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Polymorphism and Polysemy in Images of the Sefirot

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Polymorphism and Polysemy in Images of the *Sefirot*

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web:

https://works.bepress.com/martin_zwick/205 (Included in categories 'Systems Theory and Philosophy' and 'Jewish Thought')

https://sites.google.com/view/ohrchadash/home

1

Abstract (1/2)

- The resurgence of interest in Kabbalistic diagrams (Segol, Busi, Chajes) raises the question of how diagrams function in religious symbolism. This question can be approached via methods used in the graphical modeling of data. Specifically, graph theory lets one define a repertoire of candidate structures that can be applied not only to quantitative data, but also to symbols consisting of qualitative components.

- A graph is a set of nodes and links between nodes. What nodes and links are is unspecified in this definition. The Kabbalistic Ilan is – partially – a graph. The Sefirot are its nodes; the paths connecting the Sefirot are its links. The idea of a graph is actually not adequate to the Ilan, because in a graph nodes can be anywhere in space, while in the Ilan arrangement in space is significant and not arbitrary. However, graph theory can be supplemented with spatial considerations.

2

Abstract (2/2)

- What (an augmented) graph theory offers that is of special interest is a way to conceptualize the structural polymorphism of a symbol, i.e., the various decompositions possible for the symbol viewed as a graph.
- Structural polymorphism correlates with conceptual polysemy. A structural decomposition conveys a particular interpretation of the symbol, and to viewers of the symbol the variety of possible decompositions presents simultaneously a multiplicity of meanings.
- This polymorphism and thus polysemy is what gives many symbols their richness and evocative power. This paper will apply the graph theory-based methodology of decomposition to the Kabbalistic images of the *Sefirot*.

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Outline

1. Introduction: scope, orientation, prior work, graph theory
2. Scholem's Ilan; structural themes; 3-7-12 structures
3. Non 3-7-12 structures
4. Sequential *Sefirotic* orders
5. Ring composition; centrality; substructures
6. More substructures; fractals & networks
7. Summary

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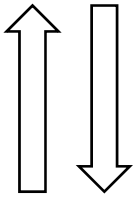
Scope (1/2)

- This talk is nearly all about polymorphism; it only touches on polysemy – there is just too much polymorphism to present! Not considered here at all is poly-performance.

- Poly-performance — Pragmatic
- Polysemy — Semantic
- Polymorphism — Syntactic



5

Scope (2/2)

- Focus here is on Jewish Kabbalah, with only a few glances at Christian (and Occult / Western esoteric) Kabbalah
- This talk draws on the work of Marla Segol, Giulio Busi, other Kabbalah researchers, & *especially* Yossi Chajes.
- This is only a very preliminary exploration.

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Ilanot Project (Chajes)

http://ilanot.haifa.ac.il/site

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Orientation

- Focus here is thematic – on structure of Kabbalistic images, ignoring geography & especially chronology. So this talk will not address canonization that has occurred in Kabbalistic images which counteracts polymorphism.
- While Kabbalistic images are always embedded in a context of words, and also *include* letters and words, focus on images per se can enhance understanding of how images and words are complementary.
- "Contemplation of the linguistic structures mentioned by Scholem – words, names, and thoughts – is itself dependent on imaginative visualization of these very structures. Can we in any meaningful way distinguish the verbal and visual?" –Elliot Wolfson

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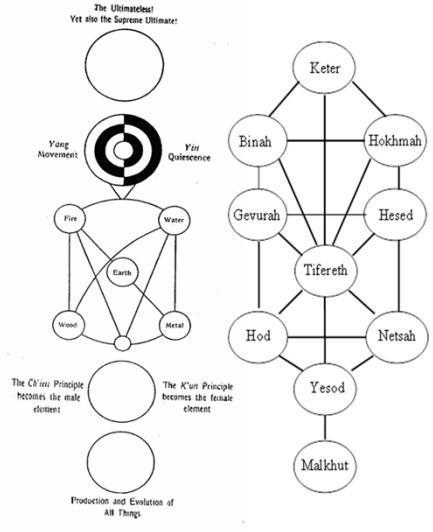
Diagram of Supreme Ultimate & Kabbalistic Tree



Zwick, REW 2009
(Gevurah replacing Din)

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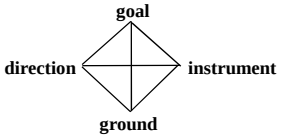
Ideas and Graphs

Bennett's tetrad of activity



Graphs & digraphs below illustrate ***polymorphism***; interpretations below them illustrate ***polysemy***

Graphs:


motivation vs operation


'system' vs 'life-world'


matter-energy-information vs utility


controller vs controlled


flow of information or matter-energy

Digraphs: (directed graphs)


hegemony of economy


hegemony of polity


hegemony of culture


hegemony of community


control by negative feedback


planning


problem solving


adaptive failure


evolution of control

Zwick, IJGS 2018

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6. More substructures; fractals & networks
7. Summary

