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Studies on Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought

by Dov Schwartz

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INTRODUCTION

This book deals with a specific kind of magic,[1] widespread among Jewish intellectuals from the early twelfth century onwards and known as astral magic. The focus of the discussion is on the period up to the expulsion from Spain. Astral magic is predicated on the assumption that individuals can utilize celestial elements for their benefit and advantage. Stars and signs release a constant and steady emanation known as *rūhaniyyāt* [spirituality], which is also endowed with extraordinary forces. The quality of the emanation and the character of the supreme forces are determined by the influencing signs and planets and their location in heaven. The celestial emanation and the supreme forces can be absorbed and directed in the terrestrial world on condition suitable preparations are made, and their absorption is known as "drawing down" [*horadah* or *hanahah*]. The magician brings down this spirituality for practical purposes, such as changing the course of natural forces, predicting the future, or healing the sick. Exploiting this emanation or these celestial powers requires detailed and exact knowledge about the circumstances surrounding the sources of the emanation (the celestial bodies such as planets and constellations), as well as of the preparations required.

What ensures success in drawing down the stellar emanation? Preparations involve the creation or procuring, at a specific time, of an image, an effigy or an amulet that symbolize the emanating source, the planet or the constellation. This preparation presumes sympathetic interaction between heaven and earth, and between the symbol and what is symbolized. Often, the symbol of the emanating star or constellation is engraved on the image.[2]

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[1] The term magic in the present context is problematic. Many students of medieval astral magic would strongly contest this definition, emphasizing that this is a scientific field. But Aristotelian science, which was dominant during this period, did not recognize astral magic as a science and we have accordingly opted for the term *magic* that has no room in Aristotle's scientific world. This distinction between the Aristotelian scientific paradigm and the one stressing the phenomenon of magic is discussed at length in the book.

[2] For a concise summary, see, for instance, Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 131-133. Cosmic sympathy, on which astrology and astral magic are predicated, is a notion developed in Greek and

How does the magic action take place? The magician's act involves several stages:

1. A meticulous examination of the specific configuration of stars and constellations that could yield the desired result. For instance, if the aim is to heal sickness, magicians will consult astrological and magical sources to find out what stellar configuration will summon the emanation that will cure the illness. The configuration might be a specific constellation rising on the horizon ("ascendant")', a particular planet (*mesharet*) found within the sign's area ("house"), or the encounter of two planets within the sign's house ("conjunction"). Often, the configuration intended by the magician is quite elementary and includes only a single constellation or star.
2. Preparing an effigy or image that symbolizes the emanating celestial configuration.
3. Procuring the image at a time the stars and constellations are arranged in an influential configuration. In the present example, the magician places the effigy on the body part affected by the illness, when the star or constellation is influential.
4. Using various auxiliary techniques, such as incense burning, praying to the stars, invocations, using magic names, and so forth.

Systematic formulations of astral magic appear in the Hermetic literature of the first three centuries CE referring to the revelation of Hermes' secrets, the god identified with Thoth, the Egyptian god of wisdom. Both Greeks and Romans related to ancient Egyptian religion as a kind of "ancient truth" and hence singularly significant. Systematic formulations of astral magic, then, develop as the pagan mythological religions in the ancient East and in the Hellenistic world are waning. Hermetic literature includes a philosophical world view that comprises Neoplatonic, Stoic, and Eastern elements, together with astrological conceptions and detailed techniques of magic and astral magic.[3] These techniques were meant to assist in attaining the

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Roman culture, particularly in the Stoa. Stoic philosophers systematically formulate the notion of sympathy as part of their outlook on immanence. See, for instance, Samuel Sambursky, *Physics of the Stoics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 41-43; Robert B. Todd, "Monism and Immanence: The Foundations of Stoic Physics" in *The Stoics*, ed. John M. Rist (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 151; Liba Chaia Taub, *Ptolemy's Universe: The Natural Philosophical and Ethical Foundations of Ptolemy's Astronomy* (Chicago, Ill.: Open Court, 1993), 129.

[3] In many astrological and magical traditions, Hermes' name is linked to hermetic

speculative and ecstatic goal to which Hermetic literature directs its readers. *Aesculapius*, a philosophical work in the Hermetic corpus, formulates the magic principle of drawing down spirituality on images in Hermes' answer to a question by Aesculapius, who gives the book its name:

> [The qualities of the gods and their influences[4]] come from a mixture of plants, stones and spices, Asclepius, that have in them a natural power of divinity.[5] And this is why those gods are entertained with constant sacrifices, with hymns, praises and sweet sounds in tune with heaven's harmony:[6] so that the heavenly ingredient enticed into idol by constant communication with heaven[7] may gladly endure its long stay among humankind.[8]

Magic and theurgic views also feature in the Neoplatonic writings of Proclus and Iamblichus, and Hermetism also played a significant role in the growth of alternative approaches to the Aristotelian *Welt-anschauung*. The scientific Aristotelian legacy states that the physical order of the material world is explainable mainly from within and without recourse to supernal levels, so that the origin of the laws of movement, for instance, should not be sought in the celestial world. The doctrine of natural locations, whereby each of the four elements (earth, water, air, and fire) strives to return to its natural setting, explains the movement of the elements. Aristotle makes the laws of the universe dependent on the celestial, supernal world only in specific

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literature and its surroundings. See, for instance, Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation: Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 54-55; Andre-Jean Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermés Trismegiste*, vol. 1, *L'astrologie et les sciences occultees* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1949); Idem, *Hermetisme et mystique païenne* (Paris: Aubier-montaigne, 1967); Frances Amelia Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 44-61.

[4] In the available Latin translation, *qualitas*, through which the writer refers to magical forces.

[5] In Latin, *divinitatis naturalem vim*. In Festugière's reading, cited in p. 256 of Copenhaver's translation (see note 8 below), "hidden spiritual power." Could also be read as "hidden celestial power."

[6] Reflecting the Pythagorical tradition, whereby the moving spheres make sounds.

[7] In Latin, *caelestius*. According to Nock's reading, cited in p. 257. It could also be translated as "celestial world."

[8] The passage as cited is from Brian P. Copenhaver, ed. and trans., *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation, with Notes and Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 90.

cases and, even then, confines it to the movement of the sun.[9] By contrast, other traditions, including the Hermetic one, seek to explain physical processes by relying to some extent on the stellar effect on the material world. According to these views, stellar emanations exert essential influence upon processes in the material world, a conception that paves the way for astral magic.

In the twelfth century, astral magic assumes a role in the philosophical discourse of Jewish-Spanish culture and becomes a convenient platform for various theological doctrines. Judah Halevi relies on astral magic rather than on theoretical considerations to explain the view that the commandments are the vehicle to religious perfection. Astral magic is based on experience, and is thus no different from astrology. Just as in astral magic the preparation is what draws the emanation down, in Judaism observing the commandments leads to the realization of prophecy. Judah Halevi attacks contemporary theoretical science by presenting Judaism as an alternative science, with astral magic as one of its most essential elements. Abraham Ibn Ezra also holds that astrology and astral magic are essential to the building of a Jewish theology. Since Ibn Ezra ascribes great value to astrology and even focuses his scientific concern on it, astrology becomes a mainstay of his biblical exegesis. The approach of these two thinkers will concern us in Chapter One of this book.

Maimonides' authority deals a fatal blow to this young theology. Maimonides targets his attack on astral magic, denies it any value, and forbids it on religious grounds, presenting it as idolatry. Maimonides' harsh critique is the subject of Chapter Two.

The rationalists' neglect of astral magic as a serious theological factor appears to have paved its way to the hearts of many Spanish kabbalists. Whereas the rationalists abandon any intensive concern with astral-magic theology during the thirteenth century, the kabbalists preserve these traditions and an entire school of Nahmanides' disciples turns astral magic into a legitimate theology, as discussed in Chapter Three.

Eventually, astral magic reaches the core of the philosophical-rationalist consensus prevalent in Provence and Spain. Toward the end of the thirteenth century, it is appropriated by many rationalists for its medical uses. University courses at Montpellier and Bologna, for

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[9] Aristotle, *De generatione et corruptione*, trans. C. J. F. Williams (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), II:10.

instance, begin teaching the uses of astral magic in healing. Bernard Gordon and Arnold of Villanova taught healing through amulets, as Joseph Shatzmiller shows.[10] Doctors were required to prove their astrological expertise to be allowed to practice. Times for the administration of medication were often set according to astrological methods.[11] Despite the conflict that erupted among Provence Jews, astral magic was not banned. The controversies in Provence and Spain are the subject of Chapters Four and Five.

The medical-practical uses of astral magic were probably instrumental in returning the theological concern with it. Paragons of fourteenth century rationalism consistently present exegeses of biblical texts directly based on principles of astral magic. At the same time, and rather naturally, Ibn Ezra is presented as a forerunner of Jewish rationalism, beside Maimonides. Supercommentaries on Ibn Ezra's biblical exegeses begin to appear, written by contemporary Spanish rationalists and emphasizing astral magic as an essential element of their interpretation. Chapter Six describes this phenomenon, marking the return of astral magic to the theological map.

The influence of Spanish culture is also evident in other geographical areas, some of them far-flung, which also came to endorse these modes of explanation. Among them is the group of Byzantine rationalist thinkers in the late Middle Ages that have hardly been studied. Chapter Seven, then, briefly outlines the structure and horizons of Byzantine rationalist thought during this period. Chapter Eight delves into the unique character of this culture's astral magical explanations. Some of the works influenced by Byzantine culture reflect Spanish approaches, while others are distinctly unique. The comparison between astral magical theology in Spanish and Byzantine cultures points to some unique Byzantine viewpoints. The epilogue outlines the implications of the studies in this book for the philosophy of science.

Preliminary or partial versions of various chapters in this book have been published before. Several chapters have appeared in Hebrew in

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[10] Joseph Shatzmiller, "In Search of the Book of Figures: Medicine and Astrology in Montpellier at the Turn of the Fourteenth Century," *AJS Review* 7/8 (1982/1983), 383-407; Joseph Shatzmiller, "The Forms of the *Twelve Constellations*: A Fourteenth Century Controversy," in *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume: On the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Moshe Idel, Warren Zeev Harvey and Eliezer Schweid (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought, 1988), 397-408.

[11] Per-Gunnar Ottoson, *Scholastic Medicine and Philosophy: A Study of Commentaries on Galen's Tegni ca. 1300-1450* (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1984), 258-259.

my two books on the subject: *Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1999) and *Amulets, Properties, and Rationalism in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2004). Others have been published as articles and are reprinted in this book by kind permission of the publishers. Chapter Two is to appear in *Maimonidean Studies* 5, by Yeshiva University. The Hebrew version of Chapter Three was published in *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 4 (1999): 387-411, Cherub Publishers. Abridged English versions of Chapters Three, Seven, and Eight appeared in *Aleph* 3 (2002): 165-211, and are reprinted by kind permission of *Aleph: Historical Studies in Judaism and Science*, published by The Sydney M. Edelstein Center for the History and Philosophy of Science, Technology and Medicine and the Institute of Jewish Studies, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

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CHAPTER ONE

JUDAH HALEVI AND ABRAHAM IBN EZRA

Astral magic begins to serve as a crucial theological element in Jewish thought at the beginning of the twelfth century, and one of the first thinkers to lay solid foundations for a magic astral exegesis of the Torah and its commandments is Judah Halevi. His arguments, discussed below in detail, will also provide clues to his style in *The Kuzari*.

Judah Halevi: Astral Magic and Esoteric Writing

The Thought and Literary Style of Judah Halevi

Scholars of Judah Halevi—the thinker, the poet, and the aesthete—recognize that attempts to understand the philosophical content of *The Kuzari* must take into account the book's form. The esoteric literary style *of The Kuzari*, which requires the reader to decipher contradictions and understand hints, has been recurrently discussed in the research literature, from Leo Strauss's pioneer work,[1] and up to studies by Shlomo Pines, Eliezer Schweid, Yohanan Silman, and others.[2] These scholars seek to show that Judah Halevi wavers between his recognition of philosophy, which is predicated on reason, and his perception of it as inferior to revelation. The esoteric character of Judah Halevi's literary style, however, is not confined to the status of reason; it is also reflected in other matters, such as his controversy with Christianity

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[1] Leo Strauss, "The Law of Reason in *The Kuzari*," in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), 95-141.

[2] On the literary style of *The Kuzari*, see, for instance, Shlomo Pines, "Note sur la doctrine de la prophétie et la réhabilitation de la Matière dans le Kuzari," *Mélanges de philosophie et de littérature juives* 1-2 (1956-1957): 253-260; Eliezer Schweid, "The Literary Structure of the First Book of *The Kuzari*" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 30 (1961): 257-272; Idem, "The Art of Dialogue in *The Kuzari* and its Speculative Meaning" [Hebrew], in *Feeling and Speculation* (Ramat Gan: Massada, 1970), 37-79; Aryeh Leo Motzkin, "On Judah Halevi's *The Kuzari* as a Platonic Dialogue" [Hebrew], *Iyyun* 28 (1978): 209-219; Yohanan Silman, *Philosopher and Prophet : Judah Halevi, The Kuzari, and the Evolution of his Thought*, trans. Lenn J. Schramm (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1995); Idem, "The Literary Aspect of *The Kuzari*" [Hebrew], *Da'at* 32-33 (1994): 53-65.

and his view of messianism.[3] The assumption of esotericism in the book thus requires a reconsideration of all its questions in light of its style, including the issue of astral magic. As shown below, the attitude toward astral magic will emerge as one of the peaks of esoteric writing in *The Kuzari*.

Several scholars have already adopted a magical interpretation of Judah Halevi's outlook regarding the commandments' mode of action and their function as a vehicle to perfection for those who abide by them. The most important study in this regard is Shlomo Pines' detailed study of *The Kuzari*'s magic-astral character.[4] Pines indicates that Judah Halevi equates the effect of the commandments with the bringing down of spirituality and explains the prophets' influence on their surroundings in light of the magic-astral model. Finally, Pines also shows that Judah Halevi explains in magic-astral terms the advantage of Judaism as a divine religion:

> What is the basis for *The Kuzari*'s statement concerning Judaism's superiority over pagan religions? Judah Halevi is unequivocal on this count: he holds, as noted in the passage quoted above (1:97), that Judaism is superior to religions relying on *rūhaniyyāt* [spirituality], on activities involving talismans, and so forth, because it is more efficient. The worship—the rituals—of the pagan religions resembles the actions of a layman working as a doctor, who uses the medicines in his possession without understanding their purpose, the required dosage, and the circumstances of their administration to the patient. Judaism, however, particularly as it had been known before the exile, abundantly provided and still continues to do so the required information and the ability to deal with issues for which religion ensures the most beneficial support. The utilitarian criterion, then, enables the comparison of which I spoke above, proving Judaism's superiority. If you will, Judaism is an efficient and useful theurgy, whereas the pagan religions to which Judah Halevi refers are intrinsically unfounded theurgies, because they are far from

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[3] See Dov Schwartz, *Messianism in Medieval Jewish Thought* [Hebrew] (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1997), 63-69. On the anti-Christian controversy, see idem, *Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought* [Hebrew] (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1999), 41-47, 58-61.

[4] Shlomo Pines, "On the Term *Rūhaniyyāt* and its Origin, and on Judah Halevi's Doctrine" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 57 (1988), especially 524-530. See also David H. Baneth, "R. Judah Halevi and Al-Ghāzalī" [Hebrew], *Knesset* 7 (1942): 328; Yitzhak Heinemann, *The Reasons for the Commandments in the Tradition* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: WZO, 1966); Moshe Idel, "Hermeticism and Judaism," in *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Ingrid Merkel and Allen Debus (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1988), 62.

> ensuring any benefits resembling the efficiency and usefulness that Judaism, as a theurgy, provides through its system of commandments.[5]

According to this passage, Judah Halevi presents a magic-astral perception of Judaism, viewing the commandments' mode of action as a parallel (and effective) model of magic-astral activity. Idolaters and image worshippers fail to bring down spirituality effectively, whereas those who observe the commandments receive the divine (astral?) emanation. The magic-astral model as a "true" key for the understanding of the commandments, including their details and their timing, was later endorsed in the doctrines of such thinkers as Abraham Ibn Ezra and Nahmanides.[6] In other contexts in the present volume, Judah Halevi also emerges as the paramount source for the incorporation of the astral magic model into the theological arguments of Jewish philosophy.

As noted, Pines' important discussion of *The Kuzari*'s magical character, like those of his predecessors, failed to take the book's esoteric style into account. This style emerges in a magic-astral context mainly in Judah Halevi's explanation of the sin of the golden calf (1:97). My chief claim in the discussion below is that Judah Halevi suggests the magic-astral explanation as the *sole* option for explaining this sin, hence the presentation of Judaism as a kind of effective astral magic technique.

A Divine v. an Astral Source

Judah Halevi indicates that the main motivation for the sin of the golden calf was the attraction of ancient paganism. He points to two views concerning the source of the emanation: God and the stars. The emanation can be exploited through "effigies" that symbolize its origin, such as the image of the calf. At the opening of his discussion on this issue, Judah Halevi writes as follows:

> Some of these nations ascribed this [referring to powers or "miraculous" and "strange" possibilities] to God, even as we do today concerning places we revere, to the point of finding ourselves blessed by them and by their dust and stones. Others ascribed this to the spirituality of a particular star or constellation, or of a talisman,[7] or other such things.[8]

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[5] Pines, "On the Term *Rūhaniyyāt* and its Origin," 529. Compare also *The Kuzari* 3:23.

[6] See below, 9-26 and 55-90.

[7] In the original Arabic, "*aw burǧ aw nisbah talāsim*." The original is cited from

According to the first view, the effigy is blessed by *divine emanation*, as the holy places illustrate. The divine emanation is a source of utilitarian achievements, and the effigy symbolizes and conveys the emanation. According to the second view, the effigy functions as an image for *drawing down the spirituality of the stars and signs*. Both views can explain the motivation behind the sin of the golden calf and Judah Halevi does not appear to have chosen between them. At the opening of section 1:97, then, we do not know what had been intended when making the golden calf—to draw down the divine emanation or the spirituality of the stars.

The rest of the discussion on the sin of the golden calf ostensibly points to the adoption of the former view, namely, that emanation is divine. According to Judah Halevi, God provided holy means, such as the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud, and Moses knew how to use them for beneficial purposes. Furthermore, Moses went up Mount Sinai to bring further devices that would be a source of blessing to the desert wanderers (the ark and the tablets):

> The children of Israel had been promised that God would send them a visible object that they could follow, as they had followed the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire when leaving Egypt, something concrete they would venerate, to which they would turn, before which they would bow to God's glory… and Moses ascended the mount in order to bring down the two tables of the law, written by the hand of God. In order for them to have a visible object that they could address, he [Moses] was supposed to build an ark for them to contain the sign of the covenant with God, the two tables that God Himself had created. It [the ark] would be wrapped in the cloud and in the glory, and miracles would become manifest through His intermediary.[9]

According to Judah Halevi's explanation, the ark is a source of divine blessing, and that is why it is said, "God resides in it."[10]

Yet, after the reader identifies the golden calf as a source of blessing, Judah Halevi makes a seemingly passing remark from which we

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Kītāb Al-Radd Wa-'l-Dalīl Fī'l-Dīn Al-Dhalīl (*Al-Kītāb Al-Khazarī*), ed. David H. Baneth (Jerusalem: Magnes Press and the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1977), 30, ll. 2-3. The Hebrew translation of Shmuel Ibn Tibbon is incorrect here. Ibn Tibbon, who may have wanted to play down the talismanic aspect, wrote here: "or a star from among the stars or a constellation or other such things."

[8] *The Kuzari* 1:97.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

infer his actual interpretation. The remark is implicit in the following apology:

> In committing this sin, the children of Israel had not sought release from the duty of obedience they owed to Him who had led them out of Egypt. They only violated one of His commandments, because God had banned effigies and they made one. They should have waited, without setting up for themselves an image for worship, an altar, and sacrifices. And they did so on the advice of astrologers and builders of talismans[11] who had thought that their actions, as dictated by reason, would be more correct than true deeds. In doing this, they behaved as the fool of whom we have already spoken [1:89], who entered the doctor's surgery and killed the people who had formerly been helped by the medicines provided there.[12]

In this passage, Judah Halevi reveals his view: the golden calf was made in order to receive and absorb stellar emanations according to the advice of the sorcerers who draw down spirituality from the planets ("astrologers and builders of talismans"). *Ab initio*, then, Judah Halevi tends to explain the sin of the golden calf according to principles of astral magic, whereas the alternative explanation, presented first and discussed below, was meant to conceal the genuine magic-astral leanings. Hence, the other objects that had been the source of a blessing—the pillar of cloud, the pillar of fire, the tablets, and the ark—have astral-magic meaning.

The reason for the concealment and the writing between the lines is patent. Judah Halevi presents a new, magic-astral interpretation of the events in the desert. According to this interpretation, the people of Israel were a nation of slaves recently liberated and released into the desert's dangers and terrors. In order to satisfy their ongoing needs, they needed means to draw down spirituality and they also needed Moses, who knew how to attract the astral emanation. According to the utilitarian magic-astral explanation, the people of Israel feared the perils lurking in a menacing desert, and felt even more threatened when Moses disappeared after ascending the mount without announcing his return. Hence, they made the golden calf as an alternative to the previous devices, seeking an image and an effigy that would help

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[11] In the original, "*al-munjimīn wal-mutalsimīn*" (Baneth, *Kītāb Al-Radd*, 31, ll. 7-8), and this is also how Judah ibn Shmuel translates. Ibn Tibbon translated "seers and astrologers," insisting on concealing the talismanic aspect.

[12] *The Kuzari*, 1:97.

them survive in the desert. Their sin, then, or that of some of them, is the *initiative* to create effigies to draw down the emanation instead of waiting for God to guide them on how to do this. God did indeed deliver such guidance in the shape of the commandments: "Making the effigies was not itself foreign, since He commanded us to make the cherubim."[13] Judah Halevi, then, holds that talismans ("effigies") of some kind were placed in the Tabernacle and the Temple in order to bring down spirituality.

Ancient Wisdom

We can now surmise why Judah Halevi wished to cloak astral magic in secrecy and conceal it behind hints meant for the wise. The esoteric status of astral magic reflected the status of astrology in general. The Khazar king accurately discerns that the commandments' mode of action rests on "powers reigning over hours, days, and places, as the astrologers do."[14] In his response, the Rabbi criticizes astrologers directly:

> Do we reject the idea that heavenly spheres influence terrestrial matters? We do not! We recognize that matter, which generates and corrupts, is subject to the Sphere, but the forms are given by Him who guides them, sets them into action, and uses them as instruments to generate all the beings He wishes should exist. We do not know the precise details of this process whilst the astrologer pretends to know the particulars, but we deny he has this knowledge and categorically declare that no mortal possesses it. If we find in this knowledge any element that relies on the authority of a revealed divine science, we accept it. We rest satisfied with the mentions of astrology in the words of our sages because we believe it to be transmitted by a divine power and hold it to be true. Otherwise, this science is but conjecture, and our earthly lot has more truth to it.[15]

This passage clarifies that the Rabbi agrees with the underlying assumption of the Khazar king. The mechanism of the halakhic act is indeed based on the changing influences of the stars, according to the time and place. Furthermore, Jewish sources endorse astrological theories, and this is the meaning of the minimalist statement in the above passage: the astrological material that appears in rabbinic

[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 4:8.
[15] Ibid., 4:9.

literature is valid. Judah Halevi's critique, therefore, is not directed against the principles of astrology itself—including its influence on human character, on the nation and on the world, as suggested in the talmudic quoted intimated in this passage—but against the astrologers' pretension to know them without the "divine power." It is in this spirit that we must understand the constant deprecation of astrology as "vanities" throughout *The Kuzari*,[16] as well as the transformation undergone by Abraham, who was told: "'Go forth from thy planet gazing' [TB Sabbath 156b]. That is to say, He commanded him to leave off his speculative researches, such as astrology, and cleave to His worship."[17] Astrology is therefore rejected as are the other sciences, including philosophy (5:2), as a weakness of human reasoning in search for the revealed truth. The principles of astrology, however, remain valid, *and can only be discovered through revelation*. One instance of such knowledge is the fact that the Land of Israel "possesses a special power in its air, its soil, and its heaven."[18]

The special attitude toward astrology leads us to trace the reasons behind the concealment of the magic-astral outlook in *The Kuzari*. When dealing with the golden calf in general, Judah Halevi emphasizes that preparing effigies was a practice widespread in the ancient world although, in the course of time, these mysteries were distorted by "dissolute"[19] nations. When presenting the philosopher's view, Judah Halevi chooses to introduce several figures representing the pinnacle of intellectual attainment, such as "Hermes, Aesculapius, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle,"[20] individuals in conjunction with the Active Intellect.

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[16] Ibid., 1:49; 4:23.

[17] Ibid., 4:17. See also 4:27.

[18] Ibid., 4:17. This passage shows that the closeness and association of the Land of Israel with "heaven" have distinctive astrological meanings. For other meanings, see Yohanan Silman, "The Earthliness of the Land of Israel in *The Kuzari*" [Hebrew], in *The Land of Israel in Medieval Jewish Thought*, ed. Moshe Hallamish and Aviezer Ravitzky (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 1991), 85-86.

[19] Judah Halevi was particularly critical of *The Book of Nabatean Agriculture* (1:61). In his commentary on *The Kuzari*, the Nazir (David Hacohen) notes Judah Halevi's equivocal attitude to Indian tradition. On the one hand, he describes the Indians as a dissolute nation; on the other hand, his description of the Indian king in the parable at the beginning of the book denotes great admiration. See Dov Schwartz, ed, *The Annotated Kuzari: The Kuzari of Rabbenu Judah Halevi with Summaries of the Lectures by Our Teacher the Nazir* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Nezer David, 1997), 1:68. This attitude could suggest overt rebuke and covert esteem for the representatives of the Hermetic tradition.

[20] *The Kuzari*, 1:1. See also Idel, "Hermeticism and Judaism."

Just as he casts doubts on many elements of Aristotelian science, Judah Halevi also holds that Hermetic traditions are not founded on absolute knowledge. This knowledge is only acquired through revelation (such as presenting the cherubim as "effigies," namely, legitimate images for drawing down the emanation) and, in this sense, astrology and the drawing down of spirituality are equal. Hermes and Aesculapius, however, are included among the ancient paragons of the search for perfection.

Note that Hermes and Aesculapius, central figures in Hermetic literature, are equated with the founders of classic Greek philosophy and even precede them in the list of those who had attained intellectual perfection. Judah Halevi approaches the Hermetic traditions in which astral magic plays a significant role as an unquestionable expression of ancient wisdom, a view that concurs with accepted contemporary perceptions. This approach merits comparison with an invocation mentioned in *Picatrix*, a twelfth-century magic text in Arabic. The invocation or prayer, to be uttered when drawing down spirituality, reads as follows:

> When doing this, you should say immediately after: I call upon you, the supreme spiritualities, in whom is and from whom comes all human wisdom, to answer me and draw me close to you, and teach me your wisdom, and strengthen me with your power, and let me understand what I do not, and draw me away from events and from the harm caused by distortion or forgetfulness until you bring me to the rung of the greatest ancient sages and soothe my heart, and do not forsake me.[21]

The magician, then, seeks the status ascribed to the ancient sages. He probably aspires to be a link in the continuous chain of sages fluent in the mysteries of magic, and seeks to attain "wisdom" from these spiritualities. Abu Aflah had already written in *Sefer ha-Tamar* that most of his concern with "spiritual wisdom" is based on "the ancients, who invented it in pure minds."[22]

We find, then, that Judah Halevi adopted both the view concerning the influence of *rūhaniyyāt* [spirituality], meaning the celestial spiritual emanation, and the need for effigies as material and psychological aids in the concentration of abstract contents, as required by God's worship.

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[21] Cited from the Hebrew translation of *Picatrix* (*Ghāyat al-hakīm*), Munich Ms. 214, 62b.

[22] Gershom Scholem, "Sefer ha-Tamar by Abu Aflah al-Sarakosti" [Hebrew], *Kiryat Sefer* 3 (1926-1927): 190, l. 11.

Throughout, he is clearly aware of Hermetic sources. Judah Halevi seems to have known that this is a new theological doctrine close to idolatry, which is not explicitly mentioned in the traditional sources of Judaism. Nevertheless, he ascribes the drawing down of spirituality to the ancients and describes it as wisdom. He may have feared reactions from both rationalists and traditionalists, and therefore prefers to downplay, as usual, the significance of literary esoteric sources. In the same context, note that Moslem sources also perceive astral magic as a realm to be concealed. "The Brethren of Purity," for instance, do not give details of Sufi doctrines, although they do ascribe significant weight to them and explain this is required by the need to conceal Hermetic approaches.[23] The magic-astral interpretation of Jewish sources begins with Judah Halevi, under the cover of mystery. This course of Judah Halevi will be pursued to some extent by Abraham Ibn Ezra, who presented additional techniques for concealing magic-astral interpretations of the sources of Judaism.

Abraham ibn Ezra: Mysteries and their Interpretation

A caveat must precede any definitive statement about Abraham ibn Ezra's doctrine: his biblical commentary and his theological writings are couched in an enigmatic language that precludes clear-cut conclusions, and his writings on astral magic mark one of the pinnacles of this allusive, concealing style.

Ibn Ezra explicitly notes that celestial forces play a decisive role in shaping processes and events in the terrestrial world. This is his exegesis of the verse about God descending to earth ("and the Lord came down"): "All things on earth below are dependent upon the supreme powers; all actions are arranged from heaven. Therefore, God is known as the one who "rides upon the heaven" (Deuteronomy 33:26) and "dwellest in the heavens" (Psalms 123:1)."[24] Many of his biblical

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[23] See Yves Marquet, "Sabéens et Iḫwān Al-Ṣafá," *Studia Islamica* 25 (1966): 107. Marquet points to three causes for the concealment strategy: (1) Fear of the zealots and a desire to draw them closer to Hermetic traditions; (2) Avoiding harm to the multitude; (3) Downplaying the prominent influence of Hermeticism, which only those "who possess the knowledge" can understand and justify.

[24] Commentary on Genesis 11:5, 141. The English translation of Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Torah by H. Norman Strickman and Arthur M. Silver (New York: Menorah, 1988-2001) is occasionally quoted.

commentaries rely on astrological interpretations, and he frequently considers the magical implications of biblical passages.[25]

Supreme Power

Supreme power is a crucial notion of Ibn Ezra's astral magical outlook, and magical hints are often formulated as a desire to receive or draw down the supreme power. The terminology referring to the bringing down of spiritual power recurs in *Picatrix*, the series of texts on magic originally written in Arabic that were probably known to Ibn Ezra. For instance, the group of prayers to the planets that appears in *Picatrix* includes fixed formulae for requests from specific planets: "May you send spirituality from your spirituality and power from your power" (to Venus);[26] "May you send power from your spirituality" (to Mercury).[27] In *Sefer ha-Atsamim* [The Book of Substances], a work on magic erroneously ascribed to Ibn Ezra, we are told:

> When the power that draws them down overcomes the spiritualities, they will come down to act and comply with what is asked of them, and those who bring them down will be killed if they lack the skills to bring down the spirituality as is fitting, through the places, the incense burning, the sacrifices, the clothes, the meals, and the sayings.[28]

Statements such as the one in the cited passage are quite common in Ibn Ezra's writings. For instance: "All decrees come down from heaven" (Exodus 3:8); "Heaven—since all [divine] decrees are written and sealed there" (commentary on Psalms 18:7); "because the book of life is heaven, and it is there that all the decrees will be written on the day of their creation" (ibid. 69: 29). See also the commentary on Proverbs 22:1, and on Job 38:33. On Ibn Ezra's astrological approach, see the excellent work by Shlomo Sela, *Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

[25] See David Rosin, "Die Religionsphilosophie Abraham ibn Ezra's," *MGWJ* 42 (1898): 251-252; Colette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 104-112; Raphael Jospe, "Biblical Exegesis as a Philosophic Literary Genre: Abraham ibn Ezra and Moses Mendelssohn," in *Jewish Philosophy and the Academy*, ed. Emil L. Fackenheim and Raphael Jospe (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), 75-79.

[26] *Picatrix*, Munich Ms., 69b.

[27] Ibid., 70a. Ibn Ezra does not use the term "spirituality" or "spirituality of the star."

[28] *Sefer ha-Atsamim* [Book of Substances], ed. Menasheh Grosberg (London: Rabinovitch, 1901), 14. Passages in this style recur in this treatise (for instance, see ibid., 17). Samuel ibn Zarza, *Sefer Meqor Hayyim* (Mantua: 1559), 98a. The author of *Sefer ha-Atsamim* emphasizes that forces from the stars emanate according to the preparations made toward them.

Drawing down power refers, in these texts, to the exploitation of stellar emanations.

What does Ibn Ezra mean by *supreme power*?[29] Let us consider a passage from his second commentary on Genesis (1:14), where he defines the term:

> I believe that on the first day there was light, but it was not bright. On the second day it grew until it became the cause of the sky and the earth became visible. And on the third day it grew until the earth received supreme power to sprout. On the fourth day it grew until the lights and the stars were visible. On the fifth day it grew until the water received power to swarm with life. On the sixth day it grew until the earth received power to issue cattle and animals. And on the seventh day it was complete… We cannot deny that the seven orbits [*me'onot*] are for the seven servants [*meshartim*- the planets], and the proof of this is apodictic, which only mathematicians understand. Let me note the obvious—were all seven of them in one orbit, one could not hide the other when their length and width are in conjunction and their orbits would be equal, and the zodiac is above it.[30]

The theme of this passage is emanation (appearance of "light"). Ibn Ezra refers to the movement of the seven "servants" (the planets) and their varying speeds as the source of processes in the material world.[31] The light emerges in heaven gradually, and creation is accordingly described as the gradual spread of light or as an emanation of the visible space. The passage also seems to echo a widespread view, stating that the stars are involved in terrestrial processes.[32] The term

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[29] Raphael Jospe, "The Torah and Astrology According to Ibn Ezra" [Hebrew], *Da'at* 32-33 (1994): 42-43.

[30] The last argument states that observations demonstrate that the planets' orbits and velocities cannot possibly be equal.

[31] The expression "seven orbits" refers to the various places [*me'onot*] that the spheres traverse in their course, each in its own degree, apparently according to TB Hagigah 12b ("seven heavens") and small scientific midrashim such as *Beraita de-Shmuel ha-Katan*, ch. 7: "What is the order of the two lights and the five stars? The sages say this heaven is divided into seven degrees, one above the other, and these are the seven orbits of these seven stars" (printed in *Otsar ha-Midrashim*, ed. Yehudah David Eisenstein [New York: Resnik and Menshel, 1928]). Compare to Ibn Ezra's commentary on Psalms 8:4: "We know that there are seven orbits to the lights and the five planets, the eighth orbit is for the hosts, and the ninth for the zodiac going from east to west, and the tenth is the throne of glory." See also the commentary on Psalms 96:6. Rosin, "Die Religionsphilosophie," 345, explains the expression as referring to the houses and the squares.

[32] The motif of the light mentioned in this passage indicates the stars' mode of

power is not perceived in its classic physical sense, as the act of a particular body in the propelling or development of another body (touch or influence). *Supreme power* refers to such an act by stars affecting the terrestrial world.[33] The influence of stellar powers is visible in natural processes bound by the laws of physics and in personal and normative ("legal") decisions dictated by experience.[34] In the passage above, the stars manifest their power by giving objects the potential to develop in the material world and by shaping their structure and characteristics,[35] as Ibn Ezra also states in other writings: "Everything in the lowest world receives power from the middle world, each thing according to the constellation [of the stars]."[36] The action of stellar power changes from place to place, according to climatic conditions and according to their configuration vis-à-vis the specific location: "There is a place which is more receptive to God's power, and His might is seen there";[37] "Because some places receive more of the

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action as emanation, but this is not necessarily Ibn Ezra's outlook. He may have used the light motif in a symbolic sense. He often uses the term *power* regarding the activity of the celestial world. On the zodiac, for instance, Ibn Ezra writes: "Now this important sphere encompasses all the forty eight bodies and their forms. God's power is there revealed to the eye" (Exodus 20:14).

[33] On the meaning of *power* in physics, see Aristotle, *Physica* VII, 5, 250a 4-9. The expression *supreme power* appears in Ibn Ezra's astrological writings too. See Naphtali Ben-Menahem, ed., *Sefer ha-Teʿamim* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1941), 11.

[34] "Because their experience will enable astrologers to see great wonders and awesome deeds happening daily, according to the power of the stars and their position vis-à-vis each other, and those who know the supreme wisdom will know that the deeds of the glorious God are more and more wondrous" (Commentary on Psalms 89:7. Ibn Ezra presents experience as confirming astrological principles in his astrological writings. See, for instance, Judah Leib Fleischer, ed. "Sefer ha-Olam," *Otsar ha-Hayyim* 13 (1937): 17-19; Ben-Menahem, *Sefer ha-Teʿamim*, 22, 32, 36.

[35] On *power* as a potential see Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle: Problems of Aristotle's Physics in Jewish and Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), 690-693.

[36] Commentary on Exodus 6:3. *Receiving power* means absorbing the emanation from the stars or their power, whether the star is placed in some aspect or conjunction with another star, or the influence is evident in the material world according to the preparations made there. See Raphael Levy and Francisco Cantera, eds. *Sefer Reshit Hokhmah [The Beginning of Wisdom]* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1939), lxi; Ben Menahem, *Sefer ha-Teʿamim*, 19, 22. On the term *power*, see also *Sefer Reshit Hokhmah*, lxiv.

[37] Commentary on Genesis 4:14. See also Rosin, "Die Religionsphilosophie," 108-109; Yitzhak Tzvi Langerman, "Some Astrological Themes in the Thought of Abraham ibn Ezra," in *Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra: Studies in the Writings of a Twelfth-Century Jewish Polymath*, ed. Isadore Twersky and Jay Michael Harris (Cambridge: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 1993), 43-44.

supreme power than others."[38] The location of the Temple was actually determined relying on such criteria, namely, by forces influenced by the stars in specific places.[39]

The term *power* also appears in Ibn Ezra's writings in the context of the relationship between the intellectual dimension (which is specific to human beings) and the animate dimension (which they share with other living creatures), in the sense of a natural force: "The animate soul [*nefesh*] lives by virtue of the human soul [*neshamah*]."[40] Both senses of the term—as a force of nature and as the force of the stars—are mutually related in Ibn Ezra's discussions about the soul, which ranks with the Separate Intellects ("the holy angels that are neither bodies nor in the bodies"), and he writes:

> The human soul is of the same kind.[41] It receives power from above in accordance with the configuration of the planets, that is, the configuration of each planet vis-à-vis the heavenly hosts at the time of a person's birth. If the human soul grows wise, it will share the mysteries of the angels and will be able to receive great power from a supreme power that received it from the light of the angels. The person will then be in conjunction with the glorious God.[42]

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[38] Genesis 4:13, second commentary.

[39] "Because the place mentioned [the Temple] is a counterpart to the glorious celestial place, for places on earth vary according to the counterpart star above them, and astrologers will understand this" (commentary on Exodus 15:17); "There are places where God's power is more manifest than in other places, for two reasons. Divine manifestation varies according to the natural circumstances of the recipient and with with the supreme power that is above the receiver. That is why the place the holy temple [Mount Moriah] was chosen." (ibid., 25:40). Ibn Ezra relies on this principle in his interpretation of the whole of Psalms 24 and in other scattered exegeses, such as Psalms 132:5. See Langerman, "Some Astrological Themes," 46.

[40] Second commentary on Genesis 2:7. See also the commentary on Psalms 8:3, 73:4., and compare with the definition: "When the soul is strong, the heavenly power known as nature, which preserves the body, grows in might" (Exodus 23:25). See also Rosin, "Die Religionsphilosophie," 449-450; Henry Malter, "Medieval Hebrew Terms for Nature," in *Judaica: Festschrift zu Hermann Cohens siebzigstem Geburtstage*, ed. Ismar Elbogen et. al. (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1912), 254; Uriel Simon, *Abraham ibn Ezra's Two Commentaries on the Minor Prophets: An Annotated Critical Edition* [Hebrew] (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1989), 258-259.

[41] As the Separate Intellects.

[42] Exodus 3:15. Compare Moshe Idel, "*Hitbodedut* as Concentration in Jewish Philosophy" [Hebrew], in *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume: On the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Moshe Idel, Warren Zeev Harvey and Eliezer Schweid (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought, 1988).

> He who is in conjunction with the supreme power, his soul will rejoice and, through the power of his conjunction with Him, he will be preserved from the afflictions of change in the future. His body will thus dwell safely in this world.[43]

In the first passage, Ibn Ezra does not specify the wisdom ("if the human soul grows wise") to which he is referring.[44] Clearly, however, wisdom allows access to forces emanating from the stars. The sage's soul can thus rise and reach conjunction with God by exploiting forces influenced by the stars. Ibn Ezra is careful to indicate that these forces are used according to configuration of the planets ("vis-à-vis the heavenly hosts"). The soul's reception of stellar powers is also mentioned in *Picatrix*, the Arabic treatise on magic, which states: "Contemplate your practice and strengthen your reason and your thought in your act, so that you may thereby strengthen the human soul and prepare it to receive the full power of the spheres, as you wish."[45]

We can therefore state: the assumption that the stars exert influence through their power ("supreme power"), which is received in different places and climates, does not necessarily include a magical component. The act becomes magical only when the forces are drawn down through effigies and other objects (talismans). Receiving the supreme power through sacrificial offerings, through one of the vessels at the Tabernacle (cherubim or others), or through other means, is an act of astral magic. Drawing down the supreme power through effigies means exploiting the power emanating from the stars, and Ibn Ezra uses the terminology of receiving power in a magical context as well.

Astral Magic and Idolatry

Ibn Ezra states that reliance on astral magic to draw down stellar forces onto images is forbidden because of its resemblance to idolatry. In some of his commentaries, Ibn Ezra points to the precise term describing a worship of images that is close to idolatry: *drawing down supreme powers*. Making effigies in order to absorb spirituality without

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[43] Commentary on Psalms 16:9.

[44] Some scholars have indeed based this passage on theoretical foundations to exclude a magical interpretation. See Rosin, "Die Religionsphilosophie," 451. Ibn Ezra's terms appear to reflect the influence of Avicenna concerning the intuitive perception of the universe as a totality ("holy intellect"), which is grasped when human perfection reaches its height. This outlook was widespread in Jewish medieval thought.

[45] *Picatrix*, 50b.

an explicit textual command to do so violates the belief in direct divine omnipotence. Ibn Ezra also suggests that making effigies in the image of celestial bodies in order to draw down their power is included in the prohibition on the making of images, although he does not claim this is a vain deed without any reality. He is well aware of the fact that the prohibition "thou shalt not make for thyself any carved idol, or any likeness" refers to "the craft of the Heavens" [*melekhet shamayim*], as he says:

> It forbids the use of any craft for making an image of the heavens… There are no images in the heavens except for the forty-eight forms, and the masters of images err, doing deeds close to idolatry.[46]

> ["Lest you become corrupt, and make a carved idol, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female"] Some Gentiles bow and worship any beast that they meet at the beginning of their day in order to bring down the supreme power; for example, they draw down the power of the scorpion if they want to heal someone who has been bitten. The same applies to the remaining forty-seven forms.[47]

In the second passage, on the healing of scorpion bites, Ibn Ezra is probably referring to the tradition cited in the commentary of Abu Jaffer Ahmad b. Yusuf b. Ibrahim to the *Sefer ha-Peri* (*Centiloquium*) ascribed to Ptolemy, which is also mentioned in the *Picatrix*. This tradition attests to the healing of scorpion bites through a seal on which a scorpion shape is engraved.[48] We learn, then, that drawing

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[46] Commentary on Exodus 20:3. See ibid. for the concept of "the craft of the heavens" [*melekhet shamayyim*]. Ibn Ezra was not definite concerning this prohibition. In his commentary on Deuteronomy 4:23 ["Take heed to yourselves… and make you a carved idol, or the likeness of anything, which the Lord thy God has forbidden thee"] he writes: "Some say that the reference is to the image of the stars, but this seems far-fetched to me." Does Ibn Ezra distinguish here between making effigies for magic-astral purposes as opposed to making them in order to consider or study a specific characteristic? The clues left by this enigmatic commentator seem insufficient for unequivocal answers to this question. In most sources, however, he does point to the resemblance between magic-astral acts and idolatry. On idolatry, see also his commentary on Deuteronomy 7:13.

[47] Commentary on Deuteronomy 4:16.

[48] *Picatrix*, 51b. "One day when I was with him, he received greetings from his home and was told that one of the boys there had been bitten by a scorpion. When he heard about it, he ran to a box holding many seals smelling of frankincense and sent one to the boy. He ordered it to be crushed and given to the boy to drink, and when they did so the boy stopped screaming and all his pain ceased after he had finished drinking. I looked at the seals and found the form of a scorpion imprinted on all of them. When I asked him how the seals had been made, he took out a golden

down stellar forces on images borders on ("is close to") idolatry. A very thin line separates the making of images prohibited as a "craft of the heavens" and the holy craft of building the Tabernacle undertaken by Bezalel, who "was gifted with every wisdom. He mastered mathematics, geometry, proportions, the craft of the heavens, biology, and the mystery of the human soul."[49]

Ibn Ezra also claims that drawing down stellar forces is forbidden because it might be interpreted as assuming a mediating agent between human beings and God:

> Its meaning is: do not make images that receive supreme powers and think that you make them for My glory, in that they will serve as an intermediary between Me and you, like the golden calf which Israel made… I have no need for mediators.[50]
>
> Thou shalt not bow down unto them. As do the masters of images, who think that they can bring down the supreme powers for a given person.[51]
>
> The reason for "thou shalt have no other gods beside me" is that one should not believe those who say that He has placed the angel of glory in charge of the world, and would not make images to draw down the supreme powers.[52]

The last passage draws a parallel between the perception of the angel as a mediator and the act of drawing down stellar forces, denoting the theological meaning of the prohibition.

In his scientific writings, Ibn Ezra does not cast doubt, or at least does not explicitly question, the actual effectiveness of these techniques. He recurrently stresses in a scientific treatise that this wisdom "is forbidden in God's Torah because it is as idolatry."[53] This declaration,

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ring with a shining stone on which the form of a scorpion had been engraved. I asked him what was the secret of the seal and how it worked, and he told me… it should be stamped with ground frankincense while the moon was in Scorpio… and this helped all those bitten by scorpions, alleviating their pain and healing them. Perhaps this is what is mentioned in Ptolemy's book "(*Sefer ha-Peri*, Paris Ms. 1055, 54a-b).

[49] Commentary on Exodus 31:3.

[50] These are God's words. Commentary on Exodus 20:20. See Dov Schwartz and Eliezer Schlossberg, "Sources of Maimonides' Concept of Idolatry as Mediation," *The Annual of Rabbinic Judaism* 1 (1998): 119-128.

[51] Commentary on Exodus 20:5.

[52] Short commentary on Exodus 20:1.

[53] He says so when referring to the yearly cycle of the sun: "You should know that sages in India said that one fifth of an hour should be added to six full hours

however, does not prevent him from occasionally relating in this work to the techniques used by "masters of images" or magicians, and from pointing to sources of influence.[54] In his biblical commentaries his statements are more qualified, although astral magic is still contrasted with "magic," which is merely sleight of hand.[55] The difference between useless acts of trickery and drawing down the powers is evident in another exegesis:

> Idols [*elilim*] are graven images, and they are called *elilim* because they are false, as in "you are all physicians of no value" [*elil*] (Job 13:4). It is also plausible that the word comes from *al*, meaning something that lacks reality. "Molten gods" to receive supreme powers, because no other god is needed beside me.[56]

The idols are perceived as lacking reality, but making effigies to draw down stellar forces is forbidden because it violates God's unity. Contrary to the *elilim*, however, the concept of *molten gods* is not derived from *al*, so that their reality is not explicitly denied. We may therefore infer that astral magic is forbidden on theological grounds because it denies God's unity *and not because its actual reality is challenged.*

Why does Ibn Ezra hold that making images and drawing down the supreme force resemble idolatrous acts? What is the line between

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for every year, and this is only true for the images. Their sun is necessary only for those involved in the wisdom of images, which is forbidden in God's Torah because it resembles idolatry" (Ben Menahem, *Sefer ha-Teʿamim*, 40).

[54] See, for instance, ibid., 6, 30, 31 (concerning the making of effigies from various metals in order to receive the powers of Venus and the sun: "And brass is in its domain [of Venus], as attempted by the makers of images"; "And on its domain [the sun's] silver rises, as attempted by the masters of images"). Compare Levy and Cantera, *Sefer Reshith Hokhmah*, xv. The mention of magic-astral techniques in the scientific writings while rejecting them on religious grounds in the biblical commentaries apparently follows from the character of these scientific writings. These texts deal with astrology and, in this context, refer to related techniques, such as astral magic.

[55] Commentary on Exodus 7:11; commentary on Deuteronomy 19:10; commentary on Daniel 2:2. See also Isadore Twersky, "Did R. Abraham Ibn Ezra Influence Maimonides?" [Hebrew], in *Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra: Studies in the Writings of a Twelfth-Century Jewish Polymath* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 33.

[56] Commentary on Leviticus 19:4. Compare to Ibn Ezra on Leviticus 19:31: "Certain empty-headed people have asserted that Scripture would not have forbidden charmers as a form of witchcraft if they were not true. I declare the exact opposite of their words: Scripture has forbidden only that which is false, but has not forbidden the truth. This is borne out by the prohibition against idols and graven images."

the prohibition on idolatry and an acceptable magical or talismanic act? Ibn Ezra does interpret several Torah commandments as acts that draw down the supreme power, as noted below. The distinction between idolatry and the permitted magic-astral act, then, does not necessarily hinge on technique. Stellar forces can be brought down through an idolatrous ritual worshipping the star, but also through an act of drawing down spirituality, without any such associations. The prohibition, then, is theological. The distinction might be in the consciousness of the person drawing down the spirituality and in the closeness of this act to idolatry rather than in the use of stellar forces and its modes. Idolaters view the bringing down of the supreme power as an imperative requirement of the idolatrous religion or as a mediating channel to divine worship, whereas the scientist, the doctor, or the Jew observing the commandments views this as a utilitarian act, involving material and religious advantages.

The Astral Magic Mystery

The enigma and mystery cloaking Ibn Ezra's commentary include the use of stellar powers, as noted above and as discussed below. Why, then, does he not present astral magic openly? The concealment of the magic-astral interpretation in Ibn Ezra's exegesis is due to three reasons:

1. The similarities between acts of astral magic and idolatry, as clarified in the previous section, apparently compel Ibn Ezra to be doubly careful in his biblical exegesis.
2. In rationalist medieval literature, different branches of science are routinely presented as the prerogative of a selected few. Astral magic is unquestionably a form of "science" for Ibn Ezra, since it is based on rigorous astronomical knowledge: "For only an individual who has studied geometry and astronomy [*melekhet shamayyim*] can understand."[57]
3. The inventiveness of astral magical exegesis probably evoked the criticism of his contemporaries, as implicit from his comments.[58]

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[57] Commentary on Exodus 28:6. In reference to the mystery of the *ephod* and the breastplate.

[58] On the magic-astral interpretation of the Tabernacle and the Temple mentioned above, Ibn Ezra writes: "Should God give you wisdom, you will understand

> The critique may indeed have focused on the similarities with idolatry.

It is not hard to understand why Ibn Ezra develops esoteric techniques to downplay the scope of astral magic in his exegeses of biblical passages. Although he does not refrain from explicit astral hints in some places, in others he chooses to conceal the magic-astral foundations and their ramifications. Ibn Ezra's esoteric course comes to the fore in two ways:

1. *Refraining from explicit mention of the magic astral act.* One instance is the mystery of the *ephod* and the breastplate.[59] Ibn Ezra does not allude to the talismanic terminology explicitly, although his exegesis of this matter cannot be understood without linking it to astral magic.
2. *Ostensible rejection but actual acceptance of magic astral views.* In one group of sources, Ibn Ezra appears to reject the magic astral interpretation, and in another he presents it as the only possible option. At times, the contrast emerges within the same source. Several examples of this esoteric technique are presented below. It is first applied in his exegesis of the *terafim* that Rachel steals from her father:

   > Some say that the *terafim* are copper instruments used to tell parts of hours. Others say that astrologers have the power to make an image that speaks at specific hours, and offer proof from "for the *terafim* have spoken vanity" (Zekharia 10:2). But this is not the meaning of the aforementioned verse. Closer to mine is the view that the *terafim* are human images that were made in order

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the secret of the ark, the ark covering, and the cherubim that spread their wings, and also the secret of the objects placed outside of the curtain—the candelabrum, the incense altar, and the table—and outside the opening of the tabernacle—the altar of the burnt offering and all its vessels, and the basin and its base. These objects are the glory of God [*Elohim*]. I gave you these hints because there are many people in our times who think themselves wise, and they will perhaps mock my words" (commentary on Exodus 25:40. The term *glory* ("the glory of God [*Elohim*]") has a clear astrological context and God is therefore perceived here as "judgment," hinting at the wisdom of the "judgments of the stars," a term used to describe astrology. Compare Jac. Klatzkin, *Thesaurus Philosophicus: Linguae Hebraicae et Veteris et Recentioris* (Berlin: Eschkol, 1928). The use of *Elohim* for judgment is also reflected in Ibn Ezra's explanation of the sin of the golden calf.

[59] Compare Rosin, "Die Religionsphilosophie," 356-358.

> to receive the supreme power. I am not permitted to explain this any further. Proof that the *terafim* are human images can be found in the *terafim* that Michal, Saul's daughter, placed in David's bed, thereby fooling the guards into thinking that the *terafim* were really David… The most likely reason [for Rachel stealing the *terafim*] was that Laban, her father, was an astrologer, and Rachel feared that he would look at the stars and discover which way they had fled.[60]

Prima facie, Ibn Ezra rejects two exegeses in this passage. Whereas the first presents the *terafim* as an astronomical instrument much like an astrolabe, the second views them as effigies for drawing down stellar spirituality. Is the second exegesis indeed rejected? Certainly not. Ibn Ezra restricts the options to the making of images and reduces them—mainly due to exegetical constraints (Michal's *terafim*)—to one, the human image;[61] he fully endorses, however, the magic-astral principle of the second exegesis. Furthermore: the end of the passage implies that the first exegesis, quoted in the name of "some say," is compatible with the exegesis that Ibn Ezra prefers ("closer to mine"). Rachel had feared that the *terafim* could be used to locate Jacob. Ibn Ezra's view, then, is clear: (1) The *terafim* were images in human form designed to draw down stellar spirituality, as he says midway through the passage; (2) This view is then toned down by endorsing another view at the end of the passage, which identifies the *terafim* with an astrological instrument capable of disclosing the hidden (the location of Jacob's camp). It is not clear whether the *terafim* were accompanied by an instrument of observation or whether signs

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[60] Commentary on Genesis 31:19. On the *terafim* see Joseph Dan, "*Terafim*: From Popular Belief to Folktale," *Scripta Hiersolymitana* 27 (1978): 99-106; Daniel Sperber, *Magic and Folklore in Rabbinic Literature* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1994), 115-118.

