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JOSEPH IBN WAQÂR AND HIS ATTEMPT TO RECONCILE KABBALAH AND PHILOSOPHY

Abstract: Scion of a distinguished family of physicians and astronomers, the philosopher and kabbalist Joseph ben Abraham Ibn Waqâr, who flourished in 14th c. Toledo, is chiefly remembered for his *al-Maqâla al-jamî'a bayn al-falsafa wash-sharî'a* 'the Conciliatory Treatise between Philosophy and Revelation'. The latter was one of the few works on Qabbâlâh to have been composed in Arabic and as such constitutes the last great production of Judaeo-Arabic thought in Spain. This voluminous treatise attempts to resolve the discrepancies between the rationalist school of Maimonides and Averroes and the tenets both of the Spanish Qabbâlâh and of the science of astrology. Its author tries to demonstrate that the system of the ten *sefirôt* was reconcilable with both the philosophical doctrine of the ten intellects and the astrological conception of the ten heavenly spheres. His intention was not to show the identity of these disciplines but rather to demonstrate that each had its particular speculative system upon which its sister disciplines could shed light. Ibn Waqâr's treatise was only partially translated into Hebrew, which probably explains why, despite its being the most comprehensive synthesis of these three disciplines attempted in the Middle Ages, it did not attain wide circulation, surviving only in a single manuscript preserved in the Vatican which was studied by G. Scholem and G. Vajda.

On the other hand, one particular section was fully translated into Hebrew and, known as *Sefer shorshey ha-qabbâlâh*, the 'Book of roots' or 'Principles of the Qabbalah', thrived as an independent composition preserved in numerous copies. This section comprised a lexicon of kabbalistic technical terms, or 'roots', necessary for the understanding and decoding of hidden mysteries in biblical and rabbinic texts. It was later translated into Latin around 1486 by Flavius Mithridates under the title *Liber de Radicibus* and used by Christian Qabbalists.

Keywords: Joseph ben Abraham Ibn Waqâr (fl. 14th c.), Kabbalah, philosophy and mysticism

ЙОСИФ ИБН ВАККАР И ЕГО ПОПЫТКА ПРИМИРЕНИЯ КАББАЛЫ И ФИЛОСОФИИ

Философ и каббалист 14 века Авраам Ибн Ваккар, происходившей из знаменитой семьи врачей и астрономов, главным образом известен своим трактатом «Сочинение, примиряющее философию и откровение». Это сочинение относится к тем немногим текстам Каббалы, которые были написана на арабском языке. Помимо этого, «Сочинение...» представляет последний крупный текст, созданный еврейско-арабскими мыслителями Испании. Целью трактата было разрешение разногласий между рационализмом Маймонида и Аверроэса и принципами испанской Каббалы и астрологии. Авраам Ибн Ваккар пытался доказать, что система десяти Сфирот совместима как с философским учением о десяти интеллектах, так и с астрологическим учением о десяти небесных сферах. Ибн Ваккар, не утверждая идентичность этих учений, полагал, что в каждом из них присутствует специфическое содержание, раскрытие которого возможно только благодаря наличию остальных двух учений. Трактат Ибн Ваккара был лишь частично переведен на еврейский, что во многом объясняет то, почему столь исчерпывающий синтез рационалистической философии, Каббалы и астрологии был малоизвестен и сохранился лишь в единственной рукописи. Именно ее исследовали Ж. Вайда и Г. Шолем.

С другой стороны, один из разделов сочинения Ибн Ваккара был переведен полностью. Под названием «Книга о корнях (основах) Каббалы» этот текст, как самостоятельное произведение, существует во множестве копий. Он представляет собой лексикон технических терминов («корней») Каббалы, необходимых для понимания и разъяснения тайн, скрытых в библейских и раввинистических текстах. Примерно в 1486 г. этот трактат был переведен на латинский Флавием Митридатом под названием «*Liber de Radicibus*» и под этим названием стал известен христианским каббалистам.

Ключевые слова: Йозеф ибн Авраам ибн Вакар (fl. 14 в.), Каббала, философия и мистицизм.

Despite his formal dislike of things mystical, the great biographer Moritz Steinschneider (1816–1907) had a soft spot for certain ‘nice Kabbalists’ who caught his fancy. One of the rare mystics who had this good fortune was Joseph ben Abraham Ibn Waqâr a Kabbalist, who flourished in Toledo in the first half of the 14th century. Indeed, our bibliographer describes him as ‘one of the most interesting authors of his period’. The reason for this unusually positive judgment on the part of Steinschneider resides in Ibn Waqâr’s own interest in philosophy:

‘Though an adept of Kabbalah’, he reports, ‘he seems to have arrived at the latter through philosophical premises. Though a methodical and easily

comprehensible guide to such an obscure subject, he has almost totally fallen into oblivion, most probably because he dared question the authenticity of the *Zohar*, which had imposed itself with such deceptive authoritativeness¹.

Thus Steinschneider was not only the first scholar to have reinstated Ibn Waqâr, but also, through his characterization of the latter, one of the first to have opened one of the most fascinating chapters of Medieval Jewish thought — the relationship between philosophy and mysticism.

However, let us first specify what is intended by these two key terms. By philosophy, we mean that form of Aristotelian thought with some Neoplatonic overtones, which had been adopted in its Arabic version by the Jews since the Xth century. Initially, philosophy does not seem to have posed a problem for the early Kabbalists, who, not having been Arabists, only had limited knowledge of the Aristotelian corpus, often in the form of apocryphal fragments, which they integrated into their systems with such readiness that one surmises that they may have considered the ‘divine philosophers’ of Antiquity as a parallel source of truth as did certain Muslim thinkers such as al-Suhrawardî (1155–1191)². Take for example the Neoplatonic passages in Azriel of Gerona’s *Commentary on the Aggadot*, which conclude with the remarkable statement:

The words of the sages of the Torah and those of the philosophers who both evoke the same notions, follow the same path. There is no divergence between them except for a mere difference in vocabulary. Indeed, the philosophers were at a loss to give the proper name to each distinction, whereas the Kabbalists who received their traditions from the prophets to whom revelation was transmitted, know how to differentiate the concepts and name each notion by its appropriate denomination according to its potentiality and action³.

