

ABSTRACT

KABBALAH IN GERONA IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY:
AZRIEL AND NAḤMANIDES. A RE-EVALUATION

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Following Moshe Idel, the Kabbalistic activity in the Catalan town of Gerona in the 13th century has commonly been described in scholarship as divided into two main circles or groups: The first circle including most of the Kabbalists active in Gerona with the sole exclusion of Naḥmanides (mainly R. Ezra, R. Azriel and R. Jacob b. Sheshet), and the second circle including Naḥmanides himself, his followers and the followers of his student the Rashba. Various studies by Idel and others, established the scholarly consensus according to which in general these two circles were detached from one another in terms of their Kabbalistic thought. Consequently, these studies inferred that the unknown sources or teachers of Naḥmanides' Kabbalistic thought should be sought for outside of Gerona. The present article offers a different outlook on the Kabbalistic activity in Gerona in the 13th century. In its greater part, the article offers a textual comparison between the writings of R. Azriel and Naḥmanides in regards to some of the central themes with which the two were engaged, showing that in truth some important points are common or similar to both, a fact which has hitherto not been discussed in scholarship. In light of this, it is claimed that Naḥmanides might very well have studied from his older townsman, the Kabbalist Azriel, whether directly or through the mediations of written texts. Second, on the basis of these new insights, and while critically relating to Idel's attitude, methodological difficulties regarding the way the notion of 'circle' is used in the study of Kabbalah are pointed out in the introduction and conclusion of the article, and a more accurate and effective typology regarding the terms 'circle' and 'school' in what regards the Kabbalistic activity in the 13th century as a whole is offered.