



***Enoch-Metatron* Revisited: Prayers, Adjurations, and Metonymical Hermeneutics in Premodern Jewish Mystical and Magical Texts**

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ABSTRACT This essay explores the construction of interpretive authority as a process of both creation and re-creation of meanings, and their self-legitimization in texts. The process of interpretation in that sense does not simply replace one set of meanings with another but rather metonymically enlarges the pool of signifiers by juxtaposing the traditional and the innovative, thus safeguarding the whole range of possible meanings of texts. The cluster of *topoi* relating to Enoch-Metatron, a supreme angel featuring in Jewish textual traditions, has often been employed in Jewish exegesis and magical practices in a manner that enabled the new interpretation to nest within the set of older *imaginaire*, the authority of which is never denied nor supplanted but rather empowers the new reading. This article explores the uses the Enoch-Metatron cluster of motifs as a textual device that served as an organizing principle of interpretive process and conferred authority to new interpretations and new compilations of texts in multiple-text handwritten volumes. The article thus foregrounds a mode of reading and refashioning of earlier Jewish textual traditions of commenting on angelic names, such as that of Enoch-Metatron. It foregrounds the perspective of the producers of individual practical compilations as participants in the collective enterprise of authorship and authorization of textual units comprised in each handwritten multiple-text volume.

KEYWORDS Jewish Mysticism, Jewish Magic, Practical Kabbalah, Enoch-Metatron, authority, metonymy, compilation

Introduction: Textual Precedents

Textual traditions pertaining to the figure of Enoch-Metatron have long been of interest [1] to scholars, especially of early Jewish apocalypticism and mysticism.¹ The early ‘Enochic’

1 The bibliography of the subject is immense. A general outline of the ongoing scholarly debate and bibliographical details can be found in the following studies: Odeberg (1928); Himmelfarb (1988, 73–100, 1993);

literature—narrating the story of the seventh antediluvian patriarch Enoch—has been studied in the context of its influence on forms of worship in both Jewish and emerging Christian milieus, and led some scholars to discern an ‘Enochic’ strand of Judaism, which arguably paralleled the mainstream form of worship during the Second Temple period.² Within the studies of Jewish mysticism, it was Gershom Scholem who first took great interest in the literature related to Enoch and Metatron and claimed continuity between Jewish apocalypticism and early mysticism represented in the so-called *heikhalot* literature.³ Since then, many scholars have engaged in discussing the importance of Enochic traditions in the development of Jewish mysticism, either maintaining, discarding, or reversing Scholem’s claim of chronological linkage between Jewish apocalyptic and mystical traditions, adding the relevance of the Greco-Roman or Byzantine culture as necessary backgrounds against which the literatures on Enoch should be interpreted.⁴

A keen interest of Jewish esoteric circles, both in the figure of Enoch and in Metatron as his angelic manifestation, is of paramount importance for the study of post-ancient Jewish mysticism and magic.⁵ The early Jewish mystical texts, which included textual traditions on Enoch and his transformation into the angel Metatron, were preserved and underwent extensive redaction among medieval Ashkenazi (that is, Franco-German) mystical circles, as attested by medieval manuscripts of Ashkenazi origin.⁶ The manuscripts containing *heikhalot* texts attest to the mutual influence of the Ashkenazi mystics on the form of the *heikhalot* corpus as it is known today, and of the *heikhalot* texts on some of the main facets of Ashkenazi pietistic and mystical thought.⁷ In such a form, the *heikhalot* literature inevitably inspired nascent kabbalistic thought of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁸ The significance of Enoch-Metatron traditions in mystical thought and practice that flourished in Ashkenazi mystical circles—as manuscript evidence from the late medieval and early modern period suggests—continued to impress upon Kabbalah well into the early modern period, especially those types of Kabbalah which thrived in close contact with the textual and scribal traditions of medieval Ashkenaz.⁹

This article begins with an exploration of those Jewish textual traditions which present Enoch-Metatron as a mediator of Israel’s prayer, a divine manifestation with whom the individual connects through the performance of prayer and whom one controls via magical (coercive) rituals. These textual traditions sparked a debate among premodern Jewish audi-

Alexander (1983, 87–122); Boyarin (2004, 2010, 2018); Reed (2005a); Orlov (2005); Schäfer (2009); Geller (2010); Orlov and Boccaccini (2012); Kister (2014); Hamidovic (2017); Paz (2019). This research was supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG), within the Emmy Noether project “Patterns of Knowledge Circulation: The Transmission and Reception of Jewish Esotericism in Manuscripts and Print in Early Modern East-Central Europe” (no. 401023278).

2 See Milik (1976); Reed (2005b, 336–44); Boyarin (2005); Harding (2006, 587–92); Schäfer (2012).

3 See Scholem (1967, 43, 67–70, 1965, 41–42, 1974, 377–81). For a revision of the early chronology and locating the origins of the Enoch-Metatron tradition in Palestine of ca. 700 CE, see Paz (2019).

4 See Vajda (1979, 345–54); Segal (1980, 333–94); Idel (1990, 1996, 2001); Schneider (2001, 287–319); Abrams (2012, 17–35, especially notes 22, 29–30, and 34); Herrmann (2013); Schäfer (2013).

5 See, e.g., Idel (2008).

6 See Kuyt (1993, 62–86); Herrmann (1993, 97–116); Dan (1999); Idel (2006, 47–94, 2007b, 242–44).

7 For the corpus of the so-called *heikhalot* literature, see Schäfer (1981, 1984, 1986); Schäfer et al. (1987); Davila (2013).

8 *Kabbalah* denotes a particular variety of Jewish mysticism which emerged in the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Provence and Spain. It was generally concerned with the inner structure and processes taking place within the divine realms structured into ten emanations or divine energies (*sefirot*), on whose metaphysical dynamics the kabbalists strove to exert influence.

