Visualization of Colors, I:
David ben Yehudah he-Hasid’s Kabbalistic Diagram
Moshe Idel

Introduction
Distinct contributions to the history of Kabbalah have been made by the discussions, variegated in many manuscripts, that deal with the visualization of colors as part of the “intention” during prayer, the kavvanah, some of which have been discussed in my previous publications. Less attention is paid to the contents and function of the schematic images embedded in these texts. One of them is found on folio 4r in the kabbalistic manuscript in the Ambrosiana library in Milan, Ms. 62 S 13 Sup. 62 (fig. 1a). On several occasions I have noted in my studies that this is an anonymous diagram of the ten sefirot, which in my opinion should be attributed to one identified as R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid (13th–14th century). Since this proposed identification of the author in 1983, I have been unable to detect an additional manuscript that contains this diagram and, as promised then, I now publish the form and content of the diagram, together with an analysis of the Hebrew texts inscribed in it.

R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid is one of the Kabbalists whose writings have been identified by modern scholarship and rescued from oblivion. In the course of time, by an

Thanks are due to the Ambrosiana Library in Milan for permission to reproduce the diagram and to Elisabetta Zevi of the Adelphi Publishing House in Milan for obtaining the reproduction of the diagram and permission for its publication. The core of the present study was delivered as a lecture entitled “A Kabbalistic Mandala: From David ben Yehudah he-Hasid to Luria,” at the conference, “Text and Image in Religious Cosmography: Reading Ilanot and Parallel Artifacts.” Haifa University, July 2011. Some additional texts found in manuscripts, briefly referred to in what follows, will be analyzed and published separately. The current discussion will be continued in my “Visualization of Colors, 2: Implications of David ben Yehudah he-Hasid’s Diagram for the History of Kabbalah” forthcoming in AJ 12.


analysis of the Kabbalistic terminology and concepts it is possible to determine the affinities between this Kabbalistic and the works of some others, especially R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi (early fourteenth century), and other unidentified Kabbalists whose writings are still in need of analysis. Some of R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid’s writings have been published for the first time in our days. Below I shall take into consideration studies that have appeared since my first publications in this specific field as well as some new material that I have since found in assorted manuscripts. Like in many other cases in scholarship, passages belonging to R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi will be used to clarify aspects of R. David’s Kabbalistic thought.


6 See Daniel Ch. Matt, The Book of Mirrors: Sefer Mar’ot ha-‘Ovevot’ by R. David ben Yehuda he-Hasid: Text and Study (New York and Toronto, 1983); Or Zaru’a, by Rabbi David Ben Yehuda He-Hasid, ed. Bentzion Ben Levi Hacohen (Jerusalem and New York, 2009). The diagrams from Sefer ha-Gevul as found in Paris, BnF, Ms. 876 have been printed in Busi, Qabbalah Visiva, 197–335, and the brief Hebrew texts accompanying them have been translated into Italian. It should be mentioned that when checking other manuscripts of Sefer ha-Gevul, one may find many substantial variants in comparison to the manuscript in Paris. See, e.g., Moshe Idel, “Rabbi Nehemyah ben Shelomoh ha-navi al magen David ve-ha-shem Tafrafa: mi-magav yehudim le-kabbalah ma’asit u-le-kabbalah iyuvinit” (On Magen David and the Name Tafrafa; from Jewish Magic to Practical and Theoretical Kabbalah), in Ta-Shema: meḥkarim be-mada’ei ha-yahadut le-zikhro shel Yisrael M. Ta-Shema (Ta-Shema: Studies in Judaica in Memory of Israel M. Ta-Shema), eds. Avraham Reiner et al., 2 vols. (Alon Shvut, 2011), 1:28–32 (Hebrew).
**Visualization of Colors, 1: David ben Yehudah he-Hasid’s Kabbalistic Diagram**

**The Diagram**

The principal inscriptions within the diagram (fig. 1a) read as follows:

**a At the top of the page:**

המיוחד בכל שמותיו לבן כשלג

The Supernal Great Keter (Crown), the true Unity that is united in all its names, white like snow, YHWH

**b In the first circle (from the outside), starting at the top, counterclockwise:**

shall be tuned to it. shall be shattered to it. shall be purified to it. shall be polished to it. shall be clarified to it. shall be enlightened to it. shall be luminous to it. shall be revealed to it. shall be complete to it. shall be pure to it. shall be sparkling to it. shall be polished to it. shall be clear to it. shall be leading to it. shall be illuminating to it. shall be establishing to it. The Diagram

**c In the second circle, starting at the top, counter-clockwise:**

This is a list of thirty-two paths of wisdom, mentioned in Sefer Yezirah and described here as thirty-two intellects, which has been fleshed out in detail in several Kabbalistic lists, especially in the preface to R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi’s commentary on Sefer Yezirah.

Path 1: wondrous intellect; Path 2: resplendent intellect; Path 3: sacred intellect; Path 4: constant intellect; Path 5: rooted intellect; Path 6: separated intellect; Path 7: hidden intellect; Path 8: complete intellect; Path 9: pure intellect; Path 10: sparkling intellect; Path 11: polished intellect; Path 12: clear intellect; Path 13: leading intellect; Path 14: illuminating intellect; Path 15: establishing intellect; Path 16: eternal intellect; Path 17: sensual intellect; Path 18: plentiful intellect; Path 19: intellect of the attributes of all the creatures; Path 20: pathseeker’s intellect; Path 21: desirous intellect; Path 22: faithful intellect; Path 23: standing intellect; Path 24: imagining intellect; Path 25: experimental intellect; Path 26: renovated intellect; Path 27: perceived intellect; Path 28: innate intellect; Path 29: materialized intellect; Path 30: general intellect; Path 31: persistent intellect; Path 32: worshipful intellect.

The principal inscriptions within the diagram (fig. 1a) read as follows:

7 The phrase מודת האמת occurs twice in the short text found in Oxford, Bodleiana, Ms. 1663, fol. 128v. This phrase betrays some form of polemic tone, as if there are other persons whose understanding of unity is not the true one.

8 See fols. 10a–11a, with some small changes, especially in the matter of location of the same descriptions of the intellects, though the order is basically the same in most of the cases.

9 The correct form should be התוות. It is obvious that the copyist did not have a good version of the text in the diagram before him.

10 I do not understand why those letters appear while the final two, רש, are missing.

11 The categories mentioned in A, B, and C are linguistic par excellence, while the two others, D and E, refer to the cosmos and living beings. Categories A, B, and C represent a case of linguistic order that is projected on the metaphysical level. See Moshe Idel, “On some Forms of Order in Kabbalah,” Da’at 50–52 (2003): xxxi–lviii.

12 Compare R. Joseph Ashkenazi’s Commentary on Sefer Yezirah, fol. 6b.
and afterwards twelve Hawayyot, YHWH YWHH YHHW, and so all [D] and afterwards the twelve signs of the zodiac, and afterwards twelve months, twelve tribes, twelve stones, and afterwards twenty-four [times] Adonim, that are Adonai etc., [E]

And the entire structure of the principles of the existences, and their principles and the details of their names, and so to each and every grass, and the vegetable and the animal and the birds and the domestic animals, and reptiles and insects and the fishes of the sea, and angels and spheres and stars, and the seas and the rivers and the first man and all his offspring."

---

d In the strip descending from the second to the tenth circle:

גבוה אדום כאש יהוה זא

Hokhmah, the blue of heaven, Ze’yr ‘Anppin (divine configuration).

Binah, green as the rainbow, YHWH, Z[e’yr] ‘Anppin.

Gedulah, refined silver, YHWH, Z. ‘A.

Gevurah, red as fire, YHWH, Z. ‘A.

Tiferet, white that tends to red, YHWH, Z. ‘A.

Nezah, white that tends to blue, YHWV, Z. ‘A.

Hod, green that tends to red, YHWH, Z. ‘A.

Yesod, blue that tends to black, YHWH, Z. ‘A.

Malkhut, black hue, YHWH, Z. ‘A.

All those nine sefirot are called Ze’yr ‘Anppin

It is noteworthy that in this diagram there is no representation of the Infinity at all, and even the sefirot of Keter is described as transcending the structure of the ten sefirot. It goes without saying that the translation of the names of the colors here and below is, to a certain extent, arbitrary, since the same term for a certain color has been understood differently by different Kabbalists, particularly in the case of tekhelet (blue).

13 I did not find a parallel to the theme of 18 or 36 pipes or channels.
Visualization of Colors, 1: David ben Yehudah he-Hasid’s Kabbalistic Diagram

R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid’s Authorship of the Diagram

The diagram on fol. 4r of the Ambrosiana Ms. S 13 Sup. (fig. 1a) is anonymous. However, as mentioned above, I believe that it is possible to identify its author. On fol. 3b of the same manuscript there is the Kabbalistic response of a certain R. David about du-parzufin (two-faced), which fits the views of R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid, and which I have published and analyzed in detail. Moreover, on folios 2a–3a, there are circles that indubitably belong to some version of R. David’s Sefer ha-Gevul. An equally decisive proof for the affinity between the diagram and R. David is the fact that immediately after the response on du-parzufin in his name, found on fol. 3b, there is a short paragraph that alludes to a diagram that is similar to that reproduced above, which opens with the following sentences:

“Happy is the man that fears YHWH, he desires very much his commandments.”

This is he that constrained the constellations, a circle within the circle of the supernal sefirot, encompassing everything and emanate from their emanation upon all the separated [entities] in a general manner. And from the emanation of the Teshuva (repentance) six powers and from the emanation of the sixth, one called Keroziel.