[61] Another possible consideration is that the human image is the preferred and perhaps the most efficient one of all. In his exegesis, Ibn Ezra interprets the cherubim in the context of drawing down the supreme power and states: "Man is the most important being upon the earth, hence the form of the cherubim" (commentary on Exodus 33:21). Compare Shlomo Pines, "Le *Sefer ha-Tamar* et les *Maggidim* des *Kabbalistes*," in *Hommage a Georges Vajda: Etudes d'histoire et de pensée juives*, ed. Gerard Nahon and Charles Touati (Louvain: Peeters, 1980), 336, 357; Moshe Idel, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* [Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv: Schocken, 1996), 267 (appendix on astral magic that does not appear in the original English version). The interpretation suggested here is already mentioned in Menahem ben-Moshe Tamar's supercommentary on Ibn Ezra.

of an astrological map were engraved in the image; what is clear is that the action of the *terafim* was based on astrology. Ibn Ezra, then, accepts the first two exegeses.

A second instance of a mutual contradiction is his exegesis of *the sin of the golden calf*. In his long commentary on Exodus, Ibn Ezra rejects the view stating that "the great conjunction of the two upper bodies was in the constellation of Taurus." In his view, "the conjunction took place in Aquarius. According to the science of astrology, this is Israel's constellation, and many have tested this mystery, generation after generation. I too have seen this to be the case. Look! They placed it at the sky's midpoint." Ibn Ezra has already stated that his intention is to show that the people of Israel were not idolatrous, and that the golden calf was intended for the glory of God. How? This enigmatic passage clarifies his intention:

> Moses himself did not know this [when he would descend], for God had told him: "Come up to me onto the mount and be there until I give you the tablets of stone." The word *Elohim* refers to the glory dwelling in the image of a body, and what they had said was, "who shall go before us" (Exodus 32:1). If you pay attention to Israel's first journey you will understand this.[62]

Ibn Ezra returns to Judah Halevi's approach, whereby the journey through the desert had been guided by a talisman (the pillar of fire, the pillar of the cloud, and so forth). The same talismanic element ("image of a body") attracted the stellar forces when at their summit ("glory") in times that change according to astrological principles.[63] When they saw that Moses was not returning, the children of Israel sought divine guidance by attracting the forces of their sign, Aquarius. Since Ibn Ezra is apparently rejecting the celestial constellation of Taurus, the shape of the golden calf has no particular significance except for being an effigy ("image") to attract the stellar forces.

By contrast, in his short commentary on Exodus, Ibn Ezra unequivo-

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[62] These passages are from the commentary on Exodus 31:18.

[63] See above, note 58. The term *Elohim* refers also to legal institutions, and the "wisdom of judgments" is a synonym for astrology. For an explanation of the sin of the golden calf according to Ibn Ezra see also Idel, "Hermeticism and Judaism," 63; Roland Goetschel, "The Sin of the Golden Calf in the Exegesis of Abraham ibn Ezra," in *Abraham Ibn Ezra and His Age*, ed. Fernando Diaz Esteban (Madrid: Asociacion Española de Orientalistas, 1990), 137-145. This discussion emphasizes the esoteric techniques of presenting astral magic as an hermeneutical factor.

cally states: "he who understands the mystery of astronomy [literally, "craft of the heavens"] will know why the shape was that of a calf."[64] In other words, the form is deliberate and reflects a celestial constellation. We have no reason, then, to reject the interpretation of fourteenth century commentator Joseph Bonfils (Tov Elem), "and the house of Venus is in Taurus, and that is why they made the shape of an ox rather than any other."[65]

A third example appears in the exegesis of the *brass serpent*. In his commentary on the image of a serpent used to heal victims of serpent bites, Ibn Ezra states clearly:

> "Make thee." An image of a fiery serpent out of brass… Many err. They say that this was an image capable of receiving the supreme power. Far be it, far be it [for one to believe this] for this deed was done by God's command. We should not enquire why [Moses was commanded to make an image of] a snake. Should someone disagree, let him show us if there is a tree that makes bitter waters sweet. Even honey will not sweeten them. What reason was there to put a cake of figs upon a boil? It is not in the nature of figs to remove boils. The truth is that the mind of the Almighty is beyond us.[66]

These formulations can hardly be seen as conveying Ibn Ezra's authentic stance, unless we assume that he has retracted from his views in other exegeses. For instance, he refers to the cherubim as "images," and it is in this context that he mentions the shape of the ox mentioned in Ezekiel's chapters on the chariot.[67] It is plausible to assume that this form alludes to the sign of Taurus. As noted, the form is made for the purpose of "receiving the supreme power." Likewise, Ibn Ezra writes unambiguously: "Here is a general rule. Each

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[64] Short commentary on Exodus 32:1. Ibn Ezra cites Saadia Gaon, who states, "the reason for the form of an ox is that some people in India will think that the image will receive supreme power, and they thought so about Moses." He does not reject this notion outright, and Yehudah Leib Fleischer's rejection of the astrological interpretation *ad locum* (*Mishneh le-Ezra* [Vienna: 1926]) is unjustified. The short commentary was probably written before the long one, so that we have a choice of two options: either Ibn Ezra retracted his view or he concealed his intention when commenting on the golden calf.

[65] David Herzog, ed., *Tsafenat Paʿaneah* (Cracow: Fischer, 1912), 295.

[66] Commentary on Numbers 21:8.

[67] Commentary on Exodus 25:18. In the commentary on Genesis 3:23, Ibn Ezra explains cherubim as images, and mentions the sin of the golden calf (the form of the ox).

cherub was made to receive the supreme power."[68] The cherubim were meant to attract stellar forces. Ibn Ezra also writes elsewhere, in no uncertain terms:

> And I too will teach you the truth. Pay attention to the mystery of the cherubim—why the ark covering has no height, and why the candelabrum is on the right and the table on the north and the altar's cornice up to its middle, and why no sacrifice must be offered on the altar of incense. And after you have understood all these, you will understand the mystery of the brass serpent because, since the glory dwells in the people of Israel, the holy spirit will rest on their noblemen and they will prophesy. As long as they maintain the Temple worship, no sword will pass through their land.[69]

In order to understand how the brass serpent works its action, then, one must understand the deep meaning of the Tabernacle's vessels, including the cherubim. Ibn Ezra's interpretation thus implies that the brass serpent, like the cherubim, was made for the purpose of absorbing the supreme power. People bitten by serpents were healed by drawing down the spirituality or the stellar powers onto the image of the serpent, made of metal. Ibn Ezra derived from here a similar rule for all the vessels in the Tabernacle (the candelabra, the altar, and so forth). These vessels are talismans, designed with the aim of exploiting astral influences ("glory"), and their orderly course wards off danger to the nation as a whole.

The last example in this context is Balaam's act. Ibn Ezra cites an anonymous exegesis explaining Balaam's behavior according to astral magic, although his own view is different:

> Some say that he [Balaam] had knowledge of the supreme bodies [heavenly bodies/stars], and was able to receive their power below through images, and this is the meaning of "and he whom thou cursest is cursed." However, it appears to me that Balaam knew how the signs behaved, and when he saw in someone's star that his evil time had come, he would curse him. When evil befell the one he had cursed, then those who had seen and heard the imprecation thought that evil had befallen him because of Balaam's curse.[70]

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[68] Commentary on Exodus 25:40. See also Heinemann, *The Reasons for the Commandments in the Tradition*, 1:69. On the development of this view in the thought of Johanan Alemanno, see Moshe Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bernard Dov Cooperman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 202-203.

[69] End of the short commentary on Exodus 25:7.

[70] Commentary on Numbers 22:28.

Ibn Ezra obviously wishes to underplay Balaam's powers and dismiss the option that Balaam could have changed the course of nature through an act of astral magic, since "it is not in the hand of any creature to change a deed or a decree of God." *Prima facie*, Ibn Ezra also questions, in principle, Balaam's abilities and his recourse to astral magic, confining them to astrological knowledge ("knew the stars"). Balaam's practice, however, suggests that he had acquired his knowledge through the use of seven altars:

> There are profound mysteries only a few can fathom. The number seven occurs with regard to days, months, years; the seven lambs offered for a burnt offering, and the seven sprinklings… When the complete is given to the complete, a spirit of understanding is reborn.[71]

In other words, the knowledge was acquired through a technique almost certainly close to astral magic, as the mention of sacrifices shows. Here as well, the magic-astral element plays an important role, although in the previous exegesis he had rejected the magic-astral interpretation outright.

Ibn Ezra, then, succeeds in presenting a contrast, as it were, and even a contradiction between these various exegeses, although he clearly endorses an astrological and magic-astral interpretation of the *terafim*, the golden calf, the brass serpent, and Balaam's act. The authentic interpretation emerges mostly from a combination and comparison of several sources.

Expanding the Magic-Astral Exegesis

Ibn Ezra's exegesis of ordinary worship includes many hints alluding to a potential, and even expected magic-astral context. He had already formulated a principle: "It is part of God's worship to preserve the recipient's power in accordance with the place."[72] As noted, the influence of stellar forces changes from place to place. Hence, Ibn Ezra mentions Jacob's request from his household that they remove the effigies ("strange gods") when entering the Land of Israel. The magic-astral associations of biblical commandments and events tends

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[71] Commentary on Numbers 23:1. The enigmatic sentence at the end hints to an encounter between the perfect number (seven) and the perfect human being, with the addition of the astral element in the form of the seven planets.

[72] Commentary on Deuteronomy 31:16. See also Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, l. 11.

to be laconic and is scattered throughout his commentaries on other issues, such as the psalmist's plea to laud a "supreme power he had received," although he does not suggest how he had received this power.[73] At times, however, the magic-astral context appears in systematic hermeneutical models. For instance, Ibn Ezra presents several schemes of the parallel between the commandments and elements in the celestial world, as in his exegesis of the ten commandments.[74] These schemes, then, can be assumed to have some kind of affinity with astral magic.

Finally, several links to astral magic in Ibn Ezra's commentary are outlined briefly below—some could be part of magic-astral outlooks and some belong to them explicitly.

1. *Ransom.* Ibn Ezra formulates a principle: "Because the heavenly decree will not be dismissed unless through ransom, and this is a great mystery."[75] This "ransom," which directs the negative stellar forces to the sacrificed animal,[76] explains the need for smearing the lintel and the doorposts with blood during the Passover in Egypt.[77]

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[73] Commentary on Psalms 22:20.

[74] See the commentary on Exodus 20:14. Ibn Ezra also hints at an antinomian perception, resulting from the adaptation of the commandment to the astrological configuration. In his view, some Torah prohibitions, such as sexual proscriptions, are specifically adapted to the Land of Israel because its heavenly ranking cannot tolerate promiscuity and dissipation. See Dov Schwartz, "The Land of Israel in the Fourteenth Century Jewish Neoplatonic School" [Hebrew], in *The Land of Israel in Medieval Jewish Thought*, ed. Moshe Hallamish and Aviezer Ravitzky (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 1991), 146-150. See also Uriel Simon, "*Peshat* Exegesis of Biblical Historiography: Historicism, Dogmatism, and Medievalism"[Hebrew], in *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Grinberg*, ed. Mordechai Cogan, Barry L. Eichler and Jeffrey H. Tigay (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 181-195, particularly 183-189. In note 38 (p. 187), Simon claims that I exaggerate when ascribing antinomian conclusions to Ibn Ezra. I do not really understand this comment, since he himself shows at length that several sexual proscriptions were cancelled due to stellar constellations. This is a distinctively antinomian perspective.

[75] Short commentary on Exodus 12:7.

[76] "Since each portion is given in its due time, the portion that is the share in the world to come will escape unharmed. Hence, he interpreted "to atone" [*lekhaper*, from the root *kh-p-r*] as "to ransom" [to give *kofer*, from the same root]" (commentary on Leviticus 1:1). See also Ibn Ezra, commentary on Leviticus 1:4; Langerman "Some Astrological Themes," 35-36. Several magic-astral associations are discussed in depth in this article.

[77] Commentary on Exodus 12:7. On ransom in general see Ron Barkai, *Science, Magic, and Mythology in the Middle Ages* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Van Leer, 1987), 21-22.

2. *The Tabernacle and the Temple*. As noted, Ibn Ezra intimates that the Tabernacle and its vessels function as talismans to draw down spirituality.[78]
3. *Sacrifices*. The function of the sacrifice as a catalyst or a hindrance to the action of stellar forces is already intimated concerning the sacrifices before the giving of the Torah.[79]
4. *Festivals*. The time of the festivals is determined according to astrological constellations, and we can hardly assume that Ibn Ezra disregards the magical and theurgic significance of these calculations.[80]
5. *The Order of the Tribes' March through the Desert*. The correspondence between the order of the tribes and a defined stellar order[81] intimates a link with the absorption of stellar influence.

Note that an entire group of fourteenth-century thinkers writing supercommentaries on Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Torah develop and formulate at length the idea of drawing down spirituality, showing knowledge of Hermetic sources. It remains questionable, however, whether these thinkers indeed understood Ibn Ezra's intention, at least concerning his positive perception of an astral magic that is not founded on the laws of the Torah. The present review indicates that Ibn Ezra thinks it is possible to draw down spirituality on images (at least by acquiring astrological knowledge, as evident from his reading of Balaam's technique), but he rejects such deeds on religious grounds. By contrast, he holds that the Torah presents alternative modes for drawing down spirituality, which are in fact commanded and have proved effective. Ibn Ezra's approach, then, is not fundamentally different from that of Judah Halevi. On one count, however, the two thinkers who introduced the Hermetic tradition into Judaism do differ: Judah Halevi holds that only the Torah offers a suitable and efficient way of bringing down spirituality, while Ibn Ezra does not deny the potential for an effective way of doing this outside Judaism. Although he forbids it, he seldom entertains doubts about its effectiveness.

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[78] See above, pp. 22-24.

[79] Commentary on Genesis 8:21.

[80] See Ibn Ezra's commentary on Leviticus 23:24. See also Langerman, "Some Astrological Themes," 38-39; Idel, *Golem*, 259. For hermeneutical texts from the fourteenth century on Ibn Ezra's configuration of the festivals see Dov Schwartz, "R. Abraham Al-Tabib: The Man and His Oeuvre" [Hebrew], *Kiryat Sefer* 64 (1992-1993): 1397-1400.

[81] Commentary on Numbers 1:19.

CHAPTER TWO

MAGIC, EXPERIENTIAL SCIENCE, AND SCIENTIFIC METHOD IN MAIMONIDES

Maimonides' negative attitude to magic is mentioned or discussed directly or in passing in numerous studies, but a comprehensive analysis is as yet lacking. Maimonidean scholarship has considered his attitude to the issue of divine names, his definition of astrology and magic as idolatrous, his exclusion of medical practices from the realm of magic, and his contrasting of medicine as a science with magic as useless, as well as his linking of magic with women.[1] These scholars view Maimonides' opposition both to the reality of magic and to its religious legitimacy as consistent, unequivocal, and uncompromising. Yet, I believe is still necessary to elaborate on Maimonides' attitude to different forms of magic, as well as to place this attitude in the context of his overall philosophical views. In the present discussion, I will offer the following theses:

1. Maimonides distinguished among various levels of magic: specifically, between "primitive" or "folk" magic and "learned" magic. He considered it a special challenge to divest "learned" magic of the cloak of a "pseudo-science" and to demonstrate its falsehood.
2. Maimonides distinguished, on both substantive and halakhic

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[1] See, for instance, Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 205-213; Harry S. Lewis, "Maimonides on Superstition," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, o. s., 17 (1905): 474-488; Leon Nemoy, "Maimonides' Opposition to Magic in Light of the Writings of Jacob al-Qirqisani" [Hebrew], *Ha-Rofe ha-Ivri* 27, 1-2 (1954): 102-109. See also Yitzhak Heinemann, *The Reasons for the Commandments in the Tradition* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: WZO, 1966), 91-92; Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) 479-484; idem, "Halakhah and Science: Perspectives on the Epistemology of Maimonides" [Hebrew], *Annual of Jewish Law* 14-15 (1988-89): 135-140; Bezalel Safran, "Maimonides' Attitude to Magic and to Related Types of Thinking," in *Porat Yosef: Studies Presented to Rabbi Dr. Joseph Safran*, ed. Bezalel Safran and Eliyahu Safran (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1992), 93-110. On Maimonides' attitude to astrology, see Yitzhak Tzvi Langermann, "Maimonides' Repudiation of Astrology," *Maimonidean Studies* 2 (1991): 123-158; Hayyim Kreisel, "Maimonides' Approach to Astrology" [Hebrew], *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Judaic Studies*, Division 2, section C (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies: 1994), 25-32.

grounds, between two areas potentially related to magic: astral magic and the doctrine of *segullot* (special properties) based upon experiential science. This distinction was based upon Maimonides' scientific method and upon his concept of nature.

3. These distinctions were not clear to Maimonides' medieval critics, such as Solomon b. Adret (Rashba), who therefore raised questions and expressed astonishment in a famous responsum on the subject.

In the course of discussing these theses, I will attempt to clarify Maimonides' ambiguous language concerning magic, a difficulty that had already troubled Rashba in the mentioned responsum.

Following the discussion of these three theses, I will examine the reception of Maimonides' critical approach among fourteenth century Jewish philosophers. While some philosophers accepted his critique and rejected magic outright, others tried to harmonize his approach with their own world view, even "proving," so they believed, that astral magic was not subject to Maimonides' strictures.

The Foundations of the Maimonidean Controversy

Two Kinds of Magic

In both his halakhic writings and in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides mentions various forms of magic: divination, necromancy, black magic, and so forth. Moreover, he frankly admits that he acquired his familiarity with the various forms of magic from reading the most authoritative theoretical sources.[2] But Maimonides does not perceive

[2] In his epistle on astrology, Maimonides writes as follows: "And I also read all the matters of idolatry; it seems to me that there is not a single work in the world concerning this matter translated into the Arabic language from other languages whose subject matter I have not read and understood and penetrated completely" (quoted in Alexander Marx, "The Correspondence Between the Rabbis of Southern France and Maimonides About Astrology," *HUCA* 3 [1926]: 351). In the second section of this chapter we will see that, at the end of *Guide of the Perplexed*, 3.29, Maimonides mentions these sources in greater detail, referring particularly to writings on Hermetic talismanic magic. See Thorndike, *A History of Magic*, vol. 2, 211, 214-228. Maimonides' frankness is extremely interesting in light of his explicit remarks in the *Code*, Laws of Idolatry 2:2: "Many books have been written by the pagans concerning their worship, the essence of their worship and its acts and laws, and the Holy One blessed be He commanded us not to read any of these books at all." This issue

these forms of magic in isolation. In his view, the various forms of magic that he discusses, rather than independent disciplines, are intertwined with astrological considerations. In other words: Maimonides sees astral magic alone as his challenge and the object of his discussion. He writes in the *Guide of the Perplexed*:

> In all magical operations it is indispensable that the stars should be observed. I mean, they [magicians] deem that a certain plant should be assigned to the portion of a certain star; similarly they assign every animal and every mineral to a star. They likewise deem that the operations performed by the magicians are various species of worship offered to a certain star, which, being pleased with that operation or speech or fumigation, does for us what we wish.[3]

Maimonides' vehement opposition to astral magic, which is firmly rooted in religious law, is strongly reminiscent of the official condemnation of such activity voiced in several church edicts in the early Middle Ages.[4]

Maimonides, however, does not discuss magic as one homogenous unit. In *Guide* 3:37, he divides those forms of magic whose validity he denies into three separate groups: (1) practices deriving from the use

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thus reveals something of Maimonides' ideals of leadership, as well as the difference between the ethos of a leader and that of the masses. See Lewis, "Maimonides on Superstition," 479.

[3] *Guide* 3:37 [542]; all quotations hereafter (page numbers indicated in square brackets) are from the English translation, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963). When Maimonides describes the customs of the "Sabians" in regard to "one who practices divination, a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer" (Deuteronomy 18:11), he first places all of them in an astrological context: "In conformity with these opinions, the Sabians set up statues for the planets, golden statues for the sun and silver ones for the moon, and distributed the minerals and the climes between the planets, saying that one particular planet was the deity of one particular clime" (*Guide* 3.29 [516]). In *The Book of the Commandments*, Maimonides compares magic to astrology: "This is where the masses of men are in error. When some of the predictions come true, they think that these practices really reveal the future; and they persist in this error, until they come to believe that some of these practices are the cause of the events which follow, just as astrologers are wont to think. The art of astrology is, indeed, akin to this [practice of divination] in that both are means of stimulating the faculty of imagination." *The Commandments: Sefer ha-Mitzvoth of Maimonides*, trans. Charles B. Chavel (London and New York: Soncino Press, 1967), Negative Commandment 31, 2:30 (with modifications). Maimonides' consistent opposition to magic was thus an outcome of his attitude to astrology.

[4] See Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 92-99.

of powers inherent in existing objects, inanimate or animate; (2) the performance of these practices at certain prescribed times ("by determination of the time"); (3) practices deriving from the use of powers inherent in human actions, such as the burning of incense.

Further to these distinctions, Maimonides divides magical practices into two categories: (1) those that possess all three of the above-mentioned characteristics; (2) those based on only one characteristic out of the three. Is this distinction purely formal, or is there some qualitative difference between the two categories? Maimonides does seem to draw a qualitative distinction between the two, as he associates those practices based on only one characteristic with women, whom he holds in contempt and considers as possessing limited intellectual capacity, while practices based on all three characteristics are not limited in that regard.[5]

Let us now examine Maimonides' description of a magical practice that includes all three characteristics:

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[5] "With regard to most of these magical practices, they pose the condition that those who perform them should necessarily be women… And they recount many such fables and ravings. And you will never find them posing some condition other than that they should be performed by women" (*Guide*, 3:37 [541-42]). The examples given by Maimonides illustrate one characteristic only, namely, the star (sun), and not determination of the time. It is clear from this why Maimonides, explaining in this chapter the cult of passing one's son and daughter through fire, emphasizes that women have "feeble intellects." Maimonides uses the term *'aql* (*Dāladt al-hā'irīn*, ed. Solomon Munk and Isachar Yoel [Jerusalem: Azriel, 1931], 400, l. 14), which indicates cognition in its fullest sense, through the abstraction of form. See Abraham Nuriel, "Remarks on Maimonides' Epistemology," in *Maimonides and Philosophy*, ed. Shlomo Pines and Yirmiyahu Yovel (Dordrecht: Martin Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), 38-40. If we apply the rule formulated by Maimonides, that magical actions are rooted in astral phenomena, the ritual of passing children through fire serves the function of appeasing the stars' wrath by offering a "ransom," but it lacks the specific characteristics of bringing down spirituality, which requires intellectual knowledge, as will be noted below. Incidentally, the systematic association of magic with women appears in *Sefer ha-Tamar*, attributed to Abu Aflah. In a special chapter devoted to the issue, he explains that since women are lacking in intellect, their material disposition (that is, presumably, their imagination) is affected by the actions of magic; in males, however, the intellect and its powers do not allow for such a disposition. The reason for women's success in magic is described as follows: "And all this is due to their inferior discrimination in the science of being [*mezi'ut*, meaning nature] and their inclination toward weakness of the intellect [evidently, in the missing source: *'aql*] and the weakness of the arguments" (Gershom Scholem, *Sefer HaTamar: Das Buch von der Palme des Abu Aflah aus Syracus* [Hannover: Heinz Lafaire, 1927], 29; idem, "Sefer ha-Tamar by Abu Aflah," 200, ll. 4-5. See also 197, l. 13; 198, l. 19, and so forth See also Pines, "Le *Sefer Ha-Tamar* et les *Maggidim* des Kabbalistes," 337.

> For instance they [the magicians] say: This or that quantity of the leaves of a certain plant shall be taken while the moon is under a certain sign of the Zodiac in the East or in one of the other cardinal points; also a definite quantity shall be taken from the horns or the excrement or the hair or the blood of a certain animal while the sun is, for example, in the middle of the sky or at some other determined place; furthermore, a certain mineral or several minerals shall be taken and cast while a certain sign is in the ascendant and the stars in a certain position; then *you shall speak and say these and these things* and shall fumigate the cast-metal form with these leaves and similar things—whereupon a certain thing will come about.[6]

The words *tatakallamu wataqūlu kadha*,[7] translated here in the second person masculine, "you shall speak and say these and these things," seem to refer to the magician. It seems more likely, however, that they should be understood in the third person feminine, thus referring to the astral form itself, which breaks into speech and reveals various secrets. Given this reading, the emphasis upon the second person at the beginning of the subordinate clause (*wa'anta tubakhkhiru bitilka al'awrāq*) is readily understood as describing the action of the magician while the form is speaking. In other words: the magical practice consists in preparing some kind of image or form at the time of a specific astral configuration. Induced by incense, the astral form answers questions (*masā'il*), suggests a suitable time for action (*'ikhtiyārāt*), predicts the future, and even helps to bring about the realization of its own predictions.

Such efforts to bring down spirituality (*ruhāniyyāt*) emerge not as

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[6] *Guide* 3:37[541]. Compare Maimonides' remarks in his *Commentary to the Mishnah*, *Avodah Zarah* 3:1: "People of this type think that when the sun is in a certain degree among the degrees of the Zodiac, whatever it may be, they make a 'talisman' for that sign, similar to the form which they attribute to that degree, and that there will be revealed to them in reality powers belonging to that same image and the actions attributed to it; and they burn incense to that same 'talisman' and pray to it and praise it whenever the sun enters that particular degree, and all this is one of the species of 'talismans.'" (*Commentary to the Mishnah*, ed. Yosef David Qafih [Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1965], 349).

[7] Cited according to *Dalālat al-hā'irīn*, ed. Munk-Joel, 396, l. 18. See Pines' quotation from Suhrawardī in "Le *Sefer Ha-Tamar*," 358, concerning the hearing of a voice. The literature of astral magic frequently describes ceremonies in which an image is formed of a person, to whom the magician addresses questions and requests, actually speaking to the image. See, for instance, *Picatrix*, Ms. München 214, 85a, 86a, and so forth. It was in light of these traditions that fourteenth century literature interpreted the *terafim*.

popular practice but as the domain of learned astrologers,[8] who knew how to direct their intentions to a specific astral configuration and were well versed in the metallurgical characteristics of different minerals and metals. It is thus clear why Maimonides specifically attributed the second category of sorcery to popular magic, linking it specifically with women. Moreover, an examination of Maimonides' commentary to *Avodah Zarah* (in his *Commentary to the Mishnah*) reveals that he does not discuss popular forms of magic but expends most of his energy and reasoning in refuting the induction of spirituality by talismanic means. The distinction between the two kinds of magic is likewise implied in Maimonides' commentary to Tractate Hullin, where he draws a distinction between two types of idolater:

> One consists of those who are well versed in idolatrous practice—that is, the calculation of the sign that is in the ascendant at the time of the [idolatrous] act, and the bringing down of spirituality by it, and all the other delusions and foolish things that soil the intellect and are imagined by those of this type. And the second type are those who worship those man-made images as they have learned to do, without any knowledge of

[8] Needless to say, Maimonides had considerable respect for astronomy—the basis of professional astrology—as follows from his epistle on astrology. See Leo Strauss, "Note on Maimonides' Letter on Astrology," in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983), 206. Moreover: Maimonides conceded that astrologers, magicians, and stargazers possessed a certain knowledge of the future, in a limited, statistical manner. This view is implied by his comparison of them to prophets, whose knowledge of the future is not cumulative, but absolute and perfect. Hence, the more learned the astrologer, the greater the probability that he will foresee a considerable part of the events of the future. See Maimonides, *Commentary to the Mishnah*, Introduction, and *Code*, Laws of the Foundations of the Torah 10:3. Note, however, that in *Sefer ha-Mitzvoth* Maimonides attributes the use of amulets to women: "You must know that this practice… men bedecking themselves with women's adornments—…is sometimes [adopted] for purposes of idol-worship, as is explained in the books devoted to that subject. It is also a common practice to stipulate, in connection with the making of certain talismans, that if the maker is a man, he should wear woman's apparel and adorn himself with gold, pearls, and the like, and if the maker is a woman, she should wear armour and gird on weapons. This is well known to those who are expert in this matter." *The Commandments: Sefer ha-Mitzvoth*. Negative commandment 40, 2:39. But this kind of magical practice lacks the condition of the precise astral configuration. In addition, the woman here is not necessarily the initiator of the magical act but rather its instrument or basis. Talismanic magic is hardly mentioned at all in *The Book of the Commandments*, with the exception of the above passage. We might also mention that women (especially older women) were perceived in magic literature too as the bearers of distorted magical-astral traditions; see, e.g., Pines, "Le *Sefer Ha-Tamar*," 337, 338.

> how they were made or for what purpose they were made, except for the stories of their sages alone— and such are the majority of idolaters.[9]

While the first type involves bringing down the spiritual powers of the stars at a time determined by the astral configuration, the second is restricted to worship of the image without any astrological motivation, as is typical of the unlearned masses. Indeed, only the first type is at all related to the intellect, which is therefore contaminated by involvement with it. The second type has no intellectual aspect. Hence, Maimonides states further on that this type is not true idolatry, for those who practice it "are [merely] maintaining the custom of their ancestors"; the intellectual and halakhic challenge is thus primarily to discount the former type. It follows that Maimonides' distinction between the two types of magic is deliberate and reasoned. In other words, there are good grounds for the thesis that Maimonides drew a distinction between magic based upon detailed, meticulous astrological calculations, on the one hand, and the popular magic of the ignorant masses, on the other; between "learned" magic and "primitive magic."[10] While he was undoubtedly concerned to reject and refute both types, which the masses held in considerable respect, he saw his major intellectual and polemical challenge in contending with the former category of astral magic, which is based upon knowledge.

What were the sources of Maimonides' information about the bringing down of spirituality? This question is highly relevant in regard to Maimonides, who, in contrast to his predecessors, took the trouble (in *Guide* 3.29) to disclose his sources at some length. These include Eastern sources,[11] Hermetic sources,[12] and Sabian sources from Mesopotamia,

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[9] Maimonides, *Commentary to the Mishnah*, Hullin 1:1. See Yosef ha-Levi Faur, *Studies on Maimonides' Code (The Book of Knowledge)* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, Mosad Harav Kook, 1978), 228-229. On *ruhāniyyāt* (spirituality) in Muslim and Jewish magic, see Shlomo Pines, "On the Term *Ruhanyiut* and Its Source, and on the Teaching of Judah Halevi" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 57 (1988): 511-534. Moshe Idel, "Perceptions of the Kabbalah in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 1 (1991): 83-104.

[10] In this respect, Maimonides differs from Nahmanides, who, for example, includes the various kinds of magic in one group. See Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, trans. Charles B. Chavell (New York: Shiloh Publishing House, 1973), Leviticus 16: 8; Deuteronomy 18:9. See Jose Faur, *In the Shadow of History* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 1314; idem, "Two Forms of Jewish Spirituality," *Shofar* 3 (1992): 5-46; Yitzhak Tzvi Langermann, "Acceptance and Devaluation: Nahmanides' Attitude towards Science," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 1 (1992): 223-245.

[11] Maimonides mentions, for instance, "the book of Tumtum," which also includes

particularly *The Book of Nabatean Agriculture* by Ibn Wahshiyya, which includes "the actions of talismans, practices with a view to causing spirits to descend, demons, and ghouls living in deserts."[13] This work

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matters of talismanic magic. This is a work of Hermetic character, and the following tradition concerning the reason of the sacrifices is cited in its name in *Guide* 3:46 [582]: "Not as is the case in the cults of the idolaters who sacrifice lions, bears, and other wild animals, as is mentioned in the book of Tumtum." A similar tradition is mentioned regarding the reason for the red heifer, which was taken in substitution for the red lion as related in the books of the "idolaters," in order to avert the danger involved in hunting lions. This tradition appears at the beginning of the fourteenth century in the writings of David Ibn Bilia (see Dov Schwartz, "Epigrams (Siyyurin) of R. David Ibn Bilia" [Hebrew], *Kiryat Sefer* 63 (1990-1991): 641. Likewise, it appears in the teachings of the rationalists of Provence in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and in the following sources: (1) a letter of Kalonymus b. Kalonymus to Joseph Ibn Kaspi (*Kalonymos ben Kalonymos Sendscrhreiben an Joseph Kaspi*, ed. Joseph Perles [München: T. Ackermann, 1879], 6). (2) Jacob Farissol's commentary to *The Kuzari*: "And this is the very reason for the divine commandment concerning the red heifer, even if R. Moses [Maimonides] did not explain it thus in the reasons for the commandments in the *Guide of the Perplexed*. And the reason is the following, as is found in the books of India: that at a certain time of year they would take a red lion, which they would burn, and whoever was involved with it would become unclean, and with its ashes they would purify the impure and the menstruant women, which is the gravest impurity for them" (*Bet Ya'akov*, MS. Berlin 124 [Ms. Or. Qu. 653], 52a). This passage also appears in another work from the circle of Farissol, *Hesheq Shlomo* by Shlomo b. Judah of Lunel, Ms. Oxford-Bodleian 2383, 65a, and the interpretation is described there as "the true reason". The text of Ibn Bilia, Kalonymus ben Kalonymus, Farissol, and Shlomo ben Judah is parallel to a well-known text concerning the primordial Enoch, or Hermes. See Moshe Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretation of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bernard Dov Cooperman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 203-205. Maimonides, then, was familiar with the "book of Tumtum," which shows clear Hermetic tendencies. The work is also mentioned in the *Muqaddima* of Ibn Khaldūn as a work by "Timtim the Indian" concerning "the figures of the Zodiac and the stars" (*Muqaddima*, VI.27). This work, to the best of my knowledge, has not yet been translated into Hebrew. For a bibliography of this book, see Moritz Steinschneider, *Zur Pseudepigraphischen Literatur des Mittelalters insbesondere der geheimen Wissenschaften aus hebraischen und arabischen Quellen* (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1965) 83; Franz Rosenthal, trans. and ed. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, vol. 3 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), 156, n. 748.

[12] For example, Maimonides mentions, without elaborating further, "a book attributed to Hermes." On Ibn Ezra's references to Hermetic literature see Shlomo Sela, *Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 184-185. Maimonides also mentions a book by al-Ustumākhus, attributed elsewhere to Aristotle, as in the chronicles of Jirjis al-Makin composed around 1260, and in al-Majriti, *Picatrix von Pseudo-Magriti: Das Ziel des Wiesen*, vol. 3, trans. Hellmut Ritter and Martin Plessner (London: Warburg Institute, 1962), ch. 6. See also Pines, "Le *Sefer Ha-Tamar*," 336.

[13] *Guide*, 3:37. For a list of manuscripts of Ibn Wahshiyya, *The Book of Nabatean*

reflects typical Sabian views, such as the astrological characteristics of the stars,[14] the spirituality they emanate, and the magical possibilities for assimilating such spirituality.[15] In this respect, Ibn Wahshiyya's work presents typically Hermetic elements, such as a detailed description of the cult of effigies and images of the planet Saturn.[16]

Other authors of this circle who were active during the ninth and tenth centuries and whose writings are likely to have been known to Maimonides include Abu Mashar, who established a link between Hermetic tradition and Babylonian doctrines,[17] Thābit ibn Qurra, and possibly also Ibn al-Hātim.[18] All of these to one degree or another accepted the magic and Hermetic views of the Sabians, and Maimonides' description cited above, of how to bring spirituality down to an effigy at a given time and astral configuration conforms to their doctrines. Maimonides may also have been familiar with the Sabian material underlying the "Epistles of the Brethren of Purity," which are replete with similar descriptions.[19] A typical description of this kind from Muslim magical literature is the following prescription for the preparation of talismans to induce spirituality:

> One who wishes to bring down the spirituality of a star, first has to know the nature of that star whose spirituality he wishes to draw down and the house of its degree, and he must prepare himself by wearing a special garment, and with special food and fragrance. Thereafter he

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Agriculture, see Daniil Avraamovich Khvolson, *Über die Überreste der altbabylonischen Literatur in arabischen Übersetzungen* (St. Petersburg: Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1859, rep. Amsterdam 1968) viii, 2, 505. For a description of the contents of the book, see 440-446. A facsimile edition of the work was published by F. Sezgin in Frankfort am Mein, 1984.

[14] On talismanic magic, see Khvolson, *Über die Überreste*, 442-443. On these concepts in Nabatean literature in general, see Daniil Avraamovitch Khvolson, *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus*, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg: Buchdruckerei der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1856), 30 et passim; Jan Hjaerpe, *Analyse critique des traditions arabes sur les sabéens harraniens* (Uppsala: Skriv Service, 1972); Michel Tardieu, "Sabiens Coraniques et 'Sabiens' de Harran," *Journal Asiatique* 274 (1986): 1-44.

[15] See Khvolson, *Über die Überreste*, 732-734. See al-Shahrastani, *Kītāb al-Milal wa'l-nihal* (Cairo: 1948), 117.

[16] Khvolson, *Über die Überreste*, 443.

[17] See David Pingree, *The Thousands of Abu Mashar* (London: University of London, 1968), 17-18.

[18] See Kristen Lippincott and David Pingree, "Ibn Al-Hātim on the Talismans of the Lunar Mansion," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 50 (1987): 57-81.

[19] See Henry Corbin, "Rituel sabéen et exégèse ismaelienne du rituel," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 19 (1950): 181-246; Yves Marquet, "Sabéens et Ihwan Al-Safa," *Studia Islamica* 24 (1966): 35-80; 25 (1967): 35-80; Pines, "On the Term *Rūhanyyiāt*," 515-518.

> must wait and direct himself [to the time that] the star that is the object of his action enters the Zodiac, and that it be directly [in his line of vision] and not blocked by the line of any other star opposite to it in nature. Thereafter he must know what minerals are under the sign of that star, and then he shall make a latticed brazier, whose lower part should be hollow and its upper part open to the atmosphere, and its lower part is divided [so that] it stands upon two legs. Then you shall mount it upon two legs and arouse what is desired of spirituality, as much as you desire… And when you wish to bring down any creature you wish, you must know which star rules it and its day of birth, and make its image in stone under the sign of that same star and at its time, and take care lest there be parallel to it a star opposite in nature from that star or with it in the same constellation.[20]

According to Khvolson's studies of the *Book of Nabatean Agriculture*, Ibn Wahshiyya did not distinguish between different kinds of magic on the basis of their intellectual value. The same holds true for the other classic and Muslim magic sources that Maimonides might have used. For instance, a careful examination of the fifty-second epistle of the "Brethren of Purity," which deals with sorcery, reveals no clear distinction between bringing down spirituality in a definite astral configuration and other, non-astral, forms of magic. Maimonides, however, did postulate such a distinction between precise, calculated astral magic, such as the bringing down of spirituality, and "ordinary" sorcery. In this respect, his view corresponds to that of such works as *Picatrix*..

Can Maimonides' explicit distinction between these two types of magic be traced in later medieval Jewish thought as well? In the late thirteenth century, when almost all Jewish philosophical activity in Spain took place in a Christian environment, several Jewish rationalist thinkers rejected popular forms of magic, such as practical Kabbalah, while also accepting astral magic as a real science.[21] This development may be exemplified by a description—in positive terms—of magic

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[20] *Picatrix*, Ms. München 214, 61a. On traditions from Ibn Wahshiyya, *Book of Nabatean Agriculture*, see, for instance, 90b-91a.

[21] One, such instance, is Shem Tov Ibn Shaprut and his circle. See Norman E. Frimer and Dov Schwartz, *The Life and Thought of Shem Tov ibn Shaprut* [Hebrew](Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben Zvi and the Hebrew University, 1992), 56-166. Ibn Shaprut's attitude toward the popular belief in demons is characteristic: while completely rejecting this belief in itself, he is prepared to recognize it within an astrological framework, according to which the demons are spiritual powers drawn down from the stars. See also ch. 4 below.

activity similar to that portrayed by Maimonides, indeed involving all three of his characteristics. This description appears in a well-known text from a totally different cultural background, cited by Samuel Ibn Zarza in the name of David ibn Bilia, in which the *terafim* are described as a form of bringing down spiritual forces.[22] The text, written at the beginning of the fourteenth century in Portugal, describes *terafim* as an instrument for the induction of pneumatic powers, clearly reflecting the cult described above.

In sum: the first category of magic as defined by Maimonides in *Guide* 3.37, that is, magical practices that call simultaneously upon the factors of time, place, and astral influence, alludes to the bringing down of spiritual forces by a talismanic intermediary. In the debate over philosophy that erupted at the end of the thirteenth century and culminated in the ban imposed by Rashba and his court, the rationalists were indeed characterized by intense involvement with magic of the former type, while popular magic (oaths, demons, and the like) was completely rejected by these same intellectual circles.

A Hidden Polemic?

Maimonides' critique of astrology is aimed at a number of targets.[23] In addition, his descriptions of talismanic magic seem basically to fit Abraham ibn Ezra's astral-magical exegesis of the concept of *terafim*. According to this exegesis, *terafim* are images intended to bring down

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[22] Cited in Samuel Ibn Zarza, *Meqor Hayyim* (Mantua, 559), 121b-c. See Nehemiah Aloni, "David Ibn Bilia and His Works" [Hebrew], *Areshet* (1944): 382. For a similar description from a text that evidently belongs to the same circle, see Moshe Idel, "An Astral-Magical Pneumatic Anthropoid," *Incognita* 2 (1991): 12-14. Incidentally, the burning of incense does not figure in this text. Burning incense was a common technique in early and later works of astrology and magic, both Muslim and Christian. Following are several examples: *Sefer ha-Razim*, ed. Mordechai Margalyot (Jerusalem: American Academy of Jewish Sciences, 1967) 97; *Mafteah Shlomo* (facsimile), ed. Hermann Gollancz (Jerusalem: n.p., 1970) 15a-b; *Sefer ha-Levanah*, cited in Nahmanides, *Commentary to the Torah*, Deuteronomy 18:9, ed. H. D. Chavel, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1960), 427, and in Rabbenu Bahya, *Commentary to the Torah*, ad loc.. Selected passages appear in Fabrizio Lelli, "Le Version Ebraiche di un Testo Ermetico: Il Sefer Ha-Levanah," *Henoch* 12 (1990): 159-161. The full text of *Sefer ha-Levanah* was first published by Albert W. Greenup (London, 1912).

[23] Such as, for instance, the responsum of Abraham bar Hiyya regarding "inquiries of the Chaldean [oracles]." See the discussion by Marx, "Correspondence between the Rabbis of Southern France and Maimonides." See also Israel Efros, *Medieval Jewish Philosophy: Terms and Concepts* [Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1969) 153, and Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, 24-25.

the spirituality of the stars on the basis of meticulous astrological calculations. In Ibn Ezra's own words: "What seems most likely to me is that the *terafim* are made in the image of human beings, and are meant to receive a heavenly power."[24]

It is not inconceivable that Maimonides' firm condemnation of the act of bringing down spiritual forces (of the first category) as tantamount to idolatry was made in the context of a concealed polemic against Ibn Ezra. If Maimonides was indeed familiar with the writings of that enigmatic scholar, including his explicitly astral-magical exegesis, he could hardly have ignored his prestige as scientist and astronomer; in that case, it may well have been Ibn Ezra's views in this area that aroused Maimonides' vehement opposition. This would explain the object of Maimonides' criticism in his *Commentary to the Mishnah*:

> You must know that the perfect philosophers do not believe in talismans but deride them and those who believe in their influence, and the explanation of this matter would be lengthy. But I have said this because I know that most people, and perhaps all, are greatly tempted by them and believe in many such things of that kind, and think that they are true things, but this is not so. And even good and pious men of our Torah think that these things are true, but that they are forbidden because of [the prohibition of] the Torah alone. And they do not know that these are empty and false things, against which the Torah has warned us just as it has warned us against falsehood.[25]

What does Maimonides mean here by the "perfect" philosophers? And how do they know that there is no truth in talismanic magic? The Arabic *al-kamāl*, translated here as "perfection," refers not only to the philosophers' accomplishments, but also to the comprehensive scope of their knowledge, that is, to their mastery of different disciplines, including astronomy. Although there were not many medieval philosophers proficient in astronomy, Maimonides is postulating that scholars striving for intellectual perfection should also study astronomy and he himself, of course, set a personal example in this respect.[26]

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[24] Ibn Ezra's commentary to Genesis 31:19; Idel, "Hermeticism and Judaism," 62-64. On magical exegesis in the school influenced by Ibn Ezra's writings, which developed during the second half of the fourteenth century, see Dov Schwartz, "Various Forms of Magic in Fourteenth Century Spanish Jewish Thought" [Hebrew], *PAAJR* 57 (1991): 17-47, esp. 24-25; and see idem, *Astral Magic*, 62-91.

[25] Maimonides, *Commentary to the Mishnah*, Avodah Zarah 4.7.

[26] Langermann, "Maimonides' Repudiation," 132-133, 140-141, points out that

Maimonides may be implying that philosophers who are expert not only in the realm of astronomy but also in the natural sciences know there is no truth in astral magic. Indeed, according to the laws of physics, all processes that take place in the material world are based upon causality: "Aristotle demonstrates regarding all natural things that they do not come about by chance."[27] Since magical phenomena cannot be subsumed under the rubric of natural causality, they belong to the realm of "chance" and accidents: "The sages have already explained that whatever one considers of the effects of these 'talismans' is a matter that can happen by chance) and they attribute it to them [talismans], and this is a correct philosophical matter."[28] Maimonides uses this terminology in the *Guide* as well, noting how the magicians threaten those who ignore their actions with disaster: "Now this may happen by accident some day to a certain individual, and consequently he will seek to perform the action in question and to follow that belief [in magic]."[29] But, implies Maimonides, if the magician's threat is indeed realized, that is to be attributed to chance alone.

In other words: it is impossible to include the "effects" of magic in the framework of physical laws, as chance is not subject to causality and is therefore not a fit subject for knowledge and study. Hence, those who acknowledge magic as a regular, predictable phenomenon, subject to definite laws,[30] are not truly expert in the laws of nature, although they might be considered proficient in astronomy, being capable of performing the requisite calculations of astral configurations. Since they are unable to distinguish between the laws of nature and chance, they cannot be considered "perfect" scholars. We return below to the definition of magic as a realm amenable to neither explanation nor, *a fortiori*, verification in Aristotelian physics in the discussion of the

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astronomy and physics, as scientific disciplines, call on similar modes of thought, in the sense that stars/planets obey the physical laws governing action at a distance.

[27] *Guide* 2.20 [312]; ed. Munk-Joel, 217, l. 26.

[28] Maimonides, *Commentary to the Mishnah*, Avodah Zarah 4:7. Maimonides here uses the terms *'ittifāq* as well as *'arad* to describe the element of chance in the sublunar world. On these terms in Maimonides' thought, see Abraham Nuriel, "Maimonides on Chance in the World of Generation and Passing Away" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 2 (1983): 41. On the doctrine of nature in Maimonides, see also Arthur Hyman, "Some Aspects of Maimonides' Philosophy of Nature," *La filosofia della natura nel Medioevo* (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 1966), 209-218.

[29] *Guide* 3.37 [546]; ed. Munk-Joel, 400, l. 7.

[30] This is indeed the magician's basic assumption: magic is subject to constant laws, and the desired results will therefore always follow from the magical act.

doctrine of *segullot*. In any event, Maimonides' criticism of "the good and pious men of our Torah" may have been directed, in a sense, against Abraham Ibn Ezra and his circle. Ibn Ezra had a reputation of expertise in astronomy, but he was not known for his knowledge of natural science: his "scientific" works were exclusively concerned with astrology, not one of them having anything to say about physics.

Experiential Knowledge and Astral Magic

The distinctions between various levels of magic and the particular prominence of astral magic also figure in Maimonides' treatment of the doctrine of *segullot*, although in a different manner. According to this doctrine, the visible activities of the forms constitute only a small part of the possibilities embodied in their essence. There is a wondrous world of regularity in the hidden forms, such as the efficacy of remedies in pharmacology or the action of magnetic forces, which cannot be explained by means of Aristotelian causality. These special properties, known as *segullot* (singular: *segullah*; Arabic: *khāṣṣa*), can only be discovered through experience, and hence scholars dealing with them are sometimes called "the masters of experience." The term experience is used here in the meaning of *experimenta*, referring to "events that were indeterminate or purely contingent, and hence could be known only by experiencing."[31] In one of his medical works (*Commentary on the Aphorisms of Hippocrates*), Maimonides explains the action of medicinal herbs in terms of three levels ("powers"): (1) the primary action of the remedy, such as its cooling, warming or drying action; (2) the secondary action of the remedy, such as its softening or hardening action; both of these levels reflect the remedy's action through its matter; (3) the action of the remedy through its form, that is, its *segullot*. Maimonides describes this third level of activity as follows:

> Those actions which the remedy performs in our bodies through its *forma specifica*, by which that body becomes a substance, are what the physicians call *segullot*. And Galen used to say regarding this type of action that it acts through its being a substance. And the fact is that it effects its action through its *forma specifica*, by which that body becomes a substance, but not as an action due to its quality. And these are also

[31] Willam Eamon, *Science and the Secret of Nature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 56.

> called "the third powers," such as the laxative power of laxative remedies, or [remedies] that induce vomiting, or the property of a drug to kill or save the person who drinks it or is stung by some poisonous creature. All these actions derive from form, not from matter.[32]

The action of the *segullot* cannot be attributed exclusively to the primary opposites (dry, wet, hot, cold) and their combinations; it may be discovered only through experience. Thus, their efficacy stems from their *forma specifica* [their form as species], that is, from the essence of the objects concerned and from their powers. As a physician, Maimonides could only acknowledge that certain medicinal herbs were efficacious by virtue of such special properties, although he could not explain the phenomenon in the framework of the Aristotelian scientific paradigm to which he subscribed. He devoted a special section in *Aphorisms* (Chapter 22) to various *segullot*, quoting extensively from Muslim medical literature on the subject. For example, concerning a remedy for healing epilepsy, he writes: "and this has already been tried and tested."[33] In other words, he acknowledges the pharmacological efficacy of such remedies although it cannot be derived in any logical way from the material structure of the object.

As to the possible connection between *segullot* and magic, particularly in the context of the halakhic concept of "the ways of the Amorite," Maimonides writes in the *Guide of the Perplexed*:

> In order to keep people away from all magical practices, it has been prohibited to observe any of their [the idolaters'] usages… I mean all that is said to be useful, but is not required by speculation concerning nature, and takes its course, in their opinion, in accordance with occult properties.[34] This is the meaning of its dictum: "And ye shall not walk in the customs [*huqqot*] of the nation" [Lev. 20:23], these being those

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[32] Maimonides, *Commentary on the Aphorisms of Hippocrates*, Hebrew translation by Moses Ibn Tibbon, ed. Sussman Muntner (Jerusalem, Mosad Harav Kook, 1961) 13. See J. O. Leibowitz and S. Marcus, "*Sefer Hanisyonot*": *The Book of Medical Experiences Attributed to Abraham Ibn Ezra* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984) 18; Yitzhak Tzvi Langermann, "Gersonides on the Magnet and the Heat of the Sun," in *Studies on Gersonides: A Fourteenth-Century Jewish Philosopher-Scientist*, ed. Gad Freudenthal (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 269-275; Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, 53-54, 59-60. The distinction between effects due to quality and effects due to form was common in the Middle Ages. See, for example, Abravanel, Commentary on the Torah, Deuteronomy 18:9 (Jerusalem, 1964) 175.

[33] *Pirqei Moshe* (*Aphorisms of Moses*), trans. Nathan ha-Me'ati, ed. Sussman Muntner (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1961), 270 (18); see 272 (35). This example is also adduced in *Guide* 3:37.

[34] In the source: *al-khawāṣ* (Munk-Joel, 398, l. 10), meaning "special property." The

> that are called by [the sages], may their memory be blessed, ways of the Amorite. For they are branches of magical practices, inasmuch as they are things not required by reasoning concerning nature and lead to magical practices that of necessity seek support in astrological notions. Accordingly the matter is turned into a glorification and a worship of the stars. They say explicitly: "All that pertains to medicine does not pertain to the ways of the Amorite" [TB Shabbat 67a]. They mean by this that all that is required by speculation concerning nature is permitted, whereas other practices are forbidden... For it is allowed to use all remedies similar to these that experience has shown to be valid even if reasoning (*qiyās*) does not require them.[35]

In this passage, Maimonides presents two clear criteria for distinguishing the action of magic from that of *segullot*. A magical act must have two characteristics: (1) it may be associated with astrology ("seek support in astrological notions"); (2) it cannot be included within the framework of the laws of nature, whether theoretical or experiential. The action of a *segullah*, on the other hand, has nothing to do with astrology, and is moreover confirmed by experience. Hence, Maimonides classifies the action of *segullot* as processes that take place in the material world but are not subject to logical reasoning and do not derive from the qualities of the object. This classification should be understood in light of Maimonides' well-known statement: "All that Aristotle states about that which is beneath the sphere of the moon is in accordance with [logical] reasoning."[36] And Maimonides goes on to stipulate three conditions by virtue of which a physical process becomes a logical inference: (1) "things that have a known cause," (2) "that follow one

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word is derived from *khaṣ*, that is, "special" or "unique." Ibn Tibbon in his translation therefore added the synonymous term *ha-kohot ha-meyuhadot*, as the term equivalent to *segullah* would be *kohot* (meaning hidden in the forms of matter). Moreover, we have already explicitly stated that *segullot* are designated *kohot*, meaning "forces" (see above). This being so, it would appear that Qafih's sharp comment in his translation (*Moreh Nevukhim*, vol. 3 [Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1972] 594, n. 32) is totally inappropriate. Note that Al-Harizi translated *al-khawāṣ* simply as *kohot*.

[35] *Guide* 3.37 [543, 544]. On the permission to use medicinal remedies, see Maimonides' ruling in *Code*, Laws of Sabbath, 19:13. See *Entsiqlopedya Talmudit*, vol. 7, 706-712.

[36] *Guide* 2.24 [326]. See W. M. Feldman, "Maimonides as Physician and Scientist," in *Moses Maimonides*, ed. Isidore Epstein (London: Soncino Press, 1935) 130-132. See also the extensive study by Joel Kraemer, "Maimonides on Aristotle and the Scientific Method" [Hebrew], *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume: On the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Moshe Idel, Warren Zeev Harvey and Eliezer Schweid (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought, 1990), 193-224, esp. 215-216.

upon the other," (3) "concerning which it is clear and manifest at what points wisdom and natural providence are effective."

These conditions cannot account for *segullot*, since their mode of operation and their underlying basis are not known to the observer. Nevertheless, some of the processes associated with *segullot* belong to natural philosophy, even though they are not subject to the methods of "demonstration" or "reasoning" and do not follow from the basic material properties of the object. Since the effect of *segullot* is attributed to the form of the object, it is not independent of causality. Accordingly, it may be considered within the framework of physical causality and laws and is therefore distinct from acts of magic, which fall under the rubric of "accident" rather than "natural law." A *segullah* thus represents a law of nature, but one whose mode of operation cannot be inferred from Aristotelian physics. Notably, Maimonides does not consider the possible existence of a *segullah* relying on experience but associated with astrology.