9 See, e.g., Wolfson (1995, 60–92); Abrams (1994, 291–321).

ences over the legitimacy of prayer directed to an intermediary semi-divine figure and, as such, over the authority of interpretive traditions referring to it, which in some form or other extended major influence on kabbalistic texts and practices ever since. By focusing on the cluster of traditions concerned with Enoch-Metatron, this article will firstly examine a particular method of bestowing authority onto new and innovative mystical, kabbalistic, and magical interpretation in the context of medieval Central Europe (Ashkenaz). Secondly, the Enoch-Metatron traditions will serve to zoom in on the appositions of meanings of medieval texts as they feature copied and compiled into novel material and textual contexts of postmedieval Ashkenazi multiple-text compilations.¹⁰

In the textual sources that will be surveyed below, the claim to authority of new interpretations and textual legitimacy relies largely on metonymical hermeneutics, where no layer of meaning is to be relinquished or is inharmonious with any other, but rather each adds a surplus layer which, in turn, produces additional meanings.¹¹ This hermeneutical stand tallies with a metonymical understanding of reality, wherein the constant process of interpretation and reinterpretation embraces and safeguards an unlimited reservoir of meanings. This type of mystical or kabbalistic hermeneutics thus establishes its authority by the appeal to a divine source of knowledge (originality) and to the inheritance of that divine knowledge through firm and authoritative transmission (tradition),¹² making explicit the reliance of the interpretive tradition on a particular concept of revelation. Furthermore, the authority of new interpretations is reinforced through the inventive application of sophisticated, and often radical, exegetical devices. In what follows, the cluster of Enoch-Metatron traditions will be examined as one that not only affirms the claim to authority of the interpretation within which it is contextualised, but which also re-establishes the intellectual authority of the textual community, be it the primary or secondary Jewish elite within which the interpretation emerged.¹³ The article thus pivots on the modes of rereading, rewriting, and reinventing of earlier strata of textual traditions related to Enoch-Metatron. In doing so, it foregrounds the perspective of the producers and later users and readers of texts who rely on metonymical hermeneutics as equal participants in the collective enterprise of authorship and authorization of textual traditions.

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Praying to Angels: Layering and Authorising of Interpretations

Enoch-Metatron Between Ashkenazi Mysticism and Early Spanish Kabbalah

For the majority of pre-kabbalistic movements flourishing in Ashkenaz in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, one of the main points of interest was the intention of prayer. The question might be seen as being rooted in a larger discussion on the shape of the godhead and the position of divine Glory (*Shekhinah*) within the divine structure.¹⁴ The pre-kabbalistic inter-

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10 For the employment of ‘tradition’ as a strategy of authority that largely depends on historically and culturally construed expectations of its audience, see Lincoln (1994, 11). For a reference of this authorizing strategy to thirteenth-century Catalonia, see Idel (2007a, 69–113). On matters of authorization of secret knowledge and their revelation in writing, see Fishbane (2018, 89–113).

11 See, in passing, Paluch (2014, 2011, 109–30).

12 See Szpiech (2012, 63); Grafton (1990, 55); Fishbane (2004, 65).

13 On the construction of interpretive authority in the Second Temple period, see Najman (2000, 314–15).

14 This same problem had already been addressed by earlier Jewish thinkers, i.e., in the literature of the Geonic period; however, only in medieval Ashkenazi Pietism was it reinterpreted into a mystical theosophy emphasizing distance between God and his hypostasis. See Scholem (1974, 17–35).

pretations grappled with the dominant view that stressed continuity between the divine and its various manifestations or attributes representing the divine in the world. In the rabbinic tradition, the divine will, although single, might be represented by multiple attributes or aspects, including a supreme angel or a semi-divine being, Metatron.¹⁵ The rabbinic anxiety seems to refer to the separation of divine wills (or “ruling authorities”),¹⁶ but not to a potential multiplicity of heavenly beings or divine manifestations which could be accepted as long as they were viewed as aspects of one continuous divine entity. With the distinction between God and divine manifestation (hypostasis, divine Glory, or the angel Metatron), discussed in the pre-kabbalistic mystical thought, ensued a difficulty regarding the entity to which one should direct prayers. This question precipitated various reformulations of the status of Metatron as an elevated being, deemed conterminous and yet dependent on God.¹⁷

The matter of proper intention of prayer becomes more complex in such textual sources wherein the dynamic theosophy of *sefirot*, which gained popularity in early thirteenth-century Spain, confronts pre-kabbalistic textual traditions, popularised in Ashkenaz (Franco-German territories) and largely concerned with the status of intermediary beings between divine and human worlds.¹⁸ One of such extant sources features in a manuscript from the British Library, Add MS 27142.¹⁹ It contains a transcription of a two-page anonymous textual unit that likely originated in the intellectual circles of Gerona, approximately dating to the mid-thirteenth century.²⁰ The text begins with a brief recounting of the story of Enoch ben Jared, the seventh antediluvian patriarch, whom God took to heaven and transformed into the highest of angels because, according to the text, God had a fondness towards number seven:

[1] We have received [Hebr. *kibbalnu*] that Metatron, Prince of the Countenance, whose name is like the name of his Master, is Enoch ben Jared, as was accounted in *Bereshit Rabba* and *Heikhalot*. He was of the seventh generation from Adam, because the Holy One, blessed be He, was fond of heptads,²¹ like Sabbath, the world-to-come, and the others, [and] because of the light of the seven *sefirot*, that is the righteousness in this world.²² Enoch earned this because of the deeds of Enosh the wicked and his generation, who disavowed the upper family [*pamalia*] with the sorcery.²³ He [Enoch] burned with great zeal for the Name and destroyed

15 See *bBerakhot* 7a.

16 See *bHagiga* 15a. See Segal (1977, x); Hayman (1991, 1–15); Liebes (1990, chaps. 1–3); Assaraf (1991); Stroumsa (1981, 808–18); Halperin (1988, 31–37, 202–5); Kister (2014, 43–88).

17 See Abrams (1994, 291–321).

18 See Weiss (2020, 22–35). *Sefirot*, that is, the decadic structure of the godhead that resulted from a variously conceptualized process of emanation, became a cornerstone for the development of kabbalistic theories and practices in the medieval period.

19 BL Add 27142 is a composite manuscript comprising a compilation of kabbalistic texts, written in a sixteenth-century Italian cursive and semi-cursive, and fifteenth-century Italian-Ashkenazi semi-cursive script (multiple hands). For a detailed list of textual units of this manuscript, see https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?index=0&ref=Add_MS_27142 (last accessed on 11 December 2021).

20 Fols. 108v–109v (Italian semi-cursive script). Near-exact recension of the same text is preserved in an early sixteenth-century Italian-Ashkenazi MS Paris, BNF heb. 974, 181r–182r. A slightly different version of this short treatise contains a fifteenth-century manuscript of Sephardic derivation, now in a private collection, quoted in English in Idel (2007b, 651–52). All three texts were presented in a synoptic edition and with a short commentary in Weiss (2018, 193–208). On the purported origins of this text, see esp. (2018, 193–95).

