



Jaromír Hladík

COMPLETE WORKS

The seven books, the critical dossier and the documents

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PREFACE TO THE WORK

Eleven years, from 1928 to 1939, sufficed for Jaromír Hladík to write all that justifies him. Seven books: a treatise of philosophy in two volumes, three anthologies of Jewish mysticism, an inquiry into a German theosophist, a tragedy. The apparent dispersion is deceptive. These seven books are but one, and the present volume would make it felt by gathering them, for the first time, in the order in which they were thought.

The single thread, which the studies name the having-been: the conviction that nothing that has been can cease to have been, that time does not pass as we believe, and that eternity is neither a survival nor a prolonged duration but the very reverse of passage. The Defence of Eternity carries the argument into the open: the first volume draws up the history of the eternities men have conceived, the second denies succession. All the rest of the work is its workshop or its trial.

The workshop is the Kabbalah. Before maintaining that structure precedes time, Hladík had learned it from the texts in which structure precedes the world: the Sefer Yetzirah, which forms the universe from twenty-two letters and ten numbers; the Bahir, where those numbers become powers; the Idroth, where divinity takes on a face. The Jewish Sources of Boehme extend the inquiry one step further: they show that the same grammar could, without being named, write a Christian mystic. From the letter to the power to the face, then from the Jew to the German: it is a single thought seeking its proofs.

The trial is the play. What the Defence proves by the concept, The Enemies puts to the test upon the stage; and the author's life, at the end, sealed it in his flesh. Condemned to death in March 1939, Hladík cared, says the legend Borges gathered, only for the completion of his drama. He had made the completion of a text a matter of salvation. He died, like the Rabbi Shimon of the Idroth, at the instant his word was closed.

To gather these seven books is thus less to constitute a complete works than to set out a demonstration. Each keeps here its own preface and introduction; the original German texts, the language in which Hladík thought and wrote, are reproduced in the appendix. We have wished that the reader might read, at a single stretch, the man who denied that anything that has been could ever cease to have been.

W. d. F.

CHRONOLOGY

Life and work of Jaromír Hladík

c. 1899. Born in the Josefov, the old Jewish quarter of Prague (mother of the Jaroslavski line, father a railway employee). The family soon settles on Celetná Street (Zeltnergasse).

1920–1923. Expressionist poems, scattered in Prague reviews.

1924. A selection appears in a collective anthology (Die Jungen Stimmen). Hladík would renounce these verses.

1920s. Studies at the Clementinum: Kabbalah and German baroque. Monographs on Ibn Ezra, John Dee, Robert Fludd.

1928. Sefer Yetzirah, translated and annotated in German (Berlin, Hermann Barsdorf Verlag): the only work printed in his lifetime. The same year, Defence of Eternity, Volume I (Prague, Verlag Calve).

1929. Defence of Eternity, Volume II.

1931. Sefer ha-Bahir, completed in Vienna, accepted by the publisher R. Löwit, left unpublished.

1933. The Idroth, completed on Maiselova Street; the preface lets through, for the first time, a political protest. Left unpublished.

1934. The Jewish Sources of Boehme (Prague, Mánes).

15 March 1939. The Reich's troops enter Prague.

19 March 1939. Arrest by the Gestapo, on denunciation.

21 March 1939. Sentenced to death.

29 March 1939. Execution, at nine o'clock. According to Borges's account, Hladík obtained, between the order to fire and the volley, a secret year to complete The Enemies.

1943. *Jorge Luis Borges publishes "The Secret Miracle" (Sur, Buenos Aires; collected in Ficciones, 1944).*

1993. *Exhumation of the Hradčany notebook, the German autograph of the drama.*

NOTE ON THIS EDITION

This edition gathers, in English, the seven books of Jaromír Hladík, in the order of their composition, followed by a critical dossier, the documents of the collection, a life and bibliography, and the original German texts in appendix.

*The seven works are given in their final state. Each keeps the preface and the introduction the author gave it; the notes of each book are maintained in place. From the *Sefer Yetzirah*, the only one to appear in his lifetime (Berlin, 1928), to the *Idroth* left unpublished, the texts are established from the original editions and the autographs of the Hladík collection (shelfmarks H-1931/1, H-1933/1).*

Hladík thought and wrote in German. The English translations follow his German versions, reproduced in full in the appendix at the end of the volume. A critical dossier (eight studies) and the documents of the collection (reviews, memoirs, the Barsdorf catalogue) follow the works and illuminate them without replacing them; the Note on the Provenance, among the documents, retraces the journey of the papers.