The first three lines describe concentric circles including the phrase ‘Iggul ha-sefirot, the “circle of the sefirot” that will be dealt with in the second part this study. It is hard to avoid the significance of such a statement, found between a responsum authored by R. David and the diagram that appears on the next page. However, even more compelling is the almost total parallelism between the names of the colors and their corresponding sefirot, and what is recorded in a commentary written by R. David on Ma’asch Merkavah. Following the list of ten colors found in R. Joseph Ashkenazi’s Commentary on Genesis Rabbah, 133, R. David adopts a list parallel to the one found in the diagram in one of his shorter commentaries:

[... the spheres of Ḥokhmah [wisdom] all its sons [sic] are clothed in blue with 377 lights kinds of splendors that are found in them. And the spheres of Binah [understanding] where there are the holy beasts are all clothed in the likeness of great like of the rainbow, and the spheres of Gedulah [greatness] are all clothed in whiteness of silver and like the white waters. Gevurah [strength] are all clothed in the likeness of fire. And the spheres of Tiferet [splendor] are all clothed in white and red.]

The following statement and the entire paragraph that follows it in the manuscript that I did not reproduce is a paraphrase of R. Isaac ben Jacob ha-Kohen’s Ma’amor ha-Azhit ha-Semait, published in Gershom Scholem, “Kabbalah Rabbi Ya’akov ve-Rabbi Yizhak bnei Ya’akov ha-Kohen” (The Kabbalah of R. Jacob and R. Isaac, the sons of R. Jacob ha-Kohen), Mdda’ei ha-Yahadut 2 (1927): 249–50 (Hebrew).

15 Ps. 122:1.
17 Ps. 122:1.
18 This phrase is found already in R. Abraham ibn Ezra, in connection with the ability of God to overcome the astrological order. Here, however, it is applied to the human order. The meaning of such a phrase in this instance is the magical power of the Kabbalist. This is an interesting piece of evidence as to the astronomical or astrological backgrounds of the diagrams of ten sefirot. For astrology and R. Joseph Ashkenazi, see Moshe Idel, Saturn’s Jews: On the Witches’ Sabbat and Sabbateanism (London and New York, 2011), 17–22.
20 Jerusalem, NLI, Ms. 4° 80, fol. 81r: כְּמוֹ אֲשֶׁר יָרֵא אֶת יְהֹוָה וְחַפֵּץ אֲשֶׁר בְּמִצְוָיו Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Hasid nekeh Ha-Rambam,” 146. The number 377 is the gematria of Malbush and HaShulḥn = 378, as a number of supernal lights, seen already in the late antiquity treatise Ma’asch Merkavah, which is commented upon by R. David. For these see, see also below, n. 26. Compare also Sefer Toledot ‘Adam by R. Joseph of Hamadan, published in Sefer ha-Malkhut,
Fig. 1. (a) Kabbalistic diagram; (b) Twelve divine names, twelve seals, and twelve tribes in R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid (?). Kabbalistic treatise, 13th or 14th century. Milan, Ambrosiana Library, Ms. 62 S 13 Sup. 62, fol. 4r–4v
Visualization of Colors, 1: David ben Yehudah he-Hasid’s Kabbalistic Diagram

Fig. 1 (b)
In addition, the term “the great supernal Keter” that appears at the top of the diagram is found in a treatise belonging to the school of R. David. The ambiance of secrecy, as seen in the last statement at the bottom of the diagram, is characteristic of some of R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid's treatises, as well as those of R. Joseph Ashkenazi. Moreover, the topic of imagining colors, as related to Kabbalistic prayer, is found in a text which appears at the end of R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid's Sefer 'Or Zaru'a, and was authored by him.

However, those topics carry only circumstantial weight, and more is needed in order to strengthen the identification of the author of the diagram. Indeed, in a short discussion about prayer found in Cambridge, Ms.Add. 505, fol. 8r, we read:

R. David said: We are not allowed to visualize the ten sefirot, except in accordance with the chapter

ed. J. Toledano (Casablanca, 1930), fol. 103d, where the discussion on Hashmal and the number of lights appears in relation to the color white and the first sefirot. On Joseph of Hamandani's authorship of this book see Gottlieb, Me'khärim be-sefīrat ha-kabbalah, 251–56. See also the other Commentary on Ten Sefirot by the same author, Paris, BnF, Ms. 853, fol. 80r but in both cases a Malbush is not mentioned. See also below n. 68. For a similar list of colors and the corresponding sefīrot, see R. Joseph Ashkenazi's Commentary on Genesis Rahbah, 133, and for his resort to the term yoharim in a similar context, see ibid., 228. Inspired as R. David was by Ashkenazi's list of colors, he did not exploit the references to colors in the Zoharic literature.

The connection between Hashmal and Malbush has been elaborated upon several times in the writings of the sixteenth-century Jerusalemite Kabbalist R. Joseph ibn Zayyah. See, e.g., Even ha-Shoham, Jerusalem, NLI, Ms. 8° 416, fol. 32r, Sefer Żeror ha-Ḥayyim, London, BL, Ms. Montefiore 318, fols. 23v–28r, 36r, 73r, and Garb, "Kabbalat shel Rabbi Yeosef ibn Zayyah," 275–76 nn. 118, 119. Sometimes the Malbush is mentioned without the Hashmal. See Sefer Żeror ha-Ḥayyim, fols. 65r, 66r, or Joseph ibn Zayyah's She'erit Yeosef, Warsaw, Ms. 229, fol. 58r. This type of garment should not be confused with another garment, found in ibn Zayyah's writings which, though stemming from a variety of sources that deal with the combinations of letters that constitute a pre-sefīriot structure, is a view that influenced Luria's student R. Israel Sarug. See Moshe Idel, “Bein kabbalat Yerushalayim le-kabbalat Rabbi Yisrael Saruk” (The Relationship of the Jerusalem Kabbalists and Israel Sarug of Safed), Shalem 6 (1992): 165–73 (Hebrew). As I noted there, another student of Luria, R. Ḥaṿyim Vital, was also acquainted with views of ibn Zayyah. For more on these issues, see the second part of this study, AJ 12.

24 The beginning of one of the 18 blessings of the 'Amidah prayer.
25 The beginning of another of the 18 blessings of the 'Amidah prayer.
26 Hashmal = malbush = 378. The earliest known source for this identification seems to be R. Joseph Ashkenazi's Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah, fols. 13a, 13d. On the malbush of the sefīrot see also in the design from Sefer ha-Geṿud, reproduced in Busi, Qabbalah Visiva, 260, where there are eight occurrences of the term malbush around a circle. About the Hashmal as the garment, see the text found in Ms. Sassoon 290, now in the Bibliothèque de Genève, Montana, the Segre Amar collection 145, p. 195, which in my opinion belongs to R. David.
27 See also Idel, "An Anonymous Kabbalistic Commentary on Ten Sefirot," 179 n. 45. See, e.g., Even ha-Shoham, Jerusalem, NLI, Ms. 8° 416, fol. 32r, Sefer Żeror ha-Ḥayyim, London, BL, Ms. Montefiore 318, fols. 23v–28r, 36r, 73r, and Garb, “Kabbalat shel Rabbi Yeosef ibn Zayyah,” 275–76 nn. 118, 119. Sometimes the Malbush is mentioned without the Hashmal. See Sefer Żeror ha-Ḥayyim, fols. 65r, 66r, or Joseph ibn Zayyah’s She’erit Yosef, Warsaw, Ms. 229, fol. 58r. This type of garment should not be confused with another garment, found in ibn Zayyah's writings which, though stemming from a variety of sources that deal with the combinations of letters that constitute a pre-sefīriot structure, is a view that influenced Luria's student R. Israel Sarug. See Moshe Idel, “Bein kabbalat Yerushalayim le-kabbalat Rabbi Yisrael Saruk” (The Relationship of the Jerusalem Kabbalists and Israel Sarug of Safed), Shalem 6 (1992): 165–73 (Hebrew). As I noted there, another student of Luria, R. Ḥaṿyim Vital, was also acquainted with views of ibn Zayyah. For more on these issues, see the second part of this study, AJ 12.

28 See Idel, Kabbalah: New Perspectives, 104–5. For additional texts related to R. David found in this manuscript see Idel, "Targumo shel Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid le-sefer ha-Zohar," 87–91.

Moshe Idel
This means that the Kabbalist has had access to the external aspect of the sefirot, the garment, namely their covering, but not to the sefirot themselves. Thus, it is not just the occurrence of the diagram together with a response of R. David in the Milanese Ambrosiana manuscript that points to the possible author, but also a conceptual similarity between some details in it and a passage ascribed to a Kabbalist called R. David. However, while in the diagram we have a detailed and precise list of colors and their corresponding sefirot, in the short passage from the Cambridge manuscript colors are mentioned in general terms without any indication of the precise colors and the corresponding sefirot. Nevertheless, it is obvious that something is missing in this passage, namely the specific names of the colors that are connected to each of the sefirot and to the specific parts of the prayer.

Let me point out that unlike other instances, in the last quote it is the sefirot that are mentioned, not the “spheres of the sefirot” as is recorded in the diagram and in the quote added in n. 20 from the Commentary on Ma'aseh Merkavah. It may be that the very term sefirot was understood as a sphere.