By Ibn Waqâr’s time, in the strict sense, philosophy was synonymous with the masterful synthesis of Aristotelian thought and Mosaic religion achieved by the rationalist philosopher Moses Maimonides (1135–1204) in his *Guide for the Perplexed* written in Arabic. It was only once this work had been transposed into Hebrew followed by the radical rationalistic writings of Aver-

¹ Moritz Steinschneider, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, Berlin, 1925, p. 171: ‘Don’ Josef [...] gehört zu den interessantesten Schriftstellern jener Periode, insofern er, als entschiedener Anhänger der Kabbala, dennoch von philosophischen Grundlagen aus zu derselben gelangt zu sein scheint, und als systematischer, leicht fasslicher Führer auf jenem dunklen Gebiete vielleicht auch darum fast ganz in Vergessenheit geraten ist, weil er die Geltung des eben mit trügerischer Autorität sich Bahn brechenden Buches Sohar aufzufechten wagte.’ See also his article “Josef Wakkar”, *Allgemeine Enzyklopädie der Wissenschaften und Künste*, ed. Ersch und Grüber, t. 31, Leipzig, 1850–1855, pp. 100–102.

² See the prologue to his *Hikmat al-ishrâq*, translated by H. Corbin, *Le Livre de la sagesse orientale*, Lagrasse, 1986, pp. 241–255.

³ Azriel of Gerona, *Commentary on the Aggadot*, ed. I. Tishby, Jerusalem, 1945, pp. 82–83.

roes during the great movement of translation in Provence in the 13th century⁴ that reactions to philosophy first surfaced.

By mysticism, we mean the theosophical system known as Kabbâlâh, which also made its appearance towards the middle of the 13th century, likewise in Provence. Using ancient rabbinical literature, it elaborated a metaphysical conception of the divinity based on the system of the *sefirôt*. The complex history of the tension between these two disciplines, that of faith and reason, accepted tradition and demonstrative argumentation, remains to be written.

Albeit, from the very emergence of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the historical-critical study of Jewish mysticism drew the attention of scholars who brooded over the question of the relations between philosophy and mysticism. Their motifs and conclusions varied according to whether their attitude towards Kabbalah was positive or, as most often, negative. Indeed, at the time of the *Aufklärung* and the struggle for Jewish emancipation, it was imperative to represent the Synagogue as upholding the banner of regeneration and lucid ideas in order to integrate contemporary society. Considered as an obscurantist doctrine, it was necessary to demonstrate that the Kabbalah constituted a foreign body in the Jewish organism, incompatible with the ideas of progressive rationalism which they endeavoured to attribute to the Jewish genius. The tendency of most *Wissenschaft* scholars was to minimise the importance of Kabbalistic influence on Jewish culture, a disdain which still pervades Julius Gutmann's (1880–1950) *Philosophie des Judentums*. The latter, published in 1933, is considered as 'the ultimate product of the authentic Judaeo-German study of Judaism', and makes practically no reference to Kabbalah.

An almost unique exception was Adolphe Frank (1809–1893)⁵ who shows some propensity for the subject in his *Kabbale*, published in Paris in 1843. He presented Jewish mysticism as a profoundly Judaic phenomenon of paramount spiritual importance, even qualifying certain passages of the *Zôhar* as 'monuments of philosophical and religious thought'. Frank's work bears the subtitle: *la philosophie religieuse des Hébreux*, for he perceived in the *Zôhar* a philosophical system whose ancient layers went back not to Greece but to Persia. The arguments he advanced in favour of his theory are today devoid of scientific value on account of the philological and historical weakness of his arguments.

In this context one must recall Salomon Munk (1803–1867), a specialist of Judeo-Arabic thought who also showed interest in the Kabbalah⁶ and included

⁴ On this movement, see our study 'De l'arabe en hébreu', *Encyclopédie philosophique universelle*, t. IV 'le Discours philosophique', PUF, Paris, 1998, 1080–1110.

⁵ See our article 'La contribution d'Adolphe Franck à l'étude historico-critique de la Kabbalah' in : J-P. Rothschild and J. Grontwo (ed.), *Adolphe Franck, philosophe juif, spiritualiste et libéral dans la France du XIXe siècle*, Turnhout, 2012, 81–97.

⁶ On Munk's attitude towards Kabbalah, see our study 'Qabbalah and Academy: the Critical Study of Jewish Mysticism in France', *Shofar* (2000), 45–69.

in his *Mélanges de philosophie juive et arabe* some penetrating observations on Jewish mysticism⁷. He notably considered Kabbalah to be an extension of Alexandrian thought and perspicaciously demonstrated that its doctrinal development had been influenced by Solomon Ibn Gabirol and other Jewish Neoplatonists.

In his *Philosophy und Kabbala* (Leipzig, 1854), a highly significant title, Adolf Jellinek (1820–1893), Frank's German translator, also pointed out the presence of certain philosophical concepts in the writings of the first Kabbalists in which he was the first to discern specific elements of Sufi provenience.⁸

The famous Jewish historian, H. Graetz (1817–1891) proposed a contextual explanation of the origins of Kabbalah, based on one of the great intellectual confrontations of the history of Jewish thought. On the basis of philological considerations, he situated the appearance of kabbalistic texts on the historical scene in Provence at the beginning of the 13th century. The emergence of the Kabbalah at this time was not fortuitous, but, according to him, was the fruit of an historical context. It coincided with the extensive diffusion of Aristotelian philosophy in Jewish circles, precisely in this period and geographical area in the wake of the diffusion of the masterful Hebrew translation by Samuel Ibn Tibbon around 1200 in Lunel of the Arabic original of Maimonides' celebrated *Guide for the Perplexed*. Moreover, recent research has shown that Ibn Tibbon was not only the translator of this chef d'œuvre, but also its promoter⁹. Furthermore, through subsequent translations, in particular those of the works of Averroes (1126–1198), Aristotle's Muslim commentator, he and his descendants contributed immensely to the transformation of Judaism into a 'philosophical religion'. The elaboration of the esoteric doctrine in fact was nothing more than a reaction to the radical rationalism propounded by Maimonides' adherents. In its combat against the incursion of Aristotelian rationalism, kabbalistic 'obscurantism' upheld a system founded on the belief in the theurgical effect of ritual and religious prescriptions. Its doctrines elaborated in the 'heated brains of fantastic and extravagant thinkers' were mere superstitions of foreign origin and quite contrary to the Jewish genius.

