

An Historical Assessment of the Narrative Uses of the Words “Kabbalah,” “Cabala,” and “Qabala/h”: Discerning the Differences for Theological Libraries

by Anthony J. Elia

ABSTRACT: Terminology surrounding the subject of “Kabbalah” has long been notoriously inconsistent and complex. What limited scholarly attention has been devoted to this quandary has in some cases served only to increase the confusion, resulting in significant problems for cataloging and for reference services. This essay explores the background of variant orthographies, including origins, definitions, and usages, and considers the implications of this inconsistency for libraries. A bibliography of pertinent literature is included.

INTRODUCTION

In the present age of media conglomerates, reality television, and “snippet-driven” journalism, an immediate free-association response to the word “Kabbalah” is most likely to be with “Madonna,” emphatically *not* the mother of Jesus Christ, but the pop star, who almost three decades ago shed her family name (“Ciccone”) and began to regale the public with memorable tunes and sultry onstage antics.

To the population at large, this may be a matter of relative insignificance, but in the world of bibliography, reference, and scholarship, it is cause for some discussion, as the subject of “Kabbalah” or its common variant orthographies (Cabala, Qabala, etc.) is more complex than it appears. Part of this complexity goes beyond the commonplace associations allocated by the media and is entrenched in how scholars, writers, and editors have treated the terms, how descriptive cataloging (in the Library of Congress Classification) has dealt with the nomenclatures associated with these topics, and how the multivalent histories of these terms are understood. Almost no scholarly works in these areas have dealt with questions of orthography, and, in fact, they have perpetuated the confusion of spellings and meanings in great part due to a residual sloppiness of this detail. This detail has its roots in early transliterations in Latin and non-English scholarship. The chief task of this essay is to address the issues of orthographic confusion, specifically: a) the scholarly identification and meanings given to the terms used in this study, primarily “Kabbalah,” “Cabala,” and “Qabala/h”; b) the assessment of multiple layers of historical spellings; and c) the issue of orthography as interpreted through categorization and classification in the library profession. After these assessments, there will be a brief consideration of what may be done on the level of libraries and patrons seeking information on these topics. Ultimately, this essay is geared at increasing access to appropriate materials under the topics of “Kabbalah,” “Cabala,” and “Qabala/h.”

BACKGROUND OF THIS ESSAY

Over a decade ago, the author began researching the various areas of *Kabbalah* in graduate school. Several years into his studies, he had shifted into the lesser known area of *Christian Cabala* (note spelling), taken up assiduously at the University of Chicago. The study of *Christian Cabala* was rooted in studies he had done in *Christian Hebraism*, an increasingly well-documented series of phenomena in the history of Christian Thought, where Christians sought out Hebrew-language sources and studies, most often for the purpose of understanding the origins of

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their religious practices and identities. Also, for many, Hebrew was used for the purpose of converting Jews to Christianity. Though it is a far broader and more comprehensive field of study, *Christian Hebraism* (existing nearly the entirety of Christian history) offered an entrée into the more specific tableau of *Christian Cabala* (existing only after the emergence of Jewish Kabbalah, arguably, no earlier than the 15th century¹). This later phenomenon of Cabala is to be contextualized within the world of the Italian Renaissance, the Catholic, Protestant, and Counter-Reformations, and the intellectual landscape of 15th, 16th, and 17th century Europe. In 2004, the author wrote a paper on the history of *Christian Hebraism* scholarship and included some works about *Christian Cabala*. A year later, further studies in library school afforded the opportunity to assess the historical vocabularies of Religion Encyclopedias from the 1890s through the present. In this study, great variation and disparity were discovered in how the various terms Kabbalah, Cabala, and Qabala/h (along with other orthographic variants) were employed and defined. Around the same time, the author received a generous grant from the American Theological Library Association (ATLA), which assisted in his furthering this research and expanding it into a larger project. The present essay, taken up several years later and with more up-to-date information, is a fresh return to this project and these questions, in the hope of providing further elucidation and assisting the researcher, scholar, and curiosity seeker with the present historical treatment of these topics.

ORTHOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS AND CONSISTENCY

At the outset, it should be acknowledged that the variation of orthographies appears to be moderately accepted in publications—both scholarly and popular. But the usual variations are between “Kabbalah” and “Cabala,” whereas “Qabala/h” rarely appears in English publications, unless it deals with the category of occult materials (which I shall discuss later). Alternative orthographies become more problematic and are more difficult to differentiate when non-English publications are being considered, where the “K” and “C” spellings have different orthographic principles and roles in that given language (such as Russian, Czech, German, French, and Italian).

