Magic has become a central area of study evoking research in religious studies, ritual studies, anthropology, psychology, ethnology, sociology, folklore, cultural studies, let alone history and epigraphy. Today, one can hardly write a comprehensive phenomenology of the subject, taking into consideration every comparative aspect of the subject and its assessment. In other words, the more diversified our knowledge of the subject becomes, the more demanding its study turns. One solution to this problem is limiting the discussion to one aspect of the subject, with a particular emphasis on a certain topic. In the present study, I shall try to give an example of what I have in mind, assuming that the example at hand and the manner in which it is presented here have paradigmatic significance for a wide range of phenomenological and methodological issues.

The vantage point that serves us here is that of ritual studies and ritual theory. My argument runs as follows: Every magical act is either preceded or followed (sometimes both are the case) by certain rituals. However, cursory readings of magical literature, a common habit among many scholars, do not make it evident that there might be a connection between the ritual preparations and the magical act itself. In my view, though, there is an interesting connection between the aims of the magical act, the core event, and the manner in which one prepares for doing it. This connection constitutes the ritual procedure and, hence, the theory of the ritual event. I have explored the subject in my book *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel* (Leiden and

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1 This paper constitutes the enlarged and revised version of a lecture I have given in the framework of the conference, “Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition,” on July 17, 2006. Since it is written in the form of a methodological essay, I considered it essential not to distract the attention of the reader from the major line of argumentation with details that usually belong to the footnotes. Thus, the number of footnotes will be as restricted as possible, only to those giving the essentials of background information.
Boston, 2003), and I shall try to show that the conclusions reached there are valid, too, in the cases of magic in general, and of the theurgic rituals done to prepare and protect the mystic as described in the Hekhalot literature in particular.

For reasons dictated by the limited space at my disposal, I shall have to examine one example out of the many available. I assume that the example chosen is strong enough to convince the reader that, in general, magical acts are shaped in the course of uniquely configured procedures that structurally function as rituals. This assumption is the quintessence of my understanding of what constitutes the ritual theory in each case. I shall try to show that, since they are crafted to work once, *ad hoc* and/or *ad hominem*, the magical acts at hand should be studied in their individual context.

I

More specifically, this paper aims at bringing to the discussion table new agenda for the study of the relationship between essential aspects of magic and mysticism.² It proposes to create a new map for the territory, which points out ways leading to the two subjects at hand. I shall start, though, by reviewing a few scholarly approaches to the study of the relationship between Merkavah mysticism and magic. Then, I shall discuss the contribution that the discussion of ritual and ritual theory as presented in my book can offer to the discussion of the questions at hand. In modern scholarship, the relationship between Merkavah mysticism and magic touches on three methodological issues. The first one is represented by Gershom Scholem, in the chapter on “The Theurgic Elements of the Lesser Hekhalot and the Magical Papyri.”³

² In his recently published study James R. Davila, *Descenders to the Chariot: The People Behind the Hekhalot Literature* (Brill, 2001), the author tries to discuss this issue, citing many parallel sources. However, his major aim is to create a triangle in which magic, mysticism, and shamanism meet. Although he is aware of the essential differences between Merkavah mysticism and Shamanism (as I argued many years ago), he still forces his point, but in my view does not satisfactorily create a shift of scholarly orientation. See his discussion on pp. 49–51. Furthermore, the many sources Davila quotes from the area of magic and the magical aspects of Merkavah mysticism are left without a proper analysis from the point of view of their ritual function.

³ Chapter X in Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, two editions (New York, 1960 and 1965), p. 75. All the references here are mainly to that page.