G. Scholem (1897–1982), the acclaimed renovator of the historical study of Jewish mysticism, solidly established the discipline on historical and philological foundations. While impugning Graetz's theory tainted with partiality, Scholem recognized in his analysis that while philosophy is not the direct cause of Kabbalah, it greatly explains, by the opposition it aroused, the rapid spread of mysticism.

⁷ Munk S. *Mélanges de philosophie juive et arabe*, Paris, 1853, pp. 275–291.

⁸ Jellinek A. *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Kabbalah*, vol. 2, Berlin, 1852, "Sufismus und Kabbalah", pp. 45–47.

⁹ Fraenkel C. *From Maimonides to Samuel ibn Tibbon, The Transformation of the Dalālat al Ha'irin into the Moreh ha-Nevukhim*, Jerusalem, 2008.

In his classic work *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Scholem characterizes the principal tendencies of the schools during the phase of Spanish Kabbalah as falling into four categories:

1) gnostic Kabbalah whose principal representatives were Isaac and Jacob Ha-Kohen of Soria (13th cent.), and Moses of Burgos (*ca* 1270);

2) extatic-prophetic Kabbalah whose principal representatives were Abraham Abû l-‘Afiya (1240–1292) and Joseph Giquatilla;

3) theosophical Kabbalah whose principal representatives were the *Zôhar* and Juda ben David he-Hasid (14th cent.);

4) philosophical Kabbalah whose principal representatives were Isaac Ibn Latif (1235–1270), Juda Ibn Malka (13–14th cent.), Joseph Ibn Waqâr (14th cent.) and Samuel Ibn Motot (14th cent.)¹⁰.

It should be pointed out, however, that these categories are not set within impervious partitions; hence, it is not surprising to discover in the writings of an anti-intellectualist Kabbalist terms and notions borrowed from philosophical sources.

The study and understanding of the relationship between philosophy and Jewish mysticism were particularly advanced by the contributions of Georges Vajda (1908–1981).¹¹ He had devoted the first-fruits of his research to Judaeo-Arabic commentaries on the *Book of Creation* (*Sefer Yesirâh*)¹². Though the latter later became the central pillar of the speculative systems of the Kabbalah, its initial commentators considered the book to be a philosophical work. Having first been interested in the philosophical commentary of a Neoplatonic bent written in Judeo-Arabic by Dunash b. Tamim (10th cent.)¹³, Vajda subsequently went on to study the kabbalistic-philosophical commentaries on that book by Judah Ibn Malka (14th cent.)¹⁴, Joseph Ibn Waqâr¹⁵ (14th cent.), and Samuel Ibn Motot¹⁶ (14th cent.), and finally the attitude to the Kabbalah of a profoundly Averroist thinker, Isaac al-Balag¹⁷. It is noteworthy that he shared

¹⁰ Scholem G. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York, 1941.

¹¹ See in particular his *Recherches sur la philosophie et la kabbale dans la pensée juive du Moyen Age*, Paris, 1962.

¹² On this work and its place in Jewish mysticism, see our *Sefer Yesirah, le Livre de la Création, exposé de cosmogonie hébraïque ancienne*, Paris, 2002.

¹³ On this author, see G. Vajda and P. Fenton, *Le Commentaire sur le Livre de la Création de Dunash ben Tamim of Kairouan*, Paris-Louvain, 2002

¹⁴ Vajda G. *Juda ben Nissim philosophe juif marocain*, Paris, 1954 and P. Fenton, *Juda Ibn Malka, La Consolation de l'expatrié spirituel*, Paris, 2008.

¹⁵ Vajda G. "On the Commentary of Joseph Ibn Waqâr on the *Book of Creation*", *Ozar Yehudey Sefarad* 5 (1962), pp. 17–20 (in Hebrew).

¹⁶ On him, see G. Vajda, "Recherches sur la synthèse philosophico-kabbalistique de Samuel Ibn Motot", *AHDLMA* 27 (1960), 29–63. See now the thesis of Israel Sandman, *The Meshobeb Netibot of Samuel Ibn Matut ('Motot'): Introductory Excursus, Critical Edition and Annotated Translation*, dissertation PhD, University of Chicago, 2006.

¹⁷ See G. Vajda, *Isaac Albalag, averroïste juif, traducteur et annotateur d'al-Ghazali*, Paris, 1960.

his specific interest in the interaction of philosophy and mysticism with two others scholars from an Austro-Hungarian background — Alexander Altmann (1906–1987) and Samuel Stern (1920–1969) whose approach was somewhat different from the Jerusalem school founded by G. Scholem.

The philosophical component in the Kabbalah

It is a fact that in the Middle Ages the quasi-totality of the Kabbalistic books that discuss philosophy were composed in the West in Spain and Provence. The reason is the extraordinary spread of Averroist rationalism in the wake of the Hebrew translation of practically all of Ibn Rushd's writings, moreover under the impetus of Maimonidian thought. This movement resulted in the creation of an intellectual climate which did not exist in the East, where the impact of the Cordovan philosopher was much more limited. This does not signify that one does not find philosophical considerations in the writings of the Eastern Kabbalists, but one has to await the 16th century before they come to the fore. With a few exceptions, they are already harmoniously integrated in the speculative systems of the Eastern Kabbalists who felt no need to refute them. Certain authors, like Moses Cordovero (1522–1570)¹⁸, who made large use of them, were in any case of Western origin.