We have added nothing to the author's voice, save, clearly marked, the editor's interventions, and the modern numbering where it aids the reader.

W. d. F.

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FIRST BOOK

Sefer Yetzirah

The Book of Creation · 1928

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Prague, June 1928

I am no Hebraist by profession, and I should hardly have ventured to translate a text as cryptic as the *Sefer Yetzirah* had someone else pressed the task upon me. No one did. It came to me of its own accord, at the end of a long detour through the kabbalistic treatises, much as one realizes that a long-avoided threshold now asks to be crossed.

The *Sefer Yetzirah* is, so far as I know, one of the oldest speculative treatises in Hebrew. Where the Torah, the prophets, and even the *Hekhalot* tell stories (of creation, covenant, vision), the *Sefer* builds. It sets out numbers, letters, elements, and organs in a few pages of almost mathematical brevity. It was that brevity that arrested me. It promises a metaphysics without rhetoric, a cosmogony almost without narrative. From the first reading I sensed in it a quiet kinship with what I was struggling to write elsewhere, under the more pretentious title of *Defence of Eternity*.

The text I translate here is the so-called "short" recension, as transmitted and printed in the Mantua edition (1562, recension I) and adopted by the modern editions of Goldschmidt (Frankfurt, 1894) and Mordell (Philadelphia, 1914). I depart from the usual practice among Hebraists by setting beside the vocalized Hebrew a scholarly transliteration drawn from one of the academic systems (close to that of the *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*). This duplication may seem superfluous to expert readers; it may prove useful to the philosopher or the poet, who may wish to hear the letter of the text without first having to learn the alphabet.

A word about the notes that accompany the text. They are not a scholar's commentary. I have neither the competence, nor the

temperament, nor the time required to compete with Saadia, Donnolo, or the commentators of Safed. My notes are, more modestly, the diary of one reader: the thought a verse prompted in me one afternoon at the Klementinum; what a phrase brought to mind: a problem of position, a clockwork mechanism, a figure of return; what a verse seemed to announce or contradict. There is in these notes an autobiographical element that I have not tried to efface: one always reads from somewhere, and it is better to say where than to conceal it.

A final warning to the reader. The *Sefer Yetzirah* yields nothing to anyone who does not read it more than once. The first reading is almost always disappointing: a sequence of obscure schemata, lists of correspondences, permutations. The second reading begins to arrange those schemata into an order one can half perceive. The third sometimes makes a single hidden device suddenly appear beneath the dispersion. I do not promise that this device is the “truth” of the work. I say only that it is worth waiting for it to take shape.

My thanks go to the Hermann Barsdorf Verlag, which has agreed to publish this volume without expecting profit, and to the memory of the anonymous librarians of the Klementinum, who allowed a Jew from the Zeltnergasse to use their side reading rooms in peace for three consecutive years.

J. H.

Prague, June 1928.

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

Title, date, language, manuscripts, posterity

I. The title and its meaning

The title ספר יצירה (*Sefer Yetzirah*) is usually rendered “Book of Formation” or “Book of Creation”. The word יצירה (*yěšîrāh*) derives from the root יצר (*yāṣar*), “to form”, “to fashion”, “to give shape”; it is the verb Genesis (2:7) uses when the Lord *fashions* man from the dust of the ground, and the verb of the potter who works his clay (Jeremiah 18:4). The title therefore speaks less of a creation *ex nihilo* than of a giving of form: a work upon a matter already given, as the potter works the clay or the engraver the stone. The nuance is not trivial. The *Sefer* does not recount that God brought the world forth out of nothing; it describes *how* the world was *formed*, by what instruments, according to what measure. The instruments are letters and numbers; the measure is a combinatorics.

One finds, among the older commentators, the same hesitation between the two renderings of the title. “Formation” insists on the process, “Creation” on the result. For the present volume I have kept the second word, more accessible to the English reader, without abandoning the reminder, in the notes, that the first would be, philologically, the more exact. The *Sefer* is a book about the *manner* in which the world holds together, rather than about the instant of its beginning.

II. Date and milieu

The *Sefer Yetzirah* is, so far as one can judge, the oldest Hebrew text of systematic cosmological speculation: older by several centuries than medieval Kabbalah proper, to which it nonetheless furnished both vocabulary and skeleton. Rabbinic tradition attributes it now to the patriarch Abraham (the last chapter ends precisely on the figure of Abraham contemplating and forming), now to Rabbi Akiba, the tannaitic sage of the second century. Modern criticism holds both attributions to be equally untenable: the first belongs to pious pseudepigraphy, the second to an authoritative retrojection.