One point needs clarification here: What is the criterion for the definition of *segullot* derived from "natural philosophy"? In other words: how can one distinguish between genuine *segullot* and *segullot* which Halakhah would classify as belonging to "the ways of the Amorite"? According to the passage cited above from *Guide* 3.37, Maimonides bases the legitimacy of the *segullah* on the degree of experience involved in its discovery ("all that experience has shown to be valid"). If the results of the action in question are repeatedly confirmed by experience, it is both effective (from the medical viewpoint) and permissible (from the halakhic viewpoint). If the action is not firmly rooted in experience, it is not effective and is therefore forbidden, because it is likely to be interpreted as deriving from astral influence. Hence, Maimonides explicitly stipulates: "all that experience has shown to be valid."[37] He is willing to admit the existence of processes not open to description in Aristotelian science, provided they are subject to empirical verification. This reliance on empirical observation is in fact similar to Aristotle's method in his biological works.

In addition, Maimonides is prepared to exclude the properties of

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[37] *Millot Ha-Higayon*, ch. 8, cited according to Israel Efros, *Maimonides' Treatise on Logic* (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1938), 40, ll. 16-17. See also ch. 14, 61, l. 9. The example given there by Maimonides is the beneficial action of the drug *scammonia* (mentioned in *Aphorisms of Moses*, ch. 20. See *Pirqei Moshe*, 229 [13] for the processes of digestion and excretion).

medicinal herbs from the definition of "the ways of the Amorite," as he does not consider such properties to involve any astrological coloring.[38] On the other hand, any association of such remedies with the motions of the stars labels them, in point of both medical efficacy and Halakhah, as "idolatry," which Maimonides brands as unreal and nonsensical. Any *segullah* unconfirmed by experience is halakhically forbidden, because it cannot be included within the framework of physical reality.

In sum, Maimonides recognizes the reality of *segullot*, provided that two conditions are met: the properties in question are confirmed by experience, and their action may be explained without any reference to astrology. For instance, Maimonides' explained the precept of *orlah* (the prohibition on eating the fruit of a tree during the first three years of its growth) as aimed against magical methods to hasten the production of fruit in trees. While such attempts are indeed categorized as *segullot*, they are prohibited because they fail to meet the above two conditions: first, despite popular belief ("…what they thought," in Maimonides' terminology), their efficacy is not verified; second, these attempts employ a "method… of the same character as the talismans" in conjunction, moreover, with "the sun's entering into a certain degree [of the Zodiac]," that is, a certain astral configuration.[39]

Maimonides thus draws a sharp distinction between astral magic and *segullot*. In so doing he is not only expressing his objection to "learned" magic, and *a fortiori* "primitive" magic, but also clearly demarcating the borderline between the imaginary and the real, and between the forbidden and the permitted.

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[38] In the above quotation: "that of necessity seek support in astrological notions." On the profound philosophical and scientific motives for Maimonides' condemnation of astrology as idolatrous see Langermann, "Maimonides' Repudiation," 146-151. Thorndike, while realizing Maimonides' "retreat" from a total rejection of magic in medical matters, overlooked the fact that he removed *segullot* from the realm of astrology; see Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 2, 209.

[39] Fourteenth century exegetes of Ibn Ezra's circle interpreted biblical passages in light of the possibility of hastening the ripening of fruits. See Dov Schwartz, "Worship of God or of Star? The Controversy of R. Abraham al-Tabib and R. Solomon Franco" [Hebrew], *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 1 (1996): 219.

Reactions

Having clarified Maimonides' attitude to astral magic, we shall now consider the reactions to his firm rejection of such practices in late medieval thought. This section will be devoted to critical responses; in the next, some consideration will be given to the variegated exegeses aroused by his position.

Criticism of Maimonides' Position

Solomon ben Adret (Rashba), in a famous responsum concerning the "metallic image of a lion used as a remedy," questioned Maimonides' attitude to magic on several counts. As opposed to the brief comments of other halakhic authorities, Rashba posed several penetrating and fundamental questions. Some of these touched directly on Maimonides' attitude toward the extensive magical material in the Talmud: how, asked Rashba, could Maimonides contradict various pronouncements of the talmudic sages concerning magic, and why did he exclude such material from his great legal code? These questions exceed the scope of the present discussion.[40] Some of Rashba's other questions, however, relating to a seeming inconsistency in Maimonides' attitude toward magic, have a direct bearing on our subject:

1. On the one hand, Rashba maintains, Maimonides claims that all magical practices have no substance, while on the other hand he claims that magical practices that are beneficial for healing may be used and hence are real. This substantive distinction leads to a halakhic paradox: according to the former statement, all matters of magic are prohibited without exception as illusory, whereas according to the second statement, those verified by experience are allowed. As Rashba writes:

> The words of the Master, of blessed memory, need close examination. For from his words we learn that any thing from which true benefit

[40] Rashba was only one of many critics who attacked Maimonides for failing to adhere to rabbinic views. See, for example, Nissim Girondi, *Derashot ha-Ran*, ed. Aryeh L. Feldman (Jerusalem: Shalem Institute, 1977) 205, 220; Yosef b. David of Saragosa, *Commentary on the Torah*, ed. Aryeh L. Feldman (Jerusalem: Shalem Institute, 1970) 121. For examples of magical material in the Talmud ignored by Maimonides, see Lewis, "Maimonides on Superstition," 584-684. See Dov Schwartz, "The Debate on Astral Magic in Provence in the Fourteenth Century" [Hebrew], *Zion* 58 (1993): 141-174.

> may ensue is not considered prohibited by the Torah in any respect, whether it be through a real property [*segullah*] which is found in their body [namely, of natural substances], or whether it be confirmed by experience… But now, after forbidding, he has permitted, [ruling that] if something has been shown by experience to be beneficial, it is permitted to rely because of this experience upon magicians.[41]

2. Although Maimonides permitted magical practices associated with healing, he prohibited them again under the heading of "the ways of the Amorite." After quoting the passage from *Guide* 3.37 cited above in the discussion of *segullot*, Rashba comments: "Indeed, he has prohibited to us even a thing that is beneficial by virtue of being a *segullah*, if it cannot be derived by natural philosophy. Thus, we should again prohibit the nail of a person who is crucified because of 'ways of the Amorite,' after having permitted it."[42] Rashba therefore concludes: "Hence the Master, of blessed memory, has left us in great confusion."

3. At the conclusion of his lengthy responsum, Rashba adds a further critical comment regarding Maimonides' statement that "all that is derived by natural philosophy is permitted, whereas other practices are forbidden."[43] Rashba examines the concept of "natural philosophy": Maimonides was presumably referring to whatever the classical philosophers and physicians considered in their writings (he specifically mentions Aristotle and Galen), and claimed that whatever is not included within that framework cannot be subsumed under the heading of "natural philosophy." Rashba comments: "This is truly something that the intellect cannot accept,"[44] for a major characteristic of the *segullah* is that its mode of operation cannot be explained logically within the frame of Aristotelian science, and so it cannot be considered in the context of the findings of the philosophers, even the most perfect among them. Rashba's discussion of magic was in fact included in the debate over philosophy that broke out at that time, and in which he himself took a major part.[45] He could not, there-

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[41] The responsum was printed in Abba Mari of Lunel's book *Minhat Qena'ot*, ch. 21, and in Rashba, *Responsa*, 1: 414. The quotations are from Rashba, *Responsa*, ed. Hayyim Z. Dimitrovsky, Part I, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1990) 285-287, ll. 56-59, 72-73.

[42] Ibid., 287-288, ll. 85-87. See Twersky, "Halakhah and Science," 137, n. 54.

[43] Ibid., 309, ll. 348-349.

[44] Ibid., 309, l. 356.

[45] On the connection between this polemic and magical teachings, see Shatz-

fore, agree to make philosophical authority the exclusive criterion for attitudes to magic.

Rashba's objections, even considered in isolation from the historical context of Provence at the end of the thirteenth century and beginning of the fourteenth century, highlight the problematic nature of Maimonides' attitude to magic, understood by Rashba and his contemporaries to apply uniformly to all forms of magic. Our discussion up to this point indicates that Maimonides' stance was coherent and consistent, even if Rashba, who believed in the principles of astrology and was inclined to acknowledge the reality of astral magic, found it difficult to accept such a stance.

The question Rashba had been asked concerned "the image of a lion [as a remedy to heal] the kidneys," that is, an act of bringing down astral spirituality for medical purposes. Maimonides strongly denied the reality of talismanic/astral magic, as we saw in the first two sections above, and in fact associated it with idolatry. Since Maimonides' definition of magic is based on astrology, it seems clear that his attitude was consistent and coherent. The contradictions that Rashba claimed to have found were due to the fact that, unlike Maimonides, he made no distinction between the validity and substance of astral magic and those of the doctrine of *segullot*. Understanding Maimonides' concept of magic to be homogeneous, Rashba could not reconcile the latter's absolute prohibition of magic with his permission to use experientially verified *segullot*. Since both astrologers and magicians on the one hand, and "masters of experience" on the other, claimed that their discoveries were based on experience, that is, on the recurrent success of their activities, Rashba lumped astral magic and *segullot* together.

Rashba was in fact representative of the tendency in his day to combine astral magic with the doctrine of *segullot*. A good illustration of this may be found in the book *Ma'aseh Nissim* by Nissim of Marseilles (first half of fourteenth century), who bases his explanation of the sacrificial rite on talismanic magic and the efficacy of *segullot*:

> The matter of sacrifices was known from antiquity and was well known to all persons who purport to know the future, such as soothsayers and

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miller, "The Form of the Twelve Constellations," 397-398, and the bibliography cited there. In addition, Nahmanides' influence on Rashba in this connection should not be ignored. Compare David Margalit, *Jewish Sages as Physicians* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1962), 131-133. For a comprehensive discussion see Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, 219-261.

> priests of high places and Baalim and Ashtarot, and those who make images and talismans, that is to say, they [sacrifices] help in various things through their pleasant odors, for the odor of burning flesh and fats are a marvelous *segullah* for this.[46]

Returning now to Maimonides' distinction between astral magic and the doctrine of *segullot*, let us refine that distinction, noting that his position in relation to experientially discovered remedies is rooted in his scientific methodology. As Kraemer has already observed,[47] Maimonides does not reject findings that have not been obtained by demonstrative methods, that is, by logical reasoning. He requires such findings, however, to be treated within the framework of other modes of inference, namely, by dialectical reasoning, which is influenced to some degree by human subjectivity. Dialectical reasoning is an integral part of science, though considered inferior in validity to demonstrative methods. The study of *segullot* does indeed belong to natural science, but its findings are discovered by experience and hence not derivable by logical inference. In addition, there is a significant affinity between the medicinal benefits of *segullot* and Aristotle's biological teaching, which employs different methods of research than physics and closer to those of experimental science,[48] as Maimonides was apparently well aware. Similarly, Galen's medical works are also partly based upon experience.[49] This being so, the study of those *segullot* that meet the requirements of science may be considered a scientific discipline. Yet, any association of such studies with astrology pulls the "scientific" ground from beneath them and takes matters into a halakhically

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[46] Nissim of Marseilles, *Ma'aseh Nissim*, published by Joshua Heschel Schorr in *He-Halutz* 7 (1865): 130. On further references related to magic in *Ma'aseh Nissim*, see Schorr's comments, 111-112. The magical link between the sacrificial rite and the prediction of the future appears in other sources. See, for instance, the paraphrase to a commentary on *Sefer Yetsirah* by Judah ibn Malkah, *Kitāb Uns wa-Tafsīr*, ed. Georges Vajda (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1974) 26 (the abridger notes the Hermetic source of the material). See also the responsum of Profiat Duran to Meir Crescas, which relies upon Ibn Ezra's commentary to Leviticus 1:1 ("There are also in the burnt offerings secrets concerning the future." See Idel, "Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretation," 81-82.

[47] Kraemer, "On Aristotle and the Scientific Method," 220.

[48] See, for example, G. E. R. Lloyd, "Experiment in Early Greek Philosophy and Medicine," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 190 (1964): 50-72; Robert Bolton, "Definition and Scientific Method in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* and *Generation of Animals*," in *Philosophical Issues in Aristotle's Biology*, ed. Allan Gotthelf and James G. Lennox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 120-166.

[49] See Thorndike, *A History of Magic*, vol. 2, 139-165.

forbidden area, since astral magic is a false belief, completely devoid of any scientific value.

Maimonides is thus consistent in his approach to magic, even given his seemingly ambivalent rulings concerning the issue of *segullot*, to which Rashba addressed himself. As to the halakhic and talmudic material cited by Rashba as seemingly contradicting this position, Maimonides would presumably have classified the relevant practices under the heading of *segullot* discovered by natural philosophy and therefore permissible.

Influence and Rejection

How did the Maimonidean rejection of magical practices influence the coming generations of medieval philosophy? In order to answer this question, we will briefly outline some of the reactions to Maimonides' critique in the late Middle Ages, in particular to his negation of astral magic. Emphasis will be placed on the dilemma facing those rationalists who, on the one hand, looked up to Maimonides as their primary philosophical authority, while on the other subscribing to some degree or another to astral magic. A widespread belief in the efficacy of astral magic is documented from approximately the last third of the thirteenth century.[50]

We begin with some of the thinkers who joined Maimonides in his rejection of astral science, since it was only natural his unequivocal approach should evoke similar critiques among his contemporaries and immediate successors. In the philosophical context, mention should be made of Isaac Pollegar, who devoted the third part of his work, *Ezer ha-Dat*, to an attack upon astrology, in the course of which he mentions Hermetic literature alongside astral magic.[51] Among halakhic scholars, an uncompromising stand against astrology, and probably also astral magic, was taken by Judah ben Asher.[52] Another follower of Maimonides in this area was Menahem ha-Meiri, who formulated

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[50] One of the earliest thinkers to deal at length with astral magic was Judah b. Nissim ibn Malkah, as shown by the studies of Georges Vajda. On the period of his activity, see Moshe Idel, "The Beginning of North African Kabbalah?" [Hebrew], *Peʿamim* 43 (1990): 6-7.

[51] See Yitzhak Folker, *Ezer ha-Dat*, ed. Jacob Levinger (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1984), 115.

[52] See Ron Barkai, *Science, Magic, and Mythology in the Middle Ages* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Van Leer, 1987), 11.

a clear-cut criterion for the permissibility of medications based upon repeated experience: as long as there is no connection between the action of the medication and that of the stars, it is not considered "ways of the Amorite."[53] In the fifteenth century, Elijah Delmedigo criticized attempts to explain the commandments as tools for bringing down heavenly forces.[54] Rashba's hesitations and his tentative language thus reflect the considerable differences between those who acknowledged the validity of astral magic, or at least its medicinal benefit, and those who, following Maimonides, opposed it.

Other scholars were troubled by their dilemma between their veneration of Maimonides and their own belief in astral magic. Some of them tried to resolve the impasse by arguing that Maimonides actually admitted the efficacy and beneficial effects of magic, not in an ontological but in a psychological sense. Magical practices, they reasoned, arouse the imagination and thereby enable the magician to foresee the future. A moderate example of this is found in an apologia sent to Rashba by Jedaiah ha-Penini Bedersi at the beginning of the fourteenth century. While admitting that Maimonides negates the reality of different forms of magic, Jedaiah believes that Maimonides would agree that the future can be predicted with a reasonable degree of probability through magic and astrological calculations. Jedaiah wrote his apologia in response to the anti-philosophical ban issued by Rashba and his court, referring in particular to their prohibition on interpreting the Temple vessels and priestly garments as symbols of astronomical instruments (such as the astrolabe). There are, he claims, two kinds of knowledge of the future outside the prophetic sphere:

> The first type is revealing the unknown by the power of the imagination alone, through a wondrous disposition of his [the practitioner's] nature. The practitioner of this technique reveals secrets, whether in sleep—that is, the matter of correct dreams—or in a waking state, while exercising his faculties to some extent, and that is what is called divination [*kesem*]. Sometimes the divination is preceded by certain actions to arouse the

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[53] See *Beth ha-Behirah le-Masekhet Shabbat*, ed. Yitzhak Shimson Lange (Jerusalem: n.p. 1976) 249-250. In this source, Menahem ha-Meiri attributes simple magical belief to "nursing women and those who raise their children in the study of these vain things" (250). On Meiri's attitude to astral magic, see Dov Schwartz, "La Magie Astrale dans la pensée juive rationaliste en Provence au XIV[e] siècle," *AHDLMA* 61 (1994): 35-37; idem, *Astral Magic*, 219-261.

[54] *Sefer Behinat ha-Dat*, ed. Jacob Joshua Ross (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Avi University, 1984), 99. See Idel, "Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretation," 76.

> imagination, and sometimes without them, depending on the strength of the disposition. Among such preliminary actions are consulting a medium or a wizard, and necromancy, and augury involving the chirping of living creatures and in audible speech, and certain kinds of soothsaying at set hours, and many kinds of sorcery and casting lots by striking the sand, and by palmistry and creases in the shoulder, and other kinds of lots—all these are only means of arousing the imagination for those who are so disposed, according to the opinion of our great Rabbi [Maimonides], without these contemptible acts having any concrete reality.[55]

Maimonides, Jedaiah believes, would not deny that magical techniques might be considered effective to some degree, provided that their efficacy is attributed solely to stimulation of the imaginative faculty.

Jedaiah's second type is prediction of the future based upon the laws of astrology, which he believed that even Maimonides would acknowledge, once again with the proviso that astral influence was capable only of arousing the imaginative faculty:

> And even though it seems from the words of our great rabbi, of blessed memory, in *The Book of the Commandments* and elsewhere that such prediction of the future [by means of astrology] is also to be ascribed to the imagination, and that determining the laws [lit: the judgments, of the stars, namely, astrology] is useless except insofar as it arouses the imaginative faculty alone, because he does not believe in astrology in the manner that was agreed upon by the elders of that art in their books, for necessary reasons relating to religion and intellect.[56]

Thus, Jedaiah argued that Maimonides allowed magical techniques as a psychological tool, though he did not go as far as claiming that Maimonides acknowledged the reality of magic; magic is effective, he asserts, solely as a means of exciting and arousing imaginative powers and thus enabling the practitioner to predict the future.

What Jedaiah did not do at the beginning of the fourteenth century, however, was done later during that century. Discussing astral influences, Nissim Gerondi (Ran) wrote: "It is impossible that their influence

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[55] *Ketav Hitnazzelut*, printed in *Teshuvot ha-Rashba* (Bologna, 1539), 79b. Note that Jedaiah indeed rejects the reality of astral magic. One of the benefits gained by studying the secular sciences, he believes, is their use in proving the inefficacy of such magic. See ibid., 81a, and Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, 219-261.

[56] Rashba, *Responsa*, 79c. Incidentally, Gersonides follows a similar line, interpreting the *terafim* as a means of bringing astral influence down to images, adding that they were "a thing that arouses the power of the imagination" (Commentary to 1 Samuel 15:23), and see Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, 237-243.

[that of celestial bodies] should not be drawn down to a greater or lesser degree in accordance with the disposition of those who become aroused."[57] Nissim quotes from *Guide* 3.37 and immediately goes on to say, as if summarizing Maimonides' view:

> And it follows from this that the only things prohibited by the Torah are the vain things that have no reality, that is, to direct the will of the source of influence, which is a matter that has no truth. But as to preparing the affected object, whether through overt or covert nature, as in the doctrine of *segullot*, the Torah did not prohibit that at all.[58]

Thus, unlike ha-Meiri and others who held similar opinions, Nissim believed that even Maimonides conceded the possibility of using experiential means to receive the influence of astral bodies.

Finally, I conclude with an interesting example of an impossible attempt to harmonize Maimonides' teachings with astral magic in a concrete sense. Samuel Ibn Zarza, active in Spain in the second half of the fourteenth century, used ideas of astral magic in his exegesis on rabbinic Aggadah and the Bible, as well as in a supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's biblical commentary. The context of my illustration is the astral-magical explanation of the sacrificial rite as a technique for bringing down spirituality. Ibn Zarza, ignoring Maimonides' critique of astral magic, wonders why Maimonides did not mention this line of reasoning in his own interpretation of sacrifices. Answering his own query, he replies: "And the truth is that the Rabbi, of blessed memory, avoided saying things that relate to the stars, but brought his words and his discussion close to the intention of the Torah."[59] In other words, Maimonides endeavored to ensure that his reasons for the commandments would conform to the plain meaning of the written text, rather than to their deeper significance. In another context, commenting on Maimonides' statement that "he who knows God 'finds grace in His sight' and not he who merely fasts and prays" (*Guide* 1.54 [123]), Ibn Zarza writes:

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[57] Feldman, *Derashot ha-Ran*, 58. See also 60.

[58] Ibid., 59. See also 219-222. He concludes that we are permitted to prepare "a special image for healing" (222).

[59] Ibn Zarza, *Meqor Hayyim*, 63d. On the magical rationale in the writings of Ibn Zarza for the sacrificial rite as negating the harm caused by the stars, see Dov Schwartz, *The Religious Philosophy of R. Samuel ibn Zarza* [Hebrew] (Ph. D. diss., Bar Ilan University, 1989), 1: 180.

> That if he prays [as a defense against] anger, he should do so at a time when the planet Jupiter, which signifies anger, is in its degree. And if he prays for water he should do so when the moon is in its degree, which signifies water; and he should not pray [as a defense against] heat when Mars, which signifies heat, is at its exaltation; and in the degree of Saturn for the revelation of secrets and for revenge from his enemies.[60]

Thus, Ibn Zarza interprets Maimonides' statement to the effect that a person's prayer is defective if not coordinated with the position of the heavenly body appropriate to his need. Prayer here assumes an explicitly magical guise, in accordance with the benefits mentioned (water, being saved from heat, vengeance), and Maimonides is depicted as specifically advocating such an outlook. Ibn Zarza, incidentally, was well versed in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, which he cites on almost every page of *Meqor Hayyim* and frequently in *Mikhlol Yofi*. Thus, despite presumably being aware of Maimonides' views on astral magic, he nevertheless saw fit to propose a patently absurd reading, namely, to harmonize his views with those of the magicians.[61] Perhaps Ibn Zarza believed that Maimonides' rejection of astral magic was intended for an exoterical context, but that esoterically he in fact believed in astral magic.

It is instructive to compare this philosophical situation with the parallel one in the world of Muslim thought: Averroes' adamant opposition to astrology and its kindred practices found no tangible echoes in the Muslim world. Thus, for example, Ibn Khaldūn was not at all influenced by Averroes in the lengthy discussion of magic in his *Muqaddima*, just as he was not influenced by him in his own moderate rejection of astrology.[62] By contrast, Maimonides' massive influence

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[60] Samuel ibn Zarza, *Mikhlol Yofi*, Ms. Paris Heb. 729-730, Coll. 1, 217a. Solomon Alconstantin likewise claims that Maimonides certainly did not ignore the magical-astral rationale for sacrifices. See Dov Schwartz, "Astrology and Astral Magic in the Writings of R. Salomon Alconstantin" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 15 (1993): 56; idem, *Astral Magic*, 118.

[61] On a similar phenomenon in the teaching of Ibn Shaprut, see Schwartz, "Various Forms of Magic," 44, n. 73; Frimer and Schwartz, *The Life and Thought of Shem Tov ibn Shaprut*, 162. Note also two formulas in the realm of alchemy that were attributed to Maimonides in Ms. Manchester-Gaster 1435. See: *Iggerot ha-Rambam*, ed. Yitzhak Shailat, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Ma'lyiot, 1988) 693-694. Shailat remarks that it is questionable "the author did not know Maimonides' attitude to alchemy." More probably, the copyist wished to appropriate the authoritative figure of Maimonides to legitimize alchemical activities close to his own heart.

[62] Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 258-267.

was a central element of Jewish philosophic thought from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, so that a thinker like Samuel ibn Zarza had to reconcile the approach of Maimonides to his own world view, no less than magical discussions were ascribed to Averroes.[63] Neither he nor other rationalists could accept such an obvious clash between the approach of the profoundly venerated Maimonides and a central, significant area of their own activity and thought—astral magic.

In a sense, the attitude to magic is comparable with certain traditions that saw Maimonides as a kabbalist.[64] But together with this similarity there is also a great difference: nowhere in his writings does Maimonides relate to kabbalistic doctrines, and his supposed attitude to Kabbalah was inferred solely from attempts to reinterpret the spirit of his teachings, which are not readily harmonized with theosophic or ecstatic doctrines. Magic, however, he rejects explicitly and entirely. Yet despite this uncompromising rejection, medieval thinkers and writers claimed that Maimonides recognized the efficacy of astral magic and, in the epistle known as *Megillat Setarim*—falsely attributed to Maimonides—the author of the epistle proposes, in Maimonides' name, a detailed formula for bringing down celestial spirituality.[65] In sum: Maimonides' true approach to magic was never universally accepted and did not strike roots in medieval Jewish thought.

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[63] The book *Moznei ha-'Iyyunim* was attributed to Averroes by several medieval thinkers. For example, the circle of Provençal exegetes of *The Kuzari* at the beginning of the fifteenth century consistently attributed this work to him. See, for instance, Nathaniel Kaspi, *Edut le-Yisra'el* (Commentary to *The Kuzari*), Ms. Paris 677, 21b, 158a, 181a; Jacob Farissol, *Beth Ya'akov*, Ms. Berlin 124, 18b, 122b, 123a, 139b; Solomon ben Judah of Lunel, *Hesheq Shelomo*, Ms. Oxford-Bodleian 2383, 20b, 139b. A special chapter in *Moznei ha-'Iyyunim* discusses the spiritual powers of the stars and techniques for bringing them down. On this work, see Binyamin Abrahamov, "The Sources of *Moznei ha-'Iyyunim*" [Hebrew], *Da'at* 34 (1995): 83-86.

[64] See Moshe Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," *Studies in Maimonides*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990) 31-79.

[65] See *Qovets Iggerot ha-Rambam*, Part II (Leipzig, 1859) 36b. See Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," 79. A similar phenomenon may be observed in our own times. A group of yeshivah students engaged in the study of Jewish astrological writings has already published two books in a series entitled "Astrology from a Torah Perspective" (*Ha-Itztagninut be-Aspaqlaryah shel Torah*): Shelomo Peniel, *Or Einayim* (Jerusalem: A. Fischer, 1983); and a selection of writings by Moses Sofer (*Hatam Sofer*) on astrology (Jerusalem, 1984). Both books open with a publisher's introduction citing various passages from Maimonides' writings on the value of knowledge about the universe as a motto for the entire book, as if Maimonides had never written anything in condemnation of astrology!

CHAPTER THREE

FROM THEURGY TO MAGIC: SACRIFICE IN THE CIRCLE OF NAHMANIDES AND HIS INTERPRETERS

In the early history of Kabbalah, in thirteenth century Spain, Nahmanides was an authoritative key figure, perceived as such by the kabbalists themselves. He had several kabbalist-disciples, including Solomon b. Adret (Rashba), Isaac Todros and David Cohen, and some of them in turn had their own disciples. Toward the end of the thirteenth century and at the beginning of the fourteenth century, members of the second generation of this circle, mainly disciples of Rashba, wrote a series of works whose main intent was to explain the kabbalistic "secrets" included in Nahmanides' commentary to the Torah. Among these were Bahya b. Asher, Shem Tov ibn Gaon, Joshua ibn Shuʿeib (whose commentary was attributed to ibn Sahula), and Isaac of Acre. These thinkers have hitherto been considered as forming a distinct kabbalistic school, propounding a well-defined set of ideas. Other disciples, who did not deal directly with Nahmanides' "secrets" though kabbalistic theories were by no means foreign to them, included Yom Tov ibn Ashbili (known as Ritba) and Jacob Sikili, both disciples of Rashba.

The focus of this chapter is on two models purporting to explain the reasons for the Torah's religious precepts: kabbalistic theurgy (enhancement of divine power) and astral magic, and with the contacts between them, from the preliminary synthesis in Nahmanides' biblical exegesis and interpretation of the "secret" of sacrifice to the shades of opinion that evolved among his disciples.

In the kabbalistic-theurgic model, the precepts' main action is to achieve proper balance in the world of the *sefirot* and to enhance their power and fertility. The balance is generally obtained by drawing down emanation or influence from the uppermost *sefirah* (or from several *sefirot*) to the lower *sefirot*. The action (offering a sacrifice) and its accompanying intention are directed toward "the need of heaven" (*tzorekh gavoah*), that is, toward the perfection and proper functioning of the divine world. The kabbalist is not concerned with personal, material benefit; even if that is the ultimate outcome, it is not a direct

consequence of the religious act or the performer's intent.

The magic-astral model focuses the positive action of the religious precept on drawing down emanation from the world of the *sefirot* to the terrestrial world through rites prescribed in the Hermetic literature, echoes of which found their way into the worlds of Islam and Judaism. In many cases, the advocates of this model ascribe the descending influence to an additional, astral source (stars, constellations). The religious act is thus directed toward the beneficial, material advantage of the celebrant (the person offering the sacrifice). The magic-astral model is also typified by its mode of operation. The influence is brought down through appropriate preparation on the performer's part, which involves a certain symbolification of the emanating source. The magic-astral model entered Kabbalah thanks to the influence of Abraham ibn Ezra and Judah Halevi, in whose thought the idea of bringing the spirituality of the stars down to earth is prominent. It is already clear in Judah Halevi's teachings that one can embrace the model of emanation assumed in astral magic while not necessarily considering the stars as the source of the emanation. The emanation may flow from God or from the *sefirot*, and it is drawn down in the same way as astral spirituality, that is, by making the prescribed preparations to bring down divine influence to the material world in combination with a variety of techniques (prayer, incense burning, and so forth). Some kabbalists identify the stars themselves as the source of emanation, while others are content with a theosophical source.

In what follows, I will show how the magic-astral model was embraced by kabbalistic circles in thirteenth and fourteenth century Spain as a distinct theological factor, and will consider the special part played in that process by the "secret of sacrifice."

The Secret of Sacrifice According to Nahmanides: Theurgy v. Astral Magic

Two facts in Nahmanides' biography point to the coexistence of the theoretical and practical models. First, Nahmanides was one of the earliest theosophical kabbalists, although his relationship with the circle of Gerona kabbalists is a matter of scholarly controversy. Second, Nahmanides was a healer who employed magic-astral techniques.[1] I shall

[1] On the evidence of Rashba as collected in *Minhat Qena'ot*. See David Margalit, *Jewish Sages as Physicians* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1962), 131-133; Isaiah

argue that Nahmanides, in his philosophical teachings, created a synthesis of the two models—the theosophical-theurgic and the magic-astral. This synthesis was the beginning of a ramified system of contacts between the two models among his later kabbalist interpreters.

At several points in Nahmanides' commentary on the Torah, he discusses the "secret" of the sacrificial rite, which he calls a "great secret" or "profound secret."[2] In his commentary on Leviticus 1:9 he makes a series of allusions that considerably influenced his kabbalist interpreters in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Several passages touch directly upon the theurgic action of the sacrifice:

> But the whole subject is explained in the Torah [itself], as it is said, "My offering, My bread for My fire-offerings (*le-ishai*)" [Numbers 28: 2]; and it is said, "the food of the fire offering (*isheh*)" [Leviticus 3:11, 16, and so forth], meaning that the offerings are the food of *isheh*, and from it they are for the *ishim*—the word *isheh* being an expression for "fire." … The reason, however, why He did not say *esh* but said *isheh* [composed of the letters *alef*, *shin*, *heh*] is [to allude to] the plain meaning thereof, as it has been shown you in the Mount[3] at the Giving of the Torah, which refers to the offering in the attribute of justice.[4] The slaughtering [of the offering] must be to the Name of the Lord alone, meaning that [he who slaughters it] must have no intention to do anything else in the world, save unto the Name of the Lord only,[5]

Shachar, "The Seal of Nahmanides" [Hebrew], in *Jerusalem in the Middle Ages: Selected Papers*, ed. Benjamin Z. Kedar and Zvi Baras (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben Zvi, 1979), 146-147.

[2] Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, 5 vols. trans. Charles B. Chavel (New York: Shilo Publishing House, 1971-76) Genesis 4:3 [88]; Exodus 22:19 [392]. All further quotations from Nahmanides' Torah commentary are from this translation, with occasional modifications. Number in square brackets refers to page in the corresponding volume.

[3] Exodus 27:8 (the expression).

[4] Nahmanides cites rabbinic sources (*Sifri*, Pinehas, 143; TB Menahot 110a) according to which the only Divine Name occurring in the texts relating to sacrifice is the Tetragrammaton. He quotes several passages dealing with sacrifices, however, in which names derived from the name *Elohim* are used. His explanation is that a sacrifice, by its very nature, involves a sacrifice to *esh*, "fire," which represents the attribute of *din* (justice). In this sense, the sacrifice is a ransom, as it were, intended to allay divine wrath. The celebrant's intentions, however, should be directed toward the attribute of *hesed* (love). See Chayim Henoch, *Nahmanides Philosopher and Mystic* (Jerusalem: The Harry Fischel Institute for Research in Jewish Law, 1978), 404-407. In Henoch's interpretation, the divine influence descends to the *sefirot* in a fixed order, one after the other. See Elliot R. Wolfson, "By Way of Truth: Aspects of Nahmanides' Kabbalistic Hermeneutic," *AJS Review* 14 (1989), 131-133.

[5] The association of the Tetragrammaton (represented here by "the Lord") with

> this being the meaning of the expression "it is a burnt offering… a fire-offering" (*olah hu… isheh hu*) [Exodus 29:25]… That is why the verse says, "for the fire-offerings (*ishei*) of the Lord, the bread of their God, they offer and they shall be holy," for the offering of their God is unto the *ishei* of the Lord; and therefore the Rabbis have said that in [the section of the Torah that presents] the commands for the offerings, it does not mention *El* or *Elohim* (God), but "a fire-offering to the Lord, a pleasing odor to the Lord," for the intention must be to the Lord alone, and he who performs the acts of offering it up should have no other intention save only to the proper Name [the Tetragrammaton].
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> It is with reference to this too that it is said, [speaking of the offerings,] "They shall come up with acceptance on My altar, and I will add glory to My glorious house" [Isaiah 60:7]—meaning to say that the offerings shall be accepted upon His altar, and He will then add glory to His glorious house when they go up for a pleasing odor, the word "pleasing" (*nihoah*) being derived from the expression "there rests" (*nahah*) the spirit of Elijah on Elisha"; "and there rested (*va-tanah*) the spirit upon them" [Numbers 11:26]. Likewise all terms of *qorban* (offering) [from the root *qrb*, near] are expressions of approaching and unity.[6]

This kabbalistic interpretation is given after an exposition of the psychological explanation, according to which the actions involved in offering the sacrifice shape the celebrant's thoughts.[7] This passage,

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the attribute of mercy or compassion (*tif'eret*, lit.: "splendor") first appears in the commentary to Genesis 7:1 [114-115]: "[But] now with the attribute of mercy He hinted to him concerning the sacrifice, to inform him that He will have regard for his offering and that by the merit of his offering, the world will exist, never again to be cut off by the waters of the flood. This is why the Tetragrammaton is mentioned here."

[6] Commentary to Leviticus 1:9 [23-25]. The last sentence derives from *Sefer ha-Bahir*: "Why is [a sacrifice] called a *qorban*? Because it brings near [*meqarev*] the forms of the holy powers… And *nihoah* is nothing but descent, as it is said, "and he descended" [Leviticus 9:22], translated [into Aramaic] *ve-nahit*, meaning that the spirit descends and becomes one with those holy forms and is brought near by the sacrifice, and therefore it is called *qorban*" (Margalyot ed., para. 109). See Gershom Scholem, *The Kabbalah in Gerona* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mif'al Hashikhpul, 1976), 334; Henoch, *Nahmanides Philosopher and Mystic*, 401.

[7] "Since man's deeds are accomplished through thought, speech and action, therefore God commanded that when man sins and brings an offering, he should lay his hands upon it in contrast to the [evil] deed [committed]. He should confess his sin verbally in contrast to his [evil] speech, and he should burn the inwards and the kidneys [of the offering] in fire because they are the instruments of thought and desire in the human being. He should burn the legs [of the offering] since they correspond to the hands and feet of a person, which do all his work. He should sprinkle the blood upon the altar, which is analogous to the blood in his body. All these acts are performed in order that when they are done, a person should realize that he has sinned against his God with his body and his soul, and that his blood should really

as apparently noted already by Ritba,[8] is rather ambiguous on two counts:

1. The pairs of *sefirot* described here as the theosophical object of the sacrificial rite are not clearly identified. The "approaching" brought about by the sacrifice in the world of the *sefirot* may be understood as referring to several pairs: *din* and *tif'eret* ("His glorious house," mercy, the Tetragrammaton); *din* and *malkhut*[9](*isheh, ishim*);[10] *tif'eret* and *malkhut* ("altar," "glorious house"); *hesed* (*Yah*) and *din* (*Elohim*); *hokhmah* (*Yah*, "*ratzon*" [good will, acceptance)[11] and *tif'eret* or *malkhut*. This question

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be spilled and his body burned, were it not for the loving-kindness of the Creator, who took from him a substitute and a ransom, namely, this offering, so that its blood should be in place of his blood, its life in place of his life, and that the chief limbs of the offering should be in place of the chief parts of his body. The portions [of the sin-offering given to the priests] are in order to support the teachers of the Torah, so that they pray on his behalf. The reason for the daily public offering is that it is impossible for the public [as a whole] to continually avoid sin. Now these are words which are worthy to be accepted, appealing to the heart as do words of Aggadah" (Commentary on Leviticus 1:9 [21]).

[8] See below, note 34.

[9] See Isaac of Acre on sacrifice: "For many of the things R. Azriel associates with *hesed* and *pahad* [fear (*din*), the master (Nahmanides), may he rest in peace, associates them with *tif'eret* and *atarah* [*malkhut*]" (Amos Goldreich, *Sefer Me'irat Eynayim le-R. Yitzhak de-min Akko* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1984), 146 ll. 16-17. R. Isaac tries to resolve the contradiction between the two. See Moshe Idel, "R. Moshe ben Nahman: Kabbalah, Halakhah, and Spiritual Leadership" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 64 (1995): 541.

[10] See Elliot Wolfson, "The Secret of the Garment in Nahmanides" [Hebrew], *Da'at* 24 (1990): 30-32.

[11] Compare: "And He made of them [the thirty-two paths emanating from *keter* (the crown)] an object of *tif'eret* (splendor), alluded to in the Ineffable Name, and this splendor is known as *hokhmah* [wisdom]." Gershom Scholem, "The Genuine Commentary of Nahmanides to the *Book of Creation* and other Kabbalistic Writings Attributed to Him" [Hebrew], in *Studies in Kabbalah* (I), ed. Yosef Ben-Shlomo and Moshe Idel (Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1998), 89. Nahmanides, in his commentary to Exodus 3:13 [39], identifies *Yah* with both *hokhmah* and *tif'eret*: "It is for this reason that God commands Moses yet further, 'The Lord… has sent me to you' (Exodus 3:15), for this Name [the Tetragrammaton] indicates the attribute of mercy, and thus they will know that He 'made His glorious arm [*zeroa tif'arto*] march at the right hand of Moses' [Isaiah 63:12] and He will make new signs and wonders in the world… For the two final letters of the first name [*Ehyeh*, the letters being *yod* and *he*] constitute the first ones in this one [the Tetragrammaton]; for in the first they indicate the wisdom of Solomon… and in this one they indicate the wisdom of God. And the letter *alef* in the first [name] indicates eternity and unity, and the *yod*—the ten *sefirot* of *bli mah*." At the beginning of this passage, Nahmanides identifies *Yah* (the first two letters of the Tetragrammaton) with *tif'eret*, which performs miracles when nourished by *din*. Further, he discusses the structure of the name *Ehyeh*: The *alef* represents the crown and *yod-he* wisdom. It seems plausible, therefore, that Nahmanides explains

was discussed at length by the kabbalists among Nahmanides' interpreters in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.

2. The magic-astral nature of the act of sacrifice is ignored. In this passage, the secret of sacrifice consists solely of its theurgic effect. Nahmanides explains the word *nihoah* ("pleasing [odor]") as derived from the root *nwh*, with the connotation of "to rest" or "to place." The term thus implies both the fixing of the *sefirot* in their proper, balanced positions ("approaching" and "unity") and the descent of influence to the *sefirot.*[12] Nahmanides' other references to the secret of sacrifice indicate that the significance of the theurgic action is to draw influence down to the *sefirot.*[13] Nevertheless, neither of these meanings is magical because they lack the utilitarian factor, the idea of direct influence on the material world. On the contrary, worship is "a need of the Most High." Moreover, it is clear from this passage that, for Nahmanides, theurgic action is achieved by focusing intention on the "proper Name," namely, the Tetragrammaton. In other words, although the sacrifice comes from the *sefirah* of *din*, the intention must be directed toward the *sefirah* of *tif'eret* (the Tetragrammaton). The celebrant's intention when offering a sacrifice is not mere contemplation but involves a clear-cut active dimension. Once again, such activity is unquestionably theurgic, not magical.

As indicated, the explanation in Nahmanides' commentary on Leviticus 1:9 differs from other passages in his commentary, where he combines theurgy with magic-astral technique. Both models may be found, for example, in Jacob's sacrifices just before his "descent"

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the ability to perform miracles as achieved by extending the influence of *hokhmah* to *din* and *tif'eret*. The combination of Solomon's wisdom, as mentioned in this passage—which according to Nahmanides represents magic in its purest form—and the *sefirah* of *hokhmah*, clearly points to the magical nature of the use of influence from the *sefirot*. I consider below the magical nature of the "secret of sacrifice" in Nahmanides' writings. On Solomon's wisdom as "the real science" see, for instance, Yitzhak Tzvi Langermann, "Acceptance and Devaluation: Nahmanides' Attitude toward Science," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 1 (1992): 232; Dov Schwartz, *Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1999), 134-140. See further Roland Goetschel, "*Ehyeh asher Ehyeh* in the Works of the Gerona Kabbalists" [Hebrew], in *The Beginnings of Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Europe* [Hebrew], ed. Yosef Dan (Jerusalem: Defense Ministry, 1987), 289-291.

[12] This interpretation follows the passage from *Sefer ha-Bahir* quoted above (n. 6)

[13] See Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 167. See also Michal Kushnir-Oron's comment in her edition of *Sha'ar ha-Razim* by Todros b. Joseph Abulafia (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1989), 145.

to Egypt, which were aimed at bringing the *sefirot* nearer but were at the same time a technique of ransom. "When Jacob was about to go down to Egypt, he saw that the exile was beginning for him and his children, and he feared it, so he offered many sacrifices to 'the fear of his father Isaac' in order that divine judgment not be aimed against him[14]… But on account of his fear of the Lord, Jacob offered peace-offerings in order to bring all divine attributes into accord towards him."[15] The concept of ransom is even more far-reaching in Nahmanides' interpretation of the goat dispatched to Azazel (the scapegoat) on the Day of Atonement. According to him, the object of this precept is to channel the destructive influence of Mars to the goat, thereby averting its application to Israel. Thus, the goat is offered to Mars by explicit divine command:

> Now the Torah has absolutely forbidden to accept them [the angels, the source of the power of the spheres] as deities, or to worship them in any manner. However, the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded us that on the Day of Atonement we should let loose a goat in the wilderness, to that "lord" [power] which rules over wastelands, and this [goat] is fitting for it because he is its master, and destruction and waste emanate from that power, which in turn is the cause of the stars of the sword, wars, quarrels, wounds, plagues, division and destruction.[16] In short, it is the spirit of the sphere of Mars,[17] and its part among the nations is Esau

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[14] Later in the commentary, Nahmanides states: "Thus, by the merit of the sacrifices, the God of his father Isaac appeared to him in the visions of the night with an ameliorated Divine attribute of Justice" (commentary on Genesis 46:1[543]).

[15] Ibid. [542].

[16] Compare Ibn Ezra: "Mars is hot, dry, burning, harmful and destructive, it signifies destruction and drought and fires and rebellion and blood and slaying and war and disputes and division" (Raphael Levy and Francisco Cantera, eds. *Sefer Reshit Hokhmah [The Beginning of Wisdom]* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1939], xlvi).

[17] Elsewhere, the sources of the heavenly powers are "lords who abide in the atmosphere as the angels do in the heavens" and "the Separate Intelligences, which are the soul of the constellations" (commentary on Exodus 20:3 [294-296]). The term "soul of the constellations" is probably unrelated to the term "soul of the sphere," as the Peripatetics, for example, call the psychological motive power that moves the spheres. More probably, the concept includes the functions of both the Separate Intelligences and the spirituality of the stars. I discuss this subject at length in *Astral Magic*. Nahmanides' disciple Rashba notes that "the lords on high" are "the spirit of the spheres, like the guardian angel of Esau and the other nations" (*Hiddushei Rashba*: *Perushei ha-Haggadot*, ed. Aryeh L. Feldman [Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1991], 11). Rashba uses the expression "spiritual form" for the forces moving the spheres; see below.

> [Rome], the people that inherited the sword and the wars, and among the animals [its portion consists of] the *seʿirim* (demons) and the goats. Also in its portion are the devils called "destroyers" in the language of our Rabbis,[18] and in the language of Scripture: *seʿirim* (satyrs, demons), for thus he [Esau] and his nation were called *seʿir*. Now the intention in sending away the goat to the desert was not that it should be an offering from us to it—Heaven forbid! Rather, our intention should be to fulfill the wish of our Creator, Who commanded us to do so.[19]

Nahmanides was aware that the ritual of the scapegoat could be construed as idolatry. We see, however, from the end of this passage that he was quite content with the fact that the ritual was a result of divine command. The difference between idolatry and such an act is a question of intention only.[20] In this connection, Nahmanides clearly delineates the two possible ways of explaining the precept—the magic-astral and the kabbalistic:

> Thus the matter is explained, unless you pursue a further investigation from this subject to that of the Separate Intelligences and how the spirits [are affected by] the offerings—[the influence upon the spirits] being known through the study of necromancy, while that of the [Separate] Intelligences is known by means of certain allusions of the Torah to those who understand their secrets. I cannot explain more, for I would have to shut the mouths of those who claim to be wise in the study of nature, following after that Greek [philosopher Aristotle] who denied

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[18] See TB Berakhot 3b, 8a, and so forth In the magical literature, demons are commonly considered to be the natural denizens of the desert, which in turn is associated with the scapegoat. See, for instance, Edina Bozoky, "Mythic Mediation in Healing Incantations," in *Health, Disease, and Healing in Medieval Culture*, ed. Sheila Campbell, Bert Hall and David Klausner (London: St Martin's Press, 1992), 85-86.

[19] Commentary on Leviticus 16:8 [219-220]. Nahmanides states of the red heifer: "The purport thereof is analogous to that of the goat sent away [to Azazel], which is to remove the spirit of impurity" (ibid., 221). For the relevant interpretation of the fourteenth century kabbalistic supercommentators, see Henoch, *Nahmanides Philosopher and Mystic*, 414-427. On the phenomenon of the goat and its association with demons see James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (abridged edn.), vol. 2 (New York: Avenel Books, 1981), 182 ff.

[20] This is the meaning of the parable in which a person, in the course of a banquet he has made for his master, obeys the master's command to give his servant a share of the food, out of respect for the master. See Josef Stern, 'The Fall and Rise of Myth in Ritual: Maimonides versus Nahmanides on the *Huqqim*, Astrology, and the War against Idolatry," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 6 (1997): 247-249. On the place of this idea of Nahmanides in the fourteenth century controversy see Dov Schwartz, "Worship of God or of a Star?: The Controversy of R. Abraham al-Tabib and R. Solomon Franco" [Hebrew], *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 1 (1996):" 248-249.

> everything except that which could be perceived by him [through the physical senses].[21]

Astral magic ("spirits") and Kabbalah ("Intelligences"), then, have two things in common: both explain religious worship, on two levels, and both express a genuine ideology, in contrast to the philosophical-scientific conception, which is invalid.

The magic-astral action of sacrifice is not confined to the concept of ransom; it extends to the positive aspect, as furthering emanation. Commenting on the midrash, "'To till it and tend it' [Genesis 2: 15]—this refers to sacrifices,"[22] Nahmanides writes:

> The intent of the Rabbis in this interpretation is that plants and all living beings are in need of primary forces from which they derive the power of growth and that through the sacrifices there is an extension of the blessing to the higher powers. From them it flows to the plants of the Garden of Eden,[23] and from them it comes and exists in the world in the

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[21] Commentary on Leviticus 16:8 [222]. Nahmanides defined the "spirits" in his commentary on Exodus 20:3 [295]: "The third kind of idolatry appeared afterwards when people began worshiping the demons which are spirits, as I will explain with God's help. Some of them too are appointed over the peoples to be masters in their lands and to harm their beleaguered ones and those who have stumbled, as is known of their activity through the art of necromancy, as well as through the words of our Rabbis. It is with reference to this [third kind of idolatry] that Scripture says, 'They sacrificed to demons, no-gods, gods they had never known, new gods, who came but lately, whom your fathers dreaded not' [Deuteronomy 32:17]. Scripture ridicules them [the Israelites], saying that they sacrifice also to the demons who are no gods at all. That is to say, they are not like the angels who are called *eloah*. Instead, they are gods that they had never known, meaning that they found in them no trace of might or power of rulership. Furthermore, they are new to them, having learned only lately to worship them from the Egyptian sorcerers, and even their wicked forefathers such as Terah and Nimrod did not dread them at all. Of this [kind of idolatry] Scripture warns, 'They shall offer their sacrifices no more to the demons after whom they stray' [Leviticus 17:7]." In Nahmanides' view, demons are inferior to stars. He seems to have adopted the conception of *Sefer ha-Atsamim*, misattributed to Ibn Ezra, in which the demons represent a negative, inferior type of astral spirituality. The goal of necromancy is to bring these spirits down to earth. See *Sefer ha-Atsamim* [Book of Substances], ed. Menasheh Grosberg (London: Rabinovitch, 1901), 16. According to Nahmanides, Egyptian religion also involved astrology. See, for instance, his quotation from *The Guide of the Perplexed* in his commentary on Genesis 11:28. On the association of the Separate Intelligences with the *sefirot* see Assi Farber, "On the Sources of R. Moses de Leon's Early Kabbalistic System" [Hebrew], in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism, Philosophy and Ethical Literature, Presented to Isaiah Tishbi on His Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Yosef Dan and Yosef Hacker (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986), 84-87.

[22] *Genesis Rabba* 16:4 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, 149).

[23] In his commentary on Genesis 3:22 [86], Nahmanides again discusses this homily, referring to "the fruit of the tree of knowledge below and on high" as "a

> form of "rain of goodwill and blessing," through which they grow. This conforms to what the Rabbis have said: "The Trees of the Lord drink their fill, the cedars of Lebanon, His own planting' [Psalms 104:16]. R. Hanina said: Their life shall have its fill; their waters shall have their fill; their plantings shall have their fill. "Their life" refers to their higher foundations; "their wastes" refer to His good treasure which brings down the rain; and "their plantings" refer to their force in heaven, just as the Rabbis have said: There is not a single blade of grass below that does not have a constellation in heaven that smites it and says to it, "Grow." It is this which Scripture says, "Do you know the laws of heaven or impose its authority (*mishtarah*) on earth?" [Job 38:33]—[*mishtarah* being derived from the same root as] *shoter* (executive officer).[24]

The sacrificial rite, then, has an active influence on attracting ("extension") the emanation to the *sefirot* ("higher foundations") and to the stars ("their force in heaven") at the same time. This theurgic and magic influence has immensely beneficial results in the material world, for Nahmanides holds that the Garden of Eden is a material, geographic location.[25] Thus, offering a sacrifice produces abundant rain, nourishing trees and other vegetation. Elsewhere, I have shown that Nahmanides' portrayal of the emanation that can be drawn down and used has two aspects: a supernal one, as the divine emanation originating in the world of *sefirot*, and an inferior one, as the astral emanation flowing from the stars. Clearly, what we have here is exactly the same emanation, which is essentially two-dimensional.[26] Theurgic technique is therefore also magic-astral, as indicated by discussion of the reasons for the sacrifices.

The magic-astral model in Nahmanides' Kabbalah is further consolidated by the fact that he was influenced, terminologically and otherwise, by Abraham ibn Ezra's conception of sacrifice. In his

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high and lofty" secret. That is, the earthly tree of knowledge has a counterpart in the world of the *sefirot* (*malkhut*). Nevertheless, the heavenly status of the Garden of Eden does not detract from its earthly-geographical meaning, which is Nahmanides' concern in this passage. See below.

[24] Commentary on Genesis 2:8 [70-71]. The homily quoted at the end of this passage is from *Genesis Rabba* 10:6 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, 79). See Daniel C. Matt, "The Mystic and the *Mitsvot*," in *Jewish Spirituality*, vol. 1, ed. Arthur Green (London: Crossroad, 1986), 381. Matt does not discuss the astral aspect of emanation.

[25] See Havivah Pedayah, "The Spirit vs. the Concrete Land of Israel in the Geronese School of Kabbalah" [Hebrew], in *The Land of Israel in Medieval Jewish Thought*, ed. Moshe Hallamish and Aviezer Ravitzky (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben Zvi, 1991), 278-279; Schwartz, *Messianism in Medieval Jewish Thought*, 106.

[26] Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, 134-140.

sermon *Torat ha-Shem Temimah*, Nahmanides presents three explanations for the sacrificial rite, thus adding another explanation to those set forth in the passage cited above from his Bible commentary (on Leviticus 1:9):

1. The psychological explanation: "He slaughters it before his God, signifying that it would be proper for a person to spill his blood for his sin in this matter, and he burns the fatty parts, which are the chambers of thought, and the kidneys, where the power of his desire resides, as if to say that the instruments of his thought are worthy of being burned for his sin."[27]
2. The magic-astral explanation: Sacrifice is considered to be a technique of ransom, as in Ibn Ezra's commentary on Leviticus 1:1: "As <each> part is given, a part is saved."
3. The theurgic explanation, which is superimposed on the magical explanation but only by implication: "The virtues enumerated in the sacrifices, whereby the *Shekhinah* inhabits the world through Israel, and that the choicest place in the lower world is the place of the sacrifices, which is the throne of the Lord on earth—these things need another explanation."[28]

Ibn Ezra's magical explanation is cited here as a fitting explanation for the sacrifice's material influence. Nahmanides presents the need for a further level of interpretation—the theosophical. Ibn Ezra, he implies, failed to recognize the theosophical aspect of emanation, but the magic-astral reasons in that enigmatic commentator's exposition are nevertheless "fitting and worthy of acceptance,"[29] because "the precepts of the Torah have many benefits—physical, visible, and spiritual." The sacrifice exerts palpable influence of two kinds: magic-astral and theosophical. In other words, with regard to sacrifices Nahmanides adopts Ibn Ezra's magic-astral approach as it is—without presenting it as "kabbalistic"[30]—but adds the theosophical dimension.

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[27] Nahmanides, *Torat ha-Shem Temimah*, in *Kitvei ha-Ramban*, vol. 1, ed. Charles D. Chavel (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1963), 163. See above, note 7.

[28] Ibid., 164 (my emphasis).

