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The Doctrine of Sefirot in the Prophetic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia

ELLIOT R. WOLFSON

I*

Typological Classification of Theosophic and Ecstatic Kabbalah in Modern Scholarship

Perhaps the most significant typological remark offered by Gershom Scholem in his seminal work, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, is the distinction he makes between “two opposing schools of thought in Spanish Kabbalism,” the ecstatic and theosophical kabbalah. The representative example of the former is the figure of Abraham Abulafia and that of the latter the *Zohar*.¹ Scholem, of course, was not the first scholar to appreciate the fundamental difference in orientation between the writings of Abulafia and other kabbalistic sources. Indeed, the very beginnings of modern scholarship on Abulafia, represented by Meyer Heinrich Landauer, is marked by the claim that Abulafia’s kabbalah

* Part II will be published in the next issue. – Earlier drafts of this study were read at the 25th Annual Meeting of the Association for Jewish Studies, held in Boston, Massachusetts, December 12, 1993, and at a seminar for the faculty and graduate students of the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies, Brandeis University, February 9, 1994. The final draft has been enhanced by comments that I received from the respective audience on both of those occasions. I would also like to thank Professor Moshe Idel who carefully read this study and offered some suggestions that have been adopted. – The following abbreviations are used to refer to manuscript repositories cited in the notes to this study: MS London-BM: London, British Museum; MS Milan-BA: Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana; MS Munich-BS: Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek; MS NY-JTSA: New York, Jewish Theological Seminary of America; MS Oxford-BL: Oxford, Bodleian Library (cited according to the Neubauer number); MS Paris-BN: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale; MS Vatican-BA: Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica.

¹ *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1956), p. 124. See idem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah ve-shel 'Avraham 'Abul'afiyah*, ed. J. Ben-Shlomo (Jerusalem, 1965), pp. 85–94, 107, 127–128; idem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 53–55.

did not promote the doctrine of ten *sefirot*.² Moreover, Adolph Jellinek, in part responding to Landauer's mistaken claim that Abulafia was the author of the *Zohar*, clearly isolated the Abulafian mystical system as a distinct "kabbalistische Schule,"³ which he designated (on the basis of Abulafia's own writings) as "prophetische Kabbala."⁴ The impact of Jellinek's distinction can be seen in Heinrich Graetz's typically pointed observation regarding Abulafia: "Even the trite Kabbala as commonly accepted, with its doctrine about the Sefiroth, did not satisfy his soul. ... He, a Kabbalist, criticised the unsoundness of this mystic theory so severely and correctly that it is surprising that he should have conceived still more insane notions."⁵ Scholem too builds upon the nascent typological classification of Jellinek, but he is to be given credit for providing a richer phenomenological sketch of the two kabbalistic currents and presenting a more comprehensive treatment of the prophetic kabbalah reflected in the writings of Abulafia and his disciples.⁶ Leaving aside the appropriateness of Scholem's delineation of ecstatic or prophetic kabbalah as a form of Spanish kabbalism – a point contested by Moshe Idel⁷ – there can be little doubt of the

² See Scholem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 98–99; R. Kiener, "From *Ba'al ha-Zohar* to Prophet to Ecstatic: The Vicissitudes of Abulafia in Contemporary Scholarship," in *Gershom Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism. 50 Years After*, ed. P. Schäfer and J. Dan (Tübingen, 1993), pp. 146–149.

³ See A. Jellinek, *Auswahl kabbalistischer Mystik* (Leipzig, 1853), p. 18.

⁴ See Jellinek, *Auswahl*, pp. 24–26; idem, *Philosophie und Kabbala* (Leipzig, 1854), Erstes Heft, p. xi; and the remarks of Kiener, "From *Ba'al ha-Zohar* to Prophet to Ecstatic," pp. 149–152. It is of interest to recall that in *Philosophie und Kabbala*, p. xi, n. 15, Jellinek cites a passage from *Zohar* 3:138b–139a concerning the cleaving of Israel to the divine name in conjunction with the description of the goal of prophetic kabbalah as knowledge of the divine names. Although it obviously would be wrong to collapse the idea of cleaving to the name in zoharic literature to the notion of *devequt* in ecstatic kabbalah, I think there is still merit in the tacit assumption of Jellinek's approach, viz., theosophic kabbalists and ecstatic kabbalists were likely drawing from a common motif that placed the cleaving to God's name at the center of Jewish spirituality.

⁵ *History of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1894), 4: 44–5.

⁶ Noted as well by Kiener, "From *Ba'al ha-Zohar* to Prophet to Ecstatic," pp. 152–157. The history of Scholem's scholarship on Abulafia and its larger impact on the academic study of Jewish mysticism is reviewed by M. Idel, "The Contribution of Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalah to the Understanding of Jewish Mysticism," in *Gershom Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism. 50 Years After*, pp. 117–143.

⁷ Idel has emphasized that ecstatic kabbalah developed primarily in Italy, Greece, and Palestine, especially the Upper Galilee, due to the banishment of Abulafia from Spain by Solomon ben Abraham ibn Adret. Abulafia lived in Italy from 1279 to at least 1291, the last date for which we have any biographical data. See M. Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany, 1989), p. 83; idem, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany, 1988), pp. 91–101. The major tenets of Abulafian kabbalah, in turn, had a substantial impact on Safedian kabbalah in the sixteenth century and East-European Hasidism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See Idel, *Studies*

soundness of the distinction that he makes between two major forms of kabbalah expressed in the last decades of the thirteenth century, the one focused on the hypostatic conception of the Godhead and the other focused on the cultivation of meditative practices that lead to prophetic and unitive states.

Several other scholars have touched upon this typological classification of late-thirteenth-century kabbalah,⁸ but no one has appropriated it more centrally than Idel in several works and most conspicuously in *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*. In this work Idel attempts to expand Scholem's typologies from their narrow historical framework by extending them to characterize sources that cover a much wider chronological range. For Idel the two major trends of kabbalah, the theosophical-theurgical (the latter term is Idel's very significant addition to Scholem's turn of phrase) and the ecstatic, represent first and foremost religious orientations.⁹ Notwithstanding this important shift in methodology and the many new insights into the vast corpus of Abulafia and his followers that one finds in the studies of Idel, there is a basic agreement between the latter and Scholem inasmuch as both scholars have noted the typological difference between Abulafia's ecstatic or prophetic kabbalah and the theosophical kabbalah.¹⁰ Idel's own research has strengthened Scholem's classification by charting in a more systematic way what he considers to be the basic phenomenological differences between the theosophic kabbalah and the ecstatic kabbalah with respect to such central issues as hermeneutics and the symbolic view of lan-

in *Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. vii–ix; idem, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," in *Studies in Maimonides*, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1990), p. 56; and, most recently, "Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalah," pp. 124–127. Idel's critique of calling the Abulafian and zoharic trends of Jewish mysticism "two opposing schools of thought in Spanish kabbalism" also turns on his assumption that both theosophic kabbalah and ecstatic kabbalah draw upon earlier sources that well precede the thirteenth-century Spanish milieu. See "Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalah," p. 127, and references to other studies of Idel given in nn. 59–60 ad locum. The challenge to calling Abulafia's mysticism a form of Spanish kabbalism does not, of course, deny the obvious fact that Abulafia had disciples in Spain whom he taught directly as he himself records in an autobiographical passage from *'Ozar 'Eden Ganuz* printed in A. Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 3rd ed. (Jerusalem, 1967), 3: xli. See Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 127; idem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 100–101.

⁸ See, e.g., E. Gottlieb, *Studies in the Kabbala Literature*, ed. J. Hacker (Tel-Aviv, 1976), pp. 38–55 (in Hebrew).

⁹ M. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven and London, 1988), pp. xi–xx. See n. 7 above and n. 11 below.

¹⁰ The point has been noted by H. Tirosh-Rothschild, "Continuity and Revision in the Study of the Kabbalah," *AJS Review* 16 (1991): 175; see also Kiener, "From *Ba'al ha-Zohar* to Prophet to Ecstatic."

guage, the theurgical role of the commandments, and the theosophic structure of divinity.¹¹

One of the consequences of this typological distinction has been the neglect of scholars to deal comprehensively with the doctrine of *sefirot* in Abulafia's mystical thought and praxis, although both Scholem and Idel have made important observations on this topic. The following assessment is given by Scholem in his lecture notes (dated February 24, 1965):

The essence for Abulafia is not the ten *sefirot* but the twenty-two letters. With respect to the matter of the *sefirot* and the traditional kabbalah, these are a vague entity and Abulafia's relationship underwent various changes and it was not unequivocal. In any event, the matter of the *sefirot* was not the essence and certainly not the symbolic doctrines of creation and the hidden life of God. [The *sefirot*] appear occasionally in his books and he plays with kabbalistic terminology ... but he also acts this way with Christian terminology and certainly he does not relate to this with seriousness (the Trinity etc.).¹² His use of *sefirot* is a matter that is marginal in his teaching, and the essence for him is the great principle of the structure of the decade in the creation of the world. He is not, however, drawn after the specific problem of the *sefirot* even though he speaks about them.¹³

On a more positive note Scholem remarks that in the writings of Abulafia the ten *sefirot* are identified as the pure forms of the separate intellects: "In contrast to the kabbalists for whom the intellects are created and their place is after the *sefirot*, which emanated from the Ein-Sof, for Abulafia there is no distinction between the *sefirot* and the intellects."¹⁴ In a third passage from the same lecture Scholem again addresses Abulafia's conception of the *sefirot* and more generally his ambiguous and equivocal attitude toward theosophic kabbalah. As Scholem notes in that context, there are instances wherein Abulafia relates positively to the sefirotic kabbalah and there are instances wherein he criticizes it rather harshly. In general he sees the matter of the *sefirot* as the preliminary aspect of kabbalah (derived from *Sefer Yesirah*) that

¹¹ See the following works of Moshe Idel: "The Writings of Abraham Abulafia and His Teaching," Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University, 1976, pp. 434–449 (in Hebrew); *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany, 1988), pp. 7–10; *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. vii–ix, 18–19; *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. ix–xvii; *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 200–210; "Defining Kabbalah: The Kabbalah of the Divine Names," in *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics and Typologies*, ed. R. A. Herrera (New York, 1993), pp. 97–122, esp. 104–111; "Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalah," pp. 128–130.

¹² See below n. 101.

¹³ *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 129.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

precedes the more important matter of the letters, but in some passages he clearly advocates a notion of meditation on the *sefirot* themselves that results in the contemplative conjunction of the kabbalist.¹⁵ Abulafia adopts a philosophical interpretation of the *sefirot* by identifying them with the separate intellects, but he also preserves something of the theosophic approach of the kabbalists who identified the *sefirot* as the divine potencies. This last point is significant and it is worthwhile citing Scholem verbatim: “There is also a definition of the divine *sefirot* according to the ways of Maimonidean philosophy. ... From another perspective there are instances wherein he accepts the matter of the *sefirot* and their identification with God since they are the potencies of God. That is to say, in his approach there is a discernible wavering.”¹⁶ Scholem did not intend by this observation to challenge his own typological characterization of prophetic kabbalah as distinct from theosophic kabbalah. But it is of consequence that in these lecture notes, composed twenty-four years after the publication of *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Scholem made a point of noting that Abulafia oscillated between a philosophic and theosophic understanding of the *sefirot*.

A different approach to the question of Abulafia’s treatment of the *sefirot* is found in the studies of Idel. In consonance with Scholem, Idel has noted the cosmological interpretation of the *sefirot* as separate intellects.¹⁷ He deviates from Scholem, however, by emphasizing Abulafia’s psychological understanding of the *sefirot* as internal states of human experience.¹⁸ That is, in many of the passages wherein Abulafia employs the language of theosophic kabbalah to discuss the *sefirot* he has in fact reinterpreted his sources in a psychological way. Hence, what Scholem understood to be a fluctuation between the theosophical and the philosophical understanding of the *sefirot* may be explained as a psychological explanation of the divine potencies based in fact on certain epistemological and metaphysical assumptions. The issue, then,

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 153. By contrast, Idel (*Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 99, n. 26) concludes that Abulafia “did not deal in pneumatic contemplation of ten *sefirot*.”

¹⁶ *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 154.

¹⁷ See Idel, “Writings of Abraham Abulafia,” pp. 436–438; idem, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 33, and the brief discussion in I. Weinstock, *Perush Sefer Yesirah 'Almoni mi-Yesodo shel Rabbi 'Avraham 'Abul'afiya'* (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 11–14 of the Introduction.

¹⁸ See Idel, “Writings of Abraham Abulafia,” p. 438; idem, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 146–149, 204; idem, *Hasidism Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany, 1995), pp. 228–232.

is not that Abulafia vacillated but that he absorbed and recontextualized theosophical modes of discourse.

In spite of the important contributions of Scholem and Idel briefly summarized above, what is still lacking is a comprehensive analysis of the *sefirot* in the thought of Abulafia. The purpose of this study is to fill that lacuna by reconsidering the role played by the *sefirot* in Abulafia's overall conception of kabbalah designated most frequently by him as the "tradition of the names" (*qabbalat ha-shemot*) or the "prophetic tradition" (*qabbalah nevu'it*).¹⁹ Before proceeding to an analysis of Abulafia's treatment of the *sefirot*, however, it is necessary to review several of the literary contexts wherein Abulafia himself posits a typological classification of the different kinds of kabbalah. This discussion, in turn, will necessitate a careful examination of Abulafia's appropriation of theosophic symbolism and modes of discourse. A reexamination of these issues will set the proper framework for an appreciation of the place occupied by the *sefirot* in Abulafia's thinking.

