

# Andalusí Theosophy

## A Recontextualization

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Medieval Spain witnessed the birth and fundamental development of Islamic and Jewish theosophical movements that were largely to become the defining modes of mysticism for these faiths throughout their domains and down to modern times: the Kabbalah in Judaism, and Akbarian or *wujúdí* Şúfism in Islam.<sup>1</sup> Why both of these movements emerged into the light of history at virtually the same moment and in the same region is a question that has been almost entirely neglected by modern scholarship.<sup>2</sup> What I will attempt to accomplish in this paper is a rapprochement of three lines of research that are relevant to this question but that have hitherto been carried out in isolation from one another. These are, first, the historiographic discussion regarding the “symbiosis” and “interconfessionalism” prevailing in pre-Expulsion Andalusí philosophy; second, the vexed question of the emergence and early history of the Kabbalah; and third, the obscure intellectual origins of the Şúfí mystic Ibn al-‘Arabí and his “school.”<sup>3</sup> In the scholarship on the latter two issues, almost no attempt has been made to situate these developments in relation to each other, nor have scholars given due attention to the role of Andalusí interconfessionalism in creating the necessary fertile ground for the explosion of these revolutionary theosophies. It will not be my intention to establish lines of “influence” from Şúfism to Kabbalah or *vice versa*. Rather, my purpose will be to suggest a recontextualization of these emergent Jewish and Islamic theosophies or esotericisms, such that the interconfessional revolution in religious philosophy in tenth- to thirteenth-century al-Andalus can be seen as the most critical source for the development of these two movements, an interconfessionalism that would continue to mark their later trajectories through history.

### **Symbiosis: Judeo-Islamic Philosophy in the “Golden Age”**

Throughout the history of Islamicate<sup>4</sup> civilization, philosophy has been a pursuit carried out in interconfessional contexts. The first flowering in Islamdom of philosophy proper — *falsafah* — was owing to the joint efforts of Syriac Christians and Arab and Persian Muslims working in Baghdád under the aegis of the first ‘Abbásid caliphs

during the eight and ninth centuries.<sup>5</sup> Their translations of the intellectual legacies of ancient Greece, India and Persia into Arabic spurred the ‘Abbásid-era renaissance of science and philosophy,<sup>6</sup> and these legacies presented similar challenges to the Abrahamic religious traditions. The initial Islamicate encounter with the Hellenistic heritage developed in two distinct directions, that of the *falásafah*, often dubbed the “humanists,”<sup>7</sup> and that of the dialectical theologians, the *mutakallimún*. In both cases the contexts of development were inherently interconfessional. Oliver Leaman described the former as having taken place in “an atmosphere [that] consisted of the thought of Muslims, Christians, Jews and pagans, and, perhaps more significantly, of those within a religious group regardless of doctrinal differences.”<sup>8</sup> Beginning in the eighth century, and in a more reactive tone to the philosophical tenets that challenged such shared dogmas as the temporal, *ex nihilo* creation of the universe and the resurrection of bodies, Jewish and Muslim *mutakallimún* set down, often in shared social and cultural contexts, their elaborate philosophical theologies of these Abrahamic faiths.<sup>9</sup>

Later, in al-Andalus — Islamicate Spain — the development of philosophy continued to be marked by Jewish-Muslim interconfessionalism. In a certain sense, the cultural efflorescence of medieval al-Andalus was a mirror image of ‘Abbásid Baghdád, an image that was consciously manipulated as much by the founders of the independent Andalusí Umayyad caliphate as by the Jewish leadership associated with that court. The process by which the Andalusí Umayyads created a foundation myth that drew upon ‘Abbásid symbolism while simultaneously affirming their legitimate independence from Baghdád has been documented at length by Janina Safran.<sup>10</sup> Equally important for our purposes is the fact that the Andalusí Jewish community, under the leadership of Ḥasdai ibn Shaprut (d. 975), physician and advisor to the court of the first independent Andalusí Umayyad caliph, ‘Abd al-Raḥmán al-Nāṣir (r. 961-976), had simultaneously broken with the *yeshivot* of Baghdad and set the Jews of al-Andalus on an independent course that would lead them to rival the Babylonian centers in the spiritual and intellectual leadership of world Jewry.<sup>11</sup> The fact that both Muslims and Jews of al-Andalus understood the parallelism of these developments is evidenced by the literature emanating from both sides of the confessional divide, in which the link is made explicit.<sup>12</sup>

The ensuing centuries of Andalusí civilization have often been hailed as a “Golden Age” of Jewish-Muslim symbiosis, with Jews attaining unprecedented heights in the state apparatus, and witnessing a general flowering of poetry, literature, and philosophy that transcended religious boundaries.<sup>13</sup> As there are numerous detailed studies of this period, I will here only briefly identify the most

important personalities associated with the “Golden Age” of Andalusí philosophy, emphasizing the interconfessional aspects of these thinkers’ lives and works. First, though, a few words must be said regarding the categorization of this literary output as “philosophy.”

The distinctions made between philosophy and religion, science and magic, or rationalism and mysticism, often confuse more than they reveal about the medieval literatures to which they are applied.<sup>14</sup> This anachronistic division is at the heart of the problem of the inadequate contextualizations of Spanish Kabbalah and Andalusí Şúfism, and I will have more to say about this below. It would be well to emphasize from the start that for every one of the individuals mentioned below, the pursuit of philosophy was an explicitly religious affair, having as much to do with the character and knowability of God and prophecy as with the nature and properties of “natural” phenomena. The very few Islamicate philosophers for whom religious concerns were indifferent to the pursuit of truth – such as Abú Bakr al-Rází (d. 925) or Ibn al-Ráwandí (d. 910) – are the exceptions that prove the rule. The distinction made between Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism, with the former considered more congenial to religious applications than the latter, is likewise an inadequate one, not least because one of the single most Neoplatonic texts known to medieval Islamdom was thought until modern times to have been a work of Aristotle.<sup>15</sup> The strictest Aristotelian known to al-Andalus was Ibn Rushd, who was however famous throughout the Islamicate world not as a philosopher, but as a scholar of Islamic law.<sup>16</sup> His alter-identity in the Latin West as Averroes, the enemy of religion, was predicated upon a rather selective process of translation and mistranslation such that “the Averroes whom the West first encountered was not the full man, and...the writings the thirteenth century did not translate could have significantly altered the perception of him as an irreligious naturalist, and the perception of Aristotelianism as an implacable foe of organized religion.”<sup>17</sup>

With this *caveat* in mind, let us briefly survey the interconfessional development of philosophy in al-Andalus. Mention should first of all be made of Isaac Israeli (d. c. 955), the first great Jewish Neoplatonist who, though not an Andalusí, was to play a significant role in the interconfessional career of philosophy in al-Andalus.<sup>18</sup> Famous to medieval Muslims, Jews, and Christians primarily for his medical treatises, his philosophical works left a prominent mark on many Jewish thinkers of al-Andalus, especially Solomon ibn Gabirol (d. 1054 or 1058), Moses ibn Ezra (c. 1060-1139), Joseph ibn Şaddíq (d. 1149), Abraham ibn Ḥasday (*fl.* 13<sup>th</sup> cent.), and Shem Tov ibn Falaquera (d. c. 1295). He may also have been a principle source for Andalusí knowledge of the so-called long version of the *Theology of Aristotle*, a critical source both for Isma’ílí thought and for Jewish

Neoplatonic theology in the Middle Ages, which likely emerged from a Judeo-Isma'īlī context.<sup>19</sup> The *Theology* was also to play an important role in both Kabbalah and Andalusí *wujúdí* Šúfism, being cited by the Gerona Kabbalists,<sup>20</sup> Moses de Leon (the author of the *Zohar*),<sup>21</sup> and Ibn al-'Arabí.<sup>22</sup> In addition to the Jewish philosophers noted above, Israeli is also quoted by the 11<sup>th</sup> century Andalusí Muslim author of the *Gháyat al-ḥakím*<sup>23</sup> (the *Picatrix* of the Latin alchemical tradition), attributed to Maslamah ibn Aḥmad al-Majriṭí (d. 1007), and appears to have been a source for the Muslim philosopher Baṭalyúsí (d. c. 1127),<sup>24</sup> about whom more will be said below.