[29] Ibid. Ibn Ezra's influence in Nahmanides' concept of talismanic magic reaches its peak in the latter's commentary on the ritual of the scapegoat. See above, note 19; and see Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, ch. 4.

[30] See Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1987), 387, 411. See Bernard Septimus, "'Open Rebuke and Concealed Love': Nahmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban):*

In sum, Nahmanides' view of the secret of the sacrificial rite is dual in nature. On the one hand, the sacrifice harmonizes the world of *sefirot* through the celebrant's intention—undoubtedly a "divine need." On the other, the sacrifice also attracts the influence of the *sefirot* and the stars, and this emanation has beneficial results from the standpoint of material human needs. The theosophical explanation offered by Nahmanides is similar to that of the Gerona kabbalists, such as R. Azriel. The members of that circle did not advocate the magic-astral explanation, however, and it is here that Nahmanides differs from them.

A Representative Secret: Evidence of Disciples and Colleagues

Even within Nahmanides' own lifetime, his exposition of "the secret of sacrifice" was considered the authentic, representative kabbalistic explanation of the sacrificial rite. His approach exerted considerable influence on the circles of his disciples and on their disciples, Rashba and Ritba. Even thinkers who were not openly concerned with Kabbalah insisted on the importance of Nahmanides' kabbalistic explanation of sacrifices. It seems quite clear that they preferred to ignore the magic-astral aspect of Nahmanides' commentary, generally confining themselves, therefore, to the "secret" as presented in the commentary on Leviticus 1:9.

The psychological explanation, thought not explicitly attributed to Nahmanides, is featured in the sermons of Jonah of Gerona or his disciple, which do not rely on Kabbalah. Discussing the reasons for sacrifice, the author of the sermons stresses at the outset that these reasons are valid "in addition to the great merit in [the sacrificial rite], which depends on a great thing and a wondrous secret."[31] This statement, as noted, introduces a discourse in which Nahmanides'

Explorations in his Religious and Literary Virtuosity," ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 1983), 11-34.

[31] Shmuel Yerushalmi, *Sermons and Commentaries of R. Jonah Gerondi on the Pentateuch* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: H. Vagshal, 1988), 172. On the author of these sermons see Israel Ta-Shma, "Ashkenazi Hasidism in Spain: R. Jonah Gerondi, The Man and His Work" [Hebrew], in *Exile and Diaspora: Studies in the History of the Jewish People Presented to Professor Haim Beinart*, ed. Aharon Mirsky et. al. (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1988), 188-191; idem, *Ha-Nigle she-Banistar—The Halakhic Residue in the Zohar: A Contribution to the Study of the Zohar* [Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1995), 99-100.

psychological argument is cited almost verbatim, so that the author's "secret" is an obvious reference to Nahmanides. Clearly, then, the "secret" was seen as a true reflection of the authentic kabbalistic explanation within Nahmanides' lifetime.

Other thinkers who, like Jonah of Gerona, make no reference in their writings to Kabbalah, were also concerned with the secret of sacrifice. The author of *Sefer ha-Hinnukh*, a close associate of Aaron Halevi of Barcelona (perhaps his brother Pinehas?), Ritba's mentor, generally avoids kabbalistic matters. Nevertheless, after citing Nahmanides' philosophical-psychological explanation of sacrifice, according to which the offering is supposed to arouse in the sinner a comparison of his own limbs to the burning limbs of the sacrifice, Pinehas (?) adds: "And he [Nahmanides] wrote further that, by way of truth, there is in the sacrifices a hidden secret and so forth, as written in his commentaries in the portion of Leviticus."[32] On the other hand, with regard to the rite of the scapegoat, for example, he completely disregards Nahmanides' explanation.

Ritba refers to Nahmanides' attack, in the commentary cited above (on Leviticus 1:9) on Maimonides' rational explanation that the sacrifices were intended to "amend opinions" by slaughtering the very animals worshiped by the gentiles:

> And I say that the true tradition that our master … [Nahmanides] had with regard to sacrifice is true, while the explanation of the Rabbi and Teacher [Maimonides]… seems very weak. This caused our master… to criticize the holy man of the Torah and the holy man of the Lord, blessed be He, as he did in relation to the sacrifices. And my view regarding the Rabbi and Teacher… in this explanation and in many other explanations that he wrote for the precepts is that he did not really believe that such was the main explanation for that precept, but he wished to give some explanation so that even the masses would know how to reply, even to a learned unbeliever, in somewhat rational terms.[33]

Ritba believed that Nahmanides intentionally employed brief, allusive language because the earlier kabbalistic traditions were ambiguous.[34]

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[32] *Sefer ha-Hinnukh*, ed. Charles D. Chavel (Jerusalem; Mosad Harav Kook, 1974), 153, ll. 5-6. On the author's identity see Israel Ta-Shma, "The Real Author of *Sefer ha-Hinnukh*" [Hebrew], *Kiryat Sefer* 55 (1980): 787-790. Whatever his identity, he was clearly a member of Aaron Halevi's circle.

[33] Yom Tov b. Abraham Ashbili (Ritba), *Sefer ha-Zikkaron*, ed. Kalman Kahana (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1982), 74.

[34] "Indeed, the reason for sacrifice is deep, deep down, who can discover it [based

Nevertheless, he himself embraces this kabbalistic tradition, stressing that his defense of Maimonides is intended only to demonstrate the unity of the great master's teachings.

> And to my mind there is no doubt that one will find in the words of the Teacher… things that are not in accord with those said by the scholars of truth or other scholars, but according to the path trodden by our Rabbi the Teacher there is no error in that, nor way of contradiction or opposition, for he maintained in what he said the utmost caution and logic (*hokhmat ha-higgayon*).[35]

Ritba wholeheartedly agrees with Nahmanides' explanation of the secret of sacrifice at the beginning of Leviticus. Judging from the evidence forthcoming from the schools of Jonah Gerondi, Aaron Halevi, and Ritba, we may conclude that central figures of the time recognized Nahmanides' interpretation of the sacrificial rite as representative of the authentic "secret."

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on Ecclesiastes 7:24]. And our Master, too,… his Kabbalah/tradition is difficult in that respect, and kabbalists have therein no more than a drop out of the sea' (ibid.). This testimony by a "grand-student" of Nahmanides would seem to corroborate Moshe Idel's thesis that Nahmanides, unlike R. Azriel and R. Ezra, did not try to establish a kabbalistic system. See Moshe Idel, "We Have No Kabbalistic Tradition on This," in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 1983), 51-73; Idel, "R. Moshe ben Nahman," 535-580.

[35] Ashbili, *Sefer ha-Zikkaron*, 75. Compare his statements elsewhere: "If indeed the Rabbi [Maimonides] did not set his heart in certain matters, expounded in his book, in accord with the path of the scholars of truth, whose words are strong and firm, and those matters are ancient. Nevertheless, he did much to innovate truthful sayings with much wisdom and logic, for there are seventy aspects to the Torah; and his reward will be commensurate with his intention…" (ibid., 46); "All this have I written to excuse the Rabbi and Teacher…, while I know that the tradition of our Master Nahmanides… in the matter of sin is a true tradition, and should not be challenged, nevertheless, there are seventy aspects to the Torah and all [different views] are the words of the living God" (ibid., 84). Ritba admits that Nahmanides' tradition was superior to Maimonides' teaching ("In truth, the words of our last Rabbi are essentially superior" (ibid., 49). On the background of these ideas among Rashba and his disciples see Dov Schwartz, "Conservatism vs. Rationality (The Philosophical Thought of Rashba's Circle)"[Hebrew], *Da'at* 33-34 (1994): 143-182. On Ritba's rational approach, see ibid., 149-150, 175.

The Split within the Circle of Nahmanides' Interpreters

The Theurgic Model

Besides their frequent allusions to Nahmanides' doctrine of sacrifice, his kabbalistic interpreters offered detailed explanations of the "secret." Among Nahmanides' disciples, the two aspects of the action of sacrifice were internalized by the circles of Rashba and Ritba.[36] All these thinkers presented an activist conception of the motive for the sacrificial rite. Some, however, singled out the theurgic aspect—fertilizing the *sefirot* with emanations—while others emphasized the magic-astral meanings of this action. Indeed, interpreters who concentrated on the effect of sacrifice in the theosophical world could not ignore Nahmanides' explanation of the scapegoat ritual or the traditions relating to Balaam's actions. In his explanation of the scapegoat, for example, Nahmanides explicitly names Mars as the source of the emanation. The theosophical interpreters, however, insist that this astral emanation is negative, and that the goat was essentially a ransom [*kofer*] to neutralize the emanation. So too Balaam's actions, which combined theurgy and astral magic, were confined to the negative aspect. On the other hand, when they explain the positive action of sacrifice, they make no reference to the magic-astral technique. In their view, the sole direct action of sacrifice is to nourish the world of *sefirot*. Another group of interpreters, however, believed that sacrifice was also an instrument for attracting spirituality down to the terrestrial world.

We begin with the theurgic interpretation of Nahmanides' secret of sacrifice. Briefly: the act of sacrifice consists in bringing down emanation from the upper to the lower *sefirot*, thus harmonizing the divine world. The most typical representatives of this approach, which ignores the magic-astral aspect and its immediate beneficial effect, were Bahya b. Asher, Jacob Sikili, and Isaac of Acre. For Bahya b. Asher, a sacrifice

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[36] The thought of Nahmanides' interpreters, as a group, still lacks thorough investigation. See Wolfson, "The Secret of the Garment"; Moshe Idel, "An Unknown Commentary to the Secrets of Nahmanides" [Hebrew], *Da'at* 2-3 (1978): 121-126. For an account of the exegetical characteristics of this circle see Daniel Abrams, "Orality in the Kabbalistic School of Nahmanides: Preserving and Interpreting Esoteric Traditions and Texts," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 3 (1996): 85-102; for a penetrating study of the teachings of one of the most important interpreters of Nahmanides' esoteric teachings, see Moshe Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati the Kabbalist* [Hebrew](Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv: Schocken, 1998).

attracts emanation to the *sefirot* in various ways, some of which do not occur in Nahmanides' writings (*Ensof* → *hokhmah* → *din* → *tif'eret* → *malkhut*).[37] Bahya quotes Nahmanides in paraphrase, interpolating his own comments:

> In kabbalistic terms, I say that the sacrifice is unification, this being the connotation of the word *qorban* (sacrifice), that is to say, bringing near *(qeruv)* the forces[38] and the names of the Holy One, blessed be He, and anyone who brings the Names near himself is unifying… That is why He said "odor," that is to say, drawing the will and the descending emanation to the Lord, that is to say, to the divine attribute of mercy *(rahamim)*. And that is the meaning of the expression "a pleasing odor [*reah nihoah*] to the Lord," from the same root *as 'nahah* (there rests) the spirit of Elijah on Elisha" [2 Kings 2:15]. So shall the Supreme Spirit rest and descend to the divine attribute of mercy, which is the very existence of the world. And that is the explanation of the words "a burnt offering, a pleasing odor to the Lord," for first it is necessary to offer a fire offering to the Lord, and odor is the drawing down from above to the Lord.[39]

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[37] In his commentary on Leviticus 1:9, following Nahmanides' comments on the word *isheh*, Bahya states that the emanation flows from *din*: "The glory [*tif'eret*] absorbs from fear and both are called burnt-offerings [*ishim*]" (R. Bahya, *Be'ur al ha-Torah*, vol. 2, ed. Charles D. Chavel [Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1981), 401). See Ephraim Gottlieb, *The Kabbalah in the Writings of R. Bahya ben Asher ibn Halawa* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1970), 221. In his writings, however, Bahya considers emanation from a wide variety of sources. In his commentary on Genesis 8:20, Bahya describes sacrifices as promoting the ascent and descent of divine influence. The celebrant brings about a gradual unification "from below to above" and the influence descends: "Noah in his offerings arranged the structure from below to above, the altar [*malkhut*] first and thence to *rahamim* [mercy], that is the meaning of the phrase 'to the Lord,' and from *rahamim* everything ascends and attaches itself to the supreme level, which is the Prime Mover, blessed be He [*Ensof*]… And then the influence returns from the Mover to *rahamim*, and from *rahamim* to the altar, which is called 'Heart,' and from that to the upper and lower worlds" (Bahya, *Be'ur al ha-Torah*, 1:117). See Gottlieb, *The Kabbalah in the Writings of R. Bahya*, 230-232. It follows that the sacrifice is directed at *Ensof*, in such a way that the appeal to *Ensof* becomes to some extent personal. Finally, in his commentary on Numbers 6:27 Bahyei writes: "The main intent in the sacrifice is to attract will from pure thought [*hokhmah*] to His Supreme Names" (*Be'ur al ha-Torah*, 3:33).

[38] Sacrifice as "bringing near," in the style of *Sefer ha-Bahir*, is a common motif in Bahya's writings. See his commentary on Numbers 7:10 (*Be'ur al ha-Torah* 2:38); *Kad ha-Qemah*, s.v. *atseret* (*Kitvei Rabbenu Bahyei*, ed. Charles D. Chavel [Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1960], 292).

[39] Commentary on Leviticus 1:9 (*Be'ur al ha-Torah* 2:401).

In sum: "Each and every divine attribute draws its nourishment from the sacrifice, that is to say: the Supreme Spirit is attracted to and placed upon the divine attributes and the attributes are brought near to it, and that is unification."[40] Bahya indeed emphasizes that the act of sacrifice has a beneficial effect on the denizens of the terrestrial world as well; nevertheless, the celebrant's primary interest is the divine world. Note that Bahya emphasizes the theurgic aspect and ignores the magic implications of Nahmanides' comments, in part because he was influenced by Azriel's work on the secret of sacrifice, and interprets Nahmanides' intentions accordingly.[41] The theurgic interpretation, in its purest possible form, is briefly mentioned in comments by a disciple of Rashba [?] quoted by Isaac of Acre,[42] and in the words of Isaac of Acre himself,[43] referring to the bringing near of *malkhut* and *tif'eret* ("to raise the *atarah* to the *rahamim*"). Note below that Isaac cites traditions of a different nature in his book, but the interpretations he offers in his own name are confined to the theurgic aspect.

Jacob Sikili, Rashba's disciple, followed in Nahmanides' footsteps concerning the dual conception of emanation from the supernal world: theosophical and astral emanation. He did not, however, go so far as to adopt a magic-astral model in the technical sense, that is, to propose that the sacrificial rite attracts emanation. At the start of his discussion of the reasons for sacrifice, he declares that the material existence of the world depends on "attracting divine influence to all created beings." To explain this principle, he cites a midrash with an explicitly astrological context:

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[40] Ibid., 402.

[41] See Gottlieb, *The Kabbalah in the Writings of R. Bahya*, 77-79. On the theurgic thrust of the "secret of sacrifice" in Geronese Kabbalah see Yeshayahu Tishbi, ed., *The Wisdom of the Zohar* [Hebrew], vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1975), 196-198.

[42] Goldreich, *Sefer Me'irat Eynayim*, 137, ll. 23-26. These comments refer to the goat sacrificed on the New Moon in particular, but also to sacrifices in general. Isaac cites an otherwise anonymous authority "'R.Sh.N.R." as transmitting a tradition "according to the way of Nahmanides' Kabbalah/tradition." On the identity of "R.Sh.N.R." see ibid., 389-390. On the astrological interpretive tradition concerning the goat see Ibn Ezra, *Sefer ha-Ibbur* (Lyck, 1874), 5b.

[43] For example: "The Rabbi's whole intention is to hint that the essence of sacrifice is to bring the '*atarah* near to *tif'eret*' (Goldreich, *Sefer Me'irat Eynayim*, 149 ll. 26-27); "Know that the rabbi said so to allude to the secret of the action of sacrifice in general, because after explaining its secret he alluded to its utility, for through the sacrifice *rahamim* comes to the *atarah*" (*ibid.*, p. 150 ll. 6-7).

> Everything that exists in the lower world—its foundation and essence are in the upper worlds and from there it is nourished and grows and multiplies. As our rabbis taught: "Do you know the laws of heaven or impose its authority on earth? [Job 38:33]—There is not a single blade of grass on earth that does not have a guardian angel in heaven that smites it and says to it, 'Grow.'"[44] This smiting and saying is the power that the supernal elements confer upon the lower creatures, and this power is the divine influence that they receive from the Prime Mover, and from it they [the supernal elements] radiate it to what is below them. And this influence flows constantly, without interruption, from the Lord, blessed be He, onto the Separate Intelligences, and that is what is called "A river of fire streamed forth before Him" [Daniel 7: 10]. From the Separate Intelligences it emanates and flows onto the spheres and the stars, and their existence and constant movement stem from that emanation, and from here it flows and emanates onto the four elements and all created beings. It follows that the existence of all Creation derives from the divine supernal influence, as it is written, "And you keep them all alive" [Nehemiah 9:6].[45]

Sikili draws up an elementary cosmological plan, whereby the emanation reaching the terrestrial world derives from *Ensof* ("the Prime Mover"), descending through the theosophical world to the world of the celestial bodies and the terrestrial world. The use of the midrash, with whose original astrological meaning Sikili was surely acquainted, indicates the dual or hierarchical structure of the descending influence as it traverses the world of celestial bodies *(Ensof, sefirot* [Intelligences], spheres, stars and the lower world). Sikili adds that the secret of sacrifice is "to radiate the blessing to all creatures, to make their existence successful and perfected."[46] The theurgic aspect is evident from the following description of the action of sacrifice:

> What is that action that the lowly creatures perform, from which the Separate Intelligences partake and benefit, and the upper worlds are attracted to the lower to radiate them with divine influence, as is worthy and proper?—[That action] is the sacrificial rite, performed for the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, which is of benefit to

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[44] *Genesis Rabba* 10:6 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, 79); the original version is cited several times in Nahmanides' commentary: on Genesis 1:11; on Genesis 2:8 (cited above, n. 24), and on Leviticus 19:19. Sikili briefly quotes Nahmanides' explanation of the scapegoat ritual, referring there to Mars as the source of the influence and as parallel to "the lords on high" (Jacob Sikili, *Torat ha-Minhah*, ed. Barukh Avigdor Hefetz, vol. 2 [Safed: n. p., 1991], 2:719).

[45] Ibid., 2:506.

[46] Ibid., 2:507. See also 1: 270.

> the Separate Intelligences, as it is said: "My offering, my food for my offerings by fire"—"offerings by fire" are the lords on high;[47] therefore it is called "a continual burnt offering," for it ensures the continuation of the universe.[48]

In this passage, as in the previous one, Sikili's usage of "Separate Intelligences" in the theosophical sense of the *sefirot* is also indicative of the structure of the influence. In peripatetic science, the Separate Intelligences are the movers of the spheres, and the influence they emanate traverses the spheres in a variety of ways. Hence the action of a sacrifice, in bringing the *sefirot* nearer, necessarily results in drawing their influence down to the terrestrial world; the descent of the influence, however, is not a consequence of terrestrial preparation attracting supernal forces, as in the magic-astral model, but of the unification of the *sefirot* by theurgic action. "When the lowly creatures perform something for the benefit of the Separate Intelligences, the latter bestow upon the former some of the divine influence that they have received, as is required to perfect their existence and to ensure them of complete success."[49] Although Sikili, as noted, is aware of the possible marriage of the theosophical and astral aspects of emanation, he still proposes a theurgic interpretation of the secret of sacrifice.

The Magic-Astral Model

We now turn to those of Nahmanides' kabbalistic interpreters who linked the magic-astral and theurgic models in their explanations of the secret of sacrifice. Isaac of Acre, in his book *Me'irat Einayim*, cites an otherwise unnamed author, M.R.D.C.Y., probably David Cohen, a disciple of Nahmanides who injects a magic-astral element into the reason for sacrifices. He begins with a question: How do the base terrestrial actions of the sacrifice bring about unification in the divine world and draw down divine influence to the lower world ("blessing and being to all of existence")? The answer is couched in terms of a parable: A child who is reared far from human society cannot believe, upon becoming a member of society, that the creation of a newborn baby is a consequence of base, sexual activity. So too the

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[47] As stated above in notes 17 and 44, the "lords on high" are the *sefirot*. See Nahmanides' commentary on Numbers 11:16. See further, *Zohar* 2:18b.

[48] Ibid., 2:507.

[49] Ibid., 2:506-507.

sacrifice and its appurtenances constitute preparation for supernal activities and for attracting the influence of the *sefirot* to the terrestrial world. For example, "The smoke of the sacrifices is a cause for attracting the influence of blessing and life and goodwill to the lower world from the supernal world."[50] This tradition is important in that it confirms the magic-astral orientation of the reason for sacrifice in Nahmanides' school.

Further confirmation comes from a tradition cited in the name of another Nahmanides disciple, Isaac Todros, in one of the earliest supercommentaries on Nahmanides' mystical teachings, *Keter Shem Tov* by Shem Tov ibn Gaon. Shem Tov himself presents a theurgic approach, with hints of a magic-astral interpretive tradition. In his supercommentary to Nahmanides' commentary on Leviticus 1:9, Shem Tov maintains the theurgic framework, while emphasizing the beneficial material effect due to the balance achieved in the world of the *sefirot*. He explains at length that "the unification of the absolute, real Name" causes "blessing and life to be drawn to the lower world."[51] He explains Nahmanides' comment on the verse "the spirit rested upon them" (Numbers 11:25) as follows: "The matter alludes to the reception of influence and blessing, for when the divine attributes are conjoined,[52] blessing comes to the world."[53]

Shem Tov attributes Nahmanides' concealment of the reason for the sacrificial rite to the anti-philosophical polemic of his Torah commentary: "For I am not permitted to explain and to reconcile the different opinions because of the opinion of the Greek [Aristotle], for the Greek opposes whatever is not perceived by his physical senses, and he holds that no spiritual benefit may be derived from a

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[50] Goldreich, *Sefer Me'irat Eynayim*, 143, ll. 20-21. On the identity of "M.R.D.C.Y." see ibid., 361-364; Idel, "Kabbalah, Halakhah, and Spiritual Leadership," 572. For a few preliminary remarks on Isaac of Acre's attitude to magic in general see Moshe Idel, "Judaism, Jewish Mysticism and Magic" [Hebrew], *Jewish Studies* 36 (1996): 34-37.

[51] *Keter Shem Tov*, printed in Judah Koriat, *Ma'or va-Shemesh* (Leghorn: E. M. Atulingi, 1839), 41a; Ms. Paris 774, 97b.

[52] Koriat, who published Shem Tov's commentary with his own glosses, places special emphasis on the conjoining of *tif'eret* and *malkhut*, which he calls *du parzufin*, following TB Berakhot 61a. See also Nahmanides' commentary on Genesis 2:18. See, for instance, *Ma'or va-Shemesh*, 30a, 32b, 45a. See Goldreich, *Me'irat Eynayim*, 26, l. 8; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 128-136; Wolfson, "The Secret of the Garment," xl.

[53] *Ma'or va-Shemesh*, 41b; Ms. Paris, 98a.

sacrifice."[54] The sacrifices were intended, therefore, to cause "benefit" in the world of the *sefirot*. In this comment, Shem Tov is hinting that the full explanation of sacrifice will be achieved by adding the magic-astral aspect of the act of sacrifice. He refers the reader to "what I have hinted in relation to Manoah" and to Nahmanides' explanation of the scapegoat, discussed above. Shem Tov's allusion to Manoah probably refers to his explanation of the text in Genesis 18, where he quotes Isaac Todros:

> The garment[55]— [If the master said that he cannot explain, who shall explain?! But] I received his [Nahmanides'] opinion from my teacher R. I[saac] T[odros],[56] may God protect and bless him, [and that is the matter that I saw first], one makes [that] effigy of wax,[57] and dresses it in a garment as a mark of respect, and adjures it, and one sees a vision of an angel and a speaking of the Name; and the intention is that *atarah* is called angel; the word "angel" here alludes to this [attribute, meaning the *Shekhinah*] and the name of God [the Tetragrammaton] to *tif'eret*. As to the matter of [the angel's] departure,[58] [concerning that] he did not

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[54] Ibid. Nahmanides' style in his commentary to Leviticus 16:8 (quoted above, at n. 20) is similar.

[55] This is a commentary on the following passage from Nahmanides' commentary on Genesis 18:1 [231]: "But where Scripture mentions the angels as men, as is the case in this portion, and the portion concerning Lot—likewise, 'And a man wrestled with him' [Genesis 32:25] and 'a man came upon him' [ibid. 37:15], in the opinion of our rabbis—in all these cases there was a special glory created in the angels, called among those who know the mysteries of the Torah 'a garment,' perceptible to the human vision of such pure persons as the pious and the disciples of the prophets, and I cannot explain any further." On the secret of the garment in the writings of Nahmanides and his interpreters, see Gershom Scholem, "The Garment of the Souls and 'the Tunic of the Rabbis"' [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 24 (1955): 291-297; Moshe Idel, "The World of the Angels in Human Form" [Hebrew], in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism, Philosophy and Ethical Literature, Presented to Isaiah Tishbi on His Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Yosef Dan and Yosef Hacker (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986), 46-47; Wolfson, "The Secret of the Garment."

[56] On Isaac Todros see Ephraim Gottlieb, *Studies in the Kabbalah Literature*, ed. Joseph Hacker (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University Press, 1976), 290; Idel, "Kabbalah, Halakhah and Spiritual Leadership," 572. The text in Ms. Paris reads only "my pious teacher, may God protect him," without specifying any name.

[57] The printed edition adds: "That is: an effigy of wax directions [?] and not an angel." It is interesting that Shem Tov is writing at the time of the astral magic controversy. Abba Mari, who led the opponents of astral magic, cites a rumor about a work describing the burning of "myrrh or wax." See Joseph Shatzmiller, "In Search of the Book of Figures: Medicine and Astrology in Montpellier at the Turn of the Fourteenth Century," *AJS Review* 7/8 (1982/1983), 394. See further in the next section below.

[58] Comment on Nahmanides' observation: "The matter of [the angel's] 'disap-

> give [me] permission [to hint]; but know that the fire that came down upon it was extinguished on its own. And the allusion in the matter of Manoah when the second angel ascended in the flame of the altar, and if you understand the secret of the altar, you will understand the angel. And if you understand the flame of the altar that came down you will understand *kol* and its fire, and the merit of the angel therein.[59]

The tradition cited here by Shem Tov in the name of Isaac Todros describes spirituality being brought down to a wax effigy. The spirituality, whose source is in the *sefirot*, is revealed as an angel; that is to say, one can draw down the influence of the *sefirot* of *din* and *malkhut*, which, according to the above passage, is alluded to by the word "angel." The association with Manoah indicates that the secret of sacrifice involves bringing down emanation or ameliorating the influence of negative emanation by offering a sacrifice. Judah Koriat, who published Shem Tov's work, understood Shem Tov's teaching as based on the assumption that the stars' power derives from the *sefirot*. Commenting on Shem Tov's statement "when peace [*tif'eret*] is conjoined with the earth [*malkhut*], there will be a truly perfect dominion, so that the juncture will be perfect," Koriat writes that *malkhut* "can give the sun power to promote growth in hot and dry things."[60] Accordingly, it seems natural to explain peace offerings as causing the celebrants to be deriving "benefit from their constellation."[61]

We now consider Rashba's disciples. Isaac of Acre cites a tradition that he had heard from an anonymous kabbalist concerning a Gentile "great scholar," who considered the action of sacrifice proof of the profundity and truth of the commandments of the Torah.

> Said the Gentile to the Jew: I see indeed that your God is a God of truth and your Torah a teaching of truth and the actions of your ancestors the prophets of truth and your priests in the rite of your temple, that is, the sacrificial rite, truth. For… the supreme powers *(kohot elyon)*, although everything is in His hands, need something to draw them down to nourish the lower worlds, with sacrifices and with prayer and with pleasant song and with pure, chaste intention of the heart, conjoined

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pearance' you will understand from the account about Manoah, if you will be worthy to attain it" (on Genesis 18:1[231]).

[59] *Ma'or va-Shemesh*, 30b. This passage is discussed by Wolfson, who does not, however, discuss the magic-astral context ("Secret of the Garment," xliii-xliv).

[60] *Ma'or va-Shemesh*, 28b (on Nahmanides' commentary to Genesis 1:14); Ms. Paris, 78b. Shem Tov is referring to the unification of the *sefirot* of *yesod* and *malkhut*.

[61] Ibid., 32b.

> with the supernal worlds, for the Lord, blessed be He, gave man power to do as he pleases, and according to his actions so does he attract supreme power *(koah elyon)* to himself; if by good deeds, he will attract the power of good, and if the contrary—the contrary; everything is in man's hand…[62]

In both style and content, the statement of the anonymous kabbalist presents unmistakable traits of the magic-astral explanation of sacrifice. The purpose of the sacrifice is to "attract supreme power." Similarly, the act of offering sacrifice is not a purely defensive act ("ransom") but also an expression of the magician's unlimited power ("everything is in man's hand"). The terminology "attraction of supreme power" occurs in an astrological and theosophical context elsewhere, in a commentary attributed to Meir ibn Sahula, but most probably written by Joshua ibn Shuʿeib.[63] One principle enunciated in this commentary is that "with regard to any medication of which a person knows nothing, its power and merit become known when its benefit is seen. So too with regard to sacrifices, the benefit is apparent in several places; for example, only through the sacrificial rite did the *Shekhinah* dwell in the Tabernacle."[64] That is why Balaam made efforts "to be conjoined

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[62] Goldreich, *Sefer Me'irat Eynayim*, 143, ll. 26-33.

[63] "Although it is accepted by those who receive the truth that the created beings of this world are descended from on high, and there is no created being that does not have some power on high, as our Sages said, 'There is not a single blade of grass below that does not have a constellation in heaven that smites it and says to it, 'Grow' (Genesis Rabba 10:6)… Now, in the *Merkavah* Ezekiel saw the face of a man, the face of an ox, the face of a lion, the face of an eagle, which are the essence of the things that we have mentioned, meaning each species receives from the Lord through a star or a constellation, and man attracts a supreme power, innermost of all, and his soul is the wisest and purest, for it did not come through some intermediary as the other things evolved, but was emanated from a supreme one of them' (*Be'ur le-Ferush Ramban al ha-Torah* [Warsaw, 1875], 4c). This passage clearly states that the emanation of theosophical influence parallels the descent of astral influence, and the difference is only one of level and rank. The association with *Maʿaseh Merkavah* is explicit in Nahmanides' assertion that the Tabernacle, the Temple and their implements are intended "to understand the secrets of the action of the supernal, middle, and lower worlds, and hints of all the *Merkavah* are there" (*Kitvei Ramban*, ed. Chavel, 2: 296).

[64] *Be'ur le-Ferush Ramban*, 25a. The author of this super-commentary has this to say about the cherubim: "The reason that the cherubim in the Tabernacle and in the Temple have their wings spread out above is to receive the emanation' (ibid., 18d). Compare Ibn Shuʿeib in his sermons: "The *Shekhinah* did not dwell in the Tabernacle and in the Temple, but on the sacrifice"; "the power of the deity is brought down through sacrifice and removes itself through the secret of sacrifice" (*Derashot R. Y. ibn Shuʿeib*, ed. Zeev Metzger [Jerusalem: Lev Sameah Institute, 1992], 1:193 and 195).

with the will, that is, the altar, and perhaps [the Lord] would come to meet him through these offerings."[65]

Finally, other kabbalists who gave Nahmanides' esoteric teachings an essential place in their writings, though they did not write supercommentaries on him, also alluded to the magic-astral explanation of the sacrificial rite. Menahem Recanati interprets a certain midrashic passage concerning the descent of the *Shekhinah* as a framework for explaining sacrifice,[66] while the author of *Maʿarekhet ha-Elohut* uses the term "form" (*tzurah*) as both a symbol and an image with the capacity to draw down supreme powers.[67] Clearly, then, certain authentic traditions of Nahmanides' disciples based the secret of sacrifices on the magic-astral nature of their action, and these traditions were preserved among his kabbalistic interpreters. As noted, such authentic traditions coexisted with the "overt" theurgic exegesis, which considered the

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These statements appear after Ibn Shuʿeib's account of Ibn Ezra's notion of ransom, following Nahmanides' *Torat ha-Shem Temimah* sermon; he then refers to Judah Halevi's comparison of the action of sacrifice to the soul's descent into the body (*The Kuzari* 2: 26). The fact that Ibn Shuʿeib follows Nahmanides' text and opens his sermon with the ransom technique indicates that he was concerned not with unaided descent of the influence (theosophy) but with descent brought about by human action (magic). See Carmi Horowitz, *The Jewish Sermon in 14th Century Spain: The Derashot of R. Joshua ibn Shuʿeib* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 1989), 101 n. 62. In his sermons, Ibn Shuʿeib avoids an in-depth discussion of the kabbalistic significance of sacrifice.

[65] *Beʾur le-Ferush Ramban*, 30c. According to this explanation, Balaam attempted to draw the influence of the *sefirot* of *hokhmah* and *malkhut* down to the sacrifice, by offering sacrifices "commensurate with the whole building." The utilitarian interest is also expressed in the statement that "the supernal and lower worlds and the souls of those offering the sacrifice derive benefit" from it (ibid., 13c).

[66] "In the text, 'Noah built an altar to the Lord' (Genesis 8:20), there is an allusion to a weighty matter alluded to by our sages, that because of Adam's sin the *Shekhinah* departed from the lower worlds; then came Seth and restored it, then came Enosh and removed it, and so forth, and now there came Noah and brought it down and prepared a place for it below" (*Genesis Rabba* 19:7; *Songs Rabba* 5:1; *Tanhuma Pequddei* 6 [using the verb "to attract" rather than "bring down"]; *Pesiqta de-R. Kahana* 1:1; *Perush Recanati al ha-Torah*, 19c-d). See Gershom Scholem, O*n the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), 269-271; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 166-167. Recanati hints at the magical nature of the sacrifice in his commentary, 48, s.v. *va-yishlah*. See Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, 139.

[67] *Maʿarekhet ha-Elohut* (Mantua: 1548), 95b. See Abraham Elkayyam, "'Referentialism vs. Implementation: Two Approaches to Understanding the Kabbalistic Symbol in the Book *Maʿarekhet ha-Elohut*" [Hebrew], *Daʿat* 24 (19901): 30-31; idem, "On the Architectural Structure of the Book *Maʿarekhet ha-Elohut*" [Hebrew], *Kiryat Sefer* 64/1 (1992/93): 300 ff.

action of the sacrifices to be founded on the unification and fertilization of the *sefirot.*

Astral Magic in the Writings of Rashba and Ritba

Nahmanides' disciples and "grand-disciples" maintained, as noted, the theurgic and magic-astral interpretations of the sacrificial rite. This phenomenon should be contrasted with the deafening silence on this count of two important thinkers of Nahmanides' circle—Rashba and his disciple Ritba, who dealt with philosophy and Kabbalah only orally. The overwhelming bulk of their written opus consists of halakhic commentary on the Babylonian Talmud. Interestingly, both these thinkers say nothing of either the rich kabbalistic traditions they possessed or of the magic-astral conceptions so common in their immediate circles, as we have already shown at length. Presumably, they considered astral magic to be a branch of esoteric lore, as it was in the teachings of Judah Halevi and Abraham ibn Ezra, two scholars who exerted a decisive influence on Nahmanides. Nevertheless, one can detect in the halakhic writings of both Rashba and Ritba allusions and implicit approaches that at times testify to certain philosophical or kabbalistic traditions in their teachings. The sovereignty of the celestial system, and in particular the possibility of overcoming that sovereignty, plays a central part in Rashba's commentary on Aggadah, while Ritba relies on it in his commentaries both on the Talmud and on the Passover Haggadah. Unfortunately, Ritba's book of sermons, of whose existence we know, for example, from the evidence of his disciple Isaac Canpanton, is not available. For our purposes, we can state the following:

1. Both Rashba and Ritba recognize astrology as a primary element and use it in their commentaries on Aggadah.
2. Both of them recognize the validity of certain forms of magic, unlike, say, Maimonides.
3. While Rashba does not conceal his recognition of astral magic, Ritba prefers not to treat the topic openly.

Let us start with Rashba's clearly enunciated and reasoned halakhic approach. As to the exploitation of astral powers, we can state, based on responsa concerning astral magic preserved in Abba Mari Astruc's work *Minhat Qena'ot*, that Rashba acknowledged the reality of spirituality brought down upon amulets. Rashba states that before the eruption

of the anti-philosophical controversy he himself had unhesitatingly permitted the fashioning of effigies for medical purposes, and even during the controversy refused to issue an absolute ban on the medical use of astral magic.[68] As against Maimonides' approach, Rashba points out that both Talmuds contain an abundance of magical material that violates no religious precept. Moreover, Rashba accuses opponents of sorcery of denying the possibility of miracles.[69] To support his recognition that spirituality may descend upon amulets, he writes:

> And I say that it was the kindness of the Supreme Being at the start of Creation to create in his world things that would ensure the health of the created beings, that if the existents happen to fall ill or for any other reason deviate from their natural perfection, these [things] are ready to restore them to their realm or to make them healthy. And He placed these forces in the essence of things found in nature, as may be attained by study, such as medications and aids known to scholars of medicine, or in nature based on properties but not attainable by study… And it is not impossible that such a power should also be in speech, as in the case of amulets and similar things.[70]

Whether such actions are permissible or not depends, according to Rashba, on the magician's real intention, that is, on his recognition of God as the primary cause of recovery.[71] Clearly, therefore, Rashba's legitimization of magic-astral acts relates exclusively to the medical realm. Although his opponent Abba Mari claims, "all scholars are unanimously inclined toward prohibition,"[72] Rashba unhesitatingly

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[68] "And I permitted it, for I said that I do not see any prohibition in fashioning an effigy for medical purposes… At any rate, I do not see fit to impose an absolute prohibition on all effigies and all seasons and all deeds and all utterances in any way" (*Minhat Qena'ot*, printed in Rashba's *Responsa*, I/1, ed. Hayyim Z. Dimitrovsky [Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1990], 282, ll. 10-11, 283, ll. 26-28). Rashba agreed to prohibit only the burning of incense that accompanied the bringing down of spirituality (ibid., ll. 34-35).

[69] Ibid., 296, l. 196; 297, l. 195.

[70] Ibid., 297, l. 205; 298, l. 214. Compare the following passage: "This permission covers everything that has been said to be for medical purposes, whether through the action of an object or the action of speech and influence' (ibid., 302, ll. 268-269).

[71] "It is possible that [the permission] extends even to [fixing an appointed] time and hours, as long as one makes the effigy for medical purposes and directs' one's intent toward heaven, unlike those who direct their intent to the lord who is ruling that day, for that is as if one were worshiping him" (ibid., 302, l. 270; 203, l. 272). See also ibid., 304, l. 286 ("diverting one's attention from heaven").

[72] Ibid., 319, l. 118. Abba Mari was also referring to R. Isaac b. Judah de Lattes, who made such an effigy. Although Lattes agreed that this was, strictly speaking,

permits investing an amulet with spirituality for medical purposes. His response to the lengthy arguments adduced by Abba Mari against permitting astral magic even for medical ends is brief: Abba Mari, he writes, did not understand the sources properly, and especially not Maimonides.[73]

Rashba may even have extended the theological limits of astral magic. A responsum ascribed to him legitimizes astral worship outside the Land of Israel:

> For the Lord, blessed be He, divided the lands among the constellations and gave them dominion over the earth, so that a certain star will control a certain place, and so the different countries and places are divided in their faiths, one worshiping a certain image and one worshiping another, and whoever worships the star that controls that place is not considered an idolater, provided that he knows and realizes that that star and its dominion derive exclusively from the Lord, blessed be He, who gave it the ability to rule that land;[74] as it is said with regard to the Cutheans [Samaritans]: "They worshiped the Lord, while serving their own gods" [2 Kings 17:33]. But as to ourselves, He singled us out as his own portion, also singling out our land for his Name so that his Temple should be there, and commanded us not to worship any star or constellation at all and not to direct any of our actions toward them in any way; rather, we worship him and He answers whenever we call upon him; and whosoever worships someone else, that will be considered a great sin for him, as if he had rebelled against [God's] kingship and worshiped idols, Heaven forbid.[75]

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forbidden, he relied on Nahmanides' more lenient view. See Joseph Shatzmiller, "The Forms of the *Twelve Constellations*: A Fourteenth Century Controversy," in *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume: On the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Moshe Idel, Warren Zeev Harvey and Eliezer Schweid (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought, 1988), 2: 398.

[73] *Minhat Qena'ot*, 347-348.

[74] In his *Perushei ha-Haggadot*, Rashba argued that "the prophets of Baal, though fools, did not contest the knowledge of the Creator, blessed be He, that He is the Ultimate Cause and everything flows from Him…, they only thought to exalt Him by denying the fact of Divine Providence… They thought that He… gave His world to rulers who would lead the world and He made them owners of the world, and they are the spheres and their constellations and their spiritual form, as it is written, 'those who made offerings to Baal, to the sun and moon and constellations—all the host of heaven' [2 Kings 23:5]," 8. If this responsum was indeed written by Rashba, he has concealed his authentic view of the legitimacy of astral worship outside the Holy Land. In any case, nowhere does Rashba doubt the efficacy of the use of effigies.

[75] *Perushei ha-Haggadot*, 145. I have compared the text to that of Joseph Perles, *R. Solomon b. Abraham b. Adereth: sein Leben und seine Schriften* (Breslau: Schletter, 1863). This responsum also appears in Dimitrovsky's edition of the *Responsa*, I/1, 216, ll. 59-60.

The author of the responsum presents a typical Hermetic approach, whereby religious worship operates in parallel with astrology and astral magic. Such an antinomian approach, permitting the worship of a star in its proper climate and place, is in line with the views of fourteenth-century rationalists, who ascribed reality to astral magic and actually assigned it a central place in their theology. Nevertheless, in contrast to those rationalists, Rashba recognized several different modes of magic (magic spells, adjuration of demons, and so forth),[76] making no distinction between them and astral magic. It is clear, at any rate, that Rashba entertained no doubts as to the reality of astral magic and in fact permitted its use for medical purposes.

Rashba also hints at his acceptance of the combination of theurgy and astral magic, that is, the link between theosophical and astral emanation. Here, too, he betrays the obvious influence of Nahmanides' ideas. In his commentary on the aggadic statement, "The Holy One, blessed be He, waters the Land of Israel Himself, the rest of the world—[only] through an agent" (TB Ta'anit 10a), he distinguishes between the Land of Israel, which is beyond the astral dominion and watched over solely by God, and other countries, which are under the sway of "a constellation or one of the lords of heaven."
Rashba writes:

> For the action of all the intelligences and constellations of the heavens (*sekhalim u-mazzalot ha-shamayim*), whose dominion the Lord, blessed be He, placed over the earth,[77] derives only from the influence emanated upon them from the Prime Mover, blessed be He, and since the Land of

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On the antinomian conception of the Land of Israel see Schwartz, "The Land of Israel in the Fourteenth Century Neoplatonic School," 146-149.

[76] See, for instance, Rashba, *Responsa*, ed. Dimitrovsky, I/1, 134, l. 88.

[77] Like Nahmanides, Rashba has a rich terminology for astral spirituality ("Intelligences," "soul of the stars," "lords on high," and so forth). For example: "For all the powers, although they have dominion over the earth and the Lord assigned them to all the nations, they are subject to chance and events in the alteration of their movement, and the lowly may overcome and the strong may fall low, depending on the conjunctions and their aspect, as is known to the astronomers… It follows from this that a nation or climate subject to the dominion of the lords on high who rule, whenever chance overtakes the ruler, it will automatically overtake those who are ruled thereby" (*Perushei ha-Haggadot*, 10). Rashba also declares that "Because Solomon was the wisest of all men, so much so that he also made use of the spiritual entities" (ibid, 84). On the term "spiritual entity" [*ruhani*] in reference to the powers that move the spheres, see ibid., 12, 45, and so forth Rashba in fact laid the foundations for the identification of "lords on high" with the *sefirot*.

> Israel receives [lit.: drinks] surveillance from Him, blessed be He, without the need for any agent among the celestial constellations, it follows that the rain that descends there is the principle of rain, rain of goodwill and blessing, which brings forth abundant fruit… But the other lands, which are subject to the dominions of the heavens, it is as if they were drinking, for example, the distillation of that rain. The saying "The Land of Israel is watered first" [TB Taʿanit 10a] has precisely this meaning, for [the Land of Israel] receives the supreme blessing, while all the world [receives] the influence emanated upon all receivers from that blessing, for they are agents sent to rule the world and water it.[78]

According to this interpretation, the influence radiated upon all lands other than Israel is a combination of theosophical and astral influence. Rashba hints that beneficial rain is an outcome of the influence of "the supreme blessing" (*hokhmah* and *malkhut*), while the "dominions of the other lands" receive this influence and radiate it to the material world. It follows that astral influence is one link in the chain of emanation beginning in the world of the *sefirot*; outside the Land of Israel, at least, the influence actually received is a combination of both categories, namely, *sefirot* and stars. This passage, therefore, interweaves the theosophical and magic-astral aspects. Nevertheless, note that Rashba never explicitly recognizes astral magic as a theological factor. His acceptance of the idea that spirituality can be drawn down to earth comes to light in his halakhic responsa only, and even there it is limited to medical needs.

Ritba makes constant use of astral arguments in his commentary on the Passover Haggadah, and appeals to it once or twice in his Talmud commentary.[79] In order to prove that "Israel is not under the control of any constellation" [TB Shabbat 156a], he uses Augustine's "twins" argument, in which he attempts to reject astrology by pointing out the different fates of twins, who possess identical horoscopes. Jacob's life was thus quite different from that of Esau. Ritba, however, unlike Augustine, recognizes astrology as a general law applicable to every-

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[78] *Perushei ha-Haggadot*, 71. Rashba's interpretation of this passage is in conflict with interpretations that emerged in Castilian Kabbalah in such circles as those the Cohen brothers, which based this legend on the theurgic aspect. See, for instance, Todros Abulafia, *Otzar ha-Kavod* (Warsaw, 1879), 18c ("The Secret of *Maʿaseh Bereshith*").

[79] See Schwartz, "Conservatism vs. Rationality," 160. See also Rashba, *Novellae* on the first *mishnah* in Tractate *Taʿanit* ("for the whole intention of the *hasadim* in the benediction [the second of the *Shemoneh-Esreh*] is to nullify the astral system"). The commentary on the Haggadah is discussed below.

thing except the Jewish people.[80] In his Haggadah commentary he appeals to talmudic-midrashic literature, which relies on astrology.[81] The Exodus from Egypt is described as the outcome of the activity of "the divine attributes of *din* and *rahamim*" in their theosophical sense; the attribute of *din* causes a "war that took place on high, to defeat their guardian angel."[82] In parallel, Ritba also accepts the magic of the divine names as an interpretive principle.[83] Finally, Ritba adopts the astrological style of Nahmanides in his explanation of the scapegoat,[84] from which it is clear that he was aware of the magic-astral argument, though he preferred not to cite it at length. We may therefore assume that, to the extent that Ritba reveals his ideological conceptions, they accord with those of Nahmanides as stated by his interpreters.

Astral Magic in Ritba's Circle

Indirect evidence of Ritba's attitude to the concept of astral magic as a theological factor may be gleaned from the writings of his disciple

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[80] "…that Israel is not subject to any constellation. Know, truly, that for that reason the wicked Esau was present as a twin with the righteous Jacob in the same womb, so that the whole world should understand that the righteousness of the righteous Jacob was of himself, not consequent upon an arrangement of constellations or from the nature of his mother and father or from any other necessary cause, for he and Esau were born in the same womb, and Esau became corrupted, while Jacob took the path of the good" (*Haggadah shel Pesah im Perushei ha-Rishonim*, ed. Mordechai Leib Katznelenbogen [Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1998], 74). For Augustine's argument, see Laura Ackerman-Smaller, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly, 1350-1420* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 26-27.

[81] See, for instance, *Haggadah shel Pesah*, 51, 73, 108.

[82] Ibid., 118-119. As noted, it may be assumed that Ritba was using the terms *din* and *rahamim* in their theosophical sense, since he calls his commentary "by way of truth" (ibid.). See also ibid., 130. If so, we see that Ritba, too, established a link between the theosophical and astrological aspects ("their guardian angel").

[83] Ritba presents a magical interpretation of Moses' rod, saying that it had written on it "the combination of letters of the Names with which Heaven and Earth had been created" (ibid., 116). The magic of the Name also underlies Ritba's interpretation of the *Urim* and *Thummim* (*Novellae* on TB Yoma 73b), thus approaching Nahmanides' view in his Torah commentary (Exodus 28:30), which argues against Ibn Ezra's astrological interpretation. See also Sikili, *Torat ha-Minhah*, 1: 309.

[84] "'I have given the hill country of Seʿir as a possession to Esau' [Deuteronomy 2:5], for he is a hairy man [*saʿir*], and his place is the hill country of Seʿir, and his portion is goats [*seʿirim*]" (*Haggadah shel Pesah*, 75). Note that Ritba supported Maimonides' view of the demons as imaginary, contrary to the view that they are "solid bodies" (*Sefer ha-Zikkaron*, 79).

Judah b. Solomon Canpanton, in particular, his book *Arbaʿah Qinyanim*. This work combines philosophical, ethical and kabbalistic ideas and, as stated, to some extent documents the issues that concerned Ritba's circle.

In a chapter devoted to the uniqueness of the Jewish people, Canpanton considers the merit of man and his superiority over the angels. The universe, he writes, is an arena in which various powers act; "all the powers that were present only potentially, if not actually realized, it is as if those powers did not exist." The typical trait of man is that he is capable of "attracting" those powers to himself. The description of human superiority appears under the heading, "by way of truth": "Man, through the power invested in him, attracts[85] all the powers to himself as a magnet attracts iron[86] and as the moon attracts the power of the sun to itself so that it is seen to have the light of the sun more than is seen in the other stars."[87]

Canpanton presents two examples of the realization of the powers: magnetism, which has no scientific, causal explanation; and the light of the moon, which comes from the sun. We may conclude, therefore, that the use of the powers may be explained according to both the (Aristotelian) causal-scientific paradigm and the causally inexplicable paradigm, which includes sorcery and magic. Discussing the temple

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[85] In Canpanton's terminology, the verb *mashakh* per se, meaning attract or draw, does not necessarily have a magical meaning. Thus, he writes that "the Creator… granted strength to man's mind to attract things to itself" (*Sefer Arbaʿah Qinyanim le-R. Yehuda b. Shlomo Canpanton me-Ir Molina*, ed. M. Y. Blau, [New York: M. Y. Blau, 1997], 54). Nevertheless, we have already seen that the term was associated with magic in Rashba's circle.

[86] See Yitzhak Tzvi Langermann, "Gersonides on the Magnet and the Heat of the Sun," in *Studies on Gersonides: A Fourteenth-Century Jewish Philosopher-Scientist*, ed. Gad Freudenthal (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 276-282. Members of Rashba's circle considered the magnetic phenomenon as expressing the inadequacy of scientific explanations. For the view of the author of *Sefer ha-Hinnukh*, for example, see Dov Schwartz, "On Gersonides as a Scientist" [Hebrew], *Peʿamim* 54 (1993): 135 and n. 4. See also idem, *Messianism in Medieval Jewish Thought*, 134 and n. 56.

[87] *Arbaʿah Qinyanim*, 21. Stellar action is compared to magnetism in a translation, attributed to Ibn Ezra, of a work by Mashʿallah: "All the stars have a power, together with the seven servants, in their actions and their consequences and the action of the stars in the world. It resembles the stone known as 'magnet,' which attracts iron from nearby. Thus all the plants and trees on earth are created from the strength and motion of the stars" (*Sefer le-Mashʿallah be-Qadrut ha-Levanah ve-ha-Shemesh ve-hibbur ha-Kokhavim u-Tequfot ha-Shanim*, [Jerusalem, 1971], 2-3). The idea of attracting light does not appear in Ibn Ezra's writings in relation to the reflection of the sun's light by the moon.

implements, Canpanton suggests that it might be possible to use the powers by receiving divine influence. To his mind, the seven-branched candelabrum represents the seven planets, the middle lamp being the sun, whose "power" is clearly visible. The calyxes and petals of the candelabrum express these principles:

> And the explanation of the calyx is that it alludes to the reception of influence, while the petal alludes to the flow of influence from above to below. For the Lord first exercises His providence over the upper worlds and then over the lower, as King David, of blessed memory, said: "He sees what is below, in heaven and on earth" [Psalms 113:6]—first heaven is mentioned, and only then the earth. This was expressed [by the rabbis] when they said: "Everything depends on the constellation, except for the Land of Israel."[88]

Thus, the task of the calyxes and the petals is to absorb both astral and theosophical emanation. Moreover, explaining the species of animals that may be sacrificed, Canpanton enunciates a general rule: "Just as the powers of the constellations and the stars are found in human beings, so [God] commanded that [sacrifices] be made from the most readily available species, but he did not command that sacrifices be made from the gazelle and the deer, which would require one to go to the mountains to hunt them and take trouble to find them."[89] Sacrifices are thus directed toward the common astral emanations; accordingly, Manoah and Samson offered up kids, as against the constellation of Jupiter.[90] In the Temple, the priests and the person offering a sacrifice

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[88] *Arbaʿah Qinyanim*, 57. Compare Ritba in his *Novellae* to TB Moʿed Qatan 28a. See further *Zohar*, *Naso*, 3:134a. Canpanton expresses the extreme view that God does not watch over the regions reserved for the stars: "The Holy One, blessed be He, does not extend His providence over any man in these matters [dependent on the constellation]" (*Arbaʿah Qinyanim*, 85).

[89] Ibid., 125. Canpanton agrees with Maimonides' view of the sacrificial rite as an educational process aimed at releasing the Jews from idolatrous tendencies. Nevertheless, he refers his reader to the theurgic reason, citing "sages of truth," and insists "It is all reliable truth" (ibid., 85).

[90] "And the matter of Manoah is that he made an offering of a goat's kid [*gedi izzim*], the word *gedi* is of the same root as the expression *gad gaddi* [TB Shabbat 67b], meaning 'my constellation is good.' The allusion is to the constellation of Jupiter, which signifies everything that is good. Moreover, Samson was of the mighty ones [*azzim*], and he therefore fought the wars of the Lord and succeeded in all he set out to do, and therefore he was a Nazirite to God from the womb on. For wine is justice, that is, 'Do not look at wine when it is red' [Proverbs 23:13]; read not 'when it is red' (*yit'addam*) but rather 'it desires blood' (*yit'av dam*)" (ibid., 132). Wine is already associated with fear or justice in *Sefer ha-Bahir* (ed. Margalyot, §137). The

would see "the shape of a lion of fire <descending> from the heavens and consuming the offering."[91] On the basis of the astrological contexts that Canpanton discusses at length, we may assume that in his view the sacrifice attracts the fiery shape from the stars.