Typological Classification of Two Kinds of Kabbalah in Abulafia's Writings

At the outset let me reflect on the passage in the epistle *We-Zot li-Yehudah*, sent to Judah Salomon sometime in the late 1280's, wherein Abulafia distinguished between two types of kabbalah, in his language, *shene mine qabbalah*, the tradition of divine names, *qabbalat ha-shemot*, and the tradition of the sefirotic potencies, *qabbalat ha-sefirot*.²⁰ The work was published by Adolf Jellinek in 1853 and thus served as an important source for nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians who have attempted to present the development of medieval Jewish mysticism. Several of the modern scholars who affirm this typological classification have based their views on this passage.²¹ It is important to em-

¹⁹ See Idel, "Writings of Abraham Abulafia," pp. 438–440; *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. ix.

²⁰ *Auswahl*, p. 19 (Hebrew section); see also p. 15.

²¹ See *Auswahl*, pp. 20–25. Although Scholem does not cite the critical passage directly, it is evident from the notes to the chapter on Abulafia in *Major Trends* that he utilized this work of Abulafia edited by Jellinek. See idem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 154. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. xii, refers directly to this passage. In "Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalah," p. 127, n. 53, Idel refers to this source to substantiate the claim that Abulafia himself distinguished between two forms of kabbalah in the late thirteenth century. See also idem, "Defining Kabbalah," pp. 106–107 and 109–110, where it is again this epistle of Abulafia that is cited as support for the distinction between two types of kabbalah.

phasize that the tone of this letter is entirely polemical and self-justificatory. That is, the purpose of the document is to legitimate the author's own enterprise in the eyes of his reader. It is in the context of this letter that Abulafia responds in a rather acerbic manner to the criticism of him by Solomon ben Abraham ibn Adret.²² The strategy adopted by Abulafia to promote his own intellectual agenda was to demarcate his orientation over and against the views of others, including the talmudists, philosophers, and kabbalists primarily interested in expounding the doctrine of the *sefirot*. The distinction between the two types of kabbalah has to be seen as part of this larger project.²³

Appreciating the highly polemical nature of this context provides a key for understanding the rhyme and reason of Abulafia's adoption of a typological approach. The sharp angle of Abulafia's presentation is determined by the immediate concern to validate his own position.²⁴

²² Solomon ben Abraham ibn Adret, *Responsa* (Vienna, 1812), no. 548, 71c–72a. See Jellinek, *Auswahl*, p. 21; Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 379, n. 30; Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 30, n. 111. A rather strident attack on Abulafia is found as well in the introduction to Judah Ḥayyat's *Minḥat Yehudah*, his commentary on *Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohit* (Mantua, 1558), 3b (see Jellinek, *Auswahl*, p. 25, n. 14; Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 124; Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 145, n. 27). Ḥayyat supports his discrediting of Abulafia by referring to the aforementioned comment of the Rashba.

²³ See S. Bernfeld, *Da'at 'Elohim* (Warsaw, 1897), p. 387. Although Bernfeld well understood the need to see the typological classification in a polemical context, his characterization of Abulafia's interpretation of the *sefirot* as "only combinations of the names, which are activities of the unique God" is insufficient and misleading. The situation is much more complex and nuanced.

²⁴ Idel, "Defining Kabbalah," pp. 106–107 and 109–110, already noted that the typological approach exemplified in *We-Zot li-Yehudah* is based on Abulafia's religious struggle with the Rashba and his consequent desire to demonstrate the superiority of his own kabbalah. See also Scholem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 99. A more positive role may also be assigned to Abulafia's appropriation of *qabbalat ha-sefirot* in this process, i.e., Abulafia does not only reject the theosophic kabbalah but he shows how his own prophetic kabbalah embraces two parts, *qabbalat ha-sefirot* and *qabbalat ha-shemot*. Mention should be made of the fact that in 'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fols. 146b–147a, Abulafia sharply criticizes practitioners of magic (*ba'ale ha-shemot*) who falsely lay claim to the true kabbalah: "They think that they succeeded in the matter of the true kabbalah and they boast of the knowledge of the names. They think that the way received by them is the true way, but in relation to us it is the final limit of falsehood. These foolish people have no mind (literally, scales of intellect) upon which to weigh the truth." In the continuation of this text Abulafia refers to these individuals as "evil forgerers" and "deceitful wicked ones" who seek wealth, power, and glory in an ongoing pursuit after the vanities of the world. Abulafia also mentions in this context the written works of heretics and infidels. Cf. *ibid.*, fols. 145a and 149b. For a critique of the magical practices of the *ba'ale shemot*, cf. the epistle *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah*, in *Philosophie und Kabbala*, p. 22. See Idel, "Writings of Abraham Abulafia," p. 129; *idem*, "Historical Introduction," in Joseph Gikatilla, *Sha'are Orah: Gates of Light*, trans. A. Weinstein (San Francisco, 1994), p. xxxiii, n. 33. The defensive quality of Abulafia's thinking is evident in the autobiographical visionary tract, *Sefer ha-'Ot*, composed between 1285 and 1288.

Abulafia's kabbalah, called in this text the tradition of the names, *qabbalat ha-shemot*, is set off in a clear and distinct way from the opposing party, those who espouse the tradition of the divine potencies, *qabbalat ha-sefirot*. In an effort to legitimate his own teaching and thereby defend himself against the attacks of the Rashba, who is to be counted amongst those who focus exclusively on *qabbalat ha-sefirot*, Abulafia may have exaggerated the difference between his own brand of kabbalah and those of the other kabbalists. This is not to suggest that Abulafia advocated or even remotely intimated that the two kinds of kabbalah could be reduced to a single religious phenomenon. My point is rather that the extreme contrast of the two found in this epistle may have been shaped by the immediate concern of justifying himself in light of the criticism of a leading rabbinic authority who in his mind belonged to the other camp. Indeed, as I will suggest below, even in this document there is evidence for a more comprehensive understanding of kabbalah affirmed by Abulafia embracing both *qabbalat ha-shemot* and *qabbalat ha-sefirot*. Abulafia did not reject the doctrine of the *sefirot* as an integral part of Jewish esotericism but only a particular interpretation of the *sefirot* that has been called in contemporary scholarly literature theosophical. Granted that Abulafia harshly criticized those kabbalists who conceived of the *sefirot* as hypostatic potencies emanating from an infinite source of undifferentiated unity, but it is still necessary to investigate his own understanding of the *sefirot* to appreciate his conception of kabbalah in the fullest sense. The rigid polarization of *qabbalat ha-sefirot* and *qabbalat ha-shemot* as opposing schools of thought may reflect the particular polemical intention of this document.

Thus in one passage Zekharyahu, one of the imaginary literary personae assumed by Abulafia (the numerology of זכריהו equals that of אברהם, Abulafia's first name), is instructed by God "to write a book that is at odds with the opinions of the boastful sages of Israel...who say, 'Why should we consider the name of the Lord, what may we expect of it if we mention it and how will it benefit us if we contemplate it?'" Cf. A. Jellinek, "Sefer ha-Ôt: Apokalypse des Pseudo-Propheten und Pseudo-Messias Abraham Abulafia," in *Jubelschrift zum Siebzigsten Geburtstage des Prof. Dr. H. Graetz* (Breslau, 1887), p. 78. This remark, and other passages in this text, clearly indicate the frame of mind of someone who perceived himself to be a maverick set against the mainstream. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 79, where Zekharyahu is described as one "who destroys the edifice and builds the destruction," *ha-hores ha-binyan ha-boneh ha-hurban*. The text concludes (p. 85) with a divine assurance that the author should send his work to Spain without being afraid of any adverse reaction because God endorses the effort to disseminate knowledge of the name. In this same text (p. 83) the celestial man who appears to Zekharyahu, an obvious reference to Metatron who is specifically named near the end of the text as Yehoel (p. 84), is also depicted in the image of a warrior who must wage a battle against his enemies.

Support for my contention can be drawn both from Abulafia and from other Spanish kabbalists. Let me begin with the latter. Do we find in any other thirteenth-century kabbalistic work confirmation of Abulafia's typological classification? In a number of Castilian kabbalistic authors, e.g., Moses de León, there is surely evidence for competing esoteric circles including the *ba'ale shemot*, which refers in all probability to mystics whose primary concern consisted of theories and practices connected to the divine names and/or letters of the Hebrew alphabet rather than a hypostatic theosophy.²⁵ Even in so-called theosophic works in the second half of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth, it is evident that kabbalists refer to competing theosophies affirmed by different groups. One thinks of the remark of Isaac of Acre who distinguished between the kabbalists of Castile (referred to as Sefarad) and the kabbalists of Catalonia on the basis that the former received traditions regarding the demonic forces and the latter only traditions related to the ten *sefirot*.²⁶ The presence of such distinctions in kabbalistic texts notwithstanding, the sharp typological contrast set up by Abulafia in his letter to Judah Salomon is not found in other sources.

The closest that one comes to a typological classification that parallels Abulafia is in a passage from Ṭodros Abulafia's commentary on the talmudic aggadot, *'Oṣar ha-Kavod*, a work that is more or less contemporary with the epistle *We-Zot li-Yehudah*. In the context of discussing the kabbalistic tradition concerning the seventy-two names of God that surround the throne of glory, Ṭodros Abulafia remarks that these issues are far from his intention because "the tradition of the sages of divinity in the mysteries of Torah (*qabbalat ḥakhme ha-'elohut be-sitre torah*) is separate and the tradition of those who know the names apart from those that are not erased (*qabbalat yod'e shemot huṣ me-'otan she-'einan nimḥaqin*) is separate."²⁷ *Prima facie*, it would seem that Ṭodros Abulafia's comment implies a distinction that is analogous to that made by

²⁵ See A. Farber, "On the Sources of Rabbi Moses de Leon's Early Kabbalistic System," in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism, Philosophy, and Ethical Literature Presented to Isaiah Tishby on his Seventy-fifth Birthday*, ed. J. Dan and J. Hacker (Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 67–96, esp. 87, n. 47 (in Hebrew); *The Book of the Pomegranate: Moses de León's Sefer ha-Rimmon*, ed. E. R. Wolfson (Atlanta, 1988), p. 70, n. 4 (Hebrew section).

²⁶ The relevant comment of Isaac of Acre is cited by Gottlieb, *Meḥqarim be-Sifrut ha-Qabbalah*, pp. 341–342, and see Y. Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. A. Schwartz, S. Nakache, and P. Peli (Albany, 1993), p. 17. I would like to thank my colleague and friend, Boaz Huss, who reminded me of this well-known passage of Isaac of Acre after he heard the version of this paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Association of Jewish Studies.

²⁷ *'Oṣar ha-Kavod ha-Shalem* (Warsaw, 1879), 11c.

Abraham Abulafia,²⁸ but upon closer examination the essential difference between the two authors comes into clear focus. Ṭodros Abulafia is simply asserting that it is not appropriate to disclose secrets of the divine names in the context of explicating the mysteries of Torah connected to the wisdom about God, for only the names that cannot be erased according to the talmudic proscription are indicative of the divine nature. There are different kinds of kabbalistic tradition that should remain distinct – the kabbalah that deals with the *sefirot* symbolized by the divine names that cannot be erased and the kabbalah that deals with other, presumably magical, names of God that can be erased – but one is not to be privileged over the other in the manner that Abraham Abulafia implies in his epistle.²⁹ In fact in this very context Ṭodros Abulafia essentially affirms the veracity of the tradition that he does not wish to explicate: “There is no need for the words of those who allude in [the expression] ‘*av ‘anan* to the seventy-two names even though it is known by the masters of tradition (*ba‘ale ha-qabbalah*) that the seventy-two names surround the throne of glory.” There is no challenge here to the substance of the kabbalah about the names. The reluctance to engage in this matter is related rather to the author’s primary intention, which is the explication of matters pertaining to the sefirotic potencies. By contrast, Abraham Abulafia not only gives priority to one type of kabbalah in those passages that are evidently polemical in nature but also discredits the kabbalah based on a theosophic interpretation of the *sefirot*.

It is the case, moreover, that Abulafia himself, in other passages in this letter as well as other writings, exemplifies a much more dialectical view regarding the different forms of kabbalistic expression. Thus, for example, in one passage in *We-Zot li-Yehudah* Abulafia asserts that there are four bases of knowledge, *murgash*, *muskal*, *mefursam*, and *mequbal*, i. e., sense experience, reason (demonstrable truth), conventional opinion and received tradition.³⁰ The last item consists of a source

²⁸ See Idel, “Writings of Abraham Abulafia,” p. 438; idem, “Defining Kabbalah,” p. 105; idem, “Historical Introduction,” pp. xxviii–xxix.

²⁹ The text of Isaac ibn Abu Sahula mentioned by Idel, “Writings of Abraham Abulafia,” p. 438 and idem, “Defining Kabbalah,” p. 106, presents stronger language against the “fools” who boast that “they have a tradition of the names (*qabbalat ha-shemot*).” It is evident from that context that this kabbalist is speaking about individuals who use the divine names for magical purposes such as prognostication. The focus of his criticism, therefore, is against the misguided practical use of divine names and not against a theoretical or exegetical tradition about the divine names as is found in the passage of Ṭodros Abulafia (see reference in n. 27).

