THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

“ALL THE KINGS OF ARABIA ARE SEEKING YOUR COUNSEL AND ADVICE”:
INTELLECTUAL AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE BETWEEN JEWS AND
MUSLIMS IN THE LATER MIDDLE ISLAMIC PERIOD

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BY
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For my father
and in memory of my mother
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ABBREVIATIONS

Ar.          Arabic
BT           Babylonian Talmud
Heb.          Hebrew
Lit.          Literally
Q.            Qur’ān
R.            Rabbi

BIBLE BOOK ABBREVIATIONS

Genesis      Gen.
Exodus       Ex.
Leviticus    Lev.
Numbers      Num.
Deuteronomy  Deut.
Joshua       Josh.
Judges       Judg.
Ruth         Rth.
1 Samuel     1 Sam.
2 Samuel     2 Sam.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Book</th>
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<td>1 Kings</td>
<td>1 Kgs.</td>
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<td>2 Kings</td>
<td>2 Kgs.</td>
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<td>2 Chronicles</td>
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<td>Psalm</td>
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<td>Proverbs</td>
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<td>Ecclesiastes</td>
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<td>Song of Songs</td>
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<td>Jeremiah</td>
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<td>Lamentations</td>
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<td>Ezekiel</td>
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<td>Daniel</td>
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<td>Zechariah</td>
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<td>Malachi</td>
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ABSTRACT. “ALL THE KINGS OF ARABIA ARE SEEKING YOUR COUNSEL AND ADVICE”: INTELLECTUAL AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE BETWEEN JEWS AND MUSLIMS IN THE LATER MIDDLE ISLAMIC PERIOD

Liran Yadgar
(Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, The University of Chicago)

Committee Members: Franklin Lewis (committee chair), Fred M. Donner, David Nirenberg, and Orit Bashkin.

In his 1955 survey of Jewish-Arab relations, Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts through the Ages, S.D. Goitein, a leading scholar of Jewish history in the Medieval Islamic lands, gives almost no attention to the Later Islamic Middle Period (thirteenth-fifteenth century). In fact, Goitein concluded that in the thirteenth century “Arabs faded out from world history, and Oriental Jews from Jewish history.” Thus, he did not consider the history of Jews in the Islamic lands to be of any significance until the modern era (starting in 1800, according to his periodization). Islamic and Jewish histories were perceived to be intertwined in the pre-thirteenth century into what Goitein called ‘Jewish-Arab symbiosis,’ an idea that has been much popularized in later scholarship as the ‘Judeo-Muslim symbiosis.’ In this paradigm, Jews and Muslims achieved the highest intellectual, cultural, and scientific achievements due to the tolerant character of the ‘Arab’ Muslim rule, a character that was lost gradually due to the rise to power of non-Arab peoples within the Islamic lands (the Mamluks in Egypt and Syria, and the Almohads in the Islamic West). This dissertation wishes to challenge the ‘decline theory’ regarding Jewish life in the ‘post-classical’ era of Islam through the examination of three treatises from Egypt and the Maghrib. It argues that traditional periodization of Islamic history affected the historiography of Jewish life under medieval Islam, and that by studying the ‘Jewish-Arab symbiosis’ outside the confines of ‘classical’ Islam, a different image of medieval Jewish history could be reconstructed.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I owe a special thanks to my partner, Isaías Tinajero-Rico, for all that I have learned from him, and for his love that knows no boundaries.

Finally, I wish to thank my father, my brother Moshe, and my sister-in-law Natalie, and to dedicate this dissertation to my father and to the memory of my mother. My parents are the source of my inspiration, encouraging me to eat from the fruits of the garden of forking and converging paths of ‘Ever and ‘Arav.

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INTRODUCTION

I. On Periodization and Its Implications for the Historiography of Jews under Medieval Islam

With the emergence of Wissenschaft des Judentums in nineteenth century Germany, Jewish historians situated the apogee of medieval Jewish history in the Islamic period before c. 1250, mostly in Muslim Spain between 950-1150, and more specifically, in the period they defined as the ‘Golden Age’ of Spain, or the ‘Golden Age of Spanish Jewry.’ This paradigm emphasized ‘great men’ in Jewish history under Islamic rule, such as Solomon ibn Gabirol, Judah ha-Levi, and Maimonides. In particular, it eulogized the tolerant culture of the Umayyad emir and caliph of Córdoba, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III (r. 912-961), and after the fall of the Umayyad regime in 1030, the period of the Party Kingdoms (mulūk al-ṭawā‘if) until the rise of the Almohads (al-Muwḥḥidūn) around 1150. It was a non-Jewish German scholar who termed Jewish history in Spain as a ‘Golden Age,’ Franz Delitzsch, and Jewish historians have picked up this term and have been using it since then. As Aaron Hughes observed,
[T]he creation of the “golden age” of Spanish Jewry was directed at the Prussian authorities and other critics of Judaism. Implicit here was that whenever Jews were historically granted emancipation, they become active and productive members of society. At this point in history, it is important to remember that Jews were not only gradually being accepted into German society and were for the most part, regarded with extreme suspicion. The tradition of a “golden age” in Muslim Spain was in large part the result of a romantic and ultimately distorted reading, one that put modern assumptions about freedom and equality onto a period were but protected minorities and who were religiously and socially subservient to Muslims.  

This romantic approach is best illustrated in the works of Abraham Geiger (1810-1874) and Heinrich Graetz (1817-1891). Geiger praised the spiritual and intellectual

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achievements of medieval Judaism in what he considered to be the dark ages of rabbinic tradition. Moreover, he contrasted these achievements to the intellectual bareness of Ashkenazi Jewry in Eastern and Northern Europe. While Ashkenazi Jews are characterized with degeneration, Spanish Jews are responsible for the revival of the Hebrew language, and for significant innovations in science, philosophy, and poetry. On the ‘Golden Age of Spain,’ Geiger writes:

What magnificent results that period offers to us! Science is not only nurtured, it is enriched in every relation. Knowledge of the Hebrew language rises into science and attains a degree which has not been passed until the last century. Interpretation and explanation of the Scripture enter deep into its meaning and stimulate the greatest problems. Philosophy becomes common property, and though it is not creative, it is yet ennobling and enlightening.

Graetz, in a similar manner, regarded the ‘Golden Age of Spain’ one of the highlights of Jewish history up to his days. He contrasted the history of medieval European Jewry to Jewish history under Islam, and considered the Islamic time to be the classical period in Jewish history. This period, that is exemplified by great men such as Samuel ha-Nagid and Maimonides, represents the zenith of Jewish ingenuity. Graetz also referred to the European view of the Middle Ages as a time of backwardness by pointing that during the period of “darkness to the descendants of the sons of Japheth (the European peoples), the light of knowledge has risen among the tents of Shem [i.e. the Jewish people].”

(Würzburg: Ergon, 2008), pp. 65-86.
11 I.e. the nineteenth century.
12 Cited in Hughes, “The ‘Golden Age’ of Muslim Spain,” p. 61.
It was not only (Muslim) Spain, however, that attracted the attention of Jewish historians who searched for the Jewish highpoint in pre-modern times, and found it mostly in the Islamic period that started withMuḥammad’s prophecy in Arabia (c. 610-632), and ended, as mentioned above, around 1250, the so-called ‘classical period’ of Islam. It is usually the Arab component of Islam that is emphasized in the scholarship of ‘classical’ Islam, to the exclusion of Persian, Turkish, or other cultures, thus sometimes being referred as ‘Arab Islam.’ This concept of ‘Arab Islam’ developed mainly due to nationalistic views in Western scholarship of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, as well as in Arabic scholarship, thus pointing to the emergence of Islam among the Arab peoples and in the Arabic language, and considering its most important achievements – in literature, science, and philosophy – to be written in


this language.\textsuperscript{15} What is celebrated by Jewish historians who were inclined to the idealized view of ‘classical’ or ‘Arab’ Islam is the affinity between Hebrew and Arabic as Semitic languages; the romanticized origins of Jews and Arabs as descendants of Abraham; and the development of the ‘Judeo-Arab civilization,’ that has been defined by one scholar as “the sum total of all communications, or documents, as well as other written materials, in which Arabic-speaking Jews have expressed their spiritual and material needs, occupations, aspirations, and achievements.”\textsuperscript{16} This ‘civilization’ (sometimes ‘culture’ is also used)\textsuperscript{17} is believed to emerge in the ninth century, with Saadia Gaon (882-942) being the most noticeable representative of its early period, and Maimonides (d. 1204) as the culmination of this period, thus marking a starting point and


\textsuperscript{16} Haggai Ben-Shammai, “Observations on the Beginnings of Judeo-Arabic Civilization,” in \textit{Beyond Religious Borders: Interaction and Intellectual Exchange in the Medieval Islamic World}, David M. Freidenreich and Miriam Goldstein, eds. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), p. 13. For the idea of affinity between Jews and Arabs prior to the Islamic conquests of the seventh century, see S.D. Goitein, \textit{Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts through the Ages}, repr. as \textit{Jews and Arabs: A Concise History of Their Social and Cultural Relations} (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2005 [1955]), pp. 19-45 (see also the discussion below about Goitein’s periodization of Jewish-Arab history); and esp. Goitein’s note, \textit{ibid.}, p. 24: “[Julius] Wellhausen, the famous exponent of biblical criticism and Israelite history, wrote no less than seven books on the ancient Arabs, both of pre-Islamic and of early Islamic times. He did so, as he himself once remarked, in order to determine ‘the wild stock on which the twig of the Israelite Prophetism was grafted,’ the presumption being that the ancient Arabs would provide the best illustration for the life of Israel before it was subjected to the impact of monotheist religion.”

\textsuperscript{17} In English the difference between ‘civilization’ and ‘culture’ is not always clear. In German, however, while the former usually refers to the spiritual, intellectual, and artistic phenomena, that is, the utilitarian, outer aspect of human existence, the second is more specifically concerned with the material, technical, economic, and social facts. Nonetheless, things are not that simple in trying to distinguish between the two terms, neither in German nor in other European languages. See Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, “What is the Difference between Culture and Civilization? Two Hundred Fifty Years of Confusion,” \textit{Comparative Civilizations Review}, 66 (2012), pp. 10-28; Arnold Labrie, “\textit{Kultur} and \textit{Zivilisation} in Germany during the Nineteenth Century,” in \textit{German Reflections}, Joep Leerssen and Menno Spiering, eds. (Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1994), pp. 95-120.
end point for this civilization.\textsuperscript{18} Quite often, the ‘Golden Age of Spanish Jewry’ is considered to be the highlight of the ‘Judeo-Arab civilization,’\textsuperscript{19} especially if Maimonides’ scholarship it regarded to be the product of his education in Muslim Spain, before his emigration to Egypt.\textsuperscript{20}

The discovery of the Cairo Geniza was another influence on the view of a Judeo-Arab apogee under ‘Classical’ Islam.\textsuperscript{21} S.D. Goitein (1900-1985), the doyen of Geniza studies in the twentieth century, coined the term ‘Classical Geniza Period’ in order to refer to the time period between the tenth and thirteenth centuries,\textsuperscript{22} noticing the waning number of the Geniza documents starting around 1250. Despite his reference to 1266 as the end of the ‘Classical Geniza Period’ in his earlier scholarship,\textsuperscript{23} Goitein was unable to determine the exact end date of this period when more Geniza documents appeared from the Mamluk period (1250-1517), even when some of them were published by him. Nonetheless, Goitein admitted that his scholarship (thus, also his interest) in the Geniza materials written post-1250 was limited.\textsuperscript{24} Among the ‘great men’ of this time period, it

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{18} E.g. the statement by Eliyahu Ashtor (Strauss): “Between the Arab conquest to the Mamluk rise to power in Egypt and Syria, the Jewish communities in these countries enjoyed not only religious tolerance and autonomy, but also the best records of Jewish history were written in this period. The two most eminent scholars of medieval Jewish history lived in Egypt, one was born in it, while the other made it his home and wrote in it his magna opera – R. Saadia Gaon and Maimonides.” Ashtor, \textit{Toldot ha-Yehudim be-Mitsrayim ve-Suryah tahan shilton ha-Mamlukim} [History of the Jews in Egypt and Syria under the Mamluks] (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Quq, 1944), 1:47 (my translation).
  \item \textsuperscript{20} See Kraemer, \textit{Maimonides}, pp. 42-80.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} E.g. S.D. Goitein, \textit{Med. Soc.}, 3:140; \textit{idem, Studies in Islamic History and Institutions} (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2010 [1966]), p. 341. This term is often used by Mark R. Cohen and other Geniza scholars.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} S.D. Goitein, “Geniza Documents from the Mamluk Period” [Heb.], \textit{Tarbiz}, 41 (1972), p. 63. Recent scholarship suggests tens of Geniza documents from the Mamluk and Ottoman periods in Egypt and Syria,
was Maimonides’ son, Abraham (1186-1237), whom Goitein regarded to be the emblem of the ‘Judeo-Arab civilization’; Abraham Maimonides, for him, “represented all the best found in medieval Judaism, as it developed within Islamic civilization.”

Goitein held the opinion that the relationship between Jews and Arabs in the period before the thirteenth century is one of ‘symbiosis,’ a term he borrowed from biology and applied to his fields of inquiry. His view, colored by a sympathetic, Arabophile attitude, points to his understanding of ‘Classical’ Islam as predominantly Arab, and to the existence of Jewish-Arab contacts for two millennia before Islam. In 1949 Goitein coined the term ‘Jewish-Arab Symbiosis,’ and thereafter used it often in his works, such as his survey of Jewish-Arab relations in Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts through the Ages (1955), and in his magnum opus, A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza (1967-1988); occasionally he used the term ‘creative symbiosis’ instead. As Steven Wasserstrom demonstrates, this usage has been institutionalized in the study of Judeo-Arabica ever since Goitein’s publications, and is still relevant to studies written today.
An important change occurred when Goitein’s term, ‘Jewish-Arab Symbiosis,’ was transformed into ‘Judeo-Islamic Symbiosis’ in Bernard Lewis’ The Jews of Islam (1984). Lewis argued that it was “a kind of symbiosis between Jews and their [Muslim] neighbors that has no parallel in the Western world between the Hellenistic and modern ages.”\textsuperscript{30} Wasserstrom understood the idea of ‘Jewish-Arab Symbiosis’ to originate in the concept of ‘German-Jewish Symbiosis,’ which was common amongst German Jewish intellectuals before World War II, only to be criticized – after the Holocaust and the horrendous atrocities the Germans committed during the war – as a delusion of Jews who had a strong desire to believe in such relations.\textsuperscript{31} In Goitein’s Jews and Arabs, published a decade after the end of the War, the same critique is heard. Commenting on An Introduction to the Arabic Literature of the Jews (1901) by Moritz Steinschneider,\textsuperscript{32} who compared the German-Jewish symbiosis to the Arab-Jewish symbiosis, Goitein stated:

I venture to disagree with the great master. Despite their great relative importance, none of the creations of the Jewish authors writing in German or conceived under the impact of modern Western civilization has reached all parts of the Jewish people or have influenced the personal inner life of every Jew to the profound


\textsuperscript{32} Moritz Steinschneider (1816-1907), Bohemian bibliographer and Orientalist. On his scholarly work, see Studies on Steinschneider: Moritz Steinschneider and the Emergence of the Science of Judaism in Nineteenth-century Germany, Reimund Leicht and Gad Freudenthal, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Pe’amim, 129: Moritz (Mosheh) Steinschneider and the Judeo-Arabic Culture (2011) [Heb.].
degree as did the great Jewish writers who belonged to the medieval civilization of Arab Islam.\textsuperscript{33}

In \textit{Jews and Arabs}, Goitein divided Jewish-Arab history into four periods: the first, \textit{Pre-history}, stretches over two thousands or more years, between 1500 B.C.E.-500 C.E.; the second, the \textit{Period of Creative Jewish-Arab symbiosis} between 500-1300 C.E., started with the emergence of “Muslim religion and Arab nationhood” under Jewish impact, and ended with “traditional Judaism receiv[ing] its final shape under Muslim-Arab influence”; and the third period, 1300-1900, the stage in which “Arabs faded out from world history, and Oriental Jews from Jewish history.” The fourth stage is the modern age (1900 – present).\textsuperscript{34}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{33} Goitein, \textit{Jews and Arabs}, pp. 129-130. Compare Bernard Lewis’ words to this statement by Goitein.
\textsuperscript{34} Goitein, \textit{Jews and Arabs}, p. 10.
\end{flushright}
Table 1. S.D. Goitein’s Periodization of Jewish-Arab Relations in Jews and Arabs (1955)

I. PREHISTORY
1500 B.C. – 500 A.D.

- a. Common Origins
  - Myths: Semitic Race, Israel an Arab Tribe

b. Recorded Contacts as from 853 B.C.
   1. Biblical period
   2. Maccabean, Herodian and Roman periods
   3. Talmudic times

II. CREATIVE SYMBIOSIS
500–1300

- a. The origin and early development of Islam in its Jewish environment. "Islam an Arab recast of Israel's religion."

b. The influence of Islam on Jewish thought and that of Arab language and literature on Hebrew.

III. FADING OUT
1300–1900

- a. Of Arabs from World History
- b. Of Oriental Jews from Jewish History
- c. The common heritage of suffering

IV. THE NEW CONFRONTATION
1900–

- a. The coincidence of Jewish and Arab revivals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Similarities and differences.
- b. Israel in Palestine:
  1. A Western intrusion into the East
  2. An Eastern intrusion into a Western society
     a) Immigrants from Arab countries
     b) Arab citizens of Israel
- c. The Future:
  The parallel tasks of the two peoples.
Early on, Goitein warned historians from developing an “idealistic historiographical legend” of Jewish-Arab relations, and talked of this legend’s origins in the reaction among European Jewish historians of the nineteenth century to the legal discrimination of Jews in their countries. Nonetheless, he was, more than any other historian in the twentieth century, responsible for the idea of a flourishing ‘Jewish-Arab civilization’ in ‘classical’ Islam. To the fading out period between 1300-1800, Goitein devoted in Jews and Arabs only four and a half pages in contrast to more than 150 pages to the period of creative symbiosis (500-1300). The history of Jewish-Arab relations in the so-called ‘post-classical’ age of Islam was of no interest to this historian.

About a decade after Jews and Arabs, Goitein published a new proposal for the periodization of Islamic history.

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36 Goitein, Jews and Arabs, pp. 212-216.
Table 2. S.D. Goitein’s Periodization of Islamic History (1968)

<table>
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<th>Periodization</th>
<th>Characters</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| 1. **ARABISM AND ARABIC ISLAM, 500-850 CE** | Arab nation (*sic*) / Arabic civilization  
Creation of Arabic as a literary language  
Arabic Qur’ān  
Superiority of the Arab armies during the expansion of Islam  
Sophisticated economy: caravans and merchants |
| **Why Intermediate?** |  
1. *Time*: between Middle Eastern Hellenism and European Renaissance  
2. *Character*: between secular antiquity and clerical medieval Europe  
3. *Location*: between the Indian and Chinese civilizations in the East to Europe and Africa |
| 2. **THE INTERMEDIATE CIVILIZATION, 850-1250** | Free, monetary economy  
Predominance of the middle class  
Diffusion of Greek secular sciences  
Rich and flexible creativeness in religion |
| 3. **INSTITUTIONALIZED ISLAM, territorial, mostly non-Arab civilizations, 1250-1800** | Military feudalism and state bureaucracy  
State monopolies  
Supervision of economy  
Institutionalization of religion and science  
Ecstatic mysticism  
Sectarianism with the creation of diversified cultures |
| 4. **TRANSITION TO NATIONAL CULTURES (sic), 1800–** | Western impact on the Islamic peoples  
Pan-Islamism as a reaction to the Western threat  
-Islamic revival: non-existent; not to be confused with pan-Islamism)  
Transition and formation |
Despite the differences between Goitein’s periodizations in his publications from 1955 (Jewish-Arab history) and 1968 (Islamic history), the watershed for the end of the ‘Golden Age’ in each of the cases is the thirteenth century. This is the period that Goitein defined as an Arab eclipse up to the modern age.

In Western scholarship that was written until the last third of the twentieth century, the paradigm of an (Arab) Islamic Eclipse was predominant in studying the history of the peoples of the Middle East.\(^{38}\) Under Turkish (Ottoman) rule, occurred the (Arab) Muslims’ decadence, and then came also the degeneration of the Jewish ‘Golden Age’ in pre-modern times. Arabs and Jews, according to Goitein, shared a fate of suffering, of living in exile, while Arabs lived in “exile” even though they were never displaced – an Arab galut.\(^{39}\) S.N. Eisenstadt explained the negative meaning of the Jewish concept of galut (exile) in the lack of political sovereignty, and the partial or distorted spiritual or religious existence that creates the “metaphysical evaluation of galut.”\(^{40}\) Goitein, thus, evaluated the Arab eclipse according to the same lines.

The foremost factor for Arab-Islamic decline in Western thought was the introduction of Turkish soldiers into the Muslim armies, and the appearance of a new class – the Mamluks. This idea could be seen as part of the conflict between European

\(^{38}\) For example, in Classicism et déclin culturel dans l'histoire de l'Islam: Actes du symposium international d'histoire de la civilisation musulmane, Bordeaux 25-29 juin 1956, R. Brunschvig and G.E. Von Grunebaum, eds. (Paris; Besson: Chantemerle, 1957), where the state of Islam in its ‘post-classical’ age (up to the twentieth century) is defined with terms such as décadence, déclin (decline), and ankylosée (ankylosis). For a more recent example of the decline paradigm, see Christophe Picard, Le monde musulman du XI\(^{e}\) au XV\(^{e}\) siècle ([Paris]: Sedes, 2000), pp. 14-18, explaining the decline in Islam due to the rise to power of non-Arab peoples: Turks, Berbers, and Kurds. While the eleventh and twelfth centuries in this book are considered to be the “most remarkable [age of] Islam,” the change is attributed to the thirteenth century, when a time of uncreativity and dogmatism in religion has started.

\(^{39}\) Goitein, Jews and Arabs, p. 212. This concept stems from nationalist ideology, in which a “nation” inhabitates its “homeland,” and is sovereign of its destiny, perceiving the Arabs as constituting an Arab “nation-state” before the “Turkish” (i.e. Mamluk) conquest of Egypt and the Levant in 1250.

countries to the Ottoman Empire, which was conceived to be in political and economic decline starting in the seventeenth century, what Europeans understood as the ‘Eastern Question.’ 41 Arabic historiography adopted this idea with the rise of nationalism, and the anti-Turkish resentment is felt in Arab national discourse since the beginning of the twentieth century, blaming the “Turkish peoples” for the decline of Islam. As Tarif Khalidi states,

The ’villains’ of the historical piece were, generally speaking, identified as the period of Turkish military hegemony over the Baghdad Abbasid caliphate in the third/fourth (ninth/tenth) centuries, the Mamluk period (circa 1250-1517) and the period of Ottoman rule over the Arab Near East which began in 1517. These three were the most frequently cited culprits and ‘decline’ was dated to one or another of these periods. 42

In *Jews and Arabs*, Goitein describes the austere history of Islam in its ‘post-classical’ age according to the same terms:

The empire of the Caliphs, which [the Arabs] erected on the ruins of the kingdoms destroyed by them was […] a remarkable creation. However, the Arabs very soon lost their military prowess, and the state which they had erected disintegrated very rapidly; only nominal overlordship was conceded to the Caliphs of Baghdad by successor states, and even then only by some of them. […] [T]he Middle East was left unprotected and became prey to successive invasions from *Barbarian peoples*, while later, from the thirteenth to eighteenth century, it

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was ruled by *castes of ruthless, foreign slave soldiers*. The popular conception that the Arab countries were under *foreign domination* only during the four hundred years of Ottoman rule (1517-1917) is completely erroneous. The Mamluks who ruled over Egypt, Palestine and Syria before the Ottomans (1250-1517) were called in Arab sources “The Turkish Government,” because these slave soldiers were recruited from Turkish-speaking countries, and a similar system prevailed prior to the rule of the Mamluks. Thus, until the beginning of the nineteenth century the Arab countries were ruled by *corps of slave-guards* recruited invariably from foreign countries.\

Thus, it is now clear why, according to Goitein, the ‘post-classical’ age was the time when “Arabs faded out from world history, and Oriental Jews from Jewish history.” Despite the development in the historiography of Oriental Jewry, or Jews in Islamic lands, this was, and still is, the main view of Jewish-Muslim relations post-1250. The myth of the pre-1250 ‘Golden Age’ together with the decline of (Arab) Islam, to a large extent erased the Jews of Islamic lands between 1250-1800 from modern scholarship, unless they were linked somehow to the Spanish heritage, in itself mythicized in European-Jewish historiography.