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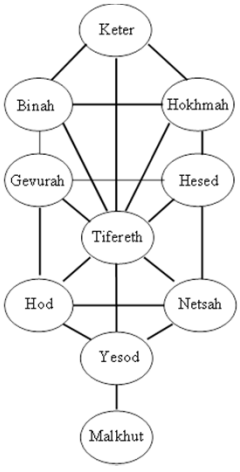
Scholem's canonical Ilan



Scholem, p.44
(Gevurah replacing Din)

STRUCTURAL THEMES

- levels: 7 levels
- columns (polarity): 3 columns, right & left mediated by center
- centrality of *Tiferet*
- symmetry: here & generally left-right, rarely top-bottom
- number of links: here 20 = 3 horizontal + 7 vertical + 10 diagonal (3-7-10); 22 is canonical (3-7-12). To my knowledge, no Ilan image has more than 22 links.

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ADDITIONAL STRUCTURAL THEMES (1/2)

For images to be shown later

- 3-7-12 structure*:* correlates with types of letters (*Sefer Yetsirah:* 3 "Mothers" (אשמ), 7 "doubles" (בגדכפרת), 12 "ordinary." Because of the prominence of the *SY*, 3-7-12 structures have a strong claim to being canonical.)
- 11th Sefirah*: Da'at*
- presence/absence of specific links, e.g., links to *Malkhut* from *Netsah* & *Hod*
- Sequential (sometimes concentric) order of all 10 Sefirot*:* from *Keter* to *Malkhut*
- circularity*: Malkhut* linked back to *Keter*

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ADDITIONAL STRUCTURAL THEMES (2/2)

For images to be shown later

- line arrangement of first 3 *Sefirot: Keter, Hokhmah, Binah*
- ring composition*:* down the right column, return on the left (a different type of circularity)
- substructures*:* groupings of *Sefirot* (e.g., 3+7, three triads)
- shifts of the locations of *Sefirot* (e.g., in Gra diagram, *Malkhut*)
- fractals, networks*:* Trees inside *Sefirot;* trees in networks

Images will be named by author/translator, book, or library

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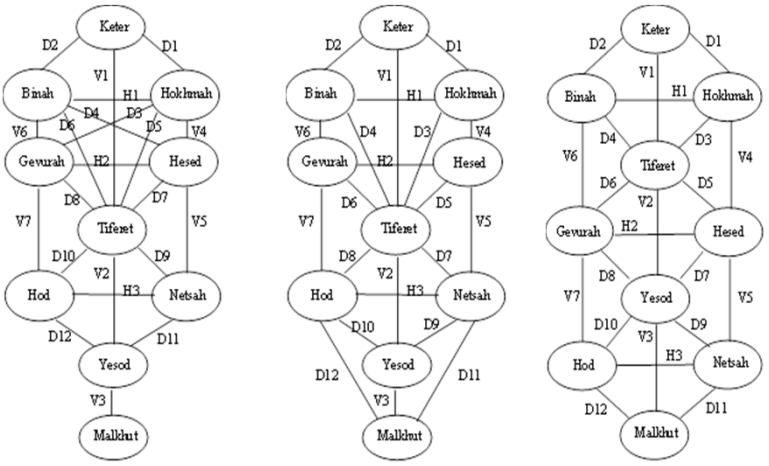
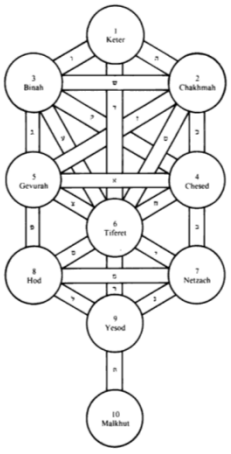
3-7-12 structures



Three versions: (a) left, (b) center, (c) right. Kaplan draws these alternatives.

15

3-7-12a: Yitzhak Luria (Ari)



- 22 links, 3-7-12a structure
- Includes links of
  - *Hokhmah-Gevurah*
  - *Binah-Hesed*
- Omits links of
  - *Netsah-Malkhut*
  - *Hod-Malkhut*

Ari structure reproduced by Kaplan, p.29

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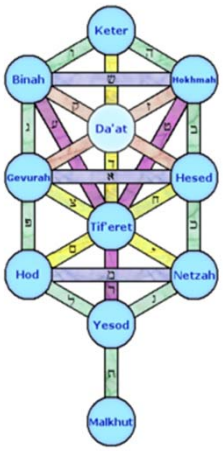
3-7-12a: Adding Da'at to Lurianic Ilan



- 22 links, 3-7-12a structure
- Add Da'at
- Includes links of
  - *Hokhmah-Gevurah*
  - *Binah-Hesed*
- Omits links of
  - *Netsah-Malkhut*
  - *Hod-Malkhut*

Wikipedia,"Da'at"