The next major figure of Andalusí philosophy is Ibn Masarra of Cordoba (b. 883), often considered in both Muslim and Western sources to have been the first Šúfí of al-Andalus. Few of his works have survived, though his views can be extrapolated from quotations and summaries in later Muslim works, chiefly those of Ibn al-'Arabí.<sup>25</sup> From these sources we learn that Ibn Masarra taught that the Throne of God governs or rules the cosmos; that human beings can attain the gift of prophecy; and that given the homology between the universe and the supernal, divine Book, the key to metaphysical understanding is the esoteric interpretation of the letters of the alphabet. All three of these theses were to be discussed by Ibn al-'Arabí, and he expressly adopted the last of them.<sup>26</sup> The emphasis on the Throne of God immediately puts one in mind of the "throne mysticism" of Judaism, whereas the latter two principles were both fundamental to the Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia, on whom see below. Whatever Ibn Masarra's relationship with pseudo-Empedocles, the Hermetic doctrines associated with the latter were to find many an enthusiast in later Andalusí centuries.<sup>27</sup>

Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021-1054 or 1058), generally regarded as the first Jewish philosopher in Spain,<sup>28</sup> carries on the tradition of Israeli and Ibn Masarra in Neoplatonism and in a cosmology with strikingly pseudo-Empedoclean features.<sup>29</sup> His writings were to be extremely influential to later Kabbalists, especially his doctrine of the Divine Will as something of a demiurge, intermediate between the unknowable Godhead and the creation.<sup>30</sup> Ibn Gabirol's doctrine that even spiritual entities are composed of matter and form appears to presage later Šúfí theosophical developments, particularly Ibn al-'Arabí. His most famous work, known in Latin translation as the *Fons Vitae*, a dialogue in which the characters are given almost full-blown literary personalities, marks the beginning of a trend toward narrativization in philosophical writing which would come to predominate in Andalusí literature.

With Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064), we stray somewhat from the course of Andalusí philosophy. The importance of Ibn Ḥazm for our purposes

lies in what his writings reveal about the character of Jewish-Muslim relations in his time. He was not particularly well-disposed towards his Jewish compatriots, but nonetheless displays a wide knowledge of contemporary Jewish literature in his polemical works. Ibn Ḥazm knows not only the Bible, but also parts of the Talmud, the *Shi'ur Qomah* literature, and even perhaps the writings of the Karajites.<sup>31</sup> His polemics against Samuel Ibn Nagrela (d. 1056), the Jewish commander of the Zirid army of Cordoba and a much-celebrated literary *virtuoso* of the court, should probably be read as springing less from a pious distaste at seeing the exaltation of a non-believer as from a certain bitterness at their respective fortunes (Ibn Ḥazm wrote from exile, having fled first Cordoba and then Seville in the wake of an *auto-de-fé* of his works there).<sup>32</sup> In any case, Ibn Ḥazm, by drawing upon it while reacting to it, reveals the remarkable extent of the Jewish-Muslim “symbiosis” prevailing in his time.<sup>33</sup>

If Ibn Ḥazm turned to Jewish texts for polemical purposes, Bahya ibn Paqúda (*fl.* second half of 11<sup>th</sup> cent.) found in Islamic literature an inspiration for Jewish pietism. It would probably not be overstating the case to term Ibn Paqúda the first Jewish Šúfí.<sup>34</sup> In his *Fará'id al-qulúb* (“Duties of the Hearts”) Ibn Paqúda quotes various Šúfís as well as Islamic *ḥadīth* literature, often camouflaging the material by putting the sayings of Muḥammad in the mouths of anonymous “sages” and replacing Qur'anic quotations with appropriate Biblical parallels. Like many of the Judeo-Islamic philosophers and theosophers of al-Andalus, Ibn Paqúda drew inspiration from and quoted the writings of the *Ikhwán al-Šafá*, a mysterious group of 10<sup>th</sup>-century authors, most likely writing in Basra and bearing a close relationship with the Isma'ílís, whose *Rasá'il* (“Epistles”) won for Neoplatonism a far-reaching impact in subsequent Islamic thought.<sup>35</sup> Regarding the Hebrew translation of Ibn Paqúda's *Fará'id al-qulúb*, Fenton writes that it “was to have an abiding influence on Jewish spirituality right down to present times, infusing generations of Jewish readers with Sufi notions. After having strongly influenced the Spanish and thereafter the Palestinian Kabbalists, who were particularly interested in Bahya's reflections on solitary meditation, the *Duties of the Heart* was avidly read in the eighteenth century by Polish ḥasidim.”<sup>36</sup>

Ibn Síd al-Baṭalyúsi (d. 1127) is one of the more obscure figures of the period, perhaps because this Islamic philosopher did not find much of an audience among Muslims for his philosophical works, being chiefly known to them as a grammarian.<sup>37</sup> His *Kitáb al-Hadá'iq* was almost exclusively read in Andalusí Jewish circles, with the notable exception of the school of Ibn al-'Arabí; the latter refers to him approvingly and attributes to him two common tropes in Šúfí and Kabbalistic literature: that of the divine unicity as distinct from

mathematical unity, and underlying all numbers; and that of the point (= the divine Will or unicity) as the primordial source of line, plane, and volume.<sup>38</sup>

The remaining luminaries of Andalusí Judeo-Islamic philosophy are too well-known to require any introduction. The interconfessional contexts in which these thinkers lived and wrote has been remarked upon by many scholars. In the circle of the Jewish poet-philosophers centering on Judah Halevi (d. 1140),<sup>39</sup> Abraham ibn Ezra (d. c. 1164), and Joseph ibn Šaddīq (1149), we find a tradition in full swing of conscious and often positive use of Islamic sources, association with Andalusí courts, and participation in a social class of – most commonly – physicians, contexts that brought Jewish and Muslim philosophers into contact with one another. Their Islamic counterparts – Ibn Bájjah (d. 1138), Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 1185), and Ibn Rushd (d. 1198) – while showing few explicit indications of influence by Jewish sources, were nonetheless integrated into the same socio-political networks, and were clearly aware of their Jewish colleagues.<sup>40</sup> The popularity of these Islamic philosophers among Jewish readers was often far greater than among Muslims, and in some cases it is due to the efforts of Jews in the preservation and translation of their works that we know them today.<sup>41</sup>

Moses Maimonides (d. 1204) stands unparalleled among this group, exerting an influence which, in its capacity for leaping over confessional and philosophical boundaries, has no peer among any thinker of the Western Islamicate world. His profound knowledge of the whole course of Islamic philosophy made him a peer of such minds as Ibn Rushd, whom he further parallels in achieving lasting fame and influence as a scholar of the sacred law. As we will see below, he was studied in the theosophical movements of both religions, a fact which is perhaps the most striking evidence of his importance in the interconfessional atmosphere of al-Andalus. Maimonides and Ibn al-‘Arabí both resided in Cairo at the same time, in 1203.<sup>42</sup> That they may have met is by no means farfetched, as both had access to the same philosophical and courtly circles there. Both, likewise, maintained and continuously asserted their identities as Andalusís while living the latter halves of their lives in other parts of the Islamicate world.<sup>43</sup>

## **Jewish Theosophy: Kabbalah and the Andalusí Context**

Steven Wasserstrom has already noted that, given that the field of Jewish-Islamic studies is still in its infancy, no “unproblematic story” can be told of the history that we are here concerned with.<sup>44</sup> It will thus not be my intention to present an alternative history of the emergence of Kabbalah, integrating it into the interconfessional

history of Andalusí thought. Rather I hope simply to point out that the need for such a recontextualization is suggested by the evidence, of which I will discuss here only four areas: the Gerona school of Kabbalists, Isaac ibn Laṭif, Abraham Abulafia, and the so-called “Jewish Śúfís” that emerged under the leadership of the Maimonidean dynasty in Egypt. First, though, some remarks on the prevailing trends in the historiography of the Kabbalah must be made.