In light of the material surveyed up to this point, it may be argued that Canpanton considers religious precepts and prohibitions as means for bringing down emanation and, in fact, he defines the attraction of emanation as the reception of "Supreme Power":

> And now I will reveal to you a certain great, good secret. It is known that the name *Elohim* is derived from the same root as *eyalut* [strength, power].[92] And all the foods that Jews eat are pure on the right-hand side, and whoever partakes of forbidden foods demonstrates that he is not content with the Supreme Power and therefore desires to take one of the other powers.[93]

Canpanton is saying that the consumption of a permitted food brings down influence from the *sefirah* of *hesed*. On the other hand, on the basis of this quotation, the reason for the prohibition of certain foods and the meaning of the expression "one of the other powers" may be interpreted in three different ways: (a) While permitted eating brings about theosophical emanation, forbidden eating is seen to attract astral emanation; (b) permitted eating brings down emanation from the *sefirah* of *hesed*, while forbidden foods bring down emanation from *din*; (c) permitted eating brings down positive emanation, but forbidden foods bring down forces of impurity.[94] All three interpretations explain the action of the precepts according to the magic-astral model.

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intent of this passage is that a sacrifice may bring down influence from *hesed*, which is identified with Jupiter.

[91] Ibid., 126. Elsewhere, Canpanton adds: "The essence of sacrifice is prayer. Accordingly, after he [Elijah on Mount Carmel] had made the altar and cut up the bull, as Scripture explains, the fire did not descend until he had prayed" (ibid., 130).

[92] The source for this statement is probably in *The Kuzari* 4:3: "But the word *el* [god] is derived from *eyalut* [strength; Psalms 22:20], from which all the powers issued." The influence of *The Kuzari* in this context is also evident elsewhere in Canpanton's work (ibid., 76). Elsewhere, he points out that the name *Elohim* refers to the angels, since "they are appointed over human beings… For He, blessed be He, granted one power to each and every angel" (ibid., 87). Such statements are clarified by the combination of astral and theosophical influence.

[93] Ibid., 66.

[94] See Moshe Idel, "*Ta'amei ha-'Ofot ha-Teme'im* by Rabbi David ben Yehuda He-Hasid" [Hebrew], in *Alei Shefer: Studies in the Literature of Jewish Thought Presented to Rabbi Dr. Alexandre Safran*, ed. Moshe Hallamish (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1990), 13, 21, and so forth.

As noted, Ritba's book of sermons is not extant. Nevertheless, it is clear from the teachings of his disciple that theosophical and magic-astral traditions coexisted in his school. At several points in his book, Canpanton writes that there are no books at his disposal and that he is quoting from memory. This observation confirms our thesis as to the preservation of traditions in Ritba's circle. Thus, Nahmanides' approach, in its later development, also had an influence on Ritba's associates.

Conclusions

The foregoing survey showed that Nahmanides' approach is an amalgam of two models, which later separated and became distinct as Castilian Kabbalah evolved during the thirteenth century. The theurgic model, which consists in attracting emanation to the *sefirot* and fertilizing the divine world, does not necessarily involve magical connotations; it became the basis of kabbalistic theurgy in Castile and later crystallized into its final form in Zoharic literature.[95] The magic-astral model, which focuses on the drawing down of emanation or influence from the supernal to the terrestrial worlds in order to ensure (or enhance) the material existence of the latter, gained acceptance mainly among the proponents of ecstatic Kabbalah (as Moshe Idel has shown at length); it became an important factor among the writers of supercommentaries on Nahmanides. Nahmanides himself saw no contradiction between the two models and used both of them. He laid the theoretical foundations for the use of both models by linking theosophical and astral emanation, presenting them as two aspects of the same influence or as two hypostases in the process of emanation. These foundations, along with Nahmanides' special terminology that associated the *sefirot* and the moving power of the spheres, were absorbed into the writing of his disciples, such as Isaac Todros and Rashba. The texts cited above, both those of Nahmanides himself and those of his school, indicate that the "secret" of the sacrificial rite was

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[95] The astral-magical model is not dominant in Zoharic literature, although its presence should not be ignored, particularly as black magic. See Dorit Cohen-Alloro, *The Secret of the Garment in the Zohar* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Institute of Jewish Studies, 1987), 82-88; idem, Magic and Sorcery in the Zohar [Hebrew] (Ph. D. dissertation: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1989), 100-104, 170-172.

based on a simultaneously theurgic and magic-astral substrate. From that time on, the two models developed independently.

Four central streams were pointed out in the kabbalistic camp concerning the relationship between theurgy and astral magic in the secret of sacrifice:

1. Synthesis, combining theurgy and astral magic in Nahmanides' formulation (David Cohen, Shem Tov ibn Gaon, Menahem Recanati, Judah Canpanton).
2. Ignoring the magic-astral dimension or combining the theosophical and astral aspects in the definition of the descending influence, but without emphasis on magic (Bahya b. Asher, Jacob Sikili, Isaac of Acre).
3. Suppressing the magic-astral element (author of *Sefer ha-Hinnukh*, author of sermons from the school of Jonah of Gerona).
4. Suppressing the entire discussion, most probably because it was considered to be esoteric lore (Rashba, Ritba).[96]

What caused this impressive dissemination of Nahmanides' "secret of sacrifice"? Obviously, Nahmanides' exceptional prestige and his halakhic status created a special halo around the "secret." Another factor could be added, however, which might explain the focus on the secret of sacrifice rather than on some other aspect of Nahmanides' mystical teachings: the magic-astral approach. Astral magic, which had been quite common in twelfth-century theology, particularly in the writings of Moses ibn Ezra, Judah Halevi, and Abraham ibn Ezra, was rejected by Jewish rationalists because of Maimonides' authority. The kabbalists of Nahmanides' circle refused to concur, however, and sharply disagreed with the philosophers about this. At the same time, the silence of the Gerona kabbalists—R. Jonah and R. Azriel—concerning the magic-astral argument is deafening: not only is it a plausible assumption that they were aware of the traditions propounded by their townsman, Nahmanides, but they also chose to ignore a time-honored model, which had been prominent in the writings of earlier scholars such as Abraham ibn Ezra.

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[96] The fact that these thinkers did consider astral magic in the context of the "secret of sacrifice" is indicated by their disciples' interest in the subject. The topic was suppressed, in all probability, under the influence of Nahmanides' opinion that astral magic was an area to be concealed and taught to a select few only. See below, and see Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, ch. 4.

It is quite likely that the activities of the kabbalists of Nahmanides' circle furthered the reappearance of astral magic in the theological world of fourteenth century Jewish philosophy. These kabbalists employed the magic-astral model in their thought, and some also preserved the esoteric dimension of the model.

CHAPTER FOUR

INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Astrological theology develops among a group of thinkers in Spain and its environs from the early fourteenth century onwards. The magic-astral approach develops as a natural and almost required corollary once astrological theology reaches maturity. This approach, stunning in its vigor and impetus, becomes a coherent and institutionalized doctrine within this Neoplatonic circle of thinkers. This chapter is focused on the magic-astral thought of this circle, tracing in detail the chronological development of the ideas that flourished within this group of Spanish philosophers. Magic-astral approaches begin to emerge systematically in the writings of two mid-fourteenth century thinkers, Solomon Alconstantin and Solomon Franco, who could be said to represent the first stage in the development of a structured magic-astral hermeneutics. In its second stage (1360-1380), the founder's ideas are elaborated by Samuel ibn Zarza, Ezra Gatigno, and Joseph Bonfils, and in its third stage (1380-1400), by Shem Tov ibn Shaprut, and Shem Tov ibn Mayor.[1]

Drawing Down Spirituality

Astral Magic as a Real Science

In the writings of this circle, as noted, astral magic becomes a real hermeneutical element with vast theological implications. These thinkers know that the sources for the available knowledge on the drawing down of stellar spirituality are idolatrous. Following Maimonides, they adopt the pagan model originating in Harran as a reflection of the ancient pagan cult, but recognize it as real and show signs of sympathy toward it. For sure, they tell themselves, the pagans learned this wisdom from the Jewish patriarchs. They do acknowledge, however,

[1] I discuss the philosophical outlook of the thinkers in this circle in my book, *The Philosophy of a Fourteenth Century Jewish Neoplatonic Circle* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute 1996), 31-32.

that the drawing down of spirituality closely resembles an act of idolatry. Alconstantin states that the worship of the planet Mars through "the image of the planet made to draw down spirituality" was part of the Baal cult.[2] He also notes that the cults of Asherah, Astarte, and the pillars, which had been popular among the Canaanites, are predicated on the drawing down of spirituality. In his view, these cults are real and were only forbidden because of their idolatrous use:

> The Canaanites used to worship Asherah, and Astarte, and the pillars, and the sun pillars, and these are abominations abhorred by God.[3] Whoever does this seeks to draw down spirituality from the planets and signs, in specific aspects, onto the trees and images, so as to extend the spirituality to the worshipper of the tree or the image and tell him of future events or matters in which he might succeed… When Moses came, God told us through him that these were all worthless and useless deeds, and commanded they [the pillars] should be destroyed when He said, "You shall surely destroy them" (Deuteronomy 12:2). The pillars had been beloved at the time of the patriarchs because the people had meant to worship God through them, but God commanded their destruction only because now they meant to worship the gods of the strangers of the land.[4] And a word to the wise will suffice.[5]

Specifically, according to Alconstantin, idolatry was forbidden because this worship was directed to "the gods of the strangers." The "pillar"[6]

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[2] Solomon Alconstantin, *Megalleh Amuqqot*, Vatican Ms 59, 6a.

[3] According to Deuteronomy 16:22, 18:9-12.

[4] According to Deuteronomy 31:16. See Ibn Ezra *ad locum*.

[5] Alconstantin, *Megalleh Amuqqot*, 110 a-b. Cited according to the critical edition that appears in Schwartz, *The Philosophy of a Fourteenth Century Jewish Neoplatonic Circle*, 281. A paraphrase of this passage appears in Samuel ibn Zarza, *Mikhlol Yofi*, Paris Ms. 729-730, 1: 227b. Concerning the attitude to idolatry, consider Alconstantin's commentary in *Megalleh Amuqqoth*, 60a on the midrash in Exodus Rabba 3:6: "I always was, I am now, and I always will be": "This means that God told Moses that all three times—past, present, and future—are one and the same for Him, may He be blessed, since He is not bound by time… This was for them a great wonder, since they were idolaters and could see that the idols they worshipped did not operate in all these three times, but at a distinct time according to their value and extent on earth. When you show them that there is a First Being that activated time they will believe it, because His power is equally effective in all three times, unlike the deities they worship, whose action is bound by time, and you should understand this." God's omnipotence, then, is evident in his action at all times, contrary to the magicians who are bound by time and place according to the rules of astral magic, which is the sign of paganism's inferiority vis-à-vis monotheism.

[6] Compare Julian Morgenstern, *Rites of Birth, Marriage, Death and Kindred Occasions among the Semites* (New York: Ktav, 1973), 146-147. The pillar is a stone that served various purposes in the biblical period, including as a site for the offering of sacrifices.

per se is not forbidden. To the contrary, Alconstantin openly argues that *God accepts idolatrous modes when adopted for divine worship*: "… because when they worship Him, may He be blessed, through the same modes they had used to worship another god, He will accept them."[7] These remarks more than hint to an outlook viewing the aim of many commandments as drawing down astral emanation in the style of idolaters. Hence, despite the close resemblance between the drawing down of spirituality and idolatry, thinkers in this circle did not recoil from turning it into a significant theological element.

Alconstantin was not the only one. An important source on the drawing down of stellar spirituality is the *Sefer ha-Atsamim* [Book of Substances] attributed to Ibn Ezra, and we deal below with the way in which thinkers in this circle became acquainted with it. Samuel ibn Zarza cites extensive passages from it about the types of spiritual forces emanating from the stars, forces partly at the magician's disposal. Excerpts from these quotations are cited below, since the attitude to these forces, their adaptation, and their adoption are the best illustration of these thinkers' attitude to idolatrous hermetic traditions:

> As for the legislators, the Sabians and the men of Habut[8] and the Chaldeans and all the others who had lived before the flood—all then held that stellar forces operate within us and they are the ones that lead us as part of their influence upon all objects in the terrestrial world. To them we owe our continued existence and they are the cause of it, as well as the cause of our privation and corruption. This was an unquestionable truth except for the person who is accompanied by a Divine Providence, which reverses all these acts and proves superior to the person it provides for. Would the star enjoin evil to befall us, Divine Providence would abolish it, and would the star enjoin good fortune to come upon us, Divine Providence would strengthen its influence, as Moses and Elijah strengthened Divine Providence. Hence, these nations worshipped the planets and their powers, praising them and glorifying them, and bowing to them on the day the planet ruled, invoking the stars' names, bringing sacrifices to them, making offerings to them, and burning the appropriate incense at the time they were in each sign, and bringing down their power…
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> Hence, I will not refrain from telling you about their concern and their acts, since you will thereby learn and understand the truth about

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[7] Alconstantin, *Megalleh Amuqqoth*, 78b.

[8] He is referring here to the Nabateans. *bot* is a reed and makes no sense here, so that this is probably a misprint of *Nbt* that refers, as noted, to the Nabateans.

> the Torah of Israel and about Moses, and all the verses in the Torah will attest to this truth, further confirmed by what I will show you from the truth of reason. All your doubts will be dismissed, and you will believe in God and in his holy Torah with incontrovertible faith rather than because of tradition, as the masses do, and especially the less worthy ones [*haserim*] among them. As this smoke goes up, the incense fragrance reaches the planet. According to the planet's desire for this smoke, it [the smoke] will come down and [man will]draw it to himself, and when the nether is in conjunction with the supreme, the supreme must be in conjunction with the nether…
>
> Whoever wishes to know about other ways of drawing down spirituality from the stars, can learn about it in the *Book of Nabatean Agriculture*, in the book of Aristotle, and in the Book of Techne.[9] All is told in these books, and it is pointless to repeat it. I did specifically mention the drawing down of spirituality from Saturn because this is the planet that rules the people of Israel, both in general and in particular and, since it is the general ruler, it will also necessarily affect the parts, and God, may He be blessed, is the path to truth.[10]

Ibn Zarza opens and closes the above passage with a series of declarations pointing both to the importance of drawing down spirituality from the stars and to the secret nature of this act. These declarations unequivocally show that he views pagan traditions as an important source for understanding the Torah. Ibn Zarza opens by saying: "You must understand this wondrous and hidden matter, and do not reveal what you understand from it except to the likes of yourself." He concludes with the words "you will still see wondrous and hidden matters that he [Ibn Ezra, to whom the *Sefer ha-Atsamim* was attributed] has written on this…on matters of prophecy."

Bonfils, with unusual candor, admits to his at least theoretical interest in the rules for drawing down spirituality:

> … This is the way of the sages of India who, at given times, make metal effigies to draw down the power of the stars, and this is a great wisdom on which there are many books, and I know Ishmaelites who

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[9] Ibn Zarza read this name as the Hebrew spelling of Galen's book *Techne*. See, for instance, Moritz Steinschneider, *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher: ein Beitrag zur Literaturgeschichte des Mittelalters, meist nach handschriftlichen Quellen* (Berlin: Kommissionsverlag des Bibliographischen Bureaus, 1893). Ibn Zarza may be referring to an abridged version of the *Book of Nabatean Agriculture*.

[10] *Sefer ha-Atsamim*, 17-21. The importance of this source is evident in its extensive citation in both of Ibn Zarza's works, *Meqor Hayyim*—93a, 97d, 114c, 117c—and *Mikhlol Yofi*—2:147.

> possess this wisdom. I myself know a little about it, theoretically and not practically for, in truth, this is idolatry.[11]

The expression *great wisdom* [*hokhmah*] conclusively attests to its value in Bonfils' eyes, although he defines it as idolatry. Ibn Zarza also relates to magic-astral effigies as "wisdom," and conveys this respectful attitude in several places. For instance, Ibn Ezra suggests that Korah and his company, who had offered sacrifices in fire-pans, were burned because of "your prayers or the wisdom that you knew."[12] The intimation of a magical deed is eminently clear, and Ibn Zarza adds: "And consider these words of the Master, for he has hinted at a great matter."[13] Generally: "There is a power in man that knows the judgments of the stars, and he will know to make an image at the time the sign grows on its image at certain hours."[14]

Recognizing astral magic as wisdom required the adoption of techniques characteristic of this realm. Let us return to Bonfils, who introduces a technique for drawing the star's power and emanation—prayer. The text relates that Moses went out of the city and entreated the Lord to cease the plague of hail (Exodus 9:29). And why did he go out? "Because while Moses was in the city, which was ruled by that sign, he could not receive the supreme power as he would have outside, hence he did not pray there."[15] *The star's emanation, then, can be drawn by praying to it*, and commentators did not hesitate to ascribe such a technique, which is widespread in magical and Hermetic literature, to Moses. Note also that, as is true of most magical activities, astral magic also poses the danger of the magician erring in some process, and the potential harm borders on disaster. Franco interprets the punishment of Nadav and Avihu according to this principle, citing a tradition concerning one of Aristotle's disciples "who was in the process of preparing an image—a matter unfit for

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[11] Bonfils, *Tsafenat Pa'aneah*, 1:245.

[12] Ibn Ezra, Commentary on Numbers 17:6.

[13] Ibn Zarza, *Meqor Hayyim*, 101b.

[14] Shem-Tov Ibn Mayor, *ha-Ma'or ha-Gadol*, Oxford Bdl. Ms. 228, 55b.

[15] Bonfils, *Tsafenat Pa'aneah*, 1:219. On mysticism and magic in prayer see Shalom Rosenberg, "Prayer and Jewish Thought: Directions and Problems" [Hebrew], in *Prayer in Judaism: Continuity and Change*, ed. Gabriel H. Cohn (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1978). Compare also Joseph Dan, "The Emergence of a Mystical Prayer," in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, ed. Joseph Dan and Frank Talmage (Cambridge, Mass.: Association for Jewish Studies, 1982), 85-120; Moshe Idel, "Kabbalistic Prayer in Provence" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 62 (1993): 265-286.

mention here—and because he was not versed in that worship was burnt by fire and died."[16]

We thus find a group of thinkers who devote their energy and creativity to the presentation of astral magic as a distinctive wisdom. These thinkers do not recoil from tracing this science's ancient pagan sources, and even anchor it in their orderly exegesis of the Torah and of Aggadah. From this point onward, no doubt would prevail concerning the reality of astral magic, or even concerning its relative religious legitimacy.

Magic-Astral Interpretation

We will now consider other exegetic applications of astral magic. Astral magic is shown to be effective in drawing down spirituality in several biblical affairs, such as the *terafim*, the golden calf, and the brass serpent. The common denominator of all the exegetes is that Ibn Ezra's cryptic language can be fully explained in astral magic terms.

Regarding the *terafim*, we found that Ibn Ezra had cloaked his views in a mist of uncertainty by citing a number of views.[17] By contrast, by the fourteenth century, no doubts prevailed concerning this enigmatic commentator's true views. The *terafim* are unequivocally presented as vessels for drawing down stellar spirituality. Consider Franco's reading of Ibn Ezra's commentary:

> The wisdom of images supplies the ways and the foundations for the making of specific forms from specific metals at specific times to bring down the supreme power on he who makes them, so that he may know the future through them and succeed.[18]

Ibn Zarza quotes the two views that appear in Ibn Ezra's commentary on the meaning of the *terafim*. One identifies the *terafim* with an astronomical instrument, "a copper instrument made to know parts of hours," and the other, with "a form at a given time." As noted, Ibn Ezra ostensibly rejects both views, but Ibn Zarza ignores this

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[16] Solomon Franco, supercommentary on Ibn Ezra, Oxford Bdl. Ms 1258, 75a.

[17] See above, ch. 1. According to the interpretation I proposed, Ibn Ezra has the magic-astral meaning in mind.

[18] Franco, supercommentary on Ibn Ezra, 59a, cited in a commentary on the mysteries of Ibn Ezra written by Ezra Gatigno, a thinker deeply influenced by Franco. See Ezra Gatigno, *Sod Adonai le-Yere'av*, Munich Ms. 15, 257a, and see also p. 37 above, the commentary by David ibn Bilia in note 22.

rejection in his quote. Rather, according to Ibn Zarza's citation and interpretation, Ibn Ezra accepts at least the latter view: "a form at a given time." Ibn Zarza then proceeds to present his own view on the matter of drawing down spirituality:

> You should know that the purpose of the *terafim* is to receive the supreme power [lit.: power from the supremes], and they would each make a specific form to draw down the supreme power upon it. And he said a great thing in *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer*: What are the *terafim*? A first-born son is killed and decapitated, the head is salted and perfumed, placed upon the wall, a golden plume is lit up, given an impure name and placed under his tongue, with a candle before it. They then bow to him and he speaks to them. And how do we know that the *terafim* speak? Because it has been said, "for the *terafim* have spoken vanity" (Zekharia 10:2), and that is why Rachel stole them, so that they would not tell Laban that Jacob had run away, and also to uproot idolatry from her father's house.[19]

Bonfils postulates that both of Ibn Ezra's exegeses should be combined. He identifies the mentioned "copper instrument" with an astrolabe.[20] His hypothesis is that stellar spirituality is brought down by means of a particular image, where the astrolabe itself is set and engraved. Hence, the use of *terafim* is the ritual of drawing down spirituality through the instrument best able to determine the astral constellation: "Possibly, the instrument was set in the form itself."[21] Doubt has thus turned into certainty, and the *terafim* are explained as means for drawing down spirituality.[22]

The same process is evident concerning the golden calf. Ibn Ezra's first concealed hints are now presented as clear and transparent. Solomon ibn Yaʿish interprets as follows the word *Elohim* in the verse, "Up, make us *Elohim* who shall go before us" (Exodus 32:1): "The word *Elohim* denotes that Aaron is to make an image that receives the supreme power, and God's glory will rest on this form, which will have the power to lead them and show them the right way."[23]

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[19] *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, ch. 36, with changes; Ibn Zarza, *Meqor Hayyim* 21b.

[20] Ibn Ezra's treatise *Kli Nehoshet* (Koenigsberg: Hartung, 1845) is devoted to the astrolabe, and is crucial to the understanding of Ibn Ezra's mysteries. See also Solomon Gandz, "The Astrolabe in Jewish Literature," *HUCA* 4 (1929): 469-486.

[21] Bonfils, *Tsafenat Paʿaneah*, 1:135.

[22] Ibn Shaprut also considered the *terafim* a form of talismanic magic (Bonfils, *Tsafenat Paʿaneah*, Oxford Bdl. Ms 2359 [Opp. Add 4º 107] 49b).

[23] Solomon ibn Yaʿish, supercommentary on Ibn Ezra on the Torah, Vatican

The drawing down of spirituality functions as a permanent political leadership, a kind of oracle purported to lead the wandering people through the desert. This interpretation is also found among philosophers in Byzantium.[24] Franco suggests an additional example of drawing down spirituality unto a calf's image, namely, "the calves that Jeroboam b. Nabat made, all in order to receive the supreme powers."[25] In this hermeneutical development, defending the sin of the golden calf takes on an old-new guise, in line with astral magic meanings: the children of Israel had not sought other gods, but rather a source of leadership.[26] Judah Halevi's implied argument now becomes explicit and transparent.[27]

A third example is the exegesis on the brass serpent, which also goes through a similar process. Ibn Ezra, as noted, states: "Many err. They say that this was an image capable of receiving the supreme power."[28] Franco claims that Ibn Ezra is not genuinely rejecting this option, and interprets his true intention as follows:

> He said in many places that the serpent's effigy was made in order to heal victims of serpent's bites according to the wisdom of images but, in order to conceal this matter, he explicitly said this in the wrong place. When he notes this in the proper place, he uses the wording "many say," and "some say," as I told you is his custom.[29]

Gatigno cites this passage from Franco verbatim, and then writes: "And so have I learned from my teachers, as Franco wrote."[30] A tradition was thus in existence concerning the magic-esoteric meaning of Ibn Ezra's exegesis on the matter of the brass serpent in particular, and on the magic-astral realm in general, as confirmed by the appearance of other exegeses in the same style. Ibn Zarza, for instance, cites talismanic interpretations of the brass serpent's effect, including that

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Ms. 4, 54, 258b; also appears as a verbatim quotation in Ibn Mayor, *ha-Ma'or ha-Gadol*, 158a.

[24] See Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, 204.

[25] Franco, supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Torah, 73b.

[26] "Because they were not seeking to worship him, and they only wanted to receive the emanation of its benefit [of the house of Venus, the sign of Taurus], which it had received from God, may He be blessed…" (Bonfils, *Tsafenat Pa'aneah*, 1: 295).

[27] See above, ch. 1.

[28] Commentary on Numbers 21:8.

[29] Franco, supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Torah, 82a. I showed above (ch. 1) that Franco's commentary can find support in Ibn Ezra's text.

[30] Gatigno, *Sod Adonai le-Yere'av*, Munich Ms. 15, 281b.

by Moses Narboni.[31] Ibn Mayor writes "this serpent was made with supreme wisdom at specific times for the sake of the victims' lives. Hence, this was done by God's command and will, since Moses knew this wisdom."[32] Hesitation turns into certainty here as well, and the brass serpent is perceived as an effigy made for the purpose of drawing down supreme forces.

Finally, note that Bonfils used the same magic-astral technique to explain Moses' rod, which serves in many traditions as an archetype of magical exegesis. According to Bonfils, the effectiveness of this cult must be played down, lest Divine Providence is affronted.[33] On God's command to Moses, "Stretch out thy hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts," Ibn Ezra quotes Moses ibn Gikatilla who says, "the reason for the locust is that he placed a locust on the rod,"[34] and rejects this exegesis. Bonfils, therefore, writes as follows:

> Moses Ha-Cohen [Gikatilla] explained that Moses placed images of locusts on the rod in order to draw the supreme power to bring locusts upon Egypt. In his view, this should be done at a specific time, known from the wisdom of the signs. R. Abraham [Ibn Ezra] therefore said that, if this is the true explanation, it is not proper to reveal it, lest onlookers should think that this happened through the power of the sign rather than through God's command.[35]

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[31] Following is Moses Narboni's commentary on *Guide of the Perplexed* 2:9 (ed. Ya'akov Goldenthal [Vienna: 1852], 28b: "His [Maimonides'] saying 'for the ancients called the stars forms' hints at the faces of the animals [in the chariot], and this is a great mystery at which he hinted, intimating a great ancient dogma concerning the images on which these crafts are based, namely, the nether forms resemble the supernal ones and receive the supreme emanation, 'surely man walks as a mere image' [Psalms 39:7], as Ptolemy says in … *Sefer ha-Peri* [*Centilloquium*]." I corrected this version, which is extremely inaccurate, according to Ibn Zarza, *Meqor Hayyim*, 102d-103a. Several corrections of the passage in *Sefer ha-Peri* appear in the notes of Joshuah Heschel Shor [Hebrew], *He-Halutz* 11 (1880), 80. For the quotation from *Sefer ha-Peri* see above, p. 15, n. 48. Ibn Zarza thus relied on Moses Narboni to explain how the serpent operates according to astral magic. See also below, ch. 5.

[32] Ibn Mayor, *ha-Ma'or ha-Gadol*, Oxford Bdl. Ms. 228, 55b.

[33] In another source, Bonfils expresses fears lest faith in Providence be affected following acceptance of the approach ascribing overwhelming influence to astrological forces. He conveys this fear when the time of the flood is set deterministically, according to stellar constellations. Bonfils' answer deals with the perception stating that astrological constellations were determined at the Creation, including the specific conjunction of the flood. See Bonfils, *Tsafenat Pa'aneah*, 1:77.

[34] Commentary on Exodus 10:12.

[35] Bonfils, *Tsafenat Pa'aneah*, 1:220.

In other words: in order to bring the locust plague upon Egypt, Moses engraved the image of a locust upon the rod, according to the sympathetic principle of placing a symbol of the request upon the instrument. It is revealing that Bonfils too, like other thinkers of this circle who had preceded him, did not accept Ibn Ezra's explicit rejection of this interpretation. Although his phrasing is somewhat hesitant ("if this is the true explanation"…), it is certainly incompatible with Ibn Ezra's explicit rejection. Bonfils too, then, thinks of Ibn Ezra's exegesis of astral magic as a classic instance of esoteric writing.

To some extent, this explanation fits Alconstantin's approach. In his view, although the plagues were an inevitable consequence of a specific celestial constellation, an "intervention of forces" as a disposition from below was necessary in order to influence the supernal "forces."[36] Alconstantin offers a daring explanation that ascribes the cause of the plagues, or at least some of them, to astral magic, and turns Moses into a magician. When discussing the plagues, Alconstantin points to the principle of sympathy between terrestrial and celestial forces to explain the magic-astral phenomenon. He also sees fit to awaken the educated reader to the importance of the theory he is suggesting for the understanding of the plagues.[37]

An explicit magic-astral exegesis of the sources has thus emerged. Although many fourteenth-century thinkers view astral magic as a realm that is not intended for the wide public, they do not bother to hide the emergence of this realm as an open and undisguised hermeneutical and theological factor.

Distinctions

The magic-astral element thus becomes an essential element in the writings of many rationalists. As noted, thinkers in this circle are indeed aware of the similarities between astral magic and idolatry, but draw a sharp distinction between a magic without astrological

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[36] Alconstantin, *Megalleh Amuqqot*, 64b.

[37] "Know that, in my view, the fifth to the seventh plagues—pestilence, boils, and hail—were brought about through the recipients forcing the supreme powers, and their action followed the preparations made below, and you should understand this as well" (ibid.). On Moses as magician see Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," 202-203; Dov Schwartz, "A Sermon Concerning the the Exodus from Egypt by R. Vidal Joseph de la Caballeria" [Hebrew], *Assufot: Annual for Jewish Studies* 7 (1993): 266.

links and astral magic. The distinction is twofold: (1) magic is sleight of hand, whereas astral magic is real; therefore (2) magic is forbidden, whereas astral magic is legitimate and even important in the religious world view.

Let us consider several statements that present ordinary magic as deception:

1. Ibn Yaʿish: "But the scholars hold that the rod turned into a serpent through sleight of hand… and no objection can be raised against this."[38] In other words, Ibn Yaʿish finds this interpretation acceptable.
2. Ibn Zarza: "Since God has given man greater intellect than to other creatures, he must flee from transgressions even without fear of punishment, because they are all abominable and repellent, a bad and false faith. Even if the Torah had not warned against them, an intellectual will escape from them, from idolatry and its uses, and from all that resembles it, including the things known as "the ways of the Amorite," a charmer, a necromancer, a soothsayer, an enchanter, and a sorcerer—all are useless and unreal. Those who are drawn after them imagining they are real are deceived, since they are only imagining it and they suffer the punishment that befalls them for having taken the course of this sin…."[39] "And know that sorcery and divination are vanity and delusion, and they do not matter, but they can harm the one in whom they have been imprinted through his faculty of imagination, which imagined it [the sorcery]… but he who places his desire, passion, intention, and faith in God, may He be blessed, will not be hurt by them… Hence, our holy Torah has commanded that this faith be uprooted from the world, and he who trusts God, God will be his cover and protection on the day of wrath."[40]
3. Bonfils: "The image (*tselem*) is called *Ṣanam*,[41] because it is empty and useless."[42]
4. Ibn Mayor: "Sorcery is entirely false, new gods who came but lately, deceptions in people's imagination… I met a sorceress from

[38] Ibn Yaʿish, supercommentary on Ibn Ezra, 253b-254a.
[39] Ibn Zarza, *Mikhlol Yofi*, 2:128b.
[40] Ibn Zarza, *Meqor Hayyim*, 76a.
[41] In Arabic.
[42] Bonfils, *Tsafenat Paʿaneah*, 1:161, following Ibn Ezra's commentary on Genesis 41:23.

Tarragona and asked her to perform a specific act. She did what I said, but was unsuccessful. She swore to me that she had used stronger means than required and wondered about her failure until she told me that, since I do not believe in magic, I would never attain anything through it. Take this as proof of the fact that all these are merely empty thoughts.[43]

5. Ibn Shaprut: "This is what you will find among those who act in this way: they take a young boy lacking any wisdom, who agrees to anything he is told and does it. They tell him: 'Look into this nail and into this utensil and you will see in them everything I will ask you…' It once happened to me with many of these sorcerers that, after they were finished, I took the boy and, without any other trappings, read swiftly to him 'And Parshandatha, and Dalphon' [Esther 9:7] and other names that frightened him, and he thus reported seeing tenfold what he had said after their lies and deception. So I said to them, 'I am as clever as you.' And they said, 'Yes, but this boy had received the spirituality through us.' I then took another boy, who did the same. They then tried to establish a difference between their acts and mine, and the truth is that they are nimbler at this because this is their craft. I then said, 'I beg you, show me one demon, and demand a high price from me for this, which I will pay, or perform some unnatural feat for me.' They tried to do this through their swindling and failed. Then they said to me, 'Indeed, your sign wins because you do not believe, since the demons will only reveal themselves to the believer and will only perform their acts for those who worship them.' So I told them, 'I do believe that any reasonable person will understand your falseness, and they bring neither good nor evil.'"[44]

Note that Ibn Zarza understood that philosophers questioned the reality of idolatrous acts: "Philosophers are divided. Some believe that idolatry is real, and some believe it is not."[45] He himself, however,

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[43] Ibn Mayor, *ha-Ma'or ha-Gadol*, 197a. A similar description appears in *Iggeret ha-Teshuvah* ascribed to Yitzhak ibn Latif, published in *Qovets al-Yad* 1 (1885), 61.

[44] Ibn Shaprut, *Pardes Rimmonim* (Savionetta: Tuvyiah Foa, 1554), 13b-14a. This description suggests that knowledge is required in order to receive spirituality, and this realm should not be tied to popular manifestations of magic (as in the case of the boy described here).

[45] Ibn Zarza, *Mikhlol Yofi*, 1: 227b. This view is cited in Alconstantin, *Megalleh Amuqqot*, 106b.

endorsed those advocating it is real and relies on them throughout his exegeses. For instance, Ibn Zarza comments as follows on Balaam's statement, "Surely there is no enchantment in Jacob" (Numbers 23: 23): "No diviner or magician[46] will harm Israel because, if he were to do so, 'Jacob and Israel are told what God had performed' (Numbers 23:23). The divination and the magic are immensely powerful, hence [the Bible] says, 'the Lord his God is with him.'"[47]

Ibn Zarza, then, casts no doubt on astrology-related activity. Furthermore, Ibn Mayor draws a clear distinction between "supreme powers" and "demonic powers": the former are real, and the latter are empty and useless.[48]

Ibn Zarza and Ibn Mayor represent the approach characteristic of this circle's thinkers in general. In their view, astral magic ("supreme powers") has gone beyond idolatry and has become legitimate, and is in no way part of magic as such. Varieties of magic were forbidden because they are not real, and the five thinkers cited above convey this view clearly. In fact, rationalists ridicule the "primitive" forms of popular magic. Techniques for drawing down stellar forces, however, termed "astral magic" for the purpose of the present discussion, are perceived as a real, and even significant, element in their world view.

After being persuaded of the validity of astral magic and of its religious legitimacy, we will henceforth follow its various expressions in a theological and hermeneutic context.

Reasons for the Commandments

The Magic-Astral Mystery of the Torah

The writings of the thinkers mentioned above afford a broad astrological explanation of reasons for the commandments. An explanation of this type (also found, as noted, in Ibn Ezra's writings) does not itself require a consistent magical exegesis. One can merely assume that certain acts will succeed in a particular celestial constellation. Such an assumption might be valid, for instance, for part of Ibn Ezra's

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[46] He is not referring to magic in the distinctive meaning of predicting the future. Ibn Zarza states elsewhere: "In my view, magician is a general name for necromancer, diviner and sorcerer" (*Meqor Ḥayyim*, 117d).

[47] Numbers 23:21; Ibn Zarza, *Meqor Ḥayyim*, 105a.

[48] Ibn Mayor, *ha-Ma'or ha-Gadol*, 197a.

astrological explanations of the commandments in his commentary on the Torah and in *Yesod Mora*.[49] We could also assume that a commandment should be observed at a specific time, since it is then that the star's spirituality can be drawn down. To be plausible, however, this assumption must rely and also be corroborated by unambiguous statements in this direction in the writings discussed. Alconstantin, for instance, appears to be making such a statement:

> …When the children of Israel were wandering in the desert, corruption and deceit marked their deeds because the master of the desert ruled over them. The surrounding nations thought that the master and ruler of the desert would draw them away from cleaving to God's worship and Divine Providence would therefore abandon them, since they had abandoned *Tsedek*[50] far behind and were close to its opposite, which rules the desert… After the faithful healer, chosen out of all human creatures, had arrived, he understood the anger [of the children of Israel] and its reason. He released them from the rulership of the one [planet] that was causing the anger and brought them under [the rule of] *Tsedek* by bringing down the tablets of the Torah and building the Tabernacle and its utensils, which draw *Tsedek* nearer and remove evil…[51]

According to Alconstantin, the Torah's general aim was to change the fate of the children of Israel in the desert. Since they were then ruled by Mars ("the master of the desert," "evil"), Moses ("chosen out of all human creatures") sought to place them under the influence of Jupiter by observing the commandments, with special emphasis on the Tabernacle and its utensils. Given that this transition is astrologically impossible, action must be taken to bring Jupiter "closer," namely, to draw down the stellar emanation by observing the commandments or, alternatively, to neutralize the influence of Mars. This approach could be the foundation for the principle of the Torah's relativity (antinomianism), due to the correspondence between the situation of the people of Israel in the desert and their unique astrological circumstances. Alconstantin certainly considered it important to draw posi-

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[49] See Yitzhak Heinemann, *The Reasons for the Commandments in the Tradition* [Hebrew], vol. 1 (Jerusalem: WZO, 1966), 68-69. Shabtai Donolo was the thinker who set the foundations for an astrological explanation of the commandments. See Ronald C. Kiener, "The Status of Astrology in the Early Kabbalah: From the *Sefer Yetzirah* to the Zohar," in *The Beginnings of Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Europe* ed. Yosef Dan (Jerusalem: Defense Ministry, 1987), 1-42.

[50] The Hebrew word *Tsedek* denotes both justice and Jupiter. Alconstantin means both.

[51] Alconstantin, *Megalleh Amuqqot*, 77b-78a.

tive stellar emanation to every single location. Given the magic-astral explanation of almost the entire Torah, we can also understand the statement claiming that every commandment gives the individual "a power that protects him due to that specific commandment," whereas a person observing many commandments becomes a *kelal* [general, as opposed to particular], which is released from preordained astrological edicts.[52] Franco concurs with Alconstantin and comments on Ibn Ezra's exegesis:

> On what he [Ibn Ezra] said, "Jacob therefore said, 'the angel who redeemed me from all evil' [Genesis 48: 16], means the evil destined to come upon me; and this is the mystery of the whole Torah."[53] The laws of the Torah and the sacrifices performed on specific days are meant to endow us with power, and lead to our communion with God, so as to save people from the evil destined to befall them according to the stellar constellation.[54]

Such an approach is obviously predicated upon a consistent magic-astral interpretation of the commandments, able to explain the unique action and influence of every single religious act. This interpretation, however, was implicit in the rationalist exegeses, since the thinkers mentioned knew that their approach was bold and radical, and they conveyed this clearly when explaining worship in the Temple and in the Tabernacle, as shown below. Let us consider a few examples of the terse and consciously esoteric style adopted by these thinkers. The explanation for keeping the Sabbath, which is exclusively focused on drawing down Saturn's emanation, is presented as a hint intimated in the Torah:

> We have a hint in our holy Torah, stating that we have a special disposition and capability on the Sabbath to absorb a divine emanation through Saturn, which governs on that day. On that account, the Torah singled out the observance of the Sabbath from the rest of the commandments.[55]

Another source in Alconstantin's writings includes a description of the commandment of charity (*tsedakah*) as affecting the positive influence

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[52] Ibid., 70a.

[53] Ibn Ezra, Commentary on Exodus 6:3.

[54] Franco, supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Torah, 65a. I discuss in the next section the use of sacrifices for drawing down spirituality.

[55] Alconstantin, *Megalleh Amuqqot*, 22a, cited in Ibn Zarza, *Mikhlol ha-Yofi*, 2:126 a-b. Compare to Franco's supercommentary, 79a.

of Jupiter (*Tsedek*), reflecting the etymological affinity between the two Hebrew words.[56] Following Ibn Ezra himself, many thinkers link the laws of ritual purity to specific astrological circumstances. One instance is the explanation of the practice of sprinkling the leper's earlobe when he undergoes a purification ritual. According to Ibn Zarza, the linkage is predicated on the parallel between the individual and the world, whereby "the ears represent Saturn and Jupiter, since they are the highest of all bodily organs, as Saturn and Jupiter are the highest of the seven planets." The right ear is therefore influenced by Saturn, which causes a foul smell, and the sprinkling is meant to neutralize this influence.[57] At the same time, one of the reasons given for the commandment of the red heifer was that sprinkling blood was meant to neutralize the emanation from Mars.[58] The entire Torah was thus explained according to astrological principles, paving the way for the astral magical outlook.

Tabernacle, Temple and Sacrifices

The magic-astral version reaches an unprecedented peak in the blunt and daring explanation of the functioning of the Tabernacle and the Temple as talismans for drawing stellar powers. Generally, the exegetes' starting point is that "the Tabernacle was built in the model of the

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[56] Alconstantin, *Megalleh Amuqqot*, 93a.

[57] Ibn Zarza, *Meqor Hayyim*, 69a. This interpretation of sprinkling as a magical technique appears to fit Ibn Zarza's view better than the one assuming he relies on notions of hygiene to explain sprinkling. See also next note.

[58] Alconstantin, *Megalleh Amuqqot*, 100 a-b. Incidentally, sprinkling [*haza'ah*] itself was considered a magical technique in this circle. For instance, Ibn Zarza noted that the two words *mah zeh* (what is) are combined into one in God's question to Moses in the verse in Exodus 4:2: "What is [*mazeh*] that in thy hand?" Ibn Zarza holds this hints to a known magical technique (*mazeh* equalling *haza'ah*], though he has reservations about it:

"I have seen an extremely strange interpretation of this verse, as follows … and you must know that magic was then widespread in all the lands, and particularly in Egypt, and mainly through sprinkling. Whoever wishes to understand the truth of the miracle must first understand, above all, the essence of magic, and that is the reason for the question "what is [*mazeh*] in thy hand" in one word" (Ibn Zarza, *Meqor Hayyim* 32b). The sprinkling of the blood was thus one of the rod's characteristics and of its power to work miracles. On the magical features attributed to the sprinkling of blood, see W. Robertson-Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites—First Series: The Fundamental Institutions* (Edinburgh: A. and C. Black, 1889), 233, 369, and index, s.v. "blood."

supernal world,"[59] namely, the Tabernacle and its utensils symbolize the celestial bodies or, at least in part, parallel the celestial world.[60] The way is thereby paved for presenting the Tabernacle's utensils as means for drawing down the stellar powers and as "drawing down influence and emanation."[61] Franco clarifies this principle through a comparison with the brass serpent made to heal those bitten:

> The intention of this sage [Ibn Ezra] in these matters is that everything should be done to have the emanation of these forces reach the earth and their noble recipients, and to protect the earth when it is ruled by the sword of the enemies besieging them.[62] Each one of these matters must have the same effect on the same matters and in the same places and from the same metals, and so it is with the brass serpent that was made in order to heal those bitten, as explicitly written in the books of this wisdom, and this explains the concern of all the verses dealing with worship at the Tabernacle.[63]

Gatigno, who was influenced by Franco, formulates a systematic principle: "Concerning the shape of the Tabernacle and its implements, everything was done to draw down the supreme power to attain the intelligibles and also to predict the future, and particularly in the cherubim, which were only made for this purpose, namely, to draw down the supreme power."[64] All these interpretations rest on Ibn

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[59] Bonfils, *Tsafenat Pa'aneah*, 1:278.

[60] According to Ibn Zarza, for instance, the Tabernacle is an "image of the world" (*Meqor Hayyim*, 51c); also, "the house and the utensils that Solomon wrought… all were made in the image of the supernal, the middle, and the lower world," *Mikhlol ha-Yofi*, Paris Ms., 729-730, 1:147b). On the details of the parallel, in which the realm of celestial bodies plays a crucial role in the Tabernacle and the Temple, see Dov Schwartz, *The Religious Philosophy of R. Samuel ibn Zarza* [Hebrew] (Ph. D. diss., Bar Ilan University, 1989),1: 218-220. This principle was widespread in Spanish philosophical hermeneutics until Isaac Abrabanel.

[61] This is Alconstantin's wording. See *Megalleh Amuqqot*, 71b, 78a, 96a, and others. Compare to Ibn Mayor, *ha-Ma'or ha-Gadol*, 149a: "If they preserve God's worship [in the Tabernacle] their sign will retain the power, as it did when building the Tabernacle."

[62] Up to this point, cited also in Ibn Mayor, *ha-Ma'or ha-Gadol*, 149a, without mention of the author. Ibn Mayor concludes: "And in all these matters we should not try to find out why this was necessary, because God's thoughts are deep and beyond human grasp."

[63] Franco, supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Torah, Oxford Bdl. Ms. 1258, 72a. For further discussion see Dov Schwartz, "More on 'Greek Science' in Fourteenth Century Jewish Thought" [Hebrew] *Sinai* 105 (1990), 94-95.

[64] Gatigno, *Sod Adonai le-Yere'av*, 265b. The foundations of Gatigno's magic-astral system are presented at length in Dov Schwartz, *Amulets, Properties, and Rationalism in*

Ezra's laconic statement, "the burnt offerings also contain profound allusions to the mysteries of the future, and in every offering one should contemplate the mystery of nature."[65] The representation of the Tabernacle as symbolizing celestial elements leads, as noted, to an astral magical interpretation: the Temple's activity—offering sacrifices—is designed to attract and manipulate the spirituality of celestial bodies symbolized in the sacrificed animals and birds. As Alconstantin states: "Though the sacrifice, the flow and the emanation will come down from above, and force spirituality down."[66]

As we saw concerning the principle formulated by Gatigno following Ibn Ezra, one special benefit that can be drawn from the Tabernacle's implements is the divination of the future through a unique combination of the act of sacrifice and the accompanying burning of incense. In Franco's supercommentary on Ibn Ezra, cited at length below, we find a comprehensive theoretical formulation of the sacrifices' magical purpose:

> A single commandment may serve many different purposes, like the commandments of the burnt offering and other sacrifices. One is that everyone in Israel will furnish the payment for the daily burnt offering to be brought according to the law, so that they will not be defeated in war nor will any sword go through the land,[67] as explained above.[68] The sacrifices also serve utilitarian purposes, because they bring down the supreme forces through which one may predict the future, as it is said, the *Shekhinah* would depart if they did not keep the law of the daily burnt offering.[69] One should learn from every sacrifice the mystery of nature, namely, learn from the things offered upon the altar about their nature and their importance. For instance, females are not used for the burnt offering, due to its importance, and so it is concerning each one of the sacrifices: one brings a ewe, another a goat, and another turtle-

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Medieval Jewish Thought [Hebrew] (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2004), 80-93. On the uses of sacrifice for forecasting the future, as stated in Ibn Ezra, see below.

[65] Ibn Ezra, Commentary on Leviticus 1:1. Ibn Ezra appears to have endorsed the view that stellar forces enable knowledge of the future through the appropriate technique. The approach stating that spirituality reveals knowledge in general and the future in particular, appears in such tracts as *Picatrix*, whereas in *Sefer ha-Tamar*, knowledge is confined to the future. See Pines, "Le *Sefer ha-Tamar* et les *Maggidim* des *Kabbalistes*," 355-356.

[66] Alconstantin, *Megalleh Amuqqot* 41b-42a

[67] According to Leviticus 26:6.

[68] In his supercommentary on *Ki Tisa* (Exodus 30-34), 73a, Franco states that sacrifices save from death, hinting there as well at magical connotations.

[69] Ibn Ezra *at locum.*

> doves, each according to his concern, and so it is with the things being sacrificed—the fat and the blood—because they are the essence of the body. Since the spiritual part of the body is in the blood, it will help to draw down the spirituality and will ransom the person offering the sacrifice serving one further purpose—the sin-offerings and the [food] portions to be given to the teachers of Torah, who are the priests.[70]

The sacrifices, then, are brought in order "to preserve the disposition of the earth."[71] Franco cites a series of benefits, and bases Ibn Ezra's commentary on a distinctive magic-astral denotation. Franco interprets the influence of the *Shekhinah* ("the *Shekhinah* will return to its place") as stellar emanation. In his view, all the details of the sacrifices and their different kinds reflect various technical needs concerning the drawing down of spirituality. While referring to the positive sides of the sacrifice, Franco also refers to its role as "ransom," a topic discussed below.

Following Ibn Ezra and his exegetes, Franco and Gatigno, Ibn Mayor also explains prediction through astral magic: "Because the act of sacrifice is meant for its own sake and is extremely useful, since it brings the *Shekhinah* to dwell among those who know how to attract the supreme power through the pleasant odor, and they know what is to come."[72] The *ephod*, the breastplate, and the *Urim* and the *Thummim* also contribute to the foretelling of the future.[73] Ibn Shaprut emphasizes the theurgic consequence of drawing down the spirituality from the Temple, so that the activity performed in the Temple intensifies the positive astral forces unique to the people of Israel (Saturn), thereby enhancing the emanation upon them.[74]

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[70] Franco, supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Torah, 74b.

[71] Ibid., 79b, in reference to the sacrifices offered during the festivals. Literally: *kibbul*, what is received (on earth).

[72] See Ibn Mayor, *ha-Ma'or ha-Gadol*, 167b.

[73] Ibid., 153b-154a. Ibn Mayor compared the relationship between the intellectual generic form and the concrete actual form to that between the celestial form and the recipient of its influence: "They imitate God in this matter, as He spreads his emanation through the celestial bodies and through the forms upon all terrestrial orders, and this is how [knowledge] of the future is attained through prophecy" (ibid.). The magical explanation is given in the context of other interpretations of Ibn Mayor, although he often cites the commentary of Gersonides, whose focus is psychological. See below, ch. 5.

[74] This is Ibn Shaprut's commentary on the rabbinic legend "God will not enter the heavenly Jerusalem until the earthly Jerusalem is built" (TB Ta'anit 5a; see also *Tanhuma Pequddei* 1; *Midrash on Psalms*, ed. Solomon Buber, 122d): "The author of the

As noted, the Temple activity exerts its influence not only in the positive constructive sense of drawing down spirituality, but also as a preventive force able to neutralize, for instance, the destructive and negative spirituality emanating from a particular star. This statement is prominent in the exegeses of Ibn Ezra's commentators on the sacrifice that Noah offered after leaving the ark, "…or to attract the supreme power."[75] Following are some of these commentaries:

> [Noah] attracted the supreme power that may rescue him from his misfortune (Franco).[76]
>
> To bring down the power of the supreme stars that rule over him in order to help himself (Bonfils).[77]
>
> Saturn and Jupiter are the cause behind [the power of] the existing planets and now, when they are at their zenith, a sacrifice was required to their rulers [Saturn and Mars] (Ibn Mayor under the name "*Ba'al ha-Sodot*").[78]

Ibn Zarza presents Ibn Ezra's magic-astral option as an absolute exegetical truth. He even formulates the general principle: "Know that the star's wrath is its harm, and the sacrifice assuages it."[79] In the terms coined by anthropologist Raymond Firth, the drawing down of spirituality through sacrifices fits the categories of both productive and defensive magic. The most obvious magic-astral mechanism of sacrifice is in its capacity as "ransom," namely, the sacrifice directs

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midrash means that, in specific places, God's miracles, his glory and his honor, will appear according to the power of the supreme servant. The planet of the Temple is Saturn, which is the planet of the people of Israel, as astrologists have agreed and as Ibn Ezra, of blessed memory writes on *Terumah* [Exodus 25-27:19). Hence, when the people of Israel worship at the Temple, the power of celestial Jerusalem is enhanced, but in their absence, it wanes. And it is called Jerusalem because of the verse 'for out of Zion shall come Torah, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem' (according to Isaiah 2:3; Micha 4:2) and Saturn influences the power of speech, and of knowledge, and of insight, and knowledge of the mysteries, and of asceticism, and of God's worship" (*Pardes Rimmonim* 33a).

[75] Ibn Ezra, Commentary on Genesis 9:21.

[76] Franco's supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Torah, 55a.

[77] Bonfils, *Tsafenat Pa'aneah*, 1:83.

[78] Ibn Mayor, *ha-Ma'or ha-Gadol*, 29a. Solomon Ibn Ya'ish adds a dimension from nature to Ibn Ezra's comment: "When the air is good, the spheres and their movement spoil it, all the more so when they find it [the air] spoilt, but the sacrifice brings down its power and then they will not lose it" (supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Torah, Vatican Ms. 4, 54, 242a).

[79] Ibn Zarza, *Meqor Hayyim*, 11a. On the technique of "ransom," see above, ch. 3.

the negative astral influence from the subject offering the sacrifice to the sacrificed object, as evident regarding scapegoats. The commentators, however, emphasize that predicting the future attained in magical ways through the sacrifice is also included in the term *ransom*. As Ibn Mayor notes:

> The reason for the commandment of sacrifices such as the burnt offering, the sin offering, the guilt offering, the freewill offering, and the peace offering, is that they are ransom [*kofer*] for the people bringing them. These people seek shield and cover, because ransom means cover, from the root *kaporet* [the cover of the holy ark]. Cover is attained by predicting the future, enabling one to escape the injuries of plague and sword by using counsel, shield, and ransom to avoid them.[80]

Finally, note an exegesis explaining the Tabernacle's magic activity as the neutralization of astrological influence. According to Bonfils, the people of Israel were commanded to build the Tabernacle

> to release them from the dominion of the stars, so that they would have no rulers except the prince of the world, Michael, the prince of the interior, the Active Intellect… And he did all this for them so that they would resemble the chariot and receive power from God without mediators, as the world receives it from Him, may He be blessed. At the beginning, therefore, when God created the patriarchs, he created them to so as resemble the supreme chariot.[81]

Bonfils preserves the magic-astral construct by stating that the purpose of the Tabernacle had been to draw power from the supreme world. He replaces magic-astral emanation, however, with direct divine emanation. The Tabernacle, then, reflects the celestial realm so as to circumvent its influence and receive the emanation at the highest level. Acceptance of the magic-astral construct while exchanging it for another kind of emanation was widespread in kabbalistic circles, which discuss the drawing down of emanation from the *sefirot*, as

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[80] Ibn Mayor, *ha-Ma'or ha-Gadol*, 167b.

[81] Bonfils, *Tsafenat Pa'aneah*, 2: 89. Bonfils alludes to the saying, "the patriarchs are God's chariot," which appears recurrently in Genesis Rabbah, for instance in 47: 6. The interpretation of the commandments as a means for overriding the celestial constellation appears in Ibn Zarza's explanation of public prayer (*Mikhlol Yofi*, 2:192b): "It is well known that the general defeats the particular, and when the public prays they become the general and their prayer is heard. Although the signs (in whose realm the nations of the world are found) determine this, no determination applies to them [the people of Israel], because the particular cannot defeat the general."

noted regarding Nahmanides.[82] Bonfils was far removed from kabbalistic doctrine,[83] but shares with the kabbalists the transformative conception of emanation.