On the other hand, in the intellectual activity deployed in the West, the two disciplines wage continuous war. From the 13th century at least, the Kabbalists show great familiarity with the principal themes of Neoplatonic and Aristotelian thought. Indeed, in varying degrees, they regularly and unscrupulously employ philosophical terminology and show no inhibitions in adapting its formulations to kabbalistic notions. Furthermore, they adopt the cosmological and metaphysical system of Greek thought, not to mention its medical and astrological theories. They derive this terminology especially from the Hebrew translations of Neoplatonic writings of 11th century Andalusian authors such as Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Abraham bar Hiyya, Juda Halevi, Abraham and Moses Ibn 'Ezra. To be sure, in their initial forms, certain kabbalistic schools can be perceived as a continuation of this speculative tradition.

The attitudes adopted by the Hebrew mystics in regard to philosophical speculation are extremely ambivalent. However, they can be summarized under the following four headings which partially reflect the attitudes adopted by the generation preceding Ibn Waqâr as a reaction to the excessive rationalism of the Maimonideans and Jewish Averroists in Spain and Provence.

1. Firstly, radical opposition which perceived philosophy as an essentially foreign and heterodox doctrine. The partisans of this tendency considered the principles of Greco-Arabic philosophy as irreconcilable with the religious tra-

¹⁸ On him, see B. Zack, *Be-sha'arei ha-Kabbalah shel R. Moshe Cordovero*, Jerusalem, 1995 (in Hebrew).

dition of Israel. This did not stop them borrowing its postulates and ideas. They contrasted the corrosive effect of rationalism with the metaphysical and meta-rational essence of religious faith, inseparable in traditional Judaism from the strict observance of ritual precepts. These radical Kabbalists, such as Jacob b. Sheshet (ca 1250), who belonged to the circle of the Kabbalists of Gerona¹⁹ and Joseph b. Shalom Ashkenazi (Catalonia, circa 1270)²⁰, reviled the idea that the biblical commandments were a mere socio-political system and a series of moral rules of a purely pedagogical bearing whose only purpose was to regulate man's physical and social needs. They took exception to the identification established by Maimonides in the introduction to the *Guide* of the 'account of creation' (*ma'aseh bereshit*) and the 'account of the chariot' (*ma'aseh merkâbâh*) with Aristotelian physics and metaphysics. In the Kabbalists' view, these terms refer to the profoundest mysteries of the world of the *sefirôt*. In their tracts, they set out primarily to refute the Aristotelian doctrine of the eternity of the world. They refused Maimonides' theory according to which divine providence flows upon the individual solely by virtue of his intellectual achievement, thus belittling the prayer and worship of the common faithful. Amongst other things, they inveighed against the rationalistic explanation of the reasons for the precepts, proposed by the doctor of Fustat and likewise rejected his naturalistic and 'spiritualized' interpretation of miracles and eschatology.

2. On the other hand, numerous Kabbalists accepted the essential truth of philosophical teachings, but limited its range. Indeed, they claimed that the Kabbalah gave access to an ontological level, which transcended that attained by rational speculation. The teachings of the esoteric doctrine go beyond the latter by opening up perspectives which discursive reflection is incapable of grasping. Whereas the philosopher seeks to unite with the Active Intellect, the Kabbalist aspires towards connecting with the *sefirôt*, which are the causal entities of this same Intellect, hence superior to it. The followers of this school include Moses of Burgos²¹, and in particular Isaac Ibn Latif of Toledo, author of the *Sha'ar ha-shamayim*, in whom the philosophers saw a kabbalist, and the Kabbalists a philosopher²².

3. An exceptional position is occupied by the mystic Abraham Abû l-'Afiya (1240–1292) of Saragossa for whom Maimonides is the kabbalistic paradigm

¹⁹ See on him Vajda G. *Recherches, op. cit.*, part one, pp. 11–113, 321–339 and J. Levy-Silagy, *Jacob ben Sheshet, Le livre de la réponse adéquate*, Nice, 2010.

²⁰ See on him, Vajda G. "Un chapitre de l'histoire du conflit entre la Kabbalah et la philosophie. la polémique anti-intellectualiste de Joseph b. Shalom Ashkenazi de Catalogne", *AHDLMMA* (1956), pp. 55–72.

²¹ On him, see Shaked M. *Explanation of the kabbalistic doctrine of Moses of Burgos*, MA dissertation, University of Tel-Aviv, 1986 (in Hebrew).

²² On him, see Heller-Wilensky S. "Isaac Ibn Latif, Philosopher or Kabbalist?", in: A. Altmann, *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, Cambridge, Mass., 1967, pp. 185–223.

par excellence²³. In his opinion, Maimonides was in reality a mystic, but his thought had been misconstrued due to erroneous translations. The followers of this school, essentially the disciples of Abraham Abû l-‘Afiya (1240–1292), such as Joseph Ibn Gīqatillia, commented Maimonides’ thought through the prism of extatic Kabbalah.

Between these two first positions, is to be found that of the Kabbalists who opted for a more or less skilful harmonization of the two disciplines on the basis of their conviction that the secret doctrine of Israel offers its adepts essentially the same values as those of philosophy. Consequently, Kabbalists had nothing to envy. To this school belong Judah Ibn Malka (ca 1260)²⁴ and Joseph Ibn Waqâr.

These two authors, who flourished in Spain in the course of the 13th and 14th centuries, are accounted among the rare Kabbalists who chose to express themselves in the Arabic idiom. Both grant an important place in their doctrines to astrology, whose cosmological conceptions they attempt to reconcile with the metaphysical system of the Kabbalah²⁵.

While using kabbalistic sources, such as the Bahîr and the Zôhar, Ibn Malka does not concede primacy to the Kabbalah, but identifies it with philosophy. More precisely, he considers Kabbalah as a particular symbolic expression of the two fundamental concepts, which underpin his doctrine — the unknowability of God and astral determinism.

The author who embodies the culmination of the conciliatory tendency is most certainly Joseph ben Abraham Ibn Waqâr, who flourished in Toledo in the first half of the 14th century. Scion of a distinguished family of physicians and astronomers, Ibn Waqâr is chiefly remembered for his *magnum opus* composed in Arabic *al-Maqâla al-jamî’a bayn al-falsafa wash-sharî’a* ‘the Conciliatory Treatise between Philosophy and Revelation’ which has come down to us in a single manuscript preserved in the Vatican.