21 See *Leviticus Rabbah* 29:11; *Pesikta de-rav Kahana* 23:10.

22 See a different reading in Idel (2007b, 652).

23 See *3Enoch*, chapter 3. See Idel (2007b, 666 n. 77) and his comparison of this idea to the Ashkenazi material contained in BL Add MS 15299, f. 45v, wherein the book of Enoch is said to have been invested with magic. See also below for the Enoch-Metatron tradition in its Ashkenazi-magical context.

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them with the power of names and incantations which he pronounced, and the Holy One, blessed be He, separated him from his companions, his soul mastered over his body, and his flesh turned into flaming fire, and he became an angel. [That is why] God let him rule over the upper and lower family [*pamalia*]. And he received [the influx] from the lower attribute of judgement.²⁴ It is written: ‘And he is no more, for God took him.’ (Gen. 5:24) He is the Prince of the World²⁵ and is comprised of the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He, and his name is like the name of his Master, the small Tetragrammaton’.

[2] I heard [*shama’ti*] that the verse (Prov. 10:25): ‘righteous is the foundation of the world’ refers to him, because for a single righteous the world exists, this is Enoch son of Jared. And there are those who direct their intention during prayer to him, and they gave the explanation for their words that because they are impure and low, how it is possible in their mind to pray to the Highest of Highest [*‘ilat ha-‘ilot*], may he be elevated. But since the Prince is authorised [to rule] over the matters of the world, we will pray to him.

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[3] But this is not our intention, for it is clear to us that there is the providence of the Holy One, blessed be He, over particulars and universals, why should we not pray to Him. He, blessed be He, listens to prayer and agrees to implorations, and does not judge according to [stern] judgement. The Scripture cries: ‘do not turn to idols’ (Ex. 19:4), the servants on high who are called ‘idols’ [lit. ‘gods,’ *elilim*], from the word ‘god’ [*el*], as opposite to those who pray to them and whose prayer is futile and vain, for the Holy One, blessed be He has no intention to separate Himself from the one who prays to him, but rather our intention [should be] to pray to the Highest of Highest which is called *Keter ‘Elyon* [the uppermost Crown, i.e., the highest of ten *sefirot*].²⁶

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The text provides a unique insight into the early thirteenth-century Jewish debate on the structure of the divine, with consequences for cultic life. It reveals a tension between dissonant theological interpretations with regards to the function of the angel Metatron within divine *pleroma*, and as such to the possibility of directing prayers to it instead of the divine, or the infinite God himself. The first part of the text introduces various commonplace ideas about Enoch ben Jared, all rooted both in the early rabbinic and the mystical literatures of *heikhalot*, to which corpora the scribe(s) and editor(s) of this particular text explicitly refer. The subsequent parts, although refuting the clout of Enoch-Metatron as the addressee of human prayers, never explicitly reject the legitimacy of Enoch-related traditions evoked in the initial paragraphs. As a result, one may see the text as a rejection of a particular concept related to the possible ‘cult’ of Enoch-Metatron,²⁷ but in no way as a disavowal of the exceptional status of Enoch-Metatron within the divine world.

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The narrative quoted above refers the discourses of both those who accept and those who reject the custom of praying to the angel to familiar notions grounded in well-established interpretive tradition. Thus anteriority and continuity of a certain textual tradition, which

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24 A marginal gloss in the version quoted by Idel in (2007b, 652).

25 *bHullin* 60a.

26 MS BL Add 27142, ff. 108v-109r, printed in Scholem (1948, 252–54), and included in the synoptic edition of this text in Weiss 2018, 193-208. See a variant English translation of this text based on a different manuscript, MS Jerusalem [Private], in Idel (2007b, 651–52).

27 On a potential ‘cult of Metatron’ in the Middle Ages, see Idel (2007b, 645–70).

the text transmits, serve here as a typical rhetorical means to authorise the whole theological claim that ensues in the following parts of the text.²⁸ Relying on that method, the first textual part builds on an image of Enoch-Metatron as chosen by God on the grounds of his predestined exceptionality, construed not only from righteousness and zeal (as a remarkable feature of human beings born among the generation of the wicked), as has been suggested by scholars,²⁹ but most prominently from his connection with the structure of both creation (based on Enoch's correspondence to heptads) and the divine itself. The anonymous text conflates narratives on Enoch as an exceedingly righteous human who undergoes a process of "angelification" with those referring to Metatron as a being that predates creation, who is related to time (Sabbath, world-to-come) and spatial dimensions ("pillar") of the created world, is contingent on divine attributes ("judgement"), and who bears a divine name ("small Tetragrammaton").³⁰ These four 'ontological' aspects of Metatron, well-grounded in earlier strata of textual traditions, are by no means questioned. Quite the opposite, it seems perfectly acceptable to the compiler of the text to follow the convention established by earlier sources and emphasise the role of the angel as the ruler of the created world, who governs over its matters by God's permission (*murshah 'al ha-'olam*, lit., has been given authority over the world).

A Medieval Textual Unit on Prayers to Angels in Post-Medieval Codices

From the perspective of extant manuscripts, it is the sixteenth-century Italian compilation (BL Add MS 27142) that integrates both kabbalistic and other strata of traditions concerning Metatron well into the main body of text. The reference to the lower seven *sefirot*, of which Metatron is supposed to be comprised, is only a marginal scribal addition in the earliest of the three extant copies of the same textual unit.³¹ More than that, the two extant early modern renditions of the text—British Library Add MS 27142 and Bibliothèque nationale de France hebr. 974—are composite, multiple-text manuscripts of Italian and Italian-Ashkenazi derivation, respectively. Both composite volumes compile fair copies of predominantly kabbalistic but also practical kabbalistic and philosophical texts. These early modern composite volumes suggest a propensity of their producers toward compilatory heterogeneity, with no preference given to any one textual tradition or their implied hierarchies.