No scholar did more to establish Kabbalah studies as an academic discipline in its own right than Gershom Scholem (d. 1982), the undisputed master of the field. No twentieth century historian of Jewish spirituality has been able to dispense with his insights, and the historiography of Kabbalah has largely followed the lines of research that he initiated. When it comes to the origins of Kabbalah, however, Scholem showed little interest in considering the context of Spain and the currents of Andalusí philosophy, much less of the latter’s interconfessional character, and posited instead a re-emergence of “subterranean” gnosticism latent in Jewish thought as the key to understanding the emergence of Kabbalah.<sup>45</sup> He took this stance in reaction to the approaches of 19<sup>th</sup>-century *Wissenschaft des Judentums* scholars, who tended to denigrate Kabbalah as an anti-rational reaction to the glories of Spanish-Jewish philosophy. Scholem’s much more sympathetic view of Kabbalah’s place in the history of Judaism led him to divorce the early history of Kabbalah from its relation to this immediate, philosophical context.<sup>46</sup> Scholem’s “counter-history,”<sup>47</sup> while it has been questioned and criticized with reference to a number of particular issues, has not been superseded by alternative narratives sensitive to the historical context that I am suggesting here.<sup>48</sup> When Scholem did offer suggestions for immediate historical antecedents, they were generally not from the direction of al-Andalus, and subsequent research has often shown up their weakness.<sup>49</sup> Eliot Wolfson has noted that, “[d]espite the fact that Scholem was keenly aware of the textual, philological, and historical influence of philosophical authors on Jewish mystics in the Middle Ages, he dichotomized the intellectual currents of mysticism and philosophy in too simplistic a fashion.”<sup>50</sup>

The Gerona school of Kabbalists, whose works constitute the most important body of pre-*Zohar* Kabbalistic literature, shows just how inadequate this dichotomy is. This circle of Kabbalists was active in Spain roughly between the years 1210 and 1260, and includes among its members the well-known Biblical exegete Naḥmanides (d. 1270) and his contemporaries Ezra ben Solomon, ‘Azriel, and Jacob ben Sheshet.<sup>51</sup> Though living in Christian Spain, the continuity of their thought with Andalusí Judeo-Islamic philosophy is proven by the sources which provided much of their inspiration: Ibn Gabirol, the direct source for Azriel’s doctrine of the primal Will; Judah Halevi;<sup>52</sup>

Abraham ibn Ezra,<sup>53</sup> and Maimonides.<sup>54</sup> As Idel has shown, Jacob ben Sheshet knew and employed the cosmological scheme of the long version of the *Theology of Aristotle*,<sup>55</sup> and explicitly utilized Maimonides' *Guide* as a source for Platonic material, albeit material which Maimonides had only quoted in order to refute.<sup>56</sup> A particularly interesting document originating from this circle is the *Sefer ha-Temunah*, which crystallizes certain speculations about cosmic cycles earlier elaborated by Abraham bar Ḥiyya, writing in Aragon around 1125. Contrary to Scholem's suggestion of Joachimite influence, Wilensky has shown the remarkable consistency between the *Sefer ha-Temunah* and Isma'īlī schema of cosmic cycles. Setting forth the theory as the "teachings of certain philosophers," bar Ḥiyya wrote:

After all the creatures have passed from potentiality to actuality, God once again returns them to potentiality as in the beginning and then brings them back to actuality a second and third time, and thus without end . . . Others say that the days of the world are 40,000 years and that each of the seven planets reigns 7,000 years in the world. When at the end of 49,000 years they have completed their reign, God destroys His world, leaves it for 1,000 years in a state of *tohu*, and at the end of the fiftieth millennium He renews it as in the beginning.<sup>57</sup>

What is truly remarkable about this theory is that it appears again, almost contemporaneously with the *Sefer ha-Temunah*, in a work by 'Azīz Nasafī, an Iranian Muslim follower of the Murcian school of Ṣūfism to be considered below.<sup>58</sup> In Nasafī's words, written in the latter half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century:

Know thou that the Transmigrationists say that there is a cycle every thousand years and at the end of a cycle there is a resurrection, a lesser resurrection. And there is a cycle every seven thousand years, and at the end of each seven thousand years there is another resurrection, a greater resurrection. And there is a cycle every forty-nine thousand years, and at the end of each forty-nine thousand years there is another resurrection, a supreme resurrection. Since you have understood this introduction now know that one of the seven thousand years is the cycle of Saturn . . . Another seven thousand years is the cycle of Jupiter . . . [And so on with the seven planets.] With the supreme resurrection [after 49,000 years] the earth is completely flooded, and water covers the entire land.<sup>59</sup>

This is an exact parallel, in every particular, of the doctrine set forth by the Gerona Kabbalists. In addition, the *Sefer ha-Temunah* is the first Kabbalistic text to use the term *gilgul* for transmigration of



the soul,<sup>60</sup> and it is to the Transmigrationists (*ahl al-tanasukh*) that Nasafí attributes the belief. This is certainly one of the most compelling pieces of evidence arguing for an interconfessional recontextualization of these literatures.<sup>61</sup>

Another important Spanish Kabbalist demonstrating continuity with the Andalusí interconfessional context is Isaac Ibn Laṭif, to whom Sara Wilensky has devoted a number of important studies. As she has shown, Ibn Laṭif declared himself to be a disciple of Maimonides,<sup>62</sup> and draws at length upon the Andalusí Neoplatonists discussed above, particularly Solomon Ibn Gabirol.<sup>63</sup> He even went “behind” Maimonides, so to speak, directly citing al-Fárábí in elaborating his theory of prophecy rather than simply utilizing Maimonides, who likewise was indebted to al-Fárábí on this issue.<sup>64</sup> He then parted company with both al-Fárábí and Maimonides on the issue of psychology, drawing instead upon Baṭalyúsi in enumerating the five-fold division of vegetative, animal, rational, philosophical and prophetic souls.<sup>65</sup> He continues the doctrine of the cosmic cycles held by the Gerona school, and Wilensky has posited direct dependence on Isma'ílí sources in this regard.<sup>66</sup> She has also demonstrated such dependence in Ibn Laṭif's negative theology, wherein the Divine Will is a demiurgic “first created being” (*al-mubda' al-awwal*), from which the cosmos is emanated.<sup>67</sup> I quote at length one passage from Wilensky's article on this doctrine, as it admirably illustrates how intertwined the earliest Kabbalah was with the Andalusí interconfessional context:

His [Ibn Laṭif's] reply to the question: how can a link exist between infinite God and finite and material man (a question posed by Judah Hallevi through the Khazar), is that there is no relationship between the transcendent, infinite God and finite man, and that the infinite God cannot be grasped by human thought. He quotes Plotinus, as formulated by Ibn Gabirol in *Fons Vitae*, and adds: “I say that the limit of cognition is when the intellectually cognized subject is able to encompass the object of cognition; and He who is infinite cannot be encompassed by the finite intellect.” He maintains that the source of prophecy is not the transcendent, infinite, hidden God, but the First Created Being. The paradox can be solved by positing a link between the First Created Being and the prophetic soul (the intuitive soul). The latter term was adopted from the *Kitáb al-Hada'ik* [sic] of the Andalusian philosopher al-Batalyawsi<sup>68</sup> (1052-1127), who in turn borrowed it from the *Epistles of the Sincere Brethren* (*Ikhwan al-Safa*), Neoplatonic texts closely connected to the Isma'ilia.<sup>69</sup>