³⁰ On the epistemological hierarchy, cf. *‘Imre Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 235a: “If you are from the Torah-true kabbalists (*mequbbale ha-‘emet ha-torit*) you must know that

of knowledge that is not only unique to the Jewish people, but, as Abulafia is quick to point out, it is hidden from most of the rabbis who are involved in the study of Talmud.³¹ That tradition, *qabbalah*, is divided into two parts: (1) “the knowledge of God by way of the ten *sefirot* that are called the shoots and the one who separates them is one who cuts the shoots, and they reveal the secret of unity,” *helqe yedi‘at*³² *ha-shem ‘al derekh ‘eser sefirot ha-niqra’ot neti‘ot ‘asher ha-mafriid benehem meqasşes ba-neti‘ot we-hem megallim sod ha-yihud*, and (2) “knowledge of God by way of the twenty-two letters, from them and their vowels and accents the names and the seal are compounded,” *yedi‘at ha-shem*

which is the goal of all kabbalah is found beyond the sensible (*murgash*), beyond the imaginative (*medummeh*), and beyond the rational (*muskal*), for it is superior in perfection and truth to every matter and order. This matter comprises all the intentions of the Torah.” Cf. *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 69b, where Abulafia distinguishes three types of proof: sensible, intelligible, and traditional.

³¹ Abulafia repeats this theme in many of his writings. Cf. *Imre Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 221b: “Thus the wisdom of Talmud is most beneficial in terms of the principles and specifics in the ways of this world for our nation and in the life of the world-to-come. But this matter is not equal in degree to the matter of those who know the name. By way of comparison the difference between the talmudist and the one who knows the explicit name is like the difference between the Jewish talmudist and the learned non-Jew.” See Scholem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 126. On the distinction between talmudists, philosophers, and prophets, cf. also Abulafia’s *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 45b and *Shomer Mişwah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fols. 39b, 42a–b. Many more examples could have been mentioned, but the ones that I have noted are sufficient to make the point. The passage from *Shomer Mişwah* is especially noteworthy inasmuch as the full attainment of the ontic status of human being is linked to the transition from the class of philosophers to that of the prophets. This attainment of the latter, moreover, is framed in decidedly visual terms: “‘You will prophesy along with them and you will become another man,’ *we-hitnabbita ‘immam we-nehppakhta le-‘ish ‘aher* (1 Sam. 10:6). ‘Be strong and show yourself a man,’ *we-hazaqta we-hayyita le-‘ish* (1 Kings 2:2). The secret [of the expression *le-‘ish*] is [that its letters are an acrostic for the colors] *lavan, ‘adom, yaroq*, and *shaḥor* [white, red, green, and black]. When you will prophesy and go in the ways of prophecy, and separate from the rest of the people who go in darkness, strive to become part of the class of prophets. That is to say, you will receive the influx from the overflow of the intellect until you discern that the one who is apart from you speaks to you in a vision or in a dream, as it says concerning this, ‘When a prophet of the Lord arises among you, I make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream’ (Num. 12:6).” The wisdom of kabbalah and that of Talmud are contrasted in *Sefer ha-Şeruf*, MS Munich-BS 22, fols. 196b–197a, on the grounds that in the case of the former the individual’s capacity to understand on his own is the ultimate criterion for transmission of secrets and mystical knowledge. Cf. *ibid.*, fols. 199a, 210b.

³² The Hebrew text published by Jellinek (see reference in next note) reads here *de‘ot*, but as Jellinek himself suggested, *Auswahl*, p. 22, n. 11, this probably should be corrected to *yedi‘at*. I have translated the text in accordance with this suggested emendation, which is borne out by several manuscript versions that I examined. Cf. MSS Paris-BN héb. 774, fol. 64a; Paris-BN héb. 825, fol. 223a; Paris-BN héb. 1092, fol. 159b; NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 98b.

'al derekh kaf-bet 'otiyot 'asher mehem u-me-nequdotehem u-meta'amehem hurkevu ha-shemot we-ha-hotemet.³³ Both of these components constitute the nature of kabbalah and they are included in *Sefer Yeşirah*. There is no doubt regarding Abulafia's acceptance of the essential place occupied by *torat ha-sefirot* in the taxonomy of the kabbalistic tradition. The consummate master of esoteric knowledge must know the "mysteries of the names and the seal together with the *sefirot*," *sitre ha-shemot we-ha-hotemet 'im ha-sefirot*.³⁴ Although Abulafia recognizes both components as part of kabbalah, he clearly gives priority to the former over the latter.³⁵ Thus, reflecting on the *sefirot* and the letters, he observes that the "first part is prior in time with respect to the study of the tradition, but the second is prior to the first in terms of level, for it is the goal of the existence of select human beings. The one who reaches it is the one whose intellect is actualized, and he is the one to whom the Lord of everything revealed Himself and disclosed to him His secret."³⁶

In another passage in the same work Abulafia describes the two types of kabbalah in a somewhat more conciliatory manner: "My intention in this epistle that has been sent as a gift in honor of the distin-

³³ *Auswahl*, p. 15 (Hebrew section). For a different typological classification see *Sefer Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 55b.

³⁴ *Auswahl*, p. 14.

³⁵ Abulafia's view concerning the priority of the twenty-two letters over the ten *sefirot* stands in marked contrast, for instance, to the position articulated by Azriel of Gerona to the effect that the letters are comprised within the *sefirot*. See Azriel's commentary to *Sefer Yeşirah* 1:2 in *Kitve Ramban*, ed. C. D. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1964), 2:453: ועל דרך הכתוב בנתיבות כ"ב אותיות והכל נכלל בעשר וכל עשר ספירות בכל אות ואות. See, by contrast, the formulation of Isaac the Blind in his commentary to *Sefer Yeşirah* 3:2 in G. Scholem, *Ha-Qabbalah be-Provans*, ed. R. Schatz (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 12 of the Appendix: והן פנימיות ויסוד: הכנין הנעשה בהם הם אותיות. The secondary ontic status of the letters as derived from the sefirotic potencies is also implied in Isaac's commentary to *Sefer Yeşirah* 1:2, p. 2: אותיות הם דברים הבאים מסבתם מלשון באות שהאות היא דבר הנהנה המצטייר והמתקבל ממקום אשר חוצב משם. According to the formulations of Isaac and Ezra the *sefirot* are the inner essence or soul contained in each letter, whereas Azriel expresses the ontic primacy of the *sefirot* in terms of the image of the letters being comprised within the ten *sefirot*. Cf. the explanation of the term 'otiyot *yesod* in *Sefer Yeşirah* given by the anonymous author of *Sha'are Şedeq*, ed. E. Parush (Jerusalem, 1989), p. 28: "They called them [by the word] *yesod* because they are the foundation of the *sefirot*, to manifest and reveal through them their actions." See, however, the citation below at the end of n. 44. In that passage Abulafia affirms the position that the letters are contained in the *sefirot*. It goes without saying that the connotation of the term *sefirot* is not the same in the case of Abulafia and kabbalists like Isaac the Blind and Azriel.

³⁶ *Auswahl*, p. 16.

guished sage and faithful colleague, R. Judah Salomon, is to notify him and all who see it that I have already received the first part [that consists of] knowledge of the *sefirot* that have been mentioned before I received the second part, for the second is not found until the first is found even though there is a great connection (*shituf gadol*) between the two like the connection of the animal soul and the rational.”³⁷ In the continuation of this passage Abulafia compares philosophy and the two types of kabbalah to the three souls, vegetative, animal, and rational, as well as to the three divisions of Jews, the Israelites, Levites, and Priests.³⁸ Both metaphors express the hierarchical view adopted by Abulafia that placed prophetic kabbalah as the goal of human endeavor and the apex of spiritual achievement. But just as the three kinds of soul and the three divisions of Jews form organic wholes, so too the three kinds of knowledge are one entity in which every part is essential to the organism as a whole. The purpose of the human being is to acquire knowledge of the divine and each one of these three elements, philosophy, the kabbalah of the *sefirot*, and the kabbalah of the names, contributes to the process, although clearly the most perfect expression of that knowledge is attained only by virtue of the last of these paths. Despite the superiority of *qabbalat ha-shemot* there is an organic link connecting all three orientations, and especially the tradition of the *sefirot* and the tradition of the names. These two together constitute the esoteric lore of Judaism that is principally focused on knowledge of the divine name.³⁹

Analogously, in his epistle *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah* Abulafia delineates the seven hermeneutical paths as follows⁴⁰: (1) *peshaṭ* or the simple, contextual meaning; (2) *perush* or the rabbinic interpretation (Mishnah and Talmud); (3) *derash* and *haggadah* or homiletics and narrative le-

³⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 18. By contrast, in *Shomer Miṣwah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fols. 46b and 49a, Abulafia associates the Israelites, Levites, and Priests with the three levels of meaning in the text, the contextual, the philosophic, and the mystical, designated respectively as *darkhe ha-peshaṭ*, *darkhe ha-hokhmah*, and *darkhe ha-qabbalah ha-nevu'it*. In that context (fols. 48a-b) Abulafia also emphasizes the organic relatedness of the three levels, although he clearly asserts that what is known through kabbalah is not attainable through the other two paths. See n. 160 below.

³⁹ See Idel, “Writings of Abraham Abulafia,” p. 436 and idem, “Defining Kabbalah,” pp. 108–110.

⁴⁰ *Philosophie und Kabbala*, pp. 2–5. The seven paths are enumerated in slightly different terms by Abulafia in his *Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fols. 169b–171b. See discussion in Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 82–109. Cf. the description of the seven approaches to *peshaṭ* in *Maṭteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 76b.

gend; (4) *mashal* and *hiddah* or philosophical allegory; (5) *hathalat hokhmat seruf ha-'otiyot*, the beginning of the wisdom of letter permutation, also identified as *darkhe ha-qabbalot ha-toriyyot*, the ways of the traditions derived from the Torah; (6) *hashavat ha-'otiyot 'el homram ha-ri'shon*, the restoration of the letters to their first matter; and (7) the truth of prophecy, *'amitat ha-nevu'ah*, which entails knowledge of the comprehension of the unique name, *da'at hassagat mahut ha-shem hameyuhad*. For my purposes it is necessary to reflect on the description of the sixth path: "The name of this path comprises the secret of the seventy languages (*shiv'im leshonot*), which is numerically equal to the permutation of the letters (*seruf ha-'otiyot*),⁴¹ and this consists of restoring the letters to their first matter, through recitation and thought by way of the ten *sefirot belimah* whose secret is holy, and everything⁴² that is holy is not less than ten."⁴³ It is evident from the further description of this path that the prevailing concern here is linguistic and, more specifically, it entails the decomposition of scriptural verses into the letters that are the constituent elements of any language. Hence, this exegetical method comprises all sorts of linguistic devices such as numerology, permutations, notarikon, and exchanging of letters. It is also in light of this essentially linguistic nature that Abulafia connects this sixth hermeneutical path with *Sefer Yesirah*: "From this awesome and glorious path is revealed something of the matter of the knowledge of the explicit name and it is alluded to in the second chapter of *Sefer Yesirah*; it says concerning it, 'Twenty-two foundational letters, three mothers, seven doubles, and twelve simples. Twenty-two letters He engraved, hewed, weighed, permuted and combined, and through them he formed the soul of every creature and everything that is to be created in the future.'"⁴⁴ Given the essentially linguistic nature of this ex-

⁴¹ That is, *shiv'im leshonot* (שבעים לשונות) = 1214 = *seruf ha-'otiyot* (צירוף האותיות).

⁴² Cf. B. Berakhot 21b; Megillah 23b.

⁴³ *Philosophie und Kabbala*, p. 4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Similarly, in *'Ozar 'Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 170a, this path is called the "way of tradition according to the form of the Book of Formation," *derekh ha-qabbalah 'al surat Sefer Yesirah*, or simply the "way of tradition," *derekh ha-qabbalah* (*ibid.*, fol. 170b). The inclusion of the *sefirot* in the linguistic path should also be explained by the simple fact that the *sefirot* are designated by the first ten letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Cf. *Imre Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 249a: "These ten letters [אבגדהוזחטי] are called the ten *sefirot belimah*." And cf. *ibid.*, fol. 265a: "The ten letters are the principal ones and they are called the ten *sefirot* of the unity for they are the units." And *ibid.*, fols. 269a–b: "Thus you have thirty *sefirot* that come to be from the units that are the ten *sefirot* from 'alef to yod. ... The essence of the essences and the root of all principles is that which is called ten *sefirot belimah*, for from it everything comes to be, even the twenty-two holy letters. Therefore I have not elaborated on the letters for they are contained in the *sefirot* for they come to be from them."

egetical method it is all the more significant that the notion of the ten *sefirot* is mentioned in conjunction with it. In this context, as we shall see in other passages in Abulafia's corpus, the *sefirot* are the separate intellects. From this identification it follows that Abulafia is here expressing the idea that the verbal utterance (*hazkarah*) and mental contemplation (*mahshavah*) of the twenty-two letters is facilitated by the ten *sefirot*. Hence, it may be deduced from this passage that for Abulafia *qabbalat ha-sefirot* and *qabbalat ha-shemot* are not in diametric opposition, but rather function together in providing the mystic with the means to attain gnosis of the divine name.