Attention was first drawn to the existence and importance of this composition by G. Scholem in 1943, who made a preliminary study of the Vatican text²⁶. He willingly left the task of making a detailed analysis of its content to G. Vajda whose research dealt with the history of Medieval Judaeo-Arabic thought in the spirit of the French school of Etienne Gilson. Vajda devoted a series of articles to this treatise in the journal *Sefarad* in 1949–50, which were later incorporated into his major book *Recherches sur la philosophie et la Kabbalah dans la pensée juive du Moyen Age*.

²³ See Idel M. *Maïmonide and the mysticism juive*, Paris, 1991.

²⁴ See *supra*, n. 13.

²⁵ On this subject Schwartz D. *Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought*, Ramat-Gan, 1999, ch. 4 (in Hebrew).

²⁶ Scholem G. “The Arabic Work of Joseph Ibn Waqâr on Kabbalah and philosophy (*sifro ha-arabi shel Rabbi Yosef Ibn Waqar ‘al ha-qabbalah weha-pilosofiyah*)”, *Kiryat Sepher* 20 (1943), pp. 153–162 (in Hebrew).

In his voluminous treatise, Ibn Waqâr attempts to reconcile rational philosophy and the mystical tradition. The *Maqâlat al-jamî'a* is undoubtedly the most considerable work on the question, and, as a consequence of its being written in Arabic, it constitutes the last great production of Judaeo-Arabic thought in Spain. As such, it hails the twilight of Maimonideanism in the Western Judaeo-Arabic tradition — which was taken over by the Hebrew transmission in Europe — in contrast to the Judaeo-Arabic tradition of Maimonideanism in the East, which evolved in a different intellectual climate. Indeed, the Western tradition, beneath the weight of the mass of Hebrew translations of Averroes' works, is marked by a strong rationalistic streak, whereas in the East where Avicenna predominated, Maimonidism took on a markedly mystical hue, when it wasn't frankly Sufi, as portrayed in the writings of Maimonides' only son R. Abraham ha-Nagîd (1186–1237)²⁷.

Besides the original Arabic version of the *Maqâla*, vestiges of a partial Hebrew translation have been preserved in a manuscript bearing the title *Sefer haskamat ha-pilôsôfim wa-ha-istagnînîm we-ha-mequbbâlim*, the 'Book of Harmony between the Philosophers, Astrologers and Kabbalists'. We had the opportunity of publishing an extract of this translation, also called the *Ma'amar ha-kôllet* or *ha-meqabbes*, under the title *Shôreshy ha-qabbâlâh*²⁸.

In the original Arabic of this voluminous composition, running into almost 400 folios of cramped writing, Ibn Waqâr proposes to resolve the discrepancies between the intellectual outlook of the followers of the rational school of Maimonides and Averroes and that of the students of Kabbalah and astrology.

Influenced by Arabic cultural trends in Muslim Spain, the Kabbalah had begun to absorb astrological and magical elements, a tendency which was already apparent in the writings of the 13th century kabbalist Judah ben Nissim Ibn Malka. As recalled above this author had also chosen to compose his work *Uns al-gharîb*, a commentary on the *Sefer Yezirâh*, in the Arabic.

Ibn Waqâr's treatise could be conceived of as a sort of kabbalistic *Guide for the Perplexed* whose purpose was to dissipate the perplexity of Jewish intellectuals faced with the apparent contradictions between the principles of philosophy and those of Kabbalah through an examination of their respective foundations with a view to bringing them into harmony. The author's preoccupations reflect the immense changes, which had taken place in the intellectual climate in Spain in the wake of the impact of Maimonides' thought and the blossoming of the Kabbalah. For Ibn Waqâr to have gone to such lengths to expound his arguments, there must still have been a keen interest in the

²⁷ See our study 'Maimonides — Father and son: continuity and change', in: Carlos Fraenkel (ed.), *Traditions of Maimonideanism*, Leiden-Boston 2009, pp. 103–137. We leave aside the Yemenite school which, while it possessed its own tradition, was likewise characterized by elements of intellectualist mysticism devoid of any influence by Averroes.

²⁸ Fenton P. B. *Rabbi Joseph b. Abraham Ibn Waqâr, The Principles of the Qabbalah edited from Hebrew and Arabic manuscripts*, Los Angeles, 2004.

subject and a sizeable readership in Arabic some three hundred years after the Christian conquest.

The treatise is divided into three parts, the first of which (fols. 1–57) deals with the faculties of the soul, prophecy and revelation. The second part (fols. 57–145) expounds the divergences between Kabbalists and philosophers, while the third (fols. 145–191) is devoted to the question of astrology.

Ibn Waqâr's impressive philosophical culture is not based on Jewish sources alone. In addition to Maimonides, Abraham Ibn Da'ûd, Abraham Ibn 'Ezra, and David Qimhi, he quotes a multitude of Greek and Arab authorities such as Aristotle, Plato, Themistius, Ptolemaeus, and Alexander of Aphrodisias, as well as al-Fârâbî (ca 872–950), Avicenna (980–1037), al-Ghazâlî (d. 1111), Ibn Tufayl (c. 1110–1185), Averroes (1126–1198) and Fakhr Din al-Râzi (1149–1209).

Among Ibn Waqâr's kabbalistic sources, there are references to the *Sefer Yesîrâh*, the *Bahîr*, Hai Ga'ôn's apocryphal consultation, 'Azriel of Gerona, Todros Abû l-'Afiya of Toledo, and the *Zôhar*, concerning whose authority Ibn Waqâr has some reservations. However, the principal source from which his esoteric knowledge is drawn, are the writings of the Castillian Kabbalists Isaac and Jacob Kohen of Soria.