However, despite those affinities there is a discrepancy that I would like to address in some detail. As seen in the diagram, each of the last nine sefirot has been explicitly described as related to or constituting the configuration of Ze'yer 'Anppin. This means that according to the diagram the nine sefirot together comprise the lower configuration, and implicitly we may assume that the sefirot of Keter was understood as 'Arikh 'Anppin. This last identification conforms to what we find in late-thirteenth-century Kabbalah, including that of R. David himself. However, insofar as the sefirotic identity of Small Face or Configuration is concerned, there are a variety of interpretations. In one of R. David’s epistles, he identified it not with nine sefirot but with the last, feminine one alone: “Now the Long-Face refers to the highest crown [Keter ‘Elion] of the ten [supernal sefirot] whereas the Small-Face refers to the lowest crown [‘Atarah] within it.”29 This understanding of the Small-Face as identical to the last, feminine sefirot, is quite rare in Kabbalah, but it is found in R. Joseph of Hamadan, probably an older contemporary of R. David, and in a Zoharic text.30 Thus, we have here a clear conflict of interpretation regarding the meaning of a key concept found in a text explicitly attributed to R. David and what we have seen in the anonymous diagram.

However, a perusal of R. David’s Sefer ha-Gevul shows his unparalleled propensity toward diagrams, more than any other Kabbalist, as the 96 circles and the forms inserted in them abundantly testify.31 In those circles the two divine configurations, 'Arikh 'Anppin and Ze'yer 'Anppin, recur constantly. Indeed, as he articulated it in this book, “All the designs that I have designed to you from the beginning until now of the worlds, are in the world of 'Arikh ['Anppin] and Ze'yer ['Anppin].”32 Thus, we have a clear testimony that his designs, or diagrams, contain references to the two configurations. In some cases a few colors are mentioned within the circles as well.33 Moreover, in one manuscript of this book we have a complete list of ten colors related to a diagram of ten sefirot that represents the “eye of 'Arikh 'Anppin.”34 The list of the colors, though not totally identical with what is found in the diagram, is nevertheless very similar to it. In one case in this manuscript the name Ze'yer 'Anppin is described as related to the sefirot of Tiferet,35 which shows that the linkage between this term and the last, female, sefirot is not exclusive in R. David’s writings. Additionally, we find here a clear statement as to the identity of Ze'yer 'Anppin as the nine lower sefirot.36

---

31 On these circles, or diagrams, see Goldreich, “Sefer ha-gevul,” 79–89; Busi, Qabbalah Visiva, 197–335.
32 See Sefer ha-Gevul, Jerusalem, NLI, Ms. 3921 8°, fol. 64v, and Jerusalem, NLI, Ms. 80 4°, fol. 94v. For the entire context see the passage I published in Idel, “Ta'amei ha-ofot ha-teme'im,” 23–24.
33 Busi, Qabbalah Visiva, 203, 205, 264.
34 Warsaw, Ms. 1193, fol. 13r.
35 Busi, Qabbalah Visiva, 273.
36 See Oxford, Bodleiana, Ms. 1911, fol. 194r.
Moreover, in a commentary on a tradition regarding the Kabbalistic intention in prayer that stems from R. Isaac the Blind and was transmitted by R. Azriel of Gerona, an anonymous Kabbalist interprets the a section of the prayer as intended to the Binah of Ze‘yir ‘Anppin, and concerning another part of prayer to the Hokhmah of Ze‘yir ‘Anppin or to Hesed of Ze‘yir ‘Anppin, but later on he speaks about Keter of ‘Anppin. This text occurs immediately before the texts added in the name of R. David quoted above. It fits the general tendency of R. David to interpret in a theosophical manner earlier Kabbalistic texts with which he was acquainted, including the book of the Zohar, by hinting at the sefirotic valences by terms written above the interpreted words.

Thus, we have a rather precise parallel to the diagram, but in this case it is obvious that the situation of prayer is related to the two configurations. On the basis of this text the Ze‘yir ‘Anppin is constituted, like in the diagram, of the nine last sefirot, or to put it differently, the Ze‘yir ‘Anppin possesses nine sefirot. R. David – like R. Joseph Ashkenazi – applies here, as in some other cases, the theory of sefirot within sefirot, which means that in a certain configuration, or even within a certain sefira, there are also other divine powers, ten or multiples of ten that increase to the infinite, according to a statement of R. Joseph Ashkenazi.

Thus, though constituting a certain problem, the discrepancy related to the meaning of Ze‘yir ‘Anppin is not insurmountable, especially in the writings of a Kabbalistic who is as eclectic as was R. David: The common denominators are nevertheless greater than the divergence, and it is quite plausible in my opinion to identify the diagram as a text of R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid.

A question that cannot be dealt with in detail here is the possible affinity between the circular diagram reproduced above and a table that is accompanied by a discussion of its content found on fol. 4v (fig. 1b), where there are discussions of issues found in the second circle that deal with non-theosophical issues like the twelve signs of the zodiac, the twelve hawayyot of the divine names, the twelve seals, the twelve tribes, and the relationships between them. I believe that this short treatise also belongs to R. David, and is possibly an explication of the macrocosmic aspects of the diagram. In any case, the topic of colors or visualization is not discussed there.

**Visualization of Colors**

Let me now analyze a major aspect of the content of the diagram. As is evident, the core of the diagram relies mainly on a series of correspondences between several categories of sets of ten: ten concentric circles, ten sefirot, ten colors, and ten Tetragrammata. It is only in the case of the Tetragrammata that there are no changes from one of the ten occurrences to another, which means that according to this tradition there is only one kind of vocalization. What is missing in the diagram is an

37 See Cambridge, Ms. Add. 505.3, fol. 7v. The original Hebrew text of the earlier Kabbalistic tradition that was interpreted by R. David, but did not contain the anthropomorphic terminology, is found in Ms. Sassoon 290, p. 233, which is a manuscript in which many traditions related to R. David have been preserved. I have published R. David’s interpretation in Moshe Idel, “Al kavanat shmoneh esreh ezel Rabbi Yizhak Sagi-Nehor” (On the Kavanah of Shemoneh ‘Esreh in R. Isaac Sagi Nehor), in Massu’ot: Studies in Kabbalistic Literature and Jewish Philosophy in Memory of Prof. Ephraim Gottlieb, eds. Michal Oron and Amos Goldreich (Jerusalem, 1994), 44 and n. 117 (Hebrew), where I suggested R. David’s authorship. See also ibid., 27 and n. 6. For more on this issue, see the forthcoming part of this publication, AJ 12.


40 Commentary on Sefer Yeziqah, fol. 18b, 25a, 37a.

41 A somewhat similar discussion is found in ibid., fol. 20d.

42 Unlike the other tradition that also is related to visualization of colors, found in the later anonymous response published in Idel, “Kavanah u-zeva’im,” where each Tetragrammatron is vocalized in a different manner.
When you vocalize devarekha, you shall visualize in your thought the letters of the Tetragrammaton before your eyes, in a circle with a color red as the fire and your thought is performing many things. From the mouth of the Rabbi Tanhum.

R. Tanhum, or more precisely the disciple who orally received the tradition from him, describes a circle that includes a visualized Tetragrammaton, vocalized with the vowels of the word devarekha and the color “red as fire.” Indeed, the above diagram, or at least one very similar to that described by R. Tanhum, includes next to the sefirah Gevurah the phrase “red as the fire,” and a vocalization of the Tetragrammaton identical with that of devarekha. Indeed, this vocalization is found in all the Tetragrammata in the diagram and it is part of the paramount role played by concentration on the Tetragrammaton in the history of Kabbalistic intention during prayer. On the basis of this correspondence we may, therefore, assume that the list of colors and the vocalization of the Tetragrammaton in the concentric circles constitute detailed instructions for visualizing the Tetragrammaton in various colors corresponding to the sefirot. We may furthermore also assume that this list is at least a part of the chapter headings mentioned by R. David when he wrote, “you shall always visualize according to that color which is [attributed to] the sefirot [according to] the chapter headings.”

Do the details in the diagram constitute the unspecified “chapter headings”? In the Kabbalistic material accompanying the diagram there are no instructions regarding the role it may fulfill nor of the meaning of the various details inscribed within the circles. However, the manner in which R. Tanhum refers to the circle opens the possibility that we may envision not only the details as instructions for visualization, but also the circle itself, as part of this process. R. Tanhum states that “you shall visualize the letter of the Tetragrammaton before your eyes in a circle in your thought,” etc. I see no reasonable argument against interpreting his words as a recommendation for visualizing the Divine Name along with the color as found in a certain circle, in which there are references to several cosmic aspects.

The verb translated as “to visualize” is le-zayer. Its precise meaning is of decisive importance for understanding the role played by the diagram, and this is the reason why it will be important to explicate upon it. It is only in R. Tanhum’s text that this is a certain kind of mental operation mentioned in an explicit context of a circle and

---

43 The vocalization of the word ידיד специфическо го в Ps. 119:89 shewa, kammaż, shewa’, kammaż, was sometimes seen as one of the ways in which the Tetragrammaton was pronounced; see, e.g., an early Kabbalistic fragment preserved in Oxford, Bodleiana, Ms. 2240, fol. 248b. This pronunciation differs from that with which I am acquainted in both the Ashkenazi and the Sefardi material known in Barcelona at the end of the thirteenth century; see Idel, “Ashkenazi Esotericism,” 74–91.

44 Galgal, which can also be translated as sphere.

45 Paris, Rabbinical Seminary, Ms. 108, fol. 95r: ה’ בנקודת דרש, תצייר במחשבתך, אחותי ידיד לפני עיניך בחול אין תחתי אלוהים קשתו הים ובר יזוחק אסíd’s Kabbalistic Diagram. See also Moshe Idel, The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia, tr. Jonathan Chipman (Albany, 1987), 32–34. For an interesting parallel to this passage, without however mentioning the sphere and colors, see the anonymous short passage printed in Sefer Raziel ha-Malakh (Amsterdam, 1701), fol. 33b (Hebrew).