HISTORY OF TERMS

Kabbalah

The history of Jewish Mysticism is long and complex, drawing forth from the proverbial wellsprings of antiquity and running through the Early Modern period. But the unique inventiveness of the term Kabbalah (lit. “receiving” or “to receive”) historically came of age around the 11th century C.E. Textually, the term Kabbalah is believed to be the conception of the thinker Solomon ibn Gabirol (ca. 1021–1058), though this is highly debated in scholarly circles. If one is to judge Kabbalah by the content of its texts and textual practices, one would likely begin with a listing of some of the classic texts considered by scholars to be the foundational or formative documents of medieval Kabbalistic literature, including the *Sefer Bahir*, *Sefer Yetzirah*, and the *Zohar*.² Jewish Mysticism,

¹ Historically, there had been some speculation that Raymond Lull/Llull (ca. 1232-1315) had been a Cabalist, but this has not been adequately justified. For further reading, see J. N. Hillgarth, *Ramon Lull and Lullism in Fourteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

² Moshe Idel, one of the preeminent scholars of Kabbalah, cites scores of Jewish mystical texts in his scholarship. Many of these exist only in Hebrew, though some have been translated. This extensive list includes the texts of *Degel Mahaneh Ephraim*, *Derekh Mitzvotekha*, *Gallya Raza*, *Ginnat Egoz*, *Sefer ha-Bahir*, *Sefer ha-Gerushim*, *Sefer ha-Gevul*, *Sefer ha-Malmed*, *Hayye ha-Nefesh*, *Hesed le-Abraham*, *Idra Zuta*, *Ketem Paz*, *Keter Shem Tov*, *Or ha-Ganuz*, *Pardes Rimmonim*, *Sha'arey Kedushah*, *Sefer Yezirah*, and *Zohar*—the last often used with a definite article (i.e., “the Zohar”). For a full list of Idel’s textual citations, see pp. 403-407 in *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (1988). The use of these three texts (Bahir, Yitzirah/Yezirah, and Zohar) is due in large part to their historic use and popularity, both among Jews and Christians. *Sefer Bahir*: see D. Abrams, *The Book Bahir: An Edition Based on the Earliest Manuscripts* (Heb. 1994). *Sefer Yetzirah* (spelling may vary, e.g., Yezirah): perhaps the most accessible version is the Aryeh Kaplan translation, which is from a more orthodox standpoint, but still very readable. Additionally, there are various versions of this text (i.e., “shorter” and “longer”

and specifically Kabbalah, has a long and varied history, which will not be explored in this essay, but readers should be aware of its impressive and rich history. Scholars like Gershom Scholem, Joseph Dan, Moshe Idel, Elliot Wolfson (see sources at this article's conclusion), and others have critically documented Kabbalah as Jewish Mystical experience, detailing such schools or trends of Kabbalistic thinking such as Lurianic Kabbalah in the 16th century and Hasidism more than a century later. The use of the term as spelled “Kabbalah” is widely accepted as the most common orthography for the Jewish Mystical tradition, as the present essay will demonstrate, variation is great both in scholarly and non-scholarly publications

