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Elke Morlok. *Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla's Hermeneutics.* Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011. xiii + 360 pp. $95.00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-16-150203-3.

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Joseph Gikatilla was one of the most important kabbalists of the late thirteenth century. Living and writing in Castile, he was a central figure in an important moment in the history of Jewish mysticism--indeed, in the history of Judaism--during which kabbalistic literature flourished. Many important texts were composed during this period, including the literary units that came to be known as the *Sefer ha-Zohar*, on which Gikatilla's writings had an important influence. Renaissance thinkers and Christian kabbalists made ample use of Gikatilla's works, even translating some of them into Latin. Surprisingly, until now there has been no monograph dedicated to the study of this important kabbalist and his works. Elke Morlok's *Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla's Hermeneutics* admirably fills this lacuna, bringing a much-needed contribution to the field.

Drawing on the methodologies of Jacques LeGoff, Ioan Couliano, and Rudolf Bultmann, among others, Morlok provides a wide ranging and comprehensive examination of Gikatilla's thought and hermeneutics in relation to Neoplatonic, Pythagorean, and Gnostic texts, as well as the full spectrum of Jewish and medieval kabbalistic sources. By drawing comparisons between "textual strategies" and "linguistic techniques" found in multiple corpora of literature, Morlok brings an impressive array of sources into conversation in order to tease out the hermeneutical principles at work in Gikatilla's many compositions. Morlok does not resort to a reductive argument of simple "influence" to explain Gikatilla's thought, but instead makes the intriguing argument that, "in this period of Jewish mysticism, we observe a significant interaction between textual corpora from different religious, cultural and philosophical backgrounds--a kind of literary intercorporeality. My working hypothesis is that creative cultural ambiances produce similar phenomena even when there is no positive evidence of direct borrowing by the minority culture from the dominant one" (p. 2).

For example, Morlok notes the similarities between Gikatilla's ideas about divine names and Neoplatonic sources, including those found in

Pseudo-Dionysius and reports of such traditions by Origen. Morlok also explores the similarities between Gikatilla's discussions of ***tzerufei 'otiyyot***, or letter permutation, and Pythagorean thought. For Gikatilla as well as a number of other medieval kabbalists, notably, Abraham Abulafia, this linguistic aspect is an important element of their understanding of the relationship between the human and the divine, since "the permutation of the letters is the medium between the divine and the human energy as exercised in Gikatilla's linguistic magic" (p. 104). Morlok also considers the Gnostic and Pythagorean influences on the idea of the primordial "point" or ***niqqud***, which plays an important role in Gikatilla's thought and medieval Kabbalah more broadly (pp. 83-84). Morlok points out that this intellectual cross-fertilization helps to "explain Gikatilla's early, smooth absorption into Christian kabbalah in the 15th century ... by such Christian thinkers of the Renaissance as Pico della Mirandola and Johannes Reuchlin" (p. 11). The extended discussion of the role of divine names in Gikatilla's thought is particularly helpful, noting that the "deep interest in the divine names by Spanish kabbalists such as Gikatilla may be regarded as a 'return' to the Greek sources and traditions of 'name theology' as exemplified in the writings of Neoplatonic authors such as Iamblicus, Proclus and Nicomachus on the one hand, and ancient Jewish traditions on the other" (pp. 55-56). By reading Gikatilla's works in light of these other bodies of literature in addition to Jewish sources, Morlok provides a helpful framework both for assessing Gikatilla's hermeneutics and for understanding the positive reception that Gikatilla's writings enjoyed in the Italian Renaissance.

In her extensive discussion of Gikatilla's approach to unlocking the meaning of the biblical text, Morlok argues that, for Gikatilla, "the Torah is described as a map of signs representing the whole spectrum of being" (p. 136). The aim of biblical exegesis for Gikatilla was to uncover the relationship between the text and the sefirotic realm. In this sense, contra the position adopted by Gershom Scholem, Morlok argues that for Gikatilla, "the symbol is the means of explaining the correspondence between the biblical words and the sefirot and not an expression of an ineffable truth" (p. 19). The discussion of Gikatilla's approach to symbolism leads to important observations regarding medieval kabbalistic linguistic theory and hermeneutics in relation to other schools of thought. For example, Morlok points out that "the difference between the 'allegory' of the philosophers and the symbolic nature of the theosophic kabbalah lies in the reduction of the whole Torah to the divine names and their availability for magical use by the mystic. The divine names represent the hidden layer of the Torah and the pure word can change nature" (p. 70). In Gikatilla's later writings, most notable, ***Sha'arei Orah***, he famously described the text of the Torah as literally a ***textus***, a fabric woven from the names of God. Morlok takes this notion and uses it to understand Gikatilla's own works, noting that "in his later writings the metaphor of the text as a woven structure ... allows for an 'integrative hermeneutics,' the creation of a new narrative within his theosophic system." This tendency to understand the text as an incorporation of multiple strands into a unified system lends itself to "an inherent openness towards other philosophical and theological schools," thereby paving the way, Morlok suggests, for the embrace of Gikatilla's works by both Jewish and non-Jewish thinkers in subsequent periods (p. 310).

Through an analysis of Gikatilla's work in conversation with other schools of thought, Morlok's book makes an important and much-needed contribution to multiple disciplines, bringing medieval Kabbalah into conversation with the study of Western Esotericism, Renaissance philosophy, and even current literary theory. In her discussion of possible directions for further research, Morlok observes that it would be fruitful to "search for kabbalistic 'infiltration' into Western thought from the Renaissance on, which in mod-

ern days are not categorized as specifically 'kabbalistic,' but have been absorbed into modern theories of language. In view of Gikatilla's early incorporation into the thinking of such writers as Pico and Reuchlin, it is possible that his ideas may have had a far greater impact on modern thought than may hitherto have been assumed" (p. 312). Recent scholarship on Kabbalah has sought to situate Jewish mystical discourse within the broader intellectual history of the West and the tradition of esotericism that has played an underappreciated role in shaping Western culture and giving rise to new forms of thought. ***Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla's Hermeneutics*** brings a well-documented and fresh analysis of these questions in relation to medieval Kabbalah. The extensive bibliography and index make the volume user friendly, and the inclusion of all of the Hebrew passages in their original in an appendix is of particular value for more specialized scholars.