ABSTRACT: This presentation will examine Leon Modena's critique of Kabbalah, a Hebrew treatise composed in Venice in 1639 entitled Ari Nohem (The Roaring Lion). One of the primary causes of Modena's critique was the printing of kabbalistic books such as the Zohar, Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut, and Sefer Yetzira. In Modena's argument, the printing of kabbalistic books in the sixteenth century had disrupted prior patterns of the transmission of kabbalistic knowledge. In particular, Modena argues that kabbalistic books had begun to be read in new ways by new audiences. Using Modena's analysis as a point of departure this presentation will focus on two questions: First, how did Leon Modena himself read kabbalistic texts? Second, did a new group of readers of kabbalistic texts indeed appear in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries?

This presentation is for the following text(s):

- The Roaring Lion
Leon Modena

Chapter Twenty Nine

‘The punishment of the iniquity of my daughter is greater,’¹ and the breach has increased, especially now that books from this [Kabbalah] have emerged from the printing press, the books of the Zohar and Tikkunim, Ma’arekhet ha-Elhot, and others like them.² As long as they remained only written matters, very few people entered into this [Kabbalah], and whoever had them in his possession would only hand them over to copied down by one who was worthy, esteemed in his eyes, and deserving of it. In most instances, the person would know [him], and teach him face to face, and only afterwards pursue the book. But now that they have appeared in print, whoever has coins or cash in his hand and knows how to read, whomever he may be or whatever or however it may be, purchases books, considers them, and imagines that he understands and knows them. The plague has spread³ to countless individuals. For even if you say that this Kabbalah should be considered the words of the living God⁴ and an exalted wisdom, there is no doubt that abandonment, error, and heresy has increased among the masses as we have said earlier.

Thus wrote the great rabbi, our teacher and master, Moses Isserlein in his book Torat ha-Olah, part three, chapter four, these are his words:⁵ ‘Many people among the masses, each one leaps up to study matters of Kabbalah, because it is desirous in his eyes, especially the words of the more recent ones, who revealed these matters explicitly in their books. All the more so in our own time, when the books of Kabbalah are in print,
the book of the Zohar, Recanati, \textit{Sha’arei Orah}, and anyone who examines them has everything explained according to his understanding, even though their words are not actually understood by way of truth, since they have not been transmitted from one recipient of the tradition to another. And not only do men of intelligence claim understanding of it but even simpletons who do not know the difference between right and left, who tread in darkness, who cannot explicate the weekly portion or pericope with Rashi’s commentary, even they leap up to study Kabbalah.’ Here ends his citation.

How mistaken was the Zohar’s editor, Immanuel Korufoli de Benevento, of blessed memory, in his introduction to the book. This man who knew Hebrew grammar, and composed \textit{Sefer Livyat Hen}, thought that he knew Kabbalah as well. But as is customary with most of those, he was quite lacking in other areas of knowledge. He was the same to whom R. Joseph of Arles wrote the inscribed letter that begins, ‘fill the breadth of thy land, Immanuel,’ daughter of Samael and Lillith, mourn the name, etc., and on the back of the letter he wrote to the sage R. Immanuel of Korfilo, may the Lord preserve him until a generation has need of him, as if to say that he was of no use in his own generation when he said any thing that has been said in front of three, there is nothing evil in it. And given that there were already copies of the Zohar extant [in manuscript] that had been bought and sold, what difference would it make if it were to appear in print now. Now over and above the fact that he compares a sacred book to something evil, he compares and equates a manuscript to a printed book, as we have said.

But even more than this, I am amazed by the words of Rabbi Moses Provencali, whose legal decision was printed with the \textit{Tikkunim}. He too declares that from the day these matters were committed to writing they were considered public, and what difference would it make if they were to appear in print etc. And he further said: a manuscript and a printed book are like one stroke to any who consider them, for they are both written down, except that the one [a manuscript] is purchased for the equivalent of several coins and the other one [a printed book], hewn with tip of iron and lead, is set out for sale on the cheap market. How could a sage like him utter such a thing?