In the limits of this study it would be impossible to give even a summary of the many philosophical and kabbalistic themes broached by Ibn Waqâr. In short, he endeavours by a process of correspondences to demonstrate how the kabbalistic system of the ten *sefirôt* is compatible with the philosophical doctrine of the ten intellects and at the same time with the cosmological system of the ten heavenly spheres. His intention was not to postulate the real conformity of these disciplines, but rather to demonstrate how each possesses its own speculative system, capable of elucidating the parallel disciplines. As a Maimonidian, Ibn Waqâr constantly underlines the absolute truth of philosophical teachings based on irrefutable demonstration. However, they are only true at their level for, as a Kabbalist, Ibn Waqâr is convinced of the pre-eminence of kabbalistic gnosis. Nonetheless, he does not dismiss the value of philosophy. He believes that the ultimate purpose of Kabbala does not radically differ from that of philosophical speculation. However, there is neither superimposition of the one upon the other, as Moses of Burgos taught, but rather continuity between the two disciplines. The aim of the philosopher is the intuitive grasp of exalted metaphysical truth by virtue of conjunction (*ittisâl*) with the immaterial Intellect, achieved — albeit momentarily — by dint of a moral and intellectual discipline tending towards individual perfection. For its part, the particular method of the Kabbalah leads to an analogous but superior result. Whereas the philosopher aspires to unite with the Active Intellect, the Kabbalist endeavours to attain the *sefirôt* which are the cause of this same Active Intellect and hence superior to it.

By following the philosophical path, the disciple progresses through moral perfection and the analysis of empirical reality towards metaphysical abstraction in order to climb towards ecstasy through intellectual contemplation. The kabbalistic path prescribes the practice of the biblical commandments and worship, accompanied by constant meditation of the sefirotic dimension of each precept and of the Divine names. This discipline attracts the flow upon the human intellect of the energy of the *sefirôt* which achieve the sought after conjunction with these superior entities. Our author likes to underline that all what is said by the philosophers concerning the ‘conjunction’ of the human intellect with the Active Intellect coincides perfectly with the opinion of the Kabbalists, except that the latter by drawing upon the sefirotic plane attain a more elevated level than that of the separated Intellects of the Fârâbian system followed by the philosophers. However, whoever possesses preliminary training in the philosophical discipline before embarking upon the kabbalistic path, possesses an ‘intuitive aptitude’ (*dhawq*) which enables him to apprehend the intelligible entities in a greater and fuller manner. He even states formally that only philosophy provides an adequate preparation for the apprehending of the *intelligiblia*.

The fact that Ibn Waqâr employs here two Arabic terms — *ittisâl* (conjunction/adhesion) and *dhawq* (intuition) — typical of Sufi vocabulary²⁹, brings us to mention yet another point of convergence between his doctrine and that of Sufism which seems most noteworthy. This concept is to be found in his political doctrine according to which man, as a social being, cannot live without a law, hence without a lawgiver. The latter must not only regulate the material well-being of his subjects but also their moral and intellectual perfection. All men possess in principle the required disposition in order to attain this degree towards which the religious Law serves as a preparation. For Maimonides, this was the role of the lawgiving prophet who brings a law for all. Now, for Ibn Waqâr the very subsistence of the world depends upon the indispensable existence of a ‘perfect man’ (*insân kâmil*), through whose sole intermediary the higher and lower worlds can be united. Unfortunately, the author is not very explicit about the nature of this individual, but in the scanty outline he devotes to the theme, we seem to be able to discern beneath the profile of the prophet-legislator certain traits belonging to the cosmic doctrine of the Perfect Man (*al-insân al-kâmil*) peculiar to Sufism and developed principally by the great Muslim mystic Muhyî d-Dîn Ibn ‘Arabî (1165–1240)³⁰, and in particular by his spiritual disciple ‘Abd al-Karîm al-Jilî (ca 1365–1417)³¹.

²⁹ On *dhawq*, see our *Deux traités de mystique juive*, Lagrasse, 1987, p. 125.

³⁰ See Takeshita M. *Ibn ‘Arabî’s Theory of the Perfect Man*, Tokyo, 1987. For the use of this notion by a descendent of Maimonides, see our *Deux traités op. cit.*, p. 219.

³¹ See the partial English translation, *Universal Man / Abd al-Karîm Jilî, extracts translated with commentary* by T. Burckhardt, English translation by Angela Culme-Seymour, Sherborne, c1983.

Having established in his first section the necessity of the religious law, Ibn Waqâr proceeds to elaborate on the opinions of the philosophers, whose doctrines are based on discursive argumentation (*hujja*) and demonstrative proof (*burhân*). The meaning of the Torah as understood by the philosophers is explained, he declares, in the writings of Abraham Ibn ‘Ezra and Moses Maimonides.

On the other hand, the Kabbalists challenge their demonstrative methods and only accept as authoritative in the spiritual domain that which they have received by tradition. The latter, they claim, was transmitted by the prophets and has no need of either proof or demonstration. Through the intermediary of tradition (*qabbâlâh*) they claim to hold knowledge of the metaphysical domain and of its spiritual hierarchy.

Homologation of kabbalistic and philosophical concepts is achieved through a method of allegorical exegesis called in Arabic *ta’wîl*, a form of spiritual hermeneutics carrying several levels of comprehension, which was already employed both by the philosophers, such as Ibn Rushd, as well as Sufis and Shi‘ite mystics.³² We have here one of the methodological points both of convergence and of divergence between the philosophical and kabbalistic method of interpretation.

If the term *ta’wîl* is generally translated by ‘explanation’, its etymological meaning refers to the notion of ‘reversion’, ‘returning a word to its initial and primary meaning’ when it is impossible to understand it according to his apparent sense.

In the *Maqâla* (fols. 54a-56b), Ibn Waqâr devotes an important development to this notion for which he offers the following definition:

ta’wîl means to take a word in one of its metaphorical meanings instead of its obvious sense without doing violence to the general rules of language or semantics. One passes from the obvious meaning to the metaphorical one either by designating a thing by the name of its cause, or by something else similar or concomitant or connected to the first meaning. [*ta’wîl*] is [thus] composed of two elements: abolition of the literal sense of the text and substitution with a figurative sense³³.

ta’wîl can be of three types: philosophical, halakhic (legal), or kabbalistic.