Cabala

Clearly the first use of the term “Cabala” came into use when it was transliterated into non-Hebrew characters, specifically in Latin. The first recognized Cabalist, i.e., a “Christian Cabalist,” was Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494). When the first waves of Jewish Kabbalistic writing and thinking began to move through Italian intellectual circles in the mid- to late- 15th century, Pico was at the receiving end of such ideas, moving around and cultivating his interest in Renaissance scholasticism. His works, written in Latin, set off a new wave of Cabalistic learning—a Christian reception and appropriation of the Jewish Kabbalah. Pico's primary works employ the term “Cabala” (with the noted C- spelling), specifically the *Oratio de hominis dignitate* (1486) and his *900 Conclusiones philosophicae, cabalisticae et theologicae* (often translated as his “900 Theses”), ushering in the new orthography among and descriptive of Christian Cabalists. Pico's writings are both Platonic and Christological, recalibrating the Kabbalistic worldview for successive Christian thinkers and Cabalists like Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522), Egidio of Viterbo (1470-1532), Henry Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535), and Guillaume Postel (1510-1581). While each of these theological writers drew upon the work of Pico and earlier interpretations of Jewish Kabbalah, they maintained their distinct agendas. Yet “schools” of Cabalistic thinking have yet to be discerned, as the role of Cabala never really surfaced into the mainstream of theological discourse. Seventeenth-century Cabalists included Christian Knorr von Rosenroth (1631-1689) and Athanasius Kircher (ca. 1601-1680), a Jesuit, each of whom took greater strides into Cabalistic learning and speculation.³ There were other lesser known Cabalists,⁴ many of whom are still not found in English translation, and a complete study has not yet been undertaken.⁵ After the 17th century, the existence of Christian Cabala as a practice (either intellectually or theologically) appears to have tapered off, with the debatable exception of Emanuel Swedenborg and his multi-volume *Arcana Coelestia* (1749-1756). What is often unclear in the current historical narratives about Christian Cabala is its relationship to the esotericism of the 18th century and developments in *Hermetic Qabalah*—a distinct strain of esoteric philosophy, which flourished in the 18th and 19th centuries. Whereas the Christian Cabala from Pico to Kircher to Swedenborg (effectively 1486–1756) dealt with Christological language, the Hermetic material becomes more speculatively non-Christian or Christological.

versions), but for a starting point, the Kaplan is useful. The text is available online or in reprint by Red Wheel/Weiser LLC (1997). *Zohar*: Among the prominent Kabbalistic works, the *Zohar* has several accessible translations into English, some partial, some in toto: Sperling and Simon's five-volume set (1933); Scholem's *Zohar: The Book of Splendor* (1963); Tishby's *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts* in three volumes (1989); and most recently Daniel Matt's *Zohar: Pritzker Edition* in four volumes. For more comprehensive bibliographies of these fundamental texts, see individual entries in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd edition (2007).

³ See C. Knorr von Rosenroth, *Kabbala denudate seu doctrina Hebraeorum transcendentalis et metaphysica atque theologica* (Salzbach), 1677, and Athanasius Kircher, *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (Rome), 1653.

⁴ See, for example, M. Bernegger, *Orationes duae de cabbala* (Strassburg), 1640; Jacob A. Alting, *De cabbala scripturaria* in Opera, vol. v (Amsterdam), 1687; Olaf Borch, *Dissertatio de kabala characterali* (Copenhagen) 1699; Jacques Gaffarel, *Abdita divinae cabalae mysteria, contra sophistarum logomachiam defensa* (Paris) 1625. For a more complete list, see Joseph Leon Blau's classic work *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance* (1944), pp. 145-154.

⁵ Joseph Leon Blau's *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance* (1944) is the closest full assessment, even after nearly seventy years.

Qabala/h

Early use of the *Qabala/h* orthography may be attributed to John Dee (1527–ca.1608), but this is still up for discussion; it is more likely that the frequency of the Q- orthography arose out of mid-19th century exploration into esotericism and the occult.⁶ Most notable is what has come to be known as *Hermetic Qabala/h* (again, with alternative spellings which almost always begin with Q-). This brand of mystical exploration is broader and harder to define than Kabbalah or Cabala, but includes secret societies (such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and even Freemasons), which incorporate philosophical aspects of ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt. Qabala/h contains elements of magic and theurgy, and is much less Christological, as noted above (and sometimes anti-Christian or satanic), than the Christian Cabala of the 16th and 17th centuries. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa's *De Occulta Philosophia* (Paris, 1531) has often garnered attention as a source for esotericism, the occult, and Qabala/h, even though his work may be considered theologically Cabalistic. Additionally, Athanasius Kircher, whose work is considered as Cabalistic, did in fact integrate Hermetic Qabala into his own writings (hence the added layer of complexity to describing and distinguishing later Cabala and early Qabala/h). The 19th century saw figures such as the French occultist Eliphas Levi (1810–1875), who wrote esoteric texts like *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie* (1855) and *The Book of Splendours: The Inner Mysteries of Qabalism*. Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) is notable among the 20th century Qabalists specifically for his work *777 and Other Qabalistic Writings*.⁷ Among the many odd ancillary claims of Crowley was that he was the reincarnation of Eliphas Levi, as Levi died around the very same time that Crowley was born. The writings of Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891) and Rudlof Steiner (1861–1925) also contain Qabalistic materials, but lead into different esoteric philosophical strains. The Q- spelling of the term Qabala/h is not known to have any relationship with Islam or Islamic Thought, and any connections have been purely speculative.