47 Cambridge, Ms. Add. 505, fol. 8r.

48 Ibid., as discussed above.
the details found in it. Let me attempt to elaborate on this verb in the context of the school of R. Joseph Ashkenazi and R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid. In Rabbinic Hebrew, the verb ז"ע-ר means to draw a diagram, namely a concrete, objective form, a picture done by the painter’s hand. In some cases God was designated in Rabbinic literature as a painter or perhaps a sculptor. In medieval Hebrew, under the influence of Arabic philosophical terminology, it means to conceptualize, to form a mental concept.50 This is, however, not a matter of images shaped within the human imagination, but a mental construct. However, at least in one philosophical text, written sometime in the mid-thirteenth century, the anonymous Ḥovot ha-Levavot, the verb in the context of the school of R. Joseph Ashkenazi resorts many times to the verb ז"ע-ר but always in theogonic and cosmological contexts, which are not related to a human mental act.54 This is also the case with R. Ezra of Gerona,55 and under his influence also with another Ashkenazi Kabbalist, R. Abraham Axelrad of Cologne.56 Much more performative is the understanding of the operations related to the verb ז"ע-ר, understood as part of a discussion where imagination, dimyon, is mentioned. This is the case in R. Jacob ben Sheshet’s Sefer ha’Emunah ve-ha-Bitahon,57 and the later so-called Holy Letter, whose author is not known.58

Let me turn to the school of the Kabbalists discussed here. According to the unidentifiable R. Tanhum quoted above, one should generate something in his own mahashavah, a term quite flexible in the Middle Ages, where it may stand for thought but sometimes also for another form of cogitation, though in a few cases it may also

David. Compare also with the view found in the anonymous Ashkenazi Commentary on Shir ha-Yaḥad, Vatican, Ms. 274, fol. 173r, where the divine ציור is understood as tantamount to decrees.


57 Ch. 15, see Nahmanides, Kitvei ha-Ramban, 2:395. See also ch. 5, ibid., 2:369, where R. Jacob quotes R. Ezra of Gerona, as to the need to direct his heart – to the attribute of the south, described as the brilliant light, נור הדרקון. However, the intention is to a light which is not visualized but believed to exist objectively. See also the material on this verb in the context of the divine acts of mental creation in Moshe Idel, “Ha-sefirot she-me-al ha-sefirot” (Sefirot above Sefirot), Tarbiz 51 (1982): 244 nn. 31, 32; 266 (Hebrew). On the concepts of ציור and דברים שאינם נמצאים כלל in Nahmanides, see Hariva Pedaya, Ha-Ramban: hit’alut – zman mahzori ve-text kadosh (Nahmanides: Cyclical Time and the Holy Text) (Tel Aviv, 2000), in the index, p. 496 (Hebrew).

58 Ch. 5, Nahmanides, Kitvei ha-Ramban, 331–32.

49 See Genesis Rabbah, 1:9.


51 Ruah Hen (Warsaw, 1865), 16, chap. 5: עָרַה שְׁדֵדְמוֹנַי לְשֵׁמֶשׁ יְשִׁקוּ הָרִיצְיָיר, is understood as tantamount to decrees.


53 Bahya ibn Pakudah, Ḥovot ha-Levavot, ed. A. Ziffoni, Gate VIII, ch. 2 (Tel Aviv, [1949]), 503. Whether the heart is related to the faculty of imagination is a matter of additional inquiry. Compare the proposed identification between the two in another instance in Wolfson, Language, Eros, Being, 125.

54 See, e.g., several times in the preface to his Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah, e.g., fols. 2c, 3a, and in his Commentary on Genesis Rabbah, ed. Hallamish, 36, 77, 174, 180. See also the anonymous materials from Ms. Sassoon 290, p. 196, that include works of R. Joseph and R.
stand for imagination. However, in another text R. David mentions the visualization of the Tetragrammaton and the color that one should do, namely in his mind, an interesting parallel to R. Tanhum’s mahashavah. Thus, our modern propensity to understand visualization as related to the faculty of imagination should not be automatically projected upon the medieval texts, at least not as if it is self-evident.

The context of these acts is related to two different components: the letters of the Divine Name, and the specific color, in our case the color red. The tradition of R. Tanhum does not specify the corresponding sefirah but refers to the “circle,” thus concealing an essential aspect of the practice, which at least implicitly, is conceived to be esoteric. In the short text the ritual purpose of the imaginative act is not specified, but the empowering aspect of the deed is mentioned: “performing many things.” Indeed, such a magical understanding of the visualization is not alien to R. David’s worldview. The following is written in a short passage found immediately after the responsum about the ten hyper-sefirot:

The language of ‘omek, hints at the thought, at the rank I mentioned “from depths [mima’amakim]

I have called YHWH” (Ps. 130:1) means: out of the thought of each and every one. If you have seen bandits you should recite Taftafayah three times and you will be saved from them. And this is the attribute of Malkhut in the hue of blue, you should visualize Agla in a red color, [good] for any trouble that you will have.

Here there is an interpretation of a view of R. Joseph Gikatilla, in accordance to that of R. David, which takes the former’s view in a markedly magical direction. Such an interpretation is characteristic of R. Joseph ibn Zayyah’s Kabbalah, as pointed out by Jonathan Garb, and here there is an independent stance, possibly indicating that such a tendency precedes ibn Ḥayyim’s much more elaborated approach. We have here names other than the Tetragrammaton that are connected to colors and sometimes to visualization, but the technique is quite similar to what we have seen above. This is also the case in a collection of magical traditions where it is said that whoever wants to implore the mercy of Keter should resort to the trisagion and “Ye’zayyer the name of the Tetragrammaton that hints at the Supernal Keter, in the color of white as snow.”

59 See Hamburg, Ms. Levi 78, fol. 257r. See also below R. Hayyim Vital’s passage referred to in the second part of this publication, AJ 12, and the passage from R. Eleazar Azikri’s Sefer Haredim, translated in Moshe Idel, Studies in Eccentric Kabbalah (Albany, 1988), 133. See also the anonymous Ashkenazi Commentary on Shir ha-Yid, Vatican, Ms. 274, fol. 174r, where the visualization of colors is discussed as related to thought, imagination, and intellect. However, in this treatise no specific colors are mentioned, as part of the esoteric trend of the anonymous Kabbalistic. For the resort to the term mahashavah as closer to imagination, see in R. Jacob ben Sheshet’s text referred to in n. 57 above.

60 Mahashavah, namely at the first sefirah. The name Taftafiyah was considered in some texts as the magical “name of the thought.” See Idel, “Rabbi Nehemiyah ben Shlomoh ha-Navi al Magen David,” 38–39.

61 Compare to what was written a few pages beforehand, in a collection of material belonging to R. David, Ms. Sassoon 290, p. 193: “The prayer should direct his thought and his perfect intention to the root of the [divine] will, that is the tittle of the yod that is the depth of the [divine] thought and about it it is said “From the depths I called Thou, the Lord.” Though the view is that of R. Joseph Gikatilla. Compare also with Hamburg, Ms. Levi 78, fol. 257v, which also includes traditions of R. David. See also Idel, “Kabbalistic Prayer and Color,” 21.

62 This seems to be the beginning of another topic, also connected to R. David.

63 This is a well-known acronym of the words of a verse from the ‘Amidah prayer.

64 This is the vocalization in the Hebrew original. On this name in R. David and its source, see Idel, “Rabbi Nehemiyah ben Shlomoh ha-Navi al Magen David,” 27–32, 38–39.

65 Compare to what was written a few pages beforehand, in a collection of material belonging to R. David, Ms. Sassoon 290, p. 193: “The prayer should direct his thought and his perfect intention to the root of the [divine] will, that is the tittle of the yod that is the depth of the [divine] thought and about it it is said “From the depths I called Thou, the Lord.” Though the view is that of R. Joseph Gikatilla. Compare also with Hamburg, Ms. Levi 78, fol. 257v, which also includes traditions of R. David. See also Idel, “Kabbalistic Prayer and Color,” 21.

66 See also Idel, “Kavvanah u-zayyah’s Kabbalah, as pointed out by Jonathan Garb, and here there is an independent stance, possibly indicating that such a tendency precedes ibn Ḥayyim’s much more elaborated approach. We have here names other than the Tetragrammaton that are connected to colors and sometimes to visualization, but the technique is quite similar to what we have seen above. This is also the case in a collection of magical traditions where it is said that whoever wants to implore the mercy of Keter should resort to the trisagion and “Ye’zayyer the name of the Tetragrammaton that hints at the Supernal Keter, in the color of white as snow.”