In another composition, *Gan Na'ul*, written in 1289, Abulafia reiterates his view that kabbalah consists of two elements, the ten *sefirot* and the twenty-two letters, but there he indicates in more detail how the knowledge of the former is intricately related to the prophetic process:

Know that the principle of all kabbalah is included in these two issues mentioned in *Sefer Yesirah*, the first of them is knowledge of the ten *sefirot* and the second is knowledge of the twenty-two letters. The one who receives should try to receive the *sefirot* first in order to receive the divine overflow from them and in themselves according to his attributes. He will cleave to each and every *sefirah* separately and he will cleave to all the *sefirot* together as one so that he will not cut the shoots.⁴⁵

In contrast to the presentation in *We-Zot li-Yehudah*, in the passage from *Gan Na'ul* Abulafia assigns a far more significant role to the first part of kabbalah, the knowledge of the *sefirot*. That is, in *We-Zot li-Yehudah* Abulafia simply affirms that the consummate master is one who attains knowledge of the *sefirot* and the letters, the former preceding the latter in time but not in significance. In that context, however, the reader is not told in what specific way this prior knowledge relates to the general aim of the second aspect of kabbalah, i. e., gnosis of the divine names. In *Gan Na'ul* Abulafia emphasizes that the person must cleave to the *sefirot*, both individually and collectively, so that he can receive the divine overflow. It is fairly obvious that here the *sefirot* refer to the separate intellects. It thus makes perfect sense for Abulafia to have assigned such a role to the *sefirot*. Significantly, it is the mandate to cleave to all the *sefirot* collectively so that no division is created amongst them. I will discuss in greater detail this aspect of Abulafia's conception of the *sefirot* at a later juncture. The important point to emphasize here is that according to Abulafia knowledge of the *sefirot* facilitates the intellectual overflow that results in the prophetic experience. In *'Ošar 'Eden Ganuz* Abulafia reiterates this idea in an extended

⁴⁵ MS Munich-BS 58, fol. 319b. See Idel, "Historical Introduction," p. xxviii.

exegetical reflection on the statement in *Sefer Yeşirah*, “Ten *sefirot belimah*, their vision is like the appearance of lightning, and their limit has no end”:

By their saying “their vision” they informed us of the truth of prophecy and its essence. Thus the sages spoke constantly of the one who contemplates the vision of the chariot. The vision of the chariot was with them, may their memory be for a blessing, for they received from the prophets, may peace be upon them, the matter of combining letter with letter, word with word, and name with name (*harkavat 'ot be-'ot we-teivah be-teivah we-shem be-shem*). ... [This is] the account of the chariot (*ma'aseh merkavah*) for they combine names and so too the combination of verse with verse. Their root is in the combination of everything from the ten *sefirot* (*we-shoresh shelahem harkavat ha-kol me-'eser sefirot*). ... Know that this is the whole of a man and this is so because all the chariots are combined by means of the names, *sefirot*, and letters. Thus they are with us and they inform us about how all the combinations in the world are combined, for inasmuch as they are sealed by them the key to their knowledge has been given to those who visualize, see, and discern them. When a person gazes upon them properly he will see all reality through them just as he sees his face in a glass mirror and the face of all those who pass by and return. When the potency of the influx begins to be seen and to be revealed in a vision to the one who contemplates the letters, the *sefirot* are at first seen in the appearance of lightning in the likeness of the celestial creatures concerning whom it says “and the creatures ran to and fro in the likeness of lightning” (Ezek. 1:14).⁴⁶

The extent to which the formulation of the typological distinction adopted by Abulafia in *We-Zot li-Yehudah* is determined by the immediate literary context of that work may be gauged by considering a similar discussion in another work of Abulafia, *'Imre Shefer*, written in 1291. In that treatise Abulafia distinguishes four groups (*kitot*) who express different orientations related to the knowledge of God: those whose study is limited exclusively to the Talmud, those who have combined the study of Talmud with philosophy, those who have studied Talmud, philosophy, and the esoteric tradition (*qabbalah*) focused on the *sefirot*, and, finally, the exponents of the kabbalah of the knowledge of the divine name (*qabbalat yedi'at ha-shem*).⁴⁷ For the purposes of my analysis it is necessary to cite Abulafia's account of the third group:

This group believes the teachings pertaining to the ten *sefirot belimah* and the orders of their matters as they are. Even though it too is divided into groups, I will not specify them here. ... Now place your mind to understand the opinion of this third group. ... It is necessary to take pains to seek out the

⁴⁶ MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 8a. Cf. the passage from *'Imre Shefer* cited below in n. 55.

⁴⁷ Cf. MS Munich-BS 40, fols. 221a–224a. The text was published by Jellinek, *Philosophie und Kabbala*, pp. 34–38. Cf. the formulation in Baruch Togarmi's

third way so that you may know their opinion, the way of the sages of the first kabbalah and they are the sages of the *sefirot*⁴⁸. ... I must inform you in general about the limit of their kabbalah⁴⁹ and how there is parity between us and them with regard to the matter of the knowledge of the recitation of the names according to the secret of the knowledge of the explicit name. ... For⁵⁰ they say that they received from the prophets and from the sages that there are ten *sefirot belimah*, and by means of the *sefirot* the Creator created the entire world, and they gave names to each and every *sefirah*, some of them are homonyms and some of them are unique. When those who know about these *sefirot* were asked [about them] they did not know to what their names refer in essence, whether to actual bodies, or to matter without form, or to forms without matter, or to accidents predicated of bodies of which they are their potencies, or to souls separated from all subjects, or to ideas that are called separate intellects. But they say that according to their faith these are matters that emanate from God, blessed be He, and now they do not exist without Him nor He without them. However, before creation they were in God *qua* imagined and in potentiality and He brought them forth from potentiality into actuality when He desired to create the world. And they called the name of one of the *sefirot* will (*raṣon*) ... and it is called by them thought (*maḥshavah*), which is called the supernal crown (*keter 'elyon*), and for them this is the first *sefirah*, and the tenth for them is the *Shekhinah* and they called it righteousness (*śedeq*). The names are known from their books and they are very confused. In truth, they called the sixth *sefirah* truth (*'emet*) and also beauty (*tif'eret*). They said that this is the glorious name of the Holy One, blessed be He, that is written but not read, and this is the explicit name. They extracted the ten *sefirot* from the verse “Yours, Lord, are greatness, might [splendor, triumph, and majesty – yes, all that is in heaven and on earth; to You, Lord, belong kingship and preeminence above all]” (1 Chron. 29:11). Thus it can be said that from the aspect of the letters the *sefirot* can be comprehended, and by means of the comprehension of the *sefirot* the name YHWH is comprehended. All that has been said from the aspect of the letters is true, but there is another way that is closer to its comprehension than their way through the intermediary of the letters and *sefirot* themselves. At the end of this book I will reveal to you my opinion in this completely and it is that which comprises the truth of the entire kabbalah. Even so our opinion and the opinion of this group are much closer than the opinions of those groups that ignore⁵¹ the perspective of the belief in the *sefirot* and the letters. Therefore I say that this group is proximate to the remedy (*qerovat ha-refu'ah*).⁵²

Maftehot ha-Qabbalah, printed in Scholem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 237: *kat ha-mequbbalim bi-yedi'at ha-shem*.

⁴⁸ Cf. MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 234a. Cf. *ibid.*, fol. 255b, where Abulafia refers to theosophic kabbalists as *ma'amine ha-neti'ot*, “believers in the shoots.”

⁴⁹ Literally, “to where their kabbalah reaches,” *'ad mah higi'ah qabbalatam*.

⁵⁰ This part of the text is translated and discussed in Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 202.

⁵¹ Literally, “pass over.”

⁵² MS Munich-BS 40, fols. 223b–224a.

If one compares the typological casting of the two kinds of kabbalah in the epistle *We-Zot li-Yehudah* to the citation from *'Imre Shefer* it is obvious that in the latter Abulafia emphasizes in even greater detail the intellectual kinship or partnership of the two groups of kabbalists. This is not to ignore Abulafia's obvious critique of theosophic kabbalah; on the contrary, he derisively portrays the theosophic kabbalists as confused with respect to the basic question of the nature of the *sefirot*, which is after all the main conceptual doctrine that informs their worldview.⁵³ Moreover, near the conclusion of the passage Abulafia alludes to the privileged status of the kabbalah that focuses its attention on the Hebrew letters and divine names. In spite of his pointed criticism of the sefirotic kabbalists, Abulafia nevertheless acknowledges common elements between the two types of kabbalah. In another passage from the same work, preceding the one cited above, Abulafia states explicitly what the critical shared element is: "Indeed, my opinion and the opinion of the third group in our mentioning the knowledge of the name in every place is one, and this is the knowledge of the prophets and the knowledge of the sages of the Mishnah and Talmud, their memory should be for a blessing, and this is the knowledge of the signification of the letters of the explicit name."⁵⁴ The common

⁵³ As noted by Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 202. See, by contrast, *'Ošar 'Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 12b. In the context of explaining why the term *sefirot* in the feminine is used and not *misparim* in the masculine Abulafia writes: "This is to instruct about the weakness of the created entity and about the strength of the Creator, but [it does not imply that] there is masculinity and femininity there. [The feminine form is used] because the *sefirot* are creatures and the Creator is not a *sefirah*. Even according to the view of those who affirm the attributes [i. e., the theosophic kabbalists], who are perfect in wisdom and the tradition, they mentioned [the *sefirot*] in the feminine noun. Moreover, they enumerated them on account of the fact that they are an emanation that emanated from God. Each one stands by itself having emanated alone from God even though they are all of one type ... and there is no difference in existence between one and the other except in grade." Significantly, in this passage the rhetoric against the theosophic kabbalists is rather mild; in fact, there is no real polemical opposition here. On the contrary, the theosophic kabbalists, designated as those who affirm the attributes, *ma'amine ha-middot*, are described by Abulafia as being "perfect in wisdom and the tradition," *shelemim be-ḥokhmah u-ve-qabbalah*, hardly a perjorative expression. Scholem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 127, emphasized another aspect of Abulafia's critique of the theosophic kabbalists: their kabbalah changed from an experiential lore to mere theoretical speculation. I am not convinced of Scholem's understanding of Abulafia on this score.

⁵⁴ MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 222b. See Idel, "Writings of Abraham Abulafia," p. 436. On the connection of the *sefirot* and letters of the divine name, cf. *'Imre Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 239a: "Thus you have the form of the ten *sefirot* within [the letters] 'AHW"Y (אהו"י)." These letters, considered in medieval sources not only as the vowel letters but also as representative of the Tetragrammaton, numerically equal twenty-two, which corresponds to the number of Hebrew consonants. The point of Abulafia's text,

denominator and unity of purpose of the two types of kabbalah is that both impart knowledge about the divine name, a knowledge that can only be transmitted as a received tradition. Thus Abulafia concludes that the kabbalists who contemplate the *sefirot* have a greater affinity with the kabbalists who possess true traditions about the divine names than with the other groups. It is highly significant that Abulafia asserts that the sefirotic kabbalists are close to the true path to which he refers at the end of the passage as the remedy or healing. Abulafia's own view is here portrayed not in opposition to the other kabbalists but rather as that which encompasses and embraces them. The virtue of the fourth group, the prophetic kabbalists, is that it comprises all the other paths of knowledge about God. In a third passage from this work Abulafia emphatically reiterates this point:

The purpose of the intention of this composition is to instruct about the knowledge of God, His attributes, His powers, His actions, and how He is different from all other existents outside Him. However, only he who has already acquired knowledge of Scripture, Talmud, and all their fine details, and he who has philosophized and after he has philosophized he has received the wisdom of kabbalah pertaining to the *sefirot* and the letters, will understand my comprehensive view. Without this he will in no way comprehend my view to its limit. There is no doubt that the sages of the *Sefer Yesirah* are called kabbalists (*mequbbalim*) and they are divided into many groups ... but I do not want to delineate here their differences, for the perfect ones will discern that my view comprises all the views of these groups, and it is the view that is comparable to the views of the sages and of the prophets.⁵⁵

therefore, might be that the ten *sefirot* are comprised within the twenty-two letters. On the interpretation of the letters "איהו" in the writings of Abulafia, see Idel, *Mystical Experience*, pp. 18, 22, 31.

⁵⁵ MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 232a. Cf. *ibid.*, fols. 248b–249a: "However, the study that brings its master to eternal love of God ... is the matter of the comprehension of God by means of the name, and this is the investigation and contemplation of His name by means of the twenty-two letters of the Torah, which succeeds the knowledge of the matter of the ten *sefirot*, which are from 'alef to yod, and contained in them are all things that come after them, for they emanate from them. They and their forms are called the speculum that shines, for all the forms are sealed in them. ... The one who looks at their forms will find their mysteries and he will speak of them and they will speak of him, and they are like the mirror in which a person sees all the forms standing opposite it. Then he will see all the particulars and all the universals." That the path of kabbalah encompasses knowledge of the ten *sefirot* and of the twenty-two letters is emphasized by Abulafia in *ibid.*, fol. 258a.

Abulafia's Appropriation of Symbols, Concepts, and Terms from Works of Theosophic Kabbalah

In several of his writings Abulafia borrowed freely from works that current scholarship would call theosophic kabbalah. By his own admission Abulafia studied some of these works⁵⁶ and on occasion he cites them explicitly in his own compositions, for example, *Sefer ha-Bahir*⁵⁷ and Nahmanides' commentary on the Torah.⁵⁸ In particular, bahiric

⁵⁶ Cf. the list of commentaries on *Sefer Yeşirah* enumerated by Abulafia in 'Oşar 'Eden Ganuz, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 16b (text printed by Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 3: xlii–xlili). Included in this list of texts studied by Abulafia are works composed by theosophic kabbalists, Ezra and Azriel of Gerona, Moses ben Nahman, Jacob ben Jacob ha-Kohen, and Moses of Burgos. I note, parenthetically, that Abulafia describes the tenth-century commentary on *Sefer Yeşirah* by Shabbetai Donnolo as a combination of philosophy and kabbalah, a description that confirms my own interpretation of this work. See E. R. Wolfson, "The Theosophy of Shabbetai Donnolo, with Special Emphasis on the Doctrine of Sefirot in His *Sefer Hakhmoni*," *Jewish History* 6 (1992): 281–316.