HISTORY OF SCHOLARSHIP

Kabbalah—Molitor's "Philosophie der Geschichte"

The watershed moment in scholarship about Jewish Kabbalah is often recognized in the character of Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), a German-born Israeli scholar who put the whole discipline on the map, rescuing it from the underbelly of Jewish Studies—mostly, because of how it was treated: that Kabbalah was seen as a mere ancillary and marginal form of Jewish thinking and practice—similarly to how Christian Cabala was considered a marginal philosophical construct to proper theology. But it was more than half a century before Scholem that the first scholarly treatment of the Kabbalah was exacted by the German philosopher and theologian Franz Joseph Molitor (1779–1860) in his seminal work *Philosophie der Geschichte* (1824-53) in four volumes, a work that is still rarely read, and exists only in German. Adolphe Franck's *The Kabbalah: Religious Philosophy of the Hebrews* (trans. 1926), originally published in French as *La Kabbale; ou la philosophie religieuse des Hébreux* in 1843, is another seminal text, but does not bear the same scholarly weight of Molitor's treatise. The key names in Kabbalistic scholarly

⁶ Don Karr, whose bibliographies I recommend below, has some brief discussions on the Q- spelling related to K- and C- spellings. The major problem of 19th-century works in general is not just the great variety of spellings (Kabbalah, Kabbala, Cabbala, Cabala, Qabbala, etc.) but that it is often difficult to discern which of the three categories the writers are dealing with. For instance, the Kabbalah of F.J. Molitor is "Jewish Kabbalah" with some digressions into "Christian Cabala," while the works of S.L. MacGregor Mathers, which draw upon the "Christian Cabala" of Knorr von Rosenroth (1631-1689), ultimately belongs to the "Qabalistic" school of esoterica in the 19th century because of Mathers' own stylizing of the hermetic traditions.

⁷ Among the best bibliographies of Qabala(h) is the recent "Approaching the Kabbalah of Maat: Altered Trees and the Procession of the AEons," by Don Karr, which is available free online. Though this bibliography is extensive (~48 pp.), it may not be completely clear for readers because of its great specificity and ornate digressions into the Golden Dawn and philosophical relationships to Jewish Kabbalistic and Christian Cabalistic precursors.

literature today are Moshe Idel, Joseph Dan, and Elliot Wolfson, each of whom are included in the bibliography of this essay.

Cabala and Christian Hebraica Scholarship: 1870s and Beyond

The period from 1870–1901 saw a new area of study begin to appear; though touched upon briefly in earlier Jewish histories, it was not until the 1890s when some of the first serious work and important articles came out dealing with “Christian Hebraica.” One of the foremost scholars in this branch of study was Moritz Steinschneider,⁸ whose contributions to the field helped underscore their importance. Historically, there were studies done in German on the Hebrew language in the 19th century, but one of the earliest, which took a more scholarly approach and assessment of Hebrew language, was L. Geiger’s *Das Studium der hebraeischen Sprache in Deutschland vom Ende des XV. Bis zur Mitte des XVI. Jahrhunderts* (1870). Though Geiger’s work covers a period extending into the European Reformations, it is foundational for its systematic study of the language. Steinschneider, who had been writing already prior to this time, published a study of Hebrew two decades later under the title *Die hebraeischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters* (1893). Steinschneider was increasingly active in the latter years of his life, especially in the period between 1896–1901, and continued his work in the area of Christian Hebraica scholarship.⁹ Over the next half century articles and books started to deal more broadly with not just “Christian Hebraica” (which would later be called Hebraism more often) but also the specific genre of “Christian Cabala,” which would focus more on the Christian appropriation of specifically Kabbalistic works, rather than simply focusing on the Hebrew language, which distinguishes these phenomena. B. Walde wrote a treatment contributing to these studies entitled *Christliche Hebraisten Deutschlands am Ausgang des Mittelalters* (1916). More recently, J. Prijs wrote an historical treatment *Die Basler hebraeischen Drucke 1492–1866* (1964). The crossover work from Christian Hebraica/Hebraism to Christian Cabala does not really come of age until the works of Gershom Scholem (1941), Joseph Blau (1944), and François Secret (1964) push it into a new arena. Scholem’s *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* focuses on Jewish Kabbalah but treats some aspects of Christian Cabala (he deals with Pico and Reuchlin, for example), while Blau and Secret focus more centrally on Christian Cabala. More current scholarship varies, and deals less with any broad phenomenology of Christian Cabala and more with specific characters, such as Marion Kuntz’s work on Guillaume Postel and John W. O’Malley’s biographical study of Giles of Viterbo.¹⁰ Scholarship on Qabala/h has not always been distinguished from Cabala, but is chiefly found under the heading of Western Esotericism.¹¹ Thus, for the purpose of this essay, readers will find citations related to Qabala/h under titles of Western Esotericism at the end of this work.