And so too our teacher and master, Rabbi Israel of Rovigo, of blessed memory, said [in his responsum printed] there, that Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai, of blessed memory, wrote the book of the Zohar before Rabbi [Judah the Prince] permitted the transcription of oral matters in writing by invoking [the verse] ‘it is time to act for the Lord,’ all the more so, [it can appear in print], etc. But one must question the very foundations of this, for Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai did not write the book of the Zohar in the first place. But the teaching of the master, our teacher and rabbi, Isaac de Lattes, who my exalted father of blessed memory informed me was a giant in his generation, his teaching is fitting. He agreed in his responsum on the printing of the Zohar their foundation is a holy mountain the whole time, that it would have been better for them not to print it [the Zohar]. For the rabbis of blessed memory [wrote, the laws of incest] cannot be
expounded [before three], etc, [nor the account of creation before two] nor the account of
the chariot before one, unless the person is wise, etc.17 ‘Do not seek those things which
are greater than you, have nothing to do with the secrets,’18 and the flaming ever turning
sword19 alludes to this. And you are not permitted to speak oral matters in writing.20 And
he who said I am still not old enough,21 he responded with straw and rubble,22 that all
this was said about the Ein Sof and not about the Sefirot. And about the claim that oral
matters cannot be spoken in writing, he [Isaac de Lattes] responded, if so why did Rabbi
Akiva see fit to write Sefer Yetizrah, and Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai the book of the Zohar.
But concerning this we have deliberated and proven earlier that they did not write them.
And to his [Isaac de Lattes’] claim that in the Zohar it is written that the Zohar itself will
be revealed in the generation of the King Messiah, in the latter generations at the end of
days, etc.23 As if this were sustained. And he said that this was explained, for the merit of
one who examines the book of the Zohar is enough to return [our nation] from captivity,
and that then the land will be filled with understanding. But we have seen that it is
approximately three-hundred and fifty years since the revelation of the book of the
Zohar in writing, but the Messiah has not come. And it is approximately seventy years
since it was printed, and the Messiah has not come. And the land lacks understanding,
for as a result of our sins the Torah has disappeared from Israel and is practically
forgotten.

Now let us return to prove our original point, that it was quite easy to destroy the ascent
to God with this investigation [Kabbalah] when it was written down, but even more so
after it appeared in print. Anyone who wants to take the name [of God] for a coin of
silver, can take it and ascend, he becomes entangled and yearns for beliefs in his heart
and mouth, for he makes it seem as if he sees God sitting on his exalted throne like
Isaiah, or the animals of His Chariot like Ezekiel, or the Ancient of Days like Daniel. And
he takes solace in saying that my unintentional wrongdoings become merits for me.
Apart from the continual damage of the printing these books to the Christians, as we
shall prove presently, with the help of God.

Endnotes

1 Lam. 4:6
2 Between 1558 and 1560, competing editions of the Zohar appeared in print, one at
Cremona and another at Mantua. Rival editions of Ma’arekhet ha-Elohut, a medieval
work of Kabbalah ascribed to Peretz ha-Kohen, appeared in print in 1558, one at Ferrara
and another at Mantua. An edition of Tikkunei Zohar, a distinct section of the Zoharic
corpus, appeared in print at Mantua in 1558. On the printing of Kabbalah in the

