfer, *Synopse*, §§219–31).

the sign of circumcision functions in the former as the seal functions in the latter, i.e., as a protective mark.²⁰ Moreover, in the comment from *Tanḥuma*, for the first time in rabbinic literature as far as I am aware, a clear connection is made between the apotropaic motif and the divine name, for it is specifically the letter *yod* of the name *Shaddai* imprinted or sealed on the phallus which guarantees the circumcised Jew God's protection and beneficence.

II

The midrashic identification of the male organ with the letter *yod* had a significant influence on subsequent medieval rabbinic literature, particularly in mystical texts²¹ but in nonmystical works as well. Typically, medieval authorities, using the correlation

²⁰ It is of interest to note that phylacteries, also commonly referred to as an *ʔot* (sign), are connected with the divine name (based on Deut. 28:10) in B. Ber. 6a. On the connection between the phylacteries and the name *Shaddai*, see above, n. 9. The phylacteries are also referred to as a seal (*ḥotam*), on the basis of a midrashic reading of Song of Songs 8:6; cf. *Song of Songs Rabbah*, ad loc. For a later kabbalistic reworking of this midrashic theme see *Tiqqune Zohar* 22, 65b.

²¹ The identification of the *yod* and the place of circumcision, or the *sefirah Yesod* which corresponds to the phallus, is widespread in thirteenth century kabbalistic documents. See, e.g., Isaac the Blind, *Perush Sefer Yeṣirah*, published by Scholem in the appendix to *Ha-Qabbalah be-Provans*, ed. R. Schatz (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 2; *Perush ha-ʔamiti shel ha-Ramban le-Sefer Yeṣirah*, ed. Scholem, *Qiryat Sefer* 6 (1929–30): 406; Todros Abulafia, *ʔOṣar ha-Kavod ha-Shalem* (Warsaw, 1879), p. 12b; *Zohar* 1:13a, 56a, 95a; 2:36a; 3:142a (*ʔIdraʔ Rabbaʔ*), 215b, 220a; *Tiqqune Zohar* 22 (66a); *The Book of the Pomegranate: Moses de León's Sefer ha-Rimmon*, ed. E. Wolfson (Atlanta, 1988), p. 240 (Hebrew section); Moses de León, *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, ed. A. W. Greenup (London, 1911), p. 63; Joseph Gikatilla, *Shaʕare ʔOrah*, ed. J. Ben-Shlomo (Jerusalem, 1981), 1:118, n. 85; Joseph Hamadan, *Sefer Taʕame ha-Miṣwot*, ed. M. Meier, pp. 242–43, 246; idem, *Sefer ha-Tashaq*, ed. J. Zwelling (Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1975), pp. 131–32. For the most part in the *Raʕaya Mehemna* section of the *Zohar* as well as in the *Tiqqune Zohar* the letter *yod*, or the sign of the covenant, symbolizes the aspect of the feminine *Shekhinah* united with the masculine *Yesod*; see *Zohar* 1:93b, 266a; 2:258a; 3:256a, 257a, 263a; *Tiqqune Zohar* §§13 (29a), 21 (62b), 30 (73b), 47 (85a), 70 (120a). The second line of interpretation was accepted by Isaac Luria, at least as we may gather from the writings of Ḥayyim Vital; cf. *Liqqutei Torah*, in *Kitve ha-ʔARI* (Jerusalem, 1963), 12:52–56; and *Shaʕar ha-Miṣwot*, *Kitve ha-ʔARI*, 7:16 (*Lekh Lekha*). The identification of the *ʔot berit* as the letter *yod* is also found in the Pietistic sources; for references see the following note.

established in *Tanḥuma*, understood the biblical expression for circumcision, ^ו*ot berit* (see Gen. 17:1), “the sign of the covenant,” as well as the liturgical formula *be-^וot berit qodesh*, “with the sign of the holy covenant,” as referring respectively to the letter of the covenant, i.e., the letter *yod*. As a representative example of this I cite from R. Abraham b. Nathan ha-Yarḥi’s halakhic compendium *Sefer ha-Manhig*, written in Toledo in the year 1204: “With the sign of the holy covenant (*be-^וot berit qodesh*),’ this refers to the circumcision which is made like a *yod*.”²² In addition to this earlier aggadic tradition, however, one finds in twelfth and thirteenth century documents, deriving from both Germany and Spain, an elaborate connection established between circumcision and the most sacred of divine names, the Tetragrammaton. In the writings of the Ḥaside Ashkenaz we thus find for the first time that the older midrashic notion is reinterpreted in light of this new conception, for the letter of the covenant, the *yod*, is taken as a reference to the first letter of the Tetragrammaton itself and not simply the last letter of the name *Shaddai*.²³ The remainder of this study will consist of tracing the transmission of this tradition from the German Ḥasidic texts to the Spanish kabbalah.²⁴ At the outset it may be said that the esoteric conception suggested in the Pietistic sources was appropriated by the

²² R. Abraham b. Nathan ha-Yarḥi, *Sefer ha-Manhig*, ed. Y. Raphael (Jerusalem, 1978), 2:579–80. Cf. Aaron ha-Kohen of Lunel, ^ו*Orhot Hayyim*, ed. M. Schlesinger, 2:15. See also R. Eleazar of Worms, *Sefer ha-Shem*, MS British Museum 737, fol. 180b: “Since the *yod* is placed in the man it serves [to denote the] masculine [form], for the flesh that surrounds the corona is like a *yod*. Therefore it is called the letter of the holy covenant (אות ברית קודש).” And see the commentary on *birkat milah* from R. Eleazar’s circle published in the *Siddur of R. Solomon b. Samson of Garmaise*, ed. M. Hershler (Jerusalem, 1971), p. 283: “‘And his descendants will be sealed with the sign of the holy covenant (באות ברית קודש)’ . . . As it is written, ‘It shall serve as a sign of the covenant (לאות ברית)’ (Gen 9:13); this is the holy letter (אות קודש) which surrounds the corona . . . the flesh is crowned like a great *yod*, and the *yod* is from the beginning of the name [i.e., the Tetragrammaton].” Cf. Joseph Hamadan, *Sefer Ta’ame ha-Miṣwot*, p. 246: “‘[ברית קודש]—באות ברית קודש’—the *yod* which is disclosed in the corona, the holy covenant that alludes to the supernal covenant. This is the literal meaning (פשוט).”

²³ See the citation from the Pietistic commentary on the benediction of the circumcision ritual cited in the preceding note.

²⁴ The precise relation between the German Pietists and the Provençal and Spanish kabbalists is a question that has engaged a host of scholars. Cf. A. Epstein, “Le-Qorot ha-Qabbalah ha-^וAshkenazit,” *Mi-Qadmoniyot ha-Yehudim*:

kabbalists, especially in Castile in the later part of the thirteenth century,²⁵ and transformed by them into a decidedly mystical conception involving a theosophical experience of God. *Prima facie* it would seem that the Pietist's use of this tradition is strictly in line with the semimagical conception which, as I have noted, underlies the passage in *Tanḥuma*. It will be seen from our textual analysis, however, that already in the Pietistic sources, especially those of R. Eleazar of Worms and his circle, the esoteric tradition concerning the correlation of the divine name and circumcision contains an important theosophical component as well, which involves a mystical experience of *devequt* (communion). The transposition of the magical into a full-fledged mystical notion, a process that is well-attested with respect to several fundamental kabbalistic doctrines, was accomplished only in Spain, where the theosophical conception of the divine physiognomy had crystallized.

The exegetical locus for this correlation in Ashkenazi sources is Deut. 30:12, "Who among us can go up to the heavens," *מי יעלה* לננו השמימה. The interpretation of this verse, which emphasizes the correlation of circumcision and the divine name, is cited in the name of R. Judah ben Samuel he-Ḥasid (d. 1217) by R. Abraham ben Azriel in his *Arugat ha-Bošem*:

Another hint that circumcision saves from Gehenna: it is written, "Who among us can go up to the heavens," *מי יעלה* (לנו השמימה). The first consonants [spell] מילה [i.e., circumcision] and the last consonants יהוה [the Tetragrammaton].

Kitve R. Avraham Epstein, ed. A. M. Haberman (Jerusalem, 1957), 2:226–50; Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, ed. by R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton, 1987), especially pp. 41–42, 97–123, 215–16, 325, n. 261; Joseph Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Ḥasidut Ṭashkenaz* (Jerusalem, 1968), pp. 97, 118, 128–29; Ivan Marcus, *Piety and Society* (Leiden, 1981), p. 22; Moshe Idel, "Ha-Sefirot she-me'al ha-Sefirot," *Tarbiz* 51 (1982): 274–77. The question has been most recently treated by Dan, "Ha-Qabbalah ha-Ṭashkenazit: 'Iyyun Nosaf,'" "Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987): 125–40.

²⁵ As Dan has noted (*Torat ha-Sod shel Ḥasidut Ṭashkenaz*, p. 261), the Castilian kabbalists, Jacob and Isaac ha-Kohen, were the main channels for the transmission of ideas derived from German Ḥasidic sources to kabbalists of the later part of the thirteenth century, including the author of the *Zohar*. On this later influence see already Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 173, 226.

