

# Some Comments on the Assumptions of Academic Zoharic Study

By Rabbi Dovid Markel

## 1.1 Introduction

When analyzing the question of the authorship of the Zohar, one is struck by a cacophony of voices, each desiring to be heard in the sea of opinions regarding the origin and composition of the work.

Ever since the Zohar appeared on the Jewish scene sometime in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, it has been adored and venerated on the one hand and denigrated and depreciated on the other. While some refer to it as the Holy Zohar or the Amazing Zohar others have called it a counterfeit and the root of tremendous corruption of true Jewish thought.

Perhaps one of the most stunning things about this work is that though its origins have been called into question from the onset, there is perhaps no other work that has caused such an upheaval and revolution in Jewish thought and practice as the Zohar.

In this short paper I will attempt to analyze some of the various academic attitudes regarding Zoharic Authorship. Though in no way a comprehensive discussion, I will attempt to ascertain what the assumptions of the various studies were, what they perhaps overlooked and the results of these assumptions.

I will look at what I believe to be the three central academic positions regarding the Zohar: 1) that it was primarily written by Moshe De Leon, 2) that it was written by a group of Kabbalists which perhaps De Leon was the leader of, and 3) that the Zohar does not really exist outside the constructs that were created by editors and publishers.

The three eminent scholars whose critique I will primarily investigate are Isaiah Tishby, Yehuda Liebes and Daniel Abrams. Their respective works each exhibit a comprehensive study on the disparate positions regarding Zoharic work.

Prior to academic Kabbalistic scholarship the biases of the various sides were clear; Gratz's denigration of the Zohar was spurred by a clear visceral hatred towards the Zohar and all things

mystical, i.e. that any arguments in defense of the Zohar can only be believed if one suspends his belief in all things rational. However, being that the entire objective of academia is to be dispassionate in one's engagement with the texts, the difficulty in finding assumptions prior to the research is somewhat more difficult.

That being said, no author writes in a vacuum and depending on when he wrote his work and under whose influence, there will be certain aspects that influence his thought process. Indeed, Tishby already pointed out concerning Ephraim Gottlieb's work on the relationship between Rabbeinu Bahya and the Zohar that<sup>1</sup>:

הרושם שמקבל סותר לחלוטין את מסקנת אוספול! גוטליב, שכתב לראשונה את ספרו כעבודת דוקטור בהדרכתו של גרשום שלום, ולאחר שזה האחרון קבע כבר את דעתו האחרונה בדבר חיבור ספר הזוהר, הגיע למסקנה שרבינו בחיי העתיק מן הזוהר שכבר היה לפניו...

Essentially then, according to Leibes, it was the preexisting notion that De Leon authored the Zohar that drove Gottlieb's to conclude that Bahya copied from a Zohar that already existed, rather than concluding more rationally—at least according to Leibes—that Bahya himself had a hand in the development in the Zohar. Accordingly, it was not the data that drove the conclusion, but the conclusion that drove the data.

Before we commence, we already have an example of the imperfections of any scholarship. It is with this in mind that we commence our discussion of the various opinions regarding the authorship of the Zohar.

In addition to a critique specifically concerning the works of the above scholars, I believe that a general appraisal can be made concerning much of the pre and post academic studies. Although I do not have the hubris to claim to have researched this topic as truly demanded, in reading Abrams' review of the scholarship,<sup>2</sup> I could not help but feel that many of the scholars were operating under what I believe to be a fundamental fallacy.

Each of the various scholars sought to discover “the” singular truth concerning the Zohar's authorship. Rather than reporting upon the various data that they found, they came to

---

<sup>1</sup> . ליבס, כיצד נתחבר הזוהר עמ' 10-11

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Abrams, *The Invention of The Zohar as a Book*, Kabbala: Journal of the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts 19, (2009) pp. 7-142.

conclusions about the data. In doing so, they made broad statements about the authorship of the Zohar.