With regard to Abraham Abulafia (d. c. 1291), another Spanish Kabbalist of the thirteenth century, we have a number of studies by the eminent historian of Kabbalah, Moshe Idel, who has shown Abulafia's intimate continuity with Andalusí philosophy and provided evidence of the influence of Şúfism on various elements of Abulafia's thought.<sup>70</sup> Considered the progenitor of an ecstatic or prophetic version of Kabbalah – as distinct from the theosophical mode which centered on the theory of the *sefirot* and the mystical meanings of the commandments<sup>71</sup> – Abulafia, like many of the earliest Spanish Kabbalists, studied Andalusí philosophy prior to becoming a Kabbalist.<sup>72</sup> He was one of the first people to write a commentary on Maimonides' *Guide*, and no one since him wrote as many commentaries of this work.<sup>73</sup> And once again, Baṭalyúsi's *Kitáb al-Hadá'iq* appears as an important source.<sup>74</sup> Idel summarizes the importance of the Andalusí interconfessional philosophical tradition thus:

In other words, Abulafia read Maimonides in Avicennian and Averroistic keys, decoded his own spiritual adventures according to Maimonides' teaching in the *Guide*, and added philosophical conceptions out of Arabic philosophy.<sup>75</sup>

Perhaps more important for our purposes than Abulafia's continuity with Andalusí Judeo-Islamic philosophy is the fact that he represents the beginning of a trend toward direct engagement of Şúfism in Kabbalah, rather than the mediated influence via earlier authors like Ibn Paqúda or Ghazálí-in-translation such as can be identified in many theosophical Kabbalistic works. There are traces of Şúfism throughout Abulafia, both in matters of doctrine and in terms of the innovation of ecstatic techniques modeled after Şúfi practices.<sup>76</sup> In his circle of followers, many of whom dwelt in Palestine, this becomes a much more marked tendency, extending to the adoption of cosmological schemas and even terminology from Şúfism, and, most notably, from the school of Ibn al-'Arabí.<sup>77</sup> To give but one example of the many adduced by Idel, we find in a Kabbalistic compilation made by Rabbi Isaac of Acre<sup>78</sup>, one of the foremost Kabbalists of the fourteenth century and a leading figure of the Abulafian tradition, the following five-world hierarchy: the World of Divinity, the World of the Intellect, the World of the Souls, the Imaginal World, and the World of the Senses.<sup>79</sup> While this schema baffled Scholem, who saw it as an odd departure from the dominant Kabbalistic cosmologies based on Neoplatonic schema, it exactly corresponds with the Şúfi five-world hierarchy that first appears in the writings of Ibn al-'Arabí's disciples.<sup>80</sup> The specific attributes of the Imaginal World are exactly the same in both cases, as Idel has shown in a point-by-point analysis, showing that this Şúfi-

Kabbalistic parallel “is not only one of terminology, but also of conceptual content.”<sup>81</sup>

The trend of explicit adoption of Šúfí material as represented by the Abulafian Kabbalistic tradition finds its most radical expression in the so-called “Jewish Šúfís,” who have been the subject of several ground-breaking studies by Paul Fenton. Utilizing material from the Cairo Geniza, he has greatly enriched our picture of this remarkable Jewish pietist movement in 13<sup>th</sup> century Egypt, led by the descendents of Maimonides, which explicitly drew its inspiration from Islamic mysticism and attempted an Islamicization of Jewish worship. The beginnings of this movement lie at least during the tenure of Moses Maimonides as *ra'ís al-yahúd* (president of the Jewish community) in Cairo during the last decades of the twelfth century. The first historical personality definitely associated with this movement was a younger contemporary of Moses Maimonides, Rabbi Abraham ha-ḥasíd (d. 1223)<sup>82</sup>, of whose extant works Fenton writes that, while “they are thoroughly permeated with the Sufi terminology and tenets which typify the [Jewish Šúfí] Pietist writings, they voice an original and specifically Jewish doctrine whose underlying inspiration was Yehúdáh ha-Levi’s *Kuzarí* and Moses Maimonides *Guide for the Perplexed*, tempered by Sufi ideology.”<sup>83</sup> One of Rabbi Abraham’s disciples was Moses Maimonides’ son, Abraham Maimonides (d. 1237), whose *Kifáyat al-‘Abidín* is one of the classics of Jewish Šúfism. Samuel Rosenblatt, in his edition and translation of a portion of that work, noted as early as 1927 that Abraham Maimonides:

... not only openly shows his admiration for the Sufis by praising their way of life, calling them the real lineal descendents of the prophets, and regretting that the Jews do not imitate their example<sup>84</sup>, but his whole ethical system as outlined in the portion of the **כפאיה**<sup>85</sup> with which we are concerned appears to be Sufic from beginning to end in terminology and ideology, or at least based on some Sufic prototype.<sup>86</sup>

Subsequent studies of this text have confirmed these assertions, and have further revealed that Abraham stood at the head of a line of Šúfí-inclined Maimonides, from his son down to his great-great-grandson, who followed him not only in leading the Egyptian Jewish community, but also in composing Jewish-Šúfí tracts and pressing vigorously for Islamic-inspired modifications to the daily rituals of Jewish life.<sup>87</sup> From ‘Obaydah Maimonides, son of Abraham, we have the deeply Šúfí work translated by Fenton as *The Treatise of the Pool*, which follows the lead of the *Kifáya* in valorizing Šúfism as the inheritor of the spiritual praxis of the ancient Israelite prophets and in setting forth a mystical program cast in a Šúfí idiom. Three

generations later, with David Maimonides' (d. 1415), we find the Jewish-Şúfí pietist tradition still going strong. His *Murshíd ilá al-tafarrud* ("The Guide to Detachment") is remarkable for two reasons. First of all, the range of Şúfí sources is much broader than was the case for any previous Jewish-Şúfí, encompassing such luminaries as Dhu'l-Nún al-Mişrî, Abú Tálíb al-Makkí, al-Sarráj, Suhrawardí Maqtúl, Ghazálí, the Andalusí Ibn al-'Aríf, al-Qushayrî, and al-Halláj.<sup>88</sup> Secondly, this work also quotes writings of the early Kabbalists, marking a significant attempt at dove-tailing the two predominant phenomena of Spanish-born Jewish mysticism.

While this last example has described events and personalities outside of al-Andalus, it is clear that such a movement as the Egyptian Jewish-Şúfís could not have come into being were it not for the prior interconfessional developments in Iberia. While Moses Maimonides, the interconfessional Andalusí *par excellence*, does not appear to have shown any direct affinity for Şúfism, it could be argued that his attitude toward Greek and Islamic philosophy prepared the way for his son's approach toward Islamic mysticism. Moses Maimonides felt that the mysteries of creation and of the divine chariot (*ma'aseh bereshit* and *ma'aseh merkaveh*), as found in the Torah, had been opaque to Jews since Tannaïtic times, the keys to their secrets having somehow how been lost.<sup>89</sup> His claim to have rediscovered them among the wisdom of the "Gentiles," in the Neoplatonist corpus that would provide the basis for his own philosophy and theology, is reflected in his son's claim to have found in the Şúfís the lost piety of the prophets of Israel.

## Islamic Theosophy: The Murcia School and Its Interconfessional Context

The figures that I will be concerned with here were all Şúfís born in Murcia in south-eastern al-Andalus, sometimes referred to as *wujúdí* Şúfís. Much like the Jewish theosophies considered above, the Murcia school presents striking evidence of an interconfessional context.

