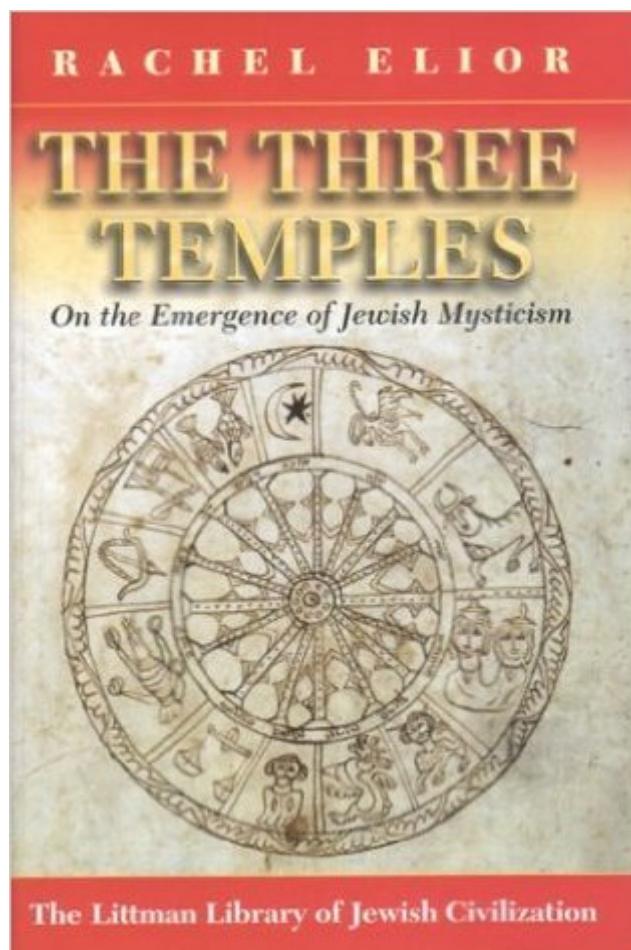


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The Three Temples: On The Emergence Of Jewish Mysticism (Littman Library Of Jewish Civilization)



Synopsis

In this ground-breaking study, Rachel Elior offers a comprehensive theory of the crystallization of the early stages of the mystical tradition in Judaism based on the numerous ancient scrolls and manuscripts published in the last few decades. Her wide-ranging research, scrupulously documented, enables her to demonstrate an uninterrupted line linking the priestly traditions of the Temple, the mystical liturgical literature found in the Qumran caves and associated directly and indirectly with the Merkavah tradition of around the second and first centuries BCE, and the mystical works of the second to fifth centuries CE known as Heikhalot literature. The key factor linking all these texts, according to Professor Elior's theory, is that many of those who wrote them were members of the priestly classes. Prevented from being able to perform the rituals of sacred service in the Temple as ordained in the biblical tradition, they channelled their religious impetus in other directions to create a new spiritual focus. The mystical tradition they developed centred first on a heavenly Chariot Throne known as the Merkavah, and later on heavenly sanctuaries known as Heikhalot. In this way the priestly class developed an alternative focus for spirituality, based on a supertemporal liturgical and ritual relationship with ministering angels in the supernal sanctuaries. This came to embrace an entire mystical world devoted to sustaining religious liturgical tradition and ritual memory in the absence of the Temple. This lyrical investigation of the origins and workings of this supernal world is sure to become a standard work in the study of early Jewish mysticism.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As an armchair student of Christianity, this book has given me tremendous insights into ancient rituals which on the surface seem like nonsense if one doesn't understand what they represent. Margaret Barker, a Christian scholar, has done an outstanding job in correlating Jewish Temple rituals with early church liturgies. Rachel Elior, a Jewish scholar, goes into detail about the significance of the solar calendar, the cycle of worship and numerical patterns of the older Temple. Elior traces the Heikhalot literature, the Merkavah tradition, some of the Qumran writings, and apocalyptic writings to a pre-Hasmonean Zadokite priesthood which placed special emphasis on books such as Chronicles, Ezekiel, Enoch, and Jubilees. Elior identifies the Qumran community as a disenfranchised Zadokite priesthood who were denied access to the Temple by the Hasmoneans. She rejects the notion that they were comprised of a so called Essene sect which was described by Josephus and Philo. Elior describes how the Temple services emulated and coincided with the services in Heaven with the Temple representing the universe and the Holy of Holies representing Heaven as illustrated in the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice found at Qumran. The solar calendar was established in Heaven where it was taught to Enoch and subsequently passed down to Noah, Melchizedek, Levi, and Moses.

With this book, Rachel Elior has contributed a great deal to the literature of Jewish mysticism. By taking a fresh look at this area in light of the discovery of, and subsequent work on, the Dead Sea Scrolls, she has done much to round out the picture of the development of Jewish mysticism from the time of Solomon all the way to the time of the Mishnah, and even to the present day. That being said, I felt there were some omissions. I would have liked to have seen more discussion on how Jewish mysticism in general related to mysticism in other religions of the periods discussed. A footnote (no. 76 on pp.77-78) gives a tantalizing taste of Egyptian, Babylonian, Assyrian, and even Gnostic and Mithraic cosmology, but it is up to the reader to do the additional research. But since little cultural and religious development happens in a vacuum, more detail about external influences intertwined as the book moved along through the stages of history would have been valuable. Additionally, within Judaism, an explanation of the impact of the differing views of the Zadokites and Sages on each other would have been welcome. Chapter nine lists in wonderful detail the stark differences between the different traditions religious and world views, but not a whole lot is said about how they affected each other practically in history. How did they deal with each other over time (we only get the ending)? How much did polemics lead to this deep separation (this is discussed, but only sparingly)? Also, the author really seems to favor the secessionist view. I do not believe the appropriate balance was struck here. Rather there was a real sense that the rabbis were

viewed as heavy-handed in the suppression of the secessionist texts.

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