⁵⁷ Jellinek, *Auswahl*, p. 25, noted Abulafia's specific reference to *Sefer ha-Bahir* and to Nahmanides. To be sure, the citation of the *Bahir* by Abulafia does not necessarily mean that he interpreted the text theosophically in light of the doctrine of *sefirot* or that for his purposes the theosophic understanding was paramount. See, for instance, Idel's discussion (*Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 95–96) of Abulafia's citation of a bahiric passage in 'Oşar 'Eden Ganuz, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 170b. Cf. the reference to the *Bahir* in *ibid.*, fol. 14b. On occasion a non-theosophic passage from the *Bahir* is cited or paraphrased in Abulafia's own compositions. See, e. g., *Gan Na'ul*, MS Munich-BS 58, fol. 322a where the influence of *Sefer ha-Bahir*, ed. R. Margalio (Jerusalem, 1978), § 115 is evident even though it is not cited by name. Cf. *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 63a and *Hayye ha-Nefesh*, MS Munich-BS 408, fol. 74b. Needless to say, many more textual examples of this phenomenon could have been adduced, but the ones that I have noted are sufficient to make the point. In 'Oşar 'Eden Ganuz, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 147a, Abulafia includes *Sefer ha-Bahir* in a list of esoteric works composed by the ancient sages. The list also includes *Pirqe Hekhalot*, 'Otiyyot de-R. 'Aqiva', and *Sefer Yeşirah*. (In the same context Abulafia enumerates books composed by the *hakhme hamillot*, which include *Sefer ha-Yihud*, *Sefer ha-Kavod*, *Sefer ha-Nefesh*, *Sefer ha-Torah*, *Sefer ha-Merkavah*, and *Sefer ha-Binyan*. Is this a reference to the esoteric writings of Ḥaside Ashkenaz? Cf. "Sefer ha-Öt," p. 75, where reference is made to the *hakhme lashon* who know the different ways of combining the divine names.) Cf. 'Oşar 'Eden Ganuz, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fols. 148b–149a. Concerning Abulafia's intimate knowledge of theosophical kabbalah, cf. the passage from his epistle, *Maşref la-Kesef*, MS Sassoon 56, fol. 25a, translated by Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 151, n. 89.

⁵⁸ See Jellinek, *Auswahl*, p. 19, who noted the specific influence of Nahmanides and Eleazar of Worms on Abulafia. (On the influence of Ḥaside Ashkenaz on Abulafia, see further references cited below, n. 161). Clearly, Abulafia saw in both of these figures important repositories for kabbalistic traditions regarding the divine names. In particular, Abulafia frequently cites Nahmanides' statement in the introduction to his commentary on the Pentateuch that the Torah in its entirety consists of divine names. Cf., e. g., 'Imre Shefer, MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 235b; 'Oşar 'Eden Ganuz, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 171a; *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 94b; *Hayye ha-Nefesh*, MS Munich-BS 408, fol. 87b; see Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 46–47, 66, 171, n. 88.

motifs are evident in Abulafia's writings even when he does not mention that text by name. Needless to say, Abulafia does not interpret the passages that he cites from the aforementioned works or other kabbalistic sources in light of a sefirotic theosophy,⁵⁹ but it is nevertheless significant that he utilized these texts and cited them as support of his own views. Here we come upon a fascinating aspect of Abulafia's intellectual profile: despite his harsh criticism of the theosophic kabbalists he studied their compositions and in some cases appropriated their symbolism and modes of discourse. Without adopting the theosophical standpoint Abulafia was able to reinterpret the language of these texts. On the one hand, it is clear that the intricate process of appropriation is a clever strategy of undermining the theosophic kabbalists,⁶⁰ but, on the other, I would propose that it also implies that Abulafia recognized shared elements in the two kinds of kabbalah notwithstanding their distinctiveness. To avoid potential misunderstanding let me again emphasize that I am not suggesting that Abulafia ever erased the difference between theosophic and ecstatic kabbalah. What I am arguing is that Abulafia's reinterpretation (and ultimate undoing) of theosophic texts was buttressed by his affirmation of a notion of kabbalah that encompassed a doctrine of the *sefirot*. At the very least an appreciation of the mechanism by which Abulafia utilized theosophic sources will enhance our understanding of his own conception of the *sefirot*.⁶¹ It is

Scholem (*Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 103) entertains the possibility that Abulafia met Nahmanides in Barcelona before the latter emigrated to Palestine in 1267.

⁵⁹ See Idel's observation in "Writings of Abraham Abulafia," p. 434: "Indeed, [Abulafia] himself acknowledges that he read compositions of the kabbalists, but an examination of the influence of these compositions indicates that apart from concepts removed from their original context Abulafia did not accept the fundamental views of the theosophic kabbalah." See also Scholem's remark (*Major Trends*, p. 126) that Abulafia "seems to have been deeply occupied with the Kabbalistic doctrines of his age, without, however, being overmuch impressed by them." See idem, *Kabbalah*, p. 54: "Abulafia was also a copious borrower of kabbalistic ideas whenever he found them relevant, but those aspects which were foreign to his nature he opposed even to the point of ridicule."

⁶⁰ I owe this formulation to Moshe Idel. See now Idel, *Hasidism Between Ecstasy and Magic*, p. 229.

⁶¹ In my view, the appropriation of technical terms and symbols from theosophic kabbalah by Abulafia may have also been instrumental in the synthesis of theosophic and ecstatic kabbalah that one finds in other sources beginning already at the end of the thirteenth and the start of the fourteenth century. This synthetic approach is certainly evident in the anonymous treatise, *Sha'are Sedeq*, a late-thirteenth-century work which has been long recognized as being very close to Abulafia's prophetic kabbalah. Concerning this work, see G. Scholem, "Sha'are Sedeq: A Kabbalistic Treatise from the School of R. Abraham Abulafia, attributed to R. Shem Tov (ibn Gaon?)," *Kiryat Sefer* 1 (1924–25): 127–139 (in Hebrew); idem, *Major Trends*, pp. 146–155. This work is cited in many of Idel's studies on Abulafia, which I will not here list separately. The author of *Sha'are*

significant, for example, that in *Gan Na'ul* Abulafia gives a detailed account of the ten *sefirot*, beginning with the tenth, the *Shekhinah* or *ṣedeq*, and ending with the first, *keter* or *maḥshavah*.⁶² Even a cursory glance at this text indicates how heavily indebted Abulafia's own description of the *sefirot* is to standard theosophic works, though it must be readily acknowledged that he rejected the essential approach of theosophic kabbalah.

A striking illustration of the complex appropriation of theosophic symbolism on the part of Abulafia is found in his treatment of the patriarchs and their association with different *sefirot* or attributes. I will discuss this motif in some detail because it provides an excellent van-

Ṣedeq appropriates and reinterprets some of the standard symbols for the *sefirot* used in theosophic kabbalah, e. g., the configuration of the ten *sefirot* in the shape of an anthropos, the androgynous bifurcation of the *sefirot* into an active male and passive female, the containment of the ten *sefirot* within the letter 'alef. Cf. *Sha'are Ṣedeq*, pp. 12–13, 18–19, 30. Thus the author of *Sha'are Ṣedeq*, p. 11, interprets Moses' request to see the "form of the glory" (*surat ha-kavod*), which is the divine face, as a reference to the "form of the supernal structure of the *sefirot*" (*surat ha-binyan ha-'elyon ba-sefirot*), a locution that is surely based on theosophic kabbalah. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 21. Further evidence of this appropriation can be seen in the identification of the *sefirot* as *middot* (*ibid.*, p. 12). To be sure, this anonymous disciple of Abulafia identifies the *middot* and *sefirot* of kabbalistic speculation with the separate forms (*ha-surot ha-nivdalot*) of the philosophers, i. e., the sefirotic potencies are the incorporeal intellects that move each heavenly sphere (cf. p. 16; and see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 345, n. 270). Nevertheless, it is clear that aspects of the theosophic tradition in a very fundamental way influenced this kabbalist's approach to the *sefirot*. See Idel's remarks, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 99, n. 26. The influence of the language and symbolism of theosophic kabbalah is also readily apparent in another composition that reflects the approach of the prophetic kabbalah, *Ner 'Elohim*. See below nn. 91, 100, 119, and 123. A similar hybrid of the two forms of kabbalah is characteristic of Isaac of Acre, a contemporary of the author of *Sha'are Ṣedeq*, especially in his mystical diary, *Oṣar Ḥayyim*. See Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 112–119. On the merging of the theosophic and ecstatic trends, see also the general remarks of Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 145–146; *idem*, *Kabbalah*, p. 105.

⁶² MS Munich-BS 58, fols. 319b–320b. Idel, "Historical Introduction," pp. xxvii–xxviii, notes that the ascending order of the *sefirot* in Abulafia influenced the approach of Gikatilla reflected in his theosophic works, *Sha'are Ṣedeq* and *Sha'are 'Orah*. I suspect that Abulafia utilized a theosophic symbol in the following statement in "Sefer ha-Öt," p. 71: "The supernal crown is the unique name ... for there is one root and three heads evolve from it." The association of the crown and the divine name is expressed in much older sources, but the particular image of three heads emanating from the supernal crown, also called the head of the first head (*ro'sh ha-ro'sh ha-ri'shon*), bears an interesting similarity to the conception expressed in the Idrot sections of the *Zohar*. See I. Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, trans. D. Goldstein (Oxford, 1989), pp. 245–246. Theosophic symbology is also evident in the following description of the *Shekhinah* in "Sefer ha-Öt," p. 75: "Therefore the name of the final *he'* [of YHWH] is the seal of the Presence (*hotam shekhinah*) and the prophecies and salvations for every rational and intelligible soul are dependent upon it." On the term *hotam* as a designation for the Active Intellect, see Idel, *Mystical Experience*, pp. 216–217, n. 96.

tage point from which to reflect on the more general phenomenon under consideration. Let me begin by citing the following passage from *Imre Shefer*:

Behold [the threefold repetition of the divine name] YHWH YHWH YHWH. One is called the God of Abraham and its secret corresponds to wisdom (*hokhmah*), which is the mercy (*hesed*) that the Holy One, blessed be He, performed with Abraham our father. ... The second is called the God of Isaac and its secret corresponds to understanding (*tevunah*), which is the potency of strength (*koah ha-gevurah*) and the attribute of fear (*middat pahaḏ*), which is the secret of fear (*sod ha-yir'ah*). The potency of love (*koah ha-'ahavah*) was [given] to Abraham ... and in order to purify the attribute of strength (*middat ha-gevurah*) Isaac our father was bound by the sacrificial binding (*'aqedah*).⁶³ The third is the God of Jacob ... and his secret corresponds to knowledge (*da'at*) ... and this is the attribute of beauty (*middat tif'eret*) that attests to the overflow of the blessing in its entirety. ... The name consists of four letters and with three of them the name is composed, and they are YH"V, and they are divided six times in the seal of six extremities as it is written in *Sefer Yeṣirah*. From them is the secret of wisdom (*hokhmah*), understanding (*tevunah*), knowledge (*da'at*), greatness (*gedullah*), strength (*gevurah*), and beauty (*tif'eret*). It is said in the kabbalah that the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, is the sixth *sefirah* and this is the attribute of truth (*middat 'emet*). Therefore, the sum of the letters YH"V [21] squared is the same as the numerical value of the word *'emet* [44].⁶⁴

The correlation of the biblical patriarchs and three divine attributes is doubtless based on a section in *Sefer ha-Bahir* even though Abulafia makes no explicit reference to that book.⁶⁵ It is evident, however, that Abulafia's reading of the relevant bahiric texts is colored by other kabbalistic sources that delineate the sefirotic potencies. The passage clearly attests to Abulafia's knowledge of theosophic kabbalah and his attempt to appropriate the symbolism of the *sefirot* to express his own opinions regarding the divine and human nature. The three pairs of attributes, *hokhmah* and *hesed*, *tevunah* and *gevurah*, *tif'eret* and *da'at*, denote internal psychological states attained respectively by the patriarchs.⁶⁶ It must be noted, however, that these qualities are at the same time attributes of God. The concluding reference to a kabbalistic tradition regarding the name of God, which is the sixth *sefirah* and the attribute of truth, underscores the divine dimension of these potencies. In another passage from this composition Abulafia explicitly writes:

⁶³ Elsewhere Abulafia explains the binding of Isaac in a psychological way as intellect overcoming imagination. See Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 61–67.

⁶⁴ MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 233b. Another part of this passage is cited below in n. 104.

⁶⁵ *Sefer ha-Bahir* §§ 135–137; see also §§ 186, 190–191. The correlation of the patriarchs and the *middot* is affirmed as well by the anonymous disciple of Abulafia in *Sha'are Sedeq*, p. 6.

“Every thought and every wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, are matters that are influenced by the divine overflow.”⁶⁷ The correlation of the internal psychical states (assigned to the patriarchs) and the external divine attributes is expressed by Abulafia in *’Oṣar ’Eden Ganuz* wherein he delineates the corporealization and anthropomorphization of the human faculties and the hypostatic qualities to which they refer:

You will understand from the body and the faculties of a man that there is a superior [element] in the body and an inferior, the superior is the head and the inferior is the feet. . . . The faculties [of the body] inform us about the attributes and they too are calculated and measured for the senses, which are external faculties, are superior and inferior. . . . The one who does not calculate this does not calculate his attributes and all the more so the attributes of his God and he will not discern or know the overflow of his God. Therefore, one must calculate the attributes in accordance with the order of the body, the

⁶⁶ Cf. *Shomer Miṣwah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fol. 60b: “He who appropriates one of the attributes and puts it in charge of all his attributes is judged with divine providence. This is like Abraham in [relation to] the attribute of mercy, Isaac in the attribute of fear, Jacob in the attribute of truth, Moses in the attribute of humility, Aaron in the attribute of peace, David in the attribute of courage, and Solomon in the attribute of justice.” On *ḥokhmah*, *binah*, and *da’at* as psychological states, cf. “Sefer ha-’Ot,” p. 83; *Maṣteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fols. 63b and 70b. In the latter context the psychological dimension has a corresponding ontological reality inasmuch as the aspect of knowledge (*da’at* or *madda*) is identified as the *mal’akh ha-’elohim*, the “angel of God,” a reference to Metatron, the Active Intellect. (On the correlation of the patriarchs, the chariot, and the *sefirot*, cf. *Ner ’Elohim*, MS Munich-BS 10, fol. 162a.) Another example of the psychological interpretation of a theosophic symbol is found in the description in *Shomer Miṣwah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fol. 58a, of the soul that is perfect in Torah, wisdom (*ḥokhmah*), and prophecy (*nevu’ah*) as “the bride in whom all is found,” *kalah ’asher ha-kol bah*. This is likely based on the kabbalistic symbol of the *Shekhinah* as the “bride that is comprised of all,” *kalah ha-kelulah min ha-kol*, to paraphrase the formulation of Nahmanides in his commentary to Gen. 24:1.