67 Garb, Hofa’otav shel ha-ko’ah ba-mistikah ha-yehudit, 88.

68 Jerusalem, NLI, Ms. 5° 266, fol. 77v. For the description of the first sefirah as white as snow, see the Commentary on Ten Sefirot found in Paris, BnF, Ms. 853, fol. 80v, that I identify as written by R. Joseph of Hamadan, an older contemporary of R. David. The other colors or hues mentioned in the commentary do not, however, correspond to the list
Another instance of resorting to the verb י-ר-י is found in the passage in the name of R. David, quoted above from the Cambridge manuscript. The phrase “We are not allowed to visualize the ten sefirot, except etc.” includes negation of the visualization of the sefirot, on the one hand, but contains implicit instructions to visualize colors, on the other hand, though the specific content of the act of visualization is not mentioned. Like R. Tanhum’s tradition, this one, too, is conceived of as transmitted orally. However, what is new here is the association of the act of visualization with a specific ritual, the most important Jewish prayer. The verb י-ר-י also recurs in an anonymous commentary on the Shema’ Yisrael blessing, found in two versions that, in my opinion, belong to R. David or to his school, and will be addressed in the next paragraph. In one of them it is written in relation to the act that accompanies the pronunciation of the word Yisra’el that refers to Tiferet: “He should visualize before his eyes the name YHWH, in a visualization of red that tends to white.” This recommendation to visualize the letters of the Divine Name between “his eyes” is reminiscent of the donning of the head phylacteries, and it also recurs much later in similar contexts, like in the writings of R. Abraham ben Eliezer ha-Levi.

There is a fourth significant instance in which this verb occurs in a similar context to that of R. David: in the anonymous Kabbalistic response, probably written toward the end of the fourteenth century, where the interdiction to visualize the sefirot, conceived of as divine attributes, is mentioned. However, by visualizing these letters in certain colors, one is capable of elevating the imagined letters or sounds to the corresponding sefirah, and so of acting on it, without, however, seeing it. The context is quite obviously the Kabbalistic intention during prayer, and again this is conceived as being quite an esoteric issue. As to the resort to the verb we read in the responsion about the letters:

[. . .] and when he intends to them, namely to the letters, he intends to the hues and colors, as for example in the moment when he says YHWH, he intends generally to Yod and to its title, to Keter and to Ḥokhmah, and he should visualize the Yod with the title, that is white like snow.

In this passage there are two verbs related to operations concerning letters and colors. The manner in which they appear requires a distinction between the two. The first is the root K-W-N, from which the noun Kavvanah is derived, which means to direct one’s attention on a certain topic, or some form of mental concentration, while י-ר-י refers here to the act of visualization, which includes a specific shape of letters and a specific color. Here the visualization is again a matter of a combination of letters and colors. Also in this case, as well as in many of the instructions found in the continuation of this quote, there is a resort to the verb י-R-י and to names of the colors that correspond to what we have seen above in the diagram, though a circle is not mentioned in the rather lengthy discussion. Thus, we may assume that in some cases circles were not intended to become an object of meditation.

Let me also mention the existence of instructions to resort to colors and divine names in prayer, in a rather

found in the diagram. This is also the case with the discussions about colors and sefirot in the other writings of R. Joseph of Hamadan, printed anonymously in Sefer ha-Malkhut, ed. J. Toledano (Casablanca, 1930), fols. 53c, 56d, 57ab, 58b, 61b, 104ab, etc. There is no visualization of colors in his writings. See also above, n. 20.

See New York, JTS, Ms. 2430, fol. 81r. For another version, found in several manuscripts, see, e.g., Oxford, Bodleiana, Ms. 1663, fols. 128v–129r, and Ms. Sassoon 290, pp. 300–301. I hope to publish a comparison of the two versions in a separate study.

The vocalization is sheuth, kammaz, sheuth, kammaz, like in the diagram, though the description of the color differs somewhat from that in the diagram.
lengthy interpretation of verses related to prayer without, however, mentioning visualization and the sefirot. This text, which appears in a collection of material from R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid’s traditions, ends with the statement: “A transmission from mouth to mouth is needed.” If we bring together those two traditions, about letters of the divine name and colors, a correlation which is not necessarily obvious, we may gain some insight into the content of visualization.

On the basis of the rhetorics and the details supplied in the aforecited material, I consider the existence of some traditions dealing with visualization of colors, as well as their actual practice, to be an established fact. I should like to dwell upon the significance of the circle. Interestingly enough, this diagram draws a distinction between the first sefirah, Keter, regularly identified as ‘Arikh ‘Anppin, or as R. ben Yehudah prefers in the Hebrew form, ‘Orekh ‘Anppin, and the other nine, designated as Ze’yir ‘Anppin, i.e., the lower divine configuration according to Zoharic symbolism. The latter is an obvious anthropomorphic symbol, which in the Zohar refers to the second and lower divine head, consisting of the sefirah of Tiferet alone or of the sefirot between Holkhamah and Yesod, while in the works of R. David it includes ten sefirot, or, as in the diagram, nine sefirot. In other contexts of R. David’s thought, this configuration is manifestly anthropomorphic; the fact that the concept appearing in the diagram differs from that of the Zohar does not obliterate its anthropomorphic character. If the understanding proposed above is correct, then the process of visualization includes not only divine names, colors, or circles, but also an anthropomorphic configuration of color that symbolizes an aspect of the divine realm.

The Diagram: A Cosmogram or a Mandala?
In the outer circle there is the well-known list of thirty-two mystical paths – identified as intellects – by means of which the world was created, while the second circle contains the names of all the realms of reality, e.g., the alphabet, stones, signs of the Zodiac, planets, spheres, angels and various kinds of living creatures such as fish of the sea, animals, and man. It is obvious that the Kabbalist intended to express the idea of the macrocosmos, which is envisioned as having been included within the divine macroanthropos. Such a macrocosmic approach is also hinted at in another tradition related to R. David. However, this is not just a cosmogram, a diagram that was intended to offer in a succinct manner the structure of the cosmos, since it is also intended to enhance a ritual performance – prayer – that is accompanied by the visualization of colors and shapes of letters of divine names that are related to divine powers: the sefirot. It is quite obvious that this is not just another cosmogram, since the occurrence of the colors and the references to the “Small Face” are not relevant for such a purpose. In general, the sefirotic diagrams, including the other ones by R. David, basically deal with representations of divine powers, without a cosmological dimension.

Thus, it is not a matter of contemplation of a static scheme that is assumed in the traditions as discussed above, but an energetic operation of visualization that generates a certain shape in colors which changes from one blessing to another during prayer. Though intended toward an objective divine world, the main type of operation generates effects that stem from human imaginative powers. This dynamic aspect is quintessential for understanding Kabbalah in general, and has little to do with what is called contemplation.

76 Ms. Sassoon 290, p. 194; זריר כלל ומכם אל המ. I hope to publish this text together with many others in my forthcoming monograph on Visualization and Prayer.
77 For such a nexus between letters and colors, without, however, mentioning visualization, see R. Joseph Ashkenazi’s Commentary on Genesis Rabbah, 143. For a nexus between sefirot and colors, see Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah, fols. 18d, 20b, 27a, 30d.
78 See Idel, “Od al Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Hasid,” 69–71. The conception of Ze’yir ‘Anppin as an entity encompassing the sefirot from Holkhamah downward was embraced by R. Moshe Cordovero; see, e.g., Or Yakar, vol. 7 (Jerusalem 1975), 17, 77 (Hebrew).
80 Cambridge, Ms. Add. 505, fol. 8v. Compare also to Milan, Ambrosiana, Ms. 62, fol. 4v, in the table occurring immediately after the diagram, where a more cosmic propensity can be discerned, as mentioned above.
81 See Idel, Kabbalah: New Perspectives, 229–33. For Scholem’s strong proclivity to depict early Kabbalistic prayer as contemplative, see, e.g., his Origins of the Kabbalah, trans. Allan Arkush, ed. R.J. Zwi...
The phenomenological affinities between this diagram and the Hindu mandala are indeed interesting. The two practices share the processes of visualization and of imaginary representation of divine forces and of colors and in both cases the circle has also a macrocosmic aspect. Moreover, while the mandala may also be a psychogram, which is at the same time also a cosmogram, it is possible to discern some hints of the theory of the existence of the tree of the sefirot within an anthropomorphic configuration in R. Joseph Ashkenazi and in a probably later Ashkenazi text. However, there are also clear differences: the Kabbalistic diagram is graphically different from those forms of mandala which I could see; their details are conspicuously unrelated. While the construction of a mandala in the objective world is accompanied by a special liturgy, the visualization of the content of the Kabbalistic diagram in someone’s mind accompanies Jewish ritualistic prayer serially. These differences notwithstanding, one cannot underrate the possibility that Hindu traditions infiltrated into Kabbalah, perhaps via the intermediacy of Sufi material. R. David lived for a certain period of time in Acre, a fact which may be a clue to the penetration of an alien mystical technique into a Jewish milieu. In addition, R. Joseph was acquainted with the terms mandala in the case of the circles found in Jewish milieu. In addition, R. Joseph was acquainted with the term mandala in the case of the circles found in...
with Arabic culture, as he mentions Arabic words and Arabian customs. Thus, the migration to Europe of an Eastern tradition close to the Hinduism and Tibetan practices is not impossible. In any case, some views that are characteristic of R. Joseph Ashkenazi may stem from Ismaili circles. In my opinion, the visualization of colors, too, reflects an impact of a Sufi view of Hindu origin on R. David or his source. It should be mentioned that the need to resort to sources that were found outside of Judaism insofar as the experiential aspects of the visualization of colors, is also motivated by the claim of R. Joseph Ashkenazi as to the origin of his discussion of colors and prophecy among “the wise men of the philosophers.”

However, attractive as such a hypothesis may be, it is complicated by the presence of theories related to visualization of colors in no later than mid-fourteenth-century central Europe, briefly mentioned in an anonymous Commentary on Shir ha-Yihud, and the possibility that both R. Joseph Ashkenazi and R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid had explicit connections to Ashkenaz and to Ashkenazi material in this commentary, and were probably somewhere in that region. However, since I did not find in the Ashkenazi material resort to visualization of colors by using a circle, the hypothesis of a Hindu or Sufi influence is still valuable. It should be mentioned that the material found in the Ashkenazi commentary may refer, in my opinion, to a quite early phase of the school of Kabbalists under scrutiny here, an issue that calls for further research. Several times in this commentary reference is made to a student who is already acquainted with some of the secrets, perhaps pointing to the possibility of the existence of a circle of Kabbalists.