That is to say, whoever is circumcised will ascend heavenward and will not descend to Gehenna.²⁶

This comment occurs in the context of a discussion on the various merits of circumcision. One of the proofs which R. Abraham offers to substantiate the rabbinic claim that circumcision saves one from Gehenna²⁷ is based on R. Judah's interpretation of Deut. 30:12. The verse instructs us that he who is circumcised will ascend heavenward and is thereby protected from Gehenna. That this is so is guaranteed by the assumed correlation between *milah* and the Tetragrammaton derived by means of an exegetical method well known from R. Judah's school,²⁸ for in the key words "Who among us can go up to the heavens?" the first consonants spell *milah* and the last *YHWH*. The Pietistic view closely follows the midrashic conception enunciated in the passage from *Tanḥuma* which was cited above. According to the *midrash*, the Jew who has the seal of the name *Shaddai* on his body is guaranteed entry into the Garden of Eden when he dies. In the version of the German Ḥasidim the correlation is between circumcision and the Tetragrammaton,²⁹ and is not simply one of the letters of the name *Shaddai*. Notwithstanding this change in detail, it is clear that the basic theme of the Pietistic eschatology is determined largely by the midrashic passage.³⁰

²⁶ *Arugat ha-Bošem*, 1:227. It is of interest to note that in *Yalqut Re'uveneri* (Warsaw, 1884), to Gen. 17:12, 1:87a, the correlation of circumcision and the Tetragrammaton based on the Pietistic exegesis of Deut. 30:12 is attributed to the *Sefer ha-Bahir*. Needless to say, no such reference is to be found in the *Bahir* that we have.

²⁷ See references given above, n. 6.

²⁸ Cf. the tenth of the seventy-three gates enumerated by Eleazar of Worms in his *Sefer ha-Ḥokhmah*, published by Dan, *Iyyunim be-Sifrut Ḥaside 'Ashkenaz* (Ramat Gan, 1975), p. 53: שער התחלת או סופי תיבורת.

²⁹ The intrinsic connection between Gehenna and the Tetragrammaton is made also by Eleazar of Worms in his *Sod ha-Shem*, MS British Museum 737, ff. 281a–82a. Eleazar concludes with "And this is [the meaning of] 'to establish His name there' (Deut. 12:11), i.e., to save those who bow down to His name from Gehenna, for Gehenna is for those who profane the name or mention it in vain" (f. 281a). And see already ²*Otiyyot de-R. 'Aqiva*², *Batte Midrashot*, ed. S. Wertheimer, 2:366, where it is stated that the Tetragrammaton was not revealed to Abraham or Isaac because the seed of their respective progeny, Ishmael and Esau, were destined to descend to Gehenna.

³⁰ This point did not escape the notice of Joshua ibn Shu'aib, who cites the Pietistic exegesis of Deut. 30:12 in connection with the aggadic idea that circumcision saves the Jew from Gehenna. See above, n. 5.

The exegesis of Deut. 30:12 is reiterated in a commentary to the Pentateuch which has been attributed to R. Judah's leading disciple, R. Eleazar ben Judah of Worms (d. ca. 1230). Joseph Dan has shown, however, that the author of this work was not R. Eleazar but rather another disciple of R. Judah, who employed the esoteric techniques of the Kalonymide school without relying on the works of R. Eleazar.³¹ The fact that this exegesis occurs in this commentary as well as in other passages which can be genuinely attributed to R. Eleazar or his circle, as we shall see, indicates that the teaching was derived in fact from R. Judah himself. The crucial comment occurs in the commentary to Gen. 18:1:

From the [time of the] creation of the world the Holy One, blessed be He, desired to give Abraham [the commandment] of circumcision, as it is written, "If not for my covenant day and night the statutes of heaven and earth I would not have established" (Jer. 33:25). "Who among us can go up to the heavens" (מי יעלה לנו השמימה). The first consonant in each word [spells] מילה and the last [the name] יהוה. That is [the meaning of] "You must be blameless with the Lord your God" (Deut. 18:13). Therefore it is written that [Ishmael and his household] "were circumcised with him [Abraham]" (Gen. 17:27), [followed immediately by the verse] "And the Lord appeared to him" (ibid. 18:1).

In this passage one finds a further application of R. Judah's exegesis: the close relationship between man and God in this world, and not merely that which comes about as a consequence of death, is made dependent upon the act of circumcision. Echoing the talmudic explanation, the anonymous Pietist asserts that a person is complete, expressed biblically in terms of "walking blamelessly" with God, when one is circumcised.³² Moreover, the theophany to Abraham at the terebinths of Mamre is consequent to the act of circumcision; the ritual of circumcision is thus viewed as an initiation into visionary experience.³³ That the

³¹ Cf. J. Dan, "The Ashkenazi Hasidic 'Gates of Wisdom,'" *Hommage à Georges Vajda*, ed. by G. Nahon and C. Touati (Louvain, 1980), pp. 183–89. I thank Professor Ivan Marcus for drawing my attention to this article.

³² This is based on earlier rabbinic exegesis; see, e.g., B. Ned. 32a.

³³ This motif, too, can be traced to earlier midrashic statements. I have discussed the development of this theme in midrashic and Zoharic sources in my

circumcised individual is in a special relationship with, indeed in close proximity to, God,³⁴ is supported by Deut. 30:12, where the first consonants spell *milah* and the last the Tetragrammaton. Through this exegetical device, examples of which abound in German Ḥasidic sources, the close nexus between circumcision and attachment to the divine is scripturally grounded.

In other contexts which can be genuinely attributed to R. Eleazar or his immediate circle, R. Judah's exegesis reappears. Hence in a commentary on the blessings of circumcision that is extant in several manuscripts,³⁵ one again finds the by now familiar exegesis of Deut. 30:12. In this context, moreover, the notion of *devequt*, the cleaving of the individual to the divine, implied by the correlation between circumcision and the divine name, is explicitly mentioned:

Thus by the reward of this [circumcision] "the living God is our portion and our fortress." For whoever cleaves to Him is alive, as it is written, "And you shall cleave to the Lord your God, each of you this day" (Deut. 4:4). For they cleave to the throne and are carried by the throne as the stone that draws the straw. For Jacob, who was born circumcised and is engraved upon the throne, draws towards him the righteous who are circumcised, as it is written, "The life of my lord will be bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord your God" (1 Sam. 25:29) . . . It is written, "Blameless be with the Lord your God" (ibid. 18:13). When you walk before Him you shall be blameless [with respect] to the [covenant of] circumcision. Thus the beginning of these words is *milah* and the end -*YHWH*, מי יעלה לנו השמימה.³⁶

"Circumcision, Visionary Experience, and Textual Interpretation: From Midrashic Trope to Mystical Symbol," *History of Religions* 27 (November, 1987): 189–215.

³⁴ Cf. *Perush ha-Roqeah 'al ha-Torah*, 3:261: "Who among us can go up to the heavens": The first consonants of each word [spell] *milah*, and the last *YHWH*. That is to say, a man cannot be next to the *Shekhinah* if he is not circumcised. For it is written in the chapter on circumcision, 'Walk in My ways and be blameless (*tamim*)' (Gen. 17:1), and it is written, 'You must be whole-hearted (*tamim*) with the Lord your God'" (Deut. 18:13).

³⁵ See M. Hershler, ed., *Siddur of R. Solomon ben Samson of Garmaise*, p. 22 of the introduction and pp. 282–90 of the text. The text is extant in MS Oxford 404 and in MS Munich 393. Hershler published independently the commentary from the Oxford MS in *Sinai* 69 (1971): 105–09.

³⁶ *Siddur of R. Solomon ben Samson of Garmaise*, pp. 284–85; *Sinai* 69: 108.

An important assumption connected with the eschatological views of R. Judah's school is operative in this context: after the death of the body the individual does not cleave directly to the divine essence or to the *kavod*—the Glory which is the anthropomorphic manifestation of God—but rather to the supernal throne.³⁷ This claim can be substantiated from a close analysis of the sentence “For they cleave to the throne,” etc. To understand the full import of the proof-text, “The life of my lord will be bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord your God,” one must bear in mind an interpretation of this verse that is employed in several Pietistic sources based on the numerical equivalence of *בצרוּר*, “in the bundle,” with *בכֶּסֶא הַקְּוֹדֵשׁ*, “in the holy throne,” for both expressions equal 498. Indeed, this numerological interpretation is to be found already in one text that is extant in MS Oxford 1567 and is attributed by Dan to Judah he-Ḥasid himself.³⁸

When the spirit leaves a man's body, it endures evil in accordance with its sin; but if the person is completely righteous, the spirit ascends to the throne of Glory and cleaves to the supernal throne. “The life of my lord will be bound up in the bundle of life,” the numerical value of *בצרוּר* is that of *בכֶּסֶא הַקְּוֹדֵשׁ*. And it is written, “God is seated on His holy throne” (Ps. 47:9).³⁹

This interpretation is employed by Eleazar of Worms also in his own writings and is cited in other Pietistic texts in his name.⁴⁰ The Ḥasidic numerology in this case was no doubt influenced by the talmudic reading of the verse “The life of my lord will be bound up in the bundle of life” (1 Sam. 25:29), as a reference to the place beneath the throne of Glory where the souls of the righteous are hidden.⁴¹ To be bound in the bundle of life, therefore, means to be attached to the holy throne. R. Eleazar, or one

³⁷ The point has been noted by Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Ḥasidut Ḥashkenaz*, p. 137.