In fourteenth-century Spain, the magic-astral pattern of thought and its application to the Tabernacle and the sacrifices were not confined to the Neoplatonic circle. Other thinkers, such as Hasdai Crescas and his group, also resort to a magic-astral style. When explaining the Tabernacle and the sacrifices, Crescas routinely relies on two assumptions:

1. The Tabernacle utensils symbolize an emanation originating in the celestial world, which is symbolized by "light," and the indication of this principle is the candelabrum.[84]
2. The sacrifices were meant to move the people away from idolatry, despite the affinities between the Temple sacrifices and idolatry.[85] The direct magic-astral consequence emerges in the following passage by Crescas on the sacrifices:

> The sacrifices involve a wondrous trace and imitation of their being a ransom for our souls, as if through them we were sacrificing ourselves to His worship, and as if we were nothing, all the more so when we compare ourselves to God's glory. Through the sacrifices, those bringing the offerings will attain the emanation, the abundance, and a perceptible and imperceptible conjunction with the light of the *Shekhinah*, to the point where they will sometimes feel the fire's descent from Heaven.[86]

The main participants in the sacrificial acts are the priests, but the children of Israel also participate in "part of the sacrifices" in order to receive the emanation. Crescas' recourse to the magic-astral element is also clearly evident in his discussion on the Land of Israel.[87] Crescas' disciple, Zarhyiah Halevi, also states:

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[82] See above, ch. 3.

[83] See Schwartz, *The Philosophy of a Fourteenth Century Jewish Neoplatonic Circle*, 43.

[84] "It was proper for a candelabrum to be there. To show that the emanation of light is from God it is linked to the number seven [it has seven branches] to point to the seven planets receiving His emanation" (Hasdai Crescas, *Or Adonai*, 2:6, ch. 2; cited from Ferrara print, 1555, which is not paginated).

[85] Ibid.: "In the various types of magic, which is a form of idolatry, they resort to sacrifices and to the burning of abominations because God wished to keep us away from anything that might lead to idolatry, and especially among those chosen to do God's worship, although it [idolatry] involves matters required for the purpose of the Torah."

[86] Ibid..

[87] Zeev Harvey, "The Uniqueness of the Land of Israel in the Thought of Crescas"

> Balaam was wise and he built seven altars, one for each of the seven supreme servants [the planets], in order to find which one ruled Israel. Through the sacrifice, he meant to obtain the emanation that would enable him to do with them as he wished. When he saw that the Lord was with them, he said that the people of Israel did not need a serpent and magic to draw down the emanation whenever they wished.[88]

Crescas and his circle, then, acknowledge the reality of astral magic and turn it into a theological element, which has a place in Divine Providence and in the sacrifices. The difference between Crescas' and the Neoplatonic circles, however, is patently evident. Whereas the latter view astral magic as a crucial consideration in their discourse and a prominent element often guiding their reflections, Crescas focuses his philosophical interests on other issues, such as his critique of Aristotelianism and his personal notion of conjunction with God, as presented in his treatise *Or Adonai*.

In the broad range of hermeneutical approaches that developed in the fourteenth century, then, the Tabernacle is perceived as a talismanic source, offering numerous options for implementing magic-astral techniques in various ways.

Demons as Astral Forces

Critique

In the ninth path of his tract *Shevilei Emunah* [Paths of Faith], which deals with reward and punishment, Meir Aldabi devotes a few lines to the definition of demons and their characteristics. The passage is taken verbatim from Nahmanides' commentary on the Torah, without mentioning Nahmanides' name.[89] At the end, Aldabi explains why he

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[Hebrew], in *The Land of Israel in Medieval Jewish Thought*, ed. Moshe Hallamish and Aviezer Ravitzky (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 1991), 157-158. On the magical powers of the divine name in Crescas doctrine see idem, "Kabbalistic Elements in Crescas' *Or Adonai*" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 2 (1983), 85-88.

[88] Joshua Heschel Schor, "R. Zarhyiah's Commentary," *He-Halutz* 7 (1865), 99.

[89] See Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, on Leviticus 17:7, which suggests the following definition of demons: "Know that just as the formation of the original Creation of man's body as well as that of all living creatures, vegetation and minerals was from the four elements, which were combined by Divine power to form material bodies which as a result of their thickness and coarseness could be perceived by the five senses, even so there was a creation from only two elements, fire and air,

addresses this question, which is not pertinent to the chapter: "I have digressed in this lengthy explanation of demons, since I have noted that some in our nation question and deny the existence of demons."[90] At the beginning of the fifteenth century, we find a similar critique, in far stronger terms, by Shem Tov ben Shem-Tov:

> The aim of this chapter [the fifth] is to strengthen faith in the literal reading of the Torah and the sages concerning the existence of demons, harmful spirits, forces of impurity, angels of destruction, and sorcery, as well as in the public's faith in them. Let me say that subtle thinkers deny this because this is not something they have either experienced or, even more so, grasped with their reason. They deny anything that the intellect denies and has not been experienced, and do not rely on the tradition.[91]

We can plausibly assume that both Aldabi and Shem Tov ben Shem Tov take to task the philosophical tradition that denies demons any real existence. Such a tradition is indeed found in the writings of the rationalist circle we are discussing, which was already thriving in Aldabi's time,[92] and the last of whose members were still active in Shem Tov ben Shem Tov's times.

Furthermore: special importance attaches to this issue in the wake of the anti-Christian controversy. Scholastic thinkers devote many

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resulting in a body which cannot be felt, nor perceived by any of the senses, just as the soul of an animal cannot be perceived by human senses because of its delicacy. The body [of these creatures of two elements] is of a spiritual nature; on account of its delicacy and lightness it can fly through fire and air…" (as cited in *Shevilei Emunah* [Warsaw, 1887, 91d]). Aldabi thus suggests, following Nahmanides, that demons are real entities made up from the light elements (fire and water) and active in the world. Nahmanides' view of demons was widely accepted among Spanish halakhists, and also greatly influenced magical conceptions in Ashkenaz. See, for instance, Yitzhak bar Sheshet, *Responsa*, ed. David Metzger (Jerusalem: Machon Or ha-Mizrah, 1993), 1: 82, #92. Compare Abraham Hershman, *Rabbi Isaac bar Sheshet Perfet and His Times* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1943), 89-91; Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (New York: Atheneum, 1979), 30-34; Israel Jacob Yuval, *Scholars in Their Time: The Religious Leadership of German Jewry in the Late Middle Ages* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1989), 290-291; Israel Ta-Shma, *Ha-Nigle she-Banistar—The Halakhic Residue in the Zohar: A Contribution to the Study of the Zohar* [Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1995), 31.

[90] Aldabi, *Shevilei Emunah*, 92a.

[91] Shem Tov ben Shem Tov, *Sefer ha-Emunot* (Ferrara: Abraham Oshki, 1556), 47b. According to Shem Tov ben Shem Tov, this realm deserves a chapter of its own because of the theory of the left emanation, and because he adopted the demonological doctrine of the Zohar.

[92] *Shevilei Emunah* was written in 1360.

discussions to the standing of angels, to their sin and fall, which influence Jewish sages and also lead them to react.[93] The various polemical texts address this issue in the context of the problem of evil and sin. Thus, for instance, Crescas and Ibn Shaprut devote a special chapter to demons in their anti-Christian writings.[94] The issue of demons also evokes interest in the philosophical circle that presents astral magic as a central theological concern, and the responses of these thinkers are analyzed below.

Demons as Creatures of Fancy

The attitude to demons among thinkers of this circle appears in two types of sources. In the first, these thinkers deny altogether that demons are real. Instead, they are perceived as products of a sick imagination and as delusions, not as actually existing. In the second type of sources, demons are identified as heteronomic forces coming from the stellar system (the spirituality) and, as such, as possessing real existence rather than as products of the imagination. The difference between these sources could be postulated as a development. At the first stage, demons are presented solely as fantasies. At the second stage, these thinkers discover a translation of a treatise ascribed to Ibn Ezra (*Sefer ha-Atsamim*), describing demons as stellar forces. Confirmation for this hypothesis can be found in the explicit claims of at least two of these thinkers—Ibn Shaprut and Ibn Mayor—stating that they reconsidered and even changed their attitude after discovering this treatise. Sources written by thinkers from this circle, analyzed below, corroborate this assumption.

Let us begin with Ibn Zarza. Commenting on Noah's drunkenness, he formulates a principle: "The truth is that, if one drinks unduly, the demon will touch him and confuse his intellect, which is in the brain."[95] We can conclude, then, that the demon is the power disrupting and damaging the mind, namely, the imagination. Following Alconstantin,

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[93] See, for instance, the attitude of Hillel ben Samuel of Verona on this issue in Joseph B. Sermonetta, "The Defeat of the Angels" [Hebrew], in *Memorial Book for Jacob Friedman*, ed. Shlomo Pines and David Rosenthal (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1974), 155-203.

[94] Hasdai Crescas, *Sefer Bittul Iqqarei ha-Notsrim*, trans. Joseph ben Shem Tov, ed. Daniel J. Lasker (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1990), 90-93 (see also Joseph ben Shem Tov's comments, 93-95); Shem Tov ibn Shaprut, *Even Bohan*, Florence Ms., Laurenziana 17, Plut II, 63a-64a.

[95] Ibn Zarza, *Meqor Hayyim* 11c.

Ibn Zarza equates the "demon's deed" with "worthless groundless fantasies."[96] The damage caused by demons emerges through their comparison with goats:

> Demons were called goats, as it says, "And they shall no more offer their sacrifices to the *seʿirim*" [satyrs] (Leviticus 17:7), since they saw fit to compare demons to them more than to other animals. The nature of the goat is to cause blight and vast damage, so great that they called the goat the angel of death, and the angel of death is Satan, as it is said: "Resh Lakish said: Satan, the angel of death, and the evil instinct are all one,"[97] hence, it is proper to call them *seʿirim*.[98]

This exegesis explains the reason for the commandment of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement. In this discussion, Ibn Zarza carefully explains, "there is no Satan there, except for the nature of matter."[99] Bonfils adds the historicist explanation for this equation between goats and demons: "Concerning God's command to perform this ritual with goats rather than with another animal, the reason was that in Egypt they used to offer sacrifices to the demons, who are the *seʿirim* and are goats, hence the offerings to what is worshipped…"[100] *The demon, then, is a pathological manifestation of the disruptive imagination*. Ibn Zarza describes this pathology in detail:

> They [the philosophers][101] have written about why a person sees in a reverie forms that are not real: when the intellect, because of a certain sickness, is too weak to deny the creations of the imagination, and the sick person sees forms that do not exist outside. As his fear grows and becomes awesome, he will think more and more of whatever terrifies him and give it form, and the intellect that could deny this grows weaker,

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[96] Ibid., 34d, according to Alconstantin, *Megalleh Amuqqot*, 64a.

[97] TB Bava Bathra 16a.

[98] Ibn Zarza, *Meqor Hayyim*, 71b.

[99] Ibn Zarza repeats this statement in *Mikhlol Yofi*, 2:137a. This passage is copied (without mentioning the author) from Jacob Anatoli, *Malmad Talmidim* (Lyck, Poland: Mʿqize Nirdamim, 1866), 183b-184a.

[100] Bonfils, *Tsafenat Paʿaneah*, 2: 18.

[101] Ibn Zarza is certainly referring here to a periphrastic version of Aristotle's *Parva Naturalia*, or to a citation relying on it. See, for instance, Gersonides' commentary on Averroes' abridged version of *Parva Naturalia*: "It may happen that someone, when afraid or ill, will have a reverie, seeing or feeling with their senses things that are not truly anywhere except inside himself." See Alexander Altman, "Gersonides' Commentary on Averroes' Epitome of *Parva Naturalia* II: 3: Annotated Critical Edition," *PAAJR* 46-47 (1980), 11-12, ll. 59-64. According to Gersonides, the masses believe in demons, which "do not exist, all the more so demons that can foretell the future" (10, ll. 35-36).

> so he may come to see the terrifying thing with his own eyes. Hence, the frightened and dispirited will see horrifying forms. This is also the cause of the voices that sorcerers and necromancers hear.[102]

These forms, then, are not real, and their appearance is explained as due to the imagination's function. In passing, we learn that biblical descriptions of magic do not reflect reality in any way. Ibn Zarza thus returns to the Maimonidean perception of magic when interpreting these passages, and the distinction between ordinary magic and astral magic, which Ibn Zarza had acknowledged, is highlighted anew. In the treatise *Mikhlol Yofi*, Ibn Zarza devotes long discussions to an explanation that takes out many rabbinic sayings on demons from their literal context. He opens these discussions as follows: "Many mistakenly think there are satans and demons, and the reason for this mistake is that they see deeds in the Talmud from which it appears that there are satans and demons in the world that could bring harm, and I will explain this at length."[103]

Ibn Zarza ponders why believers in demons make this mistake, and accepts Isaac Albalag's explanation. Albalag offers an explanation from physics, claiming phenomena in the nether world originate in the action of celestial bodies. Heat and cold stem from the atmosphere and the celestial realm, and people ascribe them to magical forces, namely, to demons:

> Since these forces originate in and are influenced by the spheres, ancient sages used to refer to them as "angels falling [*noflim*] from the sky," and the Torah called them "Nefilim" [Numbers 13:33]. Since they sustain the animal soul that leads man astray [*mesatenet*] from the path of the intellect, they would call them satans and demons. This was the origin of the popular belief in demons, and their sages would worship them and bring offerings to them, seeing how they rule this world.[104]

In the course of dealing with the issue of demons, Ibn Zarza attacks interpretations presenting the use of magic names as effective. In his view, rabbinic statements dealing with the creation of a *golem* through

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[102] Ibn Zarza, *Meqor Hayyim*, 96d.

[103] Idem, *Mikhlol Yofi*, 2:131a.

[104] Isaac Albalag, *Sefer Tikkun ha-Deʿot*, ed. Georges Vajda (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences, 1973), 49, ll. 15-20. Albalag presented this view in his commentary on the creation and the stories on paradise. Compare with the translation and discussion in Georges Vajda, *Isaac Albalag, Averroiste Juif: Traducteur et Annotateur D'al-Ghazali* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1960), 163-164. This passage is cited in Ibn Zarza, *Mikhlol Yofi*, 2: 131a, and see also 133b.

magical names should not be read literally.[105] Clearly, then, Ibn Zarza does not acknowledge the reality of intermediate creatures such as demons and spirits who, at most, symbolize "bad thoughts and spurious fantasies."[106] Adjuring demons becomes futile. More precisely: the extensive discussion refuting the reality of demons appears in the seventh chapter of *Mikhlol Yofi*, which is entirely devoted to ethos and to moral and practical conduct, to show that *demons are the passions and hindrances that prevent the attainment of ethical and intellectual perfection*. According to this criterion, the series of legends on Asmadeus and King Solomon is explained as the struggle between passions and desires as opposed to the human intellect.[107] These allegorical explanations reflect the general trend of Ibn Zarza's doctrine, which dismisses the reality of demons.

Ibn Mayor follows in Ibn Zarza's footsteps. He includes in his explanation the central motif suggested and elaborated by Ibn Zarza, namely, that demons are products of a wild and sick imagination. Before this explanation, however, Ibn Mayor grants magical and astrological meaning to this phenomenon, by presenting it as the worship of the planet:

> …as they would do in Egypt, which is ruled by Mars, where they worshipped in the fields and with swords according to the power it has in these places. "Into the open field" [Leviticus 14: 7] and "And they shall no more offer their sacrifices to the *se'irim*," refers to the demons[108] of which the sages speak relating to harmful stellar forces, and particularly those of Mars, which is hot and dry.[109]

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[105] See Ibn Zarza, *Mikhlol Yofi*, 2: 134b-135a, commenting on TB Sanhedrin 65b: "Some sages hold that the human being can create a creature through magic… and some say that the calf was created *ex nihilo*, by combining the letters of His Name through which the universe was created, and this is not an act of magic since this is an act of God through his holiness. One must question this interpretation, however, because Abaye said that these are the laws of magic and hence not an act of God. Also, far be it from God to create through names or do deeds by actually combining letters, as many believe." See Moshe Idel, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 27-30. Ibn Zarza then cites a list of sources that do accept the notion of making a *golem*, among them Shem Tov ibn Falaquera. Ibn Zarza, however, obviously denies magic through names, unless within a magic-astral context.

[106] Ibn Zarza, *Mikhlol Yofi*, 2:160b.

[107] Ibid, 138a.

[108] See Ibn Ezra's *Commentary on the Torah*, Leviticus 17:7, 16 (Shachter, 87, 90).

[109] Ibn Mayor, *ha-Ma'or ha-Gadol*, 188b-189a.

Ibn Mayor, however, then describes demons as figments of the imagination, referring also to the linkage between the cult of demons and the psychological powers to foresee the future relying on the term *baʿalei ha-kihun*:[110]

> The *baʿalei ha-kihun* will also imagine them always as *seʿirim*, whether in a reverie or in a dream. When in a reverie, they appear as shadows in the middle of the night because they resemble demons, and they will always describe them as *seʿirim* dancing according to their thought and fantasy, as if saying, "*seʿirim* shall dance there" [Isaiah 13: 21), and also "the *seʿir* shall cry to his fellow" [Isaiah 34: 14]. Another reason is that their dominant humor is black bile and they are hard and dry, and he who overcame his black nature will be more ready for the *kihun* than his fellow and will always see black things in his dreams and his fantasies, resembling his temperament. Gersonides, of blessed memory, commented on the verse "And they shall no more offer their sacrifices to the *seʿirim*" [Leviticus 17:7] by saying that this refers to demons, meaning false fantasies leading them to think of that which is not god as god.[111] I think that since the matter of demons is ascribed to Saturn [*Shabbetai*], as astrology shows, and because Capricorn is the house of Saturn, the demons were called *seʿirim*. But although Aquarius is also the house of Saturn, these destructive fantasies coming from Saturn are due to the black bile associated with the sign of Capricorn. Hence the concern with Saturn, and not because of the nature of blood that is associated with Aquarius.[112]

Ibn Mayor, then, approaches the cult of demons as a two-staged process: in the first stage, the cult is perceived as a way of placating and soothing the destructive astral force (as in the worship of Mars in Egypt); in the second stage, the demons are a specific psychological mood bordering on the psychedelic, wherein the priest hallucinates according to his physiological temperament (the black bile). This perception is predicated on the influence of the planet, which is Saturn, thus bringing back an astrological dimension to the cult of demons. Ibn Mayor thus links demons with astrology, but at this

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[110] The term *kāhin* in Arabic means diviner or necromancer. Particularly after the rise of Islam, the term came to mean priest or religious man. The meaning of the root *k-h-n* is to tell the future. See Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, Deuteronomy 13:2; Raphael Jospe, "Ramban (Nahmanides) and Arabic" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 57 (1988), 89.

[111] "…taking their falseness as far as bringing sacrifices to what appears as a deity in their deceptive imagination when, in truth, these are demons." Gersonides, *Commentary on the Bible* (Venice: Bombirghi, 1547), 158b.

[112] Ibn Mayor, *ha-Maʾor ha-Gadol*, 189a.

stage he obviously tends to present them as fantasies and delusions. Ibn Shaprut, who denies demons any reality in several of his writings, can be added to the above list of thinkers.[113]

Demons as the Spirituality of the Stars

The analysis of the attitudes held by Ibn Zarza, Ibn Mayor, and Ibn Shaprut toward demons shows that, although they hesitated, they ultimately changed their minds concerning the reality of demons as astral forces. The change took place due to a significant event: the discovery of an important treatise including magic-astral elements, the *Sefer ha-Atsamim* that, as noted, members of this circle ascribed to Ibn Ezra. *Sefer ha-Atsamim* was translated into Hebrew at this time, and immediately became part of these thinkers' discourse.[114] This treatise identifies demons with the spirituality emanating from the stars, and its discovery led to a revolution in the perception of demons among members of this circle. According to *Sefer ha-Atsamim*, demons are ontologically real entities rather than mere hallucinations. Demons are henceforth perceived as celestial forces that can be drawn down through adequate preparations prescribed by the rules of astral magic and, moreover, can be used in order to harm opponents. Following is the formulation in *Sefer ha-Atsamim*:

> The fourth way is the lowest and most sunken, that is, other spirits are created in the air through the spirituality of the stars … These bad spiritualities emanate from the holy spiritualities as the shadow emanates from the body, and they do not require preparation nor drawing down. It will simply cleave to the one it encounters, who is of the same disposition and temperament, and at times will also come to another when he draws them down, and these are called demons…[115]

Ibn Zarza refers to demons as "forces influenced by the spheres."[116] He is also ready to acknowledge the reality of various kinds of "pairs"

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[113] Frimer and Schwartz, *The Life and Thought of Shem Tov ibn Shaprut*, 157-160.

[114] The translation was the work of Yaakov ibn Alfandri, apparently following Ibn Zarza's request, as the latter notes. Plausibly, then, the ascription of this text to Ibn Ezra also originates in this circle. See Schwartz, *The Religious Philosophy of R. Shemuel ibn Zarza*, 1:6, 28; 2:3, note 15, and see also Moshe Idel, "The Study Program of R. Johanan Alemanno" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 48 (1979), 312, note 76.

[115] *Sefer ha-Atsamim*, 16. I have introduced changes according to the version in Ibn Zarza, *Meqor Hayyim*, 98b. An identical version to the original one by Ibn Zarza appears also in the commentary of Shemuel Motot, *Megillat Setarim*, 25c.

[116] Ibn Zarza, *Mikhlol Yofi*, 1:131b.

(indirectly related to demons), but identifies the influence of Mars as the source of the magic.[117] Ibn Shaprut also writes: "And for him [Ibn Ezra], demons are spiritual forces influenced by the harmful celestial hosts, so they neither help nor harm."[118] In other words, the subject of Ibn Shaprut's discussion is the spirituality, which is intrinsically neutral and can be mobilized by the magician for his own utilitarian purposes. Ibn Shaprut explicitly struggles with the reality of demons in several sources and, after discovering the *Sefer ha-Atsamim*, he is willing to recognize them as real entities.[119] Ibn Mayor also speaks about the "book" by Ibn Ezra he had discovered, and "from what is written there, it appears that his view on the reality of demons is that they are created in the air through stellar spirituality, the last spiritualities existing in the world…"[120] and then quotes from *Sefer ha-Atsamim* according to this passage. He too, then, is willing to acknowledge the reality of demons. Thus, although these thinkers initially reject the notion of any magical connotations attached to the concept of demons and establish it on a delusion, they ultimately endow it with a distinctive magic-astral meaning following the discovery of the *Sefer ha-Atsamim*. Note that a connection between demons and astral magic, in a different style, appears also in Judah ben Shemariah's commentary on the Torah.[121] In this outlook, there is no room for the popular practice of adjurations, exorcising demons, and so forth, and no such beliefs should be ascribed to this circle.

Thinkers in this circle cannot accept the classic and medieval views on demons as halfway creatures seeing and unseen, and the

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[117] Ibid., 2:139b. The meaning of the "pairs" is that the performance of a specific activity in pairs leads to harm and sorcery. See TB Pesahim 109b.

[118] Bonfils, *Tsafenat Pa'aneah*, Oxford Bdl. Ms 2359 (Opp. Add 4° 107), 168a.

[119] Frimer and Schwartz, *The Life and Thought of Shem Tov ibn Shaprut*, 159. Shemuel Motot too who, as noted, quotes from *Sefer ha-Atsamim*, unequivocally states: "And you already know that the *se'irim* are the demons, and the demons are the spirits created in the air through the power of the holy spiritualities, as the shadow is created from the body" (*Megilat Setarim*, 36d).

[120] Ibn Mayor, *ha-Ma'or ha-Gadol*, 189a.

[121] "…and he killed them in the thousands and the tens of thousands, and they are called demons, and *mazikim*, and angels of destruction, and they cause sickness and death. That is why the burning of the herbs that eliminate the spirit of impurity is helpful, because the powers of the stones and the herbs are spiritual powers emanating from the supremes. And wise Empedocles convened them upon earth, and adjured them, and found seven kinds of them" (Naomi Goldfeld, "Judah ben Shemaryah: The Commentary on the Torah from a *Genizah* Manuscript," *Qovetz al-Yad*, 10 NS [20]1982, 155. See also ibid., 154.

like. Hence, Aldabi's and Shem Tov ibn Shem Tov's critique remains valid even after thinkers in this circle had reversed their views, and perhaps because of it.

Conclusions

The discussion in this chapter leads to the following conclusions:

1. Magic and astrology: The analysis of magical techniques again exposes the significant weight of active astrology among fourteenth-century thinkers in Spain and its environs.
2. The reality of magic: These thinkers assume a clear division between astral magic, which is real, and other magic. Astral magic is not included within the biblical and talmudic boundaries of magic, and becomes a significant hermeneutical and theological instrument.[122] Various forms of magic are perceived as sleight of hand, and are forbidden.
3. The status of astral magic: These thinkers clearly relate to this realm as "wisdom." The link connecting the various tecnhiques of magic is indeed their definition as wisdom with the addition of various honorable titles, such as *great wisdom* or *ancient wisdom.* Note also the linkage of Neoplatonism, in a broad sense, to magic in general and to its perception as wisdom in particular.
4. The paucity of practical knowledge: Thinkers in the fourteenth-century Spanish circle have very superficial knowledge of magic-astral techniques. Hardly ever do they offer a detailed proposal for even one magic process. They are ready to hint at an interpretation of a verse suggesting a specific magic technique, but do not provide details. In this sense, this parallels their knowledge of astrology: most of them refer to it recurrently throughout their commentaries but only few possess detailed knowledge of it, or perhaps they failed to formulate this professional dimension in writing.

The stunning power of astral magic as a theological factor of the first order radiates far beyond the realm of Spanish culture, as illustrated in its influence upon Byzantine culture.

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[122] On astrological material in the Talmud, see, e.g., Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia,* vol. 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1970).

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CONTROVERSY IN PROVENCE

The Jewish communities of Provence and Christian Spain, besides their obvious geographical proximity, were also similar in their cultures and philosophical attitudes. Indeed, many historians of Jewish thought in the Middle Ages do not distinguish between them, sometimes rightly, sometimes unjustifiably. A closer scrutiny of the history of Jewish thought in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, however, reveals several significant differences between Jewish thought in Provence and in Spain (mainly Castile). Two examples will suffice.

The first example, though mainly formal, is a good indication of the difference in content. Jewish philosophical thought in contemporary Provence was highly conservative in its choice of sources. Many Provençal thinkers around the turn of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (such as the group of *Kuzari* commentators and the disciples of Frat Maimon, that is, Solomon b. Menahem) generally quoted Jewish sources written in Provence, from the thirteenth century and later, but had little recourse—in some cases none whatever—to the writings of Jewish thinkers in contemporary Spain.[1] By contrast, rationalist Jewish thinkers in Spain at that time frequently quoted from the works of Provençal Jews, generally specifying their sources quite explicitly.[2]

Another example is the attitude of halakhists to abstract philosophical

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[1] This is obviously true of philosophical thought after Maimonides, and evidence can be found in my forthcoming edition of the commentary of Solomon b. Judah of Lunel to *The Kuzari*. See further sources in note 84 below. On Provençal thought in the fourteenth century see Isadore Twersky, "Aspects of the Social and Cultural History of Provençal Jewry," *Journal of World History* 11 (1968): 202-207. The difference between Spanish and Provençal culture is manifest in different areas and periods. See Binyamin Zeev Benedikt, *The Torah Center in Provence* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1985), 10-11. See also Israel Ta-Shma, *Rabbi Zerahyah Halevi, Author of Sefer ha-Ma'or and His Circle* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1993), introduction and 138–141.

[2] Among these were the members of a circle of thinkers with Neoplatonic leanings whose astrological theories I discuss in my book. See Dov Schwartz, Astral *Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1999), chs. 5 and 6. These thinkers frequently discussed the writings of the Tibbonids, R. David Kimhi, and Gersonides (including his commentaries on Averroes' works), and so forth.

issues. Many Spanish halakhists combined their rationalist deliberations with a receptivity to kabbalistic concepts, as in the teachings of Solomon b. Adret (Rashba) and his philosophical circle (Aaron Halevi, Meir Aldabi, Menachem b. Zerah, Samuel b. Meshullam) and Nissim of Gerona (Ran) and his disciples.[3] In Provence, however, no such receptivity is discernible. Philosophically minded halakhists, such as Menachem b. Solomon ha-Meiri and David b. Samuel Kokhavi, did not accept kabbalistic doctrines such as metempsychosis and the theory of cyclic time, ignoring their very existence in their writings. Generalizing, one might perhaps characterize the philosophical thought of Provençal scholars in the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as inclined to be rather conservative and rationalistically minded, as against the more open attitudes of their Castilian or Navarran contemporaries.

One area in which the difference between Spanish and Provençal thinkers is clearly discernible is their attitude to astral magic and the debate over the very legitimacy of using such practices. We now proceed to study this debate.

Positions in the Debate over Magic

External Influences

With the exception of a minority, both Provençal and Spanish Jews believed that astrology was a real, effective discipline. Several Jews became professional astrologers and mastered the science of astronomy in order to draw up astrological calculations. Some served as astrological consultants in rulers' courts. Since astrology was recognized as a science, many thinkers and physicians also believed in the validity of astral magic (as a technical discipline) and used it frequently in everyday life. While some Spanish Jews expressed reservations about the use of astral magic for both religious and philosophical reasons,[4] such reactions did not, apparently, reach the dimensions of an out-and-out public debate, as they did at the turn of the thirteenth and

[3] See, for example, the use made by contemporary Spanish scholars of explicit references to the words of the Tibbonids (Samuel and Moses b. Samuel ibn Tibbon), Jacob Anatoli (known for his work *Malmad ha-Talmidim*), Gersonides, and Moses Narboni. Anonymous quotations are sometimes found. See, for instance, note 86 below.

[4] See ch. 6 below.

fourteenth centuries in Provence; moreover, it was the Provençals who dragged the Barcelonan Rashba willy-nilly into the stormy debate. It will be remembered that the debate was triggered by Abba Mari Astruc of Lunel's attacks on those who engaged in philosophy and radical allegoristic exegesis of the Bible and preached their teachings in public. The discovery that the rationalists were dabbling in astral-magical medicine provided Abba Mari with yet another motive for his zeal. He was convinced that healing by bringing down the stars' spirituality upon effigies and images was idolatry. Rashba, however, was not opposed to astral-magical practices, in fact declaring that his teacher Nahmanides had used astrological charms for healing purposes. Unlike the rationalists, however, he did not sanction such actions in all cases but only for medical purposes. Rashba also banned the burning of incense that accompanied the ceremony in which spirituality was "brought down." The letters that Abba Mari and Rashba exchanged on the medical use of effigies attest to the vigorous tones of the debate over the legitimacy of astral-magical practices.[5] The debate, as well as the controversies that preceded and followed it, spanned the entire fourteenth century, as will be seen below, and were influenced by the fact that non-Jewish physicians and scientists engaged in astral magic. Joseph Shatzmiller has suggested that a professor of medicine named Bernard Gordon, who used charms based on astral magic for healing purposes and maintained scientific contacts with the Tibbonid Jacob b. Machir, had some influence on Jewish physicians in Provence.[6] In the second half of the century there were other possible influences,

[5] See *Sefer Minhat Qena'ot*, in Rashba, *Responsa*, ed. Hayyim Z. Dimitrovsky, Part 1, vol. 1, 270 ff. See Louis Jacobs, *Theology in the Responsa* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 76–79. On the role of astral magic in the anti-Maimonidean controversy see Joseph Shatzmiller, "In Search of the Book of Figures: Medicine and Astrology in Montpellier at the Turn of the Fourteenth Century," *AJS Review* 7/8 (1982/1983): 383-407; idem, "The Forms of the *Twelve Constellations*: A Fourteenth Century Controversy" [Hebrew], in *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume: On the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Moshe Idel, Warren Zeev Harvey and Eliezer Schweid (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought, 1988), 397-408. On the relationship between Abba Mari and Rashba and the history of the ban in general see Joseph Sarachek, *Faith and Reason: The Conflict over the Rationalism of Maimonides* (Williamsport, Pa.: Bayard Press, 1935), 195–264; Joseph Shatzmiller, "The Negotiations between Abba Mari and the Rashba which Preceded the Herem in Barcelona" [Hebrew], *Studies in the History of the Jewish People and the Land of Israel*, vol. 3 (Haifa: Haifa University Press, 1975), 121–137; Marc Saperstein, "The Conflict over the Rashba's Herem on Philosophical Study: A Political Perspective," *Jewish History* 1 (1986): 27–38.

[6] Shatzmiller, "*Forms of the Twelve Constellations*," 399.

such as Guy de Chauliac, who practiced astrological medicine, and Thomas of Bologne, who used astral magic to heal his patients at the court of Charles V ("the Wise"), king of France.[7]

Four Positions

Given the popularity of astral magic both in the non-Jewish environment and in the Jewish world, Jewish physicians and astrologers, on the one hand, and their outspoken opponents, on the other, had to consider two basic questions. First, was the practice of astral magic real and effective, or mere nonsense? Second, was it halakhically permissible, or should it be condemned as idolatry?

Thinkers concerned with these questions had to take into account those talmudic sources that deal with magic and consider it to be real (such as TB Rosh ha-Shanah 24b). Maimonides ignored most of these sources and discussed primarily the passages relating to medicine; other thinkers, however, could not follow suit. Similarly, they had to grapple with Maimonides' weighty strictures against astral magic, which had shaped the attitudes to this area among earlier Provençal philosophers.

Provençal thought in the fourteenth century knew of four answers to the two questions just posed and, accordingly, four major positions toward astral magic can be delineated:

1. False and forbidden: Moderate rationalists rejected astral magic out of hand, and therefore considered it halakhically forbidden. These thinkers adopted Maimonides' uncompromising stance, according to which astral magic lacked all reality and was prohibited. They accepted the content, style, and language of Maimonides' approach (Menahem Meiri, David Kokhavi). Some rationalists saw fit to ignore the issue almost entirely, probably because they denied the reality of astral magic (Joseph Ibn Kaspi).
2. Dubious and forbidden: This was the opinion of the traditionalists, who consistently opposed the radical rationalists, in fact accusing the latter among other things of engaging in astral magic for

[7] See Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 32–33, 519. On the currency of magical concepts in scholastic thought, see also Bert Hansen, "Science and Magic," in *Science in the Middle Ages*, ed. David C. Lindberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 483-506.

medical purposes (Abba Mari, Jacob b. Solomon ha-Zarfati). They too, like the moderate rationalists, prohibited astral magic, though not entirely rejecting the reality of astral-magical practice. They typically associated astral-magical practice with the magicians' inclination to philosophize; in their view, rationalist philosophy inevitably led to astral-magical practices.

3. False as to its reality but psychologically effective, and forbidden: Some thinkers denied astral magic any reality as a means for capturing the spirituality of a star, but believed that the magical practice had some psychological effect. Nevertheless, they too considered astral-magical practices halakhically forbidden (Gersonides, Jedaiah ha-Penini). This was in a sense an intermediate position, though closer to that of the moderate rationalists; these thinkers may in fact be considered a subgroup of the first group.
4. True and permitted: Some thinkers had no doubt as to the reality of astral magic (Nissim of Marseille, Frat Maimon), and indeed considered it halakhically legitimate (Levi b. Abraham). In fact, they made of astral magic a theological principle that could be used to explain various biblical issues.

One marginal position recognized the reality of astral magic but rejected its use from an ethical and religious point of view (Solomon b. Judah of Lunel).

We shall now discuss the main positions of Provençal thinkers on astral magic, with emphasis on the halakhic and philosophical aspects of the controversy that flared up at the beginning of the fourteenth century. In that context, it will be pointed out that the rationalists had internalized the principles of astral magic to such an extent that they employed them in continuous biblical exegesis. Attention will also be devoted to Hermetic traditions that gained acceptance among Provençal rationalists and became a permanent feature of Provençal culture. This discussion should help to understand two typical figures of late medieval Provence—the rationalist in search of wisdom, on the one hand, and the conservative traditionalist, on the other.

Twofold Prohibition: The Moderate Rationalists

Provence was the venue of a philosophical circle consisting of Nahmanides' supporters and admirers, whose distinctive marks are discernible in the various stages of the anti-Maimonidean controversy. Around the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, some

thinkers relied absolutely on Maimonides' authority. They quoted him directly or expressed their own views in his halakhic and philosophical style. They had internalized Maimonides' teachings literally, without detecting antinomian secrets or radical esoteric meanings in his writings. In this respect, they parted ways with Provençal thinkers of the thirteenth century such as Samuel ibn Tibbon and Jacob Anatoli, whose commentaries on *The Guide of the Perplexed* were explicitly esoteric.[8] This statement is also true of the attitude to astral magic among Maimonides' fourteenth-century supporters. They quoted him copiously (*Code*, Laws of Idolatry, and *Guide* 3:37) and, following his lead, denied that any appeal to stellar powers had any reality, whether that of bringing down spirituality onto images or any other action based on experientialism, such as the use of *segullot.* Again following Maimonides, they invoked the halakhic prohibition on fashioning images for medical purposes, that is, fashioning a metal reproduction of a heavenly constellation and placing it on the diseased part of the body under the corresponding sign of the Zodiac in order to capture its influence. Among such thinkers were Menahem Meiri,[9] who supported the rationalist stand in the controversy over philosophical studies and in fact refused to endorse the ban issued by R. Solomon b. Adret and his court, and also David b. Samuel Kokhavi;[10] both of these scholars discussed making images for medical purposes in the context of their consideration of the prohibition of soothsaying and its halakhic definition (Deuteronomy 18:10).

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[8] See Aviezer Ravitzky, "Samuel ibn Tibbon and the Esoteric Character of the *Guide of the Perplexed*," *AJS Review* 6 (1981): 87–123; idem, "The Secrets of the *Guide of the Perplexed* Between the Thirteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in Isadore Twersky, ed., *Studies in Maimonides* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 159–207.

[9] See, for instance, Menahem ha-Meiri, *Beit ha-Behirah*, Tractate Shabbat, ed. Yitzhak Shimshon Lange (Jerusalem: n.p. 1976), 67a, 250, and see further below. Meiri was influenced by his teacher, Reuben b. Hayyim, also essentially a characteristic rationalist supporter of Maimonides, as reflected in his *Sefer ha-Tamid* (ed. Yaakov Moshe Toledano, *Otsar ha-Hayyim* 7-8 [1931–1932]). For Meiri's attitude to Maimonides as a halakhic authority and philosopher see Benedikt, *The Torah Center in Provence*, 184–191; J. David Bleich, "Divine Unity in Maimonides, the Tosafists, and Me'iri," in Lenn E. Goodman, ed., *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 242–251; Gregg Stern, *Menahem ha-Meiri and the Second Controversy over Philosophy* (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1995).

[10] David b. Samuel Kokhavi, *Sefer ha-Batim*, vol. 2; *Sefer ha-Mitsvah*, *Azharot* 30–38, ed. Moshe Herschler (Jerusalem: Makhon Shalem—Tsefunot Kadmonim, 1983), 310–319.

Between Astrology and Astral Magic

Meiri contrasts astral magic with astrology itself, discussing in detail the many talmudic and midrashic sources that recognize astrology and the recourse to astrological predictions as useful. These sources are not consistent with Maimonides' halakhic definition: "Who is a *me'onen* ['soothsayer']? He who assigns dates in the manner of the astrologers: 'Such-and-such a day is good, such-and-such a day is bad.'"[11] According to this definition, astrological forecasting itself is forbidden, even without any magical activity. Meiri, evidently troubled by this contradiction between the talmudic sources and Maimonides' ruling, introduced a dichotomy between the elements of astrology, which are, as he writes, "a natural thing among people,"[12] and astrological predictions employing magical means: the former are permitted, while the latter are absolutely forbidden.

What is the meaning of the permit to use astrological predictions considering it "a natural thing"? In Meiri's view, it is permitted to utilize such predictions, such as foretelling the aggressive personality of someone born under the sign of Mars, or determining the most auspicious time for bloodletting.[13] This view is supported in basic

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[11] Maimonides, *Code*, Laws of Idolatry 11:8. Meiri refers to Maimonides as "the greatest of authors." Maimonides ruled in the definition of soothsaying in accordance with the view of R. Akiva in *Sifri Deuteronomy* 171, and in TB Sanhedrin 65b, that soothsayers are "the assigners of dates."

[12] Menahem Meiri, *Beit ha-Behirah*, Tractate Sanhedrin, ed. Abraham Sofer (Jerusalem: Hermon, 1965), on Sanhedrin 68a, 251. Meiri's teacher, Reuben b. Hayyim, also recognized the validity of the elements of astrology; see *Sefer ha-Tamid*, 21, 24. However, he never mentions astral magic in the extant sources.

[13] TB Shabbat 156a, 129b. This question was of considerable concern to Provençal scholars. See Binyamin Zeev Benedikt, "Food Depends on the Constellation" [Hebrew], in his *The Torah Center in Provence*, 243–267. On Meiri, see 252–253. Various scholars have discussed Meiri's views on idolatry and his approach in the issue of attitudes to non-Jews. See Jacob Katz, "Religious Tolerance in the Halakhic and Philosophical System of Rabbi Menahem ha-Meiri" [Hebrew], *Zion* 18 (1953): 15–30; Israel Ta-Shma, "Judeo-Christian Commerce on Sundays in Medieval Germany and Provence" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 47 (1978): 197–210; Ephraim E. Urbach, "Rabbi Menahem ha-Meiri's Theory of Tolerance: Its Origin and Limits" [Hebrew], in *Studies in the History of Jewish Society in the Middle Ages and in the Modern Period Presented to Professor Jacob Katz*, ed. E. Etkes and Y. Salmon (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1980), 34–44. For further reactions see Israel Ta-Shma, "Additional Remarks Concerning Moslems as Intermediaries in Judeo-Christian Commerce" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 49 (1980): 218–219; Yaakov Katz, "Religious Tolerance in the Halakhic System of R. Menahem ha-Meiri: A Reply" [Hebrew], *Zion* 46 (1981): 243–246; Gerald Blidstein, "Maimonides and Me'iri on the Legitimacy of Non-Judaic Religion," in *Scholars and Scholarship: The Interaction*

scientific terms: the stars exert decisive influence on processes in the material world. Ptolemy clearly formulated the qualitative influence of the stars on the natural elements, and therefore:

> Anything that is an innate quality, such as the fact that a certain sign [of the Zodiac] governs such-and-such a day in such-and-such a place, or that the New Moon enriches the earth with water and dampens it so that it causes damage in wood that is cut at that time—there is nothing wrong with that and it is like a natural thing. The same applies to refraining from bloodletting under the government of Mars, when blood is boiling and aroused and letting it out may cause damage—that is entirely nature. This is as if one says, let us do such a thing at midday, when the sun is at its hottest.[14]

Having ruled thus, Meiri went on to permit any astrological prediction not involving any magical practice, in contrast to Maimonides' ruling. In fact, he even assigned an ethical and behavioral value to a knowledge of the elements of astrology: "A person should constantly impose upon his nature and alter his function for the good."[15] This explains why he expanded Maimonides' definition of soothsayer (*me'onen*), adding the words, "and whoever does such-and-such a thing at such-and-such a time will succeed in his efforts or conversely."[16] *It is the performance of a magical practice that turns the use of astrology into something forbidden*; merely drawing up a horoscope or employing astrological considerations to foresee the future are permitted.

Meiri continues as follows: "They have said that whoever does not consult them [the Chaldeans] but learns by himself that such is the case, or the Chaldeans told him on their own, and he is concerned by what they say—there is no guilt here."[17] Note the use of the term "Chaldeans" here: In talmudic literature, it generally means astrologers, with no hint of astral-magical practices.[18] For Meiri, however, the

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between Judaism and Other Cultures, ed. Leo Landman (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1990), 27–35. These scholars, however, did not consider the role of astrology and astral magic in the context of the prohibition of idolatry. For a brief survey of the issue see Abraham Geiger, "A Study of R. Levi b. Abraham b. Hayyim and Some of his Contemporaries" [Hebrew], *He-Halutz* 2 (1853): 15–16.

[14] Meiri, *Beit ha-Behirah*, Sanhedrin, 253.

[15] Ibid., 252.

[16] Ibid., 251.

[17] Ibid., 252.

[18] See, for instance, *Arukh Completum*, ed. Hanokh Judah Kohut, vol. 4, 232, *s.v.* "*Kalda'i*"; Franz Cumont, *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans* (New York: Dover, 1960). See also Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages. Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979), 276–277.

"Chaldeans" accomplished their predictions by magical means, and it is therefore forbidden to consult them. His definition is quite clear:

> In sum: The science of the Chaldeans is not the science of the stars alone, but it also involves the practice of sorcery.[19]
> In any case, the Chaldeans, although the greatest of the rabbis have explained the term as meaning a necromancer, are concerned mainly with the laws of the stars [astrology].[20]

In other words, "the greatest rabbis" explained "Chaldean" practices as sorcery, with no appeal to the laws of the heavens, whereas Meiri believed that the "Chaldeans" engaged in astral magic. He therefore forbade any exploitation of heavenly configurations by magical means, that is, he forbade performing some action or preparation based on a given configuration:

> But whatever changes in them constantly according to the mutual conjunction of the stars, as one might say to take a certain thing when the moon is in a certain sign of the Zodiac, that is sorcery and soothsaying; and any determination of the time to perform some action or desist from some action on such a basis is forbidden, for that is what [the stars'] worshipers attribute to their action.[21]

This halakhic distinction between astrology and astral magic is unequivocal. The prohibition applies not only to the practice itself but also to dissemination of its results: "It is forbidden to practice soothsaying, even if a person does not perform the action in question but only pronounces those falsehoods that fools believe are words of truth and wisdom."[22] Meiri therefore banned astral magic entirely, with the exception specified in the passage cited above:[23] It is permitted to employ knowledge acquired by astral-magical practice, provided that knowledge is commonly known, or that the magician offered that knowledge of his own accord. This exception, however, deserves further study.

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[19] Meiri, *Beit ha-Behirah*, Sanhedrin, 252.

[20] Meiri, *Beit ha-Behirah*, Tractate Pesahim, ed. Yosef ha-Kohen Klein (Jerusalem: Makhon ha-Talmud ha-Yisraeli ha-Shalem, 1964), on Pesahim 113b, 239.

[21] Meiri, *Beit ha-Behirah*, Sanhedrin, 253–254. For brief glosses on Meiri's interpretation of the magical material in the Talmud and on the term "*mazzikin*" (demons, evil spirits), see Moshe Halbertal, "Menahem ha-Me'iri: Talmudist and Philosopher" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 63 (1994), 80–81; Gerald J. Blidstein, "R. Menahem Ha-Me'iri: Aspects of an Intellectual Profile," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 5 (1995): 65.

[22] Ibid., 254; see also 243, on Sanhedrin 65b.

[23] See above, n. 18.

We now proceed to a controversial issue, namely, the fashioning of an image for medical purposes. Meiri proposed classifying the forms of astral magic into four methods (depending on the division into four "classes" [*kittot*]): (1) Uttering a spell that would help to make an astrological prediction come true, or worshiping the stars through effigies to achieve prophetic inspiration. (2) Capturing the spirituality of the stars by burning incense at a special time, in order to predict the future ("those who make the forces 'flow down'"). (3) Fashioning a metal image of a sign of the Zodiac for medical purposes. (4) Timing agricultural activities (such as harvesting grain or collecting seeds) by establishing the stars' position and influence. In Meiri's opinion, each of these four techniques is absolutely forbidden. Implicit in his writings is an unequivocal ruling on a question that engaged all the major polemicists of the time: a prohibition on fashioning an image for medical purposes. As he wrote in explaining the third type of astral magic:

> In any event, the fashioning of images at certain times, when the desired star is revolving in a suitable house of the signs of the Zodiac, for certain illnesses—that is definitely forbidden even according to what they have written.[24] And that is the third group of those mentioned in their writings, and they call them the image-makers.[25]

Meiri is expressing himself here quite outspokenly, on an issue directly connected to the early fourteenth century controversy. He deals with the forms of astral magic, particularly the prohibited manufacture of images for healing purposes, as part of his discussion of the biblical injunction against soothsaying (*me'onen*). According to Meiri, the making of an image for medical purposes is forbidden not only as a form of sorcery but also as a form of soothsaying. In other words, he seems to impose a dual prohibition on astral magic, based on two "negative precepts" in the Torah, implying that the offender would incur a double penalty.

While Meiri alludes only to astral magic, his contemporary David Kokhavi is quite explicit. Following Maimonides, he asserts in general, "We have been admonished not to perform any action according to stellar choices." The term "stellar choices" (*behirot kokhaviyot*) probably derives from Maimonidean terminology.[26] Kokhavi held that it was

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[24] That is, according to the many astrological references in the Talmud.

[25] Meiri, Sanhedrin, 253.

[26] *Sefer ha-Batim*, 2: 314. "Stellar choices" is the term that Maimonides uses in *The*

forbidden to make an astral image for medical purposes:

> For by assigning times according to stellar choices one will ultimately attribute divinity to a star or a sphere, and that would be absolute idolatry. And those who make images at certain times and say that those images help some illnesses—it seems to me that they are considered among those who assign times and it is forbidden to make them and to be cured by them.[27]

Kokhavi reiterates that any practice associated with times determined on the basis of stellar configurations should be forbidden, lest it lead to idolatry. Perhaps he used the phrase "it seems to me" (*yera'eh li*) not because he was in any doubt as to the prohibition, but because he forbade the capture of spirituality as being both sorcery[28] and soothsaying. This was his own innovation, not to be found in any of the sources at his disposal. In sum, both Meiri and Kokhavi believed that a person who fashioned images for medical purposes was transgressing the injunction against soothsayers, and probably also the general prohibition of sorcery.

The Means Becomes the End

Solomon b. Judah of Lunel added his voice to the basic position of Meiri and Kokhavi, who firmly reject the idea of making images for medical purposes, but adducing different reasons. Solomon, who wrote a commentary on Judah Halevi's *The Kuzari* entitled *Heshek Shelomo* (1424 or earlier), was a disciple of Frat Maimon (Solomon b. Menachem), who was probably active in the second half of the fourteenth century. While Solomon b. Judah also prohibited the manufacture of images for medical purposes, he differed from both Meiri and Kokhavi on a significant point. They had followed in the footsteps of Maimonides, who had denied the reality of bringing down spirituality

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Book of the Commandments in Negative Commandment 32. Ibn Tibbon translated the phrase as "actions by choice from the laws of stars." See also *The Commandments: Sefer ha-Mitzvoth of Maimonides*, trans. Charles B. Chavel (London and New York: Soncino Press, 1967), 2:31-32, negative commandment 32.

[27] *Sefer ha-Batim*, 2:115. See also *ibid.*, 1: *Sefer ha-Emunah*, 160.

[28] As in *Sefer ha-Batim*, 2:116, on the basis of *Guide of the Perplexed* 3:37. The quotation from Maimonides, in a passage directly concerned with the capture of spirituality as part of the definition of sorcery, indicates that Kokhavi forbade the manufacture of images for medical purposes and considered it as a form of sorcery. There are several sources in which Maimonides forbids bringing down spirituality onto images as sorcery, as in *The Book of the Commandments*, Negative Commandment 10.

to an image or an effigy. Solomon b. Judah, however, had no doubt that such phenomena were real, but deplored such magical practices and considered them absolutely forbidden. This is the import of his commentary on the passage in *The Kuzari* (3:11) in which Judah Halevi describes the qualities of the perfect man:

> [The pious, or perfect, man] will refrain from performing those practices that rely on idolatry, such as bringing down forces at certain well-defined hours, like those who today make an image to combat a disease of the kidneys and an image of a scorpion against scorpion bite; for such practices are likely to lead a person astray from the straight path, and this was the intention of Scripture when it spoke of "the lame and the blind, who are hateful to David" (2 Samuel 5:8), for it seems that these were images made at certain times with which people afflicted with these defects would be cured, and they were therefore at the gate of the city. And since they were visible to all and since the people of Israel could readily be misled by them to say that they were divinities, it was therefore said that they were "hateful to David," and therefore he gave orders to destroy them. And the pious man should heed all such abhorrent practices and beware them.[29]

Solomon b. Judah's argument to some extent harks back to Maimonides' position in *Guide of the Perplexed* (1:36), that the multitude mistakes the end for the means. At first, the stars and the effigies made in their image were seen as agents mediating between human beings and God, but the masses came to regard the stars and their images themselves as deities. Witness those images made to capture spirituality, which were "hateful to David" because they were displayed at the city gate. Such public exposure of the images inspired the common people to attribute to them divine powers. The perfect man, therefore, will distance himself from such practices for fear that their routine use might deify the images. While Solomon b. Judah

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[29] Solomon b. Judah, *Heshek Shelomo*, Ms. Oxford-Bodl. 2383 (Opp. Add. 4° 114), 62a. Note that David Kimhi also explained "the lame and the blind" as "brass images" placed at the city gate (2 Samuel 5:8), but said nothing of the astral-magical aspect. See the commentary of Netanel Kaspi, a member of Solomon b. Judah's circle, written in the same year: "Satan, that is, the evil inclination, incites [the pious man] with some opinions of the believers in spirituality, and it may occur to the pious man that they are beneficial or harmful by their own [powers] and are subject to no other governance or leader who orders and leads them; but that is not so. Rather, their causing harm or benefit is by virtue of their quality, like wind and fire whose nature it is to harm or to benefit by virtue of their quality, as they were arranged by the Almighty, who is all and knows every part as He knows the whole" (Ms. Paris 677, f. 80a).

adopted one part of Abba Mari's position rejecting the capture of spirituality for medical ends ("disease of the kidneys… scorpion bite"), he had no doubt of the reality of the magical act itself. Moreover, nowhere does Solomon b. Judah refer to the halakhic aspect of the problem, merely supplying a theoretical argument against the use of images to heal the sick.

In sum, these thinkers rejected astral-magical practices for both halakhic and philosophical reasons. Meiri and Kokhavi debated the manufacture of images for medical purposes in a halakhic context, apparently forbidding such practices as being either sorcery or soothsaying, or both. Solomon b. Judah revealed the theoretical danger that he attributed to these practices. The type of rationalist so passionately censured by Abba Mari Astruc of Lunel does not fit the mold of Meiri or Kokhavi. Abba Mari himself was a thinker who systematically employed philosophical concepts, as may be seen in the first eighteen chapters of his *Sefer Minhat Qena'ot*, which include his own anthology of his polemical letters concerning the sciences. This is also the conclusion from his *Sefer ha-Yareah*, which he added to one of his letters.[30] Abba Mari aimed his attack at the rationalists who engaged in radical allegoristic interpretation of the Bible and the Aggadah, but at the same time were proficient in astral magic and used it. His position and its influence will be considered in the next section.

The Relationship between Magic and Philosophy: The Traditionalists

A Threefold Prohibition

Abba Mari's position differed from that of Meiri only in its programmatic aspect and in the severity of his prohibition on the use of images for medical purposes.[31] Taking an extreme traditionalist approach,

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[30] Abba Mari, *Minhat Qena'ot*, ed. Moses Bisliches(Pressburg: Anton Edlen von Schmid, 1838) *Iggeret* 58; *Sefer Minhat Qena'ot*, ed. Dimitrovsky, ch. 77.

