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LENIN BEFORE ZOHAR

Abstract: The paper regards different approaches to the Kabbalistic texts. Dealing with the classical traditional approach, that of Gershom Scholem and his school, the approach of Moshe Idel and Yehuda Liebes, who attempt to rebel against Scholem, it tries to organize them according to Deleuze's theory of "dimensions of the proposition". The paper proposes a new treatment of the problem of Kabbalistic texts "sense". While developing Scholem's notion, it asks for a possibility of "materialistic kabbalah", based on the notion of "coincidence" and Lenin's "science of revolution" developing.

Key words: Kabbalah, Scholem, Idel, Liebes, Deleuze, Lenin, sense, coincidence.

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ЛЕНИН ДО КНИГИ ЗОХАР

Резюме: в статье рассматриваются различные подходы к исследованию текстов Каббалы. Главным образом, предметом анализа являются традиционный подход, представленный Г. Шолемом и его школой, и альтернативное направление, представленное М. Иделем и Й. Либесом. В статье делается попытка объяснения этих подходов, исходя из понятия «измерений пропозиции» Делеза. Статья предлагает новый взгляд на проблему «смысла» текстов Каббалы. Опираясь на концепцию Шолема, в статье наряду с этим ставится вопрос о возможности материалистической каббалы, основанной на понятии «совпадение» и на «теории революции» Ленина.

Ключевые слова: Каббала, Г. Шолем, М. Идель, Ж. Делез, Й. Либес, Ленин, смысл, совпадение

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“The conception of the kabbalists as mystical materialist with dialectic tendency would be completely unhistorical, but in no case non-sensual”: in this way concludes Gershom Scholem the fourth of his “Ten unhistorical theses on Kabbalah”.¹ The seventh thesis develops and clarifies this idea: “The real disaster of Kabbalah (as of many other forms of mystic which did not succeed to reach their proper home) can be found into the emanation theory. The comprehension of the kabbalists touched the structures of the beings (Strukturen des Seinden). Nothing is more fatal than the confusing of these structures with the emanation theory”.

In what follows, we’ll try to outline the counters of the project which will enable to carry out the program to which Scholem hints here: to “pay the debt” to the kabbalist thought, to distinguish between “the most important intentions of the kabbalists” and their inability to give an adequate expression to this intentions”, or, if we put in a bit heideggerian way, to distinguish between Kabbalah as a real movement and Kabbalah as a possibility. This distinction and the realization of this “possibility” implies the “thorough thinking” /zu Ende zu denken/ of the kabbalah, and “establishing it without any connection to the theory of the emanation”.

But how can be such a project accomplished? What is “the materialistic core” we are speaking about? What is the exact meaning of this “materialism”? Scholem’s intentions in this point are rather vague and twofold. There are at least two different meanings in which he speaks about “materialism” in the “Theses”: from the one side, there is a dialectics of the “zimzum”, the relations between the “ein-sof” and the first sefira, the problem which we will later characterize as the problem of the givenness of the ungiven, i.e. of retaining the ungivenness of the ungiven in spite of its givenness, or the givenness of this ungivenness itself. And from the other side, there is a definition of the materialistic core of the Kabbalah as “phenomenological” description of the “structures of the beings”. The relations between these two aspects remain unclear; anyway, both of them are opposed to the “theory of emanation” or to the “pantheism”.

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In order to clarify systematically the meaning of the possible “materialist” approach to the kabbalist thinking we will start from a brief classification of the existing approaches to the kabbalist thought. We will use as a guiding line the distinction which is made by Gilles Deleuze in his “The Logic of the Sense”

¹ Scholem, G. “Zehn unhistorische Sätze,” in Scholem, *Judaica* (Frankfurt M., 1970), III, 264–271. We use here the translation of David Biale, in Biale, D. “Gershom Scholem’s Ten Unhistorical Aphorisms on Kabbalah: Text and Commentary,” in Gershom Scholem: *Modern Critical Views*, ed. H. Bloom (New York, 1987), 99–124.

between the three dimensions of the proposition, or three possible functions of the language: designation, signification and manifestation.² From one side, the language can function as pointing to the entities which exist autonomously, to represent the outside reality, stable and existing independently in itself. From the other side, it can express the concepts, the ideas, the contents of the thought. And, finally, the speaking subject can use the language in order to manifest and express himself: his wishes, his assumptions and other aspects of his “inner life”.