The previous assumption that the diagram contained the “chapter headings” mentioned in R. David’s text can be substantiated by comparing the details about sefirot and colors with a short anonymous commentary on the prayer Shema Yisrael. This highly interesting document is based upon the visualization of the divine names included in this prayer in various colors, most of which correspond to the list of colors and sefirot in the diagram. Since the similarity between the colors and sefirot in the diagram and the commentary on the prayer is astonishing, including the peculiar ways used to denote the colors, the conclusion that the diagram-list was intended to supply instructions for visualization of divine names in prayer is inescapable. I shall adduce here only two examples in order to exemplify this conclusion:

Don’t pronounce the word Yisra’el until one will visualize the Divine Name, which is YHWH, with its vowels and its color, and one will visualize it as if the last letter of the [Divine] Name, namely H, surrounds the entire world, from above and below.

86 See Scholem, “Ha-meḥabbber ha-amitti shel perush Sefer yeẓirah,” 119–20; id., “Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Hasid nekhed ha-Rambam,” 140; Ashkenazi’s Commentary on Genesis Rabbah, ed. Hallamish, 226, 229, 247, 259 and his Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah, fol. 30d; and Idel, “An Anonymous Kabbalistic Commentary on Shir ha-Yihud.” The type of Kabbalah found in the commentary that I described complicates the picture of R. David’s Kabbalah as presented by Scholem, “Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Hasid nekhed ha-Rambam,” 140, about the solely Spanish nature of his Kabbalah. All the three early authors dealing with colors and visualization, R. Joseph Ashkenazi, R. David, and the anonymous commentator on Shir ha-Yihud, were not just connected formally to Ashkenaz but in their works there are themes related to Ashkenazi culture, and this is also evident in the Commentary on the Prayer-Book of R. Joseph ibn Zayyāh. Thus the synthesis is not just between Spanish Kabbalah and a technique of visualization, but a more complex combination.

89 See Scholem, “Ha-meḥabbber ha-amitti shel perush Sefer yeẓirah,” 119–20; id., “Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Hasid nekhed ha-Rambam,” 140; Ashkenazi’s Commentary on Genesis Rabbah, ed. Hallamish, 226, 229, 247, 259 and his Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah, fol. 30d; and Idel, “An Anonymous Kabbalistic Commentary on Shir ha-Yihud.” The type of Kabbalah found in the commentary that I described complicates the picture of R. David’s Kabbalah as presented by Scholem, “Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Hasid nekhed ha-Rambam,” 140, about the solely Spanish nature of his Kabbalah. All the three early authors dealing with colors and visualization, R. Joseph Ashkenazi, R. David, and the anonymous commentator on Shir ha-Yihud, were not just connected formally to Ashkenaz but in their works there are themes related to Ashkenazi culture, and this is also evident in the Commentary on the Prayer-Book of R. Joseph ibn Zayyāh. Thus the synthesis is not just between Spanish Kabbalah and a technique of visualization, but a more complex combination.


86 See his Commentary on Genesis Rabbah, ed. Hallamish, 249–50. A parallel discussion to it is found in the anonymous Commentary on Shir ha-Yihud, Frankfurt am Main, Ms. 121, fol. 12r–13r. On an aspect of the Muslim practice R. Joseph mentions there, see the earlier Jewish treatments discussed in Bernard Septimus, “Petrus Alfonsi on the Cult of Mecca,” Speculum 56 (1981): 134–36. See also in the Commentary on Genesis Rabbah, ed. Hallamish, 157, 159, 229.

87 See Shlomo Pines, “Shi’ite Terms and Conceptions in the Kuzari,” Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam 2 (1980): 245–47, which exemplifies the affinities using later Kabbalistic texts that were actually influenced by R. Joseph Ashkenazi.


89 See Scholem, “Ha-meḥabbber ha-amitti shel perush Sefer yeẓirah,” 119–20; id., “Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Hasid nekhed ha-Rambam,” 140; Ashkenazi’s Commentary on Genesis Rabbah, ed. Hallamish, 226, 229, 247, 259 and his Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah, fol. 30d; and Idel, “An Anonymous Kabbalistic Commentary on Shir ha-Yihud.” The type of Kabbalah found in the commentary that I described complicates the picture of R. David’s Kabbalah as presented by Scholem, “Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Hasid nekhed ha-Rambam,” 140, about the solely Spanish nature of his Kabbalah. All the three early authors dealing with colors and visualization, R. Joseph Ashkenazi, R. David, and the anonymous commentator on Shir ha-Yihud, were not just connected formally to Ashkenaz but in their works there are themes related to Ashkenazi culture, and this is also evident in the Commentary on the Prayer-Book of R. Joseph ibn Zayyāh. Thus the synthesis is not just between Spanish Kabbalah and a technique of visualization, but a more complex combination.

90 New York, JTS, Ms. 2430, fol. 81r. The secret of encompassing and encompassed in connection to letters occurs several times in the
The visualization of the letters and colors is accompanied by the vision of the letters as circles that bear explicit macrocosmic overtones. The vision of the letters as circles is probably not identical with the diagram; this difference notwithstanding, the existence of this image is irreversible evidence that, during prayer, not only have colors been visualized, but also letters as circles. Our previous understanding of the diagram as a mandala, namely a circular diagram that should be visualized, is thus partially confirmed by an anonymous commentary on the Shema' Yisrael, which should be attributed in my opinion to R. David. The pronunciation of the first Tetragrammaton in this prayer ought to be directed “to Binah in the color of green, like the color of the rainbow, the entire [Divine] Name.”91 This recommendation should be compared to what is written in the diagram where the third sefirah corresponds to the color “green as the rainbow.”

Finally, I shall adduce a passage from a later Kabbalistic response dealing with prayer, in order to elucidate the purpose of visualization as perceived by the Kabbalists themselves:

When you shall think upon something which points to the Keter and pronounce it with your mouth, you shall direct [your thought] to and visualize the name YHWH between your eyes with this vocalization, which is the kammaz under all the consonants, its visualization being white as snow. And he (!) will direct [your thought] so that the letters will move and fly in the air, and the whole secret is hinted at in the verse92 “I have set the Divine Name always before me.”93

The visualization of the Tetragrammaton with the vowels of kammaz is not found in our diagram in connection to Keter, where all the Tetragrammata have been vocalized in the same manner. However, the designation of the color does correspond. It is obvious that there was more than one tradition related to vocalizations, as there are also differences between the various identifications in manuscripts of specific colors and sefirot. According to this passage, the visualized colored letters are meant to ascend;94 thus, human mental activity is conceived to be ontologically creative, its products being able to ascend to the supernal Merkavah, namely to the sefirotic realm.95 This peculiar ascent may elucidate the allusion of R. Tanhum that, by means of visualized divine names, “your thought is performing many things.” This performance is accomplished by drawing the influx downward into the lower worlds and finally into our world, as stated at the end of R. David's short passage and in several other cases. Thus, colors are not only the covering of the sefirot, but when initiated during a liturgical performance they are part of a human operation, intended to obtain some results. Unlike the apparitions of colors and lights in the Middle Ages on the one hand, and cosmograms that represent as many ranges of reality as possible on the other, the above diagram is a shorthand of a technical esoteric practice enacted during liturgy.

The two different results of visualization of colored divine names may be summarized as follows: according to R. Joseph Ashkenazi, it induces a paranormal state of consciousness, and hence this technique may be appropriately regarded as a mystical practice;96 the

---

91 Ibid., fol. 81r.
92 Ps. 16:8. This verse has had an extensive record in the history of Jewish mysticism, especially because it was understood to recommend the visualization of the divine name.
93 New York, JTS, Ms. 255, fol. 60r. The Hebrew text has been published in Idel, “Kavvanah u-zeva’im,” 5. On this collection of Kabbalistic responses see Gershom Scholem, “Teshuvot ha-meyuhadot le-Rabi Yosef Gikatila” (The Responsa Attributed to R. Joseph Gikatilla), in Emet le-Ya’akov: sefer yovel li-mlot shiv'im shanah le-Ya’akov Fraiman (Jacob Freimann Festschrift) (Berlin, 1937), 163–70 (Hebrew).
94 See also New York, JTS, Ms. 255, fol. 59v, published in Idel, “Kavvanah u-zeva’im,” 3.
95 For a longer discussion of this issue, see ibid.
96 See Idel, Enchanted Chains, 228–32. This passage's emphasis on the power of imagination, influenced by Maimonides' description of prophecy, should be compared to what is written in the Commentary on Sefer ha-Bahir, entitled 'Or ha-Ganuz, published together with Tikunot Zohar, in Sefer ha-Bahir, ed. Reuven Margoliot (Jerusalem, 1978), 18 (Hebrew), attributed by Scholem, correctly in my opinion, to R. Joseph Ashkenazi; see Scholem, “Ha-mehabber ha-amtti shel penus
second result, found in material related to R. David, is a theurgical one, while in a passage translated above from Ms. Sassoon 290, p. 197, we have seen a magical use of the practice of visualization of colors and names. If my reconstruction of the process of causing the letters to ascend on high and to enable the descent of the divine influx is correct, according to this Kabbalistic school human mental activity, that a modern scholar may be inclined to describe as related to imagination, is fraught with theurgical and magical powers, though an ecstatic experience can also be achieved by its means. In any case the upward movement and its possible subsequent impact downward, which depend on attaining the supernal realm, represent one of the earliest examples of what I call the mystical-magical model.

