



The Cabala, its influence on Judaism and Christianity & The Kabbalah or, The Religious Philosophy of the Hebrews

Adolphe Franck, Bernhard Pick

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The Cabala, its influence on Judaism and Christianity.

Author:Bernhard Pick

This is a short monograph on the Kabbalah, written from a purely academic and somewhat critical point of view. The literature about the Kabbalah in the public domain in English is very limited. Most of the key texts and scholarly studies are in Hebrew, German, and other languages. So this well-crafted review of the literature is a real find.

Pick traces the origins and background of the Kabbalah to Jewish scholars of mediaeval Spain. He does not attribute any deeper roots to it historically, nor does he examine the roots of Jewish mysticism except for a brief mention of the Merkabah. Pick represents the Kabbalah as a backlash to the rationalism of Maimonides. He also discusses it as if it were purely of historical interest, ignoring the ongoing and lively popular interest in this belief system even in his day.

Pick provides a dissenting view to much of the uncritical literature produced at the turn of the 20th century by more mystically inclined authors, and as such is worth reading to get a more rounded view of the subject. If you are looking for an introduction to the subject written by an advocate of the Kabbalah, it might be better to start with some of the other books on the subject available at this site. But if you need a starting point for further academic study, this is a good place to begin.

The Kabbalah or, The Religious Philosophy of the Hebrews

by Adolphe Franck

translated by I. Sossnitz

This is a scholarly study of the origin and evolution of the Kabbalah. Originally published in French in 1843, with a second French edition in 1889, this book traces the origins of the philosophical concepts of the Kabbalah to the ancient Zoroastrians. Franck goes into fascinating detail about the doctrine of the Kabbalah, as expressed in the Sepher Yetzirah and the Zohar. He uses internal evidence to trace the origins of these texts many centuries prior to their first known publication in the thirteenth century C.E.

Franck carefully compares the philosophy of the Kabbalah with Greek philosophy, the Alexandrians, Philo, and the Gnostics, and concludes that, although there are similarities, none of them can claim to be the source of the Kabbalah. However, he does find many more similarities with the ancient Zoroastrian beliefs. By this process of elimination, he comes to the conclusion that the doctrines of the Kabbalah had their origin during the Babylonian exile circa 500 B.C.E., which was also the time when Zoroaster was active in the same geographical region. This thesis is worth considering, and potentially adds more weight to the already numerous contributions of Zoroastrianism to world culture.

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