The short text on the proper intention of prayer quoted above, copied into the heterogeneous manuscript compilations, might appear to be taking issue with consequences for practical cultic life brought about by two variant yet equally relevant conceptualisations of the heavenly world, the angelic and the *sefirotic*, that stemmed from different interpretive cultures.³² The traditions brought together by both the anonymous editors and compilers of the textual unit—as well as those copyists and redactors who engaged in the production of the manuscript volumes in which the text appears—do not disavow either of the theosophies they contain but rather overlay the earlier traditions regarding the supreme angel with the *sefirotic* organisation of the divine world. This juxtaposition of traditions, which may have originated in formerly

28 See Hervieu-Léger (1993, 141).

29 See Idel (2007b, 108–64); Weiss (2015, 28–32).

30 *b*Sanhedrin 38b; 3Enoch 12:5 (*Synopse* §15); Alexander (1983, 265). See also Dan (1993, 109); Alexander (1977, 167). Tetragrammaton denotes the ineffable four-letter divine name, *YHVH*.

31 See MS Jerusalem [Private] and note 26 above.

32 See, however, a different view of Weiss (2015, 24–39). On the accruing of variant meanings by the Enoch-Metatron figure, from a literary/textual perspective, see also Miller (2016, 138) who states that "the contextual environments have been a significant factor in the development of [...] the nature of Enoch's evolution."

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distinct mystical and philosophical circles, presents an example of metonymical hermeneutics, both on the level of an individual text and of a compilation of texts contained in the multiple-text manuscript compilations. In such juxtapositions, no layer of meaning or interpretation is forsaken or viewed as conflicting with others. Rather, each reveals another dimension that generates surplus meaning within its textual and material context, depending on the changing interpretive needs of the producers of textual compilations.³³

‘Enoch-Metatron Exegesis’ in the Ashkenazi Interpretive Tradition

The Commentary on the Seventy Names and the Sinaitic Revelation

The reworking of Enoch-Metatron traditions within new theosophical and/or cultic frameworks is one of the most cogent modes in which authoritative tradition is at the same time construed and conveyed, both in the pre-kabbalistic and kabbalistic texts. In the Ashkenazi context, however, the Enoch-Metatron cluster of traditions was frequently employed in a more radical manner. In many cases, the insertion of the Enoch-Metatron motif into the interpreted text, literary and material, with which it would have previously had little connection on the literal level, affirmed the authority of the new commentary, or, in fact, any novel interpretation. In many of the medieval Ashkenazi mystical works, the cluster of Enoch-Metatron traditions binds together a wide variety of intertextual associations previously dissociated.³⁴ The Enoch-Metatron figure serves not only as a symbolic reference to the divine realm, which is how it would be viewed through the kabbalistic or any mystical-theosophical lenses, but also as a strong hermeneutical device authorising and prompting the interpretative process to thrive in multiple directions. Both of these functions render the use of Enoch-Metatron motifs one of the most pervasive “authority conferring strategies,”³⁵ which exerted more influence on post-medieval Jewish mystical circles than has previously been assumed.³⁶

One of the ways in which the ‘Enoch-Metatron exegesis’ was conducive to authorise interpretation and therefore support novel religious assertions based on scriptural interpretation was its association with moments of divine revelation from the biblical past. By linking the appearance of Enoch-Metatron with the manifestation of God both at the Red Sea and at Mount Sinai, the passages of Scripture into which the Enoch-Metatron motif has been inserted gain an additional connotation of assumed prophetic or revelatory status. The association of the angelic revelation with Israel’s redemption underlies many of the medieval pietistic texts, especially those associated with the early thirteenth-century mystic, Nehemiah ben Shelomoh of Erfurt, whose numerous writings had a bearing on later messianic-redemptive and also practical kabbalistic traditions in the Ashkenazi world.³⁷ One of the most widespread textual units,

33 See Jakobson (1971, 76–82) which employs a definition of metonymy as a trope; Lakoff and Johnson (1981, 35–41). On metonymy and the Jewish interpretive tradition, see Handelman (1983, 74–76, 88); Mottolese (2007, 352–57, 370).

34 See Idel (2009, 223–27).

35 See Najman (2010, 39–40).

36 See, e.g., Paluch (2014).

37 See Liebes (1987, 171–98). In a series of articles, Moshe Idel recognized and mapped out a set of commentaries on a variety of divine and angelic names, alongside commentaries on liturgical poems and parts of prayers that can be traced to the exegetical output of Nehemiah ben Shelomoh, in some sources referred to as rabbi Troestlin, a “prophet” from Erfurt, active in the 20s and 30s of the thirteenth century. See Idel (2019, esp. n. 6) and further bibliography and a list of primary sources adduced there.

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or rather a set of units, stemming from this mystical-pietistic circle appears in manuscripts under the title of the *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Sar ha-Panim*. This set of texts encompasses an elaboration on the motif of the supreme angel, a heavenly being who bears seventy (in fact, occasionally a few less or a few more) names, sharing this feature with the divine.³⁸ This group of medieval Ashkenazi texts expounds on redemptive imagery, together with the notion of angelic inference in worldly matters, moulded on the appearance of the supreme angel (*Sar ha-Panim*, i.e., the Prince of the Countenance, identified with Enoch-Metatron) who guided Israel during the exodus from Egypt. Thus, two instances of Israel's direct experience of God in history, the revelation of God on Sinai and God's intervention at the Red Sea, were translated into events mediated to humans through the angel Metatron:

'A young lion' [*gur aryeh*, = 425] is numerically equivalent to [the phrase] 'creator is youth' [*bore' bahur*, = 425], for when the Holy One, blessed be He, fought upon the Sea, He was revealed to Israel as a youth³⁹ ready for war, as it says, 'the Lord is a warrior' (Ex. 15:3), and when He was revealed to them on Mount Sinai, He appeared as an elder expounding [Torah] in an academy.⁴⁰ [16]

The revelation of the divine in human history was thus embedded into what could be called an Enoch-Metatron exegesis. The passage quoted above deploys several motifs that complement each other while metonymically preserving all of their initial meanings. Hence, what in the biblical story was literally understood as an episode of unmediated encounter with a divine presence presents itself to the Ashkenazi commentator(s) also as a manifestation of God's attributes in the shape of the angel Metatron. On the other hand, the appearance of the angel of God at the Red Sea as accounted by Scripture was associated with Enoch-Metatron, but also rendered into direct theophany. By equalling the theophany at Sinai with the appearance of the divine as Metatron at the sea, what might have been understood as an indirect revelation of the Torah mediated by the angel becomes a direct experience of the divine. By inserting references to Enoch-Metatron into those parts of Scripture previously not related to it, the Ashkenazi commentator(s) validate new meanings by anchoring them in a direct revelation associated with both the angel and the divine. [17]

According to some Jewish mystical traditions which were transmitted through the early apocryphal and *heikhalot* literature up to the medieval Ashkenazi mystical and magical cir- [18]

38 The traditions of multiple names of the angel Metatron appear already in the early Jewish sources. Mentions of a list of seventy names emerge in the so-called *heikhalot* texts and in later rabbinic commentative literature (*midrashim*), while some of the names surface in the Talmud with reference to the divine. It is, however, in the medieval tradition that we begin to find these mentions and the list of seventy names elevated to a different level and placed at a center of distinct exegetical enterprises.