³⁸ Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Ḥasidut Ḥashkenaz*, p. 131; idem, *Iyyunim be-Sifrut Ḥaside Ḥashkenaz*, pp. 9, n. 2; 26, n. 2; 134–47, and 148–87 where part of the text is published.

³⁹ MS Oxford 1567, 8a, cited by Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Ḥasidut Ḥashkenaz*, p. 137 (= *Iyyunim be-Sifrut Ḥaside Ḥashkenaz*, p. 170).

⁴⁰ See *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh* 7a, 9a; *Arugat ha-Bošem*, 1:53, 2:109, 3:293.

⁴¹ Cf. B. *Shab.* 152b and parallels. The connection between the Pietistic conception and the talmudic one is made explicitly by Eleazar at the beginning of *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh*, 1a: “The souls are in the curtain and in the ark which are

of his disciples, adds to the teaching of his master that it is essentially through circumcision that one merits to be conjoined with the divine throne, or to the image of Jacob, that is according to the ancient aggadah engraved upon the throne. The notion of the righteous cleaving to the throne of Glory is reiterated by R. Eleazar in his *Sode Razaya*², both in the *Sod ha-Merkavah* and in *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh*. According to the views expressed in these passages, one does not even cleave directly to the throne, but rather each righteous person has his own throne, which in turn cleaves to the throne of Glory. Moreover, there are various levels of righteousness, and hence each *saddiq* cleaves to a specific part of the divine throne in accordance with his individual merit.⁴²

In the most general terms, however, R. Eleazar would have asserted, as did R. Judah before him, that in virtue of circumcision one is not only protected from descending to hell but also merits to ascend to heaven and to cleave to the throne of Glory.⁴³

In this respect the Ḥasidim retain and further elaborate upon the original intent of the rabbinic authorities who viewed the sign of circumcision as a protective mark.

Given the stated correlation between circumcision and the Tetragrammaton, on the one hand, and the act of cleaving implied thereby, on the other, it would seem to follow that, for R. Eleazar, there is an intimate connection between the divine name and the

under the throne, "The life of my lord will be bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord your God." See *ibid.*, 13c, and Eleazar b. Judah of Worms, *Sode Razaya*², ed. I. Kamelhar (Bulgaria, 1936), p. 19; *Sode Razaya*² in *Sefer Razi'el*, 11a (noted by Altmann, "Eleazar of Worms' *Hokhmah Ha-Egoz*," *JJS* 11 [1960]: 102); *Perush 'al ha-Merkavah*, MS Paris 850, f. 67a. In at least one recension of *Sod ha-Egoz*, MS Mossayef 1456, the space (*halal*) under the throne is identified as a feminine potency. See Dan, "Le-Toledot ha-tekst shel *Hokhmat ha-Egoz*," *Alei Sefer* 5 (1978): 52; A. Farber, "Tefisat ha-merkavah be-torat ha-sod beme'ah ha-yud gimmel—sod ha-egoz ve-toldotav" (Ph.D., Hebrew University, 1986), p. 105. On the theme of the space under the throne in the writings of the Pietists, see the comprehensive note in Farber, *op. cit.*, pp. 580–601, n. 221. Cf. *Arugat ha-Bošem*, 2:109; and H. Soloveitchik, "Topics in the *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh*," *JJS* 18 (1967): 73.

⁴² Cf. *Sode Razaya*², pp. 26–27; *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh*, 7a–b. See also the text of *Sod ha-Egoz* of R. Menahem b. Pinḥas of Mirzburg published by Dan, "*Hokhmah Ha-Egoz*, its origin and development," *JJS* 17 (1967): 81.

⁴³ See, however, *Sode Razaya*², p. 19, where R. Eleazar writes that righteous women too are guaranteed an ascent to the throne after death, implying thereby that the matter is not exclusively bound up to circumcision.

throne upon which the divine Glory sits.⁴⁴ This connection is probably based on earlier *merkavah* traditions concerning the throne's being sealed or engraved with the divine name or names.⁴⁵ But is there in the Pietistic writings any intrinsic connection between the throne and circumcision, or any symbolic connection between the throne and the place of circumcision? In the course of my research I have come across one possible link which I here offer as a tentative suggestion. As several scholars, most notably Alexander Altmann⁴⁶ and Joseph Dan,⁴⁷ have shown, in the writings of the German Pietists are found several versions of the *Sod ha-²Egoz*, the "secret of the Nut."⁴⁸ These fragments interpret the structure of the divine chariot in terms of the organic structure of the nut. Dan was the first to assume that these texts preserved an esoteric reading of Song of Songs 6:1, 'I went down to the garden of nuts,' that originated in the Orient (i.e., Babylonia) and formed part of the world of ancient *merkavah* mysticism.⁴⁹ In all the extant versions of this text the stalk (*oqes*) of

⁴⁴ See Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Ḥasidut Ḥashkenaz*, p. 135.

⁴⁵ See, for instance, Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot Literatur*, §78 (cf. 3 *Enoch*, ed. H. Odeberg [New York, 1973], p. 176) and §840 (cf. *Seder Rabbah di-Bereshit*, in *Batte Midrashot*, ed. S. Wertheimer [Jerusalem, 1980], 1:24, cited by R. Eleazar of Worms, *Sefer ha-Shem*, MS British Museum 737, ff. 186a–b), where it is stated that the throne is sealed with the six letters of the two names *Yah* and *YHWH*. Cf. R. Ya^caqov ha-Kohen, *Perush Mirkevet Yehezqel*, ed. A. Farber (M.A. thesis, Hebrew University, 1978), p. 53. See also *Sefer ha-Shem*, f. 172a, where it is stated that "the names of the Holy One, blessed be He, are written around the throne of Glory." And cf. *Zohar Ḥadash*, 107d (*Tiqqunim*): "The soul comes from the throne and there is the Tetragrammaton who guides everything." For a later theosophic development of this connection between the Tetragrammaton and the throne, see Moses b. Jacob of Kiev, *Ḳoṣar ha-Shem*, MS JTS Mic. 1804, f. 60b.

⁴⁶ Cf. A. Altmann, "Eleazar of Worms' *Hokhmah Ha-Egoz*," *JJS* 11 (1960): 101–12, reprinted without Hebrew text in Altmann, *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca, 1969), 161–71.

⁴⁷ Cf. J. Dan, "*Hokhmah ha-²Egoz*, its origin and development," *JJS* 17 (1967): 73–83; idem, *Torat ha-Sod shel Ḥasidut Ḥashkenaz*, pp. 207–10, 257–58, and "Le-Toledot ha-tekst shel Ḥokhmah ha-²Egoz," *Alei Sefer* 5 (1978): 49–53.

⁴⁸ See now the comprehensive treatment of this text in A. Farber's doctoral dissertation referred to above, n. 41.

⁴⁹ See references in n. 47. The thesis of an ancient Oriental origin has been further elaborated upon by Farber in the work referred to in the preceding note. According to Farber, the *Sod ha-²Egoz* thus represents one of the "proto-kabbalistic" sources that passed to the European kabbalists through the German

the nut, which seems to be interchangeable with the inner core or nucleus (*gar'in*) of the nut, is identified as the throne and in some later versions, definitely known to the school of R. Judah he-Ḥasid, the stalk or nucleus is further described by means of phallic symbolism.⁵⁰ Thus, to give a few examples, in one version of the *Sod ha-³Egoz*, found in the Rome MS of *Arugat ha-Bošem* and attributed to R. Eleazar,⁵¹ we read that “below on the ridge of [the nut] there issues from its compartments a kind of masculine organ (כמו זכרות).” Again, further on in the same text it is stated that “the nut has five segments, four which are female and one being the masculine organ (זכרות).” This later passage parallels the following statement in R. Eleazar of Worms’ *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh*: “The four double-columns of the kernel are round about its stalk, and the stalk is in the center. . . . The nut has four segments like the four celestial beasts (חיות), and the middle one is raised at its ridge (בחרודו), corresponding to the throne.”⁵² Although R. Eleazar does not mention the male organ by name, it is obvious that the tradition which identifies the center of the nut with the throne, on one hand, and the phallus, on the other, underlies his remarks. The protruding character of the middle segment, identified here as the throne, is the stalk or nucleus explicitly described in the other text as the phallus. Hence, the *Sod ha-³Egoz* material does provide us with an intrinsic symbolic connection between the throne and the phallus, one which was certainly known by R. Judah he-Ḥasid, R. Eleazar of Worms, and their disciples. It may be that this symbolic nexus is the underlying esoteric meaning, not committed to writing, of the correlation between circumcision and the Tetragrammaton, on the one hand, and the cleaving to the throne of the circumcised

Pietists. See, e.g., “Tefisat ha-merkavah be-torat ha-sod be-me³ah ha-yud gim-mel,” pp. 19–20, 25–26, and *passim*.

⁵⁰ Cf. Altmann, “Eleazar of Worms’ *Hokhmath ha-Egoz*,” p. 109; and in more detail Farber, “Tefisat ha-merkavah be-torat ha-sod be-me³ah ha-yud gim-mel,” pp. 105–14.

⁵¹ The text was reproduced by E. Urbach in his edition of *Arugat ha-Bošem*, 2:168–71, and by Altmann, “Eleazar of Worms’ *Hokhmath ha-Egoz*,” pp. 111–13. According to Dan, “*Hokhmath ha-³Egoz*, its origin and development,” p. 74, the passage was copied into this manuscript of *Arugat ha-Bošem* from the MS Oxford 1567 (ff. 39a–b) of the “Book of Angels,” or a similar source.