⁸ In a fine article by Menahem H. Schmelzer, written in 2007 and published in the Winter 2009 *Quntres* bulletin of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, we find a great tribute to Steinschneider and his work. Schmelzer’s article is entitled “Moritz Steinschneider: An Appreciation,” and deals with the life and work of Steinschneider (1816–1907), whom is often described as the “father of Jewish bibliography.”

⁹ See *Encyclopedia Judaica* [2007] entry “Hebraists, Christian” v. 8, p. 516: notes on Steinschneider in bibliography.

¹⁰ Marion Kuntz, *Guillaume Postel: Prophet of the Restitution of All Things* (1981); John W. O’Malley, *Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform: A Study in Renaissance Thought* (1968). Daniel Stein-Kokin recently completed a dissertation at Harvard on Egidio (Giles) da Viterbo and Christian Hebraism in the High Renaissance. Broader topics do appear as well, including Philip Beitchman’s *Alchemy of the Word* (1998) and Catherine Swietlicki’s *Spanish Christian Cabala* (1986). A full listing of Christian Hebraists (which include Cabalists) can be found in the *Encyclopedia Judaica* [2007] v. 8, pp. 518–551.

¹¹ For scholarly works on Qabala (Hermetic), occultism, and esotericism, see Select Bibliography at end of paper under “Qabala/h.” For further reading and more extensive bibliographic work on this subject, see Don Karr’s “Approaching the Kabbalah of Maat,” noted earlier.

Orthography and LC

The question of orthography of the term “Kabbalah” (or its variants) should first be considered within the context of a faceted search. Searches for *Kabbalah* and *Cabala* using FirstSearch/WorldCat are an excellent starting point. There are others, but these provide the most useful focus, primarily because *Qabalah* yields very little in comparison, and other spellings or misspellings yield nothing. On February 2, 2009, the author conducted a review for the terms “Kabbalah” and “Cabala” using Keyword, Subject, and Title searches in FirstSearch/WorldCat, with the following results:

Kabbalah

- 1) Keyword→ 2367 ALL
2021 Books
19 Serials
4 Articles
- 2) Subject→ 34 ALL
31 Books
0 Serials
0 Articles
- 3) Title→ 1877 ALL
1664 Books
17 Serials
3 Articles

Cabala

- 1) KW → 14,386 ALL
13,672 Books
39 Serials
23 Articles
- 2) Subject → 13,282 ALL
12,672 Books
37 Serials
16 Articles

Interestingly the cataloging and classification of terms pulls up by keyword and subject “Cabala” as the preferred spelling. This, no doubt, stems from the cataloging history of LC and the construction of subject terminologies over the years. Subsequently, the correlation to the more nuanced understandings of the terms “Kabbalah” and “Cabala” as either being a Jewish or Christian mystical text, respectively, will not be seen in the specificity of the cataloging language, unless its terms indicate “Cabala—Jewish,” for example. But even then, for those who are aiming at precision and accuracy and taking direction from what the scholarship indicates, the next question should be, “What changes (if any) should be made in the future classification of these terms?”

