

Elite identity, then, is perhaps not the same thing as nonelite identity. On the subject of identity more generally, I would have liked to see a greater analysis of its fluidity in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, especially since the term “Jewish identity” figures highly in the subtitle of the book. Here, and this is less a criticism of the book and perhaps more of a plea to those who work in medieval Jewish thought, it would be wonderful if a group of scholars with such excellent philological and hermeneutical skills would, just occasionally, look to the vast and important theoretical work that examines identity.

Regardless, Kozodoy has gifted us with an exemplary intellectual portrait of a fascinating and complex late medieval thinker.

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Hartley Lachter. *Kabbalistic Revolution: Reimagining Judaism in Medieval Spain*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014. 260 pp.
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Hartley Lachter’s study of Kabbalah in late thirteenth-century Spain has two parts, which accomplish different tasks. The first part places Kabbalah into the historical context of thirteenth-century Spanish Christian religion, culture, and politics. The second part responds to new scholarship concerning the dating and authorship of the Zohar. Lachter succeeds admirably in moving scholarship forward in both directions.

Lachter situates the flowering of Kabbalah in thirteenth-century Spain in the context of the so-called Alfonsine Renaissance, sponsored by King Alfonso the Wise, that is, Alfonso X of Castile (1221–84). Lachter shows that secret knowledge of many kinds was highly esteemed in the Alfonsine court, and that Jewish secrets were not excluded. He quotes a nephew of Alfonso, a certain Don Juan Manuel: “[King Alfonso] had the whole of theology, logic and the seven liberal arts ... translated into Castilian ... [and] also the entire law of the Jews, as well as their Talmud, and another doctrine of theirs, which they keep safely hidden and call *cabbala*” (17).

Royal attention can be a powerful motivation. At the same time, it was also a powerful threat. Juan Manuel was hardly Madonna; he wrote that his uncle’s purpose in bringing the Kabbalah to light was to expose Jewish errors. Kabbalah, like other secret doctrines, enjoyed cultural prestige, but it was also a part of the new polemical debates between Judaism and Christianity.

It need hardly be said that the study of Kabbalah, both within the academy and outside it, has too often been pursued with scant concern for historical context, except in the narrowest sense of the relation of one kabbalistic text to another. Yitzhak Baer’s chapter on Kabbalah in his famous *History of the Jews in Christian Spain* inspired relatively few successors; Scholem’s chapter in *Major Trends in*

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Jewish Mysticism, relatively many. Lachter's focus on the court of Alfonso is novel and intriguing.

The second part of the book, which is actually the longer of the two sections, turns to a somewhat different agenda. Over the last generation, a growing chorus of scholars has argued that our text of the Zohar took shape slowly, and that there are few passages in it, if any, that can reliably be ascribed to a specific author. The common ascription of the Zohar to Moses de Leon, it has been argued, rests on extremely shaky foundations.

Lachter steps into this breach. He focuses not on the Zohar, but on a circle of four thirteenth-century Spanish kabbalists. The four are Moses de Leon, Joseph Gikatilla, the mysterious Joseph of Hamadan, and David ben Judah ha-Hasid, who was not the son of the famous German pietist, but may have been a grandson of Nahmanides. Each one of the four, including de Leon himself, wrote kabbalistic works under his own name. All of these works have been severely overshadowed by the Zohar, both within academia and outside it. The best known is perhaps Gikatilla's *Sha'are 'orah*. Unlike the Zohar, however, all of these texts can be very securely placed in Spain in the last decades of the thirteenth century. The four authors are sufficiently similar to be studied as a school. They are easily distinguished from other contemporary kabbalists, such as Abraham Abulafia, who does not appear in Lachter's book. Together, these kabbalists, perhaps with other anonymous kabbalists of the same circle, are the agents of Lachter's revolution.