⁵² *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh*, 9c. See Altmann, “Eleazar of Worms’ *Hokhmath ha-Egoz*,” p. 103.

male, on the other, which I have been analyzing up to this point.⁵³

Be that as it may, the novel element in the texts that I have examined so far involves an aspect of cleaving which is realized in this world by virtue of the correlation between circumcision and the divine name. Not only does he who is circumcised ascend to the throne after death but it is also as if he had been already with God in his bodily existence. This point is made clear in the following passage from *Arugat ha-Bošem*:

It is written, “Be blameless” (Gen. 17:1), and it is written, “Blameless be with the Lord your God” (Deut. 18:13). Whoever fulfills the commandment of circumcision is as if he had been “with the Lord your God.” For he fulfills the verse “Who among us can go up to the heavens” (מי יעלה לנו השמימה), the first consonants [spell] מילה and the last the Tetragrammaton. Whoever fulfills the commandment of circumcision will be in heaven with the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is said, “The life of my lord will be bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord your God” (1 Sam. 25:29), i.e., in heaven, for בצרור equals numerically הקודש.⁵⁴

From this passage it can be argued that although the full cleaving is surely not attained until after death when the soul ascends heavenward, the Pietist teaching implies that through circumcision one achieves some sort of cleaving, no matter how limited, even during one’s earthly existence. This is the import of the biblical claim that Abraham walked blamelessly with God, which, according to the standard rabbinic tradition, refers to Abraham’s being circumcised. To be blameless, that is, *tamim* (perfect) means

⁵³ I offer this only as a suggestion that requires further research. Just to mention one problem with my conjecture: in several places, e.g., in the *Sod ha-Merkavah* published in *Sode Razaya*², p. 23, as well as the “Commentary on the Merkavah,” extant in MS Paris 850, f. 67a, R. Eleazar develops a comment in *Midrash Otiyyot de-R. Aqiva* which connects the throne with the letter *kaf*. Without going into great detail it is clear from these passages, especially the latter, that the circular nature of the throne, as the letter *kaf*, is related to a feminine characteristic. Given this symbolic connection, cleaving to the throne in Ḥasidic sources may also imply some sexual nuance, but the matter requires a more detailed examination.

⁵⁴ *Arugat ha-Bošem*, 3:154.

to be on the level of one who is with God. The person who is circumcised is therefore guaranteed two things: first, that he is with God even as he walks upon the earth, and second, that when he dies he will ascend to heaven and cleave to the throne of Glory. Both aspects result from the exegetical fact that circumcision is correlated with the Tetragrammaton.

III

The exegesis on Deut. 30:12, which is derived from the German Ḥasidim, was appropriated by the Spanish kabbalists of the latter part of the thirteenth century in Castile.⁵⁵ In the first instance, we cite the example of Joseph Gikatilla from his pre-theosophic classic *Ginnat ʿEgoz* (1273–74). In one context Gikatilla sets out to interpret the imagery derived from *Sefer Yeṣirah* 1:3 (cf. 6:4) concerning the “covenant of the tongue and mouth” which is set between the “ten fingers of the hands” and the “covenant of the foreskin” that is between the “ten toes (literally: fingers) of the feet.” Gikatilla comments that the two covenants and their respective fingers add up to the Tetragrammaton. The covenant of the mouth represents the letter *heh*, which numerically equals five, inasmuch as the mouth is divided into five parts: throat, palate, tongue, lips, and teeth. The ten fingers of the hand represent the *yod*, which equals ten. Hence the covenant of the mouth equals *yod heh*, the first two letters of the divine name. The covenant of circumcision, by contrast, is represented by one undivided organ. Together with the ten toes of the feet, therefore, this covenant equals eleven, which is the numerical value of *waw heh* (six plus five), the two final letters of the divine name. “Thus the covenant of the mouth is *yod heh*, and the covenant of circumcision is *waw heh*. It follows that the sacred name [*YHWH*] is divided into two parts, and they are: the covenant of Torah, which is the covenant fixed in the mouth, and the covenant of blood in the phallus.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ A possible channel of transmission of these ideas may have been Barukh Togarmi who employs the Pietistic exegesis in his commentary on *Sefer Yeṣirah*. See the relevant text published in G. Scholem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah ve-shel Avraham ʿAbulʿafiyah* (Jerusalem, 1965), p. 232. Mention should be made of the fact that the Pietistic exegesis influenced other Ashkenazi writers. Cf. the comments of R. Asher and of his son Jacob, the *Baʿal ha-Ṭurim*, to Deut. 30:12.

⁵⁶ *Ginnat ʿEgoz* (Hanau, 1614), fol. 25b–c.

After reaching this conclusion Gikatilla, clearly relying on the German Pietistic exegesis of Deut. 30:12,⁵⁷ goes on to say:

Since [the covenant of] circumcision comprises the final division of the sacred name (*waw heh*), you will find that the sacred name attests to it, as it is said in the Torah, “Who among us can go up to the heavens,” (מי יעלה לנו השמימה). You will find that the first consonants [spell] מילה and the last יהוה. . . . When the covenant of circumcision is established in a person, he is worthy that God should attest of him, “Who among us can go up to the heavens,” for the name *YHWH* attests to [the act of] *milah*.⁵⁸

For Gikatilla, then, the complete name of God is sealed in the individual by means of the two covenants, that of the mouth (*yod heh*) and that of the phallus (*waw heh*). Yet it is only with respect to the latter that we find scriptural evidence that the divine name is correlated with circumcision. Gikatilla bases his comment on the technique already familiar to us from the writings of the German Ḥasidim.

The influence of the Pietistic exegesis on other Spanish kabbalists writing in the latter part of the thirteenth century, including Moses de León, the assumed author of the *Zohar*, is also clearly discernible. At the outset it will be noted that the author of the *Zohar* nowhere explicitly employs the exegesis of R. Judah. Notwithstanding this fact, which is totally in character with the general tendency in the *Zohar* to refrain from using exegetical techniques that betray a contemporary influence, I suggest that it was through the Pietists' own writings, or perhaps through an indirect channel of transmission such as Gikatilla, that the tradition concerning the correlation of circumcision with the Tetragrammaton reached de León. This correlation is employed in any number of contexts. “Come and see: before one is circumcised one is not united with the name of the Holy One, blessed be He; when one is circumcised one enters the divine name and is united with it.”⁵⁹ “R. Shim'on said: The infant who is circumcised is

⁵⁷ For other examples of the influence of Eleazar of Worms on Gikatilla see S. Blickstein, “Between Philosophy and Mysticism” (Ph.D. dissertation, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1984), pp. 93–96.

⁵⁸ *Ginnat 'Egoz*, fol. 25c–d.

⁵⁹ *Zohar* 1:89a.

bound to the *Shekhinah*⁶⁰ which is the opening to all the upper crowns, the opening which is bound to the holy name.”⁶¹ “From the eighth day onwards Israel cleave to His name and are inscribed (ורשימין) with His name and belong to Him . . . The [other] nations do not cleave to Him and do not follow His laws. The holy sign (רשימא קדישא) is removed from them and they cleave to the Other Side which is not holy.”⁶² The holy sign of circumcision is here understood as an inscription of the divine name, indeed of the Tetragrammaton, upon the flesh. The Jew is distinguished from other nations because he is so inscribed, and by virtue of this sign he enters the divine name and cleaves to it. In one passage the *Zohar* addresses a question: Since the Muslims, called by the standard epithet Ishmael, are likewise circumcised, why do they not have a portion in God’s name as do the Jews? To this the *Zohar* responds by making a qualitative difference between the circumcision of the Jews and that of the Muslims. The former are circumcised properly and according to God’s specifications, whereas the latter are not, i.e., Jewish circumcision—as determined by rabbinic law—comprises *milah* and *peri^cah* while the Islamic ritual includes only the former.⁶³ Moreover, the Jew cleaves to the divine name from the eighth day of his life,

⁶⁰ An alternative reading is offered in the printed editions of *Zohar*, “the one who has a son is bound to the *Shekhinah*,” etc. The notion that man is unified with the *Shekhinah* through circumcision is emphasized on several occasions in the *Zohar*. See *Zohar* I, 89a, 91a–b, 93b, 98b; II, 36a; and cf. my study referred to above, n. 33.

⁶¹ *Zohar* 3:14a. Contained here is a reference to the fact that the covenant of circumcision, like the nature of covenant in general, comprises two aspects, masculine (= “the holy name”) and feminine (= *Shekhinah*), which correspond to the ninth and tenth gradations, *Yesod* and *Shekhinah*. The two aspects are correlated with the two procedures which, according to rabbinic law (see B. Shab. 137b), are part of the circumcision ritual, *milah* (cutting the foreskin) and *peri^cah* (pulling down the membrane to fully expose the corona). See *Zohar* I:13a, 32a–b, 47b, 69a, 71b, 72b, 117a; 2:40a, 60b, 125b; 3:14a, 91b, 115b, 163a.

⁶² *Zohar* 3:91a–b.