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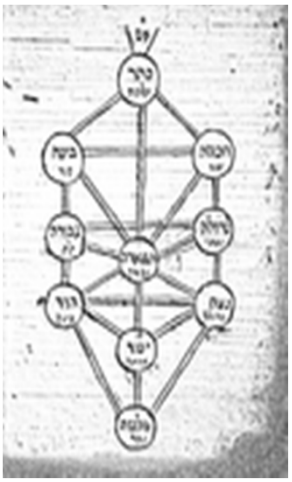
3-7-12b structure

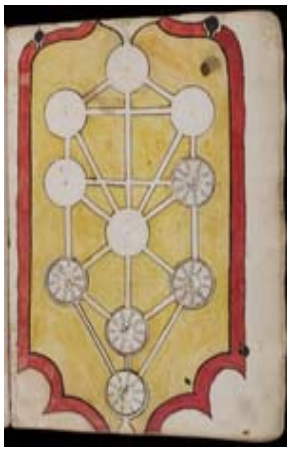


אברהם בן משלם מאנאנילו, and
London, United Kingdom - British Library Add. 27078. אילן ספירות עם אין-סוף, בתוך קובץ בקבלה, איטליה מאה 16. 1573.

Ilanot Project, directed by J.H. Chajes

18

3-7-12b structure



אברהם יוסף שלמה גרזיני, and Newberry Library VAULT Hebrew MS 3. אילן עם תנועה בתוך עסיס רימונים, איטליה, מאה 17. 1600.

Ilanot Project, directed by J.H. Chajes

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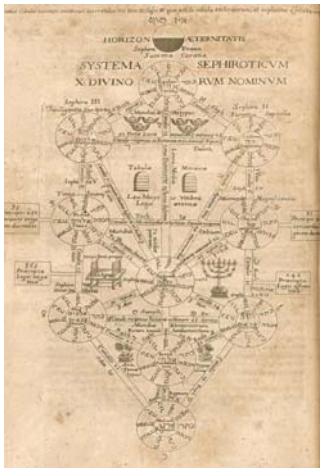
3-7-12b: Athanasius Kircher

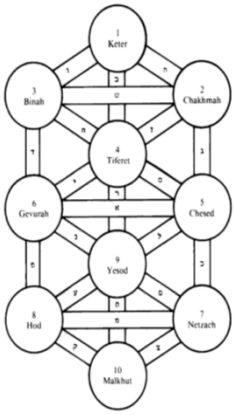


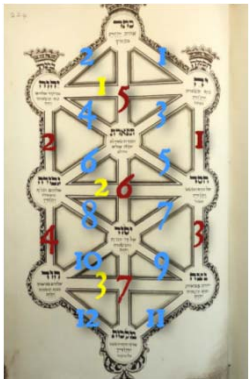
- *22* links, 3-7-12b structure
- Christian Kabbalah

Systema sephiroticvm X divino rvm nominvm, Image ID 1526785, https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e2-5d0f-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99 .

20

3-7-12c: Gaon of Vilna (Gra)





- *22* links,3-7-12c structure
- Spatial shift up of Tiferet, Yesod, Malkhut
- Symmetry here also top-bottom

Left: Kaplan, p. 30; right: Oxford Bodleian Library MS OPP Add Fol 32, 224r (cited in Chajes SSI Image 13)

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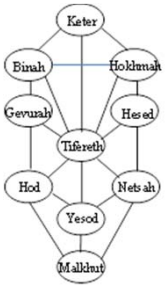
Gikatila



- 18 links, 1-7-10 structure
- Absent links:
  - *Hesed-Gevurah*
  - *Netsah-Hod*
  - *(links to Malkhut from Netsah & Hod)*

Portae Lucis frontispiece, Gross Family Trust, Tel Aviv, Israel (cited in Yossi Chajes, TKT Fig. 4 & SSI Image 6)

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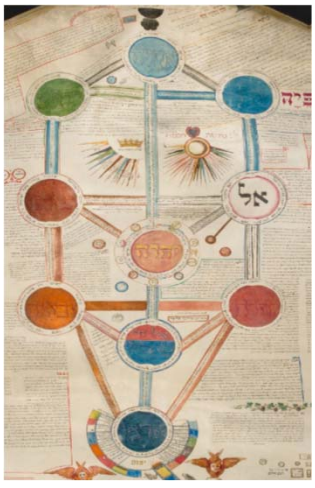
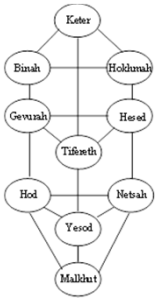
Bodleian





- 18 links, 3-7-8 structure
- Absent links:
  - *Links to Tiferet from Hokhmah & Binah*
  - *Links from Tiferet to Netsah & Hod*

Oxford - Bodleian Library MS Hunt. Add. E. - Oxford MS 2429 (cited in Chajes, TKT, Fig. 11; also KTI, Fig. 1)