TOWARD A CABALISTIC THEOLOGY: OTHER ORTHOGRAPHIES, NARRATIVES, AND MEANINGS

There have been a couple of concerns with the role of Christian Cabala in history: a) it has been often seen as a negative event and practice, especially in Jewish history, because of the role it has played in the conversion and persecution of Jews; and b) among Christian circles, Christian Cabala has often been relegated to a subjugated position in the history of Christian theology and thought. This is especially true amid the more accepted narratives of Christian history and theological expression during and after the Reformations of the 16th century because it never had a real practical potential among Christians, as it was a theological area of exercise for the elite, who were knowledgeable of Hebrew and other scholarly languages. Its relationship with “the occult” or “occult-ness” or even revisionist histories on Qabala/h often confuse the true nature of these movements, strains of thinking, and phenomena. Because the writings of such Cabalists as Guillaume Postel, Egidio of Viterbo, and Lorenzo da Brindisi did not fall within the realm of traditional or mainstream Christian theology, it was often marginalized. Thus, one might argue that “Cabalistic Theology” was a valid, even undercurrent, theological strain, which only found light in its associative appropriations of Jewish Kabbalah, but not a mainstream adherence or respectability from parent religious affiliations (Catholicism, Lutheranism, Reformed, etc.). As for a “Qabalistic Theology,” a more in-depth study of the 19th century occults and hermeticism would have to be undertaken to understand this more thoroughly, whereas scholarship in Jewish Studies has blossomed regarding the more modern movements (19th century onward) of Jewish Kabbalah¹² and its associated theologies.¹³

ENCYCLOPEDIA ENTRIES

A brief review of how some encyclopedias deal with these same terminologies shows us how variant and disparate the spellings still are. From the wildly variant spellings in many of these encyclopedias, it is unclear whether there is any distinction made either by scholars or editors of these publications. What is more confusing is that those articles written by the top scholars often are not simply orthographically different but are not even common or transliterally accurate from Hebrew (e.g., “Kaballah”). This will be by no means comprehensive, but the major encyclopedic publications the author has chosen to compare are *General Encyclopedias*: 1) *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1888), 2) *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2002); *Specialized Encyclopedias*: 1) *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (1913), 2) *Encyclopedia Judaica* (1st edition, 1971; 2nd edition, 2007), 3) *Encyclopedia of Religion* (1st edition, 1987; 2nd edition, 2005), 4) *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1st edition), 5) *The Encyclopedia of Judaism* (G. Wigoder, ed., 1989), and 6) *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* (R.J.Z. Werblowsky, 1997).

¹² See Moshe Idel’s work on Hasidism, specifically *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, 1995.

¹³ Note works on such thinkers as Elijah Benamozegh (1822-1900), Italian rabbi and Kabbalist, including his *Emat mafgia* (Leghorn), 1858.

The 121-year-old edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1888)¹⁴ does not include any C- spellings of our present study. However, under the “K” entries there is a substantial article entitled “Kabbalah,” which is today the most accepted orthography of the Jewish Mystical tradition. The article, though informative, is clearly a reflection of the nascent scholarship on both Kabbalah and Cabala. The entry is not completely accurate, reporting such comments as “Kabbalah...has also played an important part in the Christian church since the Middle Ages” (XIII: 810-11), which most contemporary scholarship would question. Nonetheless, it does tell us to some extent where the orthographic leanings were at this time. The article speaks about Pico and Reuchlin, but still uses the K- spelling for their adaptation of the mystical tradition.

The 2002 edition of *Britannica*¹⁵ offers six variations of the spelling: Kabbala, Kabala, Kabbalah, Cabala, Cabbala, and Cabbalah; it translates the word as “Tradition,” (VI: 671). The main entry is spelled “Kabbala.” The article deals exclusively with the Jewish Mystical tradition and does not treat the Christian Cabala.

*The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*¹⁶ (1913) can be cited to illustrate common usage of a century ago. This reference work uses both the terms “Cabbalism” and “Kabbalism,” both of which are less frequently used later on (noting the –ism ending, rather than simply the –a/-ah endings). The main title entry, which is said to be under the “Kabbalism” heading when cross-referenced at “Cabbalism,” is actually then written as “Kabbala” (no –h) later on in that very main entry (see Vol. VII, pp. 622-628). In the notes (on p. 628) of this article, there are citations, which include more varieties of spellings of the term, including “Cabala,” “Kabbalah,” and “Qabbalah.”

The 2nd edition of the *Encyclopedia Judaica*¹⁷ (2007) uses the citation “Cabala” but refers the reader back to the term spelled “Kabbalah.” Under this heading, the author and preeminent scholar of Jewish Mysticism, Moshe Idel, chose the spelling “Kabbalah” to describe the Jewish Mystical tradition, but also in the same article writes four pages on “the Christian Kabbalah,” without distinguishing an orthography (671-674, EJ, 2nd ed.).