To give two examples to the persistence of these ideas in the historiography of Jews in Muslim lands, it might be useful to look at the works of two distinct scholars of Oriental Jewry, Norman A. Stillman (b. 1945), and Mark R. Cohen (b. 1943), both of

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whom were students of Goitein. On the decline of Islam, Stillman writes in *Jews of Arab Lands* (1979), about a quarter of a century after Goitein’s *Jews and Arabs*:

The secular and humanistic tendencies of Hellenism, which until this period [mid-thirteenth century] had been predominant cultural forces in Islamic society, began to wane; and the same time the Islamic religious element in its most rigid form began to wax ever stronger. Non-Arab soldier castes ruled the successor states to the [*‘Abbasid*] caliphate. The political, social, and economic order they imposed might be called with some justification an oriental brand of feudalism. The dynamic mercantile economy of the High Middle Ages [900-1200 CE] stagnated. The currency was debased from years of gold overflow. Muslim society closed in upon itself within popular religious brotherhoods, trade guilds, and state monopolies. Economically, the non-Muslim minorities became increasingly marginal. Numerically, they became smaller as well.

And regarding the decline of Oriental Jewry in post-1250 Egypt, Stillman says:

The Process of Jewish economic decline and social isolation was by no means instantaneous, nor did it occur at the same rate in the various Islamic states. […] The Jewish experience under the Mamluks in many respects paralleled that of their brethren in medieval Christian Europe. In both cases, the Jews were extended “general sufferance with severe limitations.” In both cases, too, the Jews lived within an atmosphere of progressively heightening religious consciousness and cultivated contempt.

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47 Citing here Salo Baron’s phrase regarding the policy of the church in medieval Europe.
48 Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands*, pp. 65, 75. See further pp. 91-94 for Stillman’s negative view of Jewish life post-sixteenth century under the Ottomans, concluding (p. 94) that the condition of Ottoman Jewry at the turn of the nineteenth century was not very different from their situation before the Ottoman conquest of the Arab lands in 1517.
Similarly, Mark R. Cohen concludes: “The regime of the Mamluk rulers of Egypt and Palestine had been oppressive, and for two centuries, Jews living in the Mamluk domains had suffered a serious decline in both welfare and status.”

Cohen, despite his call for an intermediate method of writing the history of Jews under medieval Islam that is not in the fashion of the (pre-1250) ‘Golden Age’ nor according to the myth of intolerant Islam, is nonetheless a sympathetic historian of Jewish-Muslim relations in the ‘classical’ age of Islam. Instead of speaking of a ‘Golden Age,’ Cohen speaks in terms of ‘Renaissance,’ ‘convivencia,’ and ‘coexistence,’ and refers to Saadia Gaon and Maimonides as the acme of ‘Judeo-Arabic culture,’ until the borderlines between myth and reality in his writings become blurry. Cohen, like Goitein and Stillman, emphasizes the Arab component in Islam, and its indebtedness to the Greek sciences. For example, he writes in a recent survey:

[By the tenth century] Islam came into contact with the science, medicine, and philosophy of the Greco-Roman world centuries earlier than European Christendom. Translated early on into Arabic, these works gave rise to what the German scholar Adam Mez famously called “Die Renaissance des Islams.” Jews of the Fertile Crescent, the heartland of the Islamic Empire and the first center of the new Arabic science, medicine, and philosophy, had both access to and interest in the translated texts read by Muslim intellectuals. This facilitated the cultural convivencia of the Judeo-Arabic world, which began in the eastern Islamic domains and spread to the Muslim West. It led to Jewish adoption of

philosophy, science, and medicine—philosophy serving as a handmaiden of religious truths, as it did for Islamic philosophers themselves. The Arabic and Islamic “renaissance” laid the groundwork for other Jewish cultural innovations. The Bible was translated into Arabic. Hebrew as a language began to be studied “scientifically,” so to speak, using linguistic tools in vogue among Arab grammarians. But nearly everything Jews wrote they wrote in Arabic, and this was not limited to philosophy, for which Hebrew entirely lacked a vocabulary. Poetry, the major exception, was composed in Hebrew, but it, too, bore the stamp of Arabic culture.52

To conclude this section, scholars of Jewish history under Islam adopted the terminology of Islamicists regarding the progress of Islam in its early period; the division between ‘classical’ and ‘post-classical’ Islam (usually situated in the thirteenth century, sometimes more specifically around the mid-century, or at the fall of the Abbasid Empire in 1258); and the identification of Islam as mostly Arab, seeing the non-Arab elements in it to be foreign and destructive. In this paradigm, ‘classical’ (Arab) Islam is understood to be the age of ‘secularism’ and ‘humanism,’ and ‘post-classical’ Islam – as the time of decline and intellectual stagnation. These scholars perceived the apogee of Islam to be the ‘Golden Age’ of Jewish-Muslim relations, and thus, their interest in the history of Jewish-Muslim relations in the ‘post-classical’ age was in most cases minimal and marginal to the so-called ‘Golden Age.’53

II. The End of ‘Creative Symbiosis’ in the Late Middle Islamic Period?

“The medieval civilization of the Middle East,” writes Goitein in Jews and Arabs, “approximately up to 1300 – was far more modern than that of contemporary Europe in many respects – economic, social, and spiritual. It was basically [an] intermediate civilization linking up Hellenistic-Roman antiquity with modern times.” In his book he examines ‘symbiosis’ in the aspects of linguistics, philosophy, mysticism, and the ‘acme’ of this period, Hebrew poetry; sectarianism and messianism; law and ritual; popular religion and custom; and folk literature and art. To give two examples from Goitein’s examples of ‘creative symbiosis’ in the era of ‘classical’ Islam, I will refer here to two case-studies: linguistics and Hebrew poetry.

Goitein opens his discussion of ‘Jewish-Arab Symbiosis’ with the linguistic aspects. He sees in Arabization among the Jewish communities of the Orient the “first and most basic aspect” of symbiosis, with the Jews completing the adoption of Arabic around 1000 C.E. (around the time when, as he notes, the Arabs, i.e. the Abbasid caliphs, were replaced by “Turkish and other foreign rulers”). Unlike Aramaic, which was spoken among Jews in the countries between Palestine to Babylonia, Arabic was the language of the state, a ruling religion and society. The acquisition of the Arabic language occurred in a time of adopting the Arab ways of thinking and forms of literature as well as of religious notions. Jews developed the writing of Arabic in Hebrew script (Judeo-Arabic), a method that in Goitein’s view is of some similarity of an Arabic dialect. “It was commonplace,” he argues, “among both Jewish and Muslim scholars that Arabic, Hebrew

54 Goitein, Jews and Arabs, p. 125; cf. idem, Studies in Islamic History, p. 55, where this author defines this period as ending in 1250. On this author’s conceptualization of the ‘Intermediate Civilization,’ see ibid., pp. 54-70.
55 Goitein, Jews and Arabs, pp. 125-211.
and Aramaic were basically one and the same language (!),” thus, he blurs the borderlines between Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic, treating the three as if they were one, or originating from the same source. The ‘alliance’ between Arabic and Hebrew/Aramaic, the last two considered to be “Jewish” languages, is a testimony for the affinity between Jews and Arabs.

In his examination of Hebrew poetry written under the influence of Arabic, particularly the Hebrew poetry of Spain, Goitein continues his romantic appraisal of the ‘Jewish-Arab Symbiosis.’ “The Arabic influence on Hebrew was... great. Striking metaphors and similes, audacious comparisons and contrasts, ‘surprising’ openings and endings and many other devices of artful speech were borrowed by the Jews from the Arabs.” To express his admiration of medieval Hebrew poetry, or of the Arab influence over Oriental Jews, Goitein anachronistically recalls his memoirs from a Yemenite-Jewish funeral he attended, in which the professional mourner made the whole audience burst into tears during his performance (Goitein had devoted a large part of his early career to ethnographic and linguistic studies of the Yemenite Jews in Palestine); and in another example, after describing Judah al-Ḥarīzī’s (d. 1225) Hebrew version of the famous maqāma al-maḍīriyya, in which an affluent host fools his starving guest by presenting him room in his house without ever serving him the much-acclaimed, and desired, dish of maḍīra, Goitein tells his readers: “When, during a stay in the United States, a successful businessman concluded the tour of his home with the same detail, I got a vivid feeling for that mercantile civilization of the medieval Middle East to which

56 Ibid., p. 137.
57 Ibid., p. 158.
58 These studies were collected in S.D. Goitein, Ha-Temanim: Historyah, sidre hevrah, haye ha-ruah, mivhar mehqarim [The Yemenites: History, Communal Organization, Spiritual Life. Select Articles], Menachem Ben-Sasson, ed. (Jerusalem: Ben'Zvi Institute, 1983).
reference has been made so much in this book!” (i.e. al-Ḥarīzī’s Hebrew maqāmāt in the Book of Taḥkemoni).⁵⁹ Thus, history and personal experience as well as imagination, are mixed in Goitein’s appreciation of Jewish-Arab relations throughout history, seeing the highest point of these relations, starting already in ancient history with Abraham being the father of the two nations, as culminating in the ‘Judeo-Arab civilization’ pre-1250. Publishing the book Jews and Arabs in 1955, a short time after the establishment of the State of Israel and the 1948 War, and stressing the affinity between Jews and Arabs throughout history, was not without political aspirations for reaching peaceful relations between the two nations.⁶⁰

But what happened in the thirteenth century, according to Goitein and other scholars? In modern Jewish historiography, the Jewish renaissance under Islam ended in the thirteenth century with the military expansion of the Almohads (al-Muwahhidūn) in the Islamic West, and the rise to power of the Mamluk Sultans in Egypt and Syria (notice the Berber/so-called ‘Turkish’ origins of these two groups, respectively, in comparison to the “pure” Arab regimes pre-1250, as they are perceived in modern scholarship). The two states, the Almohad Empire and the Mamluk Sultanate, are regarded to be hostile to the Jewish communities to the degree of anti-Semitism, two states that brought with them the end of Jewish revival, and mark the end of Judeo-(Arab)-Muslim ‘symbiosis.’ The hostile

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⁶⁰ Goitein was a member of Brit Shalom (Covenant of Peace), a political association that sought a peaceful coexistence between Arabs and Jews. His publications include several articles in which he presents his vision for solving the conflict in Palestine and for reviving the cultural symbiosis between Jews and Arabs. On “Brit Shalom” see Hagit Lavsky, “German Zionists and the Emergence of Brit Shalom,” in Essential Papers on Zionism, Jehuda Reinharz and Anita Shapira, eds. (New York: New York University Press, 1995), pp. 648-670. See also Mark R. Cohen’s preface to the 2005 edition of Jews and Arabs, pp. vii-xiii.
evaluation of modern scholars to the Mamluk Sultanate was exemplified earlier in this introduction (through citations from the works of Norman Stillman and Mark Cohen), but a short survey of the historical background in the Maghrib and Egypt (for the purposes of this dissertation, I ignore Mamluk Syria) is necessary here.

The Almohad conquests of the mid-twelfth century are regarded the most destructive event for Jews living under Islamic rule during the Middle Period. The followers of the teachings of the Mahdī Ibn Tūmart (d. 1130), the Almohads swept the Islamic West with terror when they conquered al-Andalus and wide areas in the Maghrib, and established an empire that stretched between the Iberian Peninsula to Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in the eastern Maghreb, making Marrakesh their capital. The initial period of military expansion was accompanied by destruction of the Jewish communities in the Islamic West, forced conversion of Jews under the Almohad rule, or their fleeing to Christian Spain or to North Africa, escaping the fright of war. The Almohads did not recognize the dhimmi status of Jews and Christians, and forced them to convert to Islam, or leave the realm of their state. In Jewish historiography, this period marks the end of Jewish renaissance in Spain, often memorialized by Abraham ibn Ezra’s (d. 1167) elegy for the fall of the Jewish communities of the West (Aha yarad ‘al Sepharad, “Calamity Fell upon Spain”).

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In Egypt, the Mamlūks established their rule from 1250 to 1517 (in Syria, 1260-1517), having their origin as the bodyguards of al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb (r. 1240-1249). They seized power in a delicate era: the crusade of St. Louis (1249-50) and the Mongol invasion of Syria (1259-60). Nonetheless, the Mamlūks were able to save their realms from the Mongols, who were the greater danger to communities in Egypt and Syria, and fight the crusaders. Under their rule, which lasted more than 250 years, Jews are said, according to traditional historiography, to suffer from cultural and economic decline, and experience the burden of the regime in its rigorous anti-Jewish (and anti-Christian) policies. Seeing themselves as protectors of Sunnī Islam, the Mamlūks are believed to establish strong relations to the class of the ‘ulamā’ (scholars of Islamic law), devoting finances in religious endowments, and acting harshly against the non-Muslims, in what sometimes resulted in persecution of the Jewish and Christian elites, or demanding heavy taxes from these communities.63

Due to this portrayal of the Almohad and Mamluk regimes, the history of Jews living in their lands has never attracted the same attention as of the pre-thirteenth century time period. “Arabs faded out from world history, and Oriental Jews from Jewish history” (Goitein). In Egypt, the period that ends with the ‘classical Geniza period’ in the thirteenth century is the beginning of the dark ages of Jewish history, up to the sixteenth century of Ottoman ‘renaissance,’ but falling soon after into oblivion. And in the West, Jewish historiography mostly ignored the period between the thirteenth century and 1492,

63 Ashtor, Toldot ha-Yehudim.
the year in which the Jews were expelled of Spain and migrated, partially, to North Africa or to the Ottoman Empire. Thus, this is a dark age in the West, a barren land in which nothing could grow; a period of stagnation, or furthermore, of cultural, economic, and social “death” to the Jewish communities of the Maghrib until they were “revived” by the waves of Spanish Jews from the north.⁶⁴

This dissertation, however, critiques the traditional depiction of “dark ages” between 1200 and 1500 in Egypt and the Maghrib, arguing for the continuation of Jewish cultural development rather than an era of stagnation. I intend to investigate this development by adopting the model of the pre-1200 ‘creative symbiosis’ instead of rejecting it all together in favor of a more critical view of the Jewish experience under medieval Islam. The existence of ‘Judeo-Arab Civilization’ or ‘Judeo-(Arab)-Muslim Symbiosis’ should be viewed as constructs in modern Jewish historiography, not merely as history “as it actually happened” (wie es eigentlich gewesen), but nonetheless, the adoption of these terms or models for this dissertation will in fact enrich my research. My dissertation suggests, therefore, redefining the era of ‘symbiosis’ as starching beyond 1200 in order to study later developments in Jewish thought that came into dialogue with Islamic literature. Thus, bringing Jews (and Arabs) of the Later Middle Period back into history, instead of letting them “fade,” as Goitein called it. This will be achieved through examining intellectual and social exchange between Jews and Muslims during the Later Middle Period in two regions: the Maghrib (in chapters 1 and 3), and Egypt (chapter 2).

⁶⁴ On the ‘supremacy’ of Spanish Jewry in modern historiography, see note 44.
CHAPTER 1. BIBLICAL COMMENTARY.
JOSEPH IBN ‘AQIN’S (C. 1150-1220) COMMENTARY ON THE
SONG OF SONGS, INKISHĀF AL-ASRĀR WA-ZUḤŪR AL-ANWĀR
(DISCLOSURE OF SECRETS AND APPEARANCE OF LIGHT)

This chapter examines a commentary on the Song of Songs, written in the Maghrib during the age of the Almohad persecutions. The author was a scholar and physician of Spanish descent, Joseph ibn ‘Aqnīn (c. 1150-1220), a forced convert to Islam who bemoans his fate due to the Almohad oppression of the Jewish communities of the Islamic West. In what is perceived to be a dark age to the Jews of the Maghrib, Ibn ‘Aqnīn’s commentary, Inkishāf al-asrār wa-zuḥūr al-anwār (Disclosure of Secrets and Appearance of Light), is an unusual tract that celebrates, despite the harsh historical circumstances, the Islamic culture and its achievements in the sciences, cites Arabic poetry, and defends its position for the usage of Islamic materials in the composition of biblical commentary. Despite the author’s complaints of the persecution and of the “impurity of forced conversion,” he is proud of his Arab education. This is an example for the so-called ‘Judeo-Islamic Symbiosis’ in the wilderness of bloodshed and war. In studying Ibn ‘Aqnīn’s commentary, I will first start with the main problem presented in his work, as in almost every exegesis of the Song – the search after the “true” meaning of the Song, then discuss the commentary on the Song by two renowned scholars, Maimonides and Abraham ibn Ezra, before investigating the Inkishāf al-asrār against its Islamic-Arab background. My argument in this chapter is that despite the common perception of the Almohad period as the end of ‘Judeo-Islamic Symbiosis’ in the West, there was continuity in Jewish knowledge of and usage of Islamic materials, and that intellectual exchange between Judaism and Islam is well-exemplified in Ibn ‘Aqnīn’s Arabic commentary on the Song.
I. Allegorical and Philosophical Interpretations of the *Song of Songs*

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!
For your love is better than wine;
your anointing oils are fragrant;
your name is oil poured out;
therefore virgins love you.
Draw me after you; let us run.
The king has brought me into his chambers.
(Song of Songs 1:2-4)

The inclusion of the *Song of Songs* (hereafter: *Song*) in the Hebrew Bible has troubled Jews and Christians since ancient times.¹ Read plainly, the *Song* recounts dialogues of love and lust between several speakers (farm girl and shepherd, king and royal maiden, etc.), and the erotic character of it sets it apart from the rest of the Bible. Moreover, none of God’s names occur in the *Song*, nor does it refer to any historical event from the past of the Jewish people, thus one could easily read it as a secular work.² Secular reading of the *Song*, which seems to be ordinary nowadays, were neither uncommon in the past, to the degree of rabbis from as late as the second century C.E. debated the question of the *Song*’s scriptural inspiration.³ These debates have never been fully settled: while Rabbi Akiba (d. c. 137 C.E.) stated that “all the writings are holy, but the *Song of Songs* is the

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¹ For a passing reference to the *Song of Songs* by a Muslim scholar, Ibn Hazm (d. 1064), see Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1996), p. 247. Ibn Hazm’s knowledge of this book was most probably through oral transmission, and it is doubtful if he has ever read it. Aryeh Tsoref’s study, which identifies a ‘biblical’ image from the *Song* in Islamic literature, is unconvincing. See Tsoref, “‘My Eye is Asleep, and My Heart is Awake’: A Verse from the *Song of Songs* in Islamic Literature” [Heb.], *Moreshet Yisra’el*, 10 (2013), pp. 60-71.
Maimonides argued that the Song, even though it is attributed to King Solomon, defile the hands.5

Early rabbis understood the Song as a divine love song, an interpretation that has its roots in the Second Temple Period. This interpretation builds on the spousal metaphor of relationship between God and Israel, when according to the biblical tradition, Israel is imagined as God’s long-standing spouse. The Israelite prophets challenged Israel to remember the covenant with God in terms of a marital union, and described Israel as a chastise wife, or rather as an adulterous one. “I will espouse you to me,” says God, “you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion” (Hos. 2:21). In another place, however, Israel is reproached:

I am filled with fury against you, declares the Sovereign Lord, when you do all these things, acting like a brazen prostitute! When you built your mounds at every street corner and made your lofty shrines in every public square, you were unlike a prostitute, because you scorned payment. You adulterous wife! You prefer strangers to your own husband! All prostitutes receive gifts, but you give gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from everywhere for your illicit favors. So in your prostitution you are the opposite of others; no one runs after you for your favors. You are the very opposite, for you give payment and none is given to you. Therefore, you prostitute, hear the word of the Lord! (Ezek. 16:30-35).

4 Mishnah Yadaim 3:5, Midrash Shir ha-Shirim 1:11.

Often the metaphor of youthful couple is projected towards the history of the exodus and Israel’s wanderings in the Sinai desert, a figure of speech that was later used in the interpretation of the *Song*, such as in Jeremiah’s prophecy: “Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: ‘This is what the Lord says: I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown’” (Jer. 2:2). The same spousal metaphor, or at least the one of romantic relationship or devotion, is occasionally used in the Pentateuch to describe God and Israel, and it makes the spousal metaphor not exclusively unique to the prophets.  

Using this line of interpretation for understanding the meaning of the *Song*, an esoteric reading of this book, is usually defined as an *allegory*, or as Jonathan Kaplan prefers to name it in his recent study of the early rabbinic exegesis of the *Song: typological or figurative interpretation*. The exact definition of this interpretation, however, should not be the focus of this chapter, since “allegory” denotes a range of interpretations and habits of thought (originally from the Greek: *allos*, “other,” and *agoreuein*, “to speak in public,” thus in the sense of “other-speaking”). This interpretation, in sum, identifies God as the male protagonist of the *Song*, and Israel – as the female protagonist, and the villains in the book, as Israel’s “enemies” such as the Egyptians or other nations. Early rabbis historicized the *Song*, and created what is considered to be the traditional-esoteric reading of this book in rabbinic Judaism.  

A different direction of interpretation was achieved through the trans-historic, philosophical modes of thought. It is no longer the nation (Israel, or in Christianity – the

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Church) that is at the focus of the allegorical or figurative interpretation, but the individual, or the human soul. It is an individualist, psychologistic interpretation. Like the historical-allegorical reading of the Song, the philosophical one goes back to the first centuries C.E.

Before examining Ibn ‘Aqnīn’s commentary on the Song, I will examine two commentaries, what will enable us appreciate the Inkishāf for its dialogue with Islamic sources. First, I will look at Maimonides’ writings concerning the Song, then Abraham ibn Ezra’s exegesis of this book.

Maimonides saw in biblical commentary great importance and part and parcel of his scholarly work. In the introduction to the Guide of the Perplexed, he proclaims:

The first purpose of this treatise is to explain the meanings of certain terms occurring in the books of prophecy. Some of these terms are equivocal (mushtarika; lit. shared); hence the ignorant understand them according to [only] some of the meanings in which the term in question is used. And some of them are metaphorical (musta’āra; lit. borrowed); hence they understand them as well according to the original meaning from which they are derived. […] This treatise also has a second purpose, namely the explanation of very obscure parables (Ar. amthāl; Heb. meshalim) occurring in Scripture. […] An ignorant or heedless individual might think that they are said only according to their apparent meaning (ẓāhir) and there is no deeper meaning (bāṭin) to them.9

Nonetheless, Maimonides wrote no complete commentary on any of book of the bible. The method he employs is commenting on a word, a verse, or several verses, or to point to the overall meaning of a passage or a book. Thus, in order to study his understanding

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of the *Song of Songs*, one has to reconstruct it from his writings; the result, however, is inconsistent. Maimonides did not have one comprehensive interpretation of the *Song*, and he commented on it from national, philosophical, halakhic, and ethical aspects according to the objects of his tracts. As mentioned earlier, Maimonides, unlike Rabbi Akiba, considered the *Song* to defile the hands. Nonetheless, he regarded it “wise sayings,” and includes it under the category of the second degree of prophecy, the first being the degree held by the judges of Israel, the messiahs, and figures such as David and Moses:

> [The second degree of prophecy] consists in the fact that an individual finds that a certain thing has descended upon him and that another force has come upon him and has made him speak; so that he talks in wise sayings, in words of praise, in useful admonitory dicta, or concerning governmental or divine matters and all this while he is awake and his senses function as usual. Such an individual is said to speak through the Holy Spirit. It is through this kind of Holy Spirit that David composed *Psalms*, and Solomon *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes* and *Song of Songs*. *Daniel* and *Job* and *Chronicles* and the other Writings have likewise been composed through this kind of Holy Spirit. For this reason people call them Writings, meaning thereby that they are written through the Holy Spirit.

Later, Maimonides clarifies that Solomon is not to be considered a prophet to the scale of Isaiah and Jeremiah:

One of the things to which we must draw attention is that David and Solomon and Daniel belong to this group and not to that of Isaiah and Jeremiah and Nathan the prophet and Aḥija the Shilonite and men similar to them. For they – I mean David and Solomon and Daniel – spoke and said what they said through the Holy Spirit.

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10 Martsiano, “Maimonides,” p. 89.
12 1 Kings 11:31-39, 14:6-16.
Referring to the Sages’ usage of parables in their sayings, Maimonides interprets the *Song* by the same terms:

> How can one criticize [the Sages’] composition of wisdom through lowly and vulgar parables and similes when the wisest of all humans did it through the Holy Spirit, that is, Solomon, when he was writing the *Song of Songs*, *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes*.\(^\text{14}\)

In pointing to the “lowly and vulgar parables” of the *Song*, Maimonides must have meant the erotic contents of this book.\(^\text{15}\) This explains his ambiguous attitude to the *Song* and its usage of parables, which might not be understood by the masses due to their plain meaning. The interpretations he gives to the *Song* are mainly allegorical-national or mystical-devotional. In the *Epistle to Yemen*,\(^\text{16}\) Maimonides employs a national-messianic interpretation to the *Song*; he warns his readers in Yemen of arousing messianic hopes and demands them to follow Solomon’s swear of the daughters of Jerusalem, “I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field: *Do not arouse or awaken love until it so*

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\(^{14}\) Martsiano, “Maimonides,” p. 89 (my translation from the Hebrew).