The last four chapters of Lachter's book are a summary of the kabbalistic teachings of this circle. Lachter surveys their views of the *sefirot* and cosmology; Israel, the soul, and divine incarnation; and prayer, the performance of mitzvot, and divine theurgy. This is a restatement of what used to be called Zoharic Kabbalah, and there are relatively few surprises in this section. (That is, few surprises for readers who are familiar with the Zohar. Readers who are new to Kabbalah may of course find the doctrines quite surprising or even incredible.) But that is as it should be. Lachter's work is the necessary basis for a crucial argument, which is not worked out explicitly, but clearly cued up, namely that most of our Zohar could only have sprung from this exact circle, and perhaps from these exact authors.

Lachter argues that this novel version of Kabbalah should be seen as a "counter-theology" that responds to Christianity and its criticisms of Judaism. He particularly stresses that the kabbalistic doctrines of the *sefirot*, and of the divine nature of the Jewish soul, were made to echo and counter the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. He also places the kabbalistic championing of Jewish prayer, rituals, and rabbinic texts within the context of inter-religious polemic. This perspective is not an entirely new one. But once again, Lachter does service to historical scholarship by transferring attention from Zoharic texts, which are difficult to date, to his four datable authors.

Lachter's contextualization would have been richer, however, had he delved into thirteenth-century Christian theology in greater detail. His presentation of Christian doctrines, and specifically the doctrine of the Incarnation, is quite cursory. For example, one might wish for a more detailed comparison to

contemporary Christian ecclesiology, and the Christian notion of the church as the body of Christ.

Moreover, the title of the book, *Kabbalistic Revolution*, seems misleading. If “the assertion of secrecy is intrinsically political,” as Lachter writes insightfully (20), then a kabbalistic revolution ought to be political as well. As Lachter himself argues, however, his four kabbalists—viewed as political agents—were conservative figures who evinced little revolutionary élan. Lachter excludes from his purview, for example, the more radical author of the *Ra’aya’ mehemna’*, whom Baer focused on in his day. The kabbalistic “reimagining” of Judaism, as Lachter terms it in his subtitle, was certainly intensely novel. But it is precisely in the realm of politics that Moses de Leon and his circle cannot be seen as revolutionary.

Revolutionary or not, the new Kabbalah represented a crucial turn in Jewish theology. We are indebted to Lachter for his very successful and readable effort to place medieval Spanish Kabbalah within the political and religious context of thirteenth-century Iberia.

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David B. Ruderman. *A Best-Selling Hebrew Book of the Modern Era: The Book of the Covenant of Pinḥas Hurwitz and Its Remarkable Legacy*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014. 172 pp.
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David Ruderman’s *A Best-Selling Hebrew Book of the Modern Era* is a welcome addition to the growing fields of modern rabbinic history and Jewish print culture. It shines light on the relationship between science and Kabbalah and the politics of book publishing in eighteenth-century Europe. Most importantly, it productively complicates narratives of modern Judaism that often reduce rabbinic history to the struggle between modernists and traditionalists, Orthodox and Reform, secular and religious.

Ruderman’s study focuses on Pinḥas ben Eliyahu Hurwitz and his encyclopedic work, *Sefer ha-brit* (Book of the covenant), published in 1797 in The Hague. Employing data culled from archives across Europe, Ruderman carefully and engagingly retraces Hurwitz’s intellectual journey, beginning with his birth in Vilna sometime in the 1760s and then onto The Hague, Pressburg, and Cracow, revealing the myriad influences on his life. Ruderman paints a colorful portrait of an otherwise enigmatic scholar and relates important information about the censorship of media, book distribution, and Jewish publication rights.

Ruderman explains how Hurwitz’s book acted as bridge between two intellectual orientations. *Sefer ha-brit* was written as a scientific commentary to Hayim Vital’s seventeenth-century kabbalistic work *Sha’are kedushah* (Gates of holiness). In this regard Hurwitz’s magnum opus operated as the primary medium