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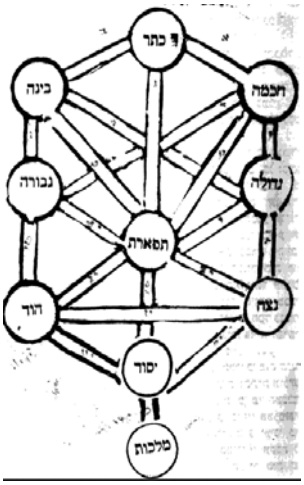
Cordovero



- 20 links, 1-7-12 structure
- Absent links:
  - *Hokhmah-Binah*
  - *Hesed-Gevurah*

Cordovero, 7.1 (Sefaria)

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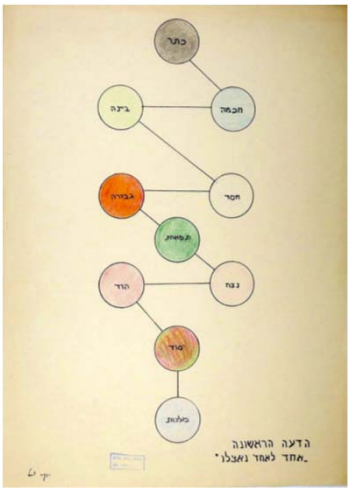
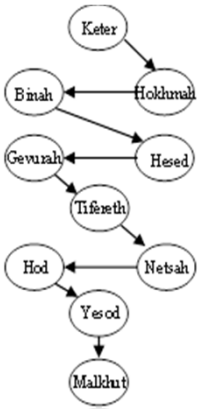
Lightening flash





- Sequential order of all *Sefirot*
- Lightening flash is more common in esoteric/occult Kabbalah

Scholem diagram (Cited in Chajes KDD)

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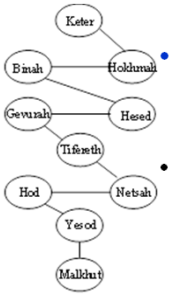
British Library



- Sequential (concentric) order of all *Sefirot* (top spoke) & correlates
- Outermost ring is *Keter*

BL Add MS 27172, 123v (cited in Chajes SSI Image 8)

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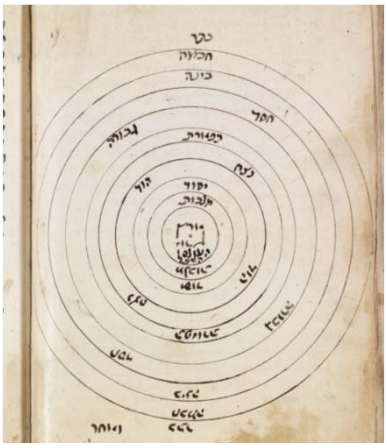
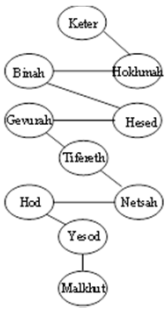
Parma





- Sequential (concentric) order of all *Sefirot* *with correlates*
- Outermost ring is *Keter*

Parma 3489, 102b (cited in Chajes SSI Image 9)

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(Manuscript not cited)

- Sequential (concentric) order of all *Sefirot*
- Left: standard order
- Right: *reversed* order

Burmistrov, Fig. 30 & 31

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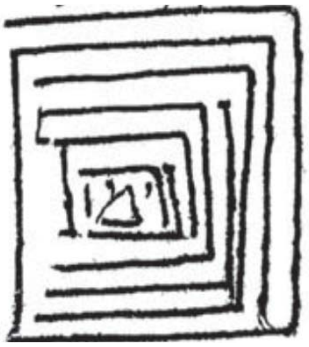
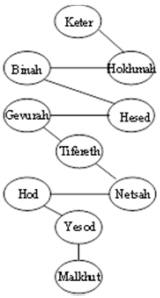
Parma





- Sequential (concentric) order of (first letters of) all *Sefirot*

Cod. Parm. 2784, 43b (Biblioteca Palatina of Parma, Ministero per I Beni e le Attività Culturali, Italy (cited in Chajes, TKT Fig. 2 & SSI Image 10)

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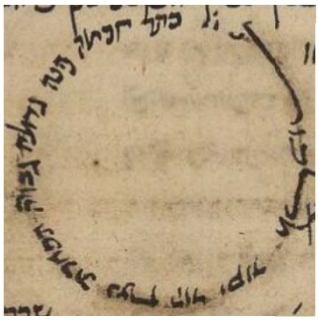
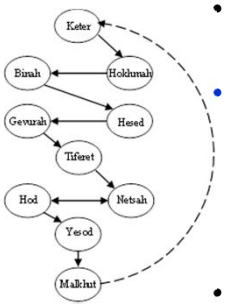
Vatican