In both editions of the *Encyclopedia of Religion*,¹⁸ one finds perhaps the most disappointing and unclear results. Three separate spellings are used: Cabala, Kaballah, and Qabbalah. The first two terms only tell the reader to “See Qabbalah,” where the main entry is found. Yet, note the spelling of the second and third terms: “Kaballah” is not even a properly transliterated spelling! It should be “bb-l,” not “b-ll,” which doesn’t make sense. Qabbalah may be correct in transliteration, but is almost never used in scholarly writings. Even more strange is that the article in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* was authored by Moshe Idel, the same person who authored the 2nd edition *Encyclopedia Judaica* article.

The 1st edition of the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*,¹⁹ published in 1967, uses the spelling “Cabala” (v. 2: 1031-35) to describe the Jewish Kabbalah, and almost entirely overlooks Christian Cabala, even though the article cites scholarship of this latter phenomenon. This may have two specific reasons; a) the paucity of scholarship dealing with Christian Cabala at the time of the *NCE*’s publication in the mid-60s and b) possible resistance to the idea of a specifically branded Christian Cabala, which had often been considered counter to 16th-century Catholic doctrine. It is likely that the earlier of these explanations would seem most reasonable.

¹⁴ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 9th edition (New York: Henry G. Allen & Company, 1888).

¹⁵ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th edition (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 2002).

¹⁶ *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913).

¹⁷ *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1st edition (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing, 1971); 2nd edition (New York: Thomson Gale, 2007).

¹⁸ *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1st edition (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1987); 2nd edition (New York: Thomson Gale, 2005).

¹⁹ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1st edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967).

Though found under the broader entry of “Jewish Mysticism,” the search terms found in the *Encyclopedia of Judaism*²⁰ are both “Cabala” and “Kabbalah,” without any distinctions. But there is, at least, a consistency in the usage of the term spelled “Kabbalah” and attributed to solely the Jewish Mystical tradition. Notably, there is no “Qabbala(h)” spelling in this work, even as a finding aid. The work, then, presumes that its readership might have an understanding of Hebrew and its accepted transliterations.

*The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*²¹ offers three separate spellings (Cabala, Kabbalah, and Qabbalah) but sends readers to the term spelled “Kabbalah,” where the main entry is found. What is interesting here is that the author of this text uses “Kabbalah” to describe both the Jewish Mystical tradition and the Christian Mystical tradition. “Christian Kabbalah” is briefly discussed in the penultimate paragraph of the article (388).

WHY THE ORTHOGRAPHIC VARIATIONS, AND DO THEY MATTER?

The general assessment of this exercise is that even though the nuanced assignment of terminologies has been acknowledged in the scholarly community, the orthographic designations do not always translate into the scholarship, or at least into the larger reference works themselves. It may also be symptomatic of contemporary publishing practices that such an error as “Kaballah” in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* is allowed to persist. With an apparent apathy on the scholarly side regarding an orthographic consistency, or, at very least, an acknowledgement of differences in meanings along with spellings, it may seem all but impossible to move forward with any constructive discussion in library cataloging and classification of terms. For, as the discussion so far has demonstrated, the usage of these options is a matter of individual preference rather than principle, with the “K-spelling” predominant. Yet, searches in the Library of Congress Classification yield far more hits using the “C- spelling” than the “K- spelling” (nearly sevenfold in keyword searches, and nearly 373-fold by subject)!

HISTORY OF THE “NEW” KABBALAH

The final discussion about orthographic practices has to do with clarifying yet another element of Kabbalistic iterations. Though critics might suggest that new religions need not be included in an essay on the orthographic differences of Kabbalah, it is just such an occasion and example of how new tendencies and appropriations should receive similar treatment in the scholarly world. It needs to be kept in mind that at one time “Cabala” and “Qabala/h” were new appropriations of religious practice themselves.