The dating remains one of the most disputed in all of Jewish literature. The internal evidence (the language, the absence of any medieval kabbalistic terminology, the affinity with certain Hellenistic and Neo-Pythagorean speculations on number) places the composition, according to the scholars, somewhere between the third and the sixth century of our era. One cannot be more precise without risking the arbitrary. What is certain is that the *Sefer* precedes by several centuries the Provençal *Bahir* (c. 1180) and the Castilian *Zohar* (c. 1280), and that it belongs to a far older stratum of Jewish thought: the one in which speculation on creation is still seeking a language, and finds it in the arithmetic of letters.

III. Language and structure

The *Sefer* opens on a now famous formula: by “thirty-two wondrous paths of Wisdom” (שלשים ושתיים נתיבות פלאות חכמה, *šēlōšīm û-štayim nētīvôt pelā’ôt ḥokhmāh*) the world was engraved. This

number, thirty-two, breaks down into ten plus twenty-two: ten *sefirot* and twenty-two letters.

The ten *sefirot* are here called *sefirot belimah* (ספירות בלימה). The word *sefirah* (from the root ספר, “to count”, “to number”) means first a *number*, an *enumeration*, and not yet the named divine emanation that medieval Kabbalah will make of the *sefirah*. The term *belimah* is obscure; it is read *belî mah*, “without anything”, that is “without support”, “without substance of their own”, or else as a form of the root בלם, “to close”, hence “closed”, “sealed”. Throughout the volume I have kept the rendering “without support”, which seems to me the most faithful: the ten *sefirot* of the *Sefer* are ten pure numbers, ten enumerations that rest on nothing, depth and height, east and west, beginning and end, and that close upon one another like the flame bound to the coal. This point must be stressed, for it is one of those on which the *Sefer* differs most from later Kabbalah: these are not yet the named *sefirot* (*Keter*, *Hokhmah*, *Binah*, and so on) of the medieval tree, but ten abstract numbers, ten dimensions of extension and of time.

The twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet are then divided into three classes. Three *mothers* (אמ, ’alef, mem, šin), from which come air, water, and fire, the heavens, the earth, and the atmosphere that divides them. Seven *doubles* (בגדכפרת), which are pronounced in two ways, and to which the book attaches the seven planets, the seven days, the seven gates of the body. Twelve *simples* (the twelve remaining letters), attached to the twelve signs of the zodiac, the twelve months, the twelve “diagonal” organs of the body. From the combination of these letters with one another the *Sefer* derives the “two hundred and thirty-one

gates” (מאתים שלשים ואחת שערים), that is, the number of possible pairs that twenty-two letters form taken two by two: “from *aleph* to all the letters, and from all the letters to *aleph*”, forward and backward. The world, in this doctrine, is literally *spelled*: it is a language before it is a thing.

To this distribution of the letters answers a geometry. The book seals the six directions of space (above, below, east, west, north, south) by six permutations of the divine name, and it arranges the three orders of the real along three parallel axes: the *world* (space), the *year* (time), the *soul* (man). Each letter receives its place in space, in time, and in the body. The structure is therefore not merely a list: it is a *device* of three columns, in which the least letter holds together a region of the heavens, a month of the year, and an organ of man.

IV. Manuscripts and printed tradition

The text of the *Sefer Yetzirah* has not come down to us in a single form. The manuscripts and editions fall into three principal recensions: a *short* recension (the barest, and the one I translate), a *long* recension (enlarged with astrological and combinatorial developments), and the recension of *Saadia Gaon*, appreciably re-ordered, which the latter appended to his Arabic commentary of the tenth century. The differences among these recensions bear less on the doctrine than on the order of the paragraphs and the extent of the tables of correspondences.

The Hebrew *editio princeps* appeared at Mantua in 1562, and it is this edition that serves, directly or indirectly, as the basis of all later editions, including the modern scholarly editions of

Goldschmidt (Frankfurt, 1894) and Mordell (Philadelphia, 1914) of which I have made use. For the present translation I have taken as my base text the short recension of Mantua, signalling in the notes, where it was useful, the additions of the long recension.

V. Posterity

The fortune of the *Sefer Yetzirah* bears no proportion to its brevity. As early as the tenth century, Saadia Gaon devoted to it an Arabic commentary that long fixed its philosophical reading; Shabbatai Donnolo, in southern Italy, gave it in the same century a Hebrew commentary of medical and astrological inspiration. In the twelfth century, Yehuda ben Barzillai commented on it again in Catalonia. The book thus passed, across the centuries, from one learned hand to the next.