39 The appellative 'youth' [*na'ar*] is one of the most common cognomens for the Enoch-Metatron figure in the Jewish rabbinical and mystical tradition. See 3Enoch, 82, 188-192; Scholem (1965, 43-55); Abrams (1994); Davila (2003, 261-62); Idel (2007b, 130-48). On earlier occurrences of the term 'youth' in Hebrew religious literature see Fossum (1995, 281-82); Corbin (1997, 275-76, 280-81).

40 MS Cambridge Add 405, f. 314v. Cf. MS Oxford-Bodleian Opp. 495, f. 15r: "For the honorable Holy One, blessed be He, was revealed on the Sea as a warrior and on Mount Sinai He began with [the word] 'I' [*anokhi*], and was revealed as an elder sitting upon His throne of glory." See also a passage from another text of Nehemiah ben Shelomoh in MS Munich 92, f. 28v, wherein the merging between representable and intelligible attributes of God and Metatron are even more evident: "[The word] *anokhi* refers to the Glory, for the Holy One, blessed be He, showed the throne of glory upon the Sea [...], as it says in the *Book of Palaces*, the length of the Holy One, blessed be He, is one hundred eighty myriad *parasangs* and the length is two hundred thirty-six myriad *parasangs*, as the number of 'of great power' [*ve-rav koah*], as it is said, 'Great is our Lord and full of power' (Ps. 147:5). He showed His length upon the Sea."

cles, the transmission of the divine Law to humans on Mount Sinai was possible only through the mediation of angels.⁴¹ In the passage of *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Sar ha-Panim* quoted above, however, it is the human origin of the angel that is foregrounded, since the commentary plays on the double nature of Metatron as both young (in the heavenly retinue) and old (in his human form before apotheosis). Moreover, the revelatory experience at sea resembles the revelation at Mount Sinai, for Israel's conduct at the sea brings about the intervention of the supreme angel who is designated not only as Israel's supporter ("ready for war") but also teacher of the Torah (in the heavenly academy). As such, the Ashkenazi interpretation organizes its religious message around the notion of Enoch-Metatron as a bearer of divine redemptive power and as a conveyor of divine knowledge, both mediated through direct revelation of an exemplary figure *per se* who possessed an immediate and substantive connection not only to humans but also to God.⁴²

This twofold nature of the supreme angel takes over the instances of anthropomorphic representations of God in Scripture, rendering the highest grade of divine infinite and abstract whilst subsuming Enoch-Metatron under the grade of divine that would be perceptible by humans through revelation or prophetic vision. With this interpretive move—which links the appearance of the supreme angel with the Sinaitic revelation, regarded as the most significant moment of Israel's history that bound the Israelites to God through the authority of Law—the angel assumes a quasi-divine role. Consequently, any subsequent instance of Metatron's intervention in worldly matters would be accorded the same authoritative semi-divine status. This in turn propels, on the hermeneutical plane, the use of 'Enoch-Metatron exegesis' to authorise new interpretive enterprises, wherein new meanings would be obtained and enforced by direct relation to the angelic, and effectively divine, revelation.

The authoritative interpretation, even the most radical, is automatically validated and institutionalized by its insertion into a chain of tradition of supreme authority, i.e., the Torah and its revelation to humans at Sinai.⁴³ The correlation between the revelations of Metatron as a semi-divine being and the prophetic status of the purported author(s) of the commentaries on the angel's names adds another layer of importance to the reliance on revelation as a mode of conferring authority to the textual interpretation. Such a correlation indeed occurs in much more explicit terms in later forms of Jewish mystical and practically oriented texts that absorb the importance of the Enoch-Metatron cluster of motifs from the earlier pietistic and mystical-magical Ashkenazi writings.⁴⁴

Authorising Magical Practices: Rereading the Medieval *Commentary on the Seventy Names* in an Early Modern Codex

The genre of commentaries on the names of Sar ha-Panim constitutes but one part of the textual strand of Jewish mystical or mystical-magical tradition that thrived in Ashkenazi circles and that placed the lists of angelic names at the center of distinct exegetical enterprises. The *Commentary on the Seventy Names* is one expression of such enterprise; however, it is ex-

41 On early precedents of these traditions see Najman (2010, 121–42).

42 See Weber's concept of 'prophet' as the basis of religious authority in (1980, 271–73); on 'master-disciple' relation see Renger (2012).

43 The Sinaitic revelation becomes the main point of reference for kabbalists, especially in the early modern period, in establishing interpretive authority. For instance, the followers of Isaac Luria (1534–72), a kabbalist active in Safed, Palestine, perceived the ongoing study and reinterpretation of Torah as tantamount to its new, mystical revelation on Sinai. See, e.g., Weinstein (2016, 57–58).