[31] The philosophical, historical, and social significance of Astruc's position in the controversy was exhaustively discussed in Shatzmiller's studies cited above. On the figure of Abba Mari Astruc as an intellectual and a halakhic authority see further Henri Gross, "Notice sur Abba Mari de Lunel," *REJ* 4 (1882): 192-207; Twersky, "Aspects of the Social and Cultural History of Provençal Jewry," 203; Joseph Shatzmiller, "Minor Epistle of Apology of Rabbi Kalonymus ben Kalonymus" [Hebrew], *Sefunot* 10 (1966): 16–17; Menachem Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought: From Maimonides to Abravanel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 69-74.

Abba Mari was not content to brand the practice of astral magic as a transgression of two precepts. While relying on the same sources in the Talmud and in Maimonides' writings as Meiri and Kokhavi, he categorized astral magic as a violation of three negative precepts: *me'onen* (soothsayer), *menahesh* (diviner) and *mekhashef* (sorcerer). Where the others had hesitated, he had no doubts, as he wrote in a letter to Rashba:

> Indeed, it seems that anyone who makes one of the images in a special season, when the sun or one of the planets is in certain degrees, must still be considered a soothsayer and a diviner... And I think it very likely that such a person is also a sorcerer, for the terms "soothsayer" and "diviner" refer only to people who plan their labor or their conduct on a certain day or in a certain season, and they believe that they will succeed in their business on those days. But in the case before us, that of a person who makes a special image of metal on a certain day, when the star is in such-and-such a degree, and believes that it thus causes good or bad, that surely seems to be an act of sorcery.[32]

In contrast to Rashba's doubts as to whether to permit or prohibit making images for medical purposes, Abba Mari laid down the law categorically:

> Since that is so, how can one permit making an image for medicine, for the maker violates [the three precepts] of soothsayer, diviner, and sorcerer; and even if the image has been made and exists, it is forbidden to use it to heal, and it is not considered among things that may be used for medical purposes, because [doing so] is like attributing power to the star and thanking it by making that image.[33]

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[32] *Minhat Qena'ot*, ch. 23, 320, line 125; 321, line 139; see also 322, lines 161–164. Incidentally, R. David Messer Leon refers to this book as *Minhat Qetatot* (literally meaning "offering of controversy" rather than the original "offering of zeal"), as he writes: "…For a young boy remembers perfectly what he learned in his infancy, and for that reason Rashba decreed in the districts of Provence that they should not study philosophy in their youth and childhood, as you may see from the book *Minhat Qetatot*, against which the Epistle of Apology was written" (*Ein ha-Kore*, Ms. Oxford-Bodl. 1263 [Reggio 41], 3a). On Jedaiah ha-Penini's *Epistle of Apology* (*Ketav ha-Hitnazlut*) see below, text at nn. 59–61.

[33] *Minhat Qena'ot*, 323, l. 176-324, l. 180. Astruc classifies medicines in the Talmud under three headings: (1) Healing by medications whose mode of operation is known and amenable to study. (2) Healing by a charm or a magic spell. (3) Healing by *segullot*, that is, medications whose modes of operation and causes are unknown. In other words, Astruc was willing to recognize the reality of non-astral magic (amulets, and so forth), but firmly prohibited making images for medical purposes. He attributed such healing to the philosophers, as we shall see below, thus making a factual contribution

Abba Mari thus explicitly equated making an image at a time determined by astrological calculations with idolatry. He differed from Meiri and Kokhavi on an issue that seems to be pragmatic rather than substantial and ideological: he attributed the practice of astral magic to the radical rationalists. Referring to those rationalists, who are in quest of "children of aliens" [alien customs; see Isaiah 2:6], he writes:

> Their cornerstone is set in the books of Averroes,
> And the mainstay of their foundation in the sayings of Aristotle.
> They are almost snared in their net, entrapped, their feet put in the stocks,
> The summit of their thought is that heavenly bodies are subject neither to generation nor to corruption.
> Some of them put their faith in the laws of the stars,
> Some of them make images at set times, when the sun is in certain degrees in the ascent of the scorpions.[34]

He seems to be proposing a basic theoretical link between astral magic and philosophy: the doctrine that the sphere is eternal implies a belief in its powers and in their exploitation. This link is not conclusive, especially in view of the fact that, historically speaking, Averroes

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to the distinction between "primitive magic" and "intellectual magic"—a distinction that emerged clearly in the Renaissance, but had already been in existence since the fourteenth century. Quite possibly, Rashba himself was acquainted with Hermetic traditions whereby every climate had its distinctive mode of worship; the climate of the Land of Israel, however, required no such worship. A responsum attributed to Rashba, therefore, includes a halakhic ruling permitting a non-Jew to worship a star if he recognizes it as an instrument: "For the Holy One, blessed be He, divided the lands among the signs of the Zodiac, which he gave government over the earth, so that such-and-such a star governs such-and-such a place... And whoever worships the star which governs that place is not an idolater, provided he knows and realizes that the said star possesses no power and no government other than through the Lord, whose name governs that land" (Aryeh L. Feldman, "Rashba's Responsum to a Non-Jewish Scholar Concerning Monotheistic Faith" [Hebrew], *Sinai* 100 [1987], 638. This responsum was published previously in J. R. Perles, *R. Salomo b. Abraham b. Adereth, seine Leben und seine Schriften* [Breslau: Schletter, 1863], 53). Astruc was thus tackling an extremely sensitive issue, and Rashba's uncertainty in the face of Astruc's categorical ruling is readily understood. Finally, it should be noted that a position similar to that of Abba Mari Astruc, recognizing the "popular" magic of charms and magic spells while at the same time expressing disapproval of rationalist philosophy, appears in a work written probably around the same time (I have been unable to determine its provenance): *Sefer Malkiel*, by R. Malkiel Hezekiah b. Abraham. See *Sefer Malkiel*, published in *Zehav Parvayim* (Pietrkow, 1840), 58b-62a.

[34] *Minhat Qena'ot*, ch. 19, 272, lines 37-41.

himself was opposed to astrology and astral magic.[35] In his emphasis on this link, however, Abba Mari essentially shaped the style of the opponents of the radical philosophers and their excessive allegories in fourteenth- century Provence.

Between Theory and Practice

Another thinker who linked rationalism and astral magic in the second half of the fourteenth century in Provence was Jacob b. Solomon ha-Zarfati. He too was sharply critical of the radical rationalists, while praising the kabbalists; at the same time, he rejected healing by means of images. Jacob B. Solomon wrote a treatise entitled *Kehillat Ya'akov*, which has survived in an anthology of his works in Ms. Paris 733 (copied in 1395). The basic object of this treatise is to establish the principle that "action, practice" (*ma'aseh*) is superior to "speculation" (*iyyun*).[36] 234 To that end, he quotes numerous passages from philosophical writings that praise action, aiming to emphasize the importance of religious practice compared with rational speculation. Jacob b. Solomon assigns the term "practice" very broad meaning, and astral magic too assumes an important position in this context. The "philosophers" use astral magic for medical purposes, indicating the great importance they attribute to "practice." As noted, one of the most interesting motifs in Jacob Zarfati's account is the link he creates, like Abba Mari, between philosophizing and astral magic. He himself was a physician, and it is clear that he did not deny the reality of astral-magical practices in the medical realm. Ultimately, however, he rejects making images for medical purposes as an explicit violation of Halakhah.

At the start of his account, he places the astrological pursuit concerned with predicting the future in the realm of interest of the "philoso-

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[35] The reference to Averroes should probably be associated with the group formed around that time in Provence, which called itself "*Kehal Me'ayyenim*" and devoted itself to studying the works of the great Aristotelian commentator. See Lawrence V. Berman, "Greek into Hebrew: Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles," in Alexander Altmann, ed., *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 238-320; idem, "A Manuscript Entitled 'Shoshan Limudim' and the Group of "Me'ayyenim" in Provence" [Hebrew], *Kiryat Sefer* 53 (1978): 368–372.

[36] See Georges Vajda, "On the Conflict between Philosophy and Religion" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 24 (1955): 309–310; Joseph Shatzmiller, "Étudiants juifs à la faculté de médecine de Montpellier—dernier quart du XIV siècle," in Barry Walfish (ed.), *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume* (Haifa: Haifa University Press, 1993), 2:252.

phers": "When I refer to philosophers, I include with them astronomers and astrologers as well. And it is well known that the ultimate aim of the sciences of astronomy and astrology and its outcome is to predict the future."[37] Astral magic branches off the "philosophical" treatment of astrology, as a typically practical discipline. Jacob b. Solomon cites two techniques of astral magic. For the first, he cites proof from the *Sefer ha-Peri* (*Centiloquium*) attributed to Ptolemy:

> Similarly, they engage in making images of the signs of the Zodiac, that have to be made as needed at certain times, engraved on certain materials, like those who make an image of a lion on a gold salver [to heal] diseases of the kidneys, or an image of a scorpion to heal the sting of a scorpion, and similar ones on frankincense, as Ptolemy said in his book *Centiloquium*: The forms that are in the earthly world obey the forms in the world of spheres, and therefore the makers of talismans and images engrave them in such a way that the [power of the] stars will give them the ability to perform a desired action.[38]
>
> And they also have images of certain letters for each one of the seven planets, which are effective for certain matters. But before they can be effective they have to be written on certain parchments or on silk garments of a certain color, and then they must be smoked and immersed in incense in ways that are known to their makers.[39]

Jacob b. Solomon, not content merely with a theoretical account of the manufacture of healing images, cites evidence of the efficacy of such images, from Abu Ja'far's commentary on *Centiloquium*.[40] The evidence concerns healing a scorpion bite by means of a stamp bearing the likeness of a scorpion; the stamp is placed on the bite when

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[37] *Kehillat Yaakov*, Ms. Paris 733, 49b. See also the excerpts published by Vajda at the end of his article "On the Conflict," Appendix 1: 15b.

[38] *Kehillat Yaakov*, Ms. Paris 733, 49b. The quotation is from a passage attributed to Ptolemy in the work *Centiloquium*, ch. 9, Ms. Paris 1055, 54a. On the translation of this work see below, n. 77. For a French translation of the quotation see *Le Centiloque de Ptolomée ou la seconde partie de l'Uranie* (Paris, 1993), 19, and Jacques Halbronn's introduction, xl–xli, xxxiii.

[39] *Kehillat Yaakov*, 50a. The basis for the technique of magical letters is explained by Levi b. Abraham in his discussion of astral magic: "Every planet has special letters, and therefore one born [under that sign of the Zodiac] is disposed to be proficient in reading some letters more than other letters, as appointed to him, and that is the reason for different languages spoken by different nations" (*Livyat Hen*, Ms. Paris 1066/1, 7b). That is to say, there are certain types of letters corresponding to each planet, and amulets based on astrology were fashioned on the basis of this correspondence. The technique is mentioned in the work *Picatrix*, Book 3, ch, 4, among others. See Hansen, "Science and Magic," 487-488.

[40] *Kehillat Yaakov*, 49b–50a.

the moon is in the "house" of Scorpio. Jacob emphatically quotes Abu Ja'far's assertion that the process has helped everyone stung under those conditions.[41] However, despite this clear-cut evidence in Abu Ja'far's name, Jacob b. Solomon firmly rejects the use of astral magic for halakhic reasons. After his account of the various magical techniques, he writes: "This is all as known to those proficient in that science and to one who believes in it, for it is forbidden to us, by reason of our divine Torah, to believe in such things, all the more so to do them."[42]

Notably, unlike Abba Mari, Jacob b. Solomon does not bother to define the precise halakhic grounds for the prohibition of astral magic. Clearly, the traditionalist opponents of astral magic considered it a well-known prohibition, which was self-evident in light of the halakhic interpretation of the general prohibition of idolatry. Jacob b. Solomon was thus continuing the polemical model established by Abba Mari. Both of these thinkers were clearly proficient in the sources and in philosophical style, both rejected the radical rationalism represented by free allegorization, and both considered the use of astral magic a characteristic of radical rationalists.

In the next section, after examining the intermediate position represented by Gersonides and Jedaiah ha-Penini, I consider the doctrines that were the target of Abba Mari's harsh criticism.

Effigies, Images and Divination: An Intermediate Position

Psychological Utility

Ranged against the post-Maimonidean thinkers who denied the reality of astral magic was a long and distinguished series of thinkers who believed it efficacious. Given the decisive influence of the teachings of Abraham ibn Ezra on fourteenth-century thinkers,[43] the task facing the adversaries of astral magic emerges as rather formidable. One common approach was to argue that astral magic grants a psycho-

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[41] See Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, 69, n. 28.

[42] *Kehillat Yaakov*, 50a.

[43] On this phenomenon see Alexander Altmann, "Moses Narboni's Epistle on Shi'ur Qoma," *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969), 196–197; Dov Schwartz, *The Philosophy of a Fourteenth Century Jewish Neoplatonic Circle* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute 1996); idem, *Astral Magic*, chs. 5-6 and 9.

logical advantage, but has no power to exert real influence in the material world. Accordingly, the effigy and the special preparation thought necessary to capture spirituality simply aroused the magician's mental faculties, in particular his imagination, and he is thus able to predict the future.[44]

This was Gersonides' argument, particularly in regard to sources that obliged him to address the problem of astral magic, that is, in his biblical exegesis. Indeed, as an exegete, he could not ignore traditions of magical interpretation established by Ibn Ezra in certain passages of the Bible, such as those treating Laban's household idols (the *terafim*), the Tabernacle and the priestly vestments, the reasons for the sacrifices, the scapegoat, and the story of Balaam.[45] While Gersonides used magical terminology, he denied that the outcome of magical practices was in any way real, confining their efficacy to the psychological realm. This was true, he argued, both for forbidden uses of magic (divination) and for its seemingly permitted category (prophecy). In order to explain this assumption, let us begin with Gersonides' explanation of the meaning of the *terafim*, as in the following two passages:

> And Rachel stole her father's *terafim* (Genesis 31:19), which is his magical tool for he was a magician... Now the *terafim* are made in a human image, as we shall see [in the matter of] Saul's daughter Michal,[46] namely, it is an image made at certain times, through which the magician's imaginative faculty is aroused and as it were hears a faint voice speaking to him of future events, as his thought wanders in such things. This does not mean that the image speaks, since that is impossible, for there can be speech only through the means that the Lord, may He be exalted, endowed with it in nature.[47]

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[44] A similar explanation appears in the writings of Shem Tov ibn Maior. See Dov Schwartz, "Varieties of Magic in Jewish Thought in 14th-Century Spain" [Hebrew], *PAAJR* 57 (1990–1991), Hebrew Section, 25.

[45] Accordingly, our most important source here will be Gersonides' commentary on the Torah, on which see Robert Eisen, *Gersonides on Providence, Covenant, and the Chosen People: A Study in Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Biblical Commentary* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995); Eli Freyman, "Le Commentaire de Gersonide sur le Pentateuque," in Gilbert Dahan, ed., *Gersonide en son temps: science et philosophie medievales* (Louvain: E. Peeters, 1991), 117-132; Amos Funkenstein, "Gersonides' Biblical Commentary: Science, History and Providence," in Gad Freudenthal, ed., *Studies on Gersonides* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 305–315.

[46] For Gersonides' treatment of this subject, see below.

[47] Gersonides, *Commentary on the Torah* (Venice, 1547), 38d. The two most recent editions of the commentary on Genesis, based on manuscripts, are: *Gersonides' Commentaries on the Torah Based on the First Edition and MS. Lehmann* [Hebrew], vol. 1, ed.

> The *terafim* were a human image, made at specific times known to them, and they thought this image would arouse the imaginative faculty so that it would become isolated from the other faculties of the soul to receive supreme power, as was its custom, and hear the likeness of a deep voice that, so they thought, would predict the future.[48]

Clearly, Gersonides did not believe that the rites bringing down spirituality onto effigies had real results; for that reason, he explained the efficacy of such rites as a kind of divination. The diviner foretells the future by receiving emanation from the "soul" of the stars. Since Maimonides had already stated that the only reliable proof of the truth of a prophecy lies in knowledge of the future, there had to be a clear distinction between the prophet and the diviner. The task was undertaken by the Muslim philosophers who discussed the Aristotelian tract *Parva Naturalia*, some parts of which are concerned with dreams; Averroes, in particular, tackled the subject in his commentaries on that work. Gersonides devoted lengthy passages to the question of how to distinguish between a diviner who predicts the future and a prophet.[49] Numerous distinctions were proposed; perhaps one of the most important states that prophets also depend on their intellect to determine the future, whereas diviners use only imagination. Since divination is based entirely on the imaginative faculties, the diviner needs tools to help the imaginative faculty prevail over the other

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Yaakov Leib Levi (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1992), 189; *Rabbinic Pentateuch with Commentary on the Torah by R. Levi b. Gershon (Gersonides, 1288–1344)*[Hebrew], ed. Baruch Braner and Eli Freyman (Maaleh Adummim: Maʿalyot, 1993), 388 (variants in this edition are cited below in square brackets). In his "Explanation of Words," Gersonides adds that the "image" was made of metal (ed. Braner and Freyman, 377). Finally, it should be noted that Gersonides' interpretation is cited in a slight variant by Abravanel. See *Abravanel's Commentary on the Torah* [Hebrew], vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1979), 331.

[48] Gersonides, on 1 Samuel 19:13.

[49] In this connection see Charles Touati, *La pensée philosophique et théologique de Gersonides* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1973), 458–459; Daniel J. Lasker, "Gersonides on Dreams, Divination and Astrology," *Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division C (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies: 1982), 47–52; Hayyim Kreisel, "The Verification of Prophecy in Medieval Jewish Philosophy" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 4 (1985): 13–17; idem, "Veridical Dreams and Prophecy in the Philosophy of Gersonides" [Hebrew], *Daʿat* 22 (1989): 73–84; Sara Klein-Braslavy, "Prophecy, Clairvoyance, and Dreams and the Concept of *Hitbodedut* in Gersonides' Thought" [Hebrew], *Daʿat* 39 (1997): 23–68. Gersonides' approach influenced Jewish philosophy in the fourteenth century and later. See, for instance, Norman Frimer and Dov Schwartz, *The Life and Thought of Shem Tov ibn Shaprut* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben Zvi and the Hebrew University, 1992), 153–156.

mental faculties. The effigy helps the diviner focus his imaginative faculty at regular times and propose a detailed forecast of the future. The *terafim* thus help to reveal "a few correct things [in the future]... but many false things will be imagined together with them."[50] In other words, the use of *terafim* did not guarantee a more accurate, complete prediction of the future than divination or dreaming.

Moreover, judging from this passage, Gersonides believed that making an image or an effigy was useful as a means of psychological concentration (the imaginative faculty would be "isolated from the other mental faculties"), and the diviner used images and effigies in order to isolate the imaginative faculty and focus on it. Gersonides contrasted the use of effigies for divination, which he considered religiously illegitimate and representative of negative values, with a symmetric, positive application: the use of sacrifices as an aid to prophecy. Sacrifices play the role of the effigy or the image in the prophetic process. The prophet, therefore, uses a sacrifice in order to isolate his intellect from his other mental faculties and concentrate on it, thus achieving prophetic inspiration. Discussing Noah's sacrifices after the Flood, Gersonides writes:

> We will see that the matter of sacrifice is a preparation for prophecy to emerge, as I shall explain, and that is... that in the matter of prophecy it is necessary to isolate the intellect from the other mental faculties, and therefore that may be achieved only when the other faculties cease their activities, and to that end the prophet who wishes to prophesy must awaken his intellectual faculty and put his other faculties to sleep... So you find in the matter of sacrifices that they awaken the intellect and put the sensory faculties to sleep, and that is because, when the animal is slaughtered and cut in pieces and burnt by fire, the sensible soul is suppressed, as cannot be ignored...[51]

Even in this description of the positive mode of foretelling the future—prophecy—Gersonides employs magical terminology. Later, he refers to the process whereby the prophet receives prophecy from the Active Intellect by means of a typical magic-astral term, "reception

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[50] Gersonides on 1 Samuel 15:23.

[51] Gersonides (Ms.), 21a; ed. Levi, 93; ed. Braner–Freiman, 173. See *Milhamot ha-Shem*, 2, ch. 5 (Riva di Trento, 1560), 19b–d. In his Torah commentary, Gersonides explains (196d) that Balaam himself was commanded to build seven altars to enable him to prophesy: "'I have set up the seven altars' [Numbers 23:4]—He imagined that the Lord had commanded him to do so beforehand, so as to be inspired by prophecy."

of a supreme power" (*koah elyon*): "It was clear to our Sages... that the Temple is the place that is best prepared to receive supreme power; they reached this conclusion because the altars that the ancients had built to the Lord, may He be exalted, were in that place, that is, on Mount Moriah."[52] So the supreme power is the emanation that causes prophecy. Clearly, then, Gersonides seems to have shifted the magical principle once more to the psychological level: When the supreme power is brought down, the prophet's intellect is fertilized by emanation from the Active Intellect. This principle is reiterated in his interpretation of the priestly vestments. The high priest's breastplate, he writes, is used to "decide future events of which he may be asked."[53] That is why the *Urim* and *Thummim* were placed in the breastplate: "And the *Urim* and *Thummim* were the reason that prophecy came to him, by way of his contemplation of the essence of the First Cause, and accordingly his intellect is isolated from among the other mental faculties, and that is the reason for the arrival of prophecy concerning the matter with which his thought was occupied."[54] Clearly, the *Urim* and *Thummim* were intended to isolate the prophet's power of intellect and, through this psychological concentration, the priest could predict the future.

Let us return now to the manufacture of images or effigies as a means to capture spirituality. Gersonides' consideration of the practice as an aid to the diviner's art also shaped his halakhic ruling on that question—he forbade the manufacture of images as a violation of the prohibition of divination. Here is his comment on "one who practices divination" [*kosem kesamim*] (Deuteronomy 18:10):

> This is a person who performs certain actions so that his thought should be isolated and he should foretell the future by divination; and this includes many varieties, some more execrable than others, but all are forbidden as negative precepts. The Torah forbade such practices because

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[52] Ibid., 21b; ed. Levi, 94; ed. Braner–Freiman, 174.

[53] Ibid., 106c.

[54] Ibid., 106d. According to Gersonides, the *Urim* and *Thummim* alluded to the origins of reality (the former to matter or primeval natural heat, the latter to the primeval form), so that concentration upon them brought about contemplation of "the essence of the First Cause." See also Moshe Idel, "*Hitbodedut* as Concentration in Jewish Philosophy" [Hebrew], in Moshe Idel, Zeev Harvey, and Eliezer Schweid, eds., *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume: On the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought, 1988), 50–51; Funkenstein, "Gersonides' Biblical Commentary," 314.

> they lead to negative things, for this variety of announcement involves falsehood, and there are varieties that come very close to being idolatry, and that is when they make images and offer them a little incense and imagine that the image will then talk to them.[55]

In any event, Gersonides denied the reality and efficacy of astral-magical practices, as had Maimonides before him. Indeed, while Gersonides recognized astrology in principle and in the theological context, and was quite proficient in its techniques[56] (unlike Maimonides or Isaac Pollegar, his Spanish contemporary, both of whom were opposed to astrology), he did not go so far as to attribute any reality to astral magic or magical practices in general. Of the Egyptian magicians [in the book of Genesis] Gersonides writes:

> I believe that the wise men were people who were proficient in Egyptian science, and the essence of that science was to invent the science of sorcery, with which they performed acts that cannot be achieved by natural means. They do so either by sleight of hand, which makes one think that they are doing what they are not doing; or by inventing natural devices that create strange things that look as if they were produced by sorcery; or by performing those strange acts by the method of sorcery, if it prove possible to produce them by sorcery as if they were true acts. And we do not know to this day the essence of that sorcery and its nature, and for that reason we have not seen fit to speak of it.[57]

Gersonides lists in this passage three possible explanations for acts of sorcery:

1. Sleight of hand.
2. "Natural devices" that produce "strange things." This probably refers to natural phenomena that have been observed and are sometimes attributed to the action of the heavenly bodies. According to this explanation, sorcery derives from the sorcerer's use of frequent testimony ("experience") as to natural phenomena that

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[55] Gersonides on the Torah, 255c.

[56] See, for instance, Joseph Shatzmiller, "Gersonides and the Jewish Community of Orange in His Day" [Hebrew], in B. Oded et al., eds. *Studies in the History of the Jewish People and the Land of Israel*, vol. 2 (Haifa: Haifa University, 1972), 122–123; Gad Freudenthal, "Epistémologie, astronomie et astrologie chez Gersonide," *REJ* 145 (1986): 357-365; idem, "Levi ben Gershon as a Scientist: Physics, Astronomy and Eschatology," *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division C (Jerusalem 1990, 65-72; Bernard R. Goldstein, "Levi ben Gerson's Astrology in Historical Perspective," *Gersonide en son temps: science et philosophie medievales* (Louvain: E. Peeters, 1991), 287-300.

[57] Gersonides on the Torah, 58c.

take place, as then believed, as a result of astral influence. Since the observer is not acquainted with these phenomena, the magician presents them as if he himself had caused them. Such phenomena were associated in the fourteenth century with another area, that of experience: the science of regular phenomena that cannot be explained by the qualitative structure of a given object, such as the efficacy of medicines or the attraction of iron by a magnet.[58] It is not inconceivable that Gersonides in the above passage was proposing an explanation of sorcery, according to which the sorcerer simply makes use of experientially discovered phenomena but presents them as produced by sorcery.[59]

3. Literal recognition of magical acts ("by the method of sorcery"). Yet, Gersonides considered this a merely hypothetical possibility, "if it prove possible to produce them by sorcery," and actually did not recognize the reality of sorcery. Acts of sorcery, therefore, do not go beyond the limits of natural regularity, whether visible or invisible, as in the discoveries of experimental science.

Gersonides' position may thus be summarized as follows: (1) Astral magic is efficacious in the psychological domain only, that is, in *isolating the imaginative faculty from the other mental faculties in order to foretell the future*. This proposition is in conflict with the view of Meiri and Kokhavi, who see no benefit in making images, not even as psychological aids. (2) As far as the halakhic prohibition is concerned, the manufacture of images belongs to the category of augury or divination (*kosem*), in contrast to Meiri and Kokhavi, who associate it with soothsaying (*meʿonen*). Similarly, Gersonides does not consider the maker of such images as having violated two negative precepts, but only one.

The Popular Belief

Another position to be considered together with Gersonides' is that of Jedaiah ha-Penini Bedersi. On the one hand, this thinker clearly

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[58] See Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, ch. 1.

[59] On the definition of experiment in relation to astrology (Arabic *tajriba*) see Yitzhak Tzvi Langermann, "Maimonides' Repudiation of Astrology," *Maimonidean Studies* 2 (1991): 136; idem, "Gersonides on the Magnet and the Heat of the Sun," in Gad Freudenthal, ed., *Studies on Gersonides* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 269–275. See also the discussion of the term in my *Astral Magic*, p. 52 n. 58.

admitted the efficacy of astrology as a psychological aid[60] but, on the other, he firmly denied any reality to magic-astral practice. We already know that Abba Mari Astruc was successful in his efforts to persuade Rashba to ban any study of philosophy below a certain age and allegorical exegesis of the Bible. Jedaiah ha-Penini, then a young scholar, sent a long letter, entitled *Ketav Hitnazzelut* ("Apologia"), in which he defended Provençal scholars against the accusations of Rashba and his court. In the course of a long list of the merits of speculative science, he pointed out that philosophy upholds the omnipotence of God. The meaning of the term "omnipotence" as a divine attribute is that all powers are concentrated in God's hands, contrary to popular belief in magical powers. In the same breath, Jedaiah defined astral magic as a popular belief, describing it as follows:

> It is similar to many of the kinds of hidden powers that people speak of, which cannot be numbered, even though today most of them have been forgotten. This is like bringing down spirituality upon effigies made of a certain matter at certain times so that they emit human speech in the language of those who made them and they prophesy, recounting hidden things, and they are called talismans. Ignorant nations used to stray after them and abandon the real truth.[61]

Elsewhere, however, Jedaiah argued that the future can be known in two ways: through astrological calculation, and through arousal of the imaginative faculty. The imaginative faculty may be aroused by sleep, for when people are asleep their physical faculties are passive and imagination is capable of predicting the future during a dream. The imagination may also be awakened by the would-be seer "handling material things a little." By "material things" he meant sorcerers' practices, such as augury and divination.[62] This implies that Jedaiah

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[60] As follows from his midrashic interpretations. See, for instance, Jedaiah ha-Penini, *Be'urim ʿal ma'amarei hazal be-midrash Tehillim*, ed. Solomon Buber (Cracow, 1891), 19-20.

[61] *Ketav ha-Hitnazzelut*, in Rashba, *Responsa* (Bologna, 1539), 81a. By "hidden powers" Jedaiah apparently meant experientially known discoveries, which he defined as popular beliefs. But it becomes clear from the sequel to this passage that Jedaiah indeed accepted the truth of careful, tested, experimental discoveries; his argument was that the prevalence of superstitions had blurred that truth: "...Although it includes true things, taken from natural *segullot* that cannot be confirmed by logic, there is an admixture of innumerable things that are madness and falsehood, which possess no reality of any kind" (*ibid.*). On *Ketav ha-Hitnazzelut* see Ernest Renan, *Les écrivains juifs français du XIV siècle* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1877), 31–36 [377–382].

[62] *Ketav ha-Hitnazzelut*, 79b. Levi b. Abraham also believed in the efficacy of

ha-Penini, too, believed that the devices employed by sorcerers had some psychological ability to single out certain mental faculties from others.

In sum: Gersonides and Jedaiah ha-Penini represent, as it were, an intermediate position. On the one hand, it does not deny the efficacy of the manufacture of images; on the other, it refuses to recognize the reality of astral-magical practices, such as bringing down stellar spirituality on images or effigies.

"Healing Images" as an "Ancient Wisdom": The Believers' Position

In contrast to the thinkers hitherto considered, some Provençal scholars believed unreservedly in the reality of astral magic and did not hesitate to grant it halakhic legitimacy. This section will examine the views of Levi b. Abraham, an astronomer and astrologer whose teachings were the focus of the controversy over philosophy in the early fourteenth century.[63] Levi's main offense was the radical rational allegorization in his commentaries on the Bible and the Midrash, but he was also indirectly connected with the dispute over astral magic. A perusal of his writings reveals that he was convinced of the reality of practices aimed at the capture of spirituality and considered them halakhically legitimate. Before describing the halakhic aspects, let us consider the systematic foundation of astral magic as posited by Levi b. Abraham.

"incense burning and the like" to arouse the magician's imaginative faculty (*Livyat Hen*, Ms. Munich 58, 15a). Gersonides and Jedaiah, however, argued that there is nothing more to such acts, while Levi considered them as applicable to medicine (see next section).

[63] On Levi as an astronomer see Gad Freudenthal, "Sur la partie astronomique du *Liwyat Hen* de Levi ben Abraham ben Hayyim," *REJ* 148 (1989): 103-112, which includes a detailed table of contents of the astronomical section of *Livyat Hen*. On Levi's part in the controversy over philosophy see Abraham S. Halkin, "The Ban on the Study of Philosophy" [Hebrew], *Perakim* 1 (1967–1968): 35–55; idem, "Why was Levi ben Abraham Hounded?," *PAAJR* 34(1966): 65–76; idem, "Yedaiah Bedersi's Apology," in Alexander Altmann, ed., *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 165–184; Charles Touati, "La controverse de 1303–1306 autour des études philosophiques et scientifiques," *REJ* 117 (1968): 21–37; Dov Schwartz, "Changing Fronts in the Controversies over Philosophy in Medieval Spain and Provence," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 7 (1997): 75–79; idem, "'Greek Wisdom': A Reexamination in the Period of the Controversy over the Study of Philosophy" [Hebrew], *Sinai* 104 (1989): 148-153.

In the astrological chapter of his major work, *Livyat Hen*, Levi renders a comprehensive and detailed account of how the stars exert their qualitative influence on the earth, referring in particular to two relevant modes of influence: (1) Influence on health and illness: "[The astrologers] assigned to each of the planets, which possesses power in its sign [of the Zodiac], sicknesses of certain limbs."[64] (2) Influence on the creation of forms in the terrestrial world: "It would seem that [the astrologers] assigned to each planet certain of the forms according to the form of the (fixed) stars which have power and disposition, for simple forms produce compound forms and act upon them..."[65] The combination of these two influences yields astral-magical practice:

> Therefore, those proficient in images believe that the planet has power over its own special images, which they make when it is in government and power. Also specific to them according to their particular temperaments are certain diseases and resistance to some diseases. Thus, specific to Venus are diseases of the white [fluid], and to Mars, those of the red.... One makes of what is assigned to each planet a stone that is laid under [a person] at the proper time, when the ascendant is associated with a specific sign [of the Zodiac]; and we need not go into more detail.[66]

Not only did Levi recognize the reality of astral magic, but actually considered it a remnant of "ancient wisdom," quoting from a book entitled *Introduction to Forms* that he attributed to Galen:

> The Jews possess stories that have been written and ancient legends in their books that teach what we have described. And these are told in an allusive style.... For the spiritual elite [*segullot*, the intellectuals] does not need the knowledge of the multitude, and the multitude does not need the knowledge of the elite. And he [Galen] said of the first to hint at these things, that is, Enoch [Hermes], that he had alluded to three things before the spirituality lifted him up. It is not necessary to mention them, for his words refer to the spirituality of the stars and the actions

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[64] *Livyat Hen*, "Fortieth Gate: On the Powers of the Stars," Ms. Paris 1066/1, 7b. In the following discussion, several of the various surviving versions of this work will be used. See Colette Sirat, "Les différentes versions du Livyat Hen de Levi b. Abraham," *REJ* 122 (1963), 167-177.

[65] *Livyat Hen*, 1066/1, 7b.

[66] Ibid., 7b–8a. Levi denied the truth of popular, non-astral magic, including it in the category of forbidden science ("Greek wisdom"). See Schwartz, "'Greek Wisdom: A Reexamination," 150. It is an interesting point that, during the fourteenth century, "Greek wisdom" was identified with the capture of spirituality. See Dov Schwartz, "More on the Issue of Greek Wisdom in Jewish Thought in the Fourteenth Century" [Hebrew], *Sinai* 105 (1990): 94–95.

> of the images by virtue of what they have captured from the powers of the stars and the *segullot*.[67]

The passage attributed to Galen presents a Hermetic tradition concerning the antiquity of the magical secrets to which the Jews are privy; the source of these secrets is "Enoch," a name for Hermes.[68] Levi himself proposed an interpretation of the passage quoted from Galen:

> When he said "the spirituality lifted him up," he apparently meant that because of [Enoch] secluding himself with wisdom and contemplating the upper worlds, he ascended to God, as it is said, "then he was no more, for God took him" [Genesis 5:24]. And they have also said that certain images can be made at appropriate times that will heal some sicknesses. Perhaps, that is why the Philistines once made golden images of hemorrhoids in order to ward off the sickness of hemorrhoids that was a common sickness in their land, and the Lord, Who can change everything, nullified the powers of those images and afflicted them with hemorrhoids because of the Ark.[69] And they returned together with [the Ark], as a gift, those gold images that had misled them, for they had made them long before. Hence Israel, the wise, should trust only in the worship of God and his love, for He is our physician, our shield, and our shelter.[70]

Clearly, then, Levi b. Abraham believed in the real efficacy of making an image for medical purposes, and considered it legitimate ("certain images can be made at appropriate times"); this will be discussed in further detail below. Proof of his belief in the reality of magical

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[67] *Livyat Hen*, Ms. Vatican 192, 120b–121a (Gate of *Aggadah*). The use of the term "spirituality" for the influence of the stars and the dissemination of their "power" over the earth recurs in the writings of Levi b. Abraham. In "Gate of *Haggadah*" he indeed cites such a conceptual usage from the work *Moznei ha-Iyyunim*, misatribbuted to Averroes (134a). On this work see Alexander Altmann, "The Ladder of Ascension," *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 48, note 28; Binyamin Abrahamov, "The Sources of *Mozené ha-Iyyunim*" [Hebrew], *Daʿat* 34 (1995): 83–86. See Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, 120.

[68] The identification of Enoch and Hermes, as well as quotations from Hermetic literature attributed to Enoch, appear in the writings of the Neoplatonic circle discussed above. See, for instance, Solomon Alconstantin, *Megalleh Amuqqot*, Ms. Vatican 59, 10a; Solomon Franco, *Supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's Torah Commentary*, Ms. Oxford-Bodl. 1258 (Hunt. 559), 61a, 72a; Joseph Bonfils, *Tsafenat Paʿaneah*, vol. 1, ed. David Herzog (Cracow, 1912), 222.

[69] The words "and the Lord... the Ark" are erroneously repeated in the manuscript. The text is referring to the story in 1 Samuel 6:5–11.

[70] *Livyat Hen*, Ms. Vatican 192, 121a.

practices is his explanation of the Philistine episode: God had to act to nullify the influence of the images, since the making of images is an efficient means of healing.

The effect of astral magic could be used for good or evil. Levi presents astral-magical practice as an expression of evil ("black") magic in his synthetic interpretation of the *terafim*, Laban's household idols. His style relies directly on Ibn Ezra's exegesis:

> It would seem moreover that the *terafim* were also one of the tools of the astrologers with which they reveal the future, and that is obvious in the language of our Rabbis of blessed memory, when they speak of the *toref* [the body or main part] of a deed, and witness "and without ephod and *terafim*" (Hosea 3:4). Some have explained that it is an image made to capture the power of the upper worlds, as witness "the *terafim* have spoken vanity" (Zekharia 10:2). It seems to me that there are two kinds of *terafim*, one good and the other evil, and it is these that are mentioned.[71]

As an astrological tool, then, *terafim* are "good," but as an instrument to capture spirituality, they are to be considered "evil." Nevertheless, not all the aims of astral magic are evil. Levi considers the "worship of God," that is, the precepts of the Torah, as a means to bring down spirituality for medical or defensive purposes. This is consistent with a statement he makes elsewhere: "For one should behave in every place in accordance with the nature of the country and the power of the sign [of the Zodiac] that rules it."[72] *Divine worship as a whole is thus perceived as a positive theurgic means of capturing stellar emanation.*

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[71] *Livyat Hen*, Ms. Munich 58, 56a. On Ibn Ezra's exegesis see Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, ch. 2.

[72] Quoted from Colette Sirat, "Moses Narbonni's *Pirqey Moshe*" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 39 (1970): 299. The idea appears as an exposition of Ibn Ezra's commentary on Deuteronomy 31:16, and it was also common in fourteenth century Spain. See Dov Schwartz, "The Land of Israel in the Fourteenth Century Jewish Neoplatonic School" [Hebrew], in *The Land of Israel in Medieval Jewish Thought*, edited by Moshe Hallamish and Aviezer Ravitzky (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 1991), 146–149; Zeev Harvey, "The Uniqueness of the Land of Israel in the Thought of Crescas" [Hebrew], in *The Land of Israel in Medieval Jewish Thought*, ed. Moshe Hallamish and Aviezer Ravitzky (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 1991), 157-160. See also Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, ch. 9. According to Shlomo Pines, the idea that the precepts of the Torah were intended to capture "positive" spirituality may already be found, to some degree, in Judah Halevi. See ch. 1 above. See also Shlomo Pines, "On the Term *Ruhaniyyot* and its Origin and on Judah Halevi's Doctrine" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 57 (1988): 529, and Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, ch. 2. Levi, however, was opposed to a consistent astral-magical exegesis of the Torah; see below.

The idea that astral magic was an "ancient wisdom" harking back to the time of the ancient Hebrews was common in Provence, and Provençal scholars therefore used fictitious names, attributed to various eponyms. In quoting Galen's reference to Enoch, Levi was not the only scholar to cite Hermetic traditions. One work written in the second half of the fourteenth century, probably by a Provençal scholar, was *Maʿyan Gannim*.[73] Quoted in that work is an exegetical tradition about the stones in shoulder-pieces of the high priest's ephod, attributed to *The Book of Governance* by one "Alexander":

> Aristotle ordered seals to be made and the names of certain planets engraved on certain precious stones that are under the influence of those planets, at certain times, to perpetuate [Alexander's] dominance and rule, and Scripture therefore said of them, "stones for the remembrance of the Israelite people" (Exodus 28:12; 39:7).[74]

This tradition holds that astral magic yields certain advantages in the political realm. It describes the priest as endowed with leadership abilities that rely on stellar emanation and, as such, an aid to royalty. The author of *Maʿyan Gannim* considered Hermetic tradition to be an "ancient wisdom," writing that "the wisdom of these matters has been

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[73] *Maʿyan Gannim* is an allegorical-philosophical commentary on the Creation chapters of Genesis and on the book of Exodus. The author quotes mainly Provençal scholars (except, of course, Maimonides), so that the work is consistent with the Provençal insularity pointed out above. A few sources provide adequate illustration: *Maʿyan Gannim* quotes Samuel ibn Tibbon on 132b (Ms. Vatican 274); Moses ibn Tibbon, 143a; Jacob Anatoli, 137a–b; Moses Narboni, 127b, 129a, 131b. See also Colette Sirat, "La Pensée philosophique de Moïse ibn Tibbon," *REJ* 138 (1979): 506; Aviezer Ravitzky, "Aristotle's *Meteorologica* and the Maimonidean Exegesis of Creation" [Hebrew], *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume: On the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Moshe Idel, Warren Zeev Harvey and Eliezer Schweid (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought, 1988), 2: 238, 249.

[74] *Sefer Maʿyan Gannim*, Ms. Vatican 274, 156b. This tradition is also stated with the same attribution by Solomon Franco in his supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's Torah commentary, 72b. See Moritz Steinschneider, *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher: ein Beitrag zur Literaturgeschichte des Mittelalters, meist nach handschriftlichen Quellen* (Berlin: Kommissionsverlag des Bibliographischen Bureaus, 1893), 247. In connection with the attribution of a *Book of Governanc*e to "Alexander," we note that the Hermetic work *Picatrix* contains a whole chapter discussing planetary spirituality (dealing with *ruḥaniyyāt al-zuhāl* [the spirituality of Saturn] and *ruhaniyyat al-mirrikh* [the spirituality of Mars], and so forth), cited in the name of *"Kitabat al-Iskandar*." See, *Picatrix*, Part 3, ch. 9, in al-Majriti, *Picatrix von Pseudo-Magriti: Das Ziel des Wiesen*, vol. 3, trans. Hellmut Ritter and Martin Plessner (London: Warburg Institute, 1962), 223. Note that Alexander the Great was traditionally said to have used images and talismans in his wars; see Thorndike, *History of Magic*, vol. 2, 264.

lost, and this concerns all those matters written in this chapter [the chapter of the Torah dealing with the priestly vestments] although their explanations are unknown to us."[75]

Around the beginning of the fourteenth century, Kalonymus b. Kalonymus translated the *Centiloquium*, attributed to Ptolemy, with the commentary of Abu Jaʿfar Ahmed b. Yusuf b. Ibrahim. That work, too, features Hermetic-magical concepts, as has already been shown here.[76]

Since Levi b. Abraham (like the anonymous author of *Maʿyan Gannim* and perhaps also Kalonymus b. Kalonymus) recognized astral magic as a legitimate realm of "ancient science," he was clearly opposed to those who considered bringing down spirituality on effigies to be halakhically forbidden. Indeed, he seems to have feverishly sought some way of halakhically legitimizing the manufacture of effigies for medical purposes. His important account, in his work *Shaʿar ha-Haggadah*, deserves quoting in full:

> Therefore there are some who permit the making of some images at certain times depending on the powers of the stars to heal certain sicknesses, commanding that the image of a lion be made during the rule of the sun; of gold, for sickness of the kidneys; and the image of a scorpion for [its] bite; and for epilepsy [?][77] one makes the image of a

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[75] *Maʿyan Gannim*.

[76] As noted, Jacob b. Solomon ha-Zarfati also quotes from the *Centiloquium*. The book is also mentioned by Hasdai Crescas; see Renan, *Les écrivains juifs français*, 85, 431; Steinschneider, *Hebräischen Übersetzungen*, 529–530; Harvey, "Uniqueness of the Land of Israel," 158; Nathan Ophir, "Rabbi Hasdai Crescas as a Philosophical Commentator on Rabbinic Sayings" [Hebrew] (Ph.D. dissertation: Hebrew University, 1993), 174. On Kalonymus b. Kalonymus as translator and his position in the translation tradition see Alexander Marx, "The Scientific Work of Some Outstanding Mediaeval Jewish Scholars," in Israel Davidson, ed., *Essays and Studies in Memory of Linda R. Miller* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America,1938), 150–153; Alfred Lyon Ivry, "Philosophical Translations from the Arabic in Hebrew during the Middle Ages," in Jacqueline Hamesse and Marta Fattori, eds., *Rencontres de culture dans la philosophie médiévale* (Louvain-la-Neuve : Universite catholique de Louvain, Institut d'etudes medievales, 1990), 171. It should further be noted that Kalonymus b. Kalonymus translated astrological letters by al-Kindi, who was known for his writing on astrology and astral magic (his translations have been preserved in a large number of manuscripts; for example: Berlin 219.6; Munich 356.2; Paris 1055; Cambridge 343.16). See also Steinschneider, *Hebräischen Übersetzungen*, 563–565.

[77] Heb. *bi-nfol*. Perhaps the correct reading is *nofel*, in the sense here translated. Talmudic medicine considers flies the cause of a dermatological disease called *ra'atan* (TB Ketubbot 77b). There are various interpretations of the nature of this disease, including that of a disease consistent with epilepsy. Of course, it should be remembered

> fly of copper, to drive away any fly that might come there; and this is no doubt in the category of *segullah*.[78] Similarly, any image that is not one of the forbidden images, such as the human face if made in relief [three-dimensionally], or the image of a dragon, or the sun, or the moon, or the signs [of the Zodiac], even if not in relief. Perhaps that is permitted if done for medical purposes, for every educated person knows that God granted powers to the stars and to his other creatures. However, it is not appropriate to instruct the masses to do so, and it was in that context that [the rabbis] said, "[Hezekiah] hid away the Book of Cures, and [the rabbis] approved of it" [TB Berakhot 10b], for at that time people were attracted to the worship of images; and this is indicated by the parallel text of the Jerusalem Talmud in Tractate Nedarim, which states that he hid [the Book of Cures] in a tablet,[79] recalling the text, "R. Gamliel used to have a diagram of phases of the moon on a tablet [hung] on the wall, and so forth"[80] But the prohibition is not explicit in the text of Maimonides in Chapter 3 of the Laws of Idolatry, for there the author is speaking of images made for ornamentation, and there too he permits making images of animals, even in relief. Hence, it is permitted to make some signs [of the Zodiac], provided he does not intend the forms of the signs and show them in their configuration in the heavens. And as he explained in the *Guide* about the Book of Cures that Hezekiah hid away, that concerned [cures] accomplished with incense and magic spells, and that is almost sorcery, as we have noted previously.[81]

Levi's argument here is somewhat hesitant. The legitimization of making images is formulated as "there are some who permit." He similarly hedges his statements with such phrases as "perhaps that is permitted" or "but the prohibition is not explicit." Nevertheless, the final conclusion is quite radical: astral magic is entirely permissible from a halakhic point of view. Levi argues that making an image at a time that has been determined by astrological calculations is equivalent to *segullah*, that is, to a certain set of supposedly factual data attested by experience. Thus, making an image is subject to the same law as

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that talmudic medicine was not generally used in the Middle Ages; see Julius Preuss, *Biblical and Talmudic Medicine*, trans. Fred Rosner (New York : Sanhedrin Press, 1978), 347–350. I am indebted to Professor Shmuel Kotek for his comments.

[78] This term denotes findings that can be corroborated by "examination and experience" (ibid.). Levi is referring here to the pharmacological meaning of the term *segullah*, that is, he is stating that images are efficacious as medicines; see below.

[79] The manuscript has a lacuna here. The source in the Jerusalem Talmud is Nedarim 6:8, 40a; Pesahim 9:1, 36c.

[80] M. Rosh ha-Shanah 2:8.

[81] *Livyat Hen*, Ms. Vatican 192, 126a.

the legitimate use of a medication whose action cannot be explained on the basis of its qualities. Moreover, not only is it permitted to make an image for medical purposes; it is even *permissible to use effigies for such purposes*, even such as are halakhically forbidden because of the Second Commandment, such as human likenesses. There are, he writes, only two restrictions on using an image: (1) Concerning the form of a sign of the Zodiac, it is forbidden to "intend" the forms of the signs or to draw them exactly as they appear in the heavens. Levi, however, does not define what is meant by the verb "intend" (*kivven*). (2) The means for capturing stellar spirituality may not be combined with burning incense or magic spells.

But that is not all. Levi b. Abraham claims that his exposition is consistent with that of Maimonides. Now Maimonides declares in no uncertain terms that "it is forbidden to create an image of the sun and the moon, the planets, the signs [of the Zodiac] and the angels... even on a tablet."[82] Levi, however, rules that in any case "it is permitted to make some signs." Similarly, Maimonides rejects any recourse to the astrological system out of hand, even for medical purposes. Levi, for his part, takes a different halakhic stand, and permits the manufacture of remedial images. Conceptually speaking, Levi b. Abraham was absolutely convinced of the reality of astral-magical practice, that is, of man's ability to capture the spirituality of the stars and place it on images and effigies, and of the efficacy of such measures.

It would appear that Levi b. Abraham had some influence on other Provençal thinkers. Isaac de Lattes, an intellectual and historiographer active in Provence in the second half of the fourteenth century, wrote of Levi in tones of great admiration: "And the great scholar. R. Levi son of R. Abraham son of R. Hayyim was learned in all sciences, he wrote terrifying and wonderful works, one of them being the respected book *Livyat Hen*, a valued and respected book, whose merit is known only to a select few."[83] Levi b. Abraham was indeed an authoritative

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[82] Maimonides, *Code*, Laws of Idolatry 3:18.

[83] Isaac de Lattes, *Sha'arei Zion*, printed in Menahem ha-Meiri, *Seder ha-Kabbalah*, ed. Shlomo Zalman Havlin (Jerusalem and Cleveland: Ofeq Institute, 1992), 179. Lattes, himself a typical rationalist, clearly expresses his admiration for Levi b. Abraham. As Havlin notes here (147), *Sha'arei Zion* is just one section of a complete work, consisting of sixteen sections ("gates"), entitled *Toledot Yitzhak* or *Kiryat Sefer*. This work included a philosophical commentary on the Torah (Ms. Oxford-Bodl. 1298 [Mich. 602], Twelfth Gate, 74a ff.), of which an example is the interpretation of the Creation story according to the principles of Aristotle's *Meteorologica*, to be

figure among Provençal intellectuals. The scholar most influenced by him was Frat Maimon (Solomon b. Menahem). Frat Maimon refers to him with veneration as "my teacher" (*mori*), though they may never even have met. In addition, Frat Maimon wrote a commentary on Levi's rhymed poem *Batei ha-Nefesh ve-ha-Lehashim*. Frat Maimon and his three disciples Jacob Farissol, Nethanel Caspi and Solomon b. Judah of Lunel in effect formed a kind of philosophical circle whose thought was influenced by Levi b. Abraham.[84] Frat Maimon believed in the reality of astral magic, as he explicitly states in his supercommentary on Abraham ibn Ezra's Torah commentary. The passage in which he does so is probably an excerpt from a lost commentary on Judah Halevi's *The Kuzari*, which is quoted almost identically in the writings of his three disciples:

> Said my teacher [Frat Maimon]: It was to this that Ibn Ezra alluded in the Torah portion *ve-Zoth ha-Berakhah* [Deuteronomy 33-34], where he wrote: "'He buried him in the valley'—Know that the mountain of Abarim, which is Mount Nevo, is the image of a star [*kokhav*]..."[85] Now his statement that it is the image of a star merits attention. Indeed, he is referring to the image of the planet Mercury [*kokhav hammah*],[86] for you know its government over intellection, and its sphere is called the sphere of knowledge, and it is the ransom [redeemer] and the ruler of prophecy and truth and intellect and Torah and precepts. Now all these were precisely Moses' powers, and that place was already created at the time of Creation, and that mountain was shaped in the established image of the planet Mercury. And Moses, may he rest in peace, chose that place to be alone there and to take his leave of the world, and the power of that planet is greater in that place than in any other place, and in it there is more disposition than elsewhere for [spiritual] conjunction,

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found in the commentary *Toledot Yitzhak* to the Creation story. Another example is Lattes' use of a phrase commonly used by Joseph ibn Caspi, when he writes that "the multitude may be likened to animals" (ibid., 143a).

[84] On his circle of disciples see my articles: "A Study of the Philosophical Variety in Spain and Provence before the Expulsion" [Hebrew], *Pe'amim* 49 (1992): 12-15; "Contacts Between Jewish Philosophy and Mysticism in the Rise of the Fifteenth Century" [Hebrew], *Da'at* 29 (1992): 41-67; "Asceticism and Self-Mortification in Attitudes Held by a Provençal Circle of Commentators of the *Kuzari*" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 11 (1993): 79-91; "The Theology of the Provençal *Kuzari* Commentators' Circle" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 64 (1995): 401-421.

[85] Ibn Ezra, *Commentary on the Torah*, Deuteronomy 34:6.

[86] The Hebrew word for star or planet, *kokhav*, is also one of the names of the planet Mercury.

> in addition to the intellect and perfection that were in Moses our leader, may he rest in peace.[87]

Thus, Frat Maimon believed that the spirituality of the planet Mercury was a source of religious and intellectual merits, including prophecy. The emanation could not be received without the proper substrate ("preparation"), including a special place "the mountain of Abarim") and an image of the planet Mercury. Clearly, then, Frat Maimon believed in the reality of capturing celestial spirituality, even in reference to such areas as religious and intellectual perfection. His interpretation is a perfect example of astral magical exegesis of a biblical episode—the death and burial of Moses. It provides incontrovertible evidence that Levi b. Abraham's ideas had struck roots among Provençal rationalists, including his astral magical world view.

Frat Maimon's disciples, nevertheless, did not fully concur with his radical position on this issue, as evidenced by Solomon b. Judah's explicit reservations about such uses of magic.[88] In other words, around the beginning of the fifteenth century, attitudes to astral magic were again subjected to a reappraisal, resulting in a moderation of views. In the fourteenth century, however, and even before that, Levi b. Abraham and the members of his circle overtly and boldly upheld the use of astral-magical practices, both *per se* and from a strictly halakhic viewpoint.

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[87] Jacob Farissol, *Beit Yaakov*, Ms. Berlin 124, 18b; Netanel Caspi, *Commentary on The Kuzari* (erroneously identified as *Edut le-Yisrael*, the lost commentary of Frat himself), Ms. Paris 677/1, 21b (neither of the latter mention Frat by name); Solomon b. Judah, *Heshek Shelomo*, Ms. Oxford 2383, 20b. This commentary is cited anonymously ("It is said..." *[yesh omer]*) in *Meqor Hayyim* by Samuel ibn Zarza, active in Spain at the same time as Frat *(Meqor Hayyim*, Mantua 1559, 129c). Moses is portrayed in the above passage as a magician, and in that respect Frat is actually invoking an age-old tradition. The portrayal was also reinforced by the comparison of Moses and Balaam. See Moshe Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," in Bernard D. Cooperman, ed., *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 202-203; Dorit Cohen-Alloro, *Magic and Sorcery in the Book of the Zohar* [Hebrew] (Ph.D. dissertation: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1989), 141-178.