\(^{15}\) “You know the severe prohibition that obtains among us against obscene language. This also is necessary. For speaking with the tongue is one of the properties of a human being and a benefit that is granted to him and by which he is distinguished. […] Now this benefit granted us with a view to perfection in order that we learn and teach should not be used with a view to the greatest deficiency and utter disgrace, so that one says what the ignorant and sinful Gentiles say in their songs and their stories, suitable for them but not for those to whom it has been said: ‘And ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation’ [Exod. 19:6]. And whoever has applied his thought or his speech to some of the stories concerning that sense which is a disgrace to us, so that he thought more about drink or copulation than is needful or recited songs about these matters, has made use of the benefit granted to him, applying and utilizing it to commit an act of disobedience with regard to Him who has granted the benefit and to transgress His orders.” Maimonides, *Guide*, 2:435.

desires” (Song 2:7). Elsewhere in the same epistle, he gives a longer interpretation of the Song according to its national meaning: The Jewish nation is beautiful woman, not having a flaw (Song 4:7), but the nations around her are trying to tempt her into sinning while she mocks them for not being able to provide an alternative to the “Maḥanayim dance” (Song 7:1), that is, according to Maimonides, the revelation on Mount Sinai.\(^{17}\) In another work, Maimonides employs the individualistic-mystical interpretation of the Song, explaining the entire book as advocating for the believer’s devotion to God:

> What is the desired love? Loving God in great and powerful passion, until the believer’s soul is bound to the love of God, and he finds himself constantly reflecting upon it as if he were faint of love, not having any rest from loving that woman, always thinking about her, whether he is sitting [at home] or walking [along the road], and whether he is eating or drinking. Furthermore, loving God should be even more powerful, as said: “[Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” [Deut. 6:5], and as Solomon said through a parable (mashal), “For I am faint with love” [Song 2:5], and the entire Song of Songs is a parable concerning this issue.\(^{18}\)

Elsewhere, Maimonides interprets the Song as dealing with matters of the Afterworld.\(^{19}\)

Abraham ibn Ezra (d. 1164), a prominent Spanish scholar, wrote his commentary on the Song of Songs ca. 1142.\(^{20}\) It is a Hebrew commentary that is divided into three sections: the first is concerned with the philological meaning of the Song; the second, the plain meaning (peshat; that is, the Song as a poem about lovers); and the third, the midrashic interpretation of the Song (derash), according to the method introduced in the

preface to his work. In the first section Abraham ibn Ezra, as a linguist, presents some of the biblical terms with their Arabic names (bi-leshon Qedar, “in the tongue of Qedar”), and once in Latin as well, as if he is concerned with materia medica, e.g. mor (Song 1:13), “myrrh,” in Arabic: misk; and kofer (Song 1:14), “camphor,” in Arabic: kāfūr, Latin: canphora [i.e. camphora]. In some cases, Abraham ibn Ezra uses Arabic in order to explain difficult words, such as redid (Song 5:7), “mantle,” in Arabic: malhafa.

The second section of the commentary opens with a warning: “This is the most elevated of all songs written by Solomon, and never never (halila halila) should the Song of Songs be considered words of desire (divre hesheq), but solely in the manner of an allegory (mashal) as in the prophecy of Ezekiel on the Jewish nation (Knesset Yisra‘el),” and lastly, Ibn Ezra ends his commentary with the midrashic interpretation of the Song. David Wacks writes that Ibn Ezra gave equal space to the literal and allegorical interpretations of the Song, and sees in it a significant feature of this commentary: “[H]ere the development of the secular meaning of the Song in Ibn Ezra’s commentary puts the secular and the sacred on the same page for the first time in the Jewish exegetical tradition.” Nonetheless, it is obvious from Ibn Ezra’s words that he did not consider the ‘secular’ reading of the Song to be legitimate (at least not in the context of biblical

21 For peshat and derash, see Michael A. Fishbane, Song of Songs: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2015), pp. xxxvi-xlii.
22 On Qedar, see note 104 below.
exegesis), and that he wished to set the second section of his commentary only for a better reading of the Song according to its allegorical meaning in the third and final section.

II. Joseph ibn ‘Aqnīn: A Biographical Sketch

Abraham ibn Ezra’s commentary on the Song of Songs, with its tripartite structure, was not approved by Joseph ben Judah ibn ‘Aqnīn (c. 1150-1220), who composed a philosophical exegesis on the Song. Ibn ‘Aqnīn, a philosopher and physician who experienced the Almohad persecutions against the Jews and the Christians in the Islamic West, was forced to convert to Islam in the days of the Caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 1184-1199). Ibn ‘Aqnīn, in addition to his commentary on the Song of Songs, entitled Inkishāf al-asrār wa-ẓuhūr al-anwār (Disclosure of Secrets and the Appearance of

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27 Ibn Ezra’s commentary on the Song was received through contact with Jewish scholars in Córdoba. See Joseph ibn ‘Aqnīn, Hitgalut ha-sodot ve-hoṭa’at ha-me’orot: Perush Shir ha-shirim [The Disclosure of Secrets and the Appearance of Light: Commentary on the Song of Songs], Abraham S. Halkin, ed. and trans. (Jerusalem: Meqitse Nirdamim, 1964), ff. 128a-128b.


Light), is the author of several other works, such as Ikhtisār shārḥ Jālīnūs li-fuṣūl Abuqrāṭ (Abridgement of Galen’s Commentary on Hippocrates’ Aphorisms), and an ethical compilation named Tibb al-nuǧūs al-salīma wa-muʿalajat al-nuǧūs al-alīma (Hygiene of the Healthy Souls and the Therapy of the Ailing Souls).

Ibn ‘Aqnīn was born in Barcelona in 1150. Probably due to the Almohad persecutions in Iberia, he, or perhaps his father, left to Fes in North Africa. He remained in this city until his death in 1220, living there as a forced convert to Islam, and expressing his wish to embrace Judaism again. It is unclear why in this period crypto-Jews chose to live in Fes, which was close to Marrakesh, the Almohad capital. Yet, some scholars suggested that in fact, for crypto-Jews, Fes was safer to live in than other areas under the Almohad rule; this question nonetheless requires further investigation.

Ibn ‘Aqnīn and Maimonides met during the latter’s sojourn in Fes, and Ibn ‘Aqnīn composed a poem on the occasion of the master’s departure for Egypt in 1165. In his writings, Ibn ‘Aqnīn expresses his admiration to Maimonides, naming him mofet ha-dor or mofet ha-

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zeman, and in Arabic: ‘alāmat al-zamān (paragon of the age); and he mentions in his writings Maimonides’ works such as his Mishneh Torah and the Guide for the Perplexed, which he names Dalīl al-ḥā’irīn instead of the more common title, Dalālat al-ḥā’irīn. It is doubtful, however, if Ibn ‘Aqnīn could have had access to the copy of the Guide in Fes, since copies of this book were probably not very common in the Maghrib.

Ibn ‘Aqnīn witnessed the Almohad anti-Jewish persecutions, and gives evidence for the forced conversion of his coreligionists to Islam. The main source for our knowledge of his experience under the Almohads is the Tibb al-nufūs that was written after 1198.

If we were to consider the persecutions (shemadot) that have befallen us in recent years, we would not find anything comparable recorded by our ancestors in their annals. We are made the object of reproach (ta‘rīḍ); great and small testify against us and judgments are pronounced, the least of which render lawful the spilling of our blood, the confiscation of our property, and the dishonor of our wives…[T]hey imposed on upon us distinctive garments as it was foretold in the Holy Scriptures: ve-hayita le-shammah, le-mashal ve-li-sheninah be-khol ha-‘amim asher yenahegkha Adnoai shammah, ‘And you shall become a desolation, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations where the Lord shall lead you’ (Deut. 28:37). The word shamma signifies ‘desolation’ on account of the scorn of the people.

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35 Bacher, introduction to Sefer musar, p. xiv; Ibn ‘Aqnīn, Hitgalut ha-sodot, fol. 112a.
36 Ibid., fol. 103b; Y. Tzvi Langermann, “The Dalālat al-ḥā’irīn and Its Commentary among Jews of Arab Lands” [Heb.], in Minnah le-Mikha’el: Meḥqarim be-hagut Yehudit u-Muslemit, muqdashim li-Profesor Mikha’el Shwarts [Tribute to Michael: Studies in Jewish and Muslim Thought, Presented to Professor Michael Schwarz], Sara Klein-Braslavy et al., eds. ([Tel Aviv]: Tel Aviv University, 2009), p. 70 and n. 8. See however Joseph ibn Kaspi’s (d. c. 1345) account of Muslim scholars studying the Guide in Fes, in Israel Abrahams, Hebrew Ethical Wills (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1926), 1:154 (in Hebrew and English trans.). On the Arabic title of the Guide, see Kraemer, Maimonides, pp. 570-571 n. 61; Stroumsa, Maimonides, p. 25; and on its reception among Muslims, see the appendix in Gregor Schwab, “The Reception of Maimonides in Christian-Arabic Literature,” in Ben ‘Ever la-‘Arav: Contacts Between Arabic Literature and Jewish Literature in the Middle Ages and Modern Times, 7: Maimonides and His World, Joseph Tobi, ed. (Haifa: Haifa University, 2014), pp. 143-146 (also p. 113 n. 20).
38 Heb. shemad (pl. shemadot), “persecution; forced apostasy.”
nations at our state of humiliation, abasement, and contempt (wa-huwa istiḥyāsh
al-ummam min aḥwālinā min al-hūn wa-l-dhilla wa-l-khāsāṣa).\(^{39}\)

Other references to the persecutions also appear in his commentary on the Song, where Ibn ‘Aqnīn says on the “tents of Qedar” in Song 1:5, that “no other enslavement is more harmful and destructive than under their kingdom [i.e. Islam]; no other hardship is worse than theirs, and none is heavier in the world,” following the traditional identification of Qedar, one of the sons of Ishmael (Gen. 25:13; 1 Chron. 1:29), with Islam.\(^{40}\) Ibn ‘Aqnīn’s interpretation echoes Maimonides’ Epistle to Yemen, where the master cites Ps. 120:5, “Woe to me that I dwell in Meshek, that I live among the tents of Qedar,” and concludes with the same message, reminding his readers that “the Madman [i.e. Muḥammad] is of the lineage of the children of Qedar.”\(^{41}\)


expresses his wish to be purified from the defilement of his conversion to Islam (*tum'at ha-shemad*) and leave the Maghrib, the “land of oppression” (*erets gezerah*), to a safer place, a wish he has never fulfilled during his lifetime.\(^{42}\)

III. Ibn ‘Aqnîn’s Commentary on the *Song of Songs*

The literal interpretation of the *Song of Songs* by some exegetes and readers, without seeing the deeper meaning of the text, is what motivated Ibn ‘Aqnîn to write his commentary on this book, using allegorical and mystical-philosophical readings – the first (allegorical) follows the rabbinic interpretation, and the second (philosophical) is his own commentary on the text, on which he boasts that no one preceded him in his approach. One can learn about Ibn ‘Aqnîn’s motivation from the introduction, where he explains that Solomon wrote the *Song* as a love poem only as a pedagogical tool, in order to attract the masses, and that the same method was used by the Indians when they composed *Kalîla wa-Dimna* and made it appealing to the laypeople in its contents and illustrations (fol. 1a). Arabic-speaking Jews were familiar with Ibn al-Muqaffa’s (d. ca. 756) rendering of *Kalîla wa-Dimna* and the illustrated manuscripts of this work. In Iberia, this work was translated twice into Hebrew, first by one Rabbi Joel (twelfth century) and again by the Toledan *maqâma* author Jacob ben El’azar (d. early thirteenth century).\(^{43}\)


The Song, as Ibn ‘Aqnīn argues, holds a unique meaning, known only to specialists; he wishes to stress this point by a narrative from the Almoravid times:

The physician Abū Abraham ibn Muwarīl told me that the physician Abū al-Ḥasan ibn Qanmīl told him: ‘Once I came before the amīr of the Almoravid kings, and found a Jewish physician, whose name I have forgotten, explaining him the Song of Songs according to its literal meaning, that is, as love poetry (ghazal). I condemned that physician and offended him in front of the king, and told the king: He is a complete fool, who does not understand neither our Torah and its wisdom, nor the intention of Solomon, son of David (may God pray for them), and the purpose for writing this book. This book is exceedingly valuable, written as love poetry at a first glance, but when you look deeper into it, you will find in it the wonderful meanings known only to the most wise, those of superior intellect and pure insight. I explained that to the amīr, clarified the intention and purpose of this book, and made the contempt he felt towards this book, caused by the words of the foolish physician, disappear from his heart. I asked him: how could a man like Solomon, son of David – peace be upon them – spend his time with the vile and inferior purpose [of writing the Song of Songs], and I raised this book into the higher level which it deserves, and the wisdom of Solomon (peace be upon him) was dear to him; and this case was for him none other but sanctification of God’s name (kiddush ha-Shem).
By removing the erotic meaning from the *Song of Songs*, Ibn ‘Aqnīn argues in another book of his:

Know that one is forbidden to sing those songs that the Ishmaelites call *ash‘ār muwashshaha* (strophic verses),\(^{49}\) in which the beauty and stature of humans is praised, because they seduce one into committing sins, and cause the individual to sin regularly. Furthermore, [these songs are forbidden] in taverns because wine more easily leads into committing sins, whether these songs are sung in the holy language [Hebrew] or in Arabic. These songs were not forbidden because of their way of speech, but because of their content. In other words, if their content encourages one to do a *mitzvah*, to speak praises [to God], or to mention the blessings of the the Holy One, Blessed Be He, it is mandatory to sing such a song, even in the tavern.

We also say that singing anything else [other than what is mentioned previously, is forbidden], and that extracting content from Biblical verses for this purpose [of singing, is forbidden], because one secularizes these verses and makes them the subject of folly and jest. The sages (of blessed memory) said: Whoever warbles a verse from the *Song of Songs* in a tavern, treating it like an ordinary song (*zemar*), brings evil to this world.\(^{50}\)

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\(^{50}\) Ibn ‘Aqnīn, *Sefer musar*, p. 24 (my translation). For the quotation, see BT, Sanhedrin 101a. In the *Ṭibb al-nafūs* Ibn ‘Aqnīn recommends teachers not to teach verses in praise of vile and despised actions (*al-radhā‘ il wa-l-qabā‘īh*) as well as love poetry (*ghazaar*), but he does recommend teaching *zuhdiyyāt* (ascetic lyrics). See the text of the *Ṭibb* in Moritz Güdemann, *Das jüdische Unterrichtswesen während der spanisch-arabischen Periode, nebst handschriftlichen arabischen und hebräischen Beilagen mit Berichtungen und Nachträgen* (Wien: C. Gerold’s Sohn, 1873), Appendix, p. 10 (Arabic).
Maimonides argues likewise in his commentary on the Tractate Aboth, where he objects to the singing of any song of a “despised” topic, whether in Arabic or in Hebrew; the relation between his commentary and Ibn ‘Aqnīn’s is clear:51

And know that poems made in any language are not examined except as to their subject, and their manner is as the way of speech, as we have already divided it [i.e. permitted, prohibited, etc.]. And I had to explain this even though it is simple because I have seen elders and pure (men) of our community when they were at the a wine banquet (majlis), whether it is a wedding or some other place, and were a man to recite an Arabic poem, even if the words of that poem were praise of courage or generosity which is in if the category of suitable, or praise of the wine, they would protest and not permit it to be heard; but if the poet were to recite a Hebrew muwashshah they would not protest it even though its speech is of the prohibited or despised category.52

Nevertheless, Ibn ‘Aqnīn and Maimonides, both physicians, could recommend music for therapeutic reasons, in order to overcome, for example, black humor (melancholy): Ibn ‘Aqnīn in his Sefer ha-musar (Book of Ethics), and Maimonides in his medical treatise for al-Afdal b. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (d. 1225), and in his introduction to Tractate Aboth, known as the Eight Chapters of Ethics.53

Ibn ‘Aqnīn’s approach to the Song of Songs is original, and does not rely on Maimonides’ method of exegesis.54 He proudly argues that he is the first to compose a

51 Maimonides’ commentary on the Tractate Aboth is mentioned as one of Ibn ‘Aqnīn sources. See Sefer musar, p. 1.
54 Abraham S. Halkin, “Ibn ‘Aknīn’s Commentary on the Song of Songs,” in Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday, [Vol. 1:] English Section (New York: Jewish
philosophical commentary on the *Song*. His commentary offers a three-layered explanation of each verse of the *Song*: first, the exoteric sense (*zāhir al-lafẓ*), an explanation of the plain meaning and of the grammatical forms; second, the rabbinic interpretation, an allegorical explanation regarding the people of Israel, its fate, its tragedy and its hopes; and third, Ibn ‘Aqnīn’s interpretation of the esoteric meaning (*tafsīr al-bāṭin*).  

The Jewish Contents of Ibn ‘Aqnīn’s Commentary

In Ibn ‘Aqnīn, the *zāhir* interpretation corresponds to the *peshat* (plain, or linguistic, meaning of the text); the allegorical – to the *derash* (the traditional interpretation); and the *bāṭin* – to the *sod* (the esoteric meaning). Throughout his commentary on the first two levels of the commentary, Ibn ‘Aqnīn mentions his sources: Saadia Gaon (882-942); Abū Zakariyā Yahyā (Judah) ibn Da’ūd al-Fāsī (of Fes), known as Ḥayyūj (c. 945-1000); Abū al-Walīd (Jonah) Ibn Janāḥ (c. 990-1050); Samuel ha-Nagid (c. 993-1056); Judah ibn Bal’am (*fl.* end of the eleventh century); Moses ibn Gikatilla (*fl.* third quarter of the eleventh century); and Isaac Abū Ibrāhīm ibn Barūn (d. c. 1128). This list, with the exception of Saadia Gaon, demonstrates a close familiarity of Ibn ‘Aqnīn with the Western (Maghribī) tradition of Hebrew grammar. While he criticizes Abraham ibn...
Ezra’s commentary on the *Song of Songs* for being unoriginal, he speaks of Saadia Gaon with high respect:

I have seen the commentaries of previous exegetes (*tafāsīr al-mutaqqadimīn*) to this book [the *Song of Songs*], such as the commentary of the teacher of this method (*tariqa*; i.e. biblical commentary), its chief and master, the exalted gaon, Saadia (may he rest in peace), after whom we shall follow the light and maintain the practice, and we [i.e. Ibn ‘Aqnīn] found it (may God be satisfied with him) to be a linguistic exegesis and elucidation of the words according to their meaning, and he explained the esoteric meaning (*bāṭin*) in accordance to the interpretation of our sages (may they rest in peace)” (f. 128a).

Ibn ‘Aqnīn finds it necessary to legitimize not only his method of exegesis, but also the usage of non-Jewish literature as sources of knowledge and wisdom in his commentary on the *Song*. After mentioning *Kalīla wa-Dimna* in the prologue of the *Inkishāf*, in the epilogue he gives examples from the works of Hai Gaon (d. 1038) who made references to Arabic lore in his dictionary *Kitāb al-ḥāwī* (The Compendium).59 Hai, for example, quoted a verse by the Umayyad prince Khālid b. Yazīd b. Mu‘awiya (d. c. 704) to his wife, Ramla bint Zubayr, in order to explain the meaning of *qulb* as a kind of jewelry (*darab min al-ḥalīl*):

![Verse from Ibn 'Aqnīn's commentary](image)

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Translation: The women’s anklets spin around,
but I did not see an anklet on Ramla nor a bracelet.\(^{60}\)

Hai Gaon also read the Qur’an and the Ḥadīth literature, and once consulted the Christian Patriarch of Baghdad in order to better understand the meaning of a biblical passage (Ps. 151:5). (f. 127b). The other example by Ibn ‘Aqnīn for a Jewish scholar who utilized Arabic materials is Saadia Gaon.\(^{61}\) Hai Gaon and Saadia are thus a model for legitimizing the usage of Arabic materials; both are mentioned for the same reason by the linguist and poet Moses ibn Ezra (d. 1138) in his book on poetics and literary criticism, *Kitāb al-Muḥādara wa-l-mudhākarah* (Book of Conversation and Discussion).\(^{62}\)

*The Islamic Contents of Ibn ‘Aqnīn’s Commentary*

1. al-Fārābī

According to Ibn ‘Aqnīn’s philosophical interpretation, the lover is the active intellect (al-‘aql al-fā‘āl), and the heroine is man’s rational soul ([al-nafs] al-nātiqa). He does not, however, always make sure to differentiate the philosophical interpretation from the *peshat*, thus he sometimes interpolates the discussion on the active intellect and the rational soul into the plain layer of the scripture; and in an original manner, lengthily

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\(^{62}\) Joseph Dana, “The Influence of Arabic Literary Culture on the Judaic-Arabic Literature of the Middle Ages as Reflected in Moses ibn Ezra’s *Kitāb al-Muḥādara wa-l-mudhākarah*” [Heb.], *Sefunot*, N.S., 5 [20], p. 22. See further on Moses ibn Ezra in chapter 2.
digressing from the text of the *Song*, he rationalizes the story of Jacob’s encounter with the angel (Gen. 32:25-33) in his exegesis of the Song 3:6. Although his rationalization was known to Jewish thinkers of later generations, Ibn ‘Aqīn’s method of interpretation was not always received with praise.

In the esoteric sense of the exegesis, Ibn ‘Aqīn relies on al-Fārābī’s (d. 950) theory of emanation (*fāyḍ*), referring to him simply by his kunya Abū Naṣr, and mentioning several of his works, the most important one being *Mabādiʿ ārāʾ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila* (The Principle Opinions of the Virtuous City; better known in English as: The Perfect State). al-Fārābī’s theory of emanation has been summarized by Frank Griffel as follows:

Relying on Ptolemy’s (d. ca.165 CE) geocentric model of the planetary system, al-Fārābī taught that the whole universe consists of ten spheres. The sphere of the earth is a true globe at the center of the universe. It is surrounded in the heavens by nine other spheres, wrapped around one another like layers of an onion. At the upper end of the universe, above the spheres of the sun, the moon, the five planets, and the fixed stars, sits the first sphere, which contains no visible object. The spheres are thought of as organisms that have a body, which is the rotating sphere itself, and a soul, which is governed by an intellect. At the upper end of the universe, the intellect that governs the first sphere is the highest created being. Beyond it is only the First Principle, of which al-Fārābī says, “One should believe this is God.”

God creates events in the world by directly acting on only one being, the intellect of the uppermost sphere. God’s acting is described as emanation (*fāyḍ*), meaning that His acts flow out of Him like rays flow out of the sun in a

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continuous process that never begins and never ends. The intellect that receives this emanation functions as an intermediary of God; it acts on the intellect of the second sphere in like manner, meaning that it emanates its actions on it. Every divine action passes as emanation through the intermediacy of the celestial intellects until it arrives at the intellect that governs over the lowest sphere, the so-called sublunar sphere of the earth. [...] 

al-Fārābī identifies the active intellect with the tenth intellect that governs the sublunar sphere. In al-Fārābī, the active intellect has a triple function: (1) being one of the celestial intermediaries for God’s actions (al-Fārābī calls them “secondary causes,” or al-asbāb al-thawānī); (2) governing and ordering the sublunar sphere; and (3) giving universal concepts to humans, thus enabling them to think and acquire knowledge. The active intellect takes on functions toward this sphere similar to those that God has toward the whole universe. It is an efficient cause of everything that happens in the sublunar sphere, and it is the final cause for all the beings therein. This means that all creatures in the sublunar sphere, particularly humans, strive to resemble the active intellect as perfectly as possible. [...] 

Given that the active intellect contains all universal concepts and ideas and can be understood as pure thought, humans strive to acquire as much of those universal ideas as possible, to the extent that their individual passive intellects begin to resemble the active intellect. Doing so, the individual human intellect advances through different stages until it reaches a level that al-Fārābī calls the acquired intellect (al-‘aql al-mustafād). This is the highest stage of human perfections, at which the human intellect becomes almost identical to the content of the active intellect. It is reached when the human being masters “all or most” (kulluhā... aw julluhā) intelligible thought.66

Figure 1. A diagram of al-Fārābī’s cosmological model. Arabic MSS 436, f. 12r.
Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
Ibn ‘Aqīn presents al-Fārābī’s teachings in the prologue to his commentary, and expresses his agreement with the master’s theory (f. 2a). He might have followed here Maimonides’ admiration to al-Fārābī. In his epistle to Samuel ibn Tibbon (d. 1232), the translator of the Guide for the Perplexed into Hebrew, Maimonides enumerates the classical (Greek) and contemporary (Muslim) philosophers whose works one must study or avoid, and states: “The most important Islamic philosophers are al-Farabi, Ibn Bajjah, and Averroes. al-Farabi is particularly praised for his works on logic. Averroes is important for his commentaries on Aristotle. Avicenna’s works are not as good as those of al-Farabi, but are still useful and worth studying.” Here I will give a couple of examples from Ibn ‘Aqīn’s rationalist commentary on the Song, following al-Fārābī’s teachings.

Example 1 (Prologue to the Inkīshāf, ff. 2a-2b)

[i. The cosmological model:] We start our commentary (sharḥ) with the description of heavens, saying that their intellects (‘āql, pl. ‘uqūl) have neither body nor substance, but they are abstract (ruḥāniyya). They are [organized in] grades, one upon the other, as said by the wise one [Solomon]: “For one high is under by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still” (Ecc. 5:7), meaning that they are [organized in] layers, one layer upon the other, and saying “for one high is under by a higher one” means that there is a layer for each of the heavens, as we [i.e. Ibn ‘Aqīn] will explain. Saying “over them both are others

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"higher still" means that God Almighty is their master. [...] Regarding the heavens, they are according to what I will explain [later] and according to the words of the sages (‘ulamā‘), and I shall cite them. Abū Naṣr [al-Fārābī] said in al-Madīna al-fāḍila, that the first [existent] emanates to the second one. The second [existent] has no body either nor is made of substance, and it acquires knowledge to itself and to the first [existent]...