I believe that what each subsequent level of scholarship displayed, is that not only can much of the data be read in various ways thereby undermining any particular conclusion, but more importantly, they did not uncover enough information to come to a positive conclusion. So that although each scholar assumed that he had laid to rest the question of the Zohar's authorship, further research found that he developed parts of his theories on incomplete data.

However, because of the ocean of uncertainty concerning even what the Zohar is, in my opinion scholars should cease attempting to locate "the" truth—at this time—and instead attempt to postulate "possible" theories.

While, each scholar wished to resolve the question of Zoharic authorship, I believe that people should resign themselves to the reality that the question may never be answered conclusively and instead report upon matters that indeed we can be sure about.

An additional difficulty in the scholarship of the Zohar is that many scholars predominantly used the printed publications of the Zohar in developing their theories, without researching early manuscripts. Such an approach is fatally flawed.

## 2.1 Isaiah Tishby

In Tishby's analyses of the Zohar he primarily works under the rubric of two poles; either the Zohar is an ancient composition authored by Rabbi Shimon bar Yoha'i and his group, or it is a book written by Rabbi Moshe De Leon.

Although he too recognizes that there is "Zoharic Literature" that was not written by De Leon, it seems clear that he identifies the main corpus of the "Zohar" with De Leon.

His primary concern is whether or not to take older scholarship that defends the authorship of Bar Yohai seriously, in the face of modern scholarship that suggests that it was not authored by him.

He is much more focused on this question rather than whether there was a larger group of Kabbalists involved in its development rather than only De Leon. In doing so, he deals with various

issues concerning the development of the Zohar, but for the most part ignores the question of Zoharic literature as found in the writings of others, either prior to De Leon, in the writings of his contemporaries or juniors.

So although it is the cohesiveness of language and the similarities of the Zohar to De Leon's own writings that convinced Scholem and Tishby that the Zohar was primarily authored by De Leon, Leibes' scholarship puts into question many of the premises of their study.

Leibes demonstrates that there is Zoharic writing and quotes found in the works of myriad authors. While we will deal with this more when discussing Leibes, this assertion brings out an interesting point concerning Scholem's and Tishby's scholarship.

If indeed as the scholarship of Leibes, Idel, Wolfson and others suggests, there are strata of content in the Zohar that perhaps spread over centuries, then much of Scholem's and Tishby's arguments concerning the certitude of the newness of Zohar are rendered obsolete.

Many of the arguments that postulate that the Zohar is *completely* pseudepigraphic are based on the supposed cohesiveness of the language of the Zohar. If indeed it was written by one author and that author is shown to have lived in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, then it is clear that the Zohar—in its entirety—is a later work that was in all probability authored by De Leon.

However, being that it has been demonstrated that there apparently are many strata of Zohar, authored in different periods, this argument loses its potency. While one may argue that it is improbable, it is nonetheless possible that there are portions embedded in the Zohar as we know it today, that are more ancient than the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Though it may prove impossible to ever identify these portions, it is difficult to disprove their existence and although there is a mountain of data pointing to later authorship, it could be that one of the layers is ancient and is the foundation upon which the edifice is built.

So although Tishby toys with the discussion of earlier authorship, he does this primarily to negate such views and does not take them into serious consideration. This is because he views the Zohar—for the most part—as a cohesive book that has one primary author. Being that he is working under this assumption, it is clear why he comes to his conclusions.

However, once the cohesiveness of the Zohar as a singular work is brought into question, it becomes important to reexamine the possibility that, at least parts of it are indeed ancient.

Asserting that De Leon must be the author because of similarities in his own writings is flawed in my opinion. For although the similarities could be because he authored some of Zohar, his own writings may have been influenced by the Zohar, rather than vice versa, or he may have been using a third text that served as a basis for both.

Indeed, this *assertion* of Scholem and Tishby that the Zohar was authored from the years 1280-1286 and his Hebrew writings from 1293-1305 has already been challenged by Menachem Kasher, in that this assertion is nothing more than conjecture. He writes:<sup>3</sup>

לדעתו של שלום חיבר ר"מ די ליאון את הזוהר במשך שש שנים משנת 1286-1293, וגנז אותו, ובשעה שכתב את ספריו העבריים, משנת 1293-1305, כבר היה לפניו ספר הזוהר והשתמש בו...אמנם מסתייג תשבי, שגם הנחתו אינה אלא בגדר השערה.