3 Lev. 13:5
4 BT Eruvin 13B.
5 Moses Isserles, Sefer Torat Ha-Olah, (Prague, 1569), 72B. This passage from Torat ha-Olah was copied without ascription by Aaron Moses Altschuler, a native of Prague and rabbi of the Kromau community in Moravia, in the preface to his Sefer Va-Yehal Moshe (Prague, 1613). See Tishby, “General Introduction,” in The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts. (Oxford: Littman Library, 1989), 112.
6 The writings of Menahem Recanati, an Italian Kabbalist who flourished at the beginning of the fourteenth century, appeared in print in the middle of the sixteenth century. His commentary on the Pentateuch was printed at Venice in 1545 and his Sefer Ta’amei ha-Mizvot, which included a liturgical commentary, appeared at Basle in 1585. See Tishby, “General Introduction,” 108, n. 92.
7 Sha’arei Orah by Joseph Gikatillia, a thirteenth-century Castilian kabbalist. The work appeared in print for the first time in 1561 at Mantua, at the same press that had printed an edition of the Zohar and Ma’arekhet ha-Elohot.
9 Modena conflated two different editors of the Zohar, Immanuel Korufoli and Immanuel ben Jekuthiel Benevento, into the same person. Immaneul ben Jekuthiel Benevento wrote Livyat Hen, a Hebrew grammar printed at Mantua in 1557. He also edited the Mantua edition of the Tikkunei Zohar and the second volume of the Mantua edition of the Zohar. Immanuel Korufoli edited the first volume of the Mantua edition of the Zohar. For his introduction to the Zohar referred to in this passage see Sefer Ha-Zohar Al Ha-Torah, (Mantua: 1558), vol. 1, 1A-3B. The passage cited by Modena appears on 2A. For clarification of Modena’s mistake see the letter by Gershom Scholem
to Nehemiah Libowitz, printed in Ari Nohem ed. Libowitz, (Jerusalem, 1929), 157;

10 Joseph Arles was a prominent rabbi in sixteenth century Italy who converted to
Christianity and took the name Jacobus Geraldino. On his conversion see, Yacob
letter mentioned by Modena see Iggerot Bet Rieti ed. Yacob Boksenboim, (Tel Aviv: Tel
Aviv University Press, 1987), 329. As Boksenboim demonstrated, the letter mentioned
by Modena has nothing to do with the printing of the Zohar. Modena adduces the letter
as further evidence against Immanuel Korufoli.

11 Isa. 8:8

12 Tikkunei Zohar (Mantua, 1558), 2B-3A.

13 Tikkunei Zohar, (Mantua, 1558), 3B.

14 Ps. 119:126.

15 Sefer Ha-Zohar Al Ha-Torah, (Mantua, 1558), vol. 1, 4A-6B.

16 Ps. 87:1

17 Mishnah Hagigah 2:1

18 BT Hagigah 13A. Quoted in the responsum by Isaac de Lattes.

19 Genesis 3:34

20 BT Temurah 14B; Gittin, 60A.

21 BT Hagigah 13A. Quoted in the responsum by Isaac de Lattes.

22 Mishnah Sabbath 3:1.

23 On the messianism of Isaac de Lattes see Tishby, “The controversy over the printing
of the Zohar in Italy,” 151-58. On his political theory see Bernard Dov Cooperman,
“Political Discourse in a Kabbalistic Register: Isaac De Lattes’ Plea for Stronger
Communal Government,” in Be’erot Yitzhak: Studies in Memory of Isadore Twersky,
and the Zohar see Yehuda Liebes, “The Messiah of the Zohar: The Messianic Image of
Simeon bar Yohai,” (Hebrew) in Ha-Ra’yon Ha-Meshihi Be-Yisrael, ed. Shmuel Reem
(Jerusalem: Israel Academy of the Sciences, 1982).

Copyright © 2012 Early Modern Workshop
Ari Nohem

1639

Prepared by Yaacob Dweck, Princeton University, USA

Leon Modena


Chapter 29 (Ed. Libowitz, 90-93)
וייתכן כי בניו של יובל, משאר ימותנו, שבおい ונמצא במקומם, והם קיימים עד היום. גם בהזкон כ şeyler אחרים, בפני וסירים. אין Invalidate.

אך⊗ "לمشاركة שלطرת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"

"לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library" "לمشاركة שלטרת.library"