[ii. The active intellect:] The eleventh existent (mawjūd) [= the tenth intellect] is the one known as the active intellect (al-‘aql al-fa‘‘āl), and this level is known as ishim (Heb. people) because of its proximity to human beings. It is the one that brings revelation (wahy) upon them from the Creator, as said: “The man of God you sent,” etc. (Judg. 13:9); “Now a man of God came to Eli,” etc. (1 Sam. 27:2); “With them was a man clothed in linen,” etc. (Ezek. 9:2); “And I heard the man clothed in linen,” etc. (Dan. 12:7). The active intellect acquires knowledge to the first cause (al-awwal) and the secondary causes (al-thawāni), and thus acquires knowledge to itself. It makes the things that are not intelligible (ma‘qūlāt) [to become intelligible], as God Almighty said in his Scripture (fī mahkam tanzīlihi): “I am sending an angel ahead of you” (Exod. 23:20), that is, to guide you, as in [the verse] “Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel’s army [withdrew and went behind them]” (Exod. 14:19); [returning to Exod. 23:20] “to guard you along the way,” to guard you in this world that is the path to the afterworld and beyond it, which one reaches through possessing wise knowledge and the true intelligibles, and making these intelligible real instead of leaving them under power. With these possessions that we receive from him, he will emanate his lights upon us, and with them we shall reach the everlasting happiness (al-sa‘āda al-abadiyya) in the afterworld.
Example 2 (Inkīshāf, f. 6a)⁶⁸

“Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth” (Song 1:2).

According to our method, the rational [soul] compares the coming of lights to it to kisses of the mouth, because these two organs [i.e. the lips] are used for this pleasure, and with them knowledge transmits from the teacher to the student, and that is the pleasure of the rational [soul]. Thus, it compares the coming of knowledge from the active intellect to it and its pleasure as in the joy of the lover kissing his beloved. As said elsewhere: “An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips” (Prov. 24:26). [The rational soul] tells us that the meaning of this pleasure is as the meaning of kisses in the time of yearning...

These two examples demonstrate that Ibn ‘Aqnīn wished to compose his exegesis in agreement with al-Fārābī’s theory. In fact, the entire book, a biblical commentary on the Song, is structured upon al-madhīna al-fādīla.

2. Ibn Ṣīnā (Avicenna)

While not receiving a full authorization from Maimonides, Ibn ‘Aqnīn does mention Ibn Ṣīnā (d. 1037), citing the opening paragraph of his philosophical-allegorical tract, Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān.⁶⁹

Where has your beloved gone, most beautiful of women? Which way did your beloved turn, that we may look for him with you? (Song 6:1)

According to our method [of interpretation], this verse was said in the tongue of state (lisān al-ḥāl; i.e. according to the esoteric meaning), meaning that the servants of the rational [soul] from among the rational powers, telling her that they will help her in searching and seeking after him⁷⁰ [i.e. the active intellect], so

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⁶⁸ Here and in the next passage, citing Ibn Ṣīnā, I will skip the peshat and derash, and move directly to Ibn ‘Aqnīn’s own interpretation.


⁷⁰ The text incorrectly says ‘her’ but then returns to the masculine form.
she may unite with him and fulfill her desire. The repetition over this idea twice in this verse ["Where has your beloved gone... Which way did your beloved turn?"], is because at first, "where has your beloved gone," they tried to find his location, and once we know his location, we (sic) wish to be involved in his affairs and in his activity. The meaning of "which way did your beloved turn" is that when we achieve fulfill these two wishes [to find the active intellect and unify with him], we are able to encounter him and to be involved in your (sic) desired activity. This is the interpretation of Ibn Sīnā in the Epistle of Ḥayy ibn Yaẓān, when Ḥayy ibn Yaẓān responds to someone who asks him for his name, hometown, age, and occupation. He says: “My name is Ḥayy (Alive),” meaning the simple intellects, in which he was created and developed. “And my father is Yaẓān (Awake),” meaning that the person from whom I received the intellects is more powerful than me, belongs to a higher status, and is closer to the Creator, because the awakening is more noble than sleeping, and thus, he awakes me until my intellects became real, not through power, since he is complete. “My hometown is Bayt al-Maqdis,”71 is a reply as common among the [ordinary] people, meaning that Bayt al-Maqdis is the upper world that is purified from any contamination. “My occupation is to travel about the world,” meaning that he is looking for the natural beings from among the first principles. “Until I hear of them,” meaning that he completely understands them. “I turned to my father,” meaning: my desire is to reach my father, that is, the Creator, God Almighty, and the intermediaries between himself [Ḥayy] and God Almighty. “I already received from him [my father] the key to the sciences,” meaning the power he put in him [in Ḥayy], making him a master of the upper level. Finally, [Ḥayy] says: “He guided me in the roads leading to the world’s regions, until I arrived in my travel to the regions of the climates,” meaning: he guided me to the rest of the natural beings. This is the meaning of Ibn Sīnā’s words in the aforementioned epistle, and this is the interpretation of it (f. 80a).

71 Bayt al-Maqdis, Jerusalem. In Corbin’s translation, the ‘Celestial Jerusalem’ (Avicenna and the Visionary Recital, p. 292 and n. 2).
3. Arabic Poetry

In his commentary, in addition to citing Hebrew poetry, Ibn ‘Aqīn cites several Arabic verses, in most cases without identifying the poet by his name. Here are few examples from my identification of the original verses (whenever necessary, I corrected the corrupted Judeo-Arabic text of the Inkishāf according to the Arabic editions).

a) Attributed to Qays, “Majnūn Laylā” (cited in the the Inkishāf, f. 98a): 72

أمر علي أفلامرأ ذيا ليل / يكبل ذا أفلامرأ ذيا أفلامرأ
أمر علي أفلامرأ بنف كيلب / ولن نپ مي سك أفلامرأ
أمر على الديار ديار ليلي / أقيل ذا الجدار هذا الجدار
وما حب الديار شغبني قليبي / ولكن حب من سكن الديار

*Translation:* I am passing by the houses, the houses of Laylā,

Kissing that wall and the other one.

It is not the love of houses that burns in my heart,

But the love to the one who dwells in them.

b) al-Buḥtūrī, d. 820 (cited in the Inkishāf, f. 45a). 73

من لله تنجله عن متاسباته / ومن لله مدى أفلامرأ مصبتة
من لؤلؤ تجله عند ابتسامها / ومن لؤلؤ عند الحديث تساقه

*Translation:* There is a pearl 74 that you discover through her smile,

and there is a pearl that falls down due to chatting.

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72 For the Arabic verse, see Muhammad Ḥasan ‘Aqīl Mūsā, *al-Mukhtār min al-rihlāt al-Ḥijāziyya ilā Makka wa-l-Madīna al-Nabawiyya* (Jeddah: Dār al-Andalus al-Khaḍrā, 2000), 3:879; and on Qays, see *EJ*, “Madjnūn Laylā” (Ch. Pellat et al.).


74 A metaphor for a woman.
c) Naṣr b. Aḥmad al-Khubzā’aruzzī (the maker of rice bread), d. 938 (cited in the inkishāf, f. 113b): 

Translation: Love made me melt away so much, that had I been cast into the pupil of the eye of someone sleeping, he would not wake up. 

I once had a ring, but it would not fit me; 
today, had I wanted, I could gird myself with it.

Following the Arabic verse, Ibn ‘Aqnīn offers its Hebrew translation by an anonymous Jewish poet:

Translation: My flesh became emaciated because of my love to the High One. 

Had it been cast into the pupil of the eye of someone sleeping, would he have woken up? 

The ring that was once on my finger is now my girdle and my belt.

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77 For the exact meaning of yizaḥ (originally appearing in Exod. 28:28), meaning both “to bind” and “to separate” (here: to ‘remove’ the one sleeping from his sleep?), see Sefer teshuvot [Book of Responses], S.G. Stern, ed. (Wien, 1870), 2:62 no. 12 (mezah).
As noticed by Abraham Meir Habermann, the ‘anonymous’ poet is no other than Solomon ibn Gabirol. The edition of his *diwān* offers another version of this verse.78

Translation: My flesh became emaciated because of great worry.

Had it been cast into the pupil of the eye of someone sleeping, would he have woken up?

Enough79 for you that I am the man who desires your company; and now I girdle myself with my ring.

d) Ibn Zuhr al-ṭabīb (the physician), d. 1198 (cited in the *Inkishāf*, f. 69a).80

Translation: Desire between us weakened,81 between me and him, and him and me.

e) Anonymous (cited in the *Inkishāf*, f. 128b, in Ibn ‘Aqnīn’s critique of Abraham ibn Ezra’s commentary on the *Song*):82

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79 Instead of *dai* (enough), Habermann suggested an alternative reading: *da‘* (know!), i.e. “Know that I am the man who desires your company.”


81 Lit. became tedious.

Translation: We saw you but were not astonished, and we tried you, but the result was unsatisfying.

IV. Conclusions

Ibn ‘Aqnīn’s *Inkīshāf al-asrār* is a complex text that still entangles many secrets. The author wishes to legitimize his usage of Islamic philosophy and Arabic poetry by relying on the methods of the Geonim, the most important of them are Hay Gaon and Saadia Gaon. The result is a multi-layered text in which the first layer is linguistic, following the Jewish linguists of the Maghribī tradition; the second, the *derash* meaning of *the Song of Songs*, according to the method of the Israelite sages; and the third, heavily relying on al-Fārābī’s theory of emanation, is a hybrid of biblical exegesis with the interpretation of male and female in the *Song* being a metaphor for the active intellect and the rational soul. In the epilogue, Ibn ‘Aqnīn writes apologetically: “Perhaps the one who is a fool, imbecile and stupid would critique what we presented in the interpretation to this noble book because of the words of the *falāsifa*, the Arabic language (*sic*), and the verses, removing himself from it, and, out of respect, he would avoid declaring that our project has been a betrayal (*iftiyāt*). That idiotic, foolish hypocrite should know that the *ḥakhamin* (sages) (may they rest in peace) preceded me…” (f. 127a).

In one of the most catastrophic time periods for the Jews of the Maghrib, and under coerced conversion to Islam, Ibn ‘Aqnīn was nonetheless a proud member of the Islamic sciences and of high culture, in what could be truly perceived as the continuation of a ‘Judeo-Islamic symbiosis’ in the age of terror. The author’s wish was, nonetheless, to readopt Judaism and achieve salvation through completing his exegetical work.
CHAPTER 2. MYSTICISM.

*AL-MURSHID ILĀ AL-TAFARRUD WA-L-MURFID ILĀ AL-TAJARRUD*

(GUIDE TO DETACHMENT AND AID TO SOLITUDE), A MYSTICAL TREATISE

BY DAVID BEN JOSHUA MAIMONIDES (C. 1335-1414)

“All the kings of Arabia are seeking your counsel and advice.”

I. Introduction

One of Maimonides’ admirers in Provence was the philosopher and Bible commentator Joseph ibn Kaspi, who was born in 1280 in Argentière, lived in several Provencal cities, traveled at least twice to the Kingdom of Aragon, and died before 1345. In 1332, while in Valencia, Joseph composed a testament to his son under the title *Sefer musar* (The Book of Admonition) or *Yoreh da’at* (Guide to Knowledge). He opened the treatise with an account of his travel to Egypt in the days of Rabbi Moses’ descendants. This account is a harsh criticism on the indifference of the Maimonidians to the philosophical heritage of their illustrious forefather:

Joseph ibn Kaspi said: All my days I have toiled to live in the society of the wise, but I have found no rest. Twenty years ago, I became an exile to a place reputed for learning. I dwelt in the uttermost part of the sea, I crossed to Egypt, and visited the school (*beit midrash*) of that renowned and perfect sage, the Guide [Maimonides].

I found there the fourth and fifth generations of his holy seed, all of them righteous, but none of them devoted to science. In all the Orient there were no scholars, and I saw the text applied to me: “Woe to them that go down to Egypt for

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3 Named thus after his *Guide for the Perplexed*. See Kraemer, pp. 11-12.
4 Abraham II Maimomides and Joshua Maiminodes, respectively.
help” (Isa. 31:1).  

Ibn Kaspi was thus disappointed with the intellectual activity of Maimonides’ descendants, in what seems to be an opposition to their involvement in and leading of the mystical Jewish movement in Egypt that was established by the son of Maimonides, Rabbi Abraham (1186-1237). This is only one account of a larger opposition to the mystical Jewish movement and to the reforms in the religious practices that were carried out by the Maimonidians. Ibn Kaspi met Abraham II (1245-1313), the great-grandson of Maimonides, and his young son Joshua (1310-1355). Years later, Rabbi Joshua, the nagid of Egypt (head of the Jewish community), was known among his contemporaries as a religious authority of great significance; like Maimonides, he received Halakhic questions from communities as far as Yemen.

David II ben Joshua continued the interest of the Maimonidians in Jewish mysticism. He was the last nagid from the house of Maimonides, a position this family

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6 Israel Abrahams, Hebrew Ethical Wills (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1926), 1:130 (in Hebrew and English trans.).
held for over two centuries. Born in 1335, he succeeded his father, but for unclear reasons left Egypt between ca. 1375 to 1386, and took residence in Aleppo and Damascus. He resumed the office of nagid after his return to Egypt and held it until his death in 1414. David is the author of several works; one of them, \textit{al-Murshid ilā al-tafarrud wa-l-murfd ilā al-tajarrud} (Guide to Detachment and Aid to Solitude), is a short manual of Sufism that is the focus of this chapter. A well-versed scholar in Islamic philosophy, astronomy, and Sufi thought, David was also a scribe (\textit{warrāq}) and book collector. The remains of his library from Aleppo were purchased in the seventeenth century by Edward Pococke, chaplain to the English merchants at Aleppo (1630-1636), or Robert Huntington, who held the same position (1671-1680), and are now part of the collection of the Bodleian Library (Oxford).

The present chapter will investigate the contents of the \textit{Murshid}, David’s mystical tract, in its relation to Sufi-Islamic literature. The discussion will be as follows: The \textit{Murshid} and its structure; literary contacts between Arabic and Hebrew literature prior to the \textit{Murshid}; the ideals and institutes of the \textit{Murshid} in their Sufi context; and finally, the Arabic background of this book, and the methods used in it for the Judaization of Islamic materials. I will argue that by drawing its materials from Sufi writings, the \textit{Murshid} exemplifies the transfer of Islamic materials into Judaism, and thus demonstrate the

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10 The first to be appointed officially as the \textit{nagid} was Abraham Maimonides; his father, who never held this position, was nonetheless addressed as \textit{nagid} in some letters and documents. See Kraemer, \textit{Maimonides}, pp. 216-220.


12 For the purposes of this chapter, I will refer to ‘Sufism’ as the name of the Islamic movement vs. ‘pietism’ (\textit{ḥasidut}) to the Jewish one. The wide spectrum of Sufi teachings and practices will be simply presented as ‘Sufism’ as if it is one homogenous movement.
symbiotic relations between Judaism and Islam in the realm of fourteenth-century mystical thought.

### Table 3. The House of Maimonides

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maimonides</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moses Maimonides</td>
<td>1138-1204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham Maimonides</td>
<td>1186-1237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David I Maimonides</td>
<td>1222-1300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham II Maimonides</td>
<td>1245-1313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua Maimonides</td>
<td>1310-1355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David II Maimonides</td>
<td>c. 1335-1414</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II. The Murshid and Its Structure

The full title of David’s tract is *Kitāb al-Murshid taḥqīq derekh ha-ḥasidut* (Guide for Achieving the Path of ḥasidut), or *al-Murshid ilā al-tafarrud wa-l-murfid ilā al-tajarrud* (Guide to Detachment and Aid to Solitude) (ff. 2a, 6a). It is a manual of Sufism written in the style of Islamic-Sufi books of this genre, or Bahya ibn Paquda’s (eleventh-twelfth

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century) *al-Hidāya ilā farāʾid al-gulūb* (Guide to the Duties of the Heart). The goal of the *Murshid* is introducing the reader to the “spiritual stations” (*maqāma*, pl. *maqāmāt*) until he reaches the station of ḥasidut (piety), which is also the term preferred term by the Maimonidians to their mystical movement. These stations are introduced through a saying from the Babylonian Talmud (‘Avodah zara, 20b) that is also cited by Bahya; in the *Murshid*, it forms the structure of the first part of the book:

Rabbi Pinḥas ben Yair said: Torah [study] leads to zehirut (caution) – zehirut leads to zerizut (quickness) – zerizut leads to neqiyut (cleanliness) – neqiyut leads to perishut (abstinence) – perishut leads to tahrar (purity) – tahrar leads to ḥasidut (piety) – ḥasidut leads to ‘anavah (humility) – ‘anavah leads to yirʾat ḥet’ (fear of sinning) – yirʾat ḥet’ leads to qedushah (holiness) – qedushah leads to the Holy Spirit – The Holy Spirit leads to the Resurrection of the Dead.

The *Murshid* consists of twenty-eight sections (*faṣl*, pl. *fuṣūl*), of differing length, but at least one section, or part of it, is missing from the manuscript (ms. Hunt 382). After introducing the concept of ḥasidut, it discusses the eight “spiritual stations” leading to it (first part of the tract), and the progress while in the state of ḥasidut towards the love (*maḥabba*) of God, which is the highest point of piety (f. 41a) (second part of the tract).

The gradations by which the “spiritual stations” are discussed are not entirely clear, nor

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16 On the meanings of this term according to the *Murshid*, see below. On the Sufi *maqāmāt*, see *EF*, “Ḥāl” (L. Gardet).

17 *Al-hidāya*, p. 336; Fenton, introduction to the *Murshid*, p. 42.

does the discussion in the Murshid seem to be exhaustive. This could be explained by the nature of the book, which was meant only to be a summary (mukhtasar) of a larger work on Sufism, supposedly written at the request of a young student (tilmid) (ff. 1b-2a). The order in the Babylonian Talmud of the ideal traits is zehirut – zerizut – neqiyut – perishut – taharah – ḥasidut – ‘anavah – yir‘at ḫet – qedushah. The Murshid borrows these ideals and presents them according to Sufi teachings in a slightly different manner: zehirut – zerizut – perishut – neqiyut – qedushah – ‘anavah – yir‘ah, “fear” – ḥasidut; thus ending with ḥasidut, “piety,” and placing it as the goal of the spiritual penitent.

To corroborate its teachings, the Murshid relies mostly on biblical verses. The Muslim authors from whom the author is citing, are never mentioned by name, and the Sufi teachings are ‘converted’ into Hebrew terms. Nonetheless, the influence of the “Philosophy of Illumination” (ḥikmat al-ishrāq) is clearly manifested in the Arabic of this book, and especially the teachings of Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Suhrawardī (executed in 1191), the founder of this mystical school. In the Murshid, God is named nūr al-anwār (light of lights); Moses, ghīrīf al-mut‘allahīn (chief of God’s seekers); Elijah, sayyid al-mut‘allahīn wa-ra‘īs al-maturajjadīn (mater of God’s seekers and head of ascetics); and David, ghīrīf al-sālikīn wa-ra‘īs al-‘ārifīn al-mustshariqīn (chief of God’s seekers [literally: travellers] and head of the enlightened, learned people). Some other terms of the “philosophy of illumination” are to be found throughout this book (see more examples below).


20 Ff. 17a (God), 35b (Moses), 3b, 16a, 50b, 57a (David). See Fenton, introduction to the Murshid, p. 47.
III. Literary Contacts between Arabic and Hebrew Literature

What were the contacts of David’s *Murshid* with Islamic-Arabic literature, and how should we explain these contacts? Is it appropriate to speak of Islamic “influence” on the *Murshid*, and regard this book as simply a citation and borrowing (perhaps even plagiarism) of Arabic materials into Jewish literature? This section examines the relations between Arabic and Hebrew literature in the so-called “classical” age of symbiosis, prior to the composition of the *Murshid*. As we will see in the next sections, this tract gives evidence for continuation from the early period to David’s times, and rather than positing a break in the phenomenon of Judeo-Islamic symbiosis around the thirteenth century, this chapter documents the existence of the same symbiosis in the Late Middle Ages. Studying the literary contacts in the earlier period will assist us in better understanding David’s project in writing the *Murshid*, and how he wanted to present his teachings to his audience.

In her book from 2000, Rina Drory studied the relations between Arabic and Hebrew literatures by adopting the terminology of “cultural contacts,” pointing thus to the bilateral relations between the two adjacent literatures in which one is usually considered to “influence” the other. She called on scholars to trace and account for “cultural contacts” in order to understand the actual circumstances of particular texts, i.e. “the processes which dominated and manipulated a literary field at a given point in time, of which the written texts are only the final products.”21 Drory also presented the questions a student of “cultural contacts” should examine in his case studies: What were the conditions in the target literature that created the need for contact with another

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literature? In what ways did the target literature exploit the source literature? And how exactly have these contacts brought about a new dynamic in the target literature?²²

Drory studied the relations between Arabic and Jewish literatures through two examples: Moses ibn Ezra’s Kitāb al-Muḥaḍāra wa-l-mudhakāra (Book of Discussion and Conversation), written in Judeo-Arabic, and Judah al-Ḥarizi’s Hebrew maqamāt. To these examples, I will add one more case-study, Abraham ibn Ezra’s Hebrew translation of Ibn Sīnā’s Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān.²³

**Moses ibn Ezra**

Moses ibn Ezra wrote the Muḥaḍāra in old age. He was born in Granda around 1055, to a distinguished family that included members such as Samuel and Joseph ibn Naghrīla. As an adult, he lived in his hometown, and enjoyed wealth and tranquility until 1090, when the Almoravid invasions disrupted the lives of Jews and Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula. He thus fled to the Christian north, and died there sometime after 1138.²⁴ The Muḥaḍāra, one of two prose books of his written in Arabic, deals with the theory of Hebrew poetry according to the Arabic model. In the eight chapters of his book, Moses elaborates on the legitimacy of the art of rhetoric and the art of poetry composition; the poetry of the Israelites in Biblical times; Andalusi Jewish poetry and its merits (including a complaint against Moses’ critics who fail to appreciate his poetry); and practical advice for Hebrew poetry composition according to the Arabic models. The Muḥaḍāra “contains

²² Ibid., p. 209.
²³ A third (Arabic) account of Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān, in addition to Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) and Abraham ibn Ezra (d. 1164), and the latest of the three, is Ibn Ṭufayl’s (d. 1164). See Aaron W. Hughes, The Texture of the Divine: Imagination in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Thought (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 23-25. For an English translation of this work, see Ibn Tufayl’s Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzan, Lenn Evan Goodman, trans. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972).
a series of ideological claims, which, over and above their comprising a defense of poetry, seek primarily to convince the reader that the Arabic method of composing poetry is the right one and that Jewish Andalusi poets are its best practitioners.”

Drory puts emphasis on the fact that the *Muḥadāra* was composed in northern Spain rather than in al-Andalus; it was intended, she believes, to be read by Jews who lived not in the midst of Arab culture but in a different cultural atmosphere, where poetry was not probably held in the same regard as in al-Andalus. The poets in northern Spain, in Moses’ opinion, are to be rejected for being ignorant and barbaric, and he himself complains of the detachment from the high culture of al-Andalus. Moses’ book on poetics, therefore, points to his acknowledgment of the Arabic model for Hebrew poetry composition, and to him being an heir to the Andalusi culture.

### Judah al-Ḥarizi

The *maqamāt* of Judah al-Ḥarizi (1170-1225) were composed after the model of al-Ḥarīrī (d. 1122), as the author states in the preface of his work. He first translated the Arabic *maqamāt* of al-Ḥarīrī into Hebrew, and then embarked on the mission to compete for the eloquence of the Arabic composition by writing a Hebrew counterpart: the *Sefer Taḥkemoni* (Book of Taḥkemoni).

al-Ḥarizi was born in northern Spain, and became a translator of Arabic-Hebrew literature, among them the *Guide for the Perplexed* by Maimonides, and traveled to the East, where he wrote the *Taḥkemoni*, “the most salient

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27 Originally, a biblical name of the root letters ḥ-k-m, meaning wisdom. See 2 Sam. 23:8.
example of ‘Arabic influence’ over Hebrew in its Andalusi ‘golden era,’”” as well as Arabic poetry. The Judeo-Arabic context of the Tahkemoni has been stressed in many studies, but the particular circumstances for its composition, according to Drory, were ignored. She therefore studied the dedications of this book to several different Jewish figures whom he encountered during his travel to the East. From these dedications Drory concluded that al-Ḥarizi was disturbed by the poor command of Hebrew among the Jews of Eastern lands. al-Ḥarizi, among other Jewish intellectuals, was a champion of a “complete revolution” in Northern Spain and Provence in which Hebrew had begun to take over the functions that which had traditionally been fulfilled by Arabic, gradually replacing Arabic as the major language of Jews. al-Ḥarizi therefore “sought to prove that the Hebrew language could be appropriately used in a wide range of written forms, so over and above translating, he also wrote his own maqamāt, comprising a handbook of Hebrew styles intended to encourage Eastern Jews to use Hebrew as a written language.”