This Kabbalistic technique has passed unnoticed by modern scholarship. One of the major reasons for this is the fact that none of the texts dealing with the details of visualization are readily at hand, but are only available in manuscripts which, for the time being, are generally ignored by modern scholars. This situation is not a matter of mere chance, but is a result of this technique’s highly esoteric nature, and I should like to adduce only a few of the statements which demonstrate its esotericism.

The text underneath the diagram reads: “All these allusions must be transmitted mouth to mouth” – a wording virtually identical with that found at the end of the aforementioned passage of R. David, in some few instances in R. Joseph Ashkenazi, and also in the Kabbalistic material written in central Europe, where colors play an important role, though details are not provided. Even more impressive are the statements of the anonymous author of the Kabbalistic responsum; I shall quote here only part of his elaborations on the esoteric nature of visualization:

Know that this is a Kabbalistic tradition which was handed down to you, and we are writing it down, [but] it is forbidden to disclose it or to pass it down to everyone, but [only] to those who fear the Divine Name and took heed of His name, blessed be He, who tremble at His word.

Due to this atmosphere of secrecy and the truncated manner of transmission, the details of the technique of visualization remained hidden away in fragments of various anonymous manuscripts; nevertheless, this technique was hardly neglected by Kabbalists. R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid’s extensive commentary on prayer, ‘Or Zarua’, was composed as an exoteric Kabbalistic commentary, though grounded in the theosophical-theurgical type of Kabbalah, even though it esoterically alludes to the performance of prayer with the help of a visualization technique.

On the basis of several fragments elaborating on prayer and visualization, I would conjecture that its practice was cultivated before R. David, as seems plausible from a discussion found in the anonymous Commentary on Shir ha-Yihud, and then in the Kabbalistic school of R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid, which are characterized by the transmission of additional esoteric issues. These visualization techniques continued to be done until the sixteenth century, as shall be shown below.

Let me emphasize that though some symbolic interpretations of the ten sefirot in terms of colors may be found in Kabbalah before R. Joseph and R. David, in my opinion the use of the visualization of those colors as part of an elaborated technique should be related to their school, sometime in the last decades of the thirteenth century, and then by their followers.

Sefer yezirah,” 128–31. For another correspondence between this commentary and R. Joseph Ashkenazi, one that concerns us here, see the description of the color Tekhelet related to Hokhmah in Sefer ha-Bahir 39.

97 See the passage quoted above from the Cambridge manuscript, attributed to R. David.

98 On this model, see Moshe Idel, Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic (Albany, 1995), 103–45.

R. David’s Diagram, R. Joseph Ashkenazi and Lurianic Kabbalah

R. David’s diagram (fig. 1a) is constituted of two main visual components: ten concentric circles, and a vertical shape as a diameter, where the names of the sefirot are found. Those two graphical components are quite visible and are unparalleled, as far as I know, by any of the dozens of diagrams of ten sefirot before the sixteenth century. However, it seems that this combination was already discussed in R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi’s Commentary on Sefer Yezirah (fig. 2), though I did not find a graphical representation in his diagrams:

And the word kefullot [double]106 is “who can come within his double bridle?”107 since it is double from male and female, and from speech and opposite. And since there are ten sefirot that are circles and spheres, like a wheel,108 and some of them are like branches that expand from the root. And the example of it is the encompassing sphere of the spheres, and the example of it the tree that has branches and branches of branches, and branches of branches of branches.109

Here there is a combination of the geometrical image of the ten concentric spheres as referring to one set of sefirot, probably influenced by both Sefer Yezirah and by astronomical diagrams, with that of the tree of sefirot, found since the very beginning of Kabbalah. The double

Fig. 2. Kabbalistic diagram from R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi’s Commentary on Sefer Yezirah

Chrysopaedia 1 (1987): 2–30. My statement here is based on a different dating of the short passage, entitled in a few of its manuscripts as “Sha’ar ha-Kavvanah la-Mekubbalim ha-Rishonim,” that was dated by Scholem to the early thirteenth century; see Gershom Scholem, “The Concept of Kavvanah in Early Kabbalah,” in Studies in Jewish Thought: An Anthology of German Jewish Thought, ed. Alfred Jospe (Detroit, 1981), 162–80. In this treatise visualization—not of colors but of lights—is connected to prayer. However, as I hope to show elsewhere, this is a much later composition. See, e.g., Idel, “Kavvanah u-z евр”im,” 9 n. 46; id., “Kabbalistic Prayer and Colors,” 27 n. 44; Wolfson, Through a Speculum that Shines, 301–3.

106 The concept of seven double consonants recurs in several chapters of Sefer Yezirah.

107 Job 41:5. Interestingly enough, this verse, as well as the entire chapter, has been addressed by R. Joseph in his Commentary on Genesis Rabbah, ed. Hallamish, 96, without, however, referring to two types of sefirot or explicitly to male and female. However, see on p. 40 the assumption that temurot, namely opposite powers, have been emanated together with the positive sefirot. Is this duality related to the text under discussion here?

108 Compare the view of the ten sefirot as the ten “spheres of the sefirot” in the Commentary on Sefer Yezirah, fol. 22a. See also ibid., fols. 22c, 35a, 40a, and Hallamish’s preface to his edition of Commentary on Genesis Rabbah, 24–27. Compare also to Ashkenazi’s distinction between the ten simple sefirot and the ten composite ones, the latter described as the “pheres of the sefirot” in his Commentary on Sefer Yezirah, fol. 21d. A question that cannot be dealt with here is whether the spheres of the sefirot, which obviously refer to the sefirot as circles, should be coupled with the concept of “the intellect of the sefirot” as parallel to the sefirot as branches. See Commentary on Genesis Rabbah, 178–79. To a certain extent the distinctions between two types of sefirot adumbrate the later development in R. Moshe Cordovero’s bringing together sefirot as vessels and sefirot as divine essence. This issue requires an additional inquiry.

109 Fol. 37a: בצלמה מפולט מעלה’ י Elli צイル הת🇿ון י מי יבוא’ כי הוא כפול מזכר ונקבה, ומזרק. ולפי שיש מזרקוא צייל מעלה’ י בני כל מחומץ ומחומץ ומחומץ והמחומץ ממחומץ חללח מחומץ וממחומץ וממחומץ וממחומץ. זו חללח שיש בלע מלחומים וממחומץ וממחומץ וממחומץ. בוד מהכל מחומץ וממחומץ. וממחומץ למחומץ למחומץ למחומץ למחומץ. Let me point out that the concept of branches also occurs in the writings of the above-mentioned R. Joseph of Hamadan. See, e.g., Toledot ‘Adam, published in Sefer ha-Malkhut, ed. J. Toledano (Casablanca, 1930), fols. 53c, 67c, 94a, 103d, and his Commentary on Ten Sefirot, Ms. Paris, BnF 853, fol. 83v. For the branches of the sefirot that may multiply infinitely, see a text that I identify as written by R. David ben Yehudah ha-Hasid, Cambridge, Ms. Add. 505, fol. 8r-v. See also the passage from his Sefer ha-Gevul, in Idel, “Ta’amei ha-‘ofot ha-teme’im,” 23–24 and n. 88.
nature of the sefirot is quite obvious, as it is a commentary on the term “double,” and the different nature of the two sets is highlighted by the couple of “male and female,” which is part of what I call “dual ontology,” or by the couple of “speech and opposite.” It should be mentioned that in one case in the same book the two words ‘Ilanot, namely trees, and ‘iggalim occur together though the relation between them is not clear. I would say that R. Joseph, who was quite influenced by Sefer ha-Bahir, adopted the tree image for one set of the sefirot, while R. David, who was fond of the Zoharic theosophy, employed the anthropomorphic imagery instead.

However, the way in which the two sets of ten sefirot are related to each other is not specified in the last quotations, graphically or otherwise, and we may conceive of more than one type of relationship between them. This is why the diagram of R. David contributes something specific to the more general assumption of two sets of decades of sefirot. Though the tree is certainly not a simple straight line, it nevertheless has some vertical nature, and I assume that we have here the image of the inverted tree with its roots on high and branches that expand downward. When combined with the geometrical concentric wheels or spheres, this Kabbalistic perception of the sefirot that is more organic, a more complex image emerges, as seen above. In any case, a comparison of our diagram with an image found in R. Joseph Ashkenazi’s work shows that they share a common denominator: in both cases there are ten concentric circles and the letter Yod is found at the center, representing earth.

Thus, we may speak of the diagram of R. David (fig. 1a) as combining the graphical aspects of R. Joseph’s scheme (fig. 2) with the content of the verbal description of R. Joseph we have adduced above. That is why I would not be surprised if such a diagram will be discovered in a manuscript belonging to R. Joseph.

The combination of a circle and its diameter as related to a step of theosophical creation is also found in R. Joseph ibn Zayyah, as analyzed briefly by Jonathan Garb, who already suggested the possibility that Luria had been influenced by the Jerusalemite Kabbalast. However, to the best of my knowledge, R. Joseph ibn Zayyah does not deal with two sets of sefirot, which is a major element in the discussions related to the diagrams I discuss here.