השערות מדעיות כאלו שוברן בצידן. שלום מזמין אצל ר"מ די ליאון כתיבת 1700 עמודים של הזוהר במשך שש שנים בדיוק!...אבל שלום..כיצד יכול לעלות על דעתו שר"מ די ליאון יהא מוכשר לכתוב מדעתו ספר ענקי כזה, בכמות ובאיכות, במשך שש שנים בלבד?..וכל הספרים שכתב ר"מ די ליאון כל ימי חייו לא יעלו בכמות אפילו לכרך אחד של הזוהר.

In my opinion Kasher raises an important point: When a scholar makes a philological comparison between two works, it is not enough to merely ascertain whether or not there are certain similarities between the two in content, but the general quality of the two works.

So, whereas the Zohar caused an upheaval within Judaism and its contents were recognized as amazing, with many individuals expressing wonderment and praise, De Leon's own works have largely been ignored and are not considered noteworthy or to have had an impact in any major way.

That a second rate scholar, who needed to rely on pseudepigraphy so that—as what Rabbi Yitzchak of Acer says—“אלו אודיע להם סודי זה, שמשכלי אני כותב לא ישגיחו בדברי ולא יתנו בעבורם” פרטה, can produce a work of such exceptional quality, is extremely doubtful. Indeed, one can only assume that he was either not the only author or that he relied on older texts in his possession when writing it. It seems clear to me that what Rabbi Yitzchak of Acer quotes can only have been concocted to disparage the authenticity of the Zohar and in no way express any true event.

---

<sup>3</sup> סיני, ספר היובל, קבצים וכתבי עת (ירושלים תשי"ח) א, ד עמ' מד

Indeed, Tishby asserts that the author of the Zohar seems to have been a second rate Talmudist.<sup>4</sup> He relies on the fact that in various instances the author of the Zohar seems to have made mistakes about the most basic of Halachot. However, this assertion, as well, is flawed.

In the work Rabbi Reuven Margalioth, entitled *Nitzutei Zohar*, he demonstrates that the author of the Zohar had a tremendous familiarity with Talmud, Midrash and many other works. That being said, this perhaps adds an additional problem to the assumption that the author is one person or that Rabbi Moshe De Leon wrote it in a mere six year period.

It seems that Tishby's and Scholem's assumptions were based on the supposition that the author did not exemplify much knowledge outside of the Kabbalistic arena. However, since to the contrary, it has been established that the author had deep and intimate knowledge of the above mentioned works, it is doubtful to assume that the author was De Leon and that he authored it in a six period of just six years.

To summarize: Much of Tishby's scholarship is based on the supposition that the Zohar is the cohesive work of one author. However, once this supposition is challenged—as has been done—we essentially are back at square one. So, although much of Tishby's arguments focus on disproving the assumption that the Zohar is ancient, they only are meaningful if the Zohar was indeed authored by a single individual. However, if it wasn't, there are a number of other theories that can be postulated concerning its development. This being the case, though Tishby assumed that his conclusions were final, subsequent research has made his theories obsolete.

## 2.1 Yehuda Leibes

As Abram's points out in his study of the authorship of Zohar, "Leibes' scholarship on the Zohar spans decades of research and treats various themes." We will primarily discuss the assumptions and expectations that Leibes had in his work "כיצד נתחבר הזוהר" that deals with the various authors that possibly contributed in the Zohar's authorship.

In his opening statement he states:

---

<sup>4</sup> י. תשבי, מבוא: ספר הזוהר וחקר הזוהר (ירושלים תשל"א) עמ' 69

מיום שזרח אור הזוהר, בימי ר' משה די-ליאון, לא חדלה בעיית חיבור הספר להעסיק דור ודור וחכמיו. ואך היום, אף שנתרבו חוקרים נאמנים של ספר הזוהר, דומה שהניחו לבעיה זו כאילו נפתרה בעיקרה. הסיבה לכך, בלא כל ספק, היא מחקריו המפורטים של גרשום שלום. אלא אמנם העמידו את הדיון על בסיס מוצק, אך גם פתחו פתח למחקר רב שנעשה מאז בספר הזוהר ובספרות קרובה אליו. סברותי שעתה הגיעה העת להשתמש בידע זה שהצטבר בשנים האחרונות לשם עיון מחודש בבעיית היסוד הישנה, להצביע על קשיים שנתעוררו במשנת שלום, ולהציע קווי פתרון חדשים.

While Leibes agrees with Scholem's assertion that there is a deep connection between the writings of De Leon and the Zohar, he nevertheless is bothered by the assumption that *all* of the Zohar is the product of De Leon's pen.

He points out that on one hand, notwithstanding the similarities of De Leon's work to the Zohar, there nevertheless is a deep divide between the two. For although the Zohar was extremely successful and recognized as an amazing work, "רובם המכריע של כתבי רמד"ל לא באו לדפוס בידי". It is because of this and the fact that De Leon incorrectly quotes Zohar in his writings, that Leibes postulates that De Leon could not have written the Zohar "אלא אם כן היו למחבר מורים". וחברים ומסעיים, ששרו עליו את הרוח הנכונה, ואף סיפקו לו חומר ולבנים.

He further points out that just as one finds "Zoharic writings" in De Leon's work, one finds Zoharic writings in the works of other Kabbalists as well, such as the writings of Yosef HaVa of Shushan, R. Dovid b. Yehuda HaChossid, R. Yosef Angelat and others. While he realizes that their quotes aren't *exactly* Zoharic, he points out that neither are De Leon's, and that it is supremely difficult to come up with objective criteria by which to judge the similarity or differences in language.

Additionally, he points out that the section of Zohar called Midrash HaNe'elam seems to be quoted in the name of our sages or as הירושלמי in works that predate De Leon.

To resolve these issues, he states:

אני מבקש להציע את האפשרות שספר הזוהר, פריה של חבורה שלמה שעסקה יחד בתורת הקבלה, על סמך מסורת משותפת וטקסטים עתיקים. חבורה זו החלה בפעולתה עוד לפני כתיבת הזוהר, ואת ראשיתה יש לזהות עם חוג 'המקובלים הגנוסטיקאים' בקסטיליה באמצע המאה השלש עשרה. וזאת על סמך הדמיון בינם לבין הזוהר בדרך היצירה ובתוכנה, ועל סמך הטקסטים הזהים שעובדו בשני החוגים, ועל סמך ריטואלים קבליים שנהגו כנראה בחבורה זו ותוארו באריכות בזוהר ובכתבי רמד"ל, ובעיקר משום שרשב"י, גיבור הזוהר, בעצמו רומז לקבוצה ורואה בהם

מעטים השותפים לידיעותיו הסודיות, והם מצדם תיארו בכתביהם מנהיג בן דמותו של רשב"י של הזוהר, כפי שהראיתי במקום אחר. מאלה צמחה חבורת ספר הזוהר...

While there are various comments that one can make about Leibes' theory on the Zohar's development, it is important to focus on his central theme.

Although, he does express strong proof that the Zohar is not the product of the writing of one individual, the idea that he postulates that there was a group of people that wrote the Zohar together, seems farfetched to me.

While it could be possible for a single individual to write the Zohar without it being discovered as pseudepigraphical, similar such cases having occurred, it nonetheless seems highly implausible that a group of Kabbalists spanning a considerable period of time and residing in different geographical areas, could work on such a large project without discovery.

To assume that a group of people can keep such an enormous secret without any leakage of the "conspiracy" is unrealistic. The Talmud (Bava Basra 39a) expresses the truism that "Your friend has a friend" to convey that if three people know about any given thing, it essentially is public knowledge or soon will be. The eventuality is that the matter will indeed become public.

Abrams has already pointed out that Leibes' assumptions are predicated on the belief that the Zohar is one cohesive book.<sup>5</sup> However, if you believe instead that it is a conglomeration of works that have been pieced together and only exists as a cohesive work in the mind of the publisher; then similarities to other works may be easily explained. Leibes clearly viewed the Zohar as one work and was therefore bothered when he saw similarities to other works.

However, according to Abrams that there was no interconnectivity between the various authors and that they all independently developed the distinct style of the Zohar, and all the more so according to Leibes, the questioned must be asked: What was the catalyst that caused various authors to write with similar Zoharic undertones—to the point that, either correctly or incorrectly, scholars have identified many disparate authors with the development of Zohar.

---

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Abrams, *The Invention of the Zohar as a Book*, Kabbala: Journal of the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts 19, (2009) pp. 61ff .



It seems that Leibes himself was bothered by what brought these various Kabbalists together and explains that the Zohar is “פריה של חבורה שלמה שעסקה יחד בתורת הקבלה, על סמך מסורת משותפת עתיקים.” It is common tradition and ancient texts, in Leibes’ opinion, that joins these various kabbalists together.

However, as I see it, this theory negates itself, because once we are forced to conclude that they all were in possession of older traditions and texts that are no longer extant, the whole theory of a group becomes superfluous.

An argument of *modes ponens* (ממה נפשך) renders—in my opinion—Leibes’ argument redundant.

This is because once we accept the assumption that there are older texts or an oral tradition of Zoharic style, we can postulate that it is this older text that was the source of Zohar and the works of all the authors who wrote with Zoharic underpinnings. Essentially, if we accept that there were ancient texts, we may as well assume that the Zohar itself is of ancient origin and was merely edited in later generations.

In other words, it could well be that similarities of other works to the Zohar are rooted in the fact the “Zohar” is ancient and that the other authors were influenced by it, rather than vice-versa. While admittedly this is speculative, it is no more speculative than Leibes’ “מסורת משותפת עתיקים וטקסטים עתיקים.”

Indeed, there is some theory needed to explain the catalyst for the sudden outburst of Zoharic writing, whether or not one accepts the ancient origins of the Zohar.

To summarize: Although Leibes’ comparative study of the Zohar to the works of other kabbalists is important and fascinating, his conclusions are somewhat self-defeating. This is because they are based on two premises that are speculative rather than proven. 1) The Zohar is a cohesive book that was produced as such and not merely created by editors and printers and 2) once one accepts that there was an ancient tradition and texts one need not speculate that there was a group and instead one can postulate that De Leon wrote the whole of Zohar using ancient texts and traditions in his possession.

### 3.1 Daniel Abrams

When reading Daniel Abrams' paper entitled *The Invention of the Zohar – On the Assumptions and Expectations of the Kabbalists and Modern Scholars* one cannot help but appreciate his inquiry into the assumptions of scholars of the Zohar throughout history.

His rather comprehensive synopsis and critique of Zoharic scholars is both informative and important when identifying the important questions that scholars have asked concerning the Zohar's authorship.

In it he highlights that most of Zoharic scholarship is based on the assumption that "the" Zohar is a cohesive, unified book with either one or multiple authors. This supposition helped shape the expectations and theories of the various academics and in Abrams' opinion caused them to develop a skewed view of Zohar.

Additionally, he points out a certain hubris that scholars throughout have had in attempting to solve even the most basic questions concerning the Zohar's authorship.

He writes:<sup>6</sup>

This shift in aims also means a relaxing of the expectations to solve the riddle in this lifetime, 'of who wrote the *Zohar*' and all the mysteries that accompany it. It is simply too early to do so simply or precisely (even in another formulation) and questions of this type get in the way of real advances that can be made in the coming years.

Additionally he notes:<sup>7</sup>

All this is to say, that Zoharic scholarship is still in its infancy and no matter what gains are made in the coming years, it will take *generations* of scholars to clarify the most basic issues. Even while appreciating the differences and unique character of the *Zohar*, a cursory comparison of the state of research to that of the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud should be sufficient to make any scholar humble regarding his or her place within the long line of scholarship that will be accomplished over the next few centuries. Beginning with

---

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* Pg. 118

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid* Pg. 124

Scholem, the field has suffered from well-intentioned eagerness to identify the author and explain how the book was written...

I believe that this is an important restraint to the often overly-zealous scholars who desire to make advances in Zoharic scholarship. Reigning in this zealotry and keeping one's research in perspective ensures that one makes confirmed statements that are verifiable rather than over-arching conclusions stated prematurely.

Notwithstanding this important stance, Abram himself makes some broad statements, both about the Zohar as we have it, and the larger definition of Zoharic literature and what should be considered to fall under that banner.

So, for example, he sums up much of his critique of the various scholarship with the statement:<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the study, I have tried to express my theoretical discomfort, indeed a perceived dissonance, concerning published methodologies for evaluating the literary quality and forms of the texts known by the name of the 'Zohar.' Admittedly, I do not offer an alternative thesis which could *resolve* the question of the *Zohar's* composition. Once again, I cannot demonstrate the absence of an edited *Zohar* similar to the literary form invented by the editors of the first edition in the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, the existing manuscript evidence strongly lends itself to the conclusion that the texts we now possess were not excised from a single literary document that is now lost. Rather the *book of the Zohar* was invented at a later date by enthusiastic editors who continued the pseudepigraphic spirit of ancient rabbinic work to 'restore' the complete literary form of these texts.

Essentially then, 'the' Zohar does not exist—according to Abrams—except within the artificial construct of 16<sup>th</sup> century editors.

However, this assumption has tremendous repercussions in how we read the Zohar, because if one accepts this premise, of a lack of uniformity in the construction of the book, then we would have to view the Zohar as a series of disparate pieces that have been spliced together, rather than a cohesive book.

---

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid* pg. 127

If the various sections of Zohar are purely artificial, then rather than trying to search for a pattern or a cohesive line of thought, we should instead appreciate each part as a separate unit. Any perceived pattern should be perceived to be either random or a product of the editor, unless verified in early handwritten manuscripts that such a pattern exists.

Interestingly, in my opinion, by opening up the question of the role that the editors played in creating the Zohar, the question of the age of the Zohar once again comes to the fore. For, if the editors played an *active* role rather than a *passive* one, then who is to say that many of the anachronisms are not merely the result of an overabundance of editors?

Additionally, as the editors possibly glued together pieces that were not of the Zohar that De Leon produced, but of other authors, it is possible that mistakenly—or purposely, depending on the manner that the Zoharic literature is defined—parts were added that were not Zohar, but rather Zoharic.

Essentially, when reading Zohar, one could never be sure about any specific folio, whether it was a part of the Zohar produced by De Leon or not. That being said, the research done on the Zohar using an edited Zohar, tells us nothing about “The Zohar” produced by De Leon, but rather about what people assumed to be Zohar when the various studies were written.

Possibly, an important question to ask is not “Is the Zohar that we have in our possession the product of Moshe De Leon or other Castilian Kabbalists?” But rather, “Is there a text embedded in the various versions of ‘Zohar’ that perhaps is older and based on ancient texts or traditions?”

Other important points in Abrams’ work is his discussion of Reception History and Recouer’s Hermeneutics of Suspicion as they relate to the study of Kabbalah and Zohar.

What Reception Theory states is that an observer who does not share the same cultural background as the original author will interpret the information according to his own paradigm and possibly miss the original intent of the author.<sup>9</sup>

Abrams applies this principle to the study of Kabbalah in his statement:

---

<sup>9</sup> Eco, Umberto (1972). Trans. Paola Splendore. "Towards a Semiotic Inquiry Into the Television Message". Working Papers in Cultural Studies (University of Birmingham) 3: 103–21.

In the context of Zohar and Kabbalistic literature, it is more important to appreciate the role of the work and its versions in the later history of kabbalah—how the text was transformed and how others understood its meaning, rather than seeking ‘the’ meaning of the original text of the work, and how it (as a presumably static text!), fixed in a certain moment in time, influenced later figures.

While I appreciate the point of the difficulty that Reception Theory presents, in my opinion, this specifically highlights the need to understand who the author of the text was, for without knowledge of *who* the author was and an understanding of what moment in history and culture he wrote in, it becomes nigh impossible to understand the original intent of the author.

A similar point is expressed with Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics of Suspicion, which states that what the author expresses is a subconscious thought. Therefore, it is important to understand the author to understand his thought. According to this theory too, it specifically becomes supremely important to know who authored the Zohar.

Another major paradigm shift suggested by Abrams is to redefine the ‘Zohar’ as a body of texts that were written in Zoharic style or content. Rather than defining Zohar as a book, Abrams suggests redefining it as a textual body:

Some well-known Kabbalists, such as R. Joseph of Hamadan composed works which bear a striking similarity to some Zoharic texts. I suggest that instead of viewing the affinity of these writings to the Zohar as proof that such a figure composed part of the Zohar or certain literary units as part of the ‘Zoharic Circle,’ scholarship should redefine [the] ‘Zohar’ to include texts that participate in the style, forming a genre of texts, especially those composed in Aramaic. The resistance to destabilize the literary boundaries of the *Zohar* points to the resilience of a convention that there must be a book, and for which the circle of its possible contributors is reconsidered and expanded. My suggestion is therefore stronger than expanding the literary boundaries of the *Zohar* from a defined book to an open book, but rather to appreciate the family of Zoharic texts and those participating in the literary style as the phenomenon of the *Zohar*.

The assumption that I believe this suggestion is predicated on, is that the ‘Zohar’ is not a book but a genre. More so, according to this, the Zohar was never intended to be written as a cohesive

book, but was instead the product of editors who developed it working under the premise that they were reconstructing an ancient work.

However, if the assumptions of these editors were incorrect, then essentially there is no difference between the Zoharic writings found in the Zohar or the Zoharic writings of other authors, such as of Rabbi Joseph of Hamadan, which are not extant in the printed Zohar.

While I appreciate the sentiment of this suggestion, I believe that a call to redefine Zoharic study is somewhat premature. Prof. Abrams himself admits—as stated before—that Zoharic study is still in its infancy and it is still too soon to make many conclusions concerning *defining* the Zohar.

That being said, a redefinition of the Zohar as a corpus rather than a book, will have further repercussions on Zoharic study, as perhaps further research will indeed reveal that the Zohar should be understood as a book rather than a genre. In my opinion including all texts that are purported to be Zoharic texts into the Zohar, would be akin to including apocryphal writings into the text of the canonized Bible, for even if the Bible were only the creation its editors, Reception Theory would inform us that how the Bible or the Zohar were defined through history, makes a difference in how we would understand it, not what its true delineations are.

Rather, it seems to me that the Zohar should remain the Zohar, whereas extraneous Zoharic texts should be seen as texts that are perhaps part of Zoharic literature and studied as such, but not part and parcel the Zohar itself.

Summary: what I particularly appreciated in Abrams' critique of Zoharic scholarship is the perspective that it gives to the various academics. For, although each scholar attempts to provide an objective account of the Zohar, there are certain preconceived assumptions that guide his thought process. The realization of a person's humility vis-à-vis further research is extremely important for coming to proper conclusions. That being said, while I respect the thought, I believe that it is somewhat too early to redefine the study of Zohar.

## Bibliography

רבי יהודה ארי' מודינא, ספר ארי' נוהם, עם הוספות "טענות ומענות המקובלים, והתשובות גאונים ומתנגדים" ירושלים, תרפ"ט

Vienna 1833 רבי אליהו דלמדיגו, ספר בחינת הדת,

רבי יעקב עמדין (יעב"ץ), ספר מטפחת סופרים, לבוב תרל"א

Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, Jerusalem 1941

Isaiah Tishby, ספר משנת הזוהר כרך א', Jerusalem 1971

Yehuda Liebes, כיצד נתחבר ספר הזוהר, Jerusalem,

Daniel Abrams, *The Invention of the Zohar as a Book*, Kabbalah (19 2009), pp. 7-142