But its deepest posterity lies elsewhere. The Ashkenazi *Hasidim* of the Rhineland, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, made the *Sefer* and its combinations of letters the heart of their speculative piety and of their traditions concerning the creation of an artificial man by the permutation of the letters of the Name, traditions from which the legend of the *Golem* would later arise. Medieval Kabbalah proper, born in Provence and in Castile, inherited from the *Sefer* its very vocabulary: the word *sefirah*, the number ten, the idea that the letters are the elements of the world. The *Bahir*, which opens medieval Kabbalah, takes up and transforms these ten enumerations into so many divine “powers”. And in the thirteenth century, Abraham Abulafia founded his whole “Kabbalah of the names” on the meditative

practice of the combinations of letters that the *Sefer* had, first of all, raised into a key to the real.

It is this first intuition that the present volume would make legible. The *Sefer Yetzirah* sets out, before all Jewish mysticism and long before the systems that would issue from it, a thesis of an almost vertiginous simplicity: the letters precede the sentences, and the sentences precede things. The world is formed as one forms a word. I pondered this thesis at length while writing elsewhere my *Defence of Eternity*; I did not yet know, in 1928, how literally a man can be bound by a grammar that others possess. It is for that reason, perhaps, that this minuscule book seemed to me, and seems to me still, one of the gravest I know.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

Hebrew editions consulted. Mantua, 1562 (editio princeps of the Hebrew Sefer Yetzirah); Lazarus Goldschmidt, *Das Buch der Schöpfung: (Sepher Jeṣirah)*, Frankfurt am Main, J. Kauffmann, 1894; Phineas Mordell, *The Origin of Letters and Numerals according to the Sefer Yetzirah*, Philadelphia, 1914; Vilna edition of 1874 (consulted for minor variants).

Older commentators used in the background. Saadia Gaon (c. 933); Shabbatai Donnolo (c. 950); Yehuda ben Barzillai (twelfth century); the commentators of Safed, principally Moshe Cordovero and, in fragments, Isaac Luria.

Secondary literature. A. Epstein, *Recherches sur le Sefer Yezira*, Paris, 1894; G. Scholem, *Bibliographia Kabbalistica*, Leipzig (W. Drugulin), 1927 (a bibliography of the printed literature on Jewish mysticism). Internal references to the translator's own writings (*Defence of Eternity*, in two volumes from Verlag Calve in Prague) remain, at the moment of the present publication, in the form of a promise.

CHAPTER I

The Thirty-Two Paths, the Ten Enumerations

The first chapter lays down the whole apparatus: thirty-two wondrous paths, ten sefirot — the enumerations without support —, twenty-two foundational letters. It does not yet describe the detail of the letters; it establishes the gesture and the measure. Creation is not told here but engraved, sealed to the six directions by the permutations of the Name. All the rest of the ספר יצירה will only unfold what is here set down in a single stroke.

I.

בשלישים ושתיים נתיבות פלאות חכמה חקק י"ה יהו"ה צבאות אלקי ישראל
אלקים חיים ומלך עולם אל שדי רחום וחנון רם ונשא שוכן עד וקדוש שמו, וברא
את עולמו בשלשה ספרים, בספר וספר וספור.

Transliteration

*Bišlošîm û-štayim nētivōt pelā'ōt ḥokhmā, ḥāqāq Yāh Adonāi
Šēva'ot, 'Elohé Israēl, 'Elohim ḥayyîm û-mélekh 'olam, 'El
Šaddai, raḥûm wě-ḥannûn, rām wě-niśšā', šōkhên 'ad, wě-
qādōš šēmō; û-bārā' 'et 'ōlāmō bišlošāh sēfārîm: bē-sēfer,
wě-sēfār, wě-sippūr.*

Translation

By thirty-two wondrous paths of Wisdom, Yah, the Lord of hosts, God of Israel, the living God and King of the world, God Almighty, merciful and gracious, exalted and uplifted, who dwells forever and whose name is holy, engraved them and created His world by three things: the Book, the Number, and the Telling.

2.

עשר ספירות בלימה ועשרים ושתים אותיות יסוד, שלש אמות ושבע כפולות
 ושתים עשרה פשוטות.

Transliteration

‘Éser sēfirot bělî mǎ, wě- ‘ésrîm ûštayim ’otiygot yēsōd; šālōš
 ’immat, we-ševa ‘kēfūlōt, û-šēteîm- ‘esrê pēšutot.