⁶⁷ MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 227a. Cf. *Shomer Miṣwah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fol. 41b, where Abulafia links *ḥokhmah* and *binah* respectively to the sun and moon. The divine status of the three attributes (*middot*) of *ḥokhmah*, *binah*, and *da’at* seems to be implied in the following passage in *Sefer ha-Haftarah*, MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 30b: “Know that the seventy-two-letter name is engraved on the head of a person, on the sun in the world, and on wisdom (*ḥokhmah*) in the [realm of the] attributes, which are the attribute of the day (*middat yom*) and the attribute of the night (*middat laylah*); the forty-two-letter name is engraved on the heart of a person, on the moon in the world, and on understanding (*binah*) in the [realm of the] attributes, which are the attribute of mercy (*middat raḥamim*) and the attribute of judgment (*middat ha-din*); and the twelve-letter name is engraved on the liver of a person, on Mercury in the world, and on knowledge (*da’at*) [in the realm] of the attributes, which are the attribute of righteousness (*middat ha-sedeq*) and the attribute of justice (*middat ha-mishpat*).” In this context, then, the realm of the attributes parallels the macrocosm (or, more specifically, the heavenly spheres) and the microcosm (the human body). It is also of interest to note that there are nine attributes enumerated in this list insofar as each of the three main attributes, *ḥokhmah*, *binah*, and *da’at*, comprises two attributes within itself.

hard limbs signify the harsh attributes and the soft the weak attributes, and as it is in the body so it is in the world. ... It is known that in the measure that a man metes out so it will be meted out to him.⁶⁸ Thus, Abraham meted out the attribute of mercy (*middat ha-ḥesed*) and through the attribute of mercy it was meted out to him, as it says, “deal graciously with my master Abraham” (Gen. 24:12). Jacob meted out the attribute of truth (*middat ha-’emet*), as it says with respect to the two of them, “You will render truth unto Jacob and mercy unto Abraham” (Micah 7:20). Isaac meted out the attribute of judgment (*middat ha-din*) and it was meted out to him in the attribute of fear (*middat pāḥad*), which is the attribute of judgment, as it says, “And Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac” (Gen. 31:53), and it says, “And the fear of Isaac was with me” (ibid., 42), and this is the attribute of strength (*middat ha-gevurah*). These three, mercy, fear, and truth, are corporeal attributes (*middot gufaniyyot*) that derive from three spiritual [attributes] (*ruḥaniyyot*), ratiocination (*hishshuv*), philosophising (*hithakkemut*), and contemplation (*hitbonenut*).⁶⁹

In the final analysis, for Abulafia there is an intrinsic connection between the interior human states and the divine potencies; the former derive from the latter.⁷⁰ The point is explicitly addressed in another passage from *’Imre Shefer*:

Since the three worlds are bound one to the other, the three worlds of a person are also bound one to the other, and the one who arranged the order of the three worlds according to His attributes also arranged the three orders of the worlds of a person according to His attributes. And just as the worlds must extend in all their matters to imitate His attributes in their attributes, so too must a person extend in all his matters to imitate in his attributes the attributes of God until the point that God must be [present] in select individuals, the most perfect in the human species, and the intellect of their thoughts is constantly with God. These people are constantly going and coming in the world of the intellects, and they are the prophets.⁷¹

In this passage there is no reference to the *sefirot* nor any attempt to use modes of theosophic discourse. In other contexts, however, including the texts cited above, Abulafia employed the symbols of theosophic kabbalah to convey the idea of man’s ontic assimilation of God’s attributes expressed above in terms of the philosophical ideal of conjunction with the immaterial intellects. One more intriguing example of

⁶⁸ An oft-repeated maxim in rabbinic literature. Cf. M. Soṭah 1:7; B. Megillah 12b, and many parallels in midrashic sources.

⁶⁹ *’Oṣar ’Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 156b.

⁷⁰ Cf. ibid., fol. 17a: “The heavens and the spirit are names for the human attributes that derive from the divine ones by means of the heavenly spheres and the elements through which everything is judged.”

⁷¹ MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 229a.

this phenomenon is found in the following passage in *Mafteah ha-Hokhmot*:

The matter of sacrifices, exile, redemption and possession of the land are issues that are connected and they necessitate one another, for the name of the [word] sacrifice (*qorban*) attests that it is the drawing near of the divine potencies to the human potencies (*qeruv ha-koḥot ha-'elohiyyot 'el ha-koḥot ha-'enoshiyyot*), and from it is necessitated exile for the bodies and redemption for the souls. Concerning the one whose soul God redeemed, as in the case of Abraham,⁷² all the world belongs to him, and how much more so when God joins to him the power of His potency in the secret of [the letter] *he'* that God bestowed upon him from the name. This is the letter for which He made a covenant with him, and not a covenant in general. His covenant [involved] a change of offspring, to add from the power of femininity onto the power of masculinity in the name. [The consonants of the names Abram and Sarai together spell] the archon of the limbs (*sar 'evarim*), and he took the tenth potency that is found with matter, and it is the archon of matter (*sar ha-ḥomer*) who is the archon of the essence of the brain (*sar 'ešem ha-moah*)⁷³ according to the kabbalah. When Sarai is joined to Abram the tenth power is divided into two equal parts as it is done in the case of YHWH,⁷⁴ to give to the male half the potency and to the female the remaining half. The explicitly perforated female becomes the archon of *he'*⁷⁵ and the male becomes the one who explains the *he'*.⁷⁶ The one who accomplishes this is he who guards the [male] organ and he reveals to man the love of God (*'ahavat ha-shem*).⁷⁷

It lies beyond the scope of this study to analyze all the interesting and complex details in this fascinating passage, including the implicit gen-

⁷² See Isa. 22:29.

⁷³ That is, *sar ha-ḥomer* = 759 = *sar 'ešem ha-moah*. The numerical equivalence only works when the word *ḥomer* is written with a *waw* (חומר) whose numerical significance is six. In the manuscript, however, the word appears in the defective form (חמר).

⁷⁴ That is, the letter *yod*, which represents the tenth power or the Active Intellect, is divided into two equal parts, each represented by the letter *he'*, as we find the doubling of this letter in the Tetragrammaton.

⁷⁵ That is, *sar he'*, the consonants of the name Sarah.

⁷⁶ That is, *meva'er he'*, the consonants of the name Abraham.

⁷⁷ MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1686, fol. 117b.

⁷⁸ In this context the female figure is associated with openness, represented by the letter *he'*, which transforms Sarai to Sarah. The change in name signifies a metamorphosis from the closed female to the open male. Cf. *'Ošar 'Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 17a: "The male is open and therefore he receives with ease, but the female is closed and therefore she receives the wisdom with difficulty." Cf. *ibid.*, fol. 17b, where the *Shekhinah* is depicted in androgynous terms as comprising male and female, related respectively to the letters *yod* and *he'*, which make up the divine name Yah. The opening of Sarai's womb to give birth marks the transition from closed female to open male. A similar symbolic nexus is evident in thirteenth-century theosophic kabbalah as I have argued at length in my study "Crossing Gender Boundaries in Kabbalistic Myth and Ritual," in *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism* (Albany, 1995).

der transformation.⁷⁸ Suffice it for my purposes to note that Abulafia's explanation of the mystical significance of the sacrifice as that which draws near, based on the wordplay of *qorban* and *leqarev*, is an idea expressed in theosophic kabbalistic texts as well, including the following passage in *Sefer ha-Bahir*: "Why is it called *qorban*? Because it draws together the forms of the holy powers" (*she-meqarev ha-šurot ha-kohot ha-qedoshot*).⁷⁹ It is undeniably true, as Idel has already noted,⁸⁰ that Abulafia has removed the bahiric expression from its original theosophical framework and interpreted it as a metaphor for the act of cleaving to the divine. There is thus a transformation from the theosophical-theurgical explanation of sacrifices as the drawing near of the divine potencies to an ecstatic-mystical model of communion. Two points, however, are noteworthy: first, Abulafia maintains a notion of divine potencies in his mystical and eschatological explanation of sacrifice as a means for cleaving to God. That is to say, despite the obvious shift from a theocentric to an anthropocentric perspective, there is still a significant claim being made about the nature of the divine powers.⁸¹ The second, and perhaps more important point, is that in some of the thirteenth-century theosophical texts that deal with the ritual of sacrifice the theurgical element is already joined to a more mystical conception. That is to say, the theurgical function of the sacrifice as creating a balance in the divine pleroma is coupled with the mystical goal of communion. Through the sacrificial offering the individual concomitantly unites the divine potencies and is united with them.⁸² Abulafia's

⁷⁹ *Sefer ha-Bahir*, § 109. For discussion of this text and other relevant material from thirteenth-century kabbalistic sources, see Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, pp. 880–882.

⁸⁰ "Writings of Abraham Abulafia," p. 435. Idel supports his interpretation by citing several other passages from Abulafia's *œuvre* that I will not repeat in this study.

⁸¹ A similar claim can be made with respect to Abulafia's description of the priestly blessing in *Shomer Mišwah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fol. 57a: "The spirit of the priest who blesses must extend in thought to all existence (*lehitpasheš ba-maššavah be-khol ha-meši'ut*) ... until he gathers together all the spirits and all the powers at the moment of blessing in order to cause the universal power of the guide of existence (*ha-manhig ha-meši'ut*) to dwell on the face of Israel so that their hearts will be illuminated and they will receive the universal grace (*hen kelali*) from God. This universal, divine grace will emanate upon each and every Jew." The extending of thought, *hitpashtut ha-maššavah*, discussed by Abulafia in conjunction with the priestly blessing is reminiscent of interpretations of prayer found in theosophic kabbalah. It stands to reason that in this case as well Abulafia appropriated the language of these texts, accentuating the ecstatic over the theosophic element. See Idel's discussion (*Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 111–112) of the phenomenon of *hamshakhat ha-maššavah*, "drawing down of thought," in *Sha'are Šedeq* (in the printed edition the relevant passage occurs on p. 22).

⁸² The point is made by Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, pp. 881–882. See also S. L. Brody, "Human Hands Dwell in Heavenly Heights: Contemplative Ascent and Theurgical Power in Thirteenth Century Kabbalah," in *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics and*

explanation of the rationale of sacrifices is not so much a radical departure from the kabbalistic sources that he may have known as much as it is a selective reading of those texts wherein the theosophical-theurgical element is rejected and the mystical-ecstatic aspect is accentuated, albeit reinforced by a Maimonidean ontology and epistemology.

The intricate appropriation of kabbalistic symbolism of a theosophic nature implied in the correlation of the patriarchs and divine attributes is also affirmed in other compositions of Abulafia. Thus, for example, in *Mafteah ha-Hokhmot* Abulafia interprets the aggadic tradition attributed to Resh Laqish that the patriarchs are the chariot (*ha-'avot hen hen ha-merkavah*)⁸³ in light of this theosophic conception:

Now let us begin to say according to the way of wisdom that the patriarchs are the chariot, and proof of that is their attributes, as it says, "You will render truth unto Jacob and mercy unto Abraham" (Micah 7:20). The attribute of Isaac is the attribute of strength (*middat ha-gevurah*), which is called the attribute of divine fear (*middat ha-pahad ha-'elohi*), as it says, "And the fear⁸⁴ of Isaac was with me" (Gen. 31:42). "And Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac" (ibid., 53), and this is the attribute of judgment (*middat ha-din*). The attribute of Jacob is the attribute of beauty (*middat tif'eret*) for it is truth (*'emet*). The attribute of Abraham is the attribute of beneficence (*middat nedivut*) for it is mercy (*hesed*), and thus it is written, "Mercy and truth meet, righteousness and peace kiss" (Ps. 85:11). The⁸⁵ world stands upon three things, upon judgment, upon truth, and upon peace, as it says, "Render truth and perfect justice in your gates" (Zech. 8:16). Truth comprises the intelligible virtues (*ha-ma'alot ha-sikhliyot*), peace comprises the ethical virtues (*ma'alot ha-middot*), and justice combines the two of them.⁸⁶

The aggadic teaching that the patriarchs are the chariot is explained in terms of the correlation of these biblical heroes with the attributes of mercy, strength or fear, and beauty or truth. In this context, in contrast to the parallel passage in *'Imre Shefer*, Abulafia attempts to combine

Typologies, ed. R. A. Herrera (New York, 1993), pp. 150–151. Idel himself (see reference in previous note) compares Abulafia's psychological explanation of sacrifices to a view expressed in the *Ra'aya' Mehemna'* section of zoharic literature. He does not, however, discuss Abulafia's interpretation in light of some of the Geronese materials discussed by Tishby, and it is precisely these materials that provide interesting parallels to Abulafia's conception of sacrifice as a means for communion. It should also be borne in mind that both Abulafia and the Geronese kabbalists were influenced by the bahiric passage.

