



The Origins of Jewish Mysticism

Peter Schafer

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The Origins of Jewish Mysticism offers the first in-depth look at the history of Jewish mysticism from the book of Ezekiel to the Merkavah mysticism of late antiquity. The Merkavah movement is widely recognized as the first full-fledged expression of Jewish mysticism, one that had important ramifications for classical rabbinic Judaism and the emergence of the Kabbalah in twelfth-century Europe. Yet until now, the origins and development of still earlier forms of Jewish mysticism have been largely overlooked.

In this book, Peter Schäfer sheds new light on Ezekiel's tantalizing vision, the apocalyptic literature of Enoch, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the writings of the Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo, the rabbinical writings of the Talmudic period, and the esotericism of the Merkavah mystics. Schäfer questions whether we can accurately speak of Jewish mysticism as a uniform, coherent phenomenon with origins in Judaism's mythical past. Rather than imposing preconceived notions about "mysticism" on a great variety of writings that arose from different cultural, religious, and historical settings, he reveals what these writings seek to tell us about the age-old human desire to get close to and communicate with God.

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