



# Mystical Resistance: Uncovering the Zohar's Conversations with Christianity

*Ellen D. Haskell*

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The thirteenth-century Jewish mystical classic *Sefer ha-Zohar* (The Book of Splendor), commonly known as the Zohar, took shape against a backdrop of rising anti-Judaism in Spain. *Mystical Resistance* reveals that in addition to the Zohar's role as a theological masterpiece, its kabbalistic teachings offer passionate and knowledgeable critiques of Christian majority culture. During the Zohar's development, Christian friars implemented new missionizing strategies, forced Jewish attendance at religious disputations, and seized and censored Jewish books. In response, the kabbalists who composed the Zohar crafted strategically subversive narratives aimed at diminishing Christian authority.

Hidden between the lines of its fascinating stories, the Zohar makes daring assertions that challenge themes important to medieval Christianity, including Christ's Passion and ascension, the mendicant friars' new missionizing strategies, and Gothic art's claims of Christian dominion. These assertions rely on an intimate and complex knowledge of Christianity gleaned from rabbinic sources, polemic literature, public Church art, and encounters between Christians and Jews. Much of the kabbalists' subversive discourse reflects language employed by writers under oppressive political regimes, treading a delicate line between public and private, power and powerlessness, subservience and defiance.

By placing the Zohar in its thirteenth-century context, Haskell opens this text as a rich and fruitful source of Jewish cultural testimony produced at the epicenter of sweeping changes in the relationship between medieval Western Europe's Christian majority and its Jewish minority.

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