⁶³ Cf. Moses de León, *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, p. 67. The claim that Muslim circumcision comprises *milah* but not *peri^cah* is also made by Isaac of Acre in *Sefer Me²irat Eynayim*, ed. A. Goldreich (Jerusalem, 1981), p. 113 (of critical edition). For references to the rabbinic ruling regarding the two acts of the circumcision ritual, and the various places in *Zohar* where this ruling is kabbalistically interpreted, see n. 61.

while the Muslim remains at a distance for many years.⁶⁴ Therefore only the Jew bears God's name as a seal on his body and thus participates in the divine. For the author of the *Zohar* the sign of circumcision has truly become a stigma, a mark of belonging: "Israel is marked by the holy sign on the flesh, and it is thus known that they are His, among those who belong to His palace. Therefore all those who are not marked with the holy sign on their flesh do not belong to Him; it is known that they are all derived from the side of impurity."⁶⁵

The correlation between circumcision and the name underlies three themes that are central to the theosophy of the *Zohar*. The first consists of the Zoharic reworking of an older aggadic motif which interprets the ritual of circumcision as a sacrificial symbol.⁶⁶ In the *Zohar* the sacrificial character of circumcision is again connected to the process of cleaving to, or entering, the divine name. "The one who brings his son for this sacrifice [i.e., circumcision] enters him into the holy name."⁶⁷ The Zoharic reading of Exod. 20:21,⁶⁸ "Sacrifice on it [on the altar of earth]⁶⁹ your burnt

⁶⁴ *Zohar* 2:32a. See the passage of Isaac of Acre referred to in the preceding note.

⁶⁵ *Zohar* 3:72b–73a.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Gen. Rabbah* 48:1, ed. Theodor and Albeck, p. 479; *Midrash Tehillim* on Ps. 112, ed. Buber, p. 468; *Pirque R. Eli'ezer*, chap. 29. The connection between circumcision and sacrifices, especially from the vantage point of atonement and salvation, is stressed in the Septuagint and targumic version of the narrative in Exodus 4 concerning the circumcision of Moses' son by Zipporah. Cf. G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* (Leiden, 1983), pp. 178–92. On the possibility that this connection may be biblical in origin see W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, 1961), 1:138, n. 3. The theme is repeated frequently in the *Zohar*, see 1:93a, 94b, 95a, 96b; 2:164a (and cf. the commentary of David Luria to *Pirque R. Eli'ezer*, chap. 29, p. 65a, n. 41); 3:44a, 164a.

⁶⁷ *Zohar* 1:96b.

⁶⁸ The reading of this verse in connection with circumcision, though not as a direct reference to it, is to be found in classical midrashic sources as well. See, e.g., *Gen. Rabbah* 48:4, ed. Theodor and Albeck, p. 480.

⁶⁹ In this context the author of the *Zohar* derives the custom for placing the foreskin in a "vessel full of earth" from the fact that circumcision is an act of sacrifice, and sacrifices had to be offered on an altar of earth. See, however, *Zohar* 3:44a (*Piqqudin*), where another reason for this practice is offered: "We set up a vessel full of earth to place the foreskin in it, according to the secret of the verses, 'And the serpent's food shall be earth' (Isa. 65:25); 'And earth shall you eat all the days of your life' (Gen. 3:14)." Insofar as the foreskin is symbolic of the demonic

offerings and your peace offerings in every place where I cause My name to be mentioned," as a reference to circumcision is based on the end of this verse: "What is [the meaning of] 'where I cause My name to be mentioned?' This refers to circumcision, concerning which it is written, 'The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, to them He makes known His covenant' (Ps. 25:14)."⁷⁰ Circumcision is thus identified as both the divine name and the secret of the Lord. The element of secrecy (*sod*) is specifically associated by de León,⁷¹ as well as by other thirteenth century kabbalists,⁷² with the ninth divine gradation, *Yesod* (Foun-

force which is also symbolized by the serpent, and as the serpent is associated in Scripture with the dust of the earth, it follows that the foreskin must be placed in a vessel full of earth. This interpretation is given as well in *Tiqqune Zohar*, Introduction, 11a; 24, 70a; 37, 78b; *Zohar Hadash* 117b (*Tiqqunim*).

⁷⁰ *Zohar* 1:95a.

⁷¹ Cf. *Zohar* 1:236b. Cf. *Zohar* 1:236b; 2:186b: *Yesod* is the "hidden place that is not revealed and should be hidden"; 3:43b (*Piqqudin*); *Zohar Hadash* 2a (*Matnitin*) where the ninth book, i.e., the ninth gradation, is said to be "invisible, hidden in the 248 worlds [corresponding to 248 limbs] that go along with it"; *The Book of the Pomegranate: Moses de León's Sefer ha-Rimmon*, pp. 226–28 (Hebrew section); Moses de León, *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, pp. 60–61; Y. Liebes, "Ha-Mashiaḥ shel ha-Zohar," in *The Messianic Idea in Jewish Thought: A Study Conference in Honour of the Eightieth Birthday of Gershom Scholem* (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 138–40. See, however, *Zohar* 3:91b: "R. Shim'on said: 'The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and to them He makes his covenant known' (Ps. 25:14). 'The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him' refers to the Community of Israel [i.e., *Shekhinah*]; 'and to them He makes his covenant known' refers to the Righteous One, Foundation of the world [i.e., *Yesod*]." It should be noted that the "secret of the Lord" in Ps. 25:14 is already interpreted as a reference to circumcision in *Gen. Rabbah*, 49:2 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, pp. 488–89); *Tanḥuma, Lekh Lekha*, 19. And cf. M. Recanati, *Commentary on the Torah* (Jerusalem, 1961), p. 23a. The hidden character of the divine grade that corresponds to the phallus may already be implied in *Sefer ha-Bahir* §193 where the Righteous one is identified as the "great hidden light." This kabbalistic idea is, of course, suggested by the older aggadic notion that the hidden light is especially stored up for the righteous; see, e.g., B. Ḥag. 12a.

⁷² Cf. Jacob b. Jacob ha-Kohen, *Perush ha-ʿOtiyyot*, ed. by Scholem, *Madda^ce ha-Yahadut* 2 (1927): 207: "[The letter] *gimmel* instructs about the [place of] circumcision. Know that we call the phallus, which is the [place of] circumcision, גריה, and one cannot say גריה without the letter *gimmel* at the beginning . . . Thus you see in the form of the *gimmel* an image of a man with the covenant of circumcision. And this is a great, wondrous, and hidden mystery, and it is appropriate to hide it." And cf. Todros Abulafia, *ʿOṣar ha-Kavod ha-Shalem*, 12b; *Tiqqune Zohar* 19, 39b. On *gimmel* as a phallic symbol in Lurianic texts, see L. Fine, "The Art of Metoposcopy: A Study in Isaac Luria's Charismatic Knowledge," p. 88.

ation) or *Saddiq* (the Righteous One).⁷³ This gradation, in turn, corresponds to the phallus in the divine anatomy, for its function is to gather all the divine energies from above and pass them along to the tenth gradation, *Shekhinah*, the feminine potency par excellence. That this gradation is further called the divine name, i.e., the Tetragrammaton, can only be comprehended in light of the kabbalistic understanding of this name as the hypostatic concentration of divine power. Put differently, the divine name comprises the totality of the theosophic structure, the ten *sefirot*, which in turn are all centralized in *Yesod*, the gradation which comprises all the upper gradations within itself; hence it is also called the All (*kol*). As such, the divine name is appropriately predicated on this gradation, for it symbolizes the whole sefirotic pleroma. “The eighth [*sefirah*, counting from *Hokhmah*] is [called by the name] the ‘Living God’ (אל חי) . . . and this is the Righteous One (*Saddiq*), for all life emerges therefrom, and it is called *YHWH*, as it is written, ‘The Lord, the Righteous One, seeks out,’ etc. (Ps. 11:5).”⁷⁴ The import, therefore, of the claim that he who is circumcised enters and cleaves to the divine name is that the Jew, by bearing the sign of circumcision—the Tetragrammaton—on his phallus, participates in that very divine gradation which is in the position of the male organ and which contains within itself all the divine potencies.⁷⁵

⁷³ Cf. Liebes, “Ha-Mashiah shel ha-Zohar,” pp. 139–40, n. 204, who suggests that the connection between *Sod* (secret) and *Yesod* (Foundation) may have been inspired by a similarity in sound. It should be pointed out that *sod* and *yesod* are connected on this phonetic basis already in rabbinic sources. See, e.g., B. Hag. 14a: “The Holy One, blessed be He, reveals to them the *secret* (סוד) in the world to come, as it is said, ‘and their *foundation* (יסודם) poured out like a river’” (Job 22:16).

⁷⁴ *Zohar* 3:11a. The literal translation of the verse from Psalms should read: “The Lord seeks out the righteous man.” My rendering reflects the exegetical perspective of the *Zohar*. Cf. Isaac of Acre, *Sefer Me'irat Eynayim*, p. 129 where the connection between the Tetragrammaton (*shem ha-gadol*) and *Yesod* is made.