- Circularity: *Malkhut* circles back to *Keter*
- Circularity is here a sequential order that closes on itself & is *different from* concentric order
- Circularity explicitly rejected by Cordovero

VAT Neofiti 28 88v (cited in Chajes SSI Image 4)

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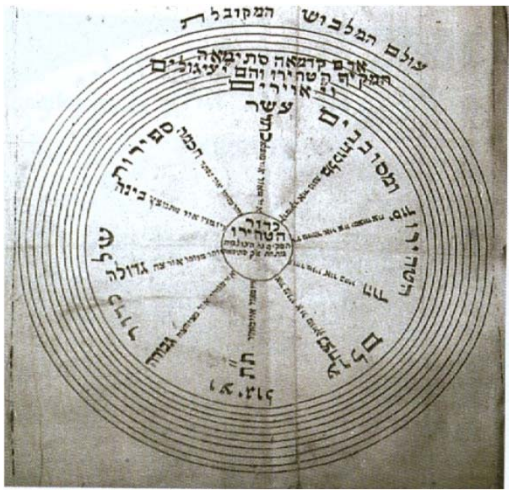
Emeq ha-Melekh



- Circularity: *Malkhut* circles back to *Keter*

Burmistrov, Fig. 27

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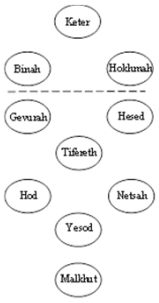
National Library of Israel



- First 3 Sefirot in a line
- Lower 7 = *Sefirot Ha'binyan*
- Spatial shift (lateral) of Malkhut

Jerusalem NLI Ms. Heb. 8°404, 40b (cited in Chajes, TKT, Fig. 6)

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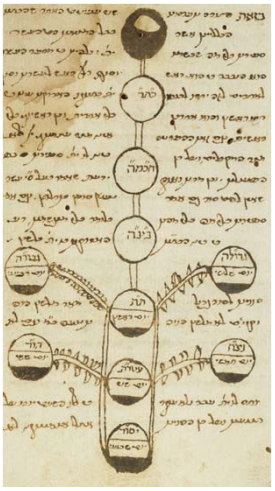
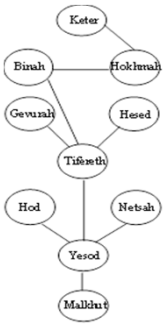
National Library of Israel





- First 3 *Sefirot* in a line (3+7 grouping)
- Spatial shift (reversal) of *Yesod & Malkhut* (Atarah)

Jerusalem NLI Ms. Heb. 8°2964, 13a (cited in Chajes TKT Fig. 7); similar diagram in Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, MS hébr. 857, fol. 9r (Chajes KTI Fig. 5)

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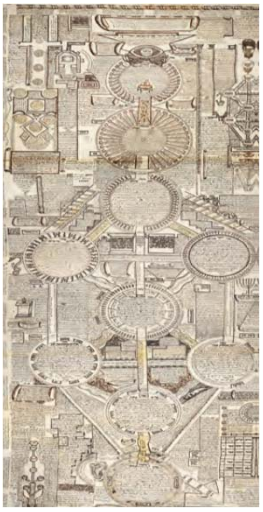
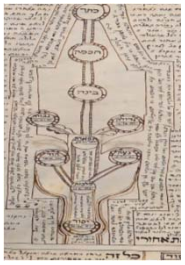
Great Parchment

Oxford - Bodleian Library MS Hunt. Add. D (Neubauer 1949) (cited in Chajes, TKT Fig. 12, SSI Image 7, KTI Fig. 7)

37

Great Parchment





- First 3 *Sefirot* in a line (3+7 grouping)
- Spatial shift (reversal) of *Yesod & Malkhut* in subordinate Ilan (right), not in main (left) Ilan

Oxford - Bodleian Library MS Hunt. Add. D (Neubauer 1949) (cited in Chajes, TKT Fig. 12, SSI Image 7, KTI Fig. 7)

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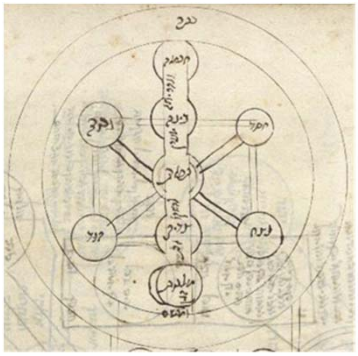
Hai Gaon

- *Keter*, *Hokhmah*, *Binah* in concentric circles, rather than a line
- Text inside *Sefirot*

Foldout sheet inserted in *Liqqutim me-ha-Rav Hai Gaon* (cited in Abrams Figure 5.11) 39