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28 Drory, Models and Contacts, p. 216.
The word of Judah son of Solomon son of al-Ḥarizi of blessed memory: The Lord has gifted me with a skilled tongue [Isa. 50:4] and lifted me above my kin that I might place within the Intellect’s palm the gold of my thought, subtly wrought, long sought-after and too precious to be brought, that he might take thereof bands for princes’ necks and dear champions’ hands. Shine, then, my muse, while the downcast and the righteous light lamps from your holy cruse: bring joy and gladness, feasting and good days to the Jews! [Esther 18:7] […] Now in ancient times Hebrew was a golden plough, but in our day villains flay with her brazen brow; righteousness lodged in here, but murderers now [Isa. 1:21]. She is banished from her children, none mourn her loss, her silver turns dross [Isa. 1:22]. Heartsick, she cries in pain, lifting her refrain to deaf ears again and yet again. What sin is mine? She cries in vain. Lo, when you ringed Sinai [Exod. 19:12] to hear God’s word, me it was you heard. […] They set Hagar [i.e. Arabic] the maidservant in my place [after Gen. 16:3] and rushed to her embrace, kissing her hand and pressing her teat – for stolen waters are sweet [Prov. 9:17]. Me they have abandoned, the Rose of Sharon [Song 2:1], saying, Hagar is fecund and Sarah barren [Gen. 11:30].

Abraham ibn Ezra

Aaron Hughes reaches similar conclusions regarding the competition between Hebrew and Arabic in his treatment of Abraham ibn Ezra’s (1089-1164) Hebrew translation of Ibn Sīnā’s Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān (in Hebrew: Hay ben Meqits). Abraham, a skillful poet and bible commentator, composed a work that is almost identical with Ibn Sīnā’s, but was more conscious regarding the literary and poetic aspects of his text. He stressed the

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Jewish and Hebrew components of it by heavily using the Scripture, resulting in a multi-layered text that allows the readers to search for the esoteric in Jewish writings.\textsuperscript{33}

IV. The Ideals and Institutions of the Murshid

The teachings of the Pietist Movement of the Maimonidians emphasized the regimen of supererogatory devotion and ascetic discipline, only to be taken by the most sincere devotees, the \textit{ḥasidim}. Abraham Maimonides trained individual devotees by a regimen of practices such as night vigils, fasting, and solitary retreat. These teachings were presented as a return to the origins of Judaism, but they clearly bear witness to the Sufi teachings of the Muslim environment.\textsuperscript{34} The \textit{Murshid}, written several generations after Abraham Maimonides, continues along the same lines. The following is a survey of the ideals and institutions in the \textit{Murshid}.\textsuperscript{35}

\textit{Fasting and Nightly Vigils}

Sufi thought saw numerous spiritual benefits in fasting and nightly vigils in order to bring the spiritual penitents closer to the ideals of self-denial, shunning from luxury, and spending the nights in devotion and self-examination. Hunger is understood as affecting on the humility of the penitents, for example, in a saying by Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. ca. 875) arguing that hunger could have restrained Pharaoh (representing haughtiness in the Qur’ān) from saying, “I am your Supreme Lord” (Q. 79:24), and could have prevented

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{34} Russ-Fishbane, \textit{Judaism, Sufism, and the Pietists of Medieval Egypt}, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{35} In studying the mystical ideals and institutions of the \textit{Murshid}, I relied on Russ-Fishbane, \textit{ibid.}, pp. 89-132; al-Suhrawardī, \textit{A Sufi Rule}; Florian Sobieroj, “Ibn Khafif’s \textit{Kitāb al-iqtīsād}.”
\end{flushleft}
the rebellious nature of Korah (Q. 28:76-82). Hunger is described in Sufi literature as a tool in fighting Satan. al-Ghazālī states in the introduction to the book on fasting in his magnum opus, Ḥiyā ʿulūm al-dīn (Revival of the Religious Sciences): “Praise be to God who has shown great favor unto His servants by delivering them from the wiles of Satan; who has thwarted the hopes of the devil and frustrated his designs by making fasting a bulwark and a shield for His saints.” Through hadīths regarding the life of the Prophet Muḥammad, Sufi manuals teach that those inclined to gluttony will suffer from hungry on the Day of Resurrection, and that one strengthens his soul by hunger and thirst.

Regarding nightly vigils, Sufis were taught that they should devote their time to God, whether it is during sleep (“The Prophet disapproved of prolonged sleep… The Sufi should strive to make his sleep for God or in God and not away from God”), or while awake – that nightly prayers would bring them into humility and ascetic lifestyle.

As in Sufi literature, the Murshid encourages the spiritual penitent to adopt the practices of sleeplessness and hunger (al-jaw’ wa-l-sahr) as the basic elements of mysticism, explaining that hunger “reduces the blood of the heart and whitens it, and by whitening it, hunger illuminates the blood,” and that in this manner God “humbled you, causing you to hunger… [in order] to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deut. 8:3). In these words, the Murshid replicates the ideal of hunger as presented by Sufi thinkers, most importantly, al-Ghazālī who related to hunger as an action that purifies the bloodstream from sinning

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38 al-Suhrawardi, A Sufi Rule, p. 59.
39 Ibid., pp. 59-60 (on sleep).
Moreover, sleeplessness, according to the Murshid, “brightens the heart, purifies it, and illuminate it… making it like a shining star and bright mirror,” here using the terminology of ḥikmat al-ishrāq (ff. 18b-19a). Hunger keeps the spiritual penitent alert during the night, while eating may cause him to sleep, and through hunger one performs nightly vigils, a practice that is corroborated in the biblical verse: “At midnight I rise to give you thanks for your righteous laws” (Ps. 119:62). Quoting al-Ghazālī as “one of the esteemed people among our religion” (baʿḍ al-fuḍalāʾ fī millatinā), the Murshid states that the penitent achieves the stage of piety through four elements: hunger (khumāṣ al-baṭn), sleeplessness, silence, and seclusion (inʿizāl). On the other hand, the Murshid does not recommend exaggerated periods of hunger because it causes weakness to the body or sickness, and thus disturbance to the soul. Hence, one should eat food of small quantity but of high quality (f. 32b).

Pietist Attire

Sufism differentiated its devotees from the rest of Muslim society by wearing the attire of the ascetic. Abū al-Najīb al-Suhrawardī (d. 1168) reports, through a story related by al-Jurayrī (d. 924), that one Sufī used to wear the same garment both in summer and winter because he saw in a dream that Sufīs wearing only one garment would be especially honored in paradise. al-Qushayrī advised wearing the simplest garments in order to distance the spiritual penitents from the rich and powerful, and thus achieve modesty in

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41 Milla could be understood here as ‘religion’ (i.e. Judaism) as well as ‘religious community’ (i.e. the pietist movement, or those inclined to mysticism).
42 Identified by Fenton.
43 al-Suhrawardī, A Sufi Rule, pp. 56-57.
their outward appearance as well as in their behavior.\textsuperscript{44} According to a saying reported in al-Qushayrī’s epistle, one Sufi said: “I traveled for thirty years without ever patching my [Sufi] garment (\textit{muraqqa’}), heading to a place in which I knew I would meet a friend, and without ever allowing anyone to carry something for me.”\textsuperscript{45}

In the \textit{Murshid}, the ideal attire for the pietist is the simplest garment to protect him from cold or heat, since the goal is to live as an ascetic, and avoid the accumulation of any materials that would distance him from God. The pietist must be satisfied with the most basic necessities for living, and seek “the path of true asceticism” (\textit{ṭarīq al-zuhd al-ḥaqīqī}).\textsuperscript{46} Asceticism is achieved when the spiritual penitent devotes his entire life to reflection and meditation, and not to paying attention to the outward, because “people look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7) (ff. 35b-36a).

\textbf{Musical Chant}

In the Sufi practice, music is supposed to arouse religious emotion and ecstasy (\textit{wajd}), and musical features in \textit{samā‘} (hearing, audition) and \textit{dhikr} (devotional utterance of God’s names) were common among different Sufi circles, although music was not entirely free of criticism. Abū al-Najīb al-Suhrawardī argued that \textit{dhikr} recitations were performed already in Muḥammad’s lifetime, in order to legitimize them in Sufi practice.\textsuperscript{47} al-Ghazālī devotes a special attention to music in the \textit{Iḥyā}: “[M]usic and singing… are the movers of the heart and arousers of that which preponderates in the heart. And I say

\textsuperscript{44} Al-Qushayri’s Epistle, p. 166.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p. 300.
that to God Most High belongs a secret consisting of the relationship of the measured airs to the souls of men, so that the airs work upon them with a wonderful working." He gives examples of the usage of music in Islam according to different categories: music during pilgrimage and during warfare; verses intended to excite courage and fortitude; lamentation and joy. "All these traditions [cited in his book]," says al-Ghazālī, "are in the two Ṣaḥīḥs and are a clear proof that singing and playing are not forbidden." Still, music was considered to be a controversial topic in Sufi and juristic writings.

As for the legitimization of music in the pietist movement, Elisha Russ-Fishbane has recently argued that musical ceremonies are not attested in the prophetic tradition of ancient Israel, thus pietist leaders found it difficult to introduce samāʿ and dhikr to their movement. Nonetheless, a study of the Murshid demonstrates that it is exactly the Israelite prophets to whom spiritual music and chanting is attributed, e.g. in 1 Sam. 10:5: "As you approach the town, you will meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, timbrels, pipes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying." After introducing several musical instruments of ancient times, the Murshid states: "Indeed the art [of music] is an illuminating and spiritual therapy of the soul, causing the latter to pine for its Creator and its noble origin." Nevertheless, this tract also ends the discussion on this topic with the warning of avoiding music that may not bring the penitent closer to his "beloved" (maḥbūb), i.e. God (ff. 33a-35a).

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49 I.e. Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, the two canonical collections of prophetic tradition (ḥadīth).
51 See, for example, the discussion on the Ḥanbalī school and Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) in Louis Pouzet, “Prises de position autour du samāʿ en Orient musulman au VIIe/XIIIe siècle,” Studia Islamica, 57 (1983), pp. 119-134.
V. The Arabic Background of the Murshid

After exploring the institutions and ideals of the Murshid in their Sufi context, studying the Arabic background of this tract will allow us to better understand and appreciate the dynamics in which David ben Joshua composed his work. Not merely recycling Sufi materials and/or plagiarizing materials from Muslim literature, David in fact created a sophisticated tract of mystical thought that is both a reaction to Islamic teachings in this field and an alternative that relies on the Jewish scriptures. Moshe Gottstein’s study of the Hebrew translation of al-Ghazālī’s Mizān al-‘amal by Rabbi Abraham bar Ḥisadai (thirteenth century), demonstrates the available methods for Judaizing Islamic materials when translating them into Hebrew, by replacing Qur’ānic verses and ḥadīth traditions with biblical verses, or with the sayings of the Sages (“Jewish ḥadīth”), or translating them into Hebrew if no equivalent was found.\(^{53}\) I will give here few examples from Abraham bar Ḥisadai’s translation:

1. Qur’ān – Bible: replacing Qur’ānic verses with biblical ones, or when the Qur’ānic citation speaks of a biblical matter, providing the biblical equivalent, e.g. regarding the creation of Adam: “When your Lord said to the angels, ‘Indeed, I am going to create a human being from clay’" (Q. 38:17) is replaced by Gen. 2:7.

2. Qur’ān – Sayings of the Sages: Gottstein noticed that this is a less successful exercise in Abraham’s translation, where the Qu’rānic verse in the original text is replaced by a saying of the Israelite Sages, but not with a true equivalent (i.e. in the contents or the wording of phrase). For example, instead of Qur’ān 50:37, “Indeed

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\(^{53}\) Moshe Gottstein, “Translations and Translators in the Middle Ages: I. Biblical Verses and Sayings of the Sages of Blessed Memory in the Translation of al-Ghazālī’s Mizān al-‘amal” [Heb.], Tarbiz, 23, no. 3-4 (1952), pp. 210-216. On Abraham bar Ḥisadai, see his biography in the introduction to Ben ha-melekh veha-nazir [The Prince and the Ascetic], Ayelet Oettinger, ed. (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2011).
in that is a reminder for whoever has a heart or who listens while he is present [in
mind],” one finds in Abraham’s translation: “Our sages said: Eat bread with salt and
drink a small amount of water and sleep on the ground and live a life of sorrow”
(Aboth 6:4). Abraham, thus, chose to add his own nuance to the translated text.

3. Qur’ân (translated): In several places in his translation, Abraham bar Ḫisadai
literally translates the Qur’ânic verses into Hebrew, and ascribes them to an
anonymous sage (e.g. “therefore a sage said…”). For example, where al-Ghazâlî
cites one verse from the Fâtiha (Qur’ân 1), Abraham bar Ḫisadai provides the entire
sûra in a Hebrew translation and presents it as a “prayer of one of the sages.”

Not in all places, however, Abraham seems to have recognized the origin of the text in
the Qur’ân, for example, when al-Ghazâlî omitted the words qâlâ taʿâlâ (God said)
and alike before his citations. In some places, Abraham omitted the Qur’ânic verses
from his translation, and the overall object, according to Gottstein, was to refrain
from any direct references to Islam. In one place, Abraham omitted the reference to
Muḥammad and replaced it with “Prophets”: “The believers are only the ones who
have believed in God and His Messenger” (Q. 49:15), was translated: “The
believers are only the ones who have believed in God and His Messengers
(heʾeminu ba-el vi-sheluḥav).”

4. Ḥadîth – Bible: replacing a prophetic tradition with a biblical verse, e.g. the ḥadîth
“improve your manners (ḥassanâʾ akhalâqakum)” is replaced by the verse, “reform
your ways and your actions” (Jer. 7:3); and the ḥadîth saying that
“leadership/imamate belongs to the Quraysh,” Muḥammad’s tribe, is Judaized in

Gottstein, “Translations and Translators,” p. 213 n. 14; Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, Intertwined Worlds:
See the discussion below on Muḥammad vs. the Israelite Prophets.
favor of the verse, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah” (Gen. 49:10).56

5. Hadith – Sayings of the Sages: replacing a prophetic tradition with a saying of the Sages, e.g. the hadith saying that “whoever does evil, shall carry the burden, and he casts the burden on the one who follows him,” is replaced by the saying, “whoever sinned and caused the many to sin – the sin of the many is appended to him” (Aboth 5:18).57

6. Hadith (translated) – Abraham translates several hadiths into Hebrew. These hadiths are transmitted in the name of anonymous sages, once from a “prophetizer” (eḥad ha-mitnab’im), and in some cases – from Socrates or an anonymous “physician,” instead of Muḥammad or ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib as in al-Ghazālī’s text. Occasionally, Abraham added to the translated hadith a biblical verse or a saying of the Sages, e.g. following the literal translation of the hadith that says that “whoever received wisdom, received a great merit,” Abraham added: “And the prophet [Solomon]58 said: ‘By wisdom the Lord laid the earth’ [Prov. 3:19]; and ‘Wisdom gives strength to the wise man’ [Ecc. 7:19].”

7. Judaization of Muslim Names: Rasūl Allāh, God’s messenger in al-Ghazālī’s text


57 The Hebrew saying refers to Jeroboam (1 Kings 15:30).

58 Solomon, to whom the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are ascribed, is not usually considered to be a prophet in Judaism. In Islam, however, he is one of God’s prophets (Qur’ān 4:163; 6:84).
(i.e. the Prophet Muḥammad), becomes “Our Master Moses” in Abraham’s text; Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767) and al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 820), the eponyms of two of the Sunnī schools of law, become Ravina I and Rav Ashi (fifth century), two of the compilers and editors of Babylonian Talmud; and the Prophet’s wife, ‘Ā‘isha (d. 678), becomes the prophetess Deborah (Judg. 4-5).

The same format used in Gottstein’s study will be used here in studying the Arabic background of the Murshid, and the innovations introduced by David ben Joshua to his sources.

1. Qurʾān – Bible

David finds in the Bible equivalents to citations from the Qurʾān. He opens the Murshid with no less than four invocations (f. 1b):

*Bism Allāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*

“In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate” (Qurʾān 1:1, and elsewhere)

*Rabbi yassir*

May God help (built upon Q. 2:26) 59

*Be-shem adonai el ‘olam*

“In the name of God, the Everlasting God”

*Derahkeha adonai hodi‘eni, orḥotekha lamdeni*

“Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths” (Ps. 25:4)

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59 *Rabbi Yassir*: one of several invocations that could follow the *bismillah*. See Adam Gacek, Arabic Manuscripts: A Vademecum for Readers (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. 200.
The usage of the *bismillah* here is not entirely unusual since Jews adopted it at the opening of their epistles and tracts. Karin Almbladh, who studied the usage of the *Bismillah* in Geniza letters, points to the opening formulae that were often used by the Jewish authors, most probably under the influence of Islam. Her list of formulae in Hebrew or Aramaic include:

1. *Bi-shmakh rahmana*, “In Your name, o Merciful”, shortened *bi-shmakh*.
2. ‘*Al shemakh rahamana*, “In Your name, o Merciful”, shortened ‘*al shemakh*.
3. *Be-shem y’y or be-shem el*, “In the name of the Lord.”
4. *Be-[shim]kha elohim*, “[In Your name], o God.”
5. *Be-shem ram we-nissa’*, “In the name of Him who is high and lofty” (built upon Isa. 47:15).

Other alternatives expressing trust in God are also found in the Geniza, whether in Hebrew or Arabic (based on the *Bismillah*).60 In the letters of Rabbi Joshua, the father of David, one finds the formula *be-shem ha-el ha-raham [ve]-ha-rahum*, “in the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate,” i.e. the Hebrew translation of the Qur’anic *bismillah*; or the words *bism Allāh*; or the entire Arabic phrase.61 David’s addition of the Hebrew formula “In the name of God, the Everlasting God” and Ps. 25:4 were probably intended to counter the Islamic formulae. Indeed, this practice was not unfamiliar to critics of Islamic ‘influence’ over Judaism such as Rabbi Simeon ben Tsemaḥ Duran (d.

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61 Goitein, “The Twilight of the House of Maimonides,” letters 1, 2, 15, 24, 26, 28.
1444) who stated: “There are places where [documents] begin: ‘in the name of God, the Everlasting God,’ according to the custom of the Ishmaelites [i.e. Muslims] and not according to the custom of the sages of blessed memory.”

In two instances the Murshid cites the Qur’an: Love (mahabba) is said to be nār Allāh al-muwqada, “the kindled fire of God” (Q. 104:6), a saying that is complemented by the Song 8:6: “Love is as strong as death, its ardor unyielding as the grave; it burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame” (f. 14b).

In another place the Murshid says: “Not even the weight of a speck of dust in the heavens or earth escapes His knowledge” (lā ya’zubu ‘an ‘ilmīhi mithqāl dhirra fī al-samāwāt wa-l-ard), very closely following Qur’ān 34:3. This expression is complemented by three Biblical verses: “He knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him” (Dan. 2:22); “The righteous God who probes minds and hearts” (Ps. 7:9); “You know when I sit and when I rise” (Ps. 139:2).

2. Islamic Poetry – Bible

al-Qushayrī (d. 1074) states in the introduction to his epistle:

Know – may God show mercy to you! – that the majority of those true Sufis have become extinct and, in our age, nothing is left of them but their traces. As a poet put it: ‘As for the tents, they look like their tents / and yet I see that the women of the tribe are not the ones who used to live in them.”

In his own lament on the loss of piety, David ben Joshua cites the Arabic verse, originally

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composed by Qays b. al-Mulawwaḥ, al-Majnūn (d. ca. 688), and finds a parallel to the same idea in Ps. 12:1: “Help, Lord, for no one is faithful (ḥasid) anymore; those who are loyal have vanished from humanity.” Thus, the biblical verse does not replace the verse by Qays, but responds to it with a Jewish equivalent. Qays’ poetic verse is attributed to an identified person (baʿḍ al-fuḍalāʾ, “an esteemed person”) (f. 54a).

3. Muḥammad – Israelite Prophets

The Murshid copied the opening paragraph from Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s (d. 1209) al-Muḥaṣṣal, and Judaized the text by replacing the eulogy over Muḥammad with a eulogy on the Israelite prophets: “May [God’s] peace be upon His worshipers, the clear lights, and the shining luminaries and the mighty intellects (al-ʿukūl al-kawāhir), and His messengers and His prophets, both the secret ones (bawāṭin) and the visible ones (ẓawāhir).”65 Ignaz Goldziher, who was curious about the phenomenon of ‘converting’ the Arabic eulogy over Muḥammad, better known as the taṣliya, into a Hebrew eulogy over the Israelite prophets, detected several cases of this kind in Hebrew literature.67 In the Murshid the same technique is used by citing Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in Arabic and finding an appropriate substitute to Islamic eulogy. Moreover, the eulogy in the Murshid, unlike the one in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s book, is using mystical terminology in speaking

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64 See EI² “Madjnūn Laylā” (Ch. Pellat et al.).
66 See EI² “Madjnūn Laylā” (Ch. Pellat et al.).
67 See EI² “Madjnūn Laylā” (Ch. Pellat et al.).
68 The words ṣalā Allāh ʿalayhi wa-sallama, “May God bless him and give him peace.”
about the prophets (bawāṭīn and zawāḥīr). For the sake of the discussion here, I produce both texts in the Arabic script, although the Murshid was written, of course, in Judeo-Arabic.

**Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī**, introduction to the *Muḥaṣṣal*. 68

الحمد لله المتعالي بجمال أحينته عن مشاهدة الأعراض والجوهر المقدس بعلو صمديته عن مناسبة الأوهام والخواطر المنتظرة بسمو سرمديته عن مقابلة الأحاديث والنظائر المستغفري بكمال قدرته عن معاضدة الإبوب والنظائر العليم الذي لا يزعب عن علته شيء من مكونات الظلمات ومستودعات السرائر العظام الذي غرقت في مطالعة أنوار كبريات أنظار الأولوان وأفكار الأولويات والوصلة على محمد المبعوث إلى الأصحاب والأكبر والشفيع المشفع في الصغائر والكبائر وعلى الله وصحبه وسلم تسليماً كثيراً.

*Translation*: 69 Praise be to God who is so exalted by the greatness of His Oneness that he cannot be compared with accidents and substances; Who is so holy in the exaltedness of His firmness (ṣamadiyya) 70 that he cannot be connected with imaginations and thoughts; Who is so remote in the sublimity of His perpetuity (sarmadiyya) 71 that he cannot be confronted with sagacities and speculations. Who, because of the perfection of His might, does not need to be contrasted to things which might resemble [Him] and be similar [to Him]. He is the Knowing One, from whose knowledge nothing escapes of what is deposited in the conscience (sarāʿīr) and of what is hidden in the recesses of the mind (damāʿīr). He is the Great One, the lights of whose majesty have been the objects of the deep speculations of the


70 Constructed from *al-Ṣamad* of Q. 112:2, a *hapax legomenon* in the Qurʾān. On the interpretations of this term in modern scholarship, see Walid A. Saleh, “The Etymological Fallacy and Qurʾānic Studies: Muhammad, Paradise, and Late Antiquity,” in *The Qurʾān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qurʾānic milieu*, Angelika Neuwirth et al., eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 654-658.

71 Constructed from *sarmad*, which appears in Q. 71:8, 72:8.
former and the latter ones. May [God’s] prayer be uponMuḥammad, the one sent to young and old, their interceder, and upon his family and companions, and may [He] grant him abundant peace.

*Murshid*, f. 1b-2a.

الحمد لله المتعالي بجلال أحيثي عن مشابهة الأعراض والجواهر المقدس بعلو صمديته عن مناسبة الأوهام والخواطر المتنزه بسمو سرديته عن مقابلة الأحاديث والتنواظر المستغني بكمال قدره عن معاضدة الإشباه والتظاهر العلمي الذي لا يعبر عن علبه شيء من مكتنونات الضمان ومستوطدة السرائر العظيم الذي غرفته في مطالعة أنوار كبريات أنظار الأوائل وأفكار والأواخر والسلام على عبده الأتوار البواهر والأضواء الزواهر والعقول القواهر ورسله وأبيباه العليا والظواهر.

*Translation of the last line:*72 “May [God’s] peace be upon His worshipers, the clear lights, and the shining luminaries and the mighty intellects, and His messengers and His prophets, both the secret ones and the visible ones.”