It should be noticed immediately, that these dimensions imply each other and are usually co-present: the question is not that of the complete extinction of the other dimensions, but of domination, of the main and foundational function which serves as a ground for the others. Deleuze claims that there are three pretenders to this role of the founding dimension: the rapport to the thing, the rapport to the general concept, and the rapport to the “I”, the inner experience of the subject.

The existing approaches to the Kabbalah can be classified according to this basic distinction of the orientations. First, there is what can be called “traditional” or “dogmatic metaphysical” approach. Such an approach deals with the kabbalistic texts as designing and representing the outside reality: the inner structures of the Divine body, the celestial palaces, the armies of the good and the evil forces. The archetypical example of such an approach can be found in Scholem’s story of his attempt to be accepted (in his youth) as a pupil in one of the Jerusalem kabbalistic yeshivas.³ The condition of becoming a student was “not to ask any questions”: and this can be seen as a slogan of the “dogmatic metaphysical” approach. The kabbalist texts deal with beings which exist necessarily in this or that determined way; they are just a description of what there is, a map achieved due to a possession of a certain kind of mystical knowledge. The things are just what they are: and we learn the evidences of how they are, transmitted to us by a tradition that must be fully accepted.

Scholem himself opposes this way, while trying to displace the designation by the signification — though it will be more appropriate to speak here not about Scholem himself, but of “sholemism” (by the pattern of “Platonism”), for if we consider Scholem’s project of the academic studies of Jewish mysticism, the situation is more complicated (but still in the final account the dimension of signification remains central). The extraction of “the theory”, of a system of the concepts, of notions, of general claims is regarded here as the main aim of the reading of the kabbalistic text. As Yehuda Liebes rightly points out,⁴

² Deleuze, G., *Logique du Sens*, (P.: Minuit, 1969), 15–24.

³ Scholem, G. *Devarim be Go*, (Tel-Aviv, 1975), p. 45. See also Huss, B. Ask No Questions: Gershom Scholem and The Study of Contemporary Jewish Mysticism, *Modern Judaism*, 25, Number 2, May 2005, 141–158.

⁴ Liebes, Y. “Kivunim Hadashim be Heker ha Kabbalah”, *Paamim*, 50 (1992), 150–171. For a brief overview of the dispute see also Anidjar, G. “Jewish Mysticism Alterable and Unalterable; On “Orienting” Kabbalah Studies and the “Zohar of Christian Spain””, *Jewish Social Studies*, 3 (1996), 89–157.

this “theoretical” inclination gives it signs even in the titles of the books (for example, Tishbey’s “The theory of the evil and the klipka in lurianic Kabbalah”, or “the learning of the Zohar”), and in the names given to the academic institution (Scholem called to a newly established faculty for the study of the Jewish mysticism “The faculty for the study of the Jewish philosophy and Kabbalah”). The formulation of the theory, of the philosophy, of the “learning” are regarded here as a central purpose of the Kabbalah.

It is this “over-theorization” that becomes the main object of the attacks on Scholem and his school in the dispute on the academic studies of Jewish mysticism starting from the late 80-ies. Scholem and his school are blamed for transforming the cabalistic text into mere elaborations of the theories concerning the metaphysical structure of the world or the meaning of the history. The representatives of the new approach — like Moshe Idel and Yehuda Liebes — oppose to this “theoretical” approach a new one. And the common denominator for this new approach — despite all the divergences which exist between the methods and the claims — is the address to the experience in its different forms.

The kabbalist texts are treated as an account of inner experience of the mystic — or as the instructions which one should follow in order to achieve such an experience (and Scholem is accused on underestimating of the place of esoteric extatic Kabbalah, whose main aim is the mystical unification of the soul with the God, in the whole corpus of the kabbalistic tradition); the “Zohar” is equated to the Eros, i.e. to the inner creative energy; the central theme of ARI’s Kabbalah is claimed to be found not into the metaphysical system which explains the structure of the world and the laws of the history, but in the theory of re-incarnations, whose main purpose is to give an account on the relations between ARI and his pupils and to clarify the sources of their souls. In different forms the “concept” is replaced here by “the subject”.⁵

Deleuze himself distinguishes between these three dimensions of the propositions only in order to claim that although each of them pretends to be the source of the sense and the foundation for all the others neither can really succeed in such a foundational project. The sense is something which is present into the language — but cannot be reduced to the language in neither of its dimensions. That is why the three dimensions of the language form a “propositional circle”: they are transformed into each other into the circular movement around the sense — the movement which always tries to attain the sense and never succeeds in accomplishing this attempt.