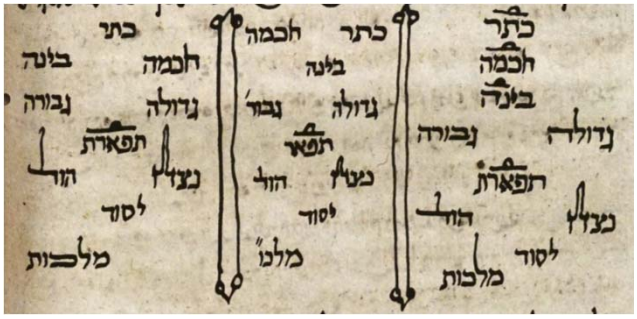
Granada



- 2nd & 3rd *Sefirot* in a line; *Keter* in outer circle
- Symmetry here is also top-bottom

Granada - Biblioteca de la Universidad de Granada, Escuela de Estudios Árabes Ms. 64, 282b (cited in Chajes SSI Image 12) 40

National Library of Israel

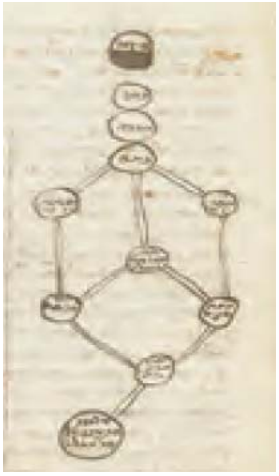


- Spatial shift (lateral) of *Malkhut* to left column

Jerusalem NLI Ms. Heb. 8°404, 40b (cited in Chajes, TKT, Fig. 6)

41

Elijah Hayyim



- Spatial shift (lateral) of *Malkhut* to left column

Elijah Hayyim of Genazzano, *Iggeret hamudot*, 1526. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, MS hébr. 857, fol. 9*r*

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Outline

1. Introduction: scope, orientation, prior work, graph theory
2. Scholem's Tree; structural themes; 3-7-12 structures
3. Non 3-7-12 structures
4. Sequential *Sefirotic* orders
5. Ring composition; centrality; substructures
6. More substructures; fractals & networks
7. Summary

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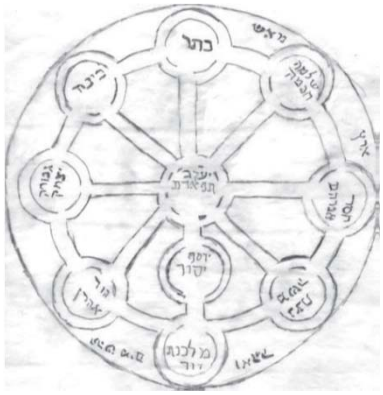
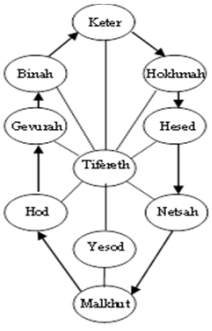
Italian



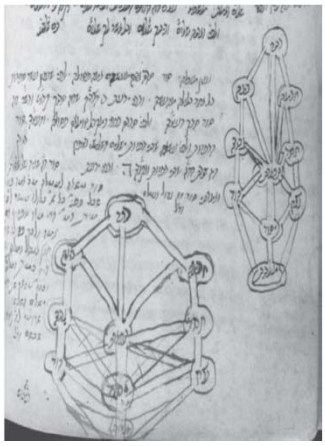


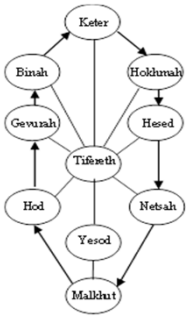
- Ring composition
- Centrality of *Tiferet*
- 0-7-12

BN 763/Code Hebreu 255, Folio 39a *Hayyei Olam Ha'Ba*, dated 1284 (cited by Segol, p.82)

44

Provencal





- Ring composition
- Centrality of *Tiferet*
- 0-7-12

JTS 1609, Folio 132a, 14th century (cited in Segol, p.69)

45

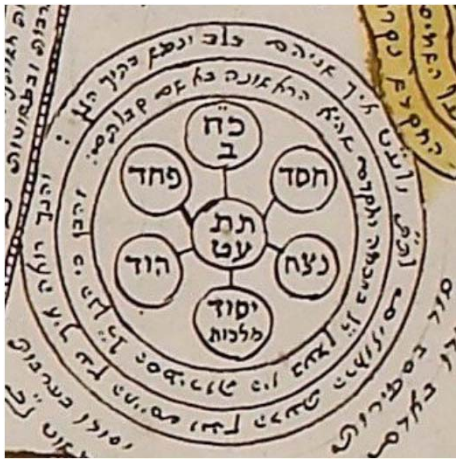
Yehoshua ben David (Kurdistan)

- Centrality of *Tiferet*
- 0-7-12
- Ring composition?