By far the most important figure of this school is Muḥyí al-Dín Ibn al-'Arabí (d. 1240), the most influential theosopher of Islamic history. In more than 400 books – the longest of which would cover 37 volumes in its projected critical edition – he presented an astonishing synthesis of Islamic knowledge and spiritual reflection into a grand mythological picture of the cosmos. Research into the sources of his thought has been tentative at best, and like the Kabbalah, has been at times subject to the whims of counter-history.<sup>90</sup> As was the case with Scholem and Kabbalah, the occasional attempts at tracing the history of his thought that have been made have paid

too little attention to the Andalusí context. For example, in the sole monograph on the important doctrine of the “perfect man” in Ibn al-‘Arabí, the author surveys Augustine and Ghazálí before concluding that Ibn al-‘Arabí has the patent on the concept.<sup>91</sup> More proximate sources of possible precedents to Ibn al-‘Arabí’s usage is neglected, and no attention is given to the fact that Maimonides uses the precise terminology (*al-insán al-kámil*) throughout the *Guide*, developing the earlier usage of the term by the great Islamic philosopher, al-Fárábí.<sup>92</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabí’s work is indeed of such a grandeur and profundity that no intellectual history could “explain” it simply by identifying sources and influences. However, his thought does not exist in a vacuum, and the attribution of novelty to his formulation of Islamic spirituality rings hollow when no attempt is made to mark off what is truly new with him from what is drawn from his milieu. Again, I am not going to attempt here to reconstruct the history of his thought, but only to point out certain facts which place him in the context of the Andalusí Judeo-Islamic symbiosis, a context in light of which the history of Ibn al-‘Arabí and his influence needs to be rewritten.

Despite the vastness of his output, Ibn al-‘Arabí very rarely refers to philosophical predecessors. Of the contacts with his contemporaries, he refers several times to his meetings with Ibn Rushd, but his judgment of the latter is a complex issue.<sup>93</sup> He refers in his magnum opus, the *Futúhát al-Makkiyya*, to a discussion he had with a Rabbi about the mystical significance of the letter “B,” (Arabic *bá*, Hebrew *bet*), with which both the Torah and the Qur’an begin. In a number of places, he refers to the Torah, but these appear to be very general allusions. And while his works lack any direct reference to most of the towering figures of Islamic philosophy – al-Kindí, al-Fárábí, Ibn Síná, Ibn Tufayl – he does refer at least twice to Baṭalyúsí, which underlines the commonality of sources between he and the Spanish Kabbalists. In a highly significant passage in the *Futúhát*, where Ibn al-‘Arabí describes his encounter with the mysterious “Youth” around the Ka’aba, he quotes from the *Theology of Aristotle*.<sup>94</sup> Once again, Ibn al-‘Arabí shares the same critical source-texts as the Judeo-Islamic philosophers and the Kabbalists.<sup>95</sup>

It is with two of Ibn al-‘Arabí’s Murcian compatriots, however, that we find the most direct evidence of the interconfessional context for this theosophy. ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Ibn Sab’in (d. 1270), a younger contemporary of Ibn al-‘Arabí, propounded a radically pantheistic doctrine, known in Islamic sources as *wahdat al-wujúd*, and insisted fiercely on the independence of his thought.<sup>96</sup> Thus, he directly criticized Ibn Masarra and Ibn al-‘Arabí, his Andalusí predecessors, while at the same time developing his system using their terminology. The strikingly Hermetic character of Ibn Sab’in and his school – Hermes is included in the Sab’iniyyún *silsilah* - links it with Kabbalah,

which also found Hermeticism a fertile source for contemplation.<sup>97</sup> Most importantly, though, Ibn Sab'in found inspiration in Jewish sources, citing Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* in his *Risála Núriyya*<sup>98</sup> and including the Jewish angels Yahoel and Metatron in an invocation found in his treatise on the letter qáf.<sup>99</sup> His philosophical correspondence with Emperor Frederick II further displays his knowledge of Maimonidean thought.<sup>100</sup> A later follower of both Ibn Sab'in and Ibn al-'Arabí, the thirteenth-century Egyptian magician al-Búní, also "included Metatron in his repertoire, along with other Jewish motifs."<sup>101</sup>

This interconfessionalism becomes even more pronounced when we consider the career of Ibn Sab'in's disciple, the fellow-Murcian Ibn Húd (d. 1300), who worked as a physician and mystical guide in Damascus, finding clients among both Muslims and Jews. He is said to have proclaimed his readiness to guide any aspirant in any of the three ways – Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. Following Ibn Sab'in's interest in Maimonides, Ibn Húd is known to have taught the *Guide of the Perplexed* to Damascene Jews. One source calls him the "Shaykh of the Jews," and Kraemer suggests that there may have been some connection between Ibn Húd's circle in Damascus and the "Jewish Súfís" of Cairo.<sup>102</sup> Obviously, while the school of Murcia may have been concerned first and foremost with the inner meaning of the Qur'an, their contributions to the history of Islamicate thought cannot be understood without placing them in the context of Andalusí interconfessionalism.

## Conclusion

It should be clear by now how limited such historiographical distinctions as those between philosophy and mysticism, or even between Muslim and Jew, ultimately are in aiding our understanding of the movements considered above. It can also be unequivocally stated that any explanation of the Judeo-Islamic symbiosis in al-Andalus that rests on the assumption that "the high culture of the [Muslims] was to a great degree secular"<sup>103</sup> is absurd. What we find in these events and personalities is not simply thinkers who were incidentally Jewish interacting creatively with counterparts who were incidentally Muslim. On the contrary, we find here an interpenetration and crosspollination of values, of precisely religious ideas and ideals. The ever-eloquent Lenn Goodman wrote, referring to the medieval Judeo-Islamic philosophical "conversation":

What we learn from these conversations, as we cock our ears to listen, is first to doubt and then to deny the stereotypic notions of nineteenth-century scholarship that would assign to each race and nation a particular genius or spirit of its

own, uncommunicable and inscrutable to any other, incapable of mixture without adulteration of each distinctive and pristine essence, but transparent, invisible, unexchangeable and uncriticisable by those who share it or those who live within its thrall.<sup>104</sup>

In these words lies a compelling critique of the whole historiographic debate over *convivencia*, which sees in medieval Spain an experience of human “togetherness” only through the lens of reified differences, naturalized ideological divides. Obviously, such lines were not drawn on the landscape. In terms of what this suggests for how we approach the history of mysticism, consider this influential declaration by Gershom Scholem:

There is no mysticism as such, there is only the mysticism of a particular religious system, Christian, Islamic, Jewish mysticism and so on.<sup>105</sup>

This historian’s appeal itself begs the question of historicity, for what, indeed, is a religious system “as such?”

The recontextualization that I have argued for here challenges not only the prevailing historiographical approaches to the beginnings of the Jewish and Islamic philosophical mysticisms of the Middle Ages; it also questions the common Western view of medieval Islam as a civilization “intermediate” between the Hellenistic Age and the Renaissance,<sup>106</sup> whose sole purpose in the grand *telos* of history was to rescue the torch of Greek enlightenment that it might duly be passed to Europe, its rightful inheritor.<sup>107</sup> The importance of the Andalusí “Golden Age” in the development of Western civilization cannot be gainsaid, but nor should this symbiotic achievement be seen as having been without issue for the Islamicate world. Far from being simply passed on, the torch held aloft in al-Andalus fired not only the scientific revolutions of Europe; it also flooded with its lights the minds of the Jewish and Muslim mystics of the East.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The vast influence exerted upon the history of Islamic thought by the figure at the center of the Akbarian movement, Muḥyí al-dín Ibn al-‘Arabí (known as the *Shaykh al-Akbar* (“Doctor Maximus”), whence the term “Akbarian”), has been demonstrated in a large number of studies, but see the concise presentation in Chodkiewicz, “Diffusion.” The persistence of Kabbalah into our own times is well known and it has even entered into popular culture, but critical historiography of Kabbalah in the modern period is lacking, for reasons discussed by Idel in *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 25f.