1 The philosopher employs *ta’wîl* when he encounters in the scriptural text or its commentaries, a narrative or verse (*ayât*) whose exoteric tenure (*zâhir*) contradicts the principles established by rational demonstration. Verses con-

³² These have been studied at length by H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, Paris, 1972, vol. IV, index.

³³ *Maqâla*, fol. 54a. G. Vajda, *Recherches*, p. 163, has already shown that Ibn Waqâr is indebted to Ibn Rushd for this definition.

taining anthropomorphic or anthropopathic expressions are necessarily metaphorical since they are incompatible with the the unity and incorporeity of God.

2 halakhic *ta'wil* is that used by the Rabbis when they employ the thirteen traditional hermeneutic rules in order to elucidate certain legal aspects of the precepts which are not explicit in the scriptural text. Strictly subordinated to traditional exegesis, this method does not necessarily have recourse to rational and demonstrative argumentation.

Just as the Rabbis deducted non-explicit teachings from the biblical text on the basis of certain indications called *asmakhta be-'alma*, similarly, the Kabbalists discover implicit inferences in the text which they interpret (*ta'wil*) in conformity with their tradition using the midrashic method which they call *nigleh we-nistar*.

3 The Kabbalists refuse the method of rational *ta'wil* used by the philosophers and authenticate their own method by the authority of an estoteric tradition of which they claim to be the repositories. They maintain that this tradition was handed down from time immemorial. Its principle is that all beings and actions in this world come about through the action of the *sefirôt* and their effects. Human perfection is attained through the meditation of the *sefirôt* which are allusively concealed in multiple passages of the Bible and rabbinic texts and which are to be uncovered through the interpretation (lit. 'reversion' (*radd*) of all events and (biblical) narratives in terms of their sefirotic content.

They are to be found in prophetic discourse in the form of symbols (*mar-mûz*), which use code words, determined by convention by the prophets and sages. The *ta'wil* is based on the interpretation of these codes which include Divine names, cantillation signs, grammatical, orthographic, and graphical anomalies of consonants (e.g. large, small, defective letters, etc), as well as their numerical values.

In order to decode biblical texts and rabbinic passages and uncover the metaphysical truth which underlie them, the Kabbalists employ an hermeneutical method based on a technical vocabulary. Now Ibn Waqâr compiled a dictionary of these terms, which, though not the first of its kind, is certainly one of the most complete. We will refer to it in our conclusion.

In his exegesis Ibn Waqâr follows a methodological principle. Where the rabbinic interpretation of a biblical verse does not involve a point of law, they encapsulate a hidden meaning which has either a kabbalistic or a philosophical, or an astrological meaning. Priority is to be afforded to the kabbalistic interpretation since in relation to the law of Moses this kind of exegesis is preferable to all other. If in a given case, the kabbalistic interpretation is inapplicable, recourse must be made to philosophical interpretation, and only subsequently to astrological explanation. Where none of these criteria seem to apply, it is to be concluded that allusion is being made to an ancient philosophical doctrine which was known in rabbinic times, but which had subsequently fallen into oblivion.

Among the numerous possible conciliatory expedients which Ibn Waqâr’s ingenious mind envisaged, one particular solution seems to have gained his favour. If we discount the First Cause, which is totally unknowable, being is constituted by thirty entities or *sefirôt* divided into three groups of ten. The first group of ten *sefirôt* which are intermediaries between the First Cause and the first Motor, are the absolutely pure and immaterial Intelligences which are unrelated to the physical body. The First, emanated from the First Cause or the Infinite, in the language of the Kabbalists is *keter*, the last is *malkût*. From the latter proceeds the second series of *sefirôt*, the ten intellects, which move the heavenly spheres and which are the object of philosophical reflection.

Finally, the third series comprises the ten forms of the celestial and sublunary bodies. Between each of the components of these three series, Ibn Waqâr tries to find a correspondence. With great skilfulness, he devises several parallel tables. According to which philosophical or kabbalistic system is adopted, a specific *sefirâh* will correspond to such and such a planet.

Table of Correspondence between *sefirôt*, Intelligences and spheres

	sefirôt	planets	intelligences
I	<i>kether</i>	All-encompassing sphere <i>maqîf</i>	first
II	<i>hokhmâh</i>	sphere of constellations <i>mazzalôt</i>	second
II	<i>bînâh</i>	sphere of Saturn <i>shabbatay</i>	third
IV	<i>hesed</i>	sphere of Jupiter <i>sedeq</i>	fourth
V	<i>gebûrâh</i>	sphere of Mars <i>ma'dim</i>	fifth
VI	<i>tif'eret</i>	sphere of the Sun <i>hamâh</i>	sixth
VII	<i>nesah</i>	sphere of Venus <i>nôgâh</i>	seventh
VIII	<i>hôd</i>	sphere of Mercury <i>kokhab</i>	eighth
IX	<i>yesôd</i>	sphere of the moon <i>lebânâh</i>	ninth
X	<i>malkhût</i>	Active intellect	Active intellect

Conclusion

Judging by the few traces that have survived of his work, Ibn Waqâr’s attempt to reconcile Kabbalah and philosophy, though ‘conducted with erudition, skilfulness and an objectivity which commands our respect’ (Vajda) did not meet with great success. Besides the Kabbalists Samuel Ibn Motot and

Samuel Sarsa, who mention him in their Hebrew writings, his composition does not seem to have exercised a great influence.

As Ibn Waqâr himself remarks, besides the irrationalism of the Kabbalah which the philosopher finds offensive, the latter is inclined to reject kabbalistic doctrine for two reasons. Firstly, certain notions contradict the principles established by reason and exegesis. Furthermore, the Kabbalists do not agree amongst themselves about the principles of their doctrine, a fact, which throws discredit upon their so-called tradition.

On their part, the Kabbalists remain firmly resolute about the absolute superiority of esoteric knowledge, which bears no comparison with rational thought.

The fact that the *Conciliatory Treatise* was only partially translated into Hebrew, probably explains why despite its being the most comprehensive and synthetic attempt in the Middle Ages to reconcile the three disciplines of philosophy, astrology and Kabbalah, it did not attain wide circulation. Indeed, only a single complete manuscript of this work has survived.