⁸³ *Genesis Rabbah* 47:6, 82:6.

⁸⁴ The manuscript here adds the word "Lord" which is not found in the verse. I assume that this is a scribal error and thus I have left it out of the translation.

⁸⁵ M. 'Avot 1:18.

⁸⁶ MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1686, fols. 115b–116a. On the close connection of the attributes of Abraham and Jacob, cf. *Sefer ha-Melis*, MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 10a.

the kabbalistic tradition with the doctrine of Maimonides regarding the intelligible and moral virtues.

In another composition, *Mafteah ha-Tokhahot*, Abulafia again has a lengthy discourse on the attributes of the patriarchs, but in that context he relates the three attributes to the ten *sefirot*. In this passage, moreover, Abulafia exegetically links the attributes of the patriarchs to the verse, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut. 6:5):

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are the masters of the covenant of the Holy One, blessed be He, and their attributes are three, viz., truth (*'emet*), justice (*mishpat*), and peace (*shalom*). Truth is the attribute of Jacob and it is comparable to the attribute of wealth for it is beauty (*tif'eret*) and the rich are glorified (*mitpa'arim*) in their wealth. This is intimated in their saying that “with your might” refers to the third attribute, i.e., with all your wealth.⁸⁷ And every wise man who knows the truth is glorified in his knowledge and he is the true rich man who is satisfied with his lot,⁸⁸ for the truth in relation to wise men is like wealth for the rich. Justice (*mishpat*) is the attribute of Isaac and its name is the attribute of judgment (*middat ha-din*) and it is compared to the attribute of the soul (*middat ha-nefesh*) that sustains all of the body and the measure of its characteristics as the attribute of Elohim that sustains the world, as it is explained at the beginning of creation. Therefore this is intimated when it is said “with all your heart”. . . . Peace (*shalom*) is a branch that extends from the attribute of mercy (*middat ha-ḥesed*), which is the attribute of Abraham our forefather, peace be upon him. . . . These two distinct attributes together are one attribute, one bound to the other, and they are not to be separated, for peace is the attribute of perfection and the perfect attribute that brings one to the Holy Spirit, and the attribute of mercifulness (*middat ha-hasidut*) makes peace between us and our Father in heaven. . . . And since it says in *Sefer Yeṣirah* that the heart in the soul is like the king at war, and it says there that the opposite of peace is war, and it says in Ecclesiastes (3:8), “a time of war and a time of peace” . . . therefore it mentions here the heart first, and it says, “with all your heart.” [The text] begins with it and repeats it by concluding with it, saying “Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day” (Deut. 6:6). This is alluded to in the verse, “And Melchizedek, king of Salem,” *malki-ṣedeq melekh shalem* (Gen. 14:18), for righteousness (*ṣedeq*) is a proximate branch that comes forth from the root of mercy (*ḥesed*) and it is the king of peace (*melekh ha-shalom*). Thus the [rab- bis], blessed be their memory, said that the world stands upon three things, judgment, truth, and peace, as it says, “Render truth and perfect justice in your gates” (Zech. 8:16). . . . The three attributes of the patriarchs are bound

⁸⁷ Abulafia here is alluding to the interpretation of “with all your might” (Deut. 6:5) as a reference to monetary wealth. See M. Berakhot 9:5; *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, 32, ed. L. Finkelstein (New York, 1969), p. 55; Targum Onkelos and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Deut. 6:5.

⁸⁸ M. 'Avot 4:1.

to one another until the point that they are one matter for the three of them were alluded to in the case of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The nine were contained in one and this is the faith of the divine righteousness (*'emunat ha-šedaqah ha-'elohit*).⁸⁹

In the above citation the three attributes of truth or beauty, justice or judgment, and peace or mercy, are again correlated with the three patriarchs, but in this context a new element is added, viz., the three are bound together and coalesce to form the attribute of righteousness, *šedeq*, symbolized by the figure of Melchizedek who is, as his name and title indicate, the king of righteousness and the king of peace. This fourth attribute is also depicted as the tenth that complements the nine attributes symbolized by the patriarchs since each of the patriarchs comprises the three attributes within himself. The tenth attribute that completes the structure is called the "faith of the divine righteousness." Abulafia has here incorporated one of the standard symbolic structures of theosophic kabbalah: the tenth *sefirah*, sometimes called *šedeq* or *'emunah*, is depicted as the fourth leg of the chariot that complements the three attributes that correspond to the patriarchs.⁹⁰

It would be useful to cite several other examples of Abulafia's appropriation of theosophic kabbalistic symbolism. In *'Ošar 'Eden Ganuz* Abulafia thus reflects on the nature of the first of the thirteen attributes of mercy (Exod. 34:6-7): "Repentance (*teshuvah*) is the attribute of understanding (*middat ha-tevunah*) that is born from the attribute of wisdom (*middat ha-ḥokhmah*). ... and it too was born of thought (*maḥshavah*), which is called the supernal crown (*keter 'elyon*). ... They call it the first *sefirah* and wisdom (*ḥokhmah*) is second to it ... and understanding (*binah*) is third to it. These three *sefirot* are the first three attributes and their secret is YeHoWah YeHoWaH HaHaWaYaHa, that

⁸⁹ MS Oxford-BL 1605, fol. 43a–44a.

⁹⁰ Other kabbalistic traditions concerning the *Shekhinah* are appropriated (in a psychological vein) by Abulafia as may be seen in the following passage from *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 53a: "Since the thought (*maḥshavah*) that is in the rational soul (*nefesh ha-medabberet*) is a tabernacle for the intellect the sages of the kabbalah called it the holy temple (*hekhhal ha-qodesh*) and similarly they called the intellect by the name holy spirit (*ruah ha-qodesh*). This matter is the faithful spirit, which they also called the kingship of heaven (*malkhut shamayim*), which reveals to the prophets the visions that vary and change in accordance with the change in the powers of those who comprehend (*she-mar'eh la-nevi'im mar'ot mishtanot u-mithalfot be-hithalfut kohot ha-masigim*)." It is evident that kabbalistic symbols for the *Shekhinah* are applied to the Active Intellect. Cf. *Hayye ha-Nefesh*, MS Munich-BS 408, fol. 50a: "The providence of the supernal soul (*ha-neshamah ha-'elyonah*), which is called *keneset yisra'el*, is in us constantly, in terms of our generalities and our particulars, in actuality from its side and in potentiality from our side." See Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 211–212, n. 36.

is, thought makes understanding wise (*maḥshavah maḥkemet binah*), that is, rational thought (*ha-maḥshavah ha-sikhilit*) brings the intelligent soul (*ha-nefesh ha-maskelet*) to wisdom until the point that it understands by itself the need for repentance.”⁹¹ From the concluding part of this citation it is evident that Abulafia has rendered the theosophic symbolism in terms of the rational psychology of Maimonidean epistemology. It must be emphasized, however, that in that very context Abulafia discusses the topic of divine attributes, which in some sense he clearly distinguishes from human attributes.

In *Maḥteah ha-Tokhaḥot* Abulafia remarks that “there are seven *sefirot* with the central point whence is the source of everything,”⁹² language that may reflect an older mythologoumenon based on the notion of a pleroma consisting of seven hypostases, an idea found in the *Bahir*,⁹³

⁹¹ MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 155b. Cf. *Ner 'Elohim*, MS Munich-BS 10, fol. 130b, where the first three *sefirot* are delineated as thought (*maḥshavah*), wisdom (*hokhmah*), and understanding (*binah*). In that context as well the *sefirot* are described both as cosmological and anthropological. Cf. *ibid.*, fol. 134a: “Thus there are three hidden, spiritual names that are like internal souls corresponding to the three spiritual *sefirot* whose sign is ח”במ, *binah*, *maḥshavah*, and *hokhmah*. Do not be surprised by their rotation (*hippukham*), for the three of them are one thing, and be careful not to cut the shoots.” On fol. 134b *maḥshavah* is identified as the “supernal crown (*keter 'elyon*), the first through which to comprehend what is possible to comprehend of God.” Mention of *maḥshavah*, *hokhmah*, and *binah* is also made on fols. 137a and 139b. See fol. 146b where the three *sefirot* are delineated as *hokhmah*, *binah*, and *da'at*. Cf. fols. 165b–166a: “Thus it says in *Sefer Yesirah*, ‘Understand in wisdom and be wise in understanding, examine them and investigate them,’ that is, examine the *sefirot* of wisdom and understanding and discern understanding and wisdom from the *sefirot*. Thus one will recognize his Creator when he sets everything correctly.”

⁹² MS Oxford-BL 1605, fol. 24a. On the division of the *sefirot* into the upper three and the lower seven, cf. *ibid.* fol. 83b, and *Shomer Miṣwah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fol. 75b. On the image of six potencies with the seventh as the midpoint, cf. *Maḥteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 83b. In that context the midpoint is described further as “the middle tree that is entirely filled with eyes and the masters of the eyes can see it from all sides and it sees them. It is hidden except from them. . . . It is already known that the phylacteries are an allusion to the explicit name and to the form of the tree that is called the Tree of Knowledge.” On the mystical significance of phylacteries in Abulafia’s writings, see below, n. 153. In the commentary to *Sefer ha-Meliṣ*, MS Munich-BS 285, fols. 15a–16a, Abulafia describes in some detail the Tree of Knowledge, which he beheld in a spiritual vision, as a spherical ladder with 340 rungs (corresponding to the numerical value of the word *shem*, i.e., the divine name). For a translation and analysis of this text, see Idel, *Mystical Experience*, pp. 109–113. On the symbolization of the divine name as a ladder in the writings of Abulafia and Isaac of Acre, see Idel, *op. cit.*, pp. 116 and 164, n. 196. The Tree of Knowledge can also function as a negative symbol in Abulafia’s writings, associated in particular with the faculty of the imagination. See Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 52.

⁹³ See E. R. Wolfson, “The Tree That is All: Jewish-Christian Roots of a Kabbalistic Symbol in *Sefer ha-Bahir*”, *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3 (1993): 31–76, esp. 65–68.

or alternatively it may have been influenced by the idea quite common in thirteenth-century kabbalistic texts regarding the seven lower *sefirot* that emanate from *Binah*. In either case it is noteworthy that in this context Abulafia focused on seven and not ten *sefirot*. Similarly, in 'Or ha-Sekhel Abulafia describes the image of Jacob engraved upon the throne as comprising the seven *sefirot*.⁹⁴ As I have argued in a separate study,⁹⁵ in this passage Jacob's image symbolically refers to the Active Intellect also personified as Meṭatron to whom is attributed the name Israel. The significance of Abulafia's comment regarding the containment of the seven *sefirot* within the image of Jacob is that Meṭatron comprises the seven intellects that most likely correspond to the seven planets. That this is indeed the implication of the text may be deduced from the fact that Abulafia notes that the word *mal'akh* has the same numerical value as *ha-'elohim*, that is, both equal ninety-one, and together they make up the sum one hundred and eighty-two, which is the respective value of the expressions 'el qanna', *ya'aqov*, and seven times the four-letter name YHWH (i. e., 7×26) conveyed in the expression *zayyin sefirot ha-shem*. The containment of the seven *sefirot* in the image of Jacob, therefore, reflects the numerical equivalence of the name *ya'aqov* and seven times the Tetragrammaton. It is evident that underlying all of these associa-

⁹⁴ MSS Munich-BS 92, fol. 59b and Vatican-BA ebr. 233, fol. 97b. Cf. the fragment in MS Paris-BN héb. 774, fol. 69b: "The rabbis, blessed be their memory, said that the form of Jacob is engraved upon the throne of glory. ... Thus his name comprises seven holy names corresponding to the seven *sefirot*" אמרו רז"ל צורת יעקב חקוקה בכסא ... הכבוד ... והנה שמו כולל ז' שמות הקודש כנגד ז' ספירות (Concerning this fragment see Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 41.) The meaning of this text parallels the passage from 'Or ha-Sekhel: Jacob (יעקב) = 182 = 7×26 (the numerical value of יהו"ה). Hence the name Jacob comprises the seven holy names (or permutations of the Tetragrammaton) that correspond to the seven *sefirot*. The emphasis on seven *sefirot* is also found in the following passage from an anonymous late-thirteenth or early-fourteenth-century commentary on the Torah, which bears the influence of Abulafia, in MS Oxford-BL 1920, fol. 2b: "Know that the harp and the musical instruments in the Temple allude to the comprehension of thought (*hassagat ha-mahshavah*), which is the perfection of the holy spirit in the seven *sefirot*, and they are the seven parts of comprehension and they are alluded to in the seven candles of the menorah and the seven altars that Balaam arranged. ... In the days of Messiah one will comprehend the eighth comprehension (*hassagah sheminit*), which is the complete rest (*menuḥah shelemah*) of the ten *sefirot*." See *ibid.*, fols. 15a, 16b, 20a. Regarding the provenance of this text, see M. Idel, "Notes on a Jewish-Christian Debate in the Middle Ages," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (1984): 691, n. 10 (in Hebrew).

⁹⁵ See E. R. Wolfson, "The Image of Jacob Engraved Upon the Throne of Glory: Further Speculation on the Esoteric Doctrine of the German Pietists," in *Massu'ot: Studies in Kabbalistic Literature and Jewish Philosophy in Memory of Prof. Ephraim Gottlieb*, ed. M. Oron and A. Goldreich (Jerusalem, 1994), pp. 148–149 (in Hebrew). On the explicit identification of Meṭatron as the throne of glory, cf. the fragment transcribed by Scholem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 228.

tions is a tradition about Metatron who contains within himself the seven *sefirot*. Again, it seems that Abulafia is drawing upon an earlier strand of esoteric tradition.