Israel National Library, Jerusalem, 1257 4° (cited in Baumgarten, Safrai, Chajes p.857)

46

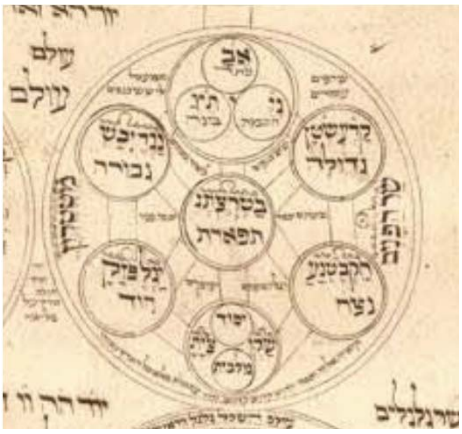
Great Parchment



- Centrality of *Tiferet*
- Substructures
  - *Keter-Hokhmah-Binah*
  - *Yesod-Malkhut*
- Ring composition?

Oxford - Bodleian Library MS Hunt. Add. D (Neubauer 1949) (cited in Chajes, TKT Fig. 12f) 47

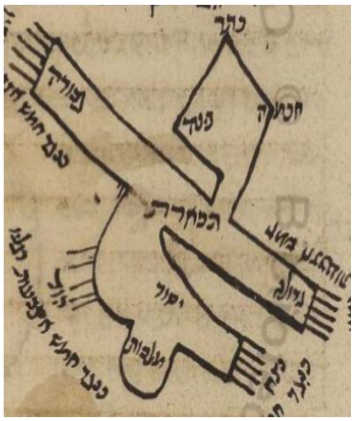
Bayerische Staats Bibliothek

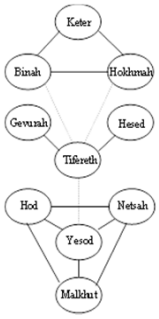


- Centrality of *Tiferet*
- Substructures
  - *Keter-Hokhmah-Binah*
  - *Yesod-Malkhut*
- Ring composition?

'Eśer sahsāhōt - Kabbalistisches Schema des Weltsystems, Stufenfolge vom 'Ēn Sōf bis zu den Qelīfōt-BSB Cod.hebr. 446, [S.l.], 17. Jh. [BSB-Hss Cod.hebr. 446] 48

Neofiti





- Centrality of *Tiferet*
- *Substructures*
  - *Keter-Hokhmah-Binah*
  - *Tiferet-Hesed-Gevurah*
  - *Netsah-Hod-Yesod-Malkhut*

Neofiti 28 88r (cited in Chajes, SSI Image 3)

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Outline

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6. More substructures; fractals & networks
7. Summary

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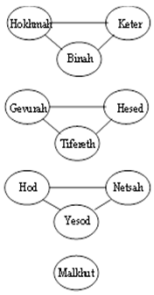
National Library of Israel



- Substructures: triads
  - *Keter-Hokhmah-Binah*
    anomalous triad: $\Delta \rightarrow \nabla$
  - *Hesed-Gevurah-Tifereth*
  - *Netsah-Hod-Yesod*

Jerusalem NLI Ms. Heb. 8°404, 40b (cited in Chajes, TKT Fig. 6)

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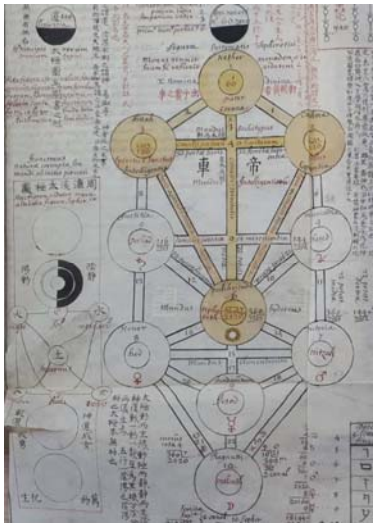
Joachim Bouvet



- 22 links, 3-7-12b structure
- Christian Kabbalah
- *Substructure:* tetrad
  - *Keter-Hokhmah-Binah-Tiferet*
- Re Chinese diagram on left: Bouvet may have noted similarity to Ilan

Vanves archives of the Society of Jesus MS GBro145 ff89

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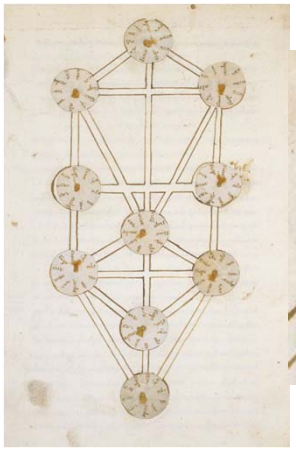
British Library



- Internal fractal structure *(Volvelles)*
- Similar fractal structure in Kircher diagram

Volvelles BL add_ms_27091_f026r (Gallico) (cited in Chajes SSI Image 11)