We seem to be dealing here with one more variant of the standard “post-modern” approach: the “deconstructivist” claim that the sense is found only

⁵ See, for instance, Idel, M. *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988; Liebes, Y. “Zohar ve Eros”, *Alpaim*, 9 (1994), 67–119; Liebes, Y. “Trein Urzilin de Ayalta” — drashato ha sodit shel ha AR”I lifhey moto”, in Elior, R., Liebes, Y. (ed.), *Kabalat ha AR”I*, Jerusalem: Magness, 1992.

into a movement of the eternal withdrawal, only as a dissemination and the dissipation, and so on. Such an approach is not absent also within the field of the Kabbalah studies: Gil Anidjar may be regarded as one of its main representatives.⁶ Anidjar accuses both Scholem and his followers, and both those who rebel against Scholem's school in "Eurocentric" and "logocentric" reduction of the text to its context, to some outside reality (no matter whether this reality is the idea or the subjective experience), and proposes as an alternative a "deconstructivist" reading of the kabbalistic texts, which will follow the movement of the rhetoric figures of the language and fix the points of the withdrawal, of the eternal delocalization and de-placement of the signified, the impossibility to draw a straight line between the text and the context.

But we must not be too hasty in our conclusions. This "post-modern" aspect is without any doubt present into Deleuze's treatment of the problem of the sense; but it is accompanied by another one. And in order to understand this interlacement we must clarify the meaning of the problem of the sense. In order to do this, we will turn now to what serves an implicit and rarely-acknowledged source of this problem both in Deleuze and in the post-modern thought as a whole: the problem of materialist dialectics as it is conceptualized by Althusser.⁷

3

What is the problem of the materialist dialectic? Let us start from the Lenin's definition of the dialectics, which is further elaborated by Althusser: "the theory of contradiction in the very nature of things". The dialectic approach to the situation is the approach which enables to see the "nature of things" — that is to say, all complex whatever which is given to us, whether the things included in it are the abstract notions, the physical objects or the subjective feelings — not as a self-understandable unity, but as a result of the holding together of the opposites: of the disconnected and divergent elements (which are themselves, in their turn, the unity of the opposites). The main question of the dialectic is the question of the method which will allow the explication of this "holding together of the distinct" — without its reduction to what is held.

This absence of reduction is the main difference between the materialist and idealist dialectic. The later is defined by its inability to attain the knowledge of the mechanisms of holding together of the distinct in their pure state, without projecting on them the features of the unity which is enabled by their work. This is the exact meaning of Marxist formula "being determines consciousness": the conceptual unities of the thought, "the figures of consciousness" are held together by the mechanisms which themselves are not thought, not "conceptual

⁶ See Anidjar, "Jewish Mysricism"; Anidjar, *Our Place in Al-Andalus: Kabbalah, Philosophy, Literature in Arab Jewish Letters*, Stanford, Ca. 2002.

⁷ Althusser, L. *Pour Marx*, (P.: Maspero, 1966), 161–224.

idealities” or “the absolute concept”, are not self-producing and self-founding, as is the case in Hegel’s idealistic dialectics. And it is very much likely that such a materialistic approach will inevitably lead to the reconsidering of the very initial definition of dialectic: the contradiction is the interpretation of the relation between the elements which are held together from the point of view of the conceptual unities of the thought — which themselves are the result of holding together.

But here we must once again be careful. The priority of the holding together over the thought must not lead to identification of its mechanisms with the economic laws or with any kind of practice whatever — as it happens in the vulgar Marxism. For the unities of the practice are nor less determined by the mechanisms of the holding-together prior to them as are the unities of the thought; and thus the identification of this mechanisms with the practice is an idealistic reduction, that is the reduction of what is holding to what is held, of the inhuman to the human — nor less than the reduction of this mechanisms to the unities of thought.