The appropriation of theosophic symbolism is evident as well in a second passage from *Mafteah ha-Tokhaḥot* wherein Abulafia notes that “the word *kol* alludes to the ninth *sefirah* and to the tenth,”⁹⁶ clearly reflecting a contemporary discussion regarding the dual signification of the word *kol* as referring both to *Yesod*, the ninth *sefirah*, and *Malkhut*, the tenth.⁹⁷ To cite one final example of Abulafia’s appropriation of sefirotic kabbalah, I note the following comment in his *Mafteah ha-Shemot* on the verse, “You must revere the Lord your God; only Him shall you worship, to Him shall you cleave, and by His name shall you swear” (Deut. 10:20): “The matter of the seven here⁹⁸ is [explicable] according to the hidden meaning, that is, he will be equal in relation to him. Therefore, the human species comprises seventy nations, seventy languages, seventy scripts, and seventy sceptres of kingship corresponding to the seventy names, and the seventh *sefirah* is the attribute of circumcision.”⁹⁹ The theosophic symbolism utilized here by Abulafia, the designation of the seventh *sefirah* as the male organ, can be traced to *Sefer ha-Bahir* where the divine phallus, the *ṣaddiq*, is described as the seventh attribute.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ MS Oxford-BL 1605, fol. 32b. Cf. *Imre Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 253a: “The ultimate intention of human existence is that one should comprehend one’s essence and substance, which is the form of the *yod*. ... And the essence of all is the ten souls according to the aggregation of the ten *sefirot* in the *sefirah* of the *Shekhinah*, the female who is impregnated and receives everything from the All. Her name is *ṣedeq* in the masculine form and *ṣedaqah* in the feminine.” It is evident that in this passage as well Abulafia is drawing on the technical language of theosophic kabbalah. In particular, the *Shekhinah*, the last of the *sefirot*, receives everything from that which is technically called *kol*, the All, which corresponds to the phallic *Yesod* in the standard theosophic symbolism.

⁹⁷ Cf., e.g., Nahmanides’ commentary on Gen. 24:1.

⁹⁸ That is, Abulafia relates the biblical expression *tishave’a*, “you shall swear,” to the word *sheva’*, i.e., seven.

⁹⁹ MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 60a. On the mystical significance of the seventh, which occupies the center position in the middle of six potencies, cf. *Ḥayye ha-Nefesh*, MS Munich-BS 408, fol. 50b: “Thus there are six extremities of Eden, above and below, front and back, right and left, and the temple of the Lord in the middle. Comprehend this for there is the splendor, majesty, radiance, light, beauty and glory, and there is the pleasure of the souls that delight in the comprehension of the supernal forms that are separate from all matter.” In the same context Abulafia expresses this idea in terms of the image of the *Shekhinah* set in the middle of four camps of angels, a motif drawn from earlier sources. On the identification of the image of the temple set in the middle and the Tetragrammaton, cf. *Sefer ha-Ṣeruf*, MS Munich-BS 22, fol. 185a.

¹⁰⁰ On the bahiric symbolism see G. Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah* (New York, 1991), pp. 93–101. The phallic identification

It is evident, moreover, that even in the highly polemical treatise, *We-Zot li-Yehudah*, Abulafia appropriated language from compositions of a theosophical nature. Thus, for example, Abulafia's description of the first part of kabbalah in that treatise is based on standard kabbalistic treatments of the *sefirot*. What is most significant from my vantage point is Abulafia's assertion that the *sefirot* reveal the *sod ha-yihud*, the secret of God's unity. To appreciate Abulafia's conception of *sefirot*, therefore, it is necessary to clarify his notion of divine unity. One would not expect Abulafia to endorse the understanding of the ten *sefirot* as paradoxically constituting God's oneness that is found in other kabbalistic texts, for it is precisely this notion that he considers to be more heretical than the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.¹⁰¹ Indeed, in any

of Metatron seems to be implied in a fascinating passage in *Ner 'Elohim*, MS Munich-BS 10, fol. 161a: "Under His feet there was the likeness of a pavement of sapphire, *we-taḥat raglav ke-ma'aseh livnat ha-sappir* (Exod. 24:10), this is the *sefirah* that is called *sefirat ha-lavan* [the white sphere] and it alludes to the snow that was beneath the throne of glory from which the world was created. ... Its principle may be discerned from Shaddai, and this is the covenant (*berit*) that is called *bere'shit*, which is combined with *mītrwn* [the letters of the name Metatron], and its secret is revealed at the giving of the Torah. This is a great secret that I am not permitted to explain." Cf. *ibid.*, fol. 139a: "Thus the secret of the semen instructs about the secret of Metatron." On the association of the phallus and Metatron, see E. R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, 1994), pp. 259, n. 304 and 337–338, n. 40; *idem*, *Along the Path: Studies in Kabbalistic Myth, Symbolism, and Hermeneutics* (Albany, 1995), pp. 129, n. 121 and 150–151, n. 204.

¹⁰¹ See *Auswahl*, p. 19 (Hebrew section), quoted by Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, p. 974. See also Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 55–56, n. 8. It is of interest to note that in *'Imre Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 238b, Abulafia himself affirms the idea that the unique name of God signifies a threefold unity, i.e., the oneness of God is expressed in terms of the three attributes of wisdom (*hokhmah*), understanding (*binah*), and knowledge (*da'at*). In that context, however, Abulafia emphasizes that God's essence is unchanging and incomposite and therefore the threefold manifestation must be understood as reflecting the vantage point of the ones who receive the divine overflow. See below where the text is quoted in full. Cf. *'Imre Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 254a: "This is the secret of the three holy names, which instruct about the unity of the threefold (*yihud ha-shilush*) and the threefold unity (*shilush ha-yihud*), alluded to in [the attributes of] Wisdom (*hokhmah*), Understanding (*tevnah*), and Knowledge (*da'at*), for the three of them are one thing. Similarly, this alludes to the secret of time, future, present, and past, and all is equal." And cf. *'Or ha-Sekhel*, MS Vatican-BA ebr. 233, fol. 98a: "There remain three *sefirot* and they instruct about the being of God (*yeshut shel shem*), which is a threefold being (*yeshut meshulash*), Thought (*maḥshavah*), Wisdom (*hokhmah*), and Understanding (*binah*). These are the secret of unity (*sod ha-yihud*), and the first contains the seven names and this one contains the three names. Thus the secret of the ten *sefirot* contains the ten names together, which are the three mysteries, and they are the ways of the Lord." (It is worth recalling in this context that Abner of Burgos interpreted the three attributes of *hokhmah*, *binah*, and *da'at*, as a reference to the Christological trinity. See I. Baer, "The Kabbalistic Doctrine in the Christological Teaching of Abner of Burgos," *Tarbiz* 27 [1958]: 280–284 [in Hebrew].) Compare also the formulation in *Shomer Miṣwah*, MS Paris-BN heb. 853, fol. 54a: "The *bet* of *bere'shit* (Gen. 1:1) instructs about the creation

number of contexts Abulafia unambiguously adopted a Maimonidean approach to depict God's unity, i.e., a simple, incomposite being without bodily parts.¹⁰² But what then is the import of Abulafia's use of the

of the world (*hiddush ha-'olam*), the 'alef of 'anokhi (Exod. 20:2) instructs about the existence of God (*meši'ut ha-shem*), the shin of *shema'* (Deut. 6:4) instructs about the unity of God (*yihud ha-shem*). Therefore you must know the unique name that is threefold (*shem ha-shem ha-meyuhad u-meshulash*), and one of them is as three and the three of them as one. The first, second, and third are equal and they instruct about the three first beings that are equivalent ... YHWH YHWH YHWH. These three unique names are the three mothers (*shalosh 'immot*), which numerically [equal] holy, holy, holy (*qadosh qadosh qadosh*), the threefold sanctus and the threefold blessing, everything is equivalent." Cf. *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 62a. In that context the unity of the threefold is connected with both the divine names mentioned in Exod. 3:14 and the repetition of the divine name in the priestly blessing in Num. 12:6. Regarding the latter, cf. 'Ošar 'Eden Ganuz, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 154b. Cf. *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 87a, where Abulafia refers to the "one who knows the name of the threefold power (*shem koah ha-meshulash*) in the triad of [the name] Yah, for the being of two are together and the one is alone, the two are above and the one is below in the image of the character of the *segol* ... He knows immediately the secret of the head of the Teli for he possesses three orifices, which are the three vents, concerning which he is called *gever*, and in his hand are the ten *sefirot* from which is the power of being that is called by the name 'el. Thus the name Gabriel [*gever + 'el*] is explained from the secret of the three vents, the substance of the whole body, which instruct about the length, width, and depth." In the commentary to *Sefer ha-Meliš*, MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 14b, Abulafia speaks of "the name unified in its threefoldness (*ha-shem ha-meyuhad be-shilusho*) for the secret of 300 is the one name in the secret [of the letters] MŠP"Š [the a"t ba"sh of YHWH]." On Abulafia's penchant to transform Christian doctrines (particularly the idea of the Trinity) into an anti-Christian polemic, see Scholem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 129, 184–186. Abulafia's adaptation of the Trinity in a philosophical-mystical key can be fruitfully compared to a similar strategy of reading in medieval Islamic thought. See R. Haddad, *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes 750–1050* (Paris, 1985). A critique of the Christological doctrine of the Trinity is also found in *Sefer ha-Šeruf*, MS Munich-BS 22, fols. 198b–199a. A polemic against the Christian idea of the divine son can be found in another passage in this work. Cf. *ibid.*, fol. 219a: "Regarding the explanation [of the Aramaic word] *bar* I have already instructed you that is the secret of the Active Intellect and he is the beginning of the edifice. ... The meaning of *bar* is son or it is from the expression *nashshequ var* (Ps. 2:12). If you say that it is from the expression son (*ben*) in truth this is how it is for just as the son is close to the father so this son is close to his father. Far be it from us to say that this closeness is from the perspective of anything shared between them as there is between a father and son. ... Rather his level is greater than the rest and thus in accordance with the love in him that draws him close to the Lord he is called a close friend (*ben bayit*) and not because of anything shared between them from the perspective of the closeness of a father and son. Understand that in this several nations have erred and even if some of the enlightened (*maskilim*) will enter into this they will not be able to withstand the subtleness of the matter, for the sense perception will overcome them and they will go mad. Understand this. In accordance with these gradations [God] called 'Israel, my first-born son' (Exod. 4:22), just as He called the supernal Israel the first-born son so too He called the lower Israel." For a critique of the Christian faith in the divine father and son, cf. the anonymous text in MS Oxford-BL 1920, fol. 23a.

rabbinic idiom for heresy, cutting of the shoots,¹⁰³ to designate one who creates a division in the *sefirot*?¹⁰⁴ This idiom was a stock phrase used by kabbalists who affirmed an understanding of the *sefirot* as the divine hypostases¹⁰⁵ and it is clear that Abulafia has drawn this image from their writings. But, if Abulafia does not accept the ontological claim of the kabbalists who identify the *sefirot* as God's potencies, why does he adopt their formal understanding of heresy as a division created within the *sefirot*? Furthermore, Abulafia explicitly states that knowledge of the *sefirot* imparts gnosis about the divine unity, but how is this so for him?

¹⁰² Cf., e.g., *Mafteah ha-Tokhaḥot*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fol. 39a: "Know that the knowledge of unity is a very deep knowledge. The matters counted by the number one are manifold, but the truth is that it is impossible to unify Him beyond what arises in the thought of the enlightened one. He is the unique one in the perfection of unity that does not yield from any perspective to duality." See *ibid.*, fol. 40b, where Abulafia interprets the word 'ehad, "one," in Deut. 6:4 along Maimonidean lines.

¹⁰³ See *Genesis Rabbah* 19:4; B. Hagigah 14b.

¹⁰⁴ See the interesting statement of Abulafia in 'Imre Shefer, MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 233b: "The third is the 'God of Jacob,' 'elohe ya'aqov with an extra connecting waw [i.e., the biblical expression in Exod. 3:6 (see also 3:15 and 4:5) is 'elohe 'avraham 'elohe yiṣḥaq we'lohe ya'aqov] to indicate that there is no cutting of the shoots by the patriarchs, but the *sefirot* are [unified] in them," שאין אצל שלשת האבות קצוץ נטיעות אבל, הספירות אצלם בהם. Idel (*Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 113–114) cites this text and renders the concluding comment, 'aval ha-sefirot 'eṣlam bahem, as a "heretical division between the attributes applied to God." Idel relates this text to the following passage in *Hayye ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, MS Oxford-BL 1582, fol. 20a: "Know that the patriarchs unified the name in truth and God, blessed be He, unified His name upon them, as it written, 'The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob [has sent me to you], this shall be My name forever, this My appellation for all eternity' (Exod. 3:15)." In that context quoted in full by Idel, *op. cit.*, pp. 112–113, Abulafia sets out a complex relationship of the three patriarchs and respective names of God. On the cutting of the shoots, cf. *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 70a: "You may call these two entities [the cherubim] according to human potencies the two interchangeable names, for example, the intellect and the imagination, or you may call them according to the divine attributes (*ha-middot ha-'elohiyyot*), YHWH Elohim. Permission is given to you with respect to all of them. Yet, you must be very careful when you speculate about them according to the divine wisdom (*be-hokhmat ha-'elohut*) lest you separate the shoots that are planted of old upon the first root whose final fruit is the distinctive element in man, concerning which it is said that he is in His image and in His likeness according to the universal potency (*ha-koah ha-kollel*) as a flame bound to the coal by analogy." Cf. 'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 15b; *Sha'are Seder*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁵ See G. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, trans. A. Arkush and ed. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton, 1987), p. 394; Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, pp. 374–375.