44 See Idel (1988, 2007b, 199–216, 2011, 100–102).

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tant in several versions and material formats. At its basis lays the hermeneutics of reading of often obscure cognomens attributed to the supreme angel Metatron, which, as seen above, sets out a causal relation between the angelic name, the biblical text, and any potential and meaningful linguistic unit in Hebrew. This complex relation is conditioned by shared para-semantic features of the text, either of numerical equivalences between any given name and a related linguistic unit or units, or a rearrangement and combination of letters that build up the name into a new and semantically valid textual block.⁴⁵ The commentary thus begins with expounding on an angelic name by juxtaposing it with its numerical equivalent(s). Subsequently, it provides either one or more concise interpretations of the name of rather arbitrary nature but related to the cognomen's numerical value. For instance, in a longer version of the *Commentary* we may read:

Yefeifyah, **by way of numerology**, [is] 'the end' [קצה = 195], because he is the Prince of the Torah, which is without end, as Scripture says: 'The measure thereof is longer than the Earth' [Job 11:9]. He is also the one who rained down the manna upon Israel, which tastes like honey. And the Torah has been compared to honey. And they [the Israelites] said: 'Our soul loathed [this light bread]' קצה נפשנו קצה [קצה = 195] [Num. 21:5], to inform [him] that they loathed and were bored with the Torah and the manna. **By way of numerology**, [he is also] 'the hidden' [הנעלם = 195], because he is more hidden than any of the serving angels on high. **By way of numerology** [he is also] 'vengeance' [נקמה = 195], because the one who knows the seventy names of the Prince of the Countenance is able to wreak vengeance upon the nations.⁴⁶

[22]

This eclectic commentary incorporates a variety of themes, from associations with Sinaitic theophany to practical angelology to magic. It is of note, however, that this multi-dimensional nature of the text is facilitated by its adaptable and potentially open-ended structure. The addition of new interpretive angles depends, per the text's hermeneutic rule, on para-semantic correspondences between the commentary's constitutive components. It is thus not unexpected that the *Commentary on the Seventy Names* assumed various shapes, lengths, but also interpretive inclinations, in the long history of its transmission in both handwritten and printed formats, while still preserving its structural idiosyncrasy. In that sense, the *Commentary on the Seventy Names* constitutes a fecund genre of writing, one that emerges out of the repetition, accumulation, and re-arrangement of short textual-numerical building blocks related to the *topoi* of Enoch-Metatron, as it lends itself to creative emulations and adaptations with each act of its copying, recopying, and compiling.

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Several versions of the text of the *Commentary on the Seventy Names* appear in a number of medieval and early modern manuscripts of heterogenous derivation and provenance. One of the relatively late renditions of this text features in an early eighteenth-century volume of practical and kabbalistic knowledge, currently held by the National Library of Israel (MS 8^o 1070).⁴⁷ Local, that is, Polish-Ashkenazi traditions of both vernacular and learned, of theoret-

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45 As noted in Idel (2019), the *Commentary on the Seventy Names*, as well as other texts attributed to Nehemiah ben Shelomoh, generally exhibit an easily replicable, tripartite structure. This compositional feature is especially evident in longer versions of the text of the *Commentary on the Seventy Names*, and less so in its shorter manifestations.

46 *Sefer ha-Heshek*, §36.

47 See a digital facsimile of this manuscript at https://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/English/digitallibrary/pages/viewer.aspx?&presentorid=MANUSCRIPTS&docid=PNX_MANUSCRIPTS990000422470205171-1#%7CFL46084111 (retrieved on 8 February 2022).

ical and practical, and of Jewish and Christian provenance transmitted mainly in Hebrew and Yiddish, but with elements of Latin, German, and Polish language, are well attested throughout the codex. This in-octavo compilation of two hundred and ninety-one folios of recipes and practical advice of all kinds assumed its form thanks to the work of one scribe and compiler who wrote all the recipes and excerpts in the body of text as well as most of the marginal notes and interlinear comments.⁴⁸

Apart from numerous recipes that operate with simple natural substances as remedies, the volume also holds a text which the scribe had entitled the Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron [sic].⁴⁹ This textual unit seems unfinished, breaking off after about one quarter of the supposed whole, that is, after the sixteenth out of the seventy names announced in the text's title. It is followed by an almost empty page, perhaps left for future continuation or additions. The short text departs from all known versions of *The Commentary on Seventy Names*, and yet it is not only through its title that it may be associated with the genre of the commentaries on the lists of names of Sar ha-Panim-Metatron that bourgeoned in the medieval Ashkenaz. The text's short, often one-line comments on the names of Metatron follow the tripartite arrangement, wherein each name is followed by its numerical coefficient and subsequently a brief interpretation of the latter.⁵⁰ Moreover, many of the numerical coefficients (*gematri'ot*) used in this text, albeit in a very concise form, appear in other versions of *The Commentary on Seventy Names* and across the corpus of texts attributed to Nehemiah ben Shelomoh. Thus, for instance, the second of the names commented upon reads:

Yaho'el [= 52], by way of numerology amounts to Elohi [= 52], and he is the judge on high, in the great court of law, and by way of numerology [it] equals Eliyahu [= 52], because Eliyahu learned all of the teachings from the mouth of Metatron.⁵¹

Indeed, as has been noted by scholars, many of the texts attributed to Nehemiah ben Shelomoh include short comments on the name of angel Yaho'el, the prophet Elijah, and other coefficients of number 52.⁵² Other numerological equivalents, however, even though familiar from Nehemiah ben Shelomoh's commentaries, do not seem to fit very well in the concise *Commentary on Seventy Names*. And so, one of the angelic names is juxtaposed with one exact numerical coefficient and one that is off the mark by 51:

Itatiyah [= 44] by way of numerology equals "the dew" [= 44], because he is in charge of the dew, and by way of numerology, the throne of Y" H [= 95], that is to say, he will wreak vengeance on Amalek, as it is written [Exod. 17:16], "Because [Amalek] lifted his hand against the throne of the LORD, [the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation]."⁵³

48 It was most likely intended for the individual use of the compiler, Elhanan, as his knowledge and collection of sources progressed. See NLI MS 8 1070, folio 35r: "I tested it, Elhanan", or folio 96r: "so it seems, in my humble opinion, Elhanan". The volume breaks off with a short scribal colophon, folio 289v: "all this [comes] from my grandfather, our teacher and master Elhanan B[a'al]K[abbalah]" [i.e., the master of *kabbalah*].

49 This seems unusual since the seventy names traditionally refer to *Sar ha-Panim*, that is, the Prince of the Countenance, one of whose names is Metatron.