The main question of the materialist dialectics is the question of the un-reductionist knowledge of the mechanisms of holding together of the distinct which are determining in the relation both to the thought and to the practice, without reducing them neither to the thought, not to the practice. In some places Althusser is very close to determining this problem as the problem of the knowledge of the coincidence. Thus, for instance, he says — concerning the question of materialist dialectic in Lenin’s “theoretical practice”: “The irreplaceable element of Lenin’s text lies here: in the analysis of the structure of the conjuncture, in the displacements and the detachments of its contradictions, in their paradox unity, which is the very existence of this “actual moment”, which the political action is going to transform... from the February until the October 1917”⁸.

Lenin (as well as Marx), according to Althusser, is only applying this materialist dialectics to a particular cases, in order to solve actual political and theoretical tasks. The materialist dialectics as such should be the (yet un-existing) theory of these and others theoretical practices: the Theory of holding together of the distinct as such.

Althusser’s own way for solving the problem of such an un-reductive knowledge of holding together is the theory of surdetermination; it is of a least interest for us now — we’ll only generally claim that for multiple reasons (for example because of its insistence on the term “contradiction”) it does not succeed in resolving the problem which it poses. But the very formulation of the problem enables us to understand the meaning of the problematic of Deleuze’s “Logic of sense”. The question which Deleuze is trying to solve is the question of elucidating the mechanisms which are non-reductive nor to the language neither to the practice (or, in Deleuze’s terms, to the world, or to the

⁸ Althusser, *Pour Marx*, 181.

states of the things), and which determinate the holding-together both of the distinct both in the language and of the practice: of what presents itself to us as an self-understandable and “natural” unities of thought and of the world, as a “common sense” or as the “qualities of the things” — and which is in reality the conjunction of distinct and heterogeneous elements. Two deleuzian names for this holding together of the divergent are “the sense” and “the event”.

Deleuze generally provides two ways for the un-reductive thinking of the sense and the event. The first of them is the common “post-modern” way, which we had already briefly outlined before: but we must also pay attention to a rather important modification of this logic of the withdrawal. The sense and the event are given only in their withdrawal consequently from the language and from the world, as a virtual unity of “non-sense”, which is different from all determined sense and exists only into a paradox, and “eventum-tantum”, the flow of becoming which differs from any of its practical actualization. But this givenness at the crossroad, as a paradox object which is found in the crossing of the two “lines of the flight” — that of the sense and that of the event — is essential: an eternal slipping away is replaced (and grounded) by the inner surplus and tension of the paradox, or the “weird” object “sense/event”, which is always more than itself and less than itself, always displaced into the relation to itself, and thus always new into relation to itself.⁹ What is grasped from each one of the sides, that of the language and that of the world, as a withdrawal, is transformed into a positive tension when regarded simultaneously from the both of them; such optics of simultaneity is the first Deleuze’s option for resolving the problem of materialist dialectics.

But as it was already mentioned, this option is accompanied by another one: and the confrontation between these two options is may be the main conflict of materialist dialectics in its present state (essentially, the main problem of Deleuze’s thought is that the very fact that these options are distinct is neglected). This second option is that of quasi-causality, or, as Deleuze puts it, “the knowledge of the distances”, of the diagrammatic or schematism which is supposed to give an account on the homeomorphous but distinct processes occurring in the spheres of the thought and the praxis¹⁰.

A good example of such a diagrammatic we can found into Deleuze’s account on the connections between Nietzsche’s biography and his philosophy. Deleuze claims that both Nietzsche’s madness and death are parallel to the development of his thought. The connections between the concepts (the inner development of Nietzsche’s philosophy which prescribes also the connection between different functions of language in his texts, between the expressions, the designations and significations) and the connections between the actions (that of Nietzsche himself, that of the molecules in his organs, that of medical

⁹ Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, 51–54.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 210–211.

institutions and so on) are totally heterogeneous, they cannot be reduced to each other. And nevertheless we can speak about the mechanism which determines both of these series of the connections. Deleuze himself conceptualizes this mechanism as the figure of “retaining the surface”. To discover the surface, and to be unable to prevent its collapse, to be unable to avoid the plunging into the depths: these are dynamic schemas of primary orientation based on the typology of the touch which are used by Deleuze in order to give an account on this mechanism¹¹.