The Jewish practice of elevating the status of the Israelite prophets to that of Muḥammad in Islam, is occasionally found in Jewish polemical writings in which Moses plays a prominent role, most probably a reaction to the devotion to Muḥammad among Muslims (when Moses and Muḥammad are considered to be the lawgivers). An example to this phenomenon is found in the *Epistle of Consolation* attributed to Rabbi Maimon ben Joseph (d. c. 1166), Maimonides’s father. In this letter, supposedly written at the time of the Almohad persecutions, Moses is portrayed as superior to Muḥammad. This polemical characteristic has not escaped the the modern editor of the *Epistle*, L.M. Simmons:

One point is striking in the reading of the letter [of Rabbi Maimon]: it is the very

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72 This text is the same as in the previous passage of the *Muḥaṣṣal*, except for the last line.
strong influence which Moslem phrases exercised upon Jewish theology. Maimun’s perpetual insisting upon belief in God and his Apostle, and in that with which he was sent down, seems almost like an echo from the Qur’an. Abraham is called without hesitation the Mahdi of God, and perhaps the great stress which is laid upon the greatness of Moses may be intended as a set off to the greatness of Mohammed.73

4. Replacing or Removing Muslim Terms and Names

In this method, David ben Joshua followed the tradition of the Maimonidians in naming their movement hasidut (piety). Abraham Maimonides had stated: “Whoever follows these unique regulations is named qadosh (holy), hasid (pious), ‘anav (humble), etc. Hasid is superior to all other [terms], because it is of the origin of hesed, meaning ‘generosity,’ [and] because [the pious] volunteers to do what is not in the Torah.”74 David replaced tasawwuf with hasidut, and šūfī with hasid, giving this terminology three interpretations. The first is that hasid is derived from hesed (benevolence) and emet


74 Cited in Fenton’s introduction to the Murshid, p. 14.
(truth), the author translating them into *al-faḍl wa-l-tafaḍḍul wa-l-ṭūl wa-l-taṭawwuł* (plenty and plentitude, profusion and profuseness) because the pious is of high spirituality and wishes to achieve success in the hereafter. The second interpretation: ḥesed as in Jonah 2:9, “Those who cling to worthless idols, lose their hesed,” and Prov. 25:5, “Lest he who hears you bring hesed upon you,” meaning hesed – shame, disgrace (*al-ʿār wa-l-hawān wa-l-ʿayb*). The explanation is that the pious lives in disgrace out of ascetic reasons. David cites here Isa. 63:3-7, “He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain,” etc. One should notice that in the second explanation, the meaning of hesed as “disgrace” is the complete opposite of the first – “benevolence, kindness.” The third interpretation: ḥasid as in ḥasida, “stork,” because like this bird that prefers the wilderness, the “pious” lives in seclusion and away from society (*al-mutajarrid ʿan al-nās li-aʾmālihi, al-mustawaḥḥish minhum, al-fārr ʿanhum*). For the same reason, David ben Joshua named his tract, *al-Murfīd ilā-al-tajarrud* (Aid to Solitude) (ff. 5a-5b). The Sufi term for the spiritual penitent/disciple, murīd, has been replaced with a Hebrew literal equivalent, ḥafets (pl. ḥafetsim), meaning “desirer, seeker” (f. 31b and elsewhere).

Other examples of substitutes to Islamic terms come in the Murshid’s citation of two narratives from al-Sarrāj’s (d. 988) *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, where David drops any

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references to Islam: *rajl min al-suﬁyya* (Sufi) becomes a *da’if* (poor person); and the name of the mystic Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Faraⱡī, a disciple of the ascetic al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 857), is replaced in favor of an anonymous narrator (*ba’ḍ al-fudalā’,* “one of the esteemed people”).

**Example 1.**

**al-Sarrāj, †Kitāb al-luma’,*81**

وسمع شيخ من المشايخ رجلاً من الصوفية يقول آنا جانع فقال له كنتي فقيل له لم قلت ذلك فقال لأن الجوع سيء من سر الله تعالى موضوع في خُزائِن من خزائن الله تعالى لا يضعه عند من يُغنيه قال ودخل [رجل] من الصوفية على شيخ فقدم إليه طعامًا فاكله فقال له منذ لم تأكل الطعام قال مذ خمس فقال ليس بك جوع الفقر جوع بخل عليك ثياب وأنت تجواع أو كما قال.

*Translation:* A sheikh once heard a Sufi saying: ‘I am hungry,’ and he told him: ‘You are lying!’ People asked him: ‘Why did you say that?’ and he answered: ‘Because hunger is one of God’s secrets, and it is found in the treasuries of God; He does not provide it to the one who may reveal it.’ A Sufi once came before a sheikh who provided him food, and the Sufi ate. ‘For how long have you not eaten?’ asked the sheikh, and the Sufi answered: ‘For five [days].’ ‘This is not hunger out of poverty,’ stated the sheikh, ‘hunger afflicts your body,’ but you [nonetheless] starve yourself,’ or he said something similar to these words.

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78 Notice however that the Arabic terms *da’if*, “needy,” and *faqīr*, “poor” (Persian: *darvish*), were often the terms used for the Sufi mystics in Islamic literature. See Adam Sabra, *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam: Mamluk Egypt, 1250-1517* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).


82 Lit. “unlock it.”

83 Lit. “makes your clothes slim.”
Murshid, f. 28b.

There was once a poor man standing at the door of a man, begging for money and telling him: ‘I am hungry.’ The man answered: ‘Go away, you liar! hunger is God’s secret, and He reveals it only to the faithful ones.’

Example 2.

al-Sarrāj, Kitāb al-luma’.84

A wise man was once asked: ‘How did you come to know your Lord?’ He answered: ‘Through loosening the oaths and untying the vows.’ Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Faraji85 said, according to what is related about him: ‘For the last thirty years I have not taken an oath with God (mighty and lofty is He) lest He reproach me and declare my falsehood.’ It is said that the difference between the notable and the commoners [in religion] is that God requires the plebs to perform of which they took oath in their tongues, and the notable – of which they took oath in their hearts.86

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85 Unidentified.
86 On the differentiation between ‘notable’ and ‘commoners,’ see EI2, “al-Khāṣṣa wa ’l-‘Āmma” (M.A.J. Beg). al-Sarrāj (The Kitāb al-luma’, pp. 354) defines “oath,” ‘aqd: “a secret that the servant takes in his heart between himself and God Almighty regarding the things he will do or not do.”
Translation: A wise man was once asked: ‘How did you come to know your Lord?’ He answered: ‘Through strengthening the oaths and tying the vows’; or according to another version: ‘Through loosening the oaths and untying the vows.’ An esteemed person once said: ‘For the last thirty years I have not taken an oath with God (mighty and lofty is He) lest He reproach me and declare my falsehood.’ A wise man said: ‘God requires the most esteemed believers to perform that which they swore oath to in their hearts, and requires those of the lower level of belief – to perform [only] that which they swore oath to on their tongues.’

Finally, we will look at a long citation of the Murshid from two passages in al-Suhrawardi’s Kalimat al-taṣawwuf. Here David ben Joshua uses multiple techniques in order to Judaize the Islamic text:

1) Replacing Arabic ḥukamā’ (sages) and ‘ulamā’ (scholars of the religious sciences) with Hebrew hakhamim (sages) and hasidim (pious);
2) Placing a verse by al-Ḥallâj (executed 922) that is cited in the Kalima elsewhere in the Murshid (f. 49b), and not identifying the poet by his name (although this should not be considered to be an unusual character of Arabic literature).

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87 The text underlined in the passages below was copied from the Kalimat al-taṣawwuf to the Murshid (the variations between the two texts are insignificant).
3) Changing the call to read the Qurʾān with reading the Torah, and adding in Hebrew: Miqra, “the Bible”;

4) Instead of the Qurʾān, the Murshid cites BT Sukkah 45b: “There are those who see [God] through a shining speculum, and those who see [Him] through a dim one”;^{89}

5) Replacing the root letters n-z-l, used in the Qurʾān for “sending down” the revelation, with w-r-d, thus making the passage sound less ‘Islamic’ when discussing the Torah.^{90}

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^{90} Notice that the Qurʾān speaks of the Torah by using the same root letters it applies to its own revelation/“sending down,” n-z-l. Nonetheless, the verb used for God’s revelation of the Torah is anzala, and for the Qurʾān – nazzala (Q. 3:3). According to the commentators, the difference is that the Torah was revealed on a single occasion, whereas the Qurʾān was sent down in portions. See EQ, “Torah” (Camilla P. Adang).
al-Suhrawardī, *Kalimat al-taṣawwuf*.  

Translation:  

But al-Ḥallāj (may God have mercy upon him) acknowledged that when he said: ‘You brought me closer to you, until I considered you to be me.’ The sages (hukamā’) and scholars (ʻulamā’) acknowledged the conjunction with the upper world, that is, the removal of the veil, meaning intellectual union. Do not be confused by the changes in the allusions because ‘does He [God] not know that when the contents of the graves are scattered?’ [Q. 100:8]. Most of human beings in God’s dominion [will rise during] the Day of Judgment, but out of 1000 people, 999 people will decay
in their graves, and these are victims of the languages and of the allusions’ swords, and they are responsible for their punishment. They neglected the meaning of these allusions, and destroyed them. The truth is like a sun that does not have more than one manifestation. [Likewise,] the city is one, and there are many roads [leading to it] but the roads are not easy [to travel].

(pp. 129-130) If you manage to avoid taking care of your superfluous needs, you will accomplish wisdom and [many] merits. You must praise and exalt and stop the redundant thoughts in order to be saved by good thoughts. The redundant thought – when you are getting rid of it first, you are being saved, and nothing will hurt you unless it has a cure. Supplicate frequently to the world to come! Ask God (may He be Exalted) that whatever you have shall never end. Do not speak without thinking first, and do not boast of what you achieved because God is all-giving. You must read the Qur’ān through free will, excitement, and refined thinking. Read the Qur’ān as if it was given to you only. If you assemble these qualities into your heart, you will be one of the successful ones.

Know that the Sufi is the one with whom these noble possessions are assembled, Taṣawwuf (Sufism) is their reconciliation, and finally I command you to be fearful of God (mighty and lofty is He). ‘The [best] outcome is to the righteous’ [Q. 11:49]. ‘Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is You who is the Knowing, the Wise’ [Q. 2:32].

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93 ‘Punishment,’ lit. ‘blood and wounds.’
94 al-Muflihūn, see Qur’ān 2:1-5.
Murshid, ff. 56a-56b.

Translation: But I say that most of the sages (ḥakhamim) and pietists (ḥasidim) acknowledged the conjunction with the upper world, that is, the removal of the elevated veil between us and Him [God]. They referred to that in [the Babylonian Talmud’s] Gemar Sukkah in the chapter on the lulav and ‘aravah,95 saying: ‘There are those who see [God] through a shining speculum, and those who see [Him] through a dim one’ [Sukkah 45b].

95 Lulav, closed frond of the date palm tree; ‘aravah, a leafy branch of the willow tree. These are two of the ‘Four Species’ used ritually during the Jewish holiday of Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles).
O you, who are reading our summary [the Murshid], seeking to achieve the path of piety and the way of God. Do not be confused by the allusions and the changes in these allusions because most people are victims of the languages and of the allusions’ swords. The truth is like a sun that does not have more than one manifestation. [Likewise,] the city is one, even if it has many roads [leading to it], some of them are difficult while others are easy [to travel]; some of the ways are wide while others are narrow – but they all lead to the same place.

If you manage to avoid taking care of your superfluous needs, you will accomplish wisdom and many merits. You must praise and exalt because the foundation of this path and the base of this truth is the preservation of the will, the continuation of performing the worship, becoming regularly humble, and reaching abundance with abundance. Perform the laws of the obedience [to God] through educating the soul, and hope [to reach] the status of the most elevated ones through the joy of getting closer [to God]. Supplicate frequently to the world to come and ask God (may He be Exalted) that whatever you have shall never end. Do not speak without thinking first. Leave behind you [whatever] may leave you behind first. Do not speak without thinking first, and do not stop mentioning God. Do not boast of what you achieved because God is all-giving. You must read the Torah, the Bible, and the words of revelation, and reflect upon their meanings through free will, excitement, and refined thinking, as if they were given to you only. If you assemble these qualities into your heart, you will be one of the pietists (ḥasidim) and lovers (ohavim), because the pietist is the one with whom these noble possessions and lofty truths are assembled. Carry with you these
excellent qualities and hold to the admirable virtues and estimable merits because piety (hasidut) is their reconciliation, and finally [end of the manuscript].

VI. CONCLUSIONS

David ben Joshua’s Murshid may be regarded as a short manual of mystical thought in the style of Sufi manuals, e.g. the epistle composed by al-Qushayrī. It draws its materials from a wealth of sources, some of them Muslim (Sufi thought), while others are Jewish, and relies on the mystical writings of the Maimonidians in previous generations (most importantly, on Abraham Maimonides, the founder of the Egyptian pietist movement). The Murshid cites and adapts Sufi materials without explicitly referring to the original writings; in fact, these materials are produced with the object of legitimizing pietism though methods of Judaizing the Islamic citations. The Murshid replaces Qur’ānic verses with biblical verses, and erases any references to the Prophet Muḥammad (speaking instead of the Israelite prophets) and Sufi thinkers (presenting them as anonymous “sages and pious men”). Nonetheless, the Murshid does include some materials that are clearly of Islamic character, but do not seem to contradict the Jewish-pietist character of this tract. Rather than arguing of neglect on the side of David ben Joshua or ignorance of their Islamic origins, I would argue that the author was fully aware of the methods of converting Islamic materials into Jewish ones, and the limits of his work.

The Murshid is thus a tract of hybrid nature, one that relies on Jewish and Islamic literatures, that transcribes and cites passages from Arabic into Judeo-Arabic, and that attaches a biblical equivalent to the original Qur’ānic verses. Despite its flaws (not being a homogenous work, its unclear structure, and not always satisfying explanation of only several mystical terms), the Murshid is an example of the Judeo-Islamic symbiosis in the
Later Middle Period, a follower to the mystical writings of the so-called “classical” age of symbiosis, such as Baḥya ibn Paquda and Abraham Maimonides. S.D. Goitein wrote that Abraham Maimonides “finds the whole material for his teachings in Jewish sources… [H]e did not confine himself to preaching and writing but, in collaboration with other Hasidim, tried to introduce a number of Muslim religious practices, congenial to him, into the Jewish rite.” David ben Joshua, a descendant of Abraham Maimonides, like his forefather, was a master in Jewish and Sufi thought, and the Murshid testifies for his conversion and adaptation of Islamic materials into Judaism. One could argue that David’s pietistic teachings were meant not so much to complement Sufi thought, but to offer a Jewish alternative. An often-quoted letter from the times of the nagid, discovered in the Geniza (T.-S. 8. J. 26/19), gives evidence to the attraction of Sufism among Jewish circles. In this letter, a Jewish housewife urges the nagid to help her bring her husband back home from his spiritual retreat with a Muslim sheikh, Yusūf al-ʿAjamī al-Kūrānī (d. 1367), “a place where there is no Torah, no prayer, and no mention of God’s name in truth.” David ben Joshua achieved the object of fusing mystical thought that originated in Islam with the Torah, believing that the practices and ideals performed in the pietist movement reflect, in fact, those of the ancient Israelites, and thus, the true path to asceticism.

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In our family, our ancestors have told their children, who taught us that Tementit [in the Tuat region] was once a Jewish capital... Between Tementit and El Hamméda there is a way of six days, and in El Hamméda there are still descendants of Jews who were expelled from Tementit, are they are called Tementitins. They and the people of El Hamméda have preserved the tradition of those events. My father and his brothers, and their father, were born in El Hamméda, and my father constantly told us about these events.¹

The words in this chapter’s epigraph, told in first person, were recorded almost four centuries after the expulsion of the Jews from Touat and Tamentit, by a Moroccan Jew of the Sahara. Rabbi Mardochée (Mordechai) Aby Serour (1826-1886), who was born in the town of Akka of Southern Morocco, traveled extensively in West Africa with a French passport that he received after moving to Algeria, which was under French rule since 1830. In a report from 1880 about his travels back to Akka and further into Sub-Saharan Africa, he traced the genealogy of the Daggatoun, a small tribe in the Dar‘a valley, to the descendants of the Jewish community of Touat. Aby Serour was mistaken to consider the Daggatouns “Jews,” a common term for tribes of low social status in the lands of Sub-Saharan Africa, but nevertheless, he gives us a valuable account for the circulation of narratives about the expulsion of the Jews of Touat among the Jewish communities of the

Sahara many years after the events there took place.²

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the rhetoric of anti-Jewish polemic in the Later Islamic Middle Period (1200-1500 CE), by focusing on the episode of the persecution of the Jews of Touat, which occurred towards the end of the fifteenth century. The inciter of this persecution was a Māliki³ scholar from Tlemcen, Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Maghīlī (d. 1504), who campaigned against the employment of Jews at the courts of Maghribi and African rulers, led a massacre against the Jews of Touat around 1492, and played an important role in the Islamization of West Africa. Accounts of his anti-Jewish polemic and activity are included in the great compendium of fatwās (legal responses), al-Mī’yār al-mu’rib wa-al-jāmi‘ al-mughrīb ‘an fatāwā ahl Ḥārān wa-Ifrīqiyā wa-l-Andalus wa-l-Maghrib (The Clear Measure and the Extraordinary Collection of the Judicial Opinions of the Scholars of Ḥārān, and the Maghrib, and the Maghrib) of Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā al-Wansharīsī (d. 1509), a contemporary of al-Maghīlī.⁵ The main text to be examined here, however, will be the untitled polemical tract by al-Maghīlī,⁶ which, for

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⁴ Ḥārān is the eastern part of the Maghrib. It is usually identified with present-day Tunisia, even though the exact geographical limits of this territory are indefinite in medieval scholarship, and it could have been confused with the entire Maghrib. The term Ḥārān is borrowed from the Latin Africa. See EI², “Ḥarfīya” (M. Talbi).


the purposes of this dissertation, will be named *Ahkām ahl al-dhimma* (Regulations for the ‘Protected People’; hereafter: *Ahkām*), after the words of the composer in the fourth paragraph of his work, and according to the medieval tradition of regulating the *dhimmīs* (the ‘protected people’, that is, Jews and Christians) in the Abode of Islam.⁷

In his polemic al-Maghīlī attacks Jews as the enemies of Muslims and their Prophet, blaming them for heresy, and gives examples of their enmity, consisting of their unwillingness to eat the meat slaughtered by Muslims, or any food prepared by Muslims, and in their duplicity while serving their Muslim masters. al-Maghīlī belligerently criticizes the Jews and their supporters, and calls for the total extermination of their males and the enslavement of their women. In order to dehumanize the Jews, he calls them “monkeys,” and defines every Jew as Satan, because Jews trap and deceive Muslims and bring them into sinning.

In the context of ‘Judeo-Muslim Symbiosis’, therefore, it is hard to see the persecution of the Jews of Touat and al-Maghīlī’s tract in the same positive meaning of ‘symbiosis’ as used by S.D. Goitein; and one could claim the *Ahkām* to be an example of Anti-Semitism.⁸ The existence of Anti-Semitism, however, in earlier centuries of Islamic

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⁷ The most famous book under this title is *Ahkām ahl al-dhimmah* by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya. On this writer, a well-known disciple of Ibn Taymiyya, see *El*², “Ibn Kayyim al-Djawziyya” (H. Laoust).

history and its evidence in the Geniza documents, did not prevent Goitein from claiming that Anti-Semitism “appears to have been local and sporadic, rather than general and endemic.” I believe that the present chapter will provide a more complex depiction of Jewish life in the Maghrib of the fifteenth century, pointing to the close relations between Jews and Muslims in the spheres of politics and economy, while putting the massacre of Touat in its historical context (so far, it has been mostly examined as a polemical text per se). The “locality” of the massacre, the motives of al-Maghīlī, and the responses to his activity, as reported in the Mi’yār, will present a unique case in the history of intimacy and tension between Jews and Muslims, in which the worldview of al-Maghīlī and the historical events in the Maghrib took an important role. Moreover, an examination of (intellectual) Jewish attitude towards Islam in the Maghrib will reveal the intricacy of living under Ishmael rather than under Edom.

I. Historical Setting

The Oasis of Touat and Gourara is located about 1600 km (995 miles) south-west of Algiers. Today it belongs to the district of Adrār, which is dotted by dozens of palm trees, 294 kṣūr (fortified hamlets; sin. kṣar) and 900 foggaras – underground irrigation canals known elsewhere in the Middle East as qanāt; the development of these systems of foggaras facilitated the subsequent development of new north-to-south trade routes across the desert. Touat is not mentioned in early Arabic writings of Maghribī Muslims, thus


9 Goitein, Med. Soc., 2:278-289; the citation is from p. 283.

10 Ar. Tuwat; Qurāra (Ber. Tiguirarin). Gourara is a small oasis at the north of Touat.

the history of Touat and Gourara is mostly unknown, and historians are left with Berber-African traditions. In the Earlier Islamic Middle Period (945-1200 C.E.) Touat became a hub for trans-Saharan trade; by the time of the foundation of the Zayyānid state in Tlemcen during the thirteenth century, it was an important center on the road from the capital to Bilād al-Sūdān, “Black Africa” (lit. Land of the Blacks). Trade-caravans to the Sūdān were sponsored by Muslim and Jewish merchants. Very little is known about the process of Islamization in the region, because the first Arabic documents to support the existence of a Muslim population appear only in the ninth century. But as in other areas in West Africa, the local communities of Touat (Berbers, Christians, and perhaps Jews) converted to Islam through the commercial activity of Maghribī merchants. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 1377), who visited the village of Būdā in the Touat oasis, spoke of the cultivation of palm trees there; and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) reported of the Berber-Zanāṭa population in Touat. Around the same time period we find the first Jewish accounts of

12 The Sūdān was the name used for the Savannah regions south of the Sahara from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea. See Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia, Joseph W. Meri, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), “Sudan” (Knut S. Vikør).
trade in Touat. A letter from the Cairo Geniza from 1235, written by rabbi and merchant Isaac b. İbrâhîm al-Tuwâfî (of Touat) reports of his travels as far as Genoa, carrying with him a consignment of saffron for a friend in Marseilles. Goitein, who was the first to publish this document, comments that “a Jew would hardly travel regularly to such a remote place [Touat], had it not contained a community of coreligionists, where he would pray and take food,” thus pointing to the existence of a Jewish community in the Saharan oasis of Touat.  

A European who traveled to the Sahara in 1447, the Genoese merchant Antoine Malfante, reported in a letter from Touat:

> There are many Jews who lead a good life here, for they are under the protection of several rulers, each of whom defends his own clients. Thus they enjoy very secure social standing. Trade is in their hands, and many of them are to be trusted with the greatest confidence.

It is unclear whether Jews actually crossed the Sahara into the Südân; Goitein, who wrote on the trade of Egyptian Jews based on the Geniza documents, explains that as Jews they “were prevented by the injunctions of their religion to travel on Saturdays and holidays. A Jew traveling in a caravan, when his day of rest approached, either stayed behind or hurried ahead of the caravan so he could observe his Sabbath.”

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not, of course, an ideal situation; and inland travel was extremely dangerous. A responsum by a Jewish rabbi of Tlemcen, Joseph Sasportas (fl. mid-fifteenth century), tells us of a Jewish merchant who was murdered by a fellow Muslim merchant while traveling in the Sahara. According to the testimony of the latter, they both fled from their caravan into the desert in order to save themselves from an attack by raiders, but their ways got separated and the Jew was finally found dead. Missing bundles of gold, that belonged to Jewish traders from Tafilalt and other neighboring communities, were found, however, with the Muslim merchant who claimed to be innocent.\textsuperscript{19} Gold, as we learn from Antoine Malfante’s letter, was the main commodity in the trans-Saharan trade.\textsuperscript{20} Other cargos in the Sahara were copper, salt, dates, spices, cowry shells, beads, tanned leather, pottery and glassware, textiles, and other manufactured goods. Aside from merchandise, local merchants traded in slaves (both males and females) and animals (such as horses and camels).\textsuperscript{21}

Touat was located on the road south to the Sūdān next to two major cities in the Maghrib, both capitals of Berber dynasties that were rivals to each other, although both dynasties belonged to the Zanāta family of the Banū Wāsīn. These cities were Tlemcen (Tilmisān), the capital of the Zayyānids (Banū Zayyān; also Banū ‘Abd al-Wād); and Fes

\textsuperscript{19} Responsa #6 and 7, in \textit{R. Yosef Sasportas, hakham ve-dayan be-malkhut Tlemsan, ve-sefer teshuvotav} [Rabbi Joseph Sasportas (Chicheportiche), hakham and dayyan in the Kingdom of Tlemcen, and His Responsa], Noah ʻAminoah, ed. (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1994), pp. 260-273 (with commentary on pp. 139-144).

\textsuperscript{20} Malfante, “The Letter of Antoine Malfante,” pp. 86, 90.

(Fās), the capital of the Marīnids (Banū Marīn). In addition to a third dynasty in the Maghrib (the Ḥafṣids of Tunis), these dynasties built their independence and power on the ruins of the Almohad Empire (al-Muwahhīdūn; twelfth-thirteenth centuries). But in contrast to the Almohads (meaning in Arabic: “Unitarians”), who were notorious for their violent treatment of the dhimmīs (i.e., Jews and Christians) in the Maghrib and in al-Andalus, and for the destruction of Jewish and Christian communities by expulsion and/or forced conversion, the Zayyānids and the Marīnids treated the Jews benevolently. Concerning this time period in the Maghrib, Isidore Epstein writes:

The Jews in Northern Africa, especially under the Zeneiades [i.e. Zayyānids], lived [...] under conditions that compare most favourably with those in European countries or those prior to the tripartition of the country [by the Marīnids in the West Maghrib, the Zayyānids in the Central Maghrib, and the Ḥafṣids in the Eastern Maghrib]. In fact, they suffered there none of the repressions and indignities that were experienced by their brethren across the sea, and were subject to no irritating discriminatory treatment. There they breathed freely, moved about securely, apprehending to undue violence nor oppression, and were placed on almost equal footing with their Arab neighbours. They enjoyed the friendship and intimacy of the commoners and the confidence and respect of the rulers.