50 See note 45 above.

51 NLI MS 8 1070, fol. 192v.

52 On this feature of Nehemiah ben Shelomoh's texts, see Idel (2007b, 199–203).

53 NLI MS 8 1070, fol. 192v.

This seemingly haphazard distribution of some of the numerical equivalents across the interpretations of angelic names is, however, not as striking as this text's overwhelmingly magical penchant. Already its introductory formula sets a performative, magical framework for the text to follow. It proclaims the seventy names of Metatron to be practically usable for all purposes and available for those persons who are knowledgeable (of the names), keep ritual purity, abstain from sexual activity, fast, and study Torah. Indeed, all the known versions of the *Commentary on the Seventy Names*, attributed to Nehemiah ben Shelomoh, contain some magical elements.⁵⁴ These elements transpire in the frequent final formulas that point to the usefulness of some of the angelic names for certain purposes, such as good memory or good fortune. Their usage is predicated on the notion that the angelic names (the cognomens of Metatron), already contained in and thus derivable from Scripture, mediate between the divine and the created world, as much as Enoch-Metatron mediates between the upper and the lower levels of reality. Consequently, it is knowledge of the names of Metatron and of their appropriate applications that can be deployed for practical purposes, having the power to bring about desired results within the physical world. Moreover, the construction of textual authority might in this case, as in other texts examined above, be conceived as a process of both creation and re-creation of meanings, and their self-legitimization. Interpretation in the *Commentary on Seventy Names* does not simply replace one set of meanings with another but rather enlarges the pool of signifiers by juxtaposing the traditional and the innovative, thus safeguarding the whole range of possible meanings. Indeed, the Enoch-Metatron cluster of traditions has often been employed in this mystical-magical instance of exegesis in such a manner that enables the new interpretation to nest within the set of older *imaginaire*, the authority of which is never denied nor supplanted but rather empowers the new reading. [29]

The *Commentary on Seventy Names of Metatron*, although short, contains advice on the practical application of as many as six of the sixteen names that the scribe managed to write down before breaking off the text. Some of the comments on the angelic names are solely magical, presented without any additional Scriptural contextualization or further numerical equivalents. Two of the practical comments refer to the healing power of the adjuration of angels, while others recommend adjurations to ward off evil spirits, prevail at war, win good fortune, or calm sea storms. Most curiously, one of the sixteen comments intertwines with a practical recipe that much exceeds a simple adjuration formula. The comment concerns the name Adiriron, whose numerical value (= 485) equals that of the phrase 'mighty is his candle' (= 485).⁵⁵ Thus, the name Adiriron is charged with the power over light and darkness, as well as opening and closing windows in the upper heavens.⁵⁶ This short explanation, based on the numerical coefficients of the name Adiriron, is followed by a more technical instruction in MS NLI 8 1070: [30]

It is also good in order to bring one's partner either in one's dream or when one is awake: take an egg that was freshly laid, on Thursday or Tuesday, take fine wheat flour but from a different household, and a bit of salt from yet another household. Make a dough, in the name of so-and-so, and write on this dough: [31]

54 There are also other straightforwardly magical texts, such as adjuration formulae, attributed to Nehemiah ben Shelomoh; see, e.g., MS Genève Comites Latentes 145 (formerly Sassoon 290), folio 620; see Idel (2019, 803 nn. 8-9).

55 The name Adiriron is known in the literature of *heikhalot*, esp. from 3Enoch, see Odeberg (1928, 164). It reappears in the Ashkenazi-mystical texts with various functions, e.g., in texts from the so-called Special Cherub Circle, such as *Pesak ha-Yir'ah veha-Emunah*, see Dan (1991, 199) and *Baraita de-Yosef ben 'Uzi'el*, see MS NY JTS 1885, fol. 73r, wherein Adiriron stands for the lower aspect of the Special Cherub figure. See

Adiriron. Immersion and fasting is required from the person [on whose behalf you put forward this request]. Afterwards, take half of the dough, in the name of so-and-so, and let it be eaten by the person who requested, and put the other half under his head to sleep upon. It has been tested.⁵⁷

Even if other known versions of *The Commentary on the Seventy Names* preserve magical formulas related to angelic adjurations and must have been read in the context of magical practices, none of them features any recipe of a similar kind, especially such that would preserve a “tried and tested” formula at the end.⁵⁸ It might be of secondary importance whether the scribe of MS NLI 8 1070 introduced the recipe into the commentary as a result of their own association between two initially distinct textual units, copied and merged together, or whether the commentary was copied from an earlier source that had already contained such a textual amalgam. Either of these hypotheses may only be further ascertained on discovering other copies of the so-far unique version of *The Commentary on the Seventy Names* as transcribed in the eighteenth-century Polish-Ashkenazi compilation.⁵⁹ [32]

As it now seems, at various moments of its historical circulation, the genre of the *Commentaries on the Seventy Names*, attributed to the medieval mystic Nehemiah ben Shelomoh, embraced magical and practical elements. Hermeneutically flexible, this literary genre enabled transformations and active processes of rereading and reconfiguring of its texts, particularly due to its segmental and sequential form. Situating *The Commentary* in the material context of the how-to book—predominantly concerned with practical recipes—brings to the fore a specific, historically conditioned practice of this text’s interpretation, consumption, and further transmission in the early modern Polish-Ashkenazi milieu. The practical context of the codex—compiled for the most part of recipes of all kinds—fashions the interpretation and adapts the *Commentary* to appropriately detailed practical instruction, far beyond that what is known from the earlier versions of texts belonging to the same genre. And so, incorporating a magical ritual instruction within a well-established textual genre and into the Enoch-Metatron exegetical tradition functions as an authority-conferring strategy for the novel text’s potentially unorthodox contents. Positioning *The Commentary on the Seventy Names* among excerpts of both natural, medical, alchemical, and practical kabbalistic character might imply an expression of empirical pragmatism assigned to the text, conceived in a manner fitting for applied and potentially verifiable lore intended for practical engagement, yet predicated on theological assumptions derived from the long-established cluster of traditions on Enoch-Metatron.⁶⁰ [33]

Concluding Remarks: Authorising Texts and Rereading Traditions with Enoch-Metatron

In the (con)textual interpretation, the semantic field of ‘authority’ encompasses the domi- [34]

Farber-Ginat (1978, 125, 151, 191–92); Abrams (1996, 54–55). See also Menahem Ziyoni, *Sefer Ziyoni*, 28c.

56 See a longer rendition of the *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Sar ha-Panim*, printed as *Sefer ha-Heshek*, par. 20, 223, on the name *Patspatsiyah*. See further Paluch (2014, 61–62).

57 Paluch (2014, 61–62).

58 See Harari (2017, 88 n.39).

59 Other texts attributable to Nehemiah ben Shelomoh also feature in NLI MS 8 1070, e.g., on fols. 193r (see MS Genève Comites Latentes 145, fols. 252) and fols. 196v-197v (see Oxford-Bodleian MS Opp. 495, fols. 7r-7v). On this Ashkenazi textual tradition in MS Genève 145, see Idel (2019).