Since the emergence of Lurianic Kabbalah, such a complex graphical scheme that deals with two sets of sefirot has become the standard depiction in the Lurianic corpus and its numerous reverberations. The concentric circles have been designated as ‘iggalim, circles, while the diametrical line has been described as yosher, the straight line, each of the two shapes referring to two different depictions of the ten sefirot. Let me quote the manner in which these two types of sefirot have been described by Ḥayyim Vital:

> here are two aspects in the manner of the ten sefirot: First they are circles, drawn as ten circles one within another. And they have another aspect in that they are ten sefirot arranged in three straight lines in the image of a man with head, arms, thighs, body and feet all of which, with God’s help, I shall set in writing clearly below.

However, despite this depiction that speaks about the three lines that organize the ten sefirot, found within the second set in the sefirotic realm – a theme that was not reflected in R. David’s diagram reproduced above, in his


111 Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah, fol. 18b: אֶלֶף הַעֲצָמָה וּמִשׁוּחֲתֵי אֵיתָן לֵיתֵון דָּוִד הַבְּרֵי וּנַעֲשׂוּת. Though the text is not very clear, the fact that three terms: trees, circles, and sefirot, occur together in one sentence is quite reminiscent of the passage quoted earlier.


113 See Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah, fol. 18a. For the description of the Yod as the sphere of the earth, namely the globe, see ibid., fols. 33a, 39a.


116 Ḥayyim Vital, Sefer Ḫayyim, 1:2 (Warsaw, 1891), 22, as translated in Pachter, Roots of Faith and Devequt, 131.
own book Vital represents these two aspects of the sefirot in a manner much closer to R. David's diagram.

Vital's representation of the two types of sefirot (fig. 3) is of paramount importance for the well-known Lurianic theogenesis, since the concentric circles are related to the first divine act, the withdrawal or the Ṣinim, namely the retreat of the divine light from the circular space that will serve the place of creation, called tehini. The straight line, or the “thread of ‘Ein Sof,” represents the second stage, the entrance of the divine light within the space, under the form of the supernal Anthropos or ‘Adam Kadmon, a theosophical structure constituted of ten sefirot. Thus, the strong anthropomorphic propensity found in R. David's approach, which is quite obvious both in his Sefer ha-Gevul and in his responsum dealing with the supernal sefirot mentioned above – though much less so in his two other books, Mar'ot ha-Ţove’ot and ’Or Zarua – found its way to the core graphical representation of Lurianic Kabbalah.

In modern scholarship, this combination of the two aspects of the sefirot, as well as of the two primordial divine acts, has been conceived of as a Lurianic innovation. However, the above diagram tells us a different story. It was already in the late thirteenth century or early fourteenth century that Zoharic anthropomorphic imagery was introduced in the most geometrical representation of the ten sefirot by R. David, creating thereby the blueprint

---

117 For R. David's impact on this topic, see Idel, “The Image of Man.”
118 Pachter, Roots of Faith and Devaqt, 131–34, 138, 141–42.
119 See, e.g., ibid., 131. Compare also to Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah (Jerusalem, 1974), 109, who took into account only R. Joseph's circular representation of the sefirot.
for the later elaborations, especially those found in the writings of R. Moshe Cordovero and R. Isaac Luria. Whether R. David had more to say about the special structure of a diagram, as part of his secret doctrine or not, is hard to ascertain at this stage of research. In any case, his *Sefer ha-Gevul*, a commentary on the 'Idra Rabbba’, is a commentary on the anthropomorphic theosophy of the Zoharic treatise that uses a variety of images, predominantly circles. Such an interpretation is certainly not a retrieval of the secrets of the Zoharic 'Idra but constitutes the application of a propensity to use circles, and geometrical images in general, that is already evident in the abovementioned writings of R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi. However, let me point out that Ashkenazi’s writings were much less concerned with anthropomorphic imagery than were the books of R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid, and all of them fully absorbed the Zoharic imagery, which is less evident in the pre-Zoharic forms of Kabbalah.

In order to foster the assumption that Luria’s theogony is related to the school of R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi, let me compare one more statement of the latter: “And since the Cause of the causes does not come close [to] or distance itself from the things, but it is equal in all the ten sefirot, and this is why it is said: ‘ten that have no end.’” In my opinion, this statement has to do with the spherical shape of the sefirot, as we learn from another discussion in the same book:

[... ] the equal union that is a circle, since in no circle can someone imagine a point that from it the beginning of the circle will be appropriate to start, neither its end, and likewise no point can be imagined in it that will be appropriate to be considered the end neither the beginning.

This explanation, which assumes that the circumference of the circle has no privileged point, namely some perfect form, should be compared to R. Hayyim Vital’s answer to the quandary created by the existence of diverging views found in the writings of earlier Kabbalists as to the existence of two types of visual representations of the sefirot: in the form of concentric spheres and as three lines, as mentioned above:

Since the 'Ein Sof is equal from all the aspects of absolute equality, [categories of] up and down, face and back are not adequate, since all these cognomens refer to limit and boundary, and domain, and size within the light of the supernal ‘Ein Sof, God forbid, and it is known that the light of ‘Ein Sof penetrates and passes the depth of each and every sefirah, from within each and every sefirah and around them from outside of each and every sefirah [...]. Since all the ten sefirot are equally close to ‘Ein Sof, and all receive light from it, therefore what is the difference between this and that, and by what would one sefirah have priority on the other, since the ranks of all of them are equal.

---

105  The equal union that is a circle, since in no circle can someone imagine a point that from it the beginning of the circle will be appropriate to start, neither its end, and likewise no point can be imagined in it that will be appropriate to be considered the end neither the beginning.

120 About R. David’s book, see Scholem, “Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid neked ha-Rambam,” 142–45; Goldreich, “Sefer ha-gevul”; Neta Sobol, “Ḥatvat ha-Idrot be-sefer ha-Zohar” (The Idrot Section in the Zohar) (Ph.D diss., Tel Aviv University, 2011), passim (Hebrew); Busi, Qabbalah Vistaha, 197–335.

121 See, e.g., Commentary on *Sefer Yeẓirah*, fol. 18a and Commentary on Genesis Rabbah, ed. Hallamish, 79, 82, all published in Busi, Qabbalah Vistaha, 174–96. See also Goldreich, “Sefer ha-gevul,” 79–84.

122 See, however, for example, the passage from the lyyun circle, discussed in Moshe Idel, Olam ha-Mal’akhim: bein hitgallut le-hit’allah (The World of Angels: Apotheosis and Theophany) (Tel Aviv, 2008), 37–45 (Hebrew).

123 This is a regular reference to the highest divine realm, prevalent in this school more than the term ‘Ein Sof.

124 Sefer Yeẓirah 1:4.

125 Commentary on *Sefer Yeẓirah*, fol. 25a: "לשלו שלועהプリンס אל כבש אל הזקק... לא יציור בו נקודה שהוא ראויה לאחרית ולא ראשית. מקים הרם בן יהודה he-Ḥasid's Kabbalistic Diagram"

126 ‘Aḥdot shaevah. R. Joseph was very fond of this phrase; see, e.g., Commentary on *Sefer Yeẓirah*, fol. 11a; Idel, “Kavvanah u-ẓeva’im,” 196.

127 Commentary on *Sefer Yeẓirah*, fol. 35a: "ואחר שוה זה נמה מבכל מקוםnikra amar נוע צוין מקים הרם בן יהודה he-Ḥasid's Kabbalistic Diagram"

128 Sefer 'Ez Haya'im, 1:2, 22. מראות שראות הוא לכל רבי יהושע רבה מתו את צדך. נחמיה ישעיהו bein hitgallut le-hit’allah (The World of Angels: Apotheosis and Theophany) (Tel Aviv, 2008), 37–45 (Hebrew).
This passage comes immediately before the discussion of the spherical shape of the space from which the divine light withdrew, where he also mentions the ten concentric spheres and the line that descends within these spheres, designated as the “thread of 'Ein Sof.”

It should be noted that perhaps also the view of R. Joseph as to the male and female aspects of the ten sets of sefirot, found an echo in Luria.

Moreover, as is the case insofar as other issues are concerned in the fabric of Lurianic thought, in this case, too, it is hard to ignore the existence of sources that nourished Lurianic theosophy, which earlier were part of an esoteric tradition and became central in Lurianism, or that were marginal and became then more pivotal. This is the case of the concept of divine withdrawal as a first act in the theogony process, the concept of 'Adam Kadmon as constituted by ten supernal luminosities, which is related to an epistle of R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid, extant in a unique manuscript, Ms. Sassoon 290 or the concept of the breaking of the vessels.

As I have shown, it is plausible that a view of R. David that deals with the term parzuf, as referring to a full-fledged anthropomorphic stature, unlike the Zoharic view that regards the term as referring to the form of the face alone, is found in Luria’s theory of the divine configurations.

Another important Lurianic view that deals with the appearance of evil powers before divine ones as the very first act of emanation in Lurianic Kabbalah, is also found in the writings of R. David, though this theory is not restricted only to these earlier Kabbalistic sources. This is just a preliminary list that shows that what has been considered by scholars to be Luria’s innovations were already present in much earlier schools of Kabbalah.

Moreover, as Gershom Scholem has duly pointed out, Luria was acquainted with R. David’s book Mar’ot ha-Ẓove’ot. Thus, it stands to reason that also in the case of the special type of diagram found in the Ambrosiana we have an additional example for such an impact on Lurianic Kabbalah. The implication of such an impact is that a diagram that was influenced, at least in part, by an Eastern mystical tradition found its way into the last major development in the history of Kabbalah. Let me emphasize that this does not mean that Luria or Vital had necessarily been acquainted with the diagram found in the Ambrosiana manuscript (fig. 1), but that they probably had access to a similar one.