MADONNA AND THE BERG’S KABBALAH CENTRE

Madonna first became interested in Kabbalah more than a decade ago, and practices a “new age” adaptation of Kabbalah through the guidance of a rabbi at the now famous Berg Centre, founded in the mid-1960s by Philip Berg.²² What exactly is it that Madonna and devotees of the Berg Centre are practicing? Is it really Kabbalah? The answer is not completely clear. Certainly, if one asked Madonna and other Berg Centre followers, their response would be that they are practicing Kabbalah. But if the question were posted to academically trained historians of Kabbalah, Orthodox Jews of Hasidic traditions, or certain rabbis in various Jewish traditions (Conservative, Conservadox, Reform, Reconstructionist, etc.), the answer would most certainly be “No—this is not Kabbalah.” But if not Kabbalah, what exactly is it? An examination of the materials that the Berg Centre uses and tenets that it espouses demonstrates that they do use some “traditional” Jewish Kabbalistic texts, such as the *Zohar*,

²⁰ *Encyclopedia of Judaism*, edited by G. Wigoder (New York: MacMillan, 1989).

²¹ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, edited by R.J.Z. Werblowsky (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²² The Berg Centre’s website is accessible at <http://www.kabbalah.com/>

Bahir, and *Sefer Yetzirah*, but there are also many reading and spiritual guides that assist the participant through mystical guidelines. In many ways, at this point, the practice of Bergian-style Kabbalah appears to be more of a New Age practice with a twist of Jewish Mysticism—i.e., its texts are bounded by their Jewish Mystical tradition, similar to the way that Eastern Religions have crept into New Age belief systems, cults, and new religions. The other departure of the Bergian-style Kabbalah is that there are certain strict guidelines in classical Jewish Kabbalah, which are not strictly followed. Some include: 1) that specific Jewish religious texts must first be studied before attempting the Kabbalistic texts; 2) that one must be a man (never a woman, such as Madonna); 3) that one must be married; 4) that one must be at least forty years of age. Clearly, the qualifications of the traditional Kabbalah are different from the Bergian-style requirements and practice.

UNDERSTANDING PLURALITIES: MYSTICISMS AND KABBALAHS

Just as formidable scholars like Jacob Neusner and J.Z. Smith gave our lexicons the heightened specificity of 'Judaisms' (plural) and 'Christianities' (plural), so too is it apropos now to speak of "Mysticisms" and "Kabbalahs." In any world of multiplicity and variant interpretation(s), the need to recognize these variants is imperative. When the use and appropriation of a text becomes the center of a discussion, debate, or argument, it is time for a new assessment of the phenomenon to determine what is exactly happening. Simply to say "he or she is not a Kabbalist" as with "he or she is not a real Christian" is not productive in the long run. Objections that Madonna is not an authentic Kabbalist, or that she is not practicing "real" Kabbalah may have some truth to them—her practices and those of the Bergs are a far cry from the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria or the *Sefer Yetzirah* of old. One might say that it is more accurate to call this a New Age appropriation of an old body of literature called Jewish Kabbalah and proceed from there to use more precise definitions in the endeavor to catalog or describe such categories of Kabbalistic/Cabalistic/Qabalistic learning.

ASSESSMENT FOR THEOLOGICAL LIBRARIES

This survey has helped shed light on the multivalent histories of both academic disciplines and the terminologies and orthographies associated with Kabbalah. With the increased understanding of traditional Jewish Kabbalah, along with its successors Cabala and Qabala/h, it should be noted both that such nuances exist and that they can be problematic. A complete overhaul of Library of Congress practices is probably too much to hope for, since such a venture would be too time consuming and labor intensive. It may be best, then, under these circumstances simply to be aware of the diversity, complexity, and sophistication of these terms in support of better service to our own user populations.

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The following bibliography is by no means extensive, but it highlights the better-known primary and secondary sources of each area. The best and most extensive bibliographies of these areas, outside of the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, are the works of Don Karr, whose annotated bibliographies are constantly updated and available free online.²³ These bibliographies are truly extensive, sometimes scores of pages long, and cover the realm of traditional "Kabbalah," "Christian Cabala," and "Qabala(h)" very effectively. The caveat for readers and librarians is that Karr often treats his subjects apologetically, where subsequent Christian iterations of the "original" Kabbalah are tempered as watered-down corruptions. Also, while a specific narrative is created in each bibliographic treatment, readers should keep in mind the specifically scholarly literature of Moshe Idel, Gershom Scholem, and Elliot

²³ 1) Christian Cabala in English: <http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/karr/ccinea.pdf>; 2) Part II: Supplement: <http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/karr/ccineb.pdf>; 3) Qabala(h): Kabbalah of Maat: <http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/karr/maat/AKM.pdf>

Wolfson, among others, when reading through Karr's bibliographies. This aside, his rich bibliographies are most highly recommended for their depth and variety.

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