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- <sup>2</sup> Wasserstrom and Kiener are the significant exceptions, and their relevant studies will be cited throughout what follows.
- <sup>3</sup> As will be explained below, I refer here not to the “school of Ibn al-‘Arabí” that extends via his disciple and son-in-law Şadr al-Dín al-Qúnáwí, but rather with the so-called “Murcian school” that includes Ibn Sab’in and Ibn Húd.
- <sup>4</sup> I borrow this term from Marshall Hodgson, who introduced and defended its usage in his *Venture of Islam*, vol. 1, pp. 57-60. “Islamicate” refers to the “culture, centered on a lettered tradition, which has been historically distinctive of Islamdom the *society*, and which has been naturally shared in by both Muslims and non-Muslims who participate at all fully in the society of Islamdom” (ibid., p. 58, with Hodgson’s emphases).
- <sup>5</sup> For a synopsis of these developments, see Fakhry, *Short Introduction*, chap. 1.
- <sup>6</sup> On which see Hodgson, op. cit., chap. 5.
- <sup>7</sup> On the early Islamicate “humanists” see Kraemer, *Humanism*, and Leaman, “Islamic Humanism.”
- <sup>8</sup> Leaman, op. cit., p. 156.
- <sup>9</sup> The still-standard work on this issue is Wolfson’s *Philosophy of the Kalám*. For more on the interconfessional contexts of both of these early developments, see Ben-Shammai, “Jewish Thought,” passim.
- <sup>10</sup> Safran, *The Second Umayyad Caliphate*.
- <sup>11</sup> Cohen’s “The Story of the Four Captives” is an excellent study of the mythohistorical underpinnings given to this unprecedented break with Baghdad by Abraham ibn Da’úd in his *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*. See also Ben-Sasson’s “The Emergence of the Qayrawán Jewish Community” for a study of a parallel development of independence from Baghdad on the part of the Jewish community under the Ifriqí Aghlabids.
- <sup>12</sup> From the Jewish side, see Abraham ibn Da’úd’s comments in his *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*, translated in Cohen, op. cit., p. 159. For the Muslim side, see Şá’id al-Andalusí’s glowing report of Ibn Shaprut’s establishment of the Andalusí Jewish community’s independence from Baghdád in his *ṭabaqát al-Umam*, translated by Norman Stillman in *Jews of Arab Lands*, p. 210.
- <sup>13</sup> The literature on the “Golden Age” is vast and charged with polemic. Stillman (op. cit., pp. 53-63) and Mark Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, present both the details of the symbiosis and surveys of the polemical arguments. See also Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, chap. six, for insightful reflections on the study of Jewish-Muslim symbiosis.
- <sup>14</sup> For a recent and provocative challenge to this anachronistic dichotomization of pre-modern philosophy, see Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*
- <sup>15</sup> I refer of course to the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, which was essentially a compilation of paraphrased extracts from Plotinus’



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- Enneads* with commentaries by Proclus. See Krayer *et al*, *Pseudo-Aristotle*.
- <sup>16</sup> On account of his *Bidáyat al-Mujtahid*, recently translated by Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee as *The Distinguished Jurist's Primer* (Reading, UK: Garnett Publishing, 1999).
- <sup>17</sup> Ivry, "Averroes and the West," p. 143.
- <sup>18</sup> On Israeli, see Altmann and Stern's excellent monograph, *Isaac Israeli*, with translations of most of his extant works.
- <sup>19</sup> On the long version of the *Theology of Aristotle*, see Fenton, "The Arabic and Hebrew Versions." On Israeli's role in its transmission, see Altmann and Stern, *Isaac Israeli*, pp. 95ff; Zimmerman, "Origin," pp. 190-4; and d'Alverny, "Pseudo-Aristotle," *passim*. On the suggestion of a Judeo-Isma'íli matrix for the development of the long version, see Wasserstrom, "Islamic Social and Cultural Context," p. 100.
- <sup>20</sup> Altmann and Stern, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-2.
- <sup>21</sup> Altmann, "Delphic Maxim," p. 33 and n. 151. In referring to de Leon as the "author of the *Zohar*," I am purposefully sidestepping the ongoing debate about this issue. Suffice it to point out that, ever since Scholem's detailed investigations into the matter of the *Zohar's* authorship (*Major Trends*, pp. 156-204) it has been recognized by historians that Moses de Leon played a central – if not sole – role in its composition. More recent debates have tended to center on whether distinctions can be made between different strata of the *Zoharic* text, some of which may not have been written by de Leon. On this whole issue see Liebes, *Studies*, chap. 2.
- <sup>22</sup> Fenton, *op. cit.*, p. 260n 2.
- <sup>23</sup> Altmann and Stern, *op. cit.*, pp. xiii and 8. The *Gháyat al-hakím* is itself a fascinating milestone in medieval interconfessionalism, lying as it does at the nexus of the parallel traditions of the magical generation of an artificial anthropoid (the *golem*, *homunculus*) in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. See O'Connor, *Alchemical Creation*, p. 189n 23 and 24.
- <sup>24</sup> This is argued by d'Alverny, *op. cit.*, p. 69. See also Altmann, "Delphic Maxim," p. 33.
- <sup>25</sup> The most extensive treatment of Ibn Masarra's life and thought is Asín Palacion, *The Mystical Philosophy*, a work which has been consistently criticized for making over-much of a pseudo-Empedoclean source for Ibn Masarra's doctrine. More recent treatments of Ibn Masarra can be found in Goodman, "Ibn Masarra," and Addas, "Andalusí Mysticism," pp. 911-20. Two of Ibn Masarra's surviving works are printed in M. Kamal Ibrahim Ja'far, *Min qadaya'l-fikr al-islami* (Cairo: Dar al-'ulum, 1978); note that these works were unknown to Asín and have been almost completely neglected even in more recent scholarship; the above-cited article by Goodman, for instance, though noting Ja'far's book in his bibliography, states erroneously in the article itself that none of Ibn Masarra's works survive.

- <sup>26</sup> See Addas, *Quest*, pp. 58f. She quotes Ibn al-‘Arabí’s *Kitáb al-Mím wa l-wáw wa l-nún* (Book of (the letters) M, W, and N), where he states that his approach to the secrets of these letters is “in the manner of Ibn Masarra.” Note that the theses regarding the Throne attributed to Ibn Masarra by Ibn al-‘Arabí – and much discussed by Asin Palacios – do not appear in either of Ibn Masarra’s surviving works, nor does one find in those texts any extended discussion of the Throne at all.
- <sup>27</sup> Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera translated pseudo-Empedocles’ *Book of Five Substances* into Hebrew, and asserted that it had been a major influence on Ibn Gabirol. See Jospe, *Torah and Sophia*, p. 74. The pseudo-Empedoclean doctrine of the vegetative soul seems to have been generally known and often affirmed in Andalusí philosophical literature.
- <sup>28</sup> According to Urvoy, *Ibn Rushd*, p. 5, his was “the first true ‘philosophical system’ to be developed in al-Andalus,” Jewish or otherwise.
- <sup>29</sup> On Ibn Gabirol, see Lancaster, “Ibn Gabirol,” and Sirat, *History*, pp. 68-81. Altmann, “Delphic Maxim,” p. 35, states that the “influence of the Pseudo-Empedocles Fragments on Solomon ibn Gabirol cannot be gainsaid.” See his references in *ibid.*, n. 157.
- <sup>30</sup> This promotion of the Will to a cosmological priority over the First Intellect is a departure from classical Neoplatonism traceable to the long version of the *Theology of Aristotle*. See the extracts and discussion in Zimmerman, “Origins,” p. 192f.
- <sup>31</sup> Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, chap. 3. The *Shi’ur Qomah* (lit. “measure of the body”) describes the proportions and mystical significances of the Divine Body, much utilized in Kabbalistic literatures. See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, Index, sv. “Shi’ur Komah.”
- <sup>32</sup> Pulcini, *op. cit.*, p. 142n 14, writes that “Ibn Nagrela’s political, military, religious, and literary successes were a source of embitterment to the disillusioned Ibn Ḥazm during his reclusive years in Mont Lisham.” It is interesting to note also that the anti-Qur’anic work which Ibn Ḥazm attacks in this polemic, and which he attributed to Ibn Nagrela, was in fact not by Ibn Nagrela but rather Ibn al-Ráwandí, the notorious 9<sup>th</sup> century Muslim “free-thinker.” See Stroumsa, “Jewish Polemics,” p. 245.
- <sup>33</sup> Some have argued, following Goldziher, that Ibn al-‘Arabí followed the áhirí legal madhhab of Ibn Ḥazm, but this is open to question. See al-Ghorab, “Muhyiddin Ibn al-Arabí.”
- <sup>34</sup> Fenton, “Judaism and Sufism,” p. 756f.
- <sup>35</sup> Sirat, *History*, p. 82, and Altmann, “The Delphic Maxim,” pp. 24f. and 36f. On the *Ikhwán al-Ṣafá* in general, see Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists*.
- <sup>36</sup> Fenton, “Judaism and Sufism,” p. 757.
- <sup>37</sup> Corbin, *History*, p. 236.