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The same words are true of the Marānīds, at least as much if not to a larger extent (and in contrast to Epstein’s special emphasis on the Zayyānids).\textsuperscript{25} Into this world of a mostly benign treatment of the Jewish communities by the Muslim Sultans, both towards those who anteceded the Muslim population in the Maghrib, and those who arrived to this region after the persecution in Spain of 1391, stepped al-Maghīlī of Tlemcen.\textsuperscript{26}


\textsuperscript{26} On the persecutions of 1391 in Spain, see James S. Amelang, \textit{Parallel Histories: Muslims and Jews in Inquisitorial Spain} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, [2013]), pp. 69-79.
### Table 4. Sources on al-Maghīlī and the Riots in Touat (c. 1492)

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<th>Author</th>
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<td><strong>1. SOURCES NEARLY CONTEMPORARY</strong></td>
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<td>al-Wansharīṣī</td>
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<td>Poetry</td>
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<td>Les Daggatoun</td>
<td>Geography</td>
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<td>Rabbi and merchant Akka (Morocco)</td>
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### 3. OTHER CONTEMPORARY SOURCES

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<th>Author</th>
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<tr>
<td>Muḥammad al-‘Uqbānī</td>
<td>Tuhfat al-nāṭir</td>
<td>Hisba Manual</td>
<td>Includes a section on the Jews of Touat</td>
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<td>Faqīh</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Abd al-Bāsiṭ al-Maṭāfī</td>
<td>al-Rawḍ al-Bāṣim</td>
<td>History; geography</td>
<td>Includes accounts of his travels to the Maghrib</td>
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**Map 1.** North and West Africa. The oasis of Touat-Gourara, encircled. (Source: John Hunwick, “Al-Mahîlî [sic] and the Jews of Tuwât”)

![Map of North and West Africa with Touat-Gourara encircled](image_url)
II. A Biographical Sketch of al-Maghilī

A note in *Della descrittione dell’Africa* (Description of Africa) by Leo Africanus (d. 1550) points to the massacre of the Jews of Touat and Gourara and the confiscation of their wealth, following the campaign of a “preacher from Tlemcen,” as occurring on the same year of the expulsion from Spain, 1492. This preacher was Muḥammad b. ʻAbd al-Karīm al-Maghilī al-Tilmišānī, whose biography has been preserved in several biographical dictionaries of ‘ulamā’ from the Islamic West. He was born in the environs of Tlemcen (Tilmisān) to the Berber tribe of the Banū Fātīn, in a small village named after the tribe. His date of birth, which is unrecorded, was probably between 1425 and 1440. He studied under ʻAbd al-Raḥmān al-Tha‘ālibī (d. 1470-1) and Yaḥyā b. Yaḍīr (1472-3), the first a scholar from Tunis, and the second – a Tilmišānī scholar and the qāḍī of Touat. They both were students of Ibn Marzūq VI al-Hafīd (d. 1438), a Sufi saint and master of the traditional Islamic sciences in the Islamic West, one of the greatest intellectuals of his time. In *fiqh*, al-Maghilī could claim a stemma going back to scholars such as al-Burzulī and Ibn ʻArafa, both fourteenth-century muftīs of

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Tunis, and Abu ‘Uthmān Sa‘īd al-‘Uqbānī (d. 1408-9), a qāḍī of Tlemcen whose great-grandson Muḥammad (d. 1467) was an older contemporary of al-Maghīlī and the composer of a ḥisba manual entitled Tuḥfat al-nāẓir; this book includes a section on the laws of the dhimmīs and another section on the Jews of Touat.31 At some point, al-Maghīlī left for Tamentit (800 km [500 miles] south of Tlemcen) and took residence there. He may have gone there to study with Yaḥyā b. Yaḍīr. He may have visited other localities in the area of Touat, since several places are mentioned in the Aḥkām. His biographer Ibn ‘Askar (d. 1578) reports:

[al-Maghīlī] held the view that the Jews – may God curse them32 – had no bond [of protection (dhimma)], since they had broken it by their association with men of authority among the Muslims, [an action] which went contrary to the humiliation and abasement (al-dhull wa-l-ṣighār) stipulated in the payment of the poll-tax (jizya), and that the breaking [of this pact] by some of them redounded upon them all. He declared it licit to spill their blood and plunder their property and announced that dealing with them was more important than dealing with any other [category of] unbelievers (kuffār).33

al-Maghīlī, who formed his opinion of the Jews during his residence in Touat, circulated his anti-Jewish polemic (Ibn ‘Askar calls it simply kitāb, while other sources

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32 On this curse in the tafsīr literature (commentary to the Qur’ān), see Robert Gleave, Islam and Literalism: Literal Meaning and Interpretation in Islamic Legal Theory (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 79-80. It replaced, according to the commentators, the Qur’ānic words “May God Kill them” (qatalahum Allāh) (Q. 9:30; 63:4), and became an idiomatic expression among Arabs.

speak of an epistle, *risāla*) among the the ‘ulamā’ of Tlemcen, Tunis, and Fez, and called for the destruction of the synagogue of Tamentit in light of the Jews breaching the pact of *dhimma*. To his followers he offered a reward of seven *mithqāls* (probably of gold)\(^3\) for every Jew killed, which might suggest that he needed to recompense his people for an operation that could have been risky, arousing the reaction of the Sultan of Fes or Tlemcen, or as a kind of encouragement to the raiders. The details of his attack on the Jews of Tamentit are unknown, but he certainly destroyed the synagogue there and put many Jews to death; some, however, have managed to escape. Many Jews of Touat left for other oases, while those who remained there were forced to convert to Islam.\(^4\)

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\(^3\) Also known as the “Pact of ‘Umar,” and attributed mistakenly to the Caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 644). It was, according to Mark R. Cohen “a kind of bilateral contract in which the non-Muslims agree to a host of discriminatory regulations in return to protection” (*Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008 [1994], p. 54).

\(^4\) The *mithqāl* (from Arabic: *thiql*, weight) was a standard of weight (about 4.72 gm) used principally for gold. Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails*, p. 250; *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources*, p. 481 (index).

III. al-Maghīlī’s Polemical Treatise, Aḥkām ahl al-dhimma

A Hebrew lament on the Spanish capture of Oran (Wahrān) in 1509, by an anonymous writer, is the only Jewish evidence for the persecutions in Touat. This poem mentions the destruction of Tamantit and Gourara, and hints at al-Maghīlī through his origin in the Maghila tribe. This lament says:37

And now, in my days, I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of wrath. Enemies arose against my congregation, the seed of Edom and the sons of Qetura. At first the people of the West, the possessors of the ax and hoe, Killed man and woman together and desecrated Torah scrolls.

And they sought their hidden treasures and filled the bellies with dainties.

More recently against me arose a well-known enemy from Meghilla, Killed the houses of Gourara and Touat and desecrated the House of the Lord of Wondrous Doings And after him arose an enemy in Dar’a and destroyed the whole house of prayer, And they also imposed upon them laws wicked and hard without pity.38


In this fragment from the lament – which later describes the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Portugal (1492), and ends with the conquest of Oran (1509) – the “seed of Edom” and the “sons of Qetura” are allegorical references to Christianity and Islam, respectively; Qetura, Abraham’s wife/concubine (Gen. 25:1-4; 1 Chron. 1:32-33) was considered the patriarch of Arab tribes, and was identified at times with Hagar.39 Possibly, as proposed by David Corcos, the reference to the Maghīla tribe is a pun on megilla (scroll), or the Book of Esther; thus the lament memorializes al-Maghīlī as a “new” Haman, the main antagonist in the megilla, who ordered “to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day” (Esther 3:13).40 And like in the megilla, he is named tsorer (enemy, foe), while Haman is referred to as tsorer ha-Yehudim (Esther 3:10; 8:1; 9:10). The poem attributes to al-Maghīlī the annihilation of the Jewish communities in Gourara and Touat, and the destruction of a synagogue (“the House of the Lord of Wondrous Doings”), which is clearly the one that stood in Tamentit. As we learn from the poem, al-Maghīlī’s operation led to the devastation of other synagogues in the Maghrib, naming Dar’a as one place where such an attack on the Jews has occurred.41


41 Dar’a is known from several sources for its Jewish population, and up to the tenth century Jews are
What was the motive of al-Maghīlī and his followers for the attack on the Jews of Touat, and how did his polemic, the *Aḥkām*, inflame the violence against them? It is my intention here to deal first with al-Maghīlī’s reasoning of purging the Islamic lands from the Jewish presence, and then to proceed to the different themes and elements in this tract that will shed light on his methods of polemic.

al-Maghīlī’s main argument in the *Aḥkām* is that the Jews, serving the Muslim rulers in the Maghrib, have violated the stipulations of Protection (*dhimma*), and as a result, he calls for the annihilation of the Jews. He quotes in his work the full text of the Pact of ‘Umar, in the form of the letter of the Christians of al-Shām to the Caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, which is usually the document cited in Islamic sources regarding the laws of *dhimma*. Thus he is implying that the stipulations there, although they have nothing to say in particular about Judaism, extend to the Jews. Moreover, that the punishment the Christians received upon themselves, in case they break the stipulations – losing the right of protection, is an obligation also extending to the Jewish case.⁴² In the *Aḥkām*, al-Maghīlī argues:

Regarding the impudence, oppression, and rebellion against the laws of the *sharīʿa* of the Jews of this age of most countries with the support of the powerful and due to their service of the ruler: I [al-Maghīlī] say, with the help of God, whose Help is to be Sought, that there is no doubt that the Jews of Touat, Tīgourarin [Gourara], Tāfīltāt, and Darʿa, many lands in Ifrīqiya [*sic*],⁴³ and Tlemcen, their lives, properties, women and children are devoid of protection.

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⁴³ Possibly: the lands of the Maghrib in general, not only the territory of Ifrīqiya. On the term Ifrīqiya, see note 4 above.
They have no protection (*dhimma*), because the protection that could save them from the sword is the protection of the *shari’a*, not the protection of *jāhiliya* (pre-Islamic ignorance). The protection prescribed by the *sharī’a* obligates them with paying the poll-tax while they are in the state of humiliation (*wa-hum ṣāghirūn*).

[…]

Any Jew who attaches himself to the service of a ruler or vizier or judge or man of authority, has violated the pact, and his life and possession are devoid of protection, because serving the men of authority means breaching the stipulations of protection regarding humiliation and degradation (*al-ṣighār wa-l-dhillā*). The greatest crime is the rebellion against the *sharī’a*, and especially in our days. […]

I swear by the One Who has my life in His Hand, that the reward for killing a single Jew is greater than waging a war against the land of the pagans (*ard al-mushrikīn*). Seize them and kill them wherever you find them, confiscate their properties, and capture their women and children until these evil-doers (*ashrār*) totally submit to the laws of the *sharī’a*, pay the poll-tax, and are humiliated. They should be put in chains and shackles, and should go wearing them into other regions at all times as a sign for the glory of the Prophet, the chosen one. Whoever unfastens any of the chains and shackles from the neck of any of the unbelievers (*‘an raqbat aḥad min al-kuffār*), has turned away from God and his messenger, and will be thrown together with them into hellfire (*al-nār*).44

al-Maghīlī’s words in this passage, “Seize them [The Jews] and kill them wherever you find them,” etc., resonate the Qur’ānic verses on waging a war against the unbelievers:

And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the pagans (*mushrikūn*) wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give alms (*zakāt*), let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful (Q. 9:5).

So when you meet those who disbelieve [in battle], strike [their] necks (fa-daraba al-riqāb) until, when you have inflicted slaughter upon them, then secure their bonds (fa-shuddū’ al-wathāq), and either [confer] favor afterwards or ransom [them] until the war lays down its burdens (Q. 47:4).

al-Maghīlī defines the Jews as mushrikūn, pagans/idolaters, and as a result dissociates them from the legal protection (dhimma) in Islam as “People of the Scripture” (ahl al-kitāb), and calls to spill their blood as if they were unbelievers. The Qur’ān has already pointed to the association of the Jews with the pagans: “You will surely find the most intense of the people in animosity toward the believers [to be] the Jews and the idolaters” (Q. 5:82).

Moreover, the Aḥkām resonate here with the harsh words of Ibn Ḥazm against Ibn Naghrila, in which he calls for the killing of the Jew, the confiscation of his property and the captivity of his children and women.45 The last words here, “Whoever unfastens any of the chains and shackles from the neck of any of the unbelievers, has turned away from God and his messenger,” may suggest an act of excommunication; al-Maghīlī possibly calls his readers to disobey Muslim sovereigns who employ Jews under their service, and dissociate from their presence, which would mean that his Aḥkām have activist political implications for the chaotic atmosphere of the Maghrib of the late fifteenth century.46

Two narratives in the Aḥkām approve killing of Jews who breached the laws of dhimma. The first narrative tells the story of the Māliki scholar Abū Bakr al-Ṭurfūshī (of Tortosa; d. 1126), who, once while in Egypt, was instructed to be brought to the Fatimid

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45 See also Abū Ishāq al-Ilbīrī: “Do not consider it a breach of faith to kill them/ - the breach of faith would be to let them carry on. / They have violated the covenant with them, / so how can you be held guilty against the violators?,” trans. in Lewis, “An Ode against the Jews,” p. 170.

caliph, probably al-Āmir bi-Aḥkām Allāh (d. 1130), after causing the ruler some distress. When al-Ṭurtūshī entered his presence, he noticed a Christian vizier (wazīr min al-ruhbān, that is, a monk) sitting there, and responded with an invective, in verse, against the employment of dhimmīs in the court, accusing the Christian to be a liar. Hearing this, the caliph immediately ordered the vizier to be dragged down, beaten and killed. As for al-Ṭurtūshī, he regained respect in the eyes of the caliph. al-Maghīlī concludes:

This great blessing came to the shaykh [al-Ṭurtūshī] and the caliph because of their recalling of the monk’s hatred of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace. The shaykh, may God be pleased with him, took no notice of his fear of the anger of the caliph and his intention to injure him, and so God protected him and brought goodness to him. God changed the mind of the caliph so that he honored him and was pleased with him.

The second narrative tells the story of a Jewish vizier who served the Marinid sultan Abū ‘Inān (d. 1358). This Jew, because of his rebellious nature (thaghyān), altered a Qur’ānic verse that was copied by a Muslim child, “And whoever desires other than Islam as religion – never will it be accepted from him [and he, in the Hereafter, will be among the losers]” (Q. 3:85), by ordering the student to omit one word – ghayr (other than), thus saying, “And whoever desires Islam as religion – never will it be accepted from him.” A shaykh who heard of this incident from the student’s teacher, arrived at the

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48 al-Maghīlī, Ahkām ahl al-dhimma, p. 556; trans. in Gwarzo, pp. 138-139 (cited here with minor changes). A similar narrative is also reported in the Musnad of Ibn Marzūq, where the vizier is simply called dhimmī (al-Musnad al-sābīh al-hasan fī maʿāthir wa-maḥāsin mawlānā Abī al-Ḥasan, Maria J. Viguera, ed. [Algiers: al-Sharīka al-Waṭaniyya lil-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘, 1981], p. 381). al-Ṭurtūshī is mostly known due to his mirror for princes Sirāj al-mulūk, which includes a chapter on the laws of dhimmā. In his treatise against innovations, Kitāb al-hawādith wa-l-bida’, he finds many faults in Muslims who imitate the dhimmīs. See EI², “al-Ṭurtūshī” (A. Ben. Abdesselem); Kitāb al-Ḥawādith wa-l-bida’, Sulaymān al-Madanī, ed. (Damascus: al-Ḥikma, 1996).
court of Abū ‘Inān without telling him anything about what happened. When the sultan read with him sura 5, verse 57: “O believers, do not take Jews and Christians as friends; they are friends of each other. If any among you makes them his friends, then he is surely one of them,” the shaykh demanded him to repeat reading it aloud several times. The sultan, as a result, left the room and ordered the Jew to be beheaded – without consulting the shaykh; only later he heard of Jew’s crime against the Islamic scripture. “No one will hesitate to strike off the necks of the aforementioned Jews,” explains al-Maghīlī, “except one of those impostors (al-dajjāl min al-dajjlīn), 49 misguided themselves and misguiding others, who have bought the life of this world with that of the next. Their bargaining brings no profit and they are not in the right path.”50 The common element between these two narratives is the correct instruction of the Muslim ruler by a member of the ‘ulamā’ regarding the necessary mistrust in the dhimmīs, more specifically the Jews, because of their corruption and enmity towards Islam. Moreover, al-Maghīlī is enraged by the humiliation of pious men, arbāb al-taqwā, in comparison to the all-powerful rulers, arbāb al-hawā (the capricious ones), and criticizes the silence of ‘ulamā’ while facing evil that is spread by supporters (anṣār) of the Jews.51

49 Dajjāl, “deceiver,” comes from the Syriac daggala, and was applied to a wide variety of individuals and groups throughout Islamic history. It is also the term used for the “arch-deceiver,” the false messiah who will appear before the end of time. David Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic (Princeton: Darwin Press, 2002), p. 93.
50 al-Maghīlī, Abkām ahl al-dhimma, p. 563; trans. in Gwarzo, p. 156.
Other violations of the dhimma are the nonpayment of the poll-tax (jizya), and building houses of prayer or synagogues (kanā‘īṣ).\(^{52}\) al-Maghīlī interprets Q9:29, “Fight those who do not believe in God or in the Last Day, and who do not consider unlawful what God and His Messenger have made unlawful, and who do not adopt the religion of truth from those who were given the Scripture – [fight] until they give the poll-tax willingly while they are humbled,” as a non-compromising command of fighting the Jews and the Christians. The only exception is when the dhimmīs pay the poll-tax and are humiliated. al-Maghīlī’s interpretation of the Qur’ān speaking of war against the unbelievers and treating them with humiliation becomes more evident in the context of the history of the Islamic conquests and the branding or tattooing the non-Muslims of the Levant in the seventh and eighth centuries as a practice of taxation. Putting the Jews in chains and shackles, as al-Maghīlī suggests, and enslaving them, might be related, therefore, to the practices of neck-sealing in the formative period of Islam.\(^ {53}\)

Treating the Jews like slaves becomes clear in the way of collecting the jizya from the dhimmīs; in this case al-Maghīlī prescribes: “Each individual will receive a tap on his neck after paying the poll-tax. He will then be pushed violently, which will make him realize that he is escaping the sword by paying the poll-tax.” This author also says that only one authority should collect the poll-tax from the Jews, and that what is being done in his time, when money is collected from the heads of the Jewish community is in fact not a poll-tax at all, but a bribe in order to keep them in peace or a move towards

\(^{52}\) See Alejandro García-Sanjuán, “La formación de la doctrina legal mālikī sobre lugares de culto de los dhimmīs,” in The Legal Status of Dimmī-s in the Islamic West (Second/Eighth-Ninth/Fifteenth Centuries), Maribel Fierro and John V. Tolan, eds. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2013), pp. 131-156.

\(^{53}\) Chase F. Robinson, “Neck-Sealing in Early Islam,” Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient, 48 (2005), pp. 401-441. These practices existed in societies that preceded the Islamic state.
receiving appointments. Collecting the poll-tax requires the subordination (ṣighār) of the Jews, and putting them in the position of degradation (dhilla) and humility (maskana). Their humiliation also necessitates imposing restrictions on them in presenting their religion in public and in talking about their learned men (‘ulamā’). To exemplify the right way in disgracing the Jews and their supporters, al-Maghīlī mentions the stories of two Muslim scholars – one of them is Sīdī Ibrāhim al-Maṣmūdī (d. 1401), the qaṭb (“spiritual axis”) of Tlemcen – who expressed great contempt towards Jews, keeping in this manner the superiority of Muslims over the unbelievers, and suitably following the laws of the sharī’a.

Three narratives in the Aḥkām attack the Jews for their enmity to the Muslims by evoking images of filth and impurity. In the first narrative, told in first person by one of al-Maghīlī’s friends, a qāḍī who hired a Jew to be his servant, saw in his employment an act of humiliation (idhlāla), but nevertheless mistrusted the servant. The Jew, however, managed his affairs and proved to give sage advices. One day, as the qāḍī was inspecting the Jew washing his clothes, he left to answer a call of nature and hurried back to find, to his surprise, that the Jewish servant was urinating over his clothes. He immediately tied him and gave him a good beating, and swore to dissociate himself from the enemies of God. In the second narrative, a Jewess who was kneading dough for bread that was meant to be eaten by a Muslim, was observed picking her nose with her hand and continuing mixing the flour without washing her hand. In the third narrative, a Jewess

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57 ʿAraḍat lī bāja. See Lane, Lexicon, 2:664 (qaḍā ḥajātahu).
who was mixing flour for Muslims picked lice from her hair, crushed them between her fingernails, and continued to knead the flour without washing her hand. The common feature of these three narratives is the revolting hygiene of the Jews, and moreover, their defilement of the clothes and food of the Muslims, with the first anecdote exemplifying the correct way to treat the Jews, by a total mistrust and dissociation. The Mālikī school of law (madhhab), to which al-Magḥilī belonged, was concerned with the question of the purity and pollution of the Christians and Jews, and whether they should be regarded as impure (najas). In this case, one could see some resemblance between the Shi‘ī notion of the impurity of Jews and Christians to that of the Mālikī madhhab. Similarly, Ibn Ḥazm claims in the Refutation that the Jews are a “filthy, stinking, dirty crew beset with God’s anger and malediction, with humiliation and wretchedness,

misfortune, filth and dirt, as no other people has ever been,” and that their clothes are “more obnoxious than war, and more contagious than elephantiasis.”

Keeping rules of hygiene while preparing food is mandated in hisba manuals (tracts for regulating the market). Two narratives reflect the mistrust in Jews who prepare food for Muslims, with the fear of the Jews polluting it. Lice, which appear in the third narrative, were known to develop from filth, sweat, or stench. Eating them is prohibited in Islam, as well as food with which they have come into contact. It was, however, a practice that was observed by the Arabs of the Jāhiliya, as we learn from al-Jāḥiẓ; thus following this custom, even unknowingly, desecrates the body of Muslims and brings them closer to the state of unbelievers. Eating lice was not only related to the fear of pollution, but also to the anxiety of identification with barbarian peoples outside the realm of Islam.

In addition to these three narratives on the impurity of the Jews, two of them dealing with food, al-Maghīlī includes the Jewish dietary laws among one of the strongest signs of Jewish enmity towards Muslims:

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How loathsome and disgraceful are those who come in the proximity of [the Jews]! Whenever one of them is looking at us, his attitude reveals his hatred, invective, and slandering (bughḍ, sabb, ʿaʾn) against us and our religion to the extent of prohibiting themselves eating from our food, our slaughtered meat, and the food that we prepare in our pots. Their worst crime is their criticism of our religion, mocking our prayers, and insulting our master and protector Muḥammad, who is our beloved one and intercessor.⁶⁶

al-Maghīlī, as a result, warns his audience against the food of the kitābī (scripturalist, i.e., Jew or Christian), which he divides into three categories: (1) Life-Sustaining Food (taʾām al-ʿumr),⁶⁷ which they use for their consumption, and is reprehensible for Muslims to eat it. (2) Food of Unbelief (taʾām al-kufr), which they make for their houses of worship and holidays, and is prohibited for Muslims because the non-Muslims slaughter for a god other than Allāh, and represents the disbelief in the Prophet.⁶⁸ (3) Food of Deception (taʾām al-makr), which they prepare for Muslims and is not consumed by them, because they are “people of deceit, treachery, and extreme hatred (ghashsh, khadiʿa, ʿadāwa balīgha),” who can never be trusted. The Jews, for example, feed the Muslims with suspicious food, which might include prohibited meat (tarīfa; from the Hebrew terefah),⁶⁹ carrion, or wine.⁷⁰

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⁶⁷ On invocations, see Freidenreich, Foreigners and Their Food, pp. 132-133.

⁶⁸ As noticed by Vajda, al-Maghīlī is using here the Hebrew word terefah that designates the flesh of an animal that is unacceptable for consumption due to injury or disease. See Vajda, “Un traité maghrébin,” 2:810 n. 20; idem, “Adversos Judaeos: A Treatise from Magrib,” pp. 349 n. 20. Abū Ishāq al-Ilbirī has used the same Hebrew term in his ode: “[The Jews] slaughter beasts in our markets, and you eat their

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⁶⁹ al-Maghīlī, Risāla fī al-Yahūd (p. 68) and Gwarzo (p. 109, but see also n. 110) have here ghimr instead of ʿumr, which does not fit the context of the paragraph; Fenton's edition (al-Maghīlī, Abkām ahl al-dhimma, p. 556) has it correctly: ʿumr. For the meaning of ghimr, “concealed enmity or violent hatred,” see Lane, Lexicon, 6:2292.