4

We can return now to the problem of materialist Kabbalah. Its main aim should become an unredutive account on the mechanisms of holding-together, which are determinate both into relation to the logos (in the particular case of the Kabbalah, the knowledge which deals with the theological situation, the logos of the Theos, of the God, the holy-scriptures) and to the praxis (that is, with the practically accomplished God’s commandments, mitzvot). We can be guided in such a materialist approach by the way in which the term “Zohar” is interpreted in the very beginning of the Zoharic corpus, in parashat Breshit:

“And the intelligent shall shine” (Dan., XII, 3). This “shining” corresponds to the movement given by the accents and notes to the letters and vowel-points which pay obeisance to them and march after them like troops behind their kings” — there are letters, and there are vowel-points, and they are the logos in its given form, they form the unity of the scripture. But “Zohar” corresponds to the “accents and notes” which determine the movement — the connections between the letters and the transition from one letter to another. “The letters being the body and the vowel-points the animating spirit, together they keep step with notes and come to a halt with them. When the chanting of the notes marches forward, the letters with their vowel-points march behind them, and when it stops they also stop. So here: “the intelligent” correspond to the letters and the vowel-points; the brightness to the notes, the “firmament” to the flow of the chant; while “they that turn to righteousness” correspond to the pausal notes, which stop the march of the words and bring out clearly the sense”.¹²

With a certain inclination to “drash” we can interpret the pausal notes as the signification (they have a universal appeal, turn multitudes to the righteousness, and “bring out clearly the sense”), the letters as the designation, and the vowel-points (animating-spirit) as manifestation. But this is less important than the general identification of “Zohar”, i.e. of the understanding and the knowledge the development of which is the main purpose of the “zoharic” corpus, with the

¹¹ Ibid., pp.131–132.

¹² Zohar, I, 16:2. We use here the English translation by Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon: *the Zohar*, London-Jerusalem-NY: Soncino Press, 1973.

“principle of the movement”: with the dimension that determines the holding-together of the distinct in the nature of things.

The “things” in the quotation are those inside the language, but this interpretation of the verse is immediately followed by another one: “Again, the words “and the intelligent will shine as the brightness of the firmament” may be referred to the pillars and sockets of the “celestial palanquin” (apiryon).” Here we are dealing with the basic metaphysical structure of the world and its basic system of connections: “the wise and intelligent are the supernal pillars and sockets, since they ponder with understanding all things needful for the upholding of the palace”. The celestial palace needs “pillars”, a constant effort is needed in order to retain its parts together. Further the “sockets” are interpreted as referring to “Hayot”, the primal vital forces of the world, and the interpretation concludes: “The brightness is that which illumines Torah, and which illumines also the heads of the “Hayah”. Zohar is the knowledge attained by the “intelligent”: the knowledge of the initial schemas of holding together of the distinct, prior both to the continuum of the logos and of the world and guarantying their unity.

It is this knowledge of the primary holding together, non reducible neither to logos nor to practice, applied to the particular situation of the theological (and to the particular form of this situation which is the situation of rabbinic Judaism) which forms the materialistic core of the thinking of the kabbalist. The elucidation of this core implies the investigation of the ways in which this thinking provides an unredutive account on this holding together of the distinct. We will conclude by two general remarks, concerning this thesis.

4.1

First, in the centre of this materialist knowledge we find the same tension and the same conflict which was mentioned above. The structures of the holding together can become an object of knowledge in an in-direct and in the direct way: as an eternal withdrawal of the paradox object, of the initial point of the “reshit”, which creates the God, the sky and the earth and is eternally distinct from them as the insistence of the question, as “mi?”, who?, which creates “ele” — these, the whole amount of the revealed in the logos and in the praxis, but is nevertheless eternally withdrawn from what is revealed. This conjunction of “ele” and “mi” is elucidated as an internal structure of “elohim” — the foundation of the whole theological field¹³.