⁷⁵ This precise point is made in slightly different terms by Joseph Hamadan, *Sefer Ta'ame ha-Miswot*, ed. M. Meier (see n. 1), pp. 243–44: “Circumcision alludes to the chain of the image (שלשלת הדמות) [i.e., the sefirotic pleroma] . . . and the image of the *yod* [of the sign of the covenant] alludes to the ten potencies (מדרות). And this one [i.e., the divine gradation which corresponds to the place of circumcision] is the whole perfection (כל השלמות).” And cf. Elijah de Vidas, *Reshit Hokhmah* (Brooklyn, 1965), *Sha'ar ha-Qedushah*, ch. 17, p. 212c: “A blemish of the phallus [literally, (the place) of the covenant] (פגם הברית) harms the whole physical stature (נוגע בכל שיעור קומה), for the phallus, which is the

The second Zoharic theme which is based on the correlation of the phallus with the divine name involves the interpretation of idolatry as a sexual offense.⁷⁶ That is, he who is an idolater, according to the *Zohar*, lies with respect to God's name, but inasmuch as this name is identical with the covenant of circumcision, it follows that such an individual lies with respect to the seal of the covenant inscribed on the phallus. "He who lies with respect to the holy covenant sealed (דחתים) on the flesh of man is as if he had lied with respect to the name of the Holy One, blessed be He. He who lies with respect to the seal of the King (חותמא דמלכא) lies with respect to the King."⁷⁷ Yet there are two kinds of sexual offense which are commensurate with lying in the name of God: having sexual relations with a non-Jew, which involves entering the place of the covenant (the phallus) in the domain of the demonic Other Side,⁷⁸ and committing adultery,

totality of the physical stature (כלל כל השיעור קומה), comprises the Tetragrammaton. . . . The Tetragrammaton is sealed in the [place of the] covenant, as it is written in the *Tiqqunim* [see references below in nn. 99–100], מי יעלה לנו השמימה—the first consonants [spell] *milah* and the last *YHWH*. Just as the Tetragrammaton is the root of all the names . . . so is the phallus the foundation (עיקר) which establishes the whole body. For he who blemishes it is as if he had actually blemished the Tetragrammaton, for it [the phallus or its correlate in the sefirotic realm, *Yesod*] comprises all the [divine] potencies."

⁷⁶ The connection between idolatry and adultery is made already in earlier rabbinic sources; see S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York, 1961), p. 250.

⁷⁷ *Zohar* 2:3b.

⁷⁸ Cf. *Zohar* 2:87b: "It has been taught: R. Isaac said, 'You shall not make [for yourself a sculptured image, etc.] (Exod. 20:4). One must not lie in the name of the Holy One, blessed be He. And what is this name? The covenant of circumcision, the sign of the holy covenant, for the one who lies with respect to this covenant lies with respect to the name of the Holy One, blessed be He . . . And in what does the lie consist? He should not enter this covenant in the other domain [i.e., he should not have sexual relations with a non-Jew] . . . The one who lies with respect to this covenant lies with respect to the Holy One, blessed be He, for this covenant is united with the Holy One, blessed be He.'" And cf. *Zohar* 3:13b: "He who lies with respect to the sign of the holy covenant (קיימא קרישא) which is inscribed on him is as if he had lied with respect to the name of the King, for the name of the King is inscribed in man . . . In what does the lie consist here? He spread out his hands to the other power [i.e., had sexual intercourse with a non-Jew] and lies with respect to [the place of] this covenant. And thus the Torah is dependent upon this [gradation], for he who guards this covenant is as if he was guarding the entire Torah. And he who lies with respect to it is as if he had lied

which likewise involves lying with respect to the seal which is inscribed on the flesh.⁷⁹

The third theme which is based on this correlation is the Zoharic prohibition, based in turn on earlier midrashic sources,⁸⁰ of teaching Torah to the uncircumcised non-Jew.

It is also forbidden to instruct [the uncircumcised] in words of Torah, for the entire Torah is the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, and each letter of the Torah is bound to the holy name. It is forbidden to instruct the person who is not marked by the holy sign (רשימא קדישא) on his flesh in the words of Torah.⁸¹

The full import of the claim that only one marked with the sign of the holy covenant may study Torah can be understood only in light of the explicit identification which is made between the Torah and the divine name in a host of thirteenth century kabbalistic texts and is elaborated upon in the *Zohar*. This theme has been discussed by several scholars⁸² and there is no need to dwell

with respect to the entire Torah.” The equivalence of circumcision to all the commandments is expressed in earlier rabbinic literature; see below, n. 85. See also *Zohar Ḥadash* 21a (*Midrash ha-Ne'elam*), *Zohar* 1:131b, and Hebrew parallel in *The Book of the Pomegranate*, pp. 212–13.

⁷⁹ Cf. *Zohar* 2:90a: “[The commandment] ‘You shall have [no other gods besides Me]’ (Exod. 20:3) corresponds to [the commandment] ‘You shall not commit adultery’ (ibid. 13). For the one [who commits adultery] lies with respect to the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, which is inscribed (דארתרשים) in man . . . And the one who lies with respect to that lies with respect to the King.” See n. 75.

⁸⁰ Cf. *Tanḥuma, Mishpatim*, 5 (see R. Judah bar Yaqar, *Perush ha-Tefillot ve-ha-Berakhot* [Jerusalem, 1979], pt. 2, p. 65); *Exod. Rabbah* 30:12. See the kabbalistic reworking of the later passage in Nahmanides, “Torat ha-Shem Temimah,” in *Kitve Ramban*, ed. H. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1963), 1:155. In light of these passages my comments in “Circumcision, Visionary Experience, and Textual Interpretation: From Midrashic Trope to Mystical Symbol,” p. 190, n. 3, should be somewhat modified, though it still seems to me correct to say that the talmudic restriction of Torah study to a Jew is not explicitly connected with circumcision.

⁸¹ *Zohar* 3:73a.

⁸² Cf. G. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York, 1978), pp. 37–44; I. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar* (Jerusalem, 1961), 2:365–66; M. Idel, “Tefisat ha-Torah be-Sifrut ha-Hekhalot ve-Gilguleha ba-Qabbalah,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981): 49–58. It is of interest to note that the esoteric identification of the Torah and the Tetragrammaton is found also in

on it here. Suffice it to say that the author of the *Zohar* centralizes the Torah-divine name symbolism in the *sefirah* of *Yesod* and thereby establishes an intrinsic relationship between textual study and the phallus.⁸³ To be sure, in earlier midrashic and aggadic sources one finds an inherent connection between the covenant of circumcision and the covenant of Sinai. In particular, two ideas are significant in this context. First, the idea that the rite of circumcision was given to Israel as a necessary precondition for their receiving the Torah at Sinai,⁸⁴ and second, the notion that *berit milah* is equivalent to all the commandments of the Torah.⁸⁵ It is only in the *Zohar*, however, that these random and isolated homiletical insights become part of a developed mystical

R. Eleazar of Worms. Thus in *Sefer ha-Shem*, MS British Museum 737, f. 173a, he writes: “[The word] הויה [the letters of the Tetragrammaton] is numerically equivalent to twenty-six, for the Torah, which was given after twenty-six generations [cf. B. Pes. 118a], is dependent upon His great name.” See also f. 181b, where he notes, on the one hand, that the Tetragrammaton, when spelled out equals forty-five, and on the other, that the Torah is divided into forty-five. Cf. Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Hasidut Ashkenaz*, p. 124, n. 45 and p. 147; Idel, op. cit., pp. 47–48.

⁸³ See E. Wolfson, “Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation,” pp. 205–15.

⁸⁴ Cf. *Pesiqta² Rabbati* 23, ed. M. Friedmann (Vienna, 1880), p. 117a; *Tanhuma, Lekh Lekha* 20; *Aggadat Bere²shit* 17; *Bere²shit Rabbati*, ed. Ch. Albeck (Jerusalem, 1940), p. 73. And cf. *Sifre Num.* 108, ed. H. S. Horovitz (Jerusalem, 1966), p. 108, where it is stated in the name of R. Judah the Prince that before the Israelites received the Torah they had to undergo circumcision and ritual immersion, and offer a sacrifice. In this sense the experience at Sinai is the paradigm for the procedure at all future conversions. See L. Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism* (Hoboken, 1985), p. 19; idem, “The Rabbinic Understanding of the Covenant,” *Review and Expositor* 84 (1987): 294. According to another view expressed in *Mekhilta de-R. Ishmael, Bo²*, 5, ed. H. S. Horovitz and I. A. Rabin (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 14, it was by virtue of the blood of circumcision and the Paschal sacrifice that the Israelite slaves merited to be redeemed from Egypt. See also *ibid.*, *Be-shallah*, 3, p. 98, where it is stated that the Israelites merited the splitting of the sea because of their observance of circumcision.