- <sup>38</sup> See Addas, *Quest*, p. 108. On the use of these symbols of the emanative process in early Kabbalistic literature, and the suggestion of Baṭalyúsi as the source, see Wilensky, “First Created Being,” p. 75n 18.
- <sup>39</sup> There are a number of studies revealing Judah Halevi’s remarkable integration into an interconfessional environment. One recent work, which surveys the history of this research while at the same time adding new insights into the depth of the penetration of Šúfi concepts into Halevi’s thinking, is Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy*.
- <sup>40</sup> On these networks, and the common thread of medical profession linking many of these Jewish and Muslim philosophers, see Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain*, p. 256, and Wasserstrom, “Islamic Social and Cultural Context,” p. 99: “Jewish and Muslim philosopher-physicians thus met with and learned from each other. Their occasional friendships could develop such intensity that ibn al-Qiftí (d. 1248) and ibn ‘Aqnín (an Andalusí, pupil of Maimonides) (d. early thirteenth century) were said to have vowed ‘that whoever preceded the other in death would have to send reports from eternity to the survivor.’”
- <sup>41</sup> Wasserstrom, “Islamic Social and Cultural Context,” p. 96, observes that “some of the sweetest fruits of Islamic philosophy — al-Fárábí (870-950), ibn Bájja (d. 1138), ibn ṭufayl (d. 1185) — were preserved, translated, transmitted, and reverently studied by Jews.” Dominique Urvoy, in *Ibn Rushd*, p. 109, writes of “the fact that Ibn Rushd has no important followers in the Muslim circles, that his work only survived thanks to his influence on a certain Jewish bourgeoisie.”
- <sup>42</sup> Wasserstrom, “Jewish-Muslim Relations,” p. 75, where it is noted that they were both resident in Cairo again in 1206, though it’s unclear what is meant here, given that Maimonides died in 1204.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabí’s famous biographical account of the Šúfis of al-Andalus, the *Rúḥ al-Quds*, was, according to Ibn al-‘Arabí himself, inspired by the chauvanism and anti-Andalusí prejudice that he met among the Šúfis of Egypt. For Maimonides’ pining for al-Andalus, see (but be warned of the Derrida-inspired prose), Anidjar, “*Our Place in Al-Andalus*.” Wasserstrom notes several additional studies focusing on Maimonides’ self-conception as an Andalusí throughout his life in “Jewish-Muslim Relations,” p. 78n 1.
- <sup>44</sup> “The Islamic Social and Cultural Context,” p. 105n 1.
- <sup>45</sup> *Origins*, p. 45, but stated and restated in many other instances throughout his *oeuvre*. Joseph Dan, one of Scholem’s former students and the current occupant of the Gershom Scholem Chair of Kabbalah at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, has noted in several instances that decades of scholarship have turned up absolutely no evidence to support Scholem’s thesis of Gnostic influence; see Dan, *Early Kabbalah*, pp. 5-7, and idem, *Heart and the Fountain*, p. 29.
- <sup>46</sup> In situating his approach as against his 19<sup>th</sup>-century predecessors, Scholem wrote that “the kabbalistic movement cannot be described

adequately according to the categories of the history of philosophy; it can only be explained in terms of the history of religions . . .” (*Origins*, p. 11). Cf. Eliade: “But if we are to avoid sinking back into an obsolete ‘reductionism,’ this history of religious meanings must always be regarded as forming part of the history of the human spirit” (*Quest*, p. 9). For Eliade as well as for Scholem, there is a double meaning to the term “history” here: it is not only religious meaning as the object of historical enquiry, but also the historian of these meanings, that forms a part of and plays a role in the “history of the human spirit.”

<sup>47</sup> See Biale, *Gershom Scholem*, passim, and Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*, esp. pages 159-61.

<sup>48</sup> I would strongly qualify this, though, with reference to the work of Moshe Idel, who has consistently proposed alternative avenues of approach to the historiography of Kabbalah. Nonetheless, a post-Scholem comprehensive history of the early Kabbalah is yet to appear, though Yizhak Baer’s work could be considered as a framework for such an alternative. Idel seems to see Baer’s work in this way, in *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 13.

<sup>49</sup> Scholem considered the Catharist movement as an influence in the emergence of Kabbalah, but see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic*, pp. 33-44. Likewise he considered certain characteristics of the Gerona Kabbalists to have perhaps derived from Joachim of Fiore, whereas Willensky’s research has shown an Islamic provenance to these characteristics to be much more likely. See below.

<sup>50</sup> “Jewish Mysticism,” p. 452.

<sup>51</sup> According to Scholem, *Origins*, p. 369, a total of twelve members of this circle are known by name.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 410f.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 411.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 413.

<sup>55</sup> “Neoplatonism,” p. 326f.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320.

<sup>57</sup> Translated in Scholem, *Origins*, p. 462.

<sup>58</sup> On Nasafi as a member of this school, see Chittick, “The School of Ibn ‘Arabí,” p. 519, and Ridgeon, *Persian Metaphysics*, pp. 19f.

<sup>59</sup> Ridgeon, *Persian Metaphysics*, pp. 237f.

<sup>60</sup> Scholem, *Origins*, p. 467n 239.

<sup>61</sup> Alexander Altmann has produced a series of studies tracing various symbols and motifs through the Andalusí philosophical milieu and into the theosophies of Ibn al-‘Arabí and the Gerona Kabbalists. I cannot here recapitulate the extensive evidence adduced by Altmann, and instead refer the reader to his “Delphic Maxim,” “‘Ladder of Ascension’,” and “Motif of the ‘Shells’.” These studies are treasures of the kinds of thematic continuities that could be fruitfully pursued along the lines of the recontextualization suggested here.