On the other hand, one particular section was fully translated into Hebrew and, known as *Sefer shorshey ha-qabbâlâh*, the ‘Book of roots’ or ‘Principles of the Qabbalah’, thrived as an independent composition as proven by the existence of numerous copies. This section comprised a lexicon of kabbalistic technical terms, or ‘roots’, necessary for the understanding and decoding of hidden mysteries in the biblical and rabbinic texts. As mentioned above, certain terms in these sources are construed by Kabbalists as code words and symbols, which allude to diverse aspects of the *sefirôt*.

The glossary is divided into four sections. Chapter 1 deals with various kabbalistic constructions of the sefirotic world. Chapter 2 discusses the various faculties and functions of the *sefirôt*. Chapter 3 is the alphabetical lexicon which itself has three subdivisions: a) a discussion of the origin of the technical terms, b) an alphabetical list of these terms arranged first by biblical usage then rabbinical usage and finally c) arranged according to the order of the *sefirôt*. Chapter 4 is a brief exposition of the types of textual anomalies in the Bible, which by their very nature elicit and thus justify a mystical interpretation.

In the introduction to Chapter 3, Ibn Waqâr exposes the idea that the natural origin of these technical codes is a proof of the superiority of the anagogical method of biblical exegesis utilised by the Kabbalists as opposed to the philosophers and astrologers, who employ conventional language. Indeed, not only is language not natural but conventional, but it was also developed by common folk and not by scholars since the latter have recourse to the vernacular in order to express their ideas. Terms can either be of a necessary character deriving from the nature of the object, such as common nouns, or a qualification connected with the action of the object named. The latter are those mostly employed by scholars. Nonetheless, there exist scientific terms which were

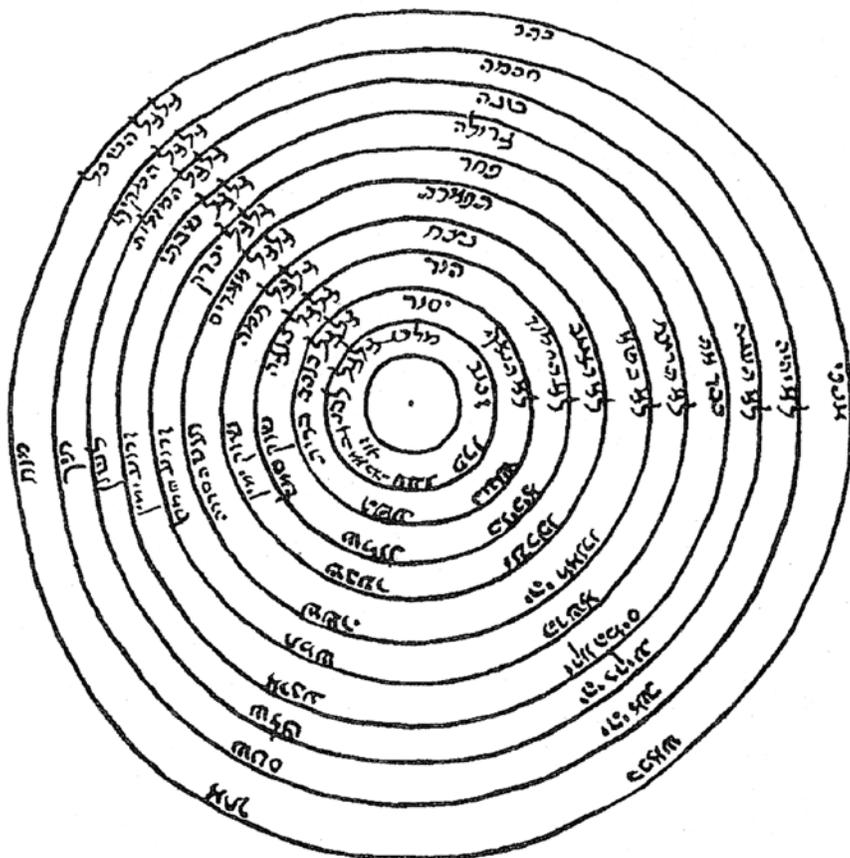


Table of Correspondence between the Ten sefirôt, commandments, utterances, corporeal members, and celestial spheres. 13th c. Kabbalistic codex, Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, Heb. Ms 2784, fol. 24a

formulated on the basis of non derived nouns. Divine Names are either derived from accidents, since the divine Essence is unknowable or, as in the case of biblical names, of actions. Similarly, the Kabbalah derives the names of the *sefirôt* from from actions such as *hesed*, *geburah*. On the other hand, the names of the ten *sefirôt* were received by tradition from the time of the Patriarchs, as stated in the *Book of the Creation* (*Sefer Yesirâh*).

Ibn Waqâr's kabbalistic lexicon is the most complete and systematic and exercised a wide influence as a model for numerous esoteric glossaries which appeared subsequently and which culminated with the *Qehillat Ya'aqob* of Jacob Yalish of Dinov (d. 1825), who still uses some of Ibn Waqâr's interpreta-

tions. It is noteworthy that it was not by chance that Ibn Waqār's dictionary was originally written in Arabic. It has striking parallels with the technical lexicons in Sufi literature composed by the Muslim mystics in order to explain the esoteric vocabulary they employ to describe their mystical states. We have here a further example of Sufi influence on the Western Judaeo-Arabic tradition.

Finally, another significant fact is that this section was also done into Latin and, under the title *Liber of racidibus*, was included in the translation of kabbalistic works undertaken around 1486 by Flavius Mithridates, alias the apostate Abû l-Faraj Samuel b. Nissim, at the behest of the Italian humanist Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494). The latter, one of the most remarkable figures of the Italian Renaissance, was the virtual founder of Christian Kabbalah. He taught notably through the Kabbalah that the doctrines of the philosophers and Moses were identical and that Plato was in fact a Greek Kabbalist. Ibn Waqār's work is also quoted by Yohanan Alemanno, another close associate of Pico. It would be interesting to speculate whether Ibn Waqār's work influenced this aspect of Christian Kabbalah, thus overflowing into the third branch of the monotheistic religions.

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