⁸⁵ Cf. P. Ned. 3:9, “Great is circumcision, for it is equivalent to all the other commandments.” And cf. *Mekhilta de-R. Ishmael, Ba-hodesh* 2, p. 208, where, according to R. Aqiva, observance of circumcision and abstinence from idolatry are seen as tantamount to observing the entire covenant. On the correspondence between circumcision and all the commandments of the Torah cf. the following remark in *Mahzor Vitry*, p. 628: “*Berit* corresponds to all the commandments. For

theosophy. Specifically, the limitation of Torah study to one who has the sign of the covenant is grounded in the equation of Torah and the divine name, on the one hand, and the place of circumcision and the divine name, on the other. By the principle of transitivity, moreover, the place of circumcision, the divine gradation of *Yesod*, is identical with the Torah. It is therefore forbidden to teach Torah to one who is not circumcised, for such a person does not participate in the divine name:

The Torah was not given [at Sinai] except to him who had the holy covenant [of circumcision]. He who teaches Torah to one who is not circumcised lies with respect to two covenants, he lies with respect to both the covenant of the Torah and the covenant of the Righteous One [*Yesod*] and the Community of Israel [*Shekhinah*]. The Torah was given to this place and to no other . . . “The righteous shall surely praise Your name” (Ps. 140:14). Who are the righteous? The Righteous One and the Community of Israel. The one who is not circumcised and has not entered the covenant shall not praise the holy name which is the Torah.⁸⁶

the 613 commandments are equal to the numerical value of [the word] ברית [= 612] plus the commandment [of circumcision] itself.” And see Al-Naqawa in *Menorat ha-Ma²or*, 3:475 (cf. Abuhab, *Menorat ha-Ma²or*, p. 183), who combines the older correspondence of circumcision to all the Torah with the Pietistic exegesis of Deut. 30:12, which correlates the divine name and circumcision. Cf. R. Jacob ha-Gozer, *Zikhron Berit la-Rishonim* (see n. 7), p. 10.

⁸⁶ *Zohar* 3:91b. Several kabbalists established the intrinsic connection between circumcision and the Torah on the basis of the correlation of the “covenant of the foreskin” and the “covenant of the tongue” mentioned in *Sefer Yeşirah* 1:3. See, e.g., Abulafia, *ʿOşar ʿEden Ganuz*, MS Oxford 1580, f. 5a: “If not for the covenant of circumcision one could not fulfill the covenant of the tongue [i.e., the Torah].” Gikatilla, *Sha^ʿare ʿOrah*, ed. Ben-Shlomo, 1:114–16: “If Israel had not received the covenant of the flesh they would never have merited [to receive] the Torah which is the covenant of the tongue . . . Therefore the Torah is only given to one who has received the covenant of the flesh, and from the covenant of the flesh one enters into the covenant of the tongue, which is the reading of the Torah.” See also Moses of Kiev, *ʿOşar ha-Shem*, MS JTS Mic. 1804, f. 40b: “There is no way to approach God (*shem ha-meyuḥad*) . . . who is the written Torah except through the gate which is called covenant [of circumcision] (*berit*) . . . Thus one must place the covenant [of circumcision] before the Torah [see B. Ber. 48b; *Zohar* 2:168b]. Whoever does not have this attribute has no way to approach the Torah. It is therefore forbidden to teach Torah to a non-Jew.”

In the theosophic system of the *Zohar*, then, the Sinatic covenant of Torah and the Abrahamic covenant of circumcision coalesce completely: "He who guards the holy covenant is as if he had fulfilled the holy Torah in its entirety, for the covenant [of circumcision] is equivalent to the entire Torah."⁸⁷

IV

If the author of the *Zohar* refrained from connecting the correlation of the divine name with circumcision to the exegetical technique of the Pietists, although he was surely influenced by them, other thirteenth century Spanish kabbalists were not so reticent. For instance, Bahya ben Asher writes as follows in his commentary to Deut. 30:12:

"Who among us can go up to the heavens?" There is here an allusion to the fact that only Israel, who are circumcised, can comprehend the Tetragrammaton, for they are sealed with the sign of the holy covenant. We have found that only the one who is circumcised can prophecy while standing up⁸⁸ . . . And Moses too alluded to this when he said to the Holy One, blessed be He, at the bush: "They will say to me, 'What is His name?' What will I say to them?" (Exod. 3:13). He said that the circumcised will inquire about the Tetragrammaton.⁸⁹

According to Bahya, then, there is an allusion to the correlation between circumcision and the divine name in Moses' request at the burning bush, for the consonants of the words "to me what" (לי מה) in his question are the very consonants of the word circumcision (מילה), and the last letters of the words לי מה שמו מה spell the Tetragrammaton. Although Bahya does not repeat the Pietistic exegesis verbatim, it is fairly obvious that he is dependent upon it in his own commentary on this verse in Deuteronomy.⁹⁰ Moreover, the reading of the phrase לי מה שמו מה from

⁸⁷ *Zohar* 1:197a. Cf. *Zohar* 2:61a, and above, n. 78.

⁸⁸ Cf. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Gen. 17:3; *Gen. Rabbah* 46:6 (ed. Theodor and Albeck, pp. 463-64), 47:3 (pp. 472-73); *Tanhuma, Lekh Lekha* 20; *Pirqe R. Eli'ezer* 29; *Num. Rabbah* 12:10.

⁸⁹ Bahya ben Asher, *Be'ur 'al ha-Torah* (see n. 1), 3:442.

⁹⁰ It is also possible that R. Bahya derived this Pietistic exegesis from an alternative source, such as Gikatilla's *Ginnat 'Egoz*. See op. cit., 9a, where Exod.

Exod. 3:13 as a reference to the Tetragrammaton is found in the works of the Pietists of R. Judah's circle, including Eleazar of Worms' *Sefer ha-Shem*.⁹¹ Baḥya tacitly assumes therefore that the query in Deut. 30:12, "Who among us can go up to the heavens?" is an allusion to the correlation between the Tetragrammaton and circumcision. However, he has theosophically transformed the esoteric notion found in the Pietistic sources, for his claim that only Israel, who are circumcised, can comprehend the Tetragrammaton means that only he who has the holy seal of the covenant can receive knowledge of the divine pleroma which is comprised within the ineffable name. A similar point, as we have seen, is made by the author of the *Zohar* in slightly different terms. The theosophic limitation of esoteric knowledge to one who is circumcised in both cases, although more explicit in the case of Baḥya, is based on the nexus between the divine name and circumcision established by the Pietists. It is clear, moreover, that for Baḥya this theosophic knowledge results in an act of cleaving to the divine pleroma realized in this earthly existence. Thus, as he further points out, Scripture mentions the "circumcision of the flesh by means of the sealing of the unique name (בְּחִתּוּמַת שֵׁם הַמְיֻחָד, i.e., the Tetragrammaton)" after it mentions the circumcision of the heart (see Deut. 30:6), "for the circumcision of the heart is the nullification of the evil inclination, and when the evil inclination is nullified, all the limbs of man are drawn after, and cleave to, the unique name. They thus accomplish in nature that which the intellect necessitates." Baḥya concludes by asserting that the correlation between circumcision and the Tetragrammaton alluded to here ultimately points to the time of redemption, when all of Israel will be *ba'ale ha-haśśagah* (masters of the intellect), and they will consequently cleave with their mind and flesh to the Tetragrammaton.

3:13 is interpreted in a similar way (see following note for references to the Pietistic literature). The passage from *Ginnat 'Egoz* was already discussed by S. Blickstein, "Between Philosophy and Mysticism," pp. 54–55, and the influence of R. Eleazar of Worms noted on p. 55, n. 57. See *ibid.*, pp. 93–96. For other examples of Baḥya's use of this latter work see E. Gottlieb, *Ha-Qabbalah be-Kitve Rabbenu Baḥya ben Asher* (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 148–55. Another possible influence of R. Eleazar of Worms on Baḥya has been noted by Gottlieb, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

⁹¹ Cf. *Sefer ha-Shem*, MS British Museum 737, ff. 174a, 175a. See also *Perush ha-Roqeah 'al ha-Torah*, ed. Ch. Konyevsky (Bene Berak, 1980), 2:21.

The dependency of the Spanish kabbalists upon the German Pietists is most apparent in the *Tiqqune Zohar*. One passage in particular follows rather closely the exegesis of the German Pietists, especially as employed in the text attributed to R. Judah in the *Arugat ha-Bošem*:

When the soul ascends, as it is written, "Who among us can go up to heaven?" (Deut. 30:12), the Holy One, blessed be He, removes from it all the angels of destruction and the prosecutors, so that they will not come near it. The Tetragrammaton rests upon the soul, as you find the first consonants in the words *השמימה לנו יעלה מי* spell *מילה* and the last consonants *יהיה*. The soul ascends. In that moment the [verse] is established, "All the peoples of the earth will see that you are called by the name of God and they will fear you" (Deut. 28:7).⁹²

In this passage we have a slight variation of the Pietistic view that he who is circumcised is saved from the raging fires of Gehenna, inasmuch as the divine name is correlated to circumcision. Here the apotropaic function of circumcision, which, as we have seen, underlies the Pietistic exegesis, is unequivocally affirmed. Yet in another context the anonymous author of *Tiqqune Zohar*, basing himself on the language of the *Zohar* itself, transforms the esoteric doctrine and places it in a new theosophic context:

"Who among us can go up to heaven?" The first consonants [spell] *milah*, and the last *YHWH*.⁹³ He who guards this sign it is as if he had guarded the holy name, and the one who lies with respect to this sign it is as if he had lied with respect to the holy name. This [sign] is thus called the seal of the signet of the King (*חותמא דגושפנקא דמלכא*).⁹⁴

In the fuller context of this passage the author of *Tiqqune Zohar* equates four signs: circumcision, Sabbath, the festivals, and the phylacteries.⁹⁵ For him all these signs have one theosophic

⁹² *Tiqqune Zohar* 60, 130b–131a. Cf. R. David b. Zimra, *Mešudat David* (Zolkiew, 1862), 17b. The verse from Deuteronomy concerning the name of God is interpreted as a reference to the phylacteries of the head in B. Ber. 6a, Men. 35b. See above, n. 20.

⁹³ Cf. *Tiqqune Zohar, Haqdamah*, p. 2b.