But this knowledge of holding together is yet indirect, it is the knowledge of the distance, but not of the distanced. To this “way of fear” is opposed “the way of love” (generally, the two strategies are intervened, but we can speak of the dominance of one of them in certain points: for example, of the dominance of the second strategy in the “Idras”, which is contrasted to the main corpus of

¹³ See, for instance, *Zohar*, I,

the Zohar as the way of love which replaces the way of fear, and the knowledge of the continuum, “parsa”, which replaces the knowledge of “kaima de had samha” — the pillar with only one foundation)¹⁴.

This is the knowledge of the structures of “tziruf”, of holding together of the distinct as such, the typology of the touch unreductible neither to praxis not to the logos, which can, for example, accept the forms of the primary connection between the parts of the divine body, or the primary connection of the graphic elements in the letters. These primal types of the touch in their mutual blocking initiate the action of the dynamic mechanisms of balance (mitkala), and the mechanics of these oscillations enables to elucidate the process of production of the basic qualities, as well as of the structures of spatiality and temporality.

4.2

The second remark concerns the foundations of this “unhistorical” approach and its legitimacy. We have tried to treat seriously Scholem’s attempt to distinguish between “the most important intentions” of the kabbalists to their “inability to give a clear expression” to these intentions: between the material core of the Kabbalah and the idealistic “ideology”. This distinction presupposes, that the Kabbalah does not succeed to “get home”, to achieve a real maturity: it does not succeed to distinguish itself from the system of notions which is heterogeneous to its inner core, from the “spontaneous ideology” which it finds in the world in the ready state in the moment of its appearance. The Kabbalah stays too young — and simultaneously too old, for, as Althusser puts it, “the youth of the science is its maturity: before this age it is old, for it has the age of the prejudices by which it lives — just as the child has the prejudices, and therefore the age, of his parents”¹⁵.

Althusser conceptualizes here the central presupposition which underlies all of the Lenin’s theoretical enterprises: the new — whether we are speaking about the revolutionary struggle of the proletarians or the revolutionary discoveries of the physics, when it appears in the world, appears into an impure and false form; it is always contaminated by the old, misguided about its real aims and tends to misinterpret itself.¹⁶ That is why there is always a need into intervention from the side of philosophy. The forces of the new, left to their spontaneity and immanence, will inevitably fall prey to the heteronomous ideology, which distorts their essence; in fact what appears before us is not a newly discovered America, but America which is already called India; this “self-understanding” is part of the “immanence” of the new, and that is why the intervention will

¹⁴ See *Zohar*, III, 128:1.

¹⁵ Althusser, L. *Ecrits sur la psychanalyse: Freud et Lacan* (P.: Stock/MEC, 1993), 2

¹⁶ See also Althusser, L. *Lenine et la philosophie : suivi de Marx et Lenine devant Hegel*, P.:François Maspero, 1975.

always be grasped as a “violence”. But such a violence is inevitable if we really want to prevent the collapse of the new and defend its autonomy.

Such is one of the main principles of the “science of revolution”. And in no case is such an approach alien to the kabbalist thought itself. It reaches one of its most radical expression in the interpretation of the concept “zohar” in Reya Mehemna, in parashat “Bamidbar”¹⁷. The interpretation is based on the distinction between two kinds of Torah, common in this belated part of Zohar corpus. The theological tradition in its given state is characterised here as “the Torah from the side of the tree of the knowledge of the good and the evil”. The main feature of this Torah is treated as “the mixture” (and thus its bearers are characterised as the representatives of “the mixed multitude”, *erev rav*). The “good” is inseparably interlaced with the “bad”; and in order to divide between them there is a need into an intervention. Such an intervention is the main task of the “intelligent”, the representatives of the “Torah from the side of the Tree of Life”, the bearers of the knowledge which is identified with “Zohar”.

This action is inevitably violent: the divine terror of “turning the mounting over them as a barrel” serves as an example of such an intervention, the final aim of which is to “liberate Moses from his grave”, from the historical tradition in which he is imprisoned — that is to say, to separate between the inner core of the Revelation and the ideological layers under which it is buried in the current state of affairs.

There is no revolution without unhistoric violence. But it may well turn out that the violence is the only way of “paying the debt”: of continuation of the kabbalist attempt to liberate Moses from his grave, and of Scholem’s attempt to liberate the “sciences of Judaism” from their “philological funeral”.

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¹⁷ *Zohar*, III, 124:1–12

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