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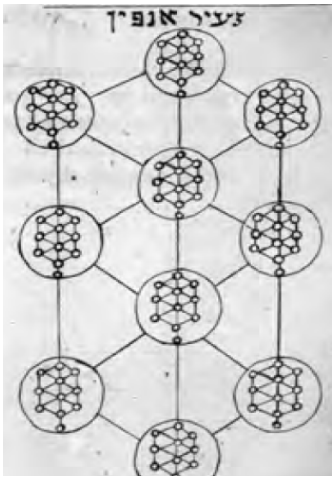
Christian Knorr von Rosenroth



- Internal fractal structure
- Christian Kabbalah

Rosenroth's *Kabbalah Denudata* (cited in Chajes DG, Fig. 9)

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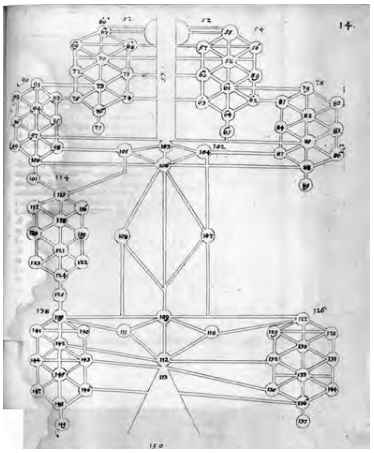
Christian Knorr von Rosenroth



- Fractal network of trees (Partzufim)
- Christian Kabbalah

Rosenroth's Kabbalah denudata (cited in Chajes DG, Fig. 11)

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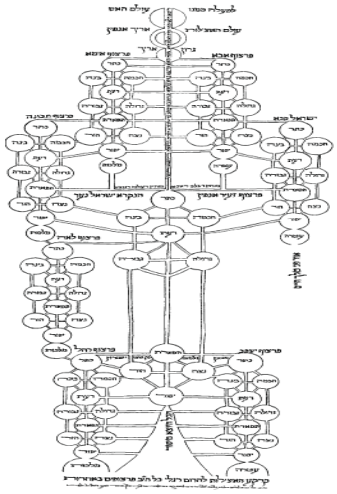
Mantua



- Fractal network of trees (Partzufim)

Mantua, Biblioteca Comunale, Ms. ebr. 51, fol. 107bis (cited in Busi, p.31)

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Polymorphism & Polysemy (1/3)

Syntax	**Semantics**
hierarchical levels	gradations of transcendence vs immanence; links between God and World
columns, triads	reconciliation of opposites, of male and female principles
centrality of *Tiferet*	Supplements the fundamental of the top & the bottom with the fundamental of the central
symmetry	beauty of divine realm, harmony of upper & lower, left & right

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Polymorphism & Polysemy (2/3)

Syntax	Semantics
number of links	integrates image & word by reference to letters of the alphabet
3-7-12 structure	correlates with three types of letters
11th *Sefirah, Da'at*	needed for triadic synthesis of *Hokhmah* & *Binah*, but "10 and not 9; 10 and not 11" (Sefer Yetsirah)
Sequential order of all *Sefirot*	Hierarchical order in divine realm; order of emergence of *Sefirot*
concentric order of all *Sefirot*	divine order like astronomical order; asserting "cosmogenic priority & primordial perfection of *Sefirot*" (Chajes)

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Polymorphism & Polysemy (3/3)

Syntax	Semantics
circularity	immanent is rooted in transcendent: (SY: "their end is fixed in their beginning")
line arrangement of first 3 *Sefirot*	distinction between upper & lower realms of the *Sefirot*
ring composition	God creates so that the created can ascend; we ascend so that we may descend
substructures	meaningful interactions are local
Shifts (up or lateral)	up =?, lateral = polarity alignment?
fractals	as above, so below; universality of wholeness; interconnectedness of all; the infinite within the 10 *Sefirot*

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Some Questions (1/2)

- Re 3-7-12 structures, what do *Netsah* & *Hod* links to *Malkhut* add; what does their absence omit?
- Re 3-7-12 structures, what do *Hokhmah-Gevurah* links and *Binah-Hesed* add; what do their absence omit?
- Is absence of a *Binah-Hesed* link compatible with the lightening flash order of the *Sefirot*?
- Does anything define columns aside from polarity? How are *Hokhmah:Binah* = *Hesed:Gevurah* = *Netsah:Hod*?
- Which features of the Ilan are (relatively) invariant despite the polymorphism & is this invariance significant?
- Are nablas (∇) syntheses & deltas (Δ) generative?

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Some Questions (2/2)

- Does internal fractalness (volvelles) allow non-local (non-link) interactions between *Sefirot*?
- Is there any evidence for triadic or higher ordinality relations among *Sefirot*?
- Do syntactic & semantic diversity underlie pragmatic (performative) diversity?
- Is the contemplation of structural polymorphism a mystical exercise?
- Is the polymorphism of Christian or occult/esoteric Kabbalah as extensive as it is in Jewish Kabbalah?

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THANK YOU

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