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⁷⁰ As noted by Vajda, al-Maghīlī is using here the Hebrew word terefah that designates the flesh of an animal that is unacceptable for consumption due to injury or disease. See Vajda, “Un traité maghrébin,” 2:810 n. 20; idem, “Adversos Judaeos: A Treatise from Magrib,” pp. 349 n. 20. Abū Ishāq al-Ilbirī has used the same Hebrew term in his ode: “[The Jews] slaughter beasts in our markets, and you eat their
Unlike other Sunnī authorities,\(^{71}\) al-Maghīlī prohibits Muslims to eat any meat slaughtered by Jews, and quotes a \(ḥadīth\) in which the Caliph ‘Umar outlaws the employment of Jewish butchers as well as money-exchangers from amongst the Jews, and decrees that these should be evacuated from Muslim markets.\(^{72}\) Equally, we find that Abū Ḥishāq al-Ilbirī accuses the Jews in his diatribe for selling their animals in the Muslim marketplace, and that Muslims eat the meat the Jews reject as \(ṭerefaḥ;\)\(^{73}\) in Ibn ‘Abdūn’s \(ḥisba\) manual, Jews are prohibited from slaughtering meat for Muslims.\(^{74}\) One \(fatwā\) in Wansharīṣī’s collection of legal responses, \(al-\text{Mi}ˈyār al-\text{mu}ˈ\text{rib},\) exemplifies the practices of sharing food with non-coreligionists, in this case Jews offering matzot (\(\text{raghā}ˈ\text{if}\)) to their Muslim neighbours over the holiday of Passover (\('id\ \text{al}-\text{fītr}, \ 'id\ \text{al}-\text{fāṭīra}.\) The \(qādī\) Abū ‘Abdālla b. al-Azraq (Granada, d. after 1492) who was asked about the lawfulness of this practice, replied that Muslims are prohibited from receiving any gifts from the hands


\(^{71}\) al-Maghīlī, \textit{Aḥkām aḥl al-dhimma}, pp. 556-557.

\(^{72}\) Freidenreich, \textit{Foreigners and Their Food}, pp. 147-149. Nurit Tsafrir (“The Attitude of Sunnī Islam,” pp. 326-328) presents the four schools of Sunnī law as tolerant towards eating meat slaughtered by \(\text{dhimmīs}\).

\(^{73}\) Lewis, “An Ode against the Jews,” pp. 170. On \(\text{ṣerefaḥ}\) see the note above.

of Christians and Jews, who are considered to be the enemies of God (Q. 60:1), and from showing any signs of kindness to the unbelievers.\(^{75}\)

In addition to the accusation of Jews for being filthy and impure, and the prohibition on Muslims of eating food prepared by them, al-Maghīlī calls the Jews “monkeys,” or more precisely, “monkey brethren” (\(i\)khwān \(q\)irada).\(^{76}\) This is in accordance with the Qur’ānic verses telling the story of the transformation (\(m\)askh) of Jews into monkeys (Q. 2:65; 5:60; 7:163-166). This technique makes the Jews loathsome in the eyes of Muslims, and places them below humankind, in contrast to their prestigious status in the Muslim courts. Moreover, the name “monkeys” was generally reserved for Jews in Islamic polemic, and especially in the West, as one can learn, in addition to the \(A\)ḥkām of al-Maghīlī, from Abū Ishāq al-Ilbiri’s invective.\(^{77}\)

Mark R. Cohen explains these derogatory references to “monkeys” in the eschatological context of post-Qur’ānic literature, as a warning and threat towards “Judaizers” from among the Muslims, in a similar manner to the preaching of St. John Chrysostom of Antioch in the fourth century against Christian “Judaizers” who imitated Jewish practices, that is – a tactic aimed at

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\(^{75}\) al-Wansharīst, \(al-M\)īyār \(al-m\)u\(r\)ib, 11:111-112; Vincent Lagardère, \(H\)istoire et société en occident musulman au moyen âge: Analyse du \(M\)īyār d’al-Wansharīst (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas; Casa de Velázquez, 1995), p. 482 #83. García-Sanjuán (“El consumo de alimentos de los dīmīmēs,” p. 145 n. 111) assumes that Passover in this \(f\)atwā is named ‘\(i\)d \(a\)l-\(f\)āṭr after the Islamic holiday. al-Maqrīzī refers to the matzah as \(a\)l-\(k\)hubz \(a\)l-\(f\)āṭr, and to the holiday as ‘\(i\)d \(a\)l-\(f\)āṭr. See Yehoshua Frenkel, “\(a\)l-Maqrīzī on the Jewish Holidays” [Heb.], in \(T\)eshurah le-Tsafrirah: \(M\)ehqārim ba-Miqra, be-toldot \(Y\)isra’el \(w\)a-Mizrāḥ ha-qadam mugashim le-Tsafrirah Ben-Baraq [A Gift for Tsafrirah: Studies in the Bible, Jewish History, and the Ancient Near East, Presented to Tsafrirah Ben-Baraq], Mayer I. Gruber et al., eds. (Be’er Sheva’: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2012), pp. 339-340 (Arabic). For a Hebrew reference to ‘\(i\)d \(a\)l-\(f\)āṭr as the Islamic “Passover,” see the \(I\)tinerary of Benjamin of Tudela, trans. in Martin Jacobs, “From Lofty Caliphs to Uncivilized ‘Orientals’: Images of the Muslim in Medieval Jewish Travel Literature,” \(J\)ewish Studies Quarterly, 18 (2011), p. 75; idem, \(R\)eorienting the East: \(J\)ewish Travelers to the \(M\)edieval \(M\)uslim \(W\)orld (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), p. 130. See also a \(f\)atwā on exchanging gifts between Christians and Muslims during Christian holidays in al-Wansharīst, \(al-M\)īyār \(a\)l-mu\(r\)ib, 11:150-152.

\(^{76}\) al-Maghīlī, \(A\)ḥkām ahī al-dīmmīma, p. 554, 557.


The same eschatological tendencies suggested by Cohen, directed against Muslim “Judaizers” and therefore intended to purify the Muslim society of “Jewish” evil-doing, is evidently what we find in al-Maghīlī’s poem that closes out the \textit{Aḥkām}:

\begin{quote}

من قُرب أنصار اليهود
وأكرموا دين اليهود
وُحَبٌّ أُصلِّ أُصلُهم
ورفعوا دين اليهود
واسترجعوا وصُفُّوا
من نصر رهط اليهود
رَبٌّ الورى فيما مضى
مٓن رضيتب عنه اليهود
في كل سوق لا يبور
على النصارى واليهود
المصطفى الهادي النبي
شملت بأنصار اليهود
وكل مطلب وولي
صبب البلا من فوقهم
وافتح لهم من محقه
إلا الذين استغفروا
وبينوا ما سَتِروا
حتى استفتَقَمت الحدود
وكتب لهم منك الرضى
فعجزب فهم من قضى
وعجزب فهم من قضى
\end{quote}

\footnote{al-Maghīlī, \textit{Aḥkām ahl al-dhimma}, pp. 563-564 (my translation).}
For the sake of the Loving Lord

I dissociate myself\textsuperscript{80} from the supporters of the Jews,

People who disgraced their religion,
And respected the religion of the Jews.
It is sufficient for a youth [to know] their disgrace,
And the wickedness that is the essence of their actions.

They turned away from their religion,
And exalted the religion of the Jews.

Had they have only turned their back,\textsuperscript{81}
Repented, and asked for God’s forgiveness.
Had they concealed their manifest support
To the Jewish community.
Do you not see how the Lord of Humankind
Decreed in the past?
How can he achieve God’s pleasure,
He with whom the Jews are pleased?
There is no doubt that truth is like light
That cannot be sold in any market.

The Patient Lord will support it
Against the Christians and Jews.
O my Lord, [I pray to you] through your Prophet,
The chosen one, the guide, and pious,
And through every great saint and holy man:
Bring misery on the supporters of the Jews;
Pour calamity on them
And erase the remains of their fortune.
And on their extermination
Open for them the gate for hellfire,

Except for those who repent
And mend what they have damaged,
And those who revealed what they concealed,
Until extremities are made correct.
Forgive them for what has passed,
And inscribe them with your pleasure;

\textsuperscript{80} bari’tu. Fenton’s translation (p. 549) says: “I am turning” (to God); but see EI\textsuperscript{2}, “Barā’a” (R. Rubinacci) and “Tabarru’” (J. Calmard).

\textsuperscript{81} dabarū’, not dabbarū’, as the edition says, which means: “they planned, organized.”
And hurry with those among them who died
To the Gardens of Eternity.

In another poem, which is not included in the *Ahkām*, al-Maghīlī says:

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19 يقاتل عنهم تسعد بمحمد
وقد كنت تفوز بالرضي بمحمد
فيا فوز من أقتفى عدو محدث
لمنه وأنت من فريق محمد
أتخشون أنصار اليهود وإنهم
حقيق حقيق كافر بمحمد
كلا با لأعداء النبي محمد
ويعودونه من أولياء محمد
وقتل وصبي من جنود محمد
حمانا جمي لأعداء دين محمد
لقد سمع الجبار قول جميعهم
بأرها نتدي عدو محمد
مقاتلتهم في أولياء محمد
لقد سمع الجبار جان جلاله
ومع بعس في حمي عبد محمد
ونحن جميع عزنا بمحمد
فيا فوز من عمنى نصير محمد

20 علیكم بقتل اليهود وكذ من
علىكم عباد الله فيهم بكل ما
أولئك أعداء النبي حقيقة
أتخشون أنصار اليهود وإنهم
تأخرون أنصار اليهود وكلهم
حقيق حقيق كفر بمحمد
تراهم وإن كانوا ملوكا بزعهم
تراهم لهم يجرعون فيما يسرهم
عليهم من الجبار جزي لعنة
لقد سمع الجبار قول جميعهم
لقد سمع الجبار قول جميعهم
مقاتلتهم في أولياء محمد
لقد سمع الجبار جان جلاله
ومع بعس في حمي عبد محمد
ونحن جميع عزنا بمحمد
فيا فوز من عمنى نصير محمد

30 أموالا من الدين غيرك فانتصر
أموالا قلوا عرهم ليهودهم
عليه صلاة الله ثم سلامه
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Notice that God watches you;  
He is a friend of the followers of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Notice that God, may he be glorified,  
is the enemy of Muḥammad’s enemies.

Notice the one you approve, and reject the enemies;  
observe the law of one who protects the enemy of Muḥammad.

Notice the one you approve, and reject the enemies;  
observe the law of one who provides shelter for the enemy of Muhammad.
Notice the one you approve, and reject the enemies; observe the law of one who accepts the enemy of Muḥammad.
Your enemy is the one who protects your enemy; woe to the one who protects the enemy of Muhammad!
Your enemy is the one who provides shelter for the enemy of Muḥammad; woe to the one who provides shelter for the enemy of Muḥammad!
Your enemy is the one who accepts the enemy of Muḥammad; woe to the one who accepts the enemy of Muḥammad!
Do you approve the one who protects the friend of your enemy as if you protect the enemy of Muḥammad?
Do you approve the one who provides shelter for the friend of your enemy as if you provide shelter for the enemy of Muḥammad?
Do you approve the one who accepts shelter for the friend of your enemy as if you accept the enemy of Muḥammad?
The infidels, enemies of God, overpowered you, the enemies of the choice of messengers, Muḥammad. But you decided to accept them and help them in defiance of the best [followers] of Muḥammad’s religion As if you have never heard any sûra of the Qurʾān (al-dhikr) or you are among the unfaithful to Muḥammad!

O community of Islam, have you not learned your lesson? You observe nothing from the laws of Muḥammad. You must kill and captivate the infidels, [those] pigs who reject the Qurʾān (dhikr) of Muḥammad. You must kill the Jews, who are the most hostile enemies of Muḥammad. You must kill the Jews, the way it happened in Khaybar under the sword, the sword of Muḥammad. You must kill the Jews, and anyone who kills them will receive Muḥammad’s blessing.

O servants of God, you must [kill them] the way you were decreed, so you’ll receive Muḥammad’s favor. These are the true enemies of the Prophet, and there is a reward for the one who annihilates the enemies of Muḥammad.
Are you afraid of the friends of the Jews? They [stand] by their side, while you are the followers of Muḥammad!
Are you afraid of the friends of the Jews, who are all
loathsome and disgraceful, and unfaithful to Muḥammad.

Look at them, they are kings (mulūk),
[those] dogs, the enemies of the Prophet Muḥammad.

25 Look at them, they do whatever they like,
and receive protection from the friends of Muḥammad.
May the Almighty put curse and disgrace upon them!
May they be killed and captivated by the soldiers of Muḥammad!
O Almighty, hear what everybody says:
“Protect us from the enemies of Muḥammad!”
O Almighty, hear what everybody says:
“We will redeem ourselves by killing the enemy of Muḥammad!”
O Almighty, may he be glorified, hear
what they say of the followers of Muḥammad.

30 Is my master holding a religion different than yours? Hurry
and defeat the one who protects the enemy of Muḥammad!
Is my master the one who honors the Jews?
We all honor Muḥammad!
Peace and blessings be upon him,
What a blessing will come to the one who becomes the friend of Muḥammad!

In order to teach the Muslims to dissociate from the Jews and their adherents, the polemic of al-Maghīlī opens with the obligation of avoiding the unbelievers (ijtīnāb al-kuffār), since “the believers are friends among themselves, and the unbelievers friends among themselves.”83 Thus, the author, like in the poem above, sees the conflict between two camps: the followers of the Prophet and the true believers, vs. the Jews and their

83 al-Maghīlī, Aḥkām ahl al-dhimma, p. 552. Cf. Q. 5:51, “O you who have believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies/friends (awlīya’). They are allies of one another. And whoever is an ally to them among you – then indeed, he is one of them. Indeed, God guides not the wrongdoing people.” On the interpretation of this verse in medieval and modern times, see Hakan Çoruha, “Friendship between Muslims and the People of the Book in the Qur’an with Special Reference to Q 5.51,” Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations, 23.4 (2012), pp. 505-513; Johanna Pink, “Tradition and Ideology in Contemporary Sunni Qur’ānic Exegesis: Qur’ānic Commentaries from the Arab World, Turkey and Indonesia and their Interpretation of Q 5:51,” Die Welt des Islams, 50 (2010), pp. 3-59. The Qur’ān (5:82) also differentiates between Jews and pagans vs. Christians, describing the hatred of the first ones to Muhammad’s religion as harsher: “You will surely find the most intense of the people in animosity (aḥshaddū al-nās ‘adāwa) toward the believers among the Jews and those who associate others with God; and you will find the nearest of them in affection (agrābahum mawadda-tan) to the believers those who say, ‘We are Christians’. That is because among them are priests and monks and because they are not arrogant.”
supporters. The motif of “friendship” comes many times in the *Aḥkām*, such as in calling God *al-Rabb al-Wadūd* (the Loving Lord), or in the idiom: “in every hostility there is hope for friendship (*mawadda*), except for the hostility of your enemy in religion,” using in both cases the root letters of w-d-d to indicate affection and amity. In order to achieve solidarity and activism among Muslims against Jews and “Judaizers,” al-Maghīlī quotes substantially from the Qu’ran:

Those who take unbelievers for their friends instead of believers, do they seek glory in them? Glory altogether belongs to God (Q. 4:139).

Do not let the believers take the unbelievers for friends, rather than the believers, for whoever does that will never be helped by God, except when taking precaution against them. God warns you that you beware of Him, and to God is the final return (Q. 3:29).

God, as we learn from the many quotations of Qur’anic verses, is the only friend and helper of the believers. Following this argument, the author turns now to the hadīth literature in order to give evidence for the necessary loyalty to Muḥammad, citing the tradition, “None is a true believer until I become better beloved in his eyes than his father, his son, or the entire people”; and adds:

My friend is the one, who shows hostility to my rival,
And heals what is in my heart towards my enemies;
The one who raises his objective among the banners [of war],
And abandons his wishes to my desire.\(^{84}\)

Finally, al-Maghīlī identifies his enemies as the followers of Satan. Every single Jew, whom the polemicist sees as an unbeliever (*kāfir*), is a friend and supporter of the

cursed Satan (*walī li-l-Shaytan al-la‘īn*), the manifest enemy of Islam. “[Satan] overpowered [the Jew], controlled his mind and entire senses, and dragged him by his forelock until he was paralyzed, and could not say a word except in accordance with his [Satan’s] opinion. Every believer, then, should realize by the light of his belief, that every Jew is Satan (*Iblīs*) himself, and that he should flee away from the Jew with his belief, so that the Jew may not deceive him unsuspectingly.”

Dragging by the forelock, which is a reference to Q. 11:56, 55:41, 96:15-16, is an act of humiliation and repentance, whereas here it is the total defeat of the Jew in front of the malicious desires of Satan.

### IV. Conclusions

Reading the *Aḥkām*, one might ask: What is new in al-Maghīlī? To what extent is he simply employing and activating existing polemics to a particular purpose, and to what extent is he doing something new? Is this something that can happen anywhere anytime, or has a particular set of new conditions arisen?

The malicious tone of al-Maghīlī’s polemics in the *Aḥkām*, might not be completely new, as evident from the examples shown above, of Ibn Ḥazm and Abū Ishāq al-Ilbīrī’s anti-Jewish works; it could be judged, however, as being extremely virulent in comparison to these two, especially because of its call for spilling the blood of male Jews and enslaving their women, treating them as if they were unbelievers (*kuffār*). al-Maghīlī, on the spectrum of ‘Believers’ (Muslims) to ‘Unbelievers’ (idolaters), ignores, therefore, the definition of Jews as the ‘People of the Scripture’ (together with the Christians: *ahl*...
al-kitāb) and as a community of monotheists who deserve the protection (dhimma) of Islam, and puts them in one category with the idolaters who deserve death. The goal of his tract is to prove that by close interaction with the Jews, the community of Muslim believers suffers degradation and corruption, and does not follow the example of the Prophet Muḥammad. Taking the example of the Prophet, as a model for his harsh and uncompromising treatment of the Jews of Arabia, is evident from the numerous quotations from the Qur’ān in the Aḥkām (not relying so much on the hadīth, the traditions of the Prophet); the first section of this tract, that is devoted to the required love for the Prophet and simultaneously to avoiding the unbelievers (ijtināb al-kuffār); and from a poem devoted to the Prophet, but not included in the Aḥkām, in which al-Maghīlī mentions the massacre of the Jews of Khaybar.87 Like Muḥammad (in the time of the conquests of Arabia), and his followers in the more recent history of the Maghrib, that is, the Almohads, who referred to themselves simply as muʿminūn (believers), as did Muḥammad’s early devotees,88 it was al-Maghīlī’s intention to remove the Jewish communities away from the realm of Islam.89

Moreover, the Aḥkām presents a unique case because of the style of the author and the wealth of sources on him and on his time, including on the Maghrībī Jews.90 Jews

90 See Table 4: Sources on al-Maghīlī and the Riots in Touat (c. 1492).
holding positions of power has a long history in the Islamic West (i.e. in al-Andalus and the Maghrib), and it is suffice to give the examples of Ḥasdai ibn Shaprut (d. 970), a prominent dignitary in the Umayyad court of Córdoba, and Samuel ibn Naghrila (Samuel ha-Nagid; d. 1056), a vizier in service of the Zīrid Berbers of Granada; Maimonides, as a court physician to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (Saladin; d. 1193), is another well-known example from medieval Islamic history.⁹¹ Focusing, therefore, on the Jews who served the Maghribī sultans in the Āḥkām, gives as an example for the debate within Islamic circles over the “Judaization” of politics in the Maghrib of the Later Islamic Middle Period, and for the excessive degree of Jewish interaction with Muslims, from the point of view of a militaristic scholar such as al-Maghīlī.⁹² If we accept Leo Africanus’ account for al-Maghīlī being a preacher, a fact that is not mentioned in the Muslim-Arabic biographies of this scholar, but does not contradict them, we might consider the structure of the Āḥkām and the narratives in them, to be a product of al-Maghīlī’s anti-Jewish preaching in the oasis of Touat.⁹³

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CONCLUSIONS

Jewish medieval history was the product of Western academies. As such, it produced historiographical studies of the Jewish Middle Ages that reflected the ideas of Jewish scholars, some of them were the founders of the Wissenschaft des Judentums in nineteenth century Germany, and of the European (non-Jewish and Jewish) scholarship on the Middle Ages. In Jewish scholarship, it was a common theme to refer to the Middle Ages as an era of persecution, the ‘lachrymose’ approach to Jewish history, that has it origins in sixteenth and seventeenth chronologies of suffering throughout history. Hence, Leopold Zunz (1794-1884) perceived the Middle Ages to be an era of continuous suffering; and Heinrich Graetz (1817-1891) adopted the ‘lachrymose’ approach while also examining with the intellectual life of the Jews throughout the ages.\(^{94}\)

This was the common image of Jewish life in medieval Europe. The Islamic civilization, however, usually offered a different model. Jewish scholars portrayed a positive image of Jewish life under Islam, and understood the Jews to be a part of the wider Islamic civilization. Thus, the idea of ‘interfaith utopia,’ which was not possible in medieval Europe, was projected towards the Islamic world. The focus, nonetheless, was on ‘Arab’ Islam, due to the Arabophile inclinations of Jewish scholars.\(^{95}\) The model of


'symbiosis’ was adopted to ‘classical’ Islam, that is, between the years ca. 600-1258, seeing in the Later Middle Ages an era of decline of the Islamic civilization. Daniel Schroeter writes:

For those who focus on the ‘Arab’ Islamic world, Islamic decline set in a much earlier date, around 1200 according to the traditional understanding […] In Jewish historiography, the decline theory is based on a number of assumptions, but with somewhat different criteria. Goitein was following the conventional model of orientalist scholars who saw the Mamluk period as marking Arab decline, characterized by cultural, intellectual and scientific stagnation in contrast to the emergence of European culture in the Renaissance. There is a convergence between intellectual or cultural contributions to civilization and the mobility and prosperity of Jewish merchants. […] Most accounts of Middle Eastern Jewry pay scant attention to the next 300 years of history (the decline period), picking up the threads when the Ottomans came to rule the Middle East.

In the Islamic West, the fall of al-Andalus into the hands of the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties (twelfth and thirteenth centuries) signifies the end of the ‘Jewish Golden Age,’ or of the end of interfaith coexistence, convivencia, in the Iberian Peninsula. Therefore, the interest in Jews living under the Islamic rule of Iberia and the Maghrebi lands post-

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1200 declined as long as the ‘convergence,’ identified by Schroeter, between the Jewish fate and the ‘Arab’ Islamic fate, the intertwining of their history through ‘symbiosis,’ seemed to be deteriorating. The focus in modern scholarship was mostly given to the pre-1200 period: the Jews of the Geonic period in Babylon, and the rise of al-Andalus with its ‘Jewish Golden Age,’ and with the discovery of the Geniza documents at the turn of the twentieth century, to the ‘Classical Geniza Period’ (tenth-thirteenth centuries). The ‘Arab eclipse’ of the Later Middle Ages, as defined by Goitein, meant also the eclipse of Jewish life under medieval Islam.

This dissertation sought, however, to reexamine Jewish-Islamic exchange in its social and intellectual aspects in what has been considered the ‘post-classical’ era of Islam, between 1200-1500 C.E. In chapter 1, I studied the composition of an Arabic commentary on the Song of Songs by a forced convert to Islam in the Almohad period, Joseph ibn ‘Aqnīn, demonstrating the continuation, not so much the break, of Jewish knowledge and usage of Islamic materials. Ibn ‘Aqnīn, a contemporary of Maimonides who was living in Fes, wished to write a philosophical commentary on the Song by relying on Farabian philosophy and materials taken from Islamic literature. Chapter 2 examined the contents of a mystical treatise by David ben Joshua Maimonides, which shows an intimate knowledge of Sufi literature and creates a dialogue with it in order to create a new composition, a Jewish-Muslim hybrid, written in Judeo-Arabic, in defense of the Maimonidian movement of piety (ḥasidut) and in competition of Sufi teachings and practices. Lastly, chapter 3 dealt with the vicious attack of a Muslim preacher, Muḥammad al-Maghīlī, against the Jews of fifteenth-century Maghrib, a polemical work that is concerned with the social aspects of Jewish life among the Muslims, and not so
much with religious polemic against Judaism. al-Maghīlī’s diatribe against the Jews was written when they still kept their power – in relative terms – in the communities of West Africa, and where important part of the trade along the Sahara. Moreover, the polemic also testifies for the close relations of Jews with the Muslim rulers of the Maghrib, and that al-Maghīlī’s attack against two Jewish Saharan communities was not approved by the Muslim authorities of his time, despite the ideal of Muslim superiority over the non-Muslims.

Instead of letting Jews and Muslims of the Later Middle Ages ‘fade’ from the pages of medieval history, I wished to bring them back to the front, and study their history with a critical outlook towards the ‘lachrymose’ approach or the ‘golden age’ ideal, while trying to expose the complicated history of Jewish creativity under late medieval Islam. I see great importance in retelling and reinvestigating the history of the 300 years that were mostly erased from modern historiography, the life of Jews in Egypt the Mamluk period (1250-1517), that has not received much attention since the early 1950, and the Maghrebi Jews post the twelfth century, who are being treated as living under the shadow of the end of the ‘Spanish Golden Age,’ and constantly suffering persecution and oppression. New history of Jewish life in the Islamic lands of the Late Middle Ages still waits to be written.

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