[88] See above, pp. 133-135. Further examples of this reserved attitude will be cited in my forthcoming edition of the commentary of Solomon b. Judah of Lunel on *The Kuzari.*

Astral Magic as a Theological Factor

The attitudes represented by Levi b. Abraham and his circle attracted other Provençal thinkers, though none of them actually dealt with the halakhic aspect of the issue. In their commentaries on various sources, they treated the capture of celestial spirituality as a *fait accompli.* They went beyond Levi himself; he had argued forcefully that it was permissible to practice astral magic for medical purposes but, as will be seen below, he opposed the use of its principles in biblical exegesis. In contrast, Nissim of Marseilles, Moses Narboni, and others wrote commentaries that offered expressly magical interpretation of the sacred texts and, through them, magical exegesis gained wide acceptance. The point of departure of these thinkers was rooted in Avicenna's doctrine that the perfect man, by virtue of his mind or his intellectual and scientific level, could control nature and perform wonders and miracles.[89] Astral magic practice reflected one aspect of this wondrous ability.

One central theological issue that provided wide scope for astral-magical conceptions was of course the explanation of the reasons for the sacrifices. As noted, the magical aspect of sacrifice is twofold: in a positive sense, the sacrifice is a means for capturing spirituality; in a negative sense, it serves as a "ransom" and scapegoat, mitigating the negative affect of the heavenly bodies or diverting it to the sacrifice itself. Many sacrifices were offered at set times (the daily burnt offering, additional sacrifices on the Sabbath and festivals, and so on). This temporal element immediately links the sacrificial rites with astral magic, which also depends on temporal calculations. It was thus quite natural that fourteenth-century rational thinkers wove astral magic into their theological perceptions of sacrifice.

We begin with Nissim of Marseilles. Like Gersonides, he believed that sacrifices had a psychological purpose. A sacrifice helped the prophet focus his faculties of thought and imagination and concentrate them, so that he could predict the future: "[The patriarchs, the prophets, and so forth] would prepare their thought and arouse their imagination to this, not diverting attention to any other, extraneous thought." But Nissim went further than Gersonides in the magical implications he attributed to the act of offering a sacrifice. In his view,

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[89] See Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, 19.

the odor of the burning inner parts of the animal was a real aid to knowledge of the future, after the manner of "diviners, priests of high places, Baal, Astarte, and those who make images and talismans."[90] The magical object of the sacrifice was thus prediction of the future and, as such, it was used mainly by the prophet. Sacrificial rites, then, have political and communal significance, reflected in their contribution to the prediction of the future.

Moses Narboni, who was born in Provence but emigrated to Spain, viewed sacrifices as means for the capture of spirituality, but endowed magical practices with a much broader object: to maintain the proper order of social and religious life in the Land of Israel. His point of departure was the astrological theory of climate, according to which the world is divided into seven climates, each affected by one of the seven planets. *The sacrificial rites were designed to capture the spirituality of the planet*, particularly influencing the Land of Israel. As he writes:

> As you already know, the scholars apportioned each climate to a particular guardian angel, and so it is with respect to all climates. And the true scholars said that the earthly Temple was in correspondence with the heavenly Temple,[91] and therefore the Torah commanded all those things that are remnants of the heavenly Temple, and rejected things that are repulsive to it.[92]

Clearly, then, Narboni saw in sacrifices a means for capturing spirituality, and considered such astral-magical practices absolutely necessary for the welfare of the Jews in the Land of Israel: "For since the matter of the sacrifices is a great secret, to be divulged only to a

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[90] *Ma'aseh Nissim*, ch. 14, in Joshua Heschel Schorr, *He-Halutz* 7 (1865): 130. Part of the passage is cited by Sirat, "Moses Narbonni's *Pirqei Moshe*," 300–301.

[91] See TB Ta'anit 5a. Narboni gives the well-known idea of a heavenly Jerusalem (or Temple) analogous to the earthly city (or Temple)—an expression of the Platonic doctrine of ideas—a magical interpretation. See Victor Aptowitzer, "The Heavenly Temple in the Agada" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 2 (1931): 137–153, 257–287; Ephraim E. Urbach, "Earthly and Heavenly Jerusalem" [Hebrew], in *The World of the Sages* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988), 376–391.

[92] *Pirqei Moshe*, ch. 3, in Sirat, "Moses Narbonni's *Pirqei Moshe*," 305. This climatic theory is common to Narboni, the author of the supercommentary *Perush ha-Sodot* on Ibn Ezra, and Nissim of Marseille. See Hayyim Kreisel, "The Land of Israel and Prophecy in Medieval Jewish Philosophy" [Hebrew], in Moshe Hallamish and Aviezer Ravitzky, *The Land of Israel in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Jerusalem: Yad Yitshak Ben Zvi, 1991) 50–51. On astral climatology see Alexander Altmann, "The Climatological Factor in Yehudah Hallevi's Theory of Prophecy" [Hebrew], *Melilah* 1 (Manchester 1944), 4–8, 13.

select few, it was given to the priests, and it is therefore quite clear that the spirituality to which we are referring is received through the burning [of the sacrifice], and it maintains the land and its people, illuminating them."[93]

This concept of the Temple as a talisman capable of absorbing heavenly emanation was also adopted by Frat Maimon's disciple Nethanel Caspi in his commentary on *The Kuzari*. Judah Halevi had stated in his work (4:3) that the word "*adonay*" as a divine name could also be assigned to certain objects, such as the light of the glory. Caspi explained that this name also applied to celestial spirituality. Commenting on Judah Halevi's statement, "When one is referring to a divine thing, one says, *adonay*, [the name written] with *alef*, *dalet*, *nun*, *yod*... alluding to what exists facing him in the place,"[94] he explains: "What he means is that when we say *adonay*, this alludes to what is facing the speaking prophet, that is, to the force that comes from the ruler in accordance with its presence in the place where the prophet is standing, for the emanation will flow and be received in accordance with the preparation of the place."[95] Prophecy, then, is achieved as a consequence of the star's spirituality. Caspi relies on the theory of special places, according to which there exist places that are particularly disposed to capture celestial emanation. The prophet secludes himself in such places and is granted his prophecy. The special places are also considered appropriate for sacrifices. A few lines later, Judah Halevi writes, "There are many attributes for a single essence, because of the changing of the receptive place." Caspi's explanation invokes the

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[93] *Pirqei Moshe*. The meaning of the last two words in this passage, translated here as "illuminating them," is not clear. The phrase may also be understood as "giving rest." The whole topic is treated by Gitit Holtzman, "The Reasons for the Commandments according to Rabbi Moses Narboni" [Hebrew], *Assufot: Annual for Jewish Studies* 9 (1995): 281–283.

[94] Hebrew *"mah she-ke-negdo ba-makom."* This is the reading in the manuscript of Caspi's commentary. Judah ibn Tibbon, however, translates, "alluding to what is limited in the place" *(mah she-yugbal ba-makom*; ed. Tzifroni, p. 212 line 15). Ibn Tibbon's translation seems to be a more faithful rendering of the Arabic text in *Al-Kitab al-Khazari*, ed. David H. Baneth (Jerusalem: Magnes Press and the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1977), 153, l. 28. Caspi offers an astrological interpretation, following the translation adjoining his commentary, which alludes to the planet aligned with the specific place.

[95] Commentary o*n The Kuzari*, Ms. Paris 677, 120b. The passage is quoted verbatim in *Beit Yaakov*, Jacob Farissol's commentary on *The Kuzari*, 94a–b. This implies that both Caspi and Farissol were quoting their teacher Frat Maimon.

same principle: "The receptive place alludes to the Sanctuary and to Mount Moriah, which were chosen in accordance with their disposition to emanation, as Scripture says, 'This is the gate of heaven [Genesis 28:17]."[96] Nethanel Caspi thus agrees with Narboni's thesis that the Temple was designed as a substrate for the capture of spirituality.[97]

It follows from the discussion of the sacrifices that not only was astral magic granted a legitimate status for medical purposes, but it also became an important theological and exegetical component in the writings of Provençal rationalists. As argued above, this process was a radicalization even of the positions expressed by Levi b. Abraham. That author, in the short version of his *Livyat Hen*, consistently refrained from astral-magical interpretations that might have been relevant. For example, he objected to describing the Temple as a talisman for the capture of spirituality; he explained incense as merely a source of pleasant odor, rather than as a means to capture spirituality.[98] His interpretation of the Temple and the sacrifices is different, following that of Maimonides, according to which they were intended to counteract such gentile practices as the capture of spirituality. As an example, here is Levi's explanation for the burning of incense:

> The meaning of the incense is that the worshipers of images used to burn incense to the heavenly host. Maimonides said that since the Creator commanded us to honor and magnify His Temple and fear Him and glorify Him, there is no doubt that because of the constant slaughter and dismemberment of many animals, the place will have an evil and repulsive smell for the multitude. He therefore commanded that incense be burnt there always for the benefit of its odor and its worship.[99]

While Levi offered an astronomical and astrological interpretation of the Tabernacle and its appurtenances, he insisted that they symbolized truths and intelligibles associated with the world of the spheres—truths

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[96] Commentary o*n The Kuzari*, 121a.

[97] The connection between prophecy and the Temple and its rites as talismans, that is, as means for the capture of spirituality, became a particularly well-known doctrine in Renaissance Italy; see Idel, "Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations," 203-206.

[98] *Livyat Hen*, Ms. Munich 58, 44a–b. As noted, incense was an important ingredient in magical practices for healing purposes.

[99] Ibid., 43b. The reference is to *Guide of the Perplexed* 3:32. See also in the short version of *Livyat Hen*, 45a: "Those fools used to sacrifice and burn incense to them besides other rites, because they thought that this would be pleasant and proper for those powers."

intended for contemplation and study, not to be explained as properly magical means. One could, he believed, agree with astrological interpretations, but it was forbidden to base such interpretations on "the science of images." Similarly, he denied that the magical interpretation of the biblical story of Balaam, who was indeed a magician and prepared altars for sacrifices and incense, could have any relevance for the present. As he wrote:

> The reason for the small number of priests and sorcerers in our time is to deny belief in them, and to persecute and wipe out anyone who uses this technique; and no one prepares himself and works in such things at all, unless brought to it by his natural disposition. And perhaps the reason is that when it was common it endowed the heavenly system extant at that time with power; but now the temperaments have weakened, as have the proper preparations for that, as they said in connection with the lack of prophecy at that time.[100]

Possibly, Levi's attitude to astral magic evolved in time to some extent. It is equally plausible, however, that he distinguished magical practice *per se*, which was absolutely permissible since intended for remedial purposes, from the idea that such practice could be a central theological principle for the interpretation of the Bible. Astral magic had thus become in Levi b. Abraham's estimation a useful tool, of considerable practical importance, but not an essentially religious factor that could shape a consistent theological worldview. The Provençal rationalists of the later fourteenth century, however, thought otherwise. *They had no scruples about presenting the Temple as a talisman and the sacrifices as means for the capture of spirituality*. As already stated, Nissim of Marseilles, Moses Narboni and Nethanel Caspi did directly consider the halakhic aspects of astral magic. Nevertheless, it seems plausible that the fusion of the principles of astral magic with basic theological perceptions also helped to enhance its halakhic legitimization in the controversy that flared up in the fourteenth century.

Conclusions

In light of the description of the various perceptions of astral magic in Provence, it becomes necessary to reexamine the following historical

[100] That is, in the present; ibid., 16a.

and ideological conceptions about the intellectual climate of Provence in the fourteenth century:

1. The ideological and halakhic argument about astral magic was not inspired only by the controversy over the study of philosophy; Provençal thinkers were concerned with attitudes to astral magic in and of itself. Presumably, the fanatical attack of Abba Mari Astruc of Lunel was associated with that issue, rather than with the dispute over philosophy and allegorical exegesis. Moreover, Hermetical traditions were part of the rationalists' regular curriculum, a fact that left its mark in their medical practice. Abba Mari Astruc considered this grounds for his attack due to the closeness to idolatry, since he himself believed in the reality of astral magic as such. He unhesitatingly recognized popular magic, which dealt in charms and spells against demons.[101] He objected to astral magic as an area characteristic of the rationalists, relying as it did on comprehensive, accurate astrological knowledge. This assumption also contributes to our conception of the figure of the rationalist at the time.
2. The controversy revolved mostly around the medical uses of magic. Presumably, then, a distinction was drawn between the use of astral magic for medical as opposed to other purposes. As noted,[102] the major opponent of astral magic, Maimonides, permitted certain practices of a magical nature for healing, provided they were not astral. Possibly, then, medicine enjoyed a special status, implying some receptiveness to magic. This distinction deserves a separate discussion.
3. Many scholars have tended to play down Levi b. Abraham's contribution to the outbreak of the controversy. He is generally seen as a kind of scapegoat, a victim of events,[103] rather than an

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[101] See above, n. 33. On popular magic in Provence see, for instance, Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (New York: Atheneum, 1979), 68.

[102] Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, ch. 3.

[103] See, for instance, Halkin, "The Ban on the Study of Philosophy"; Yithzak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, trans. Louis Schoffman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publications Society, 1961), 292, 294; Frank Talmage, "Apples of God: The Inner Meaning of Sacred Texts in Medieval Judaism," in Arthur Green, ed., *Jewish Spirituality* (London: Crossroad, 1986), 341. Talmage cites examples of allegoristic interpretation of the commandments even by more moderate rationalists, such as Hasdai Crescas. In relation to the radical nature of allegorism, however, two important factors should not be ignored: (1) The context of the interpretation. The radicals

active intellectual agitator, whose inspired preaching was designed to disseminate his radical brand of rationalism; moreover, in the present context, he may be seen as a thinker bent on achieving the halakhic and theological legitimization of astral magic. I have tried to show elsewhere that, by dint of the radical nature of his philosophical doctrines, Levi might be considered a central, decisive factor in the outbreak of the controversy.[104] The present analysis clearly shows that his views provided zealous, determined support for astral-magical practices. Levi b. Abraham was no secondary figure, but a deliberately radical rationalist.

4. Scholars have also held that the controversy died down after the events of the ban (1305). It turns out, however, that the issues underlying the outbreak of the controversy continued to trouble Provençal thinkers of both camps at least until the beginning of the fifteenth century. Astral-magical interpretation of the sources took root and became a basic theological tool, while the traditionalists continued to prohibit astral-magical practices. I have proved elsewhere that this was true of the attitude to the study of philosophy and of the rationalist position in general,[105] and in the present context the situation is obvious as far as attitudes to astral magic are concerned. It is not inconceivable that the dispute should also be associated with the objections of the Church to astral magic at this time.

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proposed allegories that relied on rational principles, such as the Aristotelian world picture or the ideal of intellectualism; this was contrary to more general interpretations, which deal with such issues as spirit and matter, or body and soul in general. (2) The frequency and consistency of such interpretations and their public dissemination. A distinction is required between allegorical exegesis addressed to a limited intellectual elite, on the one hand, as opposed to consistent allegorical exegeses openly available to any reader or preacher. An example of a radical allegorical interpretation of the commandments that is both contextually rational and continuous appears in a circle of contemporary Spanish thinkers. See Dov Schwartz, "The Spiritual Decline of the Jewish Community in Spain at the End of the Fourteenth Century" [Hebrew], *Pe'amim* 46–47 (1991): 92-114.

[104] See Dov Schwartz, *Messianism in Medieval Jewish Thought* [Hebrew] (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1997), index, *s.v.* "Levi b. Abraham." Nevertheless, the dimensions of the controversy prior to the ban were sometimes violently irrational; in that respect, this controversy was no different from many others. See, for instance, Moshe Idel, "On the History of the Interdiction against the Study of Kabbalah before the Age of Forty" [Hebrew], *AJS Review* 5 (1980): 4–6.

[105] See my forthcoming edition of Solomon b. Judah's commentary on *The Kuzari.*

5. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, certain Provençal thinkers took a more moderate stand, firmly rejecting the use of astral magic, though still recognizing its reality and efficacy. This is the conclusion from the position of Solomon b. Judah of Lunel, and it is generally confirmed by an examination of the works of other thinkers of his circle.
6. Finally, it must be reiterated that the controversy over astral magic reveals a distinct difference between Spanish and Provençal thinkers. The latter tended to adopt well-defined, radical positions, bringing the controversy to the point of open confrontation. In Spain, however, attitudes are more moderate, as suggested by the hesitations expressed by Rashba, a resident of Barcelona. Whereas some condemn radical rationalism, others deplore the courtier class and Averroism, but criticism was couched in general terms: Shem Tov b. Shem Tov attacked theoretical perceptions, while Solomon El-Ami protested the general moral decline.[106] Provençal traditionalism, however, was concerned with eminently practical areas, such as the attitude to the medical uses of astral magic.

The study of the various contacts between proponents of the rationalist and traditionalist attitudes to astral magic in Provence may contribute to our understanding of the ideological climate in this area during the fourteenth century. This conclusion spans the boundaries of defined research areas, perhaps helping to delineate the ideological, historical, and polemical foundations of Provençal Jewry, as well as the dissemination of astrological and Hermetical traditions at the time.

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[106] See Schwartz, *Philosophy of a 14th Century Jewish Neoplatonic Circle*, 23–27.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CONTROVERSY IN SPANISH JEWRY

A unique fourteenth-century phenomenon was the writing of numerous supercommentaries on Abraham ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Torah.[1] Many thinkers chose to express their ideas as commentaries on Ibn Ezra's enigmatic teachings, while others sincerely sought after the meaning of the allusions in his commentary. Of all these supercommentaries, some were more influential than others. For example, as far as Ibn Ezra's linguistic comments and literal explanations are concerned, the supercommentary by Solomon ibn Ya'ish ("*ha-bahur*") had a considerable impact. On philosophical questions, Solomon Franco's supercommentary, written in the middle of the fourteenth century, was undoubtedly the best known, as well as the most fruitful and provocative of its kind.[2] It was severely, even ferociously, criticized, but would also be openly and covertly influential on the other.

The Background to the Controversy

Solomon Franco draws a clear distinction between his personal opinions and Ibn Ezra's authentic intentions, which are gradually revealed in

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[1] For the varieties of philosophical interpretation of Ibn Ezra's Torah commentary in this period see Uriel Simon, "Interpreting the Interpreter: Supercommentaries on Ibn Ezra's Commentaries," in *Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra: The Writings of a Twelfth-Century Polymath*, ed. Isadore Twersky and Jay Michael Harris (Cambridge: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 1993), 111–121; Dov Schwartz, *The Philosophy of a Fourteenth Century Jewish Neoplatonic Circle* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute 1996); idem, *Amulets, Properties and Rationalism in Medieval Jewish Thought* [Hebrew] (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press: 2004), 67-93.

[2] Franco has received sporadic attention over the years. See M. Friedlander, *Essays on the Writings of Abraham Ibn Ezra*, vol. 4 (London: Trubner, 1877), 242-243; Judah Leib Fleischer, "Commentaries on R. Abraham Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Torah" [Hebrew], *Otsar ha-Hayyim* 11, no. 3 (1934): 80–84; Yitzhak Tzvi Langermann, "From the Collections of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts of the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem" [Hebrew], *Kiryat Sefer* 59 (1984), 637–638; Dov Schwartz, "The Neoplatonic Movement in Fourteenth Century Jewish Literature: Its Relation to Medicine" [Hebrew], *Qorot* 9 (1990): 274–275.

the supercommentary. He seems to recoil from the extreme views he finds in Ibn Ezra's commentary, throwing up a barrier between his own views and those of Ibn Ezra. His task, he writes, is exclusively that of an interpreter; he does not identify with the object of his commentary. But his contemporaries refused to believe these sanctimonious protestations, and rightly so. They were sure that the conceptions Franco attributed to Ibn Ezra were his own: the rationalists cited them with open admiration, while the moderates and the traditionalists tore into them with uncompromising rage.

In the second half of the fourteenth century, Solomon Franco's supercommentary was indeed one of the direct causes of the dispute between conservatism and rationalism. The major criticism came from one of the most extreme conservatives, Abraham Altabib.[3] Arrayed against this formidable opponent were Franco's supporters, one of the most prominent of whom was Ezra Gatigno, who frequently quotes Franco appreciatively in his own supercommentary, *Sod ha-Shem li-Yre'av*, which claimed to clarify philosophically problematic passages in Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Torah. Though Gatigno is sometimes critical, he remains faithful to the spirit of Franco's comments and views. Gatigno cites verbatim much of Franco's exegesis, which provoked a furious controversy between Franco and Altabib. Gatigno was not alone in his position. Samuel ibn Zarza also cites Franco quite frequently, generally with approval, though without actually mentioning him by name. Finally, Shem Tov ibn Mayor also quotes frequently from Franco's supercommentary, agreeing with and supporting him, though he too did not hesitate to criticize him occasionally. Clearly, then, the controversy between Altabib and Franco was significant beyond its specific exegetical and philosophical context, with implications for the intellectual and cultural history of the Jews at that time.

Altabib's objections have not survived in their original form. Nevertheless, Franco, in most of his rebuttals, is careful—so he says—to quote Altabib's objections verbatim, so we may assume that they have indeed come down us relatively intact. Opening his answers to the critique, Franco summarizes Altabib's general accusations as they

[3] See Dov Schwartz, "R. Abraham Al-Tabib: The Man and His Oeuvre" [Hebrew], *Kiryat Sefer* 64 (1992): 1389–1401. In this article, I published fragments of Al-Tabib's supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's Torah commentary that have been preserved in other contemporary supercommentaries.

emerge from the numerous details. Here are Altabib's two complaints and Franco's responses:[4]

Accusation 1
Altabib:

> Franco's ideas in his supercommentary contradict the teachings of the Torah and rabbinic tradition.

Franco:

> These ideas are Ibn Ezra's views; he (Franco) himself believes in the literal meaning of the text.

Accusation 2
Altabib:

> Franco dares to attribute his perverse views to Ibn Ezra.

Franco:

> These views are well entrenched in Ibn Ezra's text that, although brief and allusive at times, is more expansive elsewhere, so that his "secrets" may be deciphered.

It is interesting that Franco does not deny Altabib's first complaint outright; he was fully aware that the ideas he was propounding were rational and radical, even somewhat antinomian. All he could say was that "the way of the Torah is one thing and the way of philosophy another; for myself, I have chosen the way of faith" (90a). This assertion, considered in the perspective of Franco's writings as a whole, raise doubts as to the soundness of the supposed barrier between his views and those of Ibn Ezra.[5]

Most of Altabib's objections that were founded on scientific assumptions lacked proper support in the actual text of Ibn Ezra; rather, they betray the attacker's conservative theology. Altabib's frequent

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[4] Figures in parentheses refer to Ms. Oxford, Bodl. 1258.

[5] Franco's statement essentially represents his Averroistic conception of dual truth, according to which the philosophic method is not applicable to religious learning, while the religious method is not suitable for philosophical discussion. Franco makes the statement in his response to Altabib's critique, below on pp. 93b–94a. On this concept in Franco's writings see Dov Schwartz, "The Fourteenth-Century Neoplatonic Trend in the Jewish Doctrine of Creation" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 60 (1991): 620; idem, "The Spiritual-Religious Decline of the Jewish Community in Spain at the End of the 14th Century" [Hebrew], *Pe'amim* 46-47 (1991): 104–105.

appeals to scientific— astronomical and astrological—principles was superficial. They generally fade and disappear in the face of Franco's scientific credentials as a knowledgeable astronomer and astrologer. Hence, Franco's rather hollow protestations about the barrier he had erected between Ibn Ezra and himself do not undermine his answers to his critic. While Altabib's purely scientific arguments were faulty, however, his theological objections were accurate: he pinpointed the problematic aspects of Franco's views, his not infrequent excursions to the very brink of Hermetic influence. One example is Franco's outspoken advocation of one certain species of idolatry—the worship of heavenly bodies—to which we now proceed.

The Controversial Issues

Those of Altabib's objections that relate to the status of astral magic seem to be quite apt; it was Franco who, in this context, twisted and turned, sometimes directly revealing his own radical views. Altabib sensed that, for Franco, the various precepts of the Torah were instruments to capture the spirituality of the heavenly bodies; in particular, the Tabernacle, the Temple, and the sacrifices became talismans whose task was to receive stellar emanation. In so doing, Altabib argued, Franco was legitimizing the worship of stars.[6]

Most probably, Franco himself realized that he had been too explicit, failing to conceal his allusions behind a sufficiently opaque veil. He therefore reiterated that worship of planets is nothing less than idolatry, absolutely forbidden for any devout Jew. He makes this declaration, for example, in connection with the observance of the Sabbath as induced by the influence of Saturn (*hassagah* 5, 93a–b); the prohibition of using iron in the building of the Tabernacle (*hassagah* 21, 100b); the reasons for the dietary laws (*hassagah* 27, 105a); and the motivations of

[6] On this exegetical and philosophical trend in the fourteenth century see Dov Schwartz, "The Land of Israel in the Fourteenth Century Jewish Neoplatonic School" [Hebrew], in Moshe Hallamish and Aviezer Ravitzky, *The Land of Israel in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 1991), 146–147; idem, "Varieties of Magic in Jewish Thought in Fourteenth Century Spain" [Hebrew], *PAAJR* 57 (1990–1991): 17–47; idem, "Astrology and Astral Magic in the Writings of R. Solomon Alconstantin" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 15 (1993): 37-82. The numbering of the objections [*hassagot*] follows the complete edition of the objections and answers published in Dov Schwartz, *Amulets, Properties, and Rationalism in Medieval Jewish Thought* [Hebrew] (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2004), 317-380.

the festivals (*hassagah* 28, 106a). But as Franco's arguments proceed, these overt repudiations of planetary worship ring rather hollow, and they ultimately prove false. As we shall see below, Franco was convinced that the Torah permits planetary worship in certain situations; concerning some of these situations this is stated quite explicitly, while for others his radical view is implicit in various allusions.

Thus, Franco based worship in the Tabernacle, particularly the sacrificial rites, and the reasons for the precepts in general on the idea that the spirituality of the heavenly bodies had to be brought down to the material world and the planets themselves worshiped. We will now review several exegetical issues that have an essential bearing on astral magic; it was concerning such issues that the fiercest controversy erupted between Altabib and Franco. The dispute and its reverberations will be described in relation to two main issues: (1) the motive for the ritual of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement; (2) the reasons for the dietary laws. This account, however brief, will reveal something of the general features of the controversy and the positions of each side.

The Scapegoat

Franco bases the ritual of the scapegoat on the worship of Saturn and Mars. Since, as he states, these two planets are influential on the Day of Atonement, the ritual of the two goats is designed to nullify their evil, aggressive influence. As he writes in his commentary:

> It seems to me that the view of this sage [Ibn Ezra] is that, since on the tenth day of the seventh month the moon is in Capricorn, which is the abode of Mars, and also since it is always in one of the abodes of Saturn on that day, that is why they would perform the rite of the he-goats [*avodat ha-seʿirim*], one for the Lord and the other for Azazel, who is the guardian angel of Mars, so that they should not cause harm as is in their nature.[7]

According to Franco, then, the goat set aside "for the Lord" is meant for Saturn, while the other, "for Azazel," is for Mars. Moreover, Altabib takes sharp exception to the expression "the rite of the he-goats" (*hassagah* 24), on the grounds of the apparent self-contradiction in another passage of Franco. On the one hand, Franco explains the

[7] Franco's Commentary on Ibn Ezra, Ms. Oxford 1258, 76a.

text as prescribing such a rite. On the other, concerning the text "and that they may offer their sacrifices no more to the goat-demons..." (Leviticus 17:7), he comments that worship of evil heavenly bodies is forbidden. Altabib, therefore, urges a return to the classical conception of *kofer* [ransom, expiation by proxy]: in this passage, he claims, the Torah is teaching us a technique for nullifying evil influence; there is no question of direct astral worship. Franco, however, does not see any contradiction in his exegesis: astral worship is forbidden, except in situations where it is explicitly permitted, and even necessary, as in the rite of the he-goats:

> And therefrom you may understand and explain away your difficulties with this text. For as to your objection, that if indeed the Lord commanded us to offer a sacrifice to Samael, what was the intention [of the verse] "and that they may offer their sacrifices no more to the goat-demons"? There is no real contradiction between the first text and the second, for the first deals with [a rite] prescribed by the Creator, blessed be He, on this particular day, and not at any other time. And that is the [meaning of the] text, "and that they may offer their sacrifices no more to the goat-demons...." Hence, there was no reason for you to force yourself to say, in your own name, the explanation that was stated by others (103a).

Offering sacrifices to the planets of wrath was thus an explicit divine commandment. Franco held fast to his opinion that the ritual of the he-goats on the Day of Atonement was indeed actual worship of heavenly bodies, by no means a question of expiation by proxy. Thus, the dispute only served to reinforce Franco's views, clarifying that this was no ritual of mere atonement but direct worship of an evil planet.[8]

Franco's outspoken views as to the importance of astral worship in the ritual of the Day of Atonement stunned and embarrassed even his admirers. Ezra Gatigno quotes the above explanation verbatim and, after the praise, goes on to criticize it:

> Thus far the words of Franco in his explanation of the matter of Azazel according to Ibn Ezra's view. And it is very plausible, and his words of

[8] See Yitzhak Tzvi Langermann, "Some Astrological Themes in the Thought of Abraham ibn Ezra," in *Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra: The Writings of a Twelfth-Century Polymath*, ed. Isadore Twersky and Jay Michael Harris (Cambridge: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 1993), 40–42.

> explanation are to my liking. However, when he states, "and according to the importance of Saturn, Scripture frequently said of it 'his Master's name,' as our Sages, of blessed memory, said, 'Metatron, whose name is like his Master's name' (Sanhedrin 38b)," I believe that is wrong. For this scapegoat is not associated with the Lord, blessed be He, in any place. For even on the view of Rav Samuel, who said that the scapegoat was also "for the Lord," like the goat of the sin-offering, of which Scripture says that it is for the Lord—Ibn Ezra said that God had no need of this scapegoat, for it is not a sacrifice, not being slaughtered; and if this be Franco's view, how shall we associate it [the scapegoat] with the Lord, blessed be He?![9]

Evidently, Gatigno did not really understand Franco's intent. Franco, he believed, explained that the scapegoat was also marked "for the Lord," though indeed designed to neutralize the negative influence of the planet. The astral purpose—the scapegoat—is exclusive; it has nothing to do with the God of Israel, not even in an allegorical sense.[10] As a matter of fact, a careful examination of Franco's commentary will reveal that he was speaking not of the scapegoat but of the goat that was earmarked from the start as an offering to the Lord. There is no dichotomy between the designations of the two goats, one "for the Lord" and the other "for Azazel." As far as Franco is concerned, the former is intended for the worship of Saturn,[11] the latter for the worship of Mars, the guardian angel of the wilderness. In other words, Franco has obliterated the divine connection of the offering, basing it exclusively on astral worship. Both planets, Saturn and Mars, exert their harmful astral influence on the Day of Atonement. Most probably, Gatigno did not read Franco's clarifying response to Altabib, and it is doubtful whether he even knew that Franco, in

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[9] *Sod Ha-Shem li-Yre'av*, Ms. München 15, 273b. Gatigno also criticized another point in the commentary: "Moreover, what was said of Ibn Ezra's statement, 'When you reach thirty-three you will understand it,' saying that this was meant metaphorically—that is nonsense, for Ibn Ezra would not speak metaphorically in this matter, and he did not intend now at this point to speak metaphorically, for that is not the proper place, for Ibn Ezra never took that approach." Incidentally, this comment of Franco is also quoted anonymously ("some say...") by Samuel Ibn Zarza, *Meqor Hayyim* (Mantua, 1550), 70d.

[10] In *hassagah* 25, it is obvious that Altabib, too, disapproved of applying God's Name to Saturn.

[11] Incidentally, Altabib attacked Franco on this very point in *Hassagah* 33. Franco explained Aram's words, "Their God is a God of mountains" (I Kings 20:23), ostensibly referring to God, as actually referring to Saturn. It is interesting that here Gatigno quoted Franco's interpretation without any objections (*Sod Ha-Shem li-Yre'av*, fol. 282a).

the expression "rite of the he-goats," was actually referring to the worship of a planet.[12]

Another commentator who was deeply influenced by Franco's exegesis, Shem Tov ibn Mayor, was also unaware of Franco's attitude to astral worship; or, if aware, he may have simply ignored it. This is obvious from his harsh criticism of Ibn Ezra in his supercommentary:

> And I say that whoever states that they would interpret precepts of divine worship in terms of any heavenly body is wrong and his view is as nought and his faith is a false one, for no person worshiped a star unless he believed in the doctrine of eternity [*a parte ante* of the universe]. For thus wrote R. Moses [Maimonides], that he who worships a star believes that it is an eternal deity;[13] accordingly, it follows from this that the sphere in which the star is set, and which is its place, is also eternal, and since the sphere is eternal, its center, that is, the Earth, is eternal, for if the circle is eternal so is its center eternal. It also necessarily follows that the movement is also eternal, insofar as the sphere is eternal, and the divine movement is the cause of the form of the elements and what is constituted of them; if so, everything is eternal. Now truly see if there is on earth any greater heresy. It is therefore proper for whoever is descended from our Father Abraham, peace be upon him, that he repudiate this negative view and refrain from sinning to the Lord such a grievous sin.[14]

Yet, as noted, despite this forthright statement, Ibn Mayor had no scruples about citing Franco's comments and agreeing with his views, whether in the theological realm[15] or in astral magic. It is even more amazing that Ibn Mayor actually cites Franco's controversial commentary on the scapegoat and even expands upon it.[16] We may recall that

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[12] On the question of the he-goats in Franco's circle, see also Schwartz, "Varieties of Magic," 31-35.

[13] See "Epistle on Astrology," in Maimonides, *Epistles* [Hebrew], ed. Yitzhak Sheilat, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, Maʿalyot: 1988), 483. The various theological implications of Maimonides' position on astrology have been discussed by Langermann and Kreisel. See Yitzhak Tzvi Langermann, "Maimonides' Repudiation of Astrology," *Maimonidean Studies* 2 (1991): 123-158; Hayyim Kreisel, "Maimonides' Approach to Astrology" [Hebrew], *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Judaic Studies*, Division 2, section C (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies: 1994), 25-32.

[14] Shem Tov ibn Mayor, *Ha-Ma'or ha-Gadol*, Ms. Oxford, Bodl. 228 (Poc. 207), 253a.

[15] See, for instance, the natural explanation of the earth opening to swallow up Korah and his followers, *Ha-Ma'or ha-Gadol*, 231b.

[16] Ibid., 188b–189a. Parts of this text were quoted in Schwartz, "Varieties of Magic," 32-33.

Franco in that passage repeatedly used the expression "rite/worship of Mars," but Ibn Mayor quotes such passages without adverse comment. Altabib's attack indeed brought about a clarification of Franco's ideas concerning astral worship. Nevertheless, such commentators as Shem Tov ibn Mayor were not deterred from studying the views of the radical thinker.

The question of the scapegoat illustrates the controversy over the motivation for the festivals in general. Franco, relying on Hermetic traditions, consistently explained the festivals as designed to nullify the harmful influence of celestial bodies. Gatigno, as clearly evident from his praise, supported these ideas enthusiastically.[17] Thus, Franco's objective was the legitimate absorption, explicit or otherwise, of astral worship into Jewish ritual. This was the target of Altabib's wrath.

Dietary Laws

The major bone of contention between Altabib and Franco was the status of Saturn and its influence on the Jews and their religious life. As noted in the context of the scapegoat and the festivals, Altabib vehemently objects to Franco's thesis that Saturn exerts a major influence on the fate of the nation and on the explanation of the commandments.[18] Similar objections come to light in connection with the dietary laws and the laws of incestuous relationships. Against Franco's consistent magic-astral motivation, Altabib offered the rational reasons most commonly encountered in medieval philosophical literature.

To explain the dietary laws, Franco asserts that the forbidden foods are subject to the constant influence of Saturn. On various occasions, he insists that the use of materials, places, or animals subject to Saturn's influence, for any purpose other than the worship of that planet, is liable to have destructive results. The forbidden animals, he says, belong to Saturn's portion and should therefore not be eaten: "And the reason for their prohibition is because they are of the portion of Saturn, as the astrologers say. Just as the Egyptians used to do, for they abhorred the consumption of sheep because they are under the sign

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[17] See, for instance, his supercommentary on Ibn Ezra, Ms. München, 278b.

[18] Originally, the controversy centered on Ibn Ezra's exegesis, but the polemic concerning the role of Saturn and its effect on the Jewish people became a dominant motif in the arguments between Altabib and Franco. See Ron Barkai, *Science, Magic, and Mythology in the Middle Ages* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Van Leer, 1987), 30-31.

[19] Franco's commentary on Ibn Ezra, fol. 77a.

of Aries."[19] Strongly rejecting this idea, Altabib presents the classical rational argument for the dietary laws, namely, that the forbidden foods defile the body and consequently also the soul, in a hygienic sense (*hassagah* 27).[20] Altabib's criticism once more compelled Franco to clarify his views. Agreeing with Altabib's rationalist explanation, according to which harmful foods are forbidden for purely hygienic reasons, he in fact added that the prohibition is entirely valid without any need for an explicit divine command. He believed, however, that even certain good, beneficial foods had been forbidden for the sole reason that they were subject to Saturn's influence. Franco held, for example, that the consumption of pork is not at all harmful; on the contrary, it is beneficial to human health. It has been forbidden for one reason only: it is "of the portion of Saturn." The comparison with Egyptian worship also reveals Franco's attitude to the dietary laws.

On this question as well, Gatigno is strongly critical of Franco. Although Gatigno constantly relies on astral magic arguments in his theological exegesis,[21] in this particular connection he was firmly opposed to Franco's explanations. After quoting verbatim from Franco's commentary, Gatigno writes:

> As to what Franco wrote of the swine and certain forbidden foods, that the reason is their being of the portion of Saturn, he knows this reason but I do not. For R. Moses Maimonides, of blessed memory, wrote that although Galen wrote that it is the best of meats, it is good only for athletes,[22] for it is a heavy food. He also wrote another reason for it, that the Torah forbade it as an animal producing filth (*ippush*), for its nature is invariably to run about among refuse and dirt and always to stir up filth with its nose, so that our Sages, of blessed memory, said that the mouth of a pig may be likened to walking excrement (TB Berakhot 25a).[23]

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[20] See Yitzhak Heinemann, *The Reasons for the Commandments in the Tradition* [Hebrew], vol. 1 (Jerusalem: WZO, 1966), 133–134.

[21] See Schwartz, *Amulets*, 80-92.

[22] The Hebrew text of Ms. München has an error here, which I have emended according to Ms. Oxford, Bodl. 231. Maimonides frequently discusses the merits of athletics in his medical works. See, for instance, Maimonides, *Regimen Sanitatis: Letters on the Hygiene of the Body and of the Soul*, trans. Moshe Ibn Tibbon, ed. Suessmann Muntner (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1957), 32–33.

[23] *Sod Ha-Shem li-Yre'av*, Ms. München 15, 276b. For Maimonides on this question see *Guide of the Perplexed* 3:48 [598]; *Pirqei Moshe* (*Aphorisms of Moses*), trans. Nathan ha-Me'ati, ed. Sussman Muntner (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1961, 230. See also Yaakov Levinger, *Maimonides as Philosopher and Codifier* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1990), 114. I have been unable to locate the first quotation ("although Galen wrote...") in any of Maimonides' surviving works.

Apparently, then, Franco's defensive magical-astral explanation of the dietary laws could not compete with Maimonides' rational explanation, which based the prohibition on hygienic considerations. Both Altabib and Gatigno opt for Maimonides' argument against Franco's view that one should not eat animals subject to the influence of Saturn. Samuel ibn Zarza, on the other hand, cites Franco's comments verbatim in both of his books, as a legitimate commentary on Ibn Ezra's explanation of the dietary laws.[24]

The Core of the Debate

The issues on which Altabib and Franco crossed swords indicate that the point at stake was not the essence of astral magic as a reality. Altabib indeed disapproved of the considerable extent of astral-magic interpretations in Franco's supercommentary, and he was convinced that they were by no means always necessary. After all, even Franco's supporters were sometimes dismayed by the intensity and bluntness of his exegesis. In this respect, Altabib was no different from other thinkers of his time who objected to massive astral-magic interpretations, such as Judah b. Moses Halawa.[25] But as is clear from the episode of the scapegoat and others, Altabib was not among those who rejected astral magic outright, like Judah, son of the great codifier Asher b. Jehiel (the Rosh), and Menahem b. Zerah. What, then, was the real bone of contention?

The difference between Altabib and Franco was rooted, first and foremost, in the theological significance of astral magic. Franco was not afraid to name the rituals explicitly: considerations of planetary influence, worship of stars and planets, and the like. In his view, for example, the precepts of the Torah had a direct bearing on the system of links between human beings and the heavenly bodies, which he viewed as a basically autonomous system. The ritual is aimed directly at the star or planet, and as far as the Jews are concerned, the planet involved was Saturn. Franco's rather insincere protestations, "I have

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[24] *Meqor Ḥayyim*, 76a; *Mikhlol Yofi*, II, 110b. See Dov Schwartz, *The Religious Philosophy of Samuel ibn Zarza* [Hebrew], vol. 1 (Ph.D. dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, 1989), 175.

[25] Judah b. Moses Halawa, *Imrei Shefer*, ed. Hayyim Herschler (Jerusalem: Rav Herschler Institute, 1993), 86.

no part or heritage in Saturn or in the other stars" (98a), does not obscure this position at all. Altabib, on the other hand, is bitterly opposed to such definitions; God, he argues, is directly and palpably involved in the system of links between man and the astral bodies, rendering active assistance to man in resisting the astral influences. Altabib refused to recognize the worship of heavenly bodies as independent entities, even in the guise of a definite divine command in some specific connection. To the same degree, he rejected the idea that the Jewish people were subject to constant astral influence from Saturn—the idea underlying Franco's proposal of a permanent ritual to counter that influence.

The positions may therefore be summarized as follows. Altabib was utterly opposed to the creation of a comprehensive astral-magic theology that considered the entire system of divine precepts as founded on astral influence. Although some ritual acts (particularly those associated with the festivals) may be explained on the basis of astral magic, this explanation should not be expanded to produce an autonomous astral-magic system. Franco's position, by contrast, provided a solid basis for the creation of an astral-magic theology, namely, an explanation of all the precepts of the Torah based on bringing down astral influence or ensuring protection against such influence, with no fear of "idolatry," which now had, as it were, divine sanction.

In the course of the controversy over astral magic in fourteenth-century Spain, three distinct positions took shape:

1. Astral magic is useful; it in fact forms the basis for all the precepts of the Torah, as an independent, self-sufficient system (Franco, Solomon Alconstantin, and so forth).
2. Astral magic is real, but does not exclusively explain the theology of the Torah. Reliance on astral magic should be limited in two respects: it should not be used massively for exegetical purposes, and it should not be presented as an autonomous discipline, permitted by the Torah and even underpinning it (Altabib).
3. Astral magic is to be rejected outright as a theological element in Judaism (Judah b. Asher, and so forth).

Interspersed among these three basic positions are various intermediate positions, like those of Gatigno and Ibn Mayor. Thus, the Altabib-Franco dispute is a useful aid to the precise mapping of philosophical positions during the fourteenth century, and furthers our understanding of contemporary intellectual and cultural life.

CHAPTER SEVEN

JEWISH RATIONALISM IN LATE MEDIEVAL BYZANTIUM

The study of magic and astrology in Byzantium is still a new area of scholarship, requiring an introduction as to the circumstances of its development in the context of Jewish rationalism. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Byzantine Empire straddled the crossroads between the Greco-Latin and Muslim worlds. The Byzantine-Eastern culture of the time cut across geographical and political boundaries: Bulgaria, Crete, Turkey, the Crimean Peninsula, and so on. Jewish thought in late medieval Byzantium also reflects this geographical-cultural divide, in both positive and negative senses. On the one hand, a school of thought emerges with its own unique characteristics and subject matter, distinct in some respects from contemporary Spanish and Provençal philosophy, as we shall see. On the other hand, Jewish rationalists in Byzantium were remote from the main centers of polemics pro and con rationalism, which were mainly in the far-off west—Spain and Provence. For instance, a Byzantine sage of the fourteenth century vented his wrath on both the "rabbis and talmudists" who haughtily devoted all their efforts to studying the Talmud, and on the rationalists who spent all their time doing philosophy to the neglect of the practical commandments. He mentions, however, that these people are utterly remote from him, being located "at the ends of the earth."[1] The same scholar describes a state of absolute ignorance around him, but it is not clear whether he was documenting an existing condition or affecting the elitist language so common among medieval scholars and philosophers. In any event, there was clearly a considerable distance between fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Byzantine rationalist thought and the dynamic and extensive rationalist activity in the west.

The distance from the centers of Spanish-Provençal culture and

[1] *Yoreh De'ah* by "Avishai," Ms. Oxford Bodl. 267 (Opp. 212), 3b. On the views of "Avishai" see Dov Schwartz, "R. Kalonymus' *Mesharet Moshe*" [Hebrew], *Qovets al-Yad* 14 (1998): 343-347. No biographical information is so far available on this scholar.

the dearth of philosophical books and sources had their impact on Byzantine-Jewish thought, which was frequently detached, lacking philosophical precision and real scientific depth. For example, translations of Muslim philosophical works were almost unknown among the Jews. At most, we find quotations from Abu-Nasar al-Farabi alongside references to the names of classical Greek philosophers, all purporting to testify to the authors' knowledge. These claims were baseless, however, since the works of these philosophers were simply unavailable to them. Another expression of the paucity of ideas is the sparsity of Byzantine halakhic works at this time. This situation changes in the fifteenth century, at least in the philosophical realm. Several thinkers relied on philosophical sources and, in addition, Byzantine kabbalists expressed particular appreciation for the works of Abraham Abulafia, some of which were known to Byzantine mystics.

At the same time, the Byzantine-cultural style in these waning years of the Byzantine Empire left a decisive imprint on Jewish creativity. A fairly dominant feature of this culture was a tendency to exaggeration and externalization. The iconoclastic controversy that had flared up in the early Middle Ages ended in a victory for the veneration of icons (the councils of 787 and 843), and representations of saints became a central motif in Byzantine visual art and literature. Byzantine architecture created high-domed churches with interior and exterior decoration. Byzantine apocryphal literature produced rhetorical expressions in a pompous, inflated style. Even in antiquity, Byzantine poetry had been characterized by convoluted rhyming schemes. At the same time, Byzantines earned no fame as scholars and bearers of ancient philosophical traditions.[2] This cultural climate directly and indirectly affected rational Jewish creativity in the late Middle Ages. Rational works were frequently excessively verbose and fraught with exaggeration. Their main stylistic characteristics were repetitiveness, overlong and laboriously detailed introductions, and a compulsive display of trivial knowledge.

No exhaustive study of Jewish rationalist thought in Byzantium is

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[2] See Andre Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of its Origins* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1969). There is a vast literature on Byzantine art. See also Ezra Fleischer, "Early Hebrew Liturgical Poetry in its Cultural Setting (Comparative Experiments)" [Hebrew], in *Moises Starosta Memorial Lectures*, ed. Joseph Geiger (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1993), 82-90; M. C. Lyons, ed., *The Arabic Version of Themistius' "'De Anima"*(Oxford: Cassirer, 1973), xiii.

so far available, other than a few comments and monographic surveys dedicated to several figures. A preliminary survey of Jewish creativity in this period (up to the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453) appears in Steven Bowman's book, and in a few scattered, though important, studies by Joseph Hacker, Shalom Rosenberg, and Israel Ta-Shma.[3] This survey, however, is not sufficient to provide an adequate picture of the foundations of Byzantine Jewish rationalism prior to the expulsion from Spain. Access to fourteenth century philosophical material is extremely limited. Scarcely any texts remain, although they are rather unique, at least in their attempt to imitate the philosophical writings of Spanish and Provençal rationalists. The situation is slightly better, though not dramatically so, concerning the first half of the fifteenth century. Given the small number of thinkers, clear-cut conclusions about such a relatively large geographical area will be hard to draw. This chapter, then, offers only a preliminary outline of rationalist creativity in Byzantium in the late Middle Ages. I shall then go on to discuss magic-astral approaches that emerged in these areas at the time.

Wandering

Characteristically, Spanish and Provençal Jewish rationalists in the late Middle Ages traveled far afield to seek knowledge from various scholars.[4] It was only natural that Byzantine-Jewish rationalists, conscious of their remoteness from the centers of rationalism and eager to acquire philosophical knowledge, wandered to the west, for Spain and Provence were home to groups of rationalists busily engaged in studying Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle.[5] Some also traveled eastward (and these wanderings are even more richly documented

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[3] See Steven B. Bowman, *The Jews in Byzantium (1204–1453)* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1985), 129-170; Joseph Hacker, *Jewish Society in Salonica and Environs in the 15th and 16th centuries: A Chapter in the History of Jewish Society in the Ottoman Empire and its Relations with the Authorities* [Hebrew] (Ph. D. Dissertation: The Hebrew University, 1979). Israel Ta-Shma's studies are cited below.

[4] See, for instance, Joseph Shatzmiller, "Minor Epistle of Apology of Rabbi Kalonymus b. Kalonymus" [Hebrew], *Sefunot* 10 (1966): 9-52; Dov Schwartz, "Between Rationalism and Conservatism" [Hebrew], *Da'at* 32–33 (1994): 181-182.

[5] See, for instance, L V. Berman, "A Manuscript Entitled *Shoshan Limudim* and the Group of *Me'aynim* in Provence" [Hebrew], *Kiryat Sefer* 53 (1978): 368-372.

than those westward), though mostly for different motives. Those travelling to the Land of Israel, for instance, sought to end their days there and be buried in the Holy Land or were driven by economic reasons, whereas rationalists traveling westward were usually seeking knowledge and education.

Different scholars disagree with Yitzhak Baer's description of the history of the Jews in Spain, which places almost exclusive emphasis on philosophical rationalism as a social and historical driving force, notwithstanding the general recognition of the important position of rationalist thought in medieval Spanish-Jewish culture. [6] Most surviving manuscripts from the period are indeed concerned with various philosophical disciplines (logic, physics, astronomy, metaphysics, and so forth). This culture presumably fascinated the Byzantine intellectual. Elnathan b. Moses Kalkish complained bitterly about the peripatetic phenomenon. This scholar, who divided his time between Trabzon and Constantinople, was a kabbalist with a distinctly rationalist orientation. His extensive work *Even Sappir*, of which there were various editions (a short and a long version, with a lapse of sixty years in between), contains kabbalistic, rationalistic, and grammatical material. Kalkish writes, with a note of bitterness:

> He whose fear of sin does not take precedence over his wisdom, such as Aristotle, Plato and his company, his wisdom does not endure,[7] for all these are an inheritance, but sometimes it is not so, for it is an inheritance acquired hurriedly by persons who wander[8] from place to place and go to a far-off land to study Torah and to learn lofty sciences, to flee to Tarshish[9] to ascend on high and seek honor… Moreover, they pursue the science of divinity in the confines of their own hearts, to look and observe what their forebears had not seen, for they knew not the Lord[10] and did not seek the God of Israel[11]… They fly like the flying

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[6] Gerson D. Cohen, ed., *A Critical Edition with a Translation and Notes of the Book of Tradition (Sefer ha-Qabbalah) by Abraham ibn Daud* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1967), 298-299; idem, *Studies in the Variety of Rabbinic Cultures* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 292; Israel Ta-Shma, "Halakhah, Kabbalah, and Philosophy in Christian Spain" [Hebrew], *Annual of Jewish Law* 18-19 (1992-1994): 479-495.

[7] Based on M. Avot 3:9; *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan*, trans. Judah Goldin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), ch. 22, 99-100.

[8] The Hebrew verb used here (*shatim*) is used in Job 1:7 of the adversary.

[9] See Jonah 1:3; 4:2.

[10] See Jeremiah 9:2.

[11] See, e.g., Isaiah 9:12; 31:1; Jeremiah 10:21, and others.

> eagle, to pursue and acquire divine science without divine help, and they find no way and no entrance in this hurried ascent, to achieve which they are running and flying and laboring; but they remain wrathful because of its being hurried and borrowed, therefore not blessed, and they cannot acquire the abundance of blessing poured down from the supernal pool.[12]

Kalkish compares those who wander in search of Torah, wisdom, and metaphysics ("the science of divinity") to the seekers after the gold of Tarshish.[13] While they imagine the west or even Italy as a mine full of treasure, they are fleeing from the real abode of God's word, that is, Byzantium. Kalkish denounces those who go "to a far-off land," implicitly associating their peregrinations to the lack of "divine help." What scholars could have been the target or model of Kalkish's attack?

One Byzantine scholar who wandered from Greece to Majorca was Judah Moskoni, a figure who has attracted the attention of various scholars, not least among them Steinschneider. *Even ha-Ezer*, his super-commentary on Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Torah, includes many lengthy passages replete with scientific or philosophical traditions and terms, partly evidence of his desire to internalize Spanish rationalist

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[12] *Even Sappir*, Ms. Paris 727, 91a. This work was written in 1367. An earlier version, in Ms. Vatican 284, was published by Raphael Cohen in 1998 (on Kalkish's time and location see Ephraim Kupfer, "Identification of Manuscripts in the Institute of Microfilms of Hebrew Manuscripts," *Fifth World Congress of Jewish Studies* [1969], 137-138, and in Cohen's introduction, *ibid*., i–ii). Kalkish has already been discussed in several studies by Israel Ta-Shma and Moshe Idel. See, for instance, Israel M. Ta-Shma, "Rabbi Isaiah di Trani the Elder and His Connections with Byzantium and Palestine" [Hebrew], *Shalem* 4 (1984): 411-416; Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* (albany Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), 77, and in the index, s.v. Kalkish. See also Paul B. Fenton, "*Arugat ha-Bosem* in the Writings of the Early Kabbalists of the Spanish School," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, vol. 3, ed. Isadore Twersky and Jay M. Harris (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 66-68. The end of the passage quoted here is rich in allusions. The expression "supernal pool" [*berekhah elyonah*] as a designation for the source of abundance probably reflects the *sefirah* of wisdom or intelligence. See Hayyim Z. Dimitrovsky, "The Supernal Pool" [Hebrew], in *Saul Lieberman Memorial Volume*, ed. Shamma Friedmann (New York and Jerusalem: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1993), 277-290. The eagle is one of the beasts in the *Merkavah*, and flying is a characteristic of the Separate Intelligences (see, for instance, *Guide of the Perplexed* 1:43).

[13] See, for instance, 1 Kings 10:22; 2 Chronicles 9:21. The expression is probably intentionally ambiguous: the wanderers are ostensibly looking for Tarshish, which was one of the stones in the High Priest's breastplate, but they are actually "fleeing" like Jonah.

culture. Moskoni reports that he purchased many works to complete his education.[14] He was indeed severely criticized by Menahem b. Moshