

THE WORDS: **בונה ירושלים** IN **וכסא דוד מהרה לתוכה תכין**

The words: **וכסא דוד מהרה לתוכה תכין** which are part of the current version of the **ברכה** of **בונה ירושלים** in **נוסח אשכנז** and **ספרד** seem to be out of place. First, the words are inconsistent with the theme of the **ברכה** and express the theme of the next **ברכה**, **את צמח דוד**. Second, our version of the **ברכה** follows **מנהג בכל** which kept the **ברכות** of **בונה ירושלים** and **את צמח דוד** as two separate **ברכות**. It was **מנהג ארץ ישראל** which combined the themes of both **ברכות** as seen in the following versions of the **ברכה**:

רחם ה' אלקינו רחמיך הרבים עלינו ועל ירושלים עירך ועל ציון משכן כבודך ועל מלכות בית דוד משיחך. ברוך אתה ה' אלקי דויד ובונה ירושלים.

רחם ה' אלקינו ברחמיך הרבים עלינו ועל ישראל עמך ועל ירושלים עירך ועל ציון משכן כבודך ועל מלכות בית דוד משיחך ועל היכלך ועל מקדשך ועל מעונך. ברוך אתה ה' אלקי דויד בונה ירושלים.

Third, the **ברכה** as it appears in **גאון** does not contain those words.

סדר רב עמרם גאון סדר תפילה ד"ה ועומדין בתפלה—על ירושלים עירך ברחמים תשוב ושכון בתוכה כאשר דברת ובנה אותה בנין עולם בימינו. ברוך אתה ה' בונה ירושלים. את צמח דוד מהרה תצמיח, וקרנו תרום בישועתך כי לישועתך קוינו כל היום. ברוך אתה ה' מצמיח קרן ישועה.

The **נוסחאות** that follow the **רמב"ם** including **תימן** still do not include those words:

רמב"ם סדר תפילות נוסח ברכות התפילה—(יד) **תשכון בתוך ירושלים עירך כאשר דברת ובנה אותה בנין עולם במהרה בימינו. ברוך אתה יי' בונה ירושלים. (טו) את צמח דוד במהרה תצמיח וקרנו תרום בישועתך. ברוך אתה יי' מצמיח קרן ישועה.**

It is the **מחזור ויטרי** which is the first source to include those words in the **ברכה**:

מחזור ויטרי סימן פט ד"ה ברוך אתה—ולירושלם עירך ברחמים תשוב ותשכון בתוכה כאשר דברת ובנה אותה בקרוב בימינו בניין עולם וכסא דוד מהרה לתוכה תכין. בא"י בונה ירושלים: את צמח דוד עבדך מהרה אתה תצמיח וקרנו תרום בישועתך כי לישועתך קוינו כל היום. בא"י מצמיח קרן ישועה.

Why did the **מחזור ויטרי** include those words? The answer may lie in an interpretation of the following **פסוק** (**ח', טז'**) that is presented in the **זוהר**:

מן היום אשר הוצאתי את עמי את ישראל ממצרים לא בחרתי בעיר מכל שבטי ישראל לבנות בית להיות שמי שם ואבחר בדוד להיות על עמי ישראל.

The excerpt from the **זוהר** serves as an answer to a different question:

שו"ת משאת בנימין סימן נה-ולענין ברכת ירושלים בתפילת י"ח כפי הנוסחא בסידורים שלנו שחותמין בה וכסא דוד מהרה לתוכה תכין בא"י בונה ירושלים. דלכאורה נראה לאו היינו סמוך לחתימה מעין החתימה דמה ענין כסא דוד לבונה ירושלים. ובסידורי הספרדים מהפכין הנוסחא וחותמין וכסא דוד מהרה לתוכה תכין ובנה אותה בקרוב בימינו בנין עולם בא"י בונה ירושלים. ולדידהו הוי שפיר סמוך לחתימה מעין החתימה ובסד' הרמב"ם ז"ל מדלג וכסא דוד מהרה לתוכה תכין. ומ"מ נראה דאין לשבש הנוסחא שבסידורים שלנו משום דענין דוד וענין בנין ירושלים הכל ענין אחד הוא. וכן יסד הפייטן ביום הפורים: וארגמן ימנם לכונן עיר דוד בא"י בונה ירושלים. וקרא נמי הכי משמע דכתיב בספר מלכים מן היום אשר הוצאתי את עמי את ישראל ממצרים לא בחרתי בעיר מכל שבטי ישראל לבנות בית להיות שמי שם ואבחר בדוד להיות על עמי ישראל; פתח קרא לא בחרתי בעיר ומסיים ואבחר בדוד. שמע מינה היינו ירושלים היינו דוד הכל אחד הוא. והטעם מבואר בספר הזוהר בפרשה ויקהל וז"ל: א"ר אבהו: כתיב למן היום אשר הוצאתי את עמי בני ישראל ממצרים לא בחרתי בעיר מכל שבטי ישראל ואבחר בדוד; הא קרא לאו רישיה סיפיה ולא סיפיה רישיה דכתיב לא בחרתי בעיר ואבחר בדוד, מאי האי עם האי, ואבחר בירושלים מבעי ליה? אלא כד קודשא בריך הוא אית ריעותא קמיה למבני קרתא אסתכל בקדמיתא בההיא רישא דנהיג עמא דקרתא ולבתר בני קרתא ומייתי לעמא ביה, הה"ד לא בחרתי בעיר עד דאסתכלנא בדוד למהוי רעיא על ישראל בנין דמתא וכל בני מתא כולהון קיימין ברעיא דנהיג לעמא אי רעיא איהו טבא טב ליה טב למתא טב לעלמא ואי רעיא איהו בישא ווי ליה ווי למתא ווי לעמא והשתא אסתכל קודשא בריך הוא כו' עכ"ל. דברי הק' בנימין אהרן ב"ר אברהם סלניק ז"ל:

The *מחזור ויטרי* may have added the words: *וכסא דוד מהרה לתוכה תכין* so that the *ברכה* of *בונה ירושלים* would incorporate the rule enunciated by the *זוהר* that a city depends on its leaders for its welfare. *ירושלים* will reach its potential as a city only at the time that *מלכות בית דוד* governs over it. That maxim explains why *חז"ל* had no difficulty in allowing the *ברכות* of *בונה ירושלים* and *את צמח* to be merged as they were in *מנהג ארץ ישראל*. It further explains why no one questioned why the *חתימת הברכה* of the combined *ברכות* in *מנהג ארץ ישראל*, *אלקי דויד ובונה ירושלים*, is inconsistent with the rule that a *ברכה* cannot present two themes.

The fact that the *מחזור ויטרי* was the first to add these words to the *ברכה* out of concern for a rule enunciated by the *זוהר* may be circumstantial evidence that the *זוהר* was not yet composed at the time of the *סדר רב עמרם גאון* nor at the time of the *רמב"ם*. Such a position would be consistent with what scholars such as Gershom Sholem have postulated and adds fuel to the fire concerning the question as to when the *זוהר* was composed.

1. R. Benjamin Aaron b. R. Avrohom Salnik lived in Poland, 1555-1620. He was a student of R. Moses Isserlis (Rema) and R. Shlomo Luria (Maharshal).

TRANSLATION OF SOURCES

נה-ש"ת משאת בנימין סימן שמונה עשרה -Our version of the Bracha of Boneh Yerushalayim in Shemona Esrei in which we finish by reciting: V'Kisai Dovid Mihaira L'Socha Tachin. Baruch Ata Hashem Boneh Yerushalayim is troubling. The ending Bracha does not match the ending words-the words: seat of Dovid seem to express a different theme than the words: building Yerushalayim. In Nusach Sepharad they reverse the words and end: V'Kisai Dovid Mihaira L'Socha Tachin Oo'Vinai Osa B'Karov Bi'Yameinu Binyan Olam. Baruch Ata Hashem Boneh Yerushalayim. In that version of the Bracha, the ending Bracha matches the ending words. The Rambam in his order of prayers omits the words: V'Kisai Dovid Mihaira L'Socha Tachin. The conclusion I am about to draw is that we should not change our version of Shemona Esrei because an argument can be made that the theme of the words: V'Kisai Dovid Mihaira L'Socha Tachin and the theme of the words: Boneh Yerushalayim are one and the same. This is in line with what the author of the piyut for Shemona Esrei on Purim wrote²: preparing them royal blue to establish the City of David. Baruch Ata Hashem Boneh Yerushalayim. A verse in the Book of Melachim conveys the same idea: From the day I took my nation out of Egypt, I did not pick a city from among the tribes where I will build a home on which I could place My name. I picked David to be over my nation, Israel. The verse begins with the words: I did not pick a city and ends with I chose David. We can conclude that Yerushalayim is synonymous with David. They are one and the same. The connection between the two is expressed in the Book of the Zohar in Parshat V'Yakheil and this is what is written³:

R. Hiya and R. Isaac and R. Jose were walking together on the road when R. Abba met them. Said R. Hiya: 'Assuredly the Shekinah is with us.' R. Abba, when he came up with them, expounded the verse: "Since the day that I brought forth my people Israel out of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel to build a house, that my name might be there; but I chose David to be over my people Israel" (I Kings VIII, 16). "This verse", he said, "does not seem to be logically constructed. It begins, "I chose no city", and ends, "but I chose David", instead of, as we should expect, "but I chose Jerusalem". What connection have the two with each other? But the truth is, that when it is the pleasure of the Holy One, blessed be He, to build a city, He first considers who shall be the leader of its people, and not until then does He build the city and bring the people into it. The verse then says, in effect, "I chose no city until I had observed David to be fitting shepherd of Israel." For a city with all its inhabitants depends for its existence on the care of the people's shepherd and leader. If the latter be a good shepherd, it is well with him, well with the city, and well with the people; but if he be an evil shepherd, woe to him, woe to the city, and woe to the people!

2. Transaction reproduced from the Artscroll Siddur.

3. Translation reproduced from the Davka CD-ROM Soncino Classics.

‘Thus, the Holy One, blessed be He, when He looked at the world and decided to build the city, first raised up David, as it says, “but I chose David”, etc.’ ‘This is a new thought, what we have just heard’, said his Companions.

SUPPLEMENT

Dating the Authorship of the זוהר

The traditional view has been that the זוהר was authored by רבי שמעון בר יוחאי while he was hiding in a cave out of fear of the Romans. The book was hidden until it was discovered in the Middle Ages. Academic scholars have raised serious challenges to that claim, in particular Gershom Scholem in his book, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism. Scholars argue that the book was written in the Middle Ages. Below you will find the contentions of Daniel Matt, the current author of the Pritzker Edition of the translation of the זוהר, which he included in his book, Zohar, the Book of Enlightenment, that was published in 1983.

Introduction

1

Seven hundred years ago, a Spanish Jewish mystic named Moses de León began circulating booklets to his friends and fellow kabbalists. These booklets contained teachings and tales that had never been seen or heard. Moses claimed that he was merely the scribe, copying from an ancient book of wisdom. The original had been composed in the circle of Rabbi Shim'on son of Yochai, a famous teacher of the second century who lived in the land of Israel and, according to tradition, spent twelve years secluded in a cave. After Rabbi Shim'on's death, so the story goes, the book was hidden away or secretly handed down from master to disciple. Only recently had it been sent from Israel to Catalonia in northeastern Spain. Then it fell into the hands of Moses de León of Guadalajara. He took it upon himself to spread the ancient secrets, copying portions from the original manuscript and offering them for sale.

But history impinged. In 1291 the Mamluks conquered the city of Acre in Israel and massacred most of the Jewish and Christian inhabitants. One of the few who managed to escape was a young man named Isaac son of Samuel. He journeyed to Italy and eventually to Spain, arriving in Toledo in 1305. Isaac, who later became one of the leading kabbalists of the fourteenth century, was amazed at the reports he heard about the newly discovered Midrash of Rabbi Shim'on. The book had supposedly been written in Israel, but Isaac was from Israel and had never heard of it.

According to his diary, Isaac sought out those who possessed the booklets and was informed that the distributor was Moses de León, whom he located in Valladolid. Moses assured him that he owned the original manuscript composed by the ancient sage, and that

he would let Isaac see it if he came to Ávila, where Moses now lived. They parted company. Moses set out for his home, but on the way, in the town of Arévalo, he became ill and died. When Isaac heard the news, he went straight to Ávila to see if anyone there knew the truth about the book. He was told that immediately following Moses' death, the wife of Joseph de Ávila, the tax collector of the province, had offered her son in marriage to the daughter of Moses de León's widow in exchange for the ancient manuscript. Moses' widow had responded:

Thus and more may G-d do to me if my husband ever possessed such a book! He wrote it entirely from his own head. When I saw him writing with nothing in front of him, I said to him, "Why do you say that you are copying from a book when there is no book? You are writing from your head. Wouldn't it be better to say so? You would have more honor!" He answered me, "If I told them my secret, that I am writing from my own mind, they would pay no attention to my words, and they would pay nothing for them. They would say: 'He is inventing them out of his imagination.' But now that they hear that I am copying from *The Book of Zohar* composed by Rabbi Shim'on son of Yochai through the Holy Spirit, they buy these words at a high price, as you see with your very eyes!"

Isaac was aghast when he heard this story. He traveled on to make further inquiries and found support for Moses' claim that the book was ancient. He heard a report that Rabbi Jacob, a former student of Moses de León, had sworn that "the Zohar composed by Rabbi Shim'on son of Yochai ..." And here the citation from Isaac's diary breaks off.

Moses de León's name faded. The Zohar was gradually accepted as the ancient wisdom of Rabbi Shim'on and his circle. By the middle of the sixteenth century, it ranked with the Bible and the Talmud as a sacred text. While kabbalists delved into its mysteries, Oriental Jews chanted the strange Aramaic, often unaware of the literal sense. But both groups, and countless others, were inspired and uplifted by the Holy Zohar.

2

Who was Moses de León? Devoted scribe or devious author?

As with many mystics, the facts of Moses' life are scarce. In one of his books, he calls himself "Moses son of Shem Tov from the city of León." The year of his birth is unknown, but by 1264 he was engaged in the study of philosophy, for in that year a Hebrew translation of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* was copied "for the erudite [*hamaskil*] Rabbi Moses de León." (The *Guide*, completed about 1200 in Egypt, was a grandiose attempt at a synthesis of Jewish faith and Aristotelian philosophy.) Philosophy, however, was not Moses de León's only undertaking. He immersed himself in rabbinic literature and was also drawn to the teachings of Kabbalah.

Kabbalah means "receiving" and refers to that which is handed down by tradition. For

many centuries the word was used quite generally, but by the time of Moses de León, the term Kabbalah denoted esoteric teachings, techniques of meditation, and a growing body of mystical literature. A kabbalistic movement had emerged in Provence and Catalonia toward the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth centuries. The famous Rabbi Nahmanides of Gerona explored the teachings and helped Kabbalah gain wider acceptance. The movement spread westward to Castile (central Spain). Wandering south from León, Moses came to know some of the kabbalists and was introduced to the *Bahir* ("Brightness"), the main text of Provençal Kabbalah, to the teachings of the school of Gerona, and to more recent Castilian formulations.

Moses de León did not reject philosophy. Many of his kabbalistic comrades had also studied the *Guide of the Perplexed*, and there were parallels and connections between Maimonides' system and Kabbalah. Both adopted the Neoplatonic scheme; both aimed at contemplative union with higher spheres; both were dissatisfied with the plain, literal meaning of Torah and sought to spiritualize its teaching.

However, Moses and his fellow kabbalists saw the effects of radical rationalism on Spanish Jewry. Maimonides had written his Guide in Arabic for an intellectual elite. Once it was translated into Hebrew and transplanted to Spain, rationalism became the vogue among the Jewish upper class. Many of these wealthy, assimilated Jews embraced a rationalistic ideology not for the pursuit of truth but in order to justify their neglect of tradition. In his *Sefer ha-Rimmon* ("Book of the Pomegranate"), Moses de León lashes out at these lazy scoffers:

When they are alone with one another, they ridicule and mock [the words of the rabbis] and delight in the words of the Greeks and their assistants [the medieval philosophers]. They kiss their words! Furthermore, I have seen them on the festival of *Sukkot* ["Booths"] standing in their places in the synagogue, watching the servants of G-d circling with palm branches around the Torah scroll in the ark, laughing at them and mocking them, saying that they are fools without any knowledge. Meanwhile, they have no palm branch and no citron. They claim: "Has not the Torah said to take these in order to 'rejoice in the presence of YHVH your G-d for seven days' (Leviticus 23:40)? Do you think these species will make us happy? Silver and gold ornaments and fine clothes make us happier!" And they say, "Do you think we have to bless God? Does He need this? Foolishness!" Eventually there are no phylacteries on their heads. When you ask them why, they answer, "Phylacteries are only meant to be 'a reminder between your eyes' (Exodus 13:9). This is no reminder. It is better to mention the Creator with our mouths several times a day. That is a better and more fitting reminder!" They take those books and see those words and say that this is the Torah of truth!

Moses was incensed at this cavalier attitude toward tradition. At the same time, he was dissatisfied with the traditionalists. Having experienced the knowledge of Kabbalah, he was

no longer content with mere book learning. In his *Or Zaru'a* ("Sown Light"), Moses writes:

I have seen some people called "wise." But they have not awoken from their slumber; they just remain where they are.... Indeed, they are far from searching for His glorious Reality. They have exchanged His Glory for the image of a bull eating grass [cf. Psalms 106:20]. For when one of them comes to the case of a bull that is to be stoned [because it gored someone; see Exodus 21:28-32; Mishnah and Talmud, *Bava Qamma*, 4], and he finds out exactly how it should be stoned, he thinks he is a great wise man and has achieved what no one else has. Now indeed, all the words of the rabbis, may their memory be a blessing, are true and perfect; they are all words of the living God! But having reached this case, which is one level, why does he not ascend from wisdom to wisdom, from level to level?

Moses settled in the city of Guadalajara and sometime between 1275 and 1280 began to produce a mystical Midrash. The root of *midrash* means "to search." Midrash is the ancient technique of searching for the meaning of passages, phrases, and individual words of the Bible. It includes philology, etymology, hermeneutics, homiletics, and imagination. The earliest Midrashim were edited during the fourth bull eating grass [cf. Psalms 106:20]. For when one of them comes to the case of a bull that is to be stoned [because it gored someone; see Exodus 21:28-32; Mishnah and Talmud, *Bava Qamma*, 4], and he finds out exactly how it should be stoned, he thinks he is a great wise man and has achieved what no one else has. Now indeed, all the words of the rabbis, may their memory be a blessing, are true and perfect; they are all words of the living God! But having reached this case, which is one level, why does he not ascend from wisdom to wisdom, from level to level?

The ancient wise ones have said that there was once a man who engaged in Mishnah and Talmud all his days according to his animal knowledge. When the time came for him to depart from the world, he was very old, and people said that he was a great wise man. But one person came along and said to him, "Do you know your self? All the limbs in your body, what are they for?" He said, "I do not know." "Your little finger, what is it for?" He said, "I do not know." "Do you know anything outside of you, why it is how it is?" He began shouting at everyone, "I do not know my self! How can I know anything outside my self?" He went on, "All my days I have toiled in Torah until I was eighty years old. But in the final year I attained no more wisdom or essence than I attained in those first years when I began studying." The people asked, "Then what did you toil over all these years?" He said, "What I learned in the beginning." They said, "This wise man is nothing but an animal without any knowledge. He did not know the purpose of all his work; just like an animal carrying straw on its back, not knowing whether it is sifted grain or straw!" ... See now how my eyes shine, for I have tasted a bit of this honey! O House of Jacob! Come, let us walk in the light of *YHVH*!

In the standard printed editions of the Zohar there is one volume on Genesis, one on

Exodus, and one on the remaining three books of the Torah: Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. On Deuteronomy, in fact, there are only a few Zohar passages. It is unlikely that significant portions have been lost. Rather, at a certain point Moses de León simply exhausted his creative power or felt that he had done enough and turned his attention elsewhere.

From 1286 until his death in 1305, Moses wrote books in Hebrew under his own name and copied out portions of the Zohar for sale and circulation. His Hebrew writings are filled with the ideas and imagery of the Zohar and serve as a valuable commentary. They were intended to prepare his reading audience for the publication of his pseudepigraphic *magnum opus*. Frequently in these books Moses alludes to the Zohar: "It is expounded in the inner Midrashim"; "They say in the secrets of Torah"; "The pillars of the world have discussed the secrets of their words"; "I have seen a profound matter in the writings of the ancients"; "I saw in the *Yerushalmi*"; "I have seen in the secrets of the depth of wisdom." Moses is tantalizing the reader, hinting that an unknown book of ancient wisdom has been discovered. Soon it will be available.

Moses remained in Guadalajara until at least 1291, and from there he began circulating the Zohar. He did not distribute entire copies of the book, just portions. This is indicated in the diary of Isaac of Acre and accords with the fact that the first authors to quote the Zohar cite only certain sections. No complete manuscript has yet been found. When the Zohar was first printed in Italy in the sixteenth century, the editors had to combine several manuscripts to produce a complete text. Later other manuscripts were located, and an additional volume was printed elsewhere.

Despite Moses' efforts, the Zohar was not accepted by everyone as an ancient work. We have already heard of the investigation of Isaac of Acre. There were other kabbalists who treated the Zohar with restraint, for example, the students of Rabbi Solomon son of Abraham ibn Adret of Barcelona. In 1340 the philosopher and kabbalist Joseph ibn Waqqar warned: "Very many errors occur in the book. Therefore it is necessary to be careful and keep a safe distance from it in order not to make mistakes."

A number of adventurous souls followed Moses' example and produced their own ancient Midrashim. Foremost among these were *Ra'aya Meheimna* ("The Faithful Shepherd") and *Tiqqunei Zohar* ("Embellishments on the Zohar"), written at the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century. These two imitations were successful enough to become part of the zoharic literature. *Ra'aya Meheimna* is actually printed as part of the Zohar, while *Tiqqunei Zohar* appears in a separate volume. Another kabbalist, David son of Judah the Hasid, wrote *Mar'ot ha-Zove'ot* ("The Book of Mirrors") in the early fourteenth century. This work contains numerous translations of Zohar passages into Hebrew along with rabbinic Midrashim, selections from thirteenth-century kabbalistic literature, and the author's own imitations of Zohar.

Gradually the Zohar's antiquity was accepted by kabbalists. However, it was not read or circulated beyond small circles. In the middle of the fifteenth century the Marrano Pedro de la Caballeria stated that few Jews possessed the Zohar. It was not until after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 that the Zohar became the Bible of Kabbalah. From 1530 onward, Safed, Israel, was a meeting place for kabbalists. One of them, Moses Cordovero, wrote two systematic books of Kabbalah based on the Zohar and also a long commentary on it. Isaac Luria developed a new system of Kabbalah that drew heavily on certain sections of the Zohar. The mystical-ethical literature that emerged from this circle helped to popularize the Zohar's teachings, while the messianic fervor generated here encouraged the spreading of the secrets. Earlier kabbalists had already made a connection between the dissemination of Kabbalah and the redemption of Israel, but now studying the Zohar was raised to the level of a divine command:

The decree from above not to engage openly in the wisdom of Kabbalah was meant to apply only for a set time, until 1490. From then on is the time of the last generation [before the Messiah]; the decree is rescinded, and permission is granted to engage in studying *The Book of Zohar*. From 1540 on, the best way to fulfill the *mizvah* [divine command] is to engage in it publicly, young and old.... Since this and nothing else will bring about the coming of King Messiah, do not be negligent!

The technology of printing made it feasible for young and old to engage in the Zohar. Between 1558 and 1560 the first two editions appeared in the neighboring Italian cities of Mantua and Cremona. There was a fierce controversy over the printing; among the opponents were kabbalists who felt that it was dangerous and forbidden to reveal such secrets of Torah. They did not agree that the decree from above had been rescinded. Others opposed publication because they suspected that the Zohar was a late work. However, the editors countered these objections, and *The Book of Enlightenment* became available to wider circles.

Even before the Zohar was printed, it had aroused the interest of certain Christians. At the end of the fifteenth century, Pico della Mirandola and Johannes Reuchlin took up the study of Kabbalah. They became convinced that it contained the original divine revelation and that its true, hidden meaning accorded with the secrets of the Christian faith. They tried to identify kabbalistic parallels to the Trinity, Incarnation, the Virgin Mother, the Name of Jesus, and Original Sin. In the first half of the sixteenth century, the Franciscan Francesco Giorgio of Venice used manuscript material from the Zohar extensively in his works, and Guillaume Postel began to translate the Zohar into Latin.

The claims of Christian Kabbalah helped stimulate the first critical work on the Zohar, *Ari Nobem* ("Roaring Lion"), written by the Italian rabbi and scholar Leone Modena in 1639. Modena stated flatly that the Zohar was not composed by Rabbi Shim'on or his circle; that it could not be "more than 350 years old." He praised the Zohar's style and inspirational effect but identified anachronisms to prove its recent origin and impugn its authority. By now, however, the Zohar was too highly venerated to be openly challenged. Modena did

not dare to publish *Ari Nobem*; it was printed only in 1840, nearly two hundred years after the author's death. Until then it circulated in manuscript. Certain freethinkers approved, while one kabbalist of the eighteenth century, Moses Hayyim Luzzatto, responded to it with a written defense of Kabbalah.

It was not until the second half of the eighteenth century that a major critical work on the Zohar was printed. This book too was written with polemical intent. Sabbatianism, the messianic movement of the seventeenth century, was based on Lurianic Kabbalah and relied heavily on the Zohar for imagery, symbolism, and doctrine. In fact, Shabbetai Zevi, the hero of the movement and reputed Messiah, was more influenced by the Zohar than by Luria. In 1666 the royal council of Turkey, alarmed at Shabbetai's growing power and eccentric behavior, offered him the choice of being put to death or converting to Islam. Shabbetai converted, but the movement persisted and was driven completely underground only at the start of the eighteenth century.

One of the most dedicated opponents of the later secret sect was Jacob Emden, a noted rabbi and halakhic authority. He pursued suspected Sabbatians, including the famous rabbi Jonathan Eybeschutz, and developed an extraordinary critical ability for uncovering heretical allusions in Sabbatian literature. This led him to a critical reading of the Zohar, the bastion of Sabbatianism. Emden believed firmly in the truth of Kabbalah, and it was difficult for him to publish his radical discoveries. At the beginning of his *Mitpachat Sefarim* ("Covering of the Holy Books," 1768), he says that he suppressed his doubts for forty years but now feels compelled to reveal the truth. He then proceeds to list nearly three hundred pieces of evidence culled from the pages of the Zohar that prove the late editing of the book. These include traces of medieval sources, corrupt Aramaic, halakhic mistakes, historical allusions, and anachronisms. Nevertheless, Emden attempted to preserve the sanctity of at least part of the Zohar and concluded that there was an ancient core to the book, though even this was composed hundreds of years after Rabbi Shim'on. Many passages, including the entire *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*, were added in the thirteenth century.

Emden laid the groundwork for modern research on the Zohar. In the nineteenth century, Adolf Jellinek proceeded to compare one of Moses de León's Hebrew writings with the Zohar. He showed that most of the Hebrew book appeared in the Zohar in Aramaic, sometimes with variations. The Hebrew work also quoted zoharic passages, attributing them to ancient sources. Jellinek concluded that Moses de León was, at least, one of the authors of the Zohar. He also detected the influence of thirteenth-century Kabbalah on the Zohar's ideas and terminology.

The historian Heinrich Graetz relied on Jellinek but insisted that the Zohar was written entirely by Moses de León. Graetz worshiped rationalism and saw Kabbalah as a malignant growth in the body of Judaism. He called the Zohar a "book of lies" and claimed that its fantasies and illusions had blinded Jews to the light of rational truth. Accepting the testimony recorded by Isaac of Acre, Graetz charged that Moses de León was nothing but

a conniving forger.

The research of Gershom Scholem has broken through the rationalistic prejudice of the nineteenth century and demonstrated that Kabbalah is a vital component of Jewish thought and history. Scholem's first lecture at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1925 was entitled: "Did Moses de León Write the Zohar?" The question occupied him for many years. He sifted the writings of kabbalists, critics, and scholars. He examined the Zohar's language, terminology, ideas, and symbolism in the context of early Kabbalah and medieval Hebrew thought and literature. He explored the literary structure of the Zohar, its fictional format, and historical allusions. Scholem demonstrated that the peculiar Aramaic was constructed from literary sources, particularly the Babylonian Talmud and Targum Onqelos; it contains grammatical errors and medieval Hebraisms. The mystical theosophy of the work proved to be pure thirteenth-century Kabbalah, which derives from medieval Jewish Neoplatonism and Gnosticism.

Scholem undertook a detailed analysis of all of Moses de León's extant Hebrew writings, most still in manuscript. Moses draws on the Zohar frequently, quoting it directly as an ancient work, paraphrasing or altering it, combining separate passages. "His method is that of the artist who shapes the material into any form he desires." Moses' Hebrew exhibits characteristics of the Zohar's Aramaic: the same strange syntax, the same new meanings, the same incorrect grammatical forms. These similarities appear not only in Moses' translations of Zohar passages but also when he is writing on his own. Gradually Scholem became convinced that the author was one and the same. But whereas Graetz had condemned Moses de León, Scholem defended his pseudepigraphic venture as a legitimate expression of religious creativity.

Scholem's student, Isaiah Tishby, has further advanced Zohar scholarship. His *Mishnat ha-Zohar* ("The Wisdom of the Zohar") includes extensive analyses and numerous translations arranged by subject.