60 On reading Jewish kabbalistic texts in how-to manuals and recipe books, see Paluch (2021, 100–125).

nance of a particular rendering of text, alongside the mode of its reception and transmission. This combines both *auctoritas* (stemming from *auctor*) as the ‘authority’ which refers to the (divine) source and the (human) creator, commentator, and transcriber of text, as well as the ‘authority’ denoting the ultimate reliability and lore drawn from the ‘revealed’ source.⁶¹ The act of interpretation stands for the act of authorization, as commenting upon text passes down divine presence into the new text. In that sense, interpretation is self-legitimizing, constructing the claim to superiority by evoking pre-existing structures of power which are ultimate and sanctioned as divine.⁶² This superiority is assumed as a pre-existing subject which generates its own textual lore.⁶³

In the textual examples examined above, the claim to authenticity is grounded in either direct revelation or intermediation, thus the interpretive authority is legitimized by the reception of a particular tradition from the ultimate source of truth, which is marked in the text by the reference to Enoch-Metatron. On the exegetical plane, the use of this particular cluster of traditions grants a sense of authority upon a new interpretation. This parallels the idea of authority of rule of the supreme angel in both human (as Enoch) and divine (as Metatron) realms, as in the narratives to which Enoch-Metatron motifs refer. In other terms, the official authority that Enoch-Metatron represents in the early Jewish narratives coincides with personal authority that is derived from Enoch’s individual charisma, which marks him as extraordinary both among humans and in the angelic and divine realm.⁶⁴ It might be concluded that by turning the Enoch-Metatron *topos* into an exegetical device, the charisma of an ontologically distinguished being undergoes a process of interpretive regulation. Thus, the Enoch-Metatron cluster of motifs as a textual device might have served as an organizing principle of an interpretive process that conferred authority to new interpretations.

In the textual instances surveyed in this article, the phases of the process by which the early medieval Ashkenazi tradition was subsumed in various kabbalistic and practical schemes are visible concurrently, exemplifying a metonymical type of hermeneutics. In some of the early kabbalistic works that relied on medieval Ashkenazi pietistic writings, the power of the divine was imparted onto a mediating instance, an angelic being separate from, yet in many ways coextensive with the *sefirotic* system. Such interpretation not only reshaped the Ashkenazi imagery dominated by the angelic discourse into the theosophical-*sefirotic* frame of references, but metonymically conveyed the Ashkenazi web of meanings alongside the kabbalistic terminology. Although these interpretations operated within the framework of theurgical and theosophical references predominant in Spanish Kabbalah, they preserved traces of such an understanding of the Metatron’s figure, according to which this angelic entity could be effectively invoked by means of prayer. This understanding of Metatron integrated the pre-kabbalistic Ashkenazi with the kabbalistic notions of prayer, allowing both the *sefirotic* and the angelic imagery to operate with an analogous level of authority. A view of Metatron as a hypostatic, semi-divine figure placed at the centre of human worship and at the same time

61 For related yet differing notions of *auctoritas* and *auctor* in medieval Christian exegesis, see Szpiech (2012, 63–65).

62 On self-legitimization that sustains the structures of domination, see, e.g., Weber (1978, 903–4, 953–54, 978, 1980, 549–50). On ipseity, implying tautological circularity which disseminates the origin of legitimacy, see Derrida (2002, 272–77).

63 See Derrida (1997, 163) who explains legitimation as functioning in line with a logic of ‘supplementarity’: self-legitimation promotes power structures at a basic level by creating the ‘legend’ of superiority but is defined as a non-originary feature of the order of legitimacy, justifying only those ‘superiorities’ which already exist.

64 On formal vs. personal authority, see Sofsky and Paris (1994, 42).

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central to the *sefirotic* dynamics in mediating the flow of divine energy certainly resonated in later Ashkenazi Kabbalah.

The growing body of kabbalistic literature obviously drew on older traditions, mystical or not, which by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries had already been recognised as conventional methods of Jewish exegesis. With reference to Enoch-Metatron traditions, kabbalistic writers developed a whole range of possible scriptural and practically oriented interpretations. The motif of Metatron was built upon at least on two distinct levels: of an entity distinguished by a unique ontological status, underlying the structure of the universe, and as a hermeneutical device, underlying and authorizing the structure of Scripture and other canonical religious texts. In this way, the ‘Enoch-Metatron’ cluster of *topoi* became a technical exegetical tool which grounded interpretations in multiple points of reference. This double operability of the Enoch-Metatron *cluster of references* as both a narrative and an exegetical device legitimized interpretive creativity that generated a variety of new and yet authoritative meanings with regard to the text commented upon as well as the text re-copied and re-compiled into novel material contexts. This shifting of the Enoch-Metatron themes between a literary and an exegetical tool ultimately dynamized the kabbalistic hermeneutical processes. Thus, the semantic *net* connecting the cluster of Metatron motifs, most of which had already taken shape in the medieval Ashkenazi milieu, was conducive to establishing the authority of novel textual interpretations well into the early modern period.

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The appearance of the Enoch-Metatron cluster of references under the title of *Commentary on the Seventy Names* in an early modern compilation of texts of predominantly practical character exemplifies the manner in which compilers and producers of many post-medieval manuals and how-to books engaged with well-established and authoritative mystical rhetoric and *topoi*. The genre of commentaries on the names Enoch-Metatron was thus deployed to intellectually frame and authorize a variety of practices, performances, and procedures, including those that at times may seem rather unusual or unexpected, especially to the reader accustomed to mystical or kabbalistic literatures as they have been printed and thematized in modern times. The arrogation of well- and lesser-known mystical-magical prayers and adjurations copied into private compilations and recipe books by scribes-compilers was a common practice of the early modern Jewish manuscript culture. It became tantamount to the act of producing a new and distinct text, both in terms of practical purposes and potential fresh senses achieved through its reframing in new literary and material contexts. This practice thus reflects a mode of metonymical reading and refashioning of earlier Jewish textual traditions of commenting on angelic names—such as that of Enoch-Metatron—and forefronts the perspective of the producers of individual practical compilations as participants in the collective enterprise of authorship and authorization of textual units comprised in each handwritten multiple-text volume.

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