Translation

Ten sefirot without support, and twenty-two foundational let-
 ters: three mothers, seven doubles, and twelve simples.

3.

עשר ספירות בלימה במספר עשר אצבעות, חמש כנגד חמש, וברית יחיד מכוונת
 באמצע, במלת הלשון ובמילת המעור.

Transliteration

‘Éser sēfirot bělî mǎ, bě-mispar ‘eser ’ešba ‘ot, ḥamēš
 kenéged ḥamēš, û-berît yaḥid mēkuwenet bě-’emša ‘,
 bě-millat ha-lašon û-bě-millat ha-ma ‘or.

Translation

Ten sefirot without support, after the number of the ten fingers,
 five opposite five, and a single covenant set at the centre: the word
 of the tongue, and the word of the member.

NOTE BY J. H.: ON I,1-3

*The thirty-two paths of wisdom are not parallel roads, but the edges of
 a single invisible solid. The first mishnah does not describe a cosmos: it
 describes an act. God does not begin by telling the world; he engraves*

it. Creation is therefore not a birth but an incision into a matter which, before the sign, was neither empty nor full, only indeterminate.

The ten ספירות בלימה, “sefirot without support” — ten numerations rather than ten reified spheres — are not things that can be located. They are the conditions that make location possible. They do not yet say what is; they make it possible for something to be said, counted, placed in opposition, oriented. For language, they are what fingers are to the hand: instruments, but also limits.

So at the very origin freedom and constraint stand together. The letters can combine, but they do not invent themselves. The world opens like a sentence, but no sentence speaks in an alphabet of its own choosing. This is perhaps the first mystery of the Sefer Yetzirah: creation is not the absence of rule but the appearance of a field in which rules will at last make something like freedom possible.

4.

עשר ספירות בלימה, עשר ולא תשע, עשר ולא אחת עשרה, הבן בחכמה וחכם
בבינה, בחון בהם וחקור מהם, והעמד דבר על בוריו, והשב יוצר על מכוננו.

Transliteration

‘Éser sēfirot bělī mā; ‘éser wě-lō tēša’, ‘éser wě-lō ’aḥat-
‘ésrê. Hāvên bě-ḥokhmā, wě-ḥākhēm bě-vīnā; baḥōn bāhēm,
wa-ḥāqōr mēhēm, wě-ha ’āmēd dāvār ‘al buriyyō, wě-hašēv
yōšēr ‘al mēkhōnō.

Translation

Ten sefirot without support: ten and not nine, ten and not eleven. Understand by wisdom and be wise by understanding; test by them, search out from them; set the matter firmly in place, and restore the Maker to his station.

5.

עשר ספירות בלימה, מדתן עשר שאין להן סוף, עומק ראשית ועומק אחרית, עומק טוב ועומק רע, עומק רום ועומק תחת, עומק מזרח ועומק מערב, עומק צפון ועומק דרום. אדון יחיד אל מלך נאמן מושל בכלום, ממעון קדשו ועד עדי עד.

Transliteration

‘Éser sēfirot bělî mǎ; middātān ‘éser še-’ên lāhén sōf: ‘ōmeq rē-’šīt wě-‘ōmeq ‘aḥarīt, ‘ōmeq ṭōv wě-‘ōmeq ra’, ‘ōmeq rōm wě-‘ōmeq taḥat, ‘ōmeq mizraḥ wě-‘ōmeq ma‘arav, ‘ōmeq šāfōn wě-‘ōmeq dārōm. ‘Adōn yaḥīd, El mēlekh ne’eman, mōšēl bē-kullān, mim ‘ōn qodšō we-‘ad ‘adē ‘ad.

Translation

Ten sefirot without support: their measure is ten, and to none of them is an end given: a depth of beginning and a depth of end, a depth of good and a depth of evil, a depth of above and a depth of below, a depth of east and a depth of west, a depth of north and a depth of south. A single Lord, God, faithful king, rules over them all from the dwelling of his holiness for ever and ever.

6.

עשר ספירות בלימה, צפייתן כמראה הבזק ותכליתן אין להם קץ, דברו בהן ברצוא ושוב, ולמאמרו כסופה ירדופו, ולפני כסאו הם משתחוים.

Transliteration

‘Éser sēfirot bělî mǎ; šēfiyyatān kē-mar’ê ha-bāzaq, wě-takhlītān ‘ên lāhén qēš. Devarō bāhén bē-rašō wě-šōv; ū-lē-ma‘amarō kē-sūfāh yirdēfū, ū-lē-fānē kis’ō hem mištaḥāwīm.