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- <sup>62</sup> “*Guide and the Gate*,” pp. 267f.
- <sup>63</sup> Wilensky, “Isaac ibn Laṭif,” passim.
- <sup>64</sup> Idem, “*Guide and the Gate*,” pp. 272f
- <sup>65</sup> Idem, “*Guide and the Gate*,” pp. 273f; “First Created Being,” pp. 69f.
- <sup>66</sup> Idem, “First Created Being,” p. 76n 32; “*Guide and the Gate*,” p. 272n 22.
- <sup>67</sup> Idem, “First Created Being,” pp. 72ff.
- <sup>68</sup> This transliteration is often met with in the secondary sources, but “Baṭalyúsi” more accurately reflects how this name is pronounced. The name literally means “from Badajoz.”
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69f. Ibn Laṭif’s doctrine of the First Created Being is strikingly similar to the idea of the “Muḥammadan Reality,” the “third thing” in Ibn al-‘Arabí’s system. I cannot explore this parallel here, but it is by no means the only such correspondence between the two Spanish theosophies. These correspondences are but one of the many areas of research that my suggested recontextualization would fruitfully open up for inquiry.
- <sup>70</sup> On Abulafia and Andalusí philosophy, see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic*, chap. 1; idem., “Maimonides and Kabbalah,” pp. 54-79; on Abulafia and Ṣufism, see *Studies in Ecstatic*, chaps. 5-7, and idem., *Mystical Experience*, index, sv. “Sufism.”
- <sup>71</sup> On these two major forms of early Kabbalah, see Idel, “Defining Kabbalah,” passim. Idel responds to what he sees as an over-emphasis on the theosophical or speculative elements in Kabbalah in Scholem’s and most subsequent scholarship, and shows that there is also a significant theurgical and ecstatic trend, represented first and foremost by Abulafia and his school. Recently, Eliot Wolfson has challenged the adequacy of this speculative/ecstatic dichotomy, highlighting the experiential elements in the former and thus questioning the very basis for this phenomenological distinction. See his “Jewish Mysticism,” esp. p. 483.
- <sup>72</sup> According to Idel (“Maimonides and Kabbalah,” p. 55, and *Studies in Ecstatic*, p. 2), Isaac Ibn Laṭif, Moses de Leon, and Joseph Gikatilla were among Abulafia’s Kabbalistic contemporaries whose lives traced a similar trajectory in beginning with philosophical studies before authoring what would become central Kabbalistic texts.
- <sup>73</sup> Abulafia wrote three. See Idel, “Maimonides and Kabbalah,” p. 58. It would appear that his contemporary, Joseph Gikatilla, was the only other author to write a Kabbalistic commentary to the *Guide*. *Ibid.*, p. 62. It should also be noted that two of Abulafia’s *Guide* commentaries were translated into Latin, and it was on the basis of these that many of the key elements of ecstatic Kabbalah made their way into Christian Kabbalah, along with the view, promulgated by Pico della Mirandola, that Maimonides was a Kabbalist. See *ibid.*, p. 70.
- <sup>74</sup> Wasserstrom, “Jewish-Muslim Relations,” p. 75; Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic*, p. 23n 34.
- <sup>75</sup> *Studies in Ecstatic*, p. 16.

- <sup>76</sup> Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic*, esp. chap. 7. There, on p. 111, Idel writes that Abulafia's connection with Šúfism was "a relationship acknowledge by the Kabbalists themselves." Unfortunately, no sources are indicated for this.
- <sup>77</sup> I have noted a great many similarities between the Abulafian Kabbalistic texts and the writings of Ibn al-'Arabí, and this deserves closer study. One issue that I have not seen touched on in any of the secondary literature is the remarkable similarity between the central Abulafian exegetical/theurgical technique of *ẓeruf* (letter permutation) and the Akbarian notion of *tašarruf* (free disposal, magical power, grammatical inflection, transformation, permutation). These two words derive from the same Semitic triliteral root ( $\zeta-r-f = \text{š-r-f}$ ), and the contexts of their deployment in the two respective mystical traditions are often identical.
- <sup>78</sup> Šúfí influences on Isaac of Acre had been noted as early as 1852, by Adolph Jellinek. See Fenton, in 'O. Maimonides, *Treatise of the Pool*, p. 63n 94 for an extensive outline of Isaac's appropriation of Šúfí materials.
- <sup>79</sup> Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic*, chap. 5, at p. 73.
- <sup>80</sup> For this hierarchy in the school of Ibn al-'Arabí, see the masterful survey in Chittick, "Five Divine Presences," *passim*.
- <sup>81</sup> *Studies in Ecstatic*, p. 75.
- <sup>82</sup> There is, however, ample evidence to suggest that this Cairene pietist movement – in some form – predates both Maimonides and Abraham ha-ḥasíd. See Cohen, "Soteriology," p. 209.
- <sup>83</sup> In 'O. Maimonides, *Treatise of the Pool*, p. 7.
- <sup>84</sup> See Fenton, in *ibid.*, p. 8, for the translations of the passages in which these sentiments are expressed.
- <sup>85</sup> This is Judeo-Arabic, a transliteration of *kifáya*, i.e., the *Kitáb Kifáyat al-'bidín* of Abraham Maimonides, which Rosenblatt translates as "The Comprehensive Guide for the Servants of God."
- <sup>86</sup> In A. Maimonides, *High Ways*, p. 50.
- <sup>87</sup> On the attempted reforms of Jewish ritual, such as the introduction of Islamic-style ablutions, genuflections, prostrations, and serried-rank congregational prayer, see Goitein, "Abraham Maimonides," p. 147f. and Fenton in 'O. Maimonides, *op. cit.*, pp. 13ff.
- <sup>88</sup> These are identified *en passant* throughout Rosenthal's study of the text, "A Judaeo-Arabic Work under Sufic Influence." Rosenthal was unable to identify the author, which lacuna was filled in by Fenton, "Judaism and Sufism," p. 763.
- <sup>89</sup> See Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," p. 34, and Altmann, "Maimonides's Attitude," *passim*.
- <sup>90</sup> See my "Counter-History of Islam."
- <sup>91</sup> Takeshita, *Ibn 'Arabí's Theory*, *passim*, and p. 49.
- <sup>92</sup> On Maimonides' concept of the "perfect man" and its possibly relationship to Ibn al-'Arabí, see Kiener, "Ibn al-'Arabí and the

Qabbalah,” 38-44. On the “perfect man” in al-Fárábí, the source for Maimonides’ development of the concept, see Strauss, *Persecution*, p. 15.

<sup>93</sup> See Rosenthal, “Ibn ‘Arabí,” *passim*.

<sup>94</sup> See Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, p. 385.

<sup>95</sup> The number of similarities that Ibn al-‘Arabí’s works share with those of his Spanish-Jewish theosophical counterparts is vast, and cannot be detailed here. Some have already been mentioned above in connection with Abulafian Kabbalah. For a number of further parallels, see Wasserstrom, “Jewish-Muslim Relations,” pp. 75f.

<sup>96</sup> Despite the fact that the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujúd* is commonly fathered on Ibn al-‘Arabí in both Islamic and Western literatures, he himself never used this precise term in his known writings. According to William Chittick, the Western authority on this school, Ibn Sab’ín was the first to use the term in its technical sense. See his “Rúmí and *waḥdat al-wujúd*,” p. 82.

<sup>97</sup> As Wasserstrom notes, “Jewish-Muslim Relations,” p. 73: “The first Jewish philosophers to claim this (Hermetic) spiritual genealogy, Moses ibn Ezra, Judah Halevi, and Abraham ibn Ezra, were twelfth-century Spanish members of the same circle. ...In this way, the figure of Hermes stood for a transconfessional wisdom, a universal revelation, which doctrine further endorsed Muslim study of Jewish works.”

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72 and 74.

<sup>99</sup> Vincent Cornell, personal communication with the present author, dated 5/29/2003. For more on Ibn Sab’ín and Hermeticism, see Cornell’s “Way of the Axial Intellect.”

<sup>100</sup> Wasserstrom, “Jewish-Muslim Relations,” p. 74.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>102</sup> Kraemer, “Andalusian Mystic,” p. 72. For a survey of Ibn Húd’s career and his interconfessional activities, see *ibid.*, pp. 66-73.

<sup>103</sup> Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain*, p. 174f. Glick continues this thought by attributing the comparative absence of Jewish integration into the intellectual movements in Christian cultural spheres to the fact that the Jews’ “secular culture was incongruent with the religiously oriented high culture of the Christians.”

<sup>104</sup> *Jewish and Islamic*, pp. viii-ix.

<sup>105</sup> *Major Trends*, p. 6.

<sup>106</sup> The classical presentation of this view being Goitein, “Between Hellenism and Renaissance.” See Wasserstrom’s critical comments on such a characterization in *Between Muslim and Jew*, pp. 225ff.

<sup>107</sup> The obvious implication of this narrative is that philosophy, once transmitted to Europe, ceased to exist in any real sense in Islamdom. With notable exceptions, such as Corbin’s *History of Islamic Philosophy*, this view has had a rather surprising currency among twentieth-century historians. Such an otherwise keen and careful scholar as Harry Wolfson, for instance, could write seriously of “the

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abrupt disappearance of philosophic activity among the Arabic-speaking peoples, which synchronizes with the death of Averroes” (“Revised Plan,” p. 88).

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