⁹⁴ *Tiqqune Zohar* 22, p. 65b.

⁹⁵ Cf. *Tiqqune Zohar* 19, p. 40a.

correlate in the divine pleroma: that gradation which corresponds to the phallus, the foundation upon which all things depend, the pillar of existence.⁹⁶ This gradation is represented by the divine name because it comprises the totality of the sefirotic realm. Thus in place of the midrashic identification of *Shaddai* as the appropriate name affixed to the phallus, the kabbalists identified the Tetragrammaton itself as the appropriate name.⁹⁷ Indeed in one passage the author of *Tiqqune Zohar* spells out in detail the correlation of the divine name to this gradation: the *yod* corresponds to the lower Wisdom, i.e., *Shekhinah*, which is the “fruit of the tree” in the “head of the *Ṣaddiq*,” i.e., the corona of the phallus; the *waw* is the body of the phallus; the first and last *heh* are the place of the foreskin and the act of *peri'ah*, the pulling down of the membrane. Hence “the four letters are upon the *Ṣaddiq* [i.e., *Yesod*] who is the tree that bears fruit.”⁹⁸ It is of special interest to note the manner in which the theosophic correlation of the divine name with the place of circumcision translates here into a graphic depiction of the letters in anatomical images, in a way reminiscent of the passage in *Tanḥuma* wherein the letters of the divine name *Shaddai* correspond to three bodily parts. The kabbalist has thus combined the theosophical posture with a more primitive mystical and mythical conception involving the convergence of anthropomorphic and linguistic symbolism.

By way of conclusion it may be said that the correlation of the divine name and circumcision found in a host of thirteenth century writers is based in part on the midrashic identification of the place of circumcision with the letter *yod* of the name *Shaddai*. In the German Pietistic and Spanish kabbalistic circles the sign of circumcision was still identified with the letter *yod*, but in these cases the correlation was between circumcision and the Tetragrammaton. Appropriating the esoteric tradition of the German

⁹⁶ Cf. *Zohar* 3:242b (*Ra'aya Mehemna*) where the righteous person who keeps these four signs—circumcision, phylacteries, Sabbath, and the festivals—is said to receive the “extra soul” (*neshamah yeterah*) of Sabbath from the divine grade of *Yesod*, the *Ṣaddiq* above, whereas all others receive it from *Shekhinah*.

⁹⁷ It is of interest to note in this connection that in the continuation of this passage in *Tiqqune Zohar* 21, p. 66a, an effort is made to harmonize the midrashic and kabbalistic traditions: “He who lies with respect to the covenant of circumcision lies with respect to the seal of the King, for he is inscribed with *Shaddai* from without and *YHWH* from within.” Cf. Elijah de Vidas, *Re'šhit Hokhmah, Sha'ar ha-Qedushah*, ch. 17, p. 207d.

⁹⁸ *Tiqqune Zohar* 61, p. 94a.

Pietists, the Castilian kabbalists, particularly the authors of the *Zohar* and *Tiqqune Zohar*, viewed circumcision as a process by means of which the individual participates in the divine grade which corresponds to the phallus and which is represented by the letters of the Tetragrammaton. In that sense circumcision is best understood mystically as the imprinting of the divine name upon the flesh. “In the place of uncovering of the corona (פריעה) are the letters *yod heh*, and in the place of the cutting of the foreskin (מילה) are the letters *waw heh*. The secret of the matter is ‘Who among us can go up to heaven?’ (מי יעלה לנו השמימה). The last consonants spell the Tetragrammaton.”⁹⁹ Again, to cite from *Tiqqune Zohar*, “In the place of circumcision (מילה) and uncovering of the corona (פריעה) [the letters of the] Tetragrammaton rest. And this is [the import of the verse] ‘I would behold God from my flesh’ (Job 19:26).”¹⁰⁰ That is, from the flesh of the phallus one indeed beholds the divine, for the Tetragrammaton is imprinted on that limb through the twofold task of cutting the foreskin (*milah*) and pulling down the membrane (*peri^cah*) to fully expose the corona.

By the end of the thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth centuries this correlation became more widely accepted, as the esoteric theme had penetrated into mainstream halakhic works. Thus we read in the *Shibbole ha-Leqet ha-Shalem* of Zedeqiah b. Abraham ha-Rofe³: “I have found [the following interpretation]: “Who among us can go up to the heavens (מי יעלה לנו השמימה) Deut. 30:12). The beginning of it [i.e., the first letters] alludes to circumcision (מילה) and the end [the last letters] to the Tetragrammaton. This is to say, how great is circumcision, for it is, as it were, above His name.”¹⁰¹ In this case the author’s dependence

⁹⁹ *Zohar Hadash*, p. 117b (*Tiqqunim*).

¹⁰⁰ *Tiqqune Zohar* 24, p. 70a. Cf. *Zohar* 1:94a, and see my discussion of that passage in “Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation.” The verse from Job is interpreted in connection with circumcision in a completely non-mystical way in *Gen. Rabbah* 48:1 (p. 479).

¹⁰¹ Zedeqiah b. Abraham ha-Rofe³, *Shibbole ha-Leqet ha-Shalem*, ed. S. Buber (n. 8), pp. 184b–85a. Cf. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid, *The Book of Mirrors: Sefer Mar’ot Šove’ot*, ed. D. Matt (Chico, California, 1982), p. 253 (Hebrew text): “‘Who among us can go up to the heavens’ (מי יעלה לנו השמימה; Deut. 30:12): the first consonants refer to circumcision (*milah*) and the last to the Tetragrammaton (*YHWH*). This is to say that the Holy One, blessed be He,

on the Ḥaside Ashkenaz is clear. Yet in other cases the dependence on any Pietistic or kabbalistic source is less obvious, although the mystical implication of the correlation between the Tetragrammaton and circumcision based thereon is evident. A striking example of this is to be found in Aaron ha-Kohen of Lunel's *Orḥot Hayyim*:

Thus you will find in the word *milah* [the letters of] half the name, *yod heh*, and you will find in it the complete name [of the Tetragrammaton], for the [letters] *mem heh* equal [numerically] the Tetragrammaton. How is this so? The *yod* equals twenty, *heh* six, which equals [together] twenty-six, and the *waw* equals thirteen, making a sum of thirty-nine, and the *heh* equals six, thus totalling forty-five, which is [the numerical value] of the name. . . . This covenant [of circumcision] is the seal of the Holy One, blessed be He, by means of which He sealed the heavens and the earth, as it is written in *Sefer Yeṣirah*,¹⁰² He sealed the height with *yod heh* and the lower ones with *waw heh*. This is [alluded to] in the verse, "Let the heavens rejoice and the earth exult" (ישמחו השמים ותגל הארץ) (1 Chron. 16:31). With half the name [i.e., *yod heh*, the first two letters of the words ישמחו השמים] He created the upper realities and with half the name [i.e., *waw heh*, the first two letters of the words ותגל הארץ] He sealed the lower ones, and the enlightened one will understand. And this seal He placed in our flesh as an eternal covenant . . . , for the corona [of the phallus disclosed through circumcision] is like a *yod*, which is

placed circumcision before His name, as it says, 'You have exalted Your word (אמרתך) on Your entire name' (Ps. 138:2; the literal rendering should be 'You have exalted on everything Your name [and] Your word'), for circumcision is called word (אמירה), as it is said, 'I rejoice over your word (אמרתך) as one who obtains great spoil' (ibid. 119:162), and it is written, 'They observed Your word (אמרתך) and kept Your covenant'" (Deut. 33:9). David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid's first-hand knowledge of Ashkenazi sources is a fact well established in the scholarly literature; see D. Matt, *The Book of Mirrors*, p. 1, and references given there in nn. 1–5.

¹⁰² There is no quotation in the extant versions of *Sefer Yeṣirah* which directly corresponds to this citation. See, however, *Sefer Yeṣirah* 1:15, where it is stated that God selected three letters, *yod heh waw*, and sealed the height with them as well as the six directions in accord with various permutations. And cf. *Otiyyot R. 'Aqiva* in *Batte Midrashot*, 2:364.

the first letter of the Tetragrammaton. And in this form it is inscribed on the flesh of the holy nation.¹⁰³

R. Aaron ha-Kohen's discussion of the numerical allusion to the divine name within the word *milah* must be understood against the background of the accepted correlation between the Tetragrammaton and circumcision. Hence the sign of circumcision incised on the corona of the phallus is identified as the *yod* not of *Shaddai*, as in *Tanḥuma*, but of the Tetragrammaton, as it is found in Pietistic sources.¹⁰⁴ The rite of circumcision legitimately functions as the everlasting covenant between God and the Jew, because the seal of circumcision, which is at the same time the seal by means of which God created heaven and earth, is the most sacred of God's names. Circumcision is therefore the inscription of the divine letter, and hence the divine name, upon the flesh of the Jew. In the act of inscribing the physical is transformed into the spiritual, for the bodily limb itself becomes the bearer of the divine letter and is thus the eternal sign of the covenant between God and Israel.

¹⁰³ Aaron ha-Kohen of Lunel, ²*Orḥot Ḥayyim* (see n. 7), 2:15. This passage is transmitted partly incorrectly in the name of R. Solomon ibn Adret in *Ḥiddushe RaSHBA*, 7:436.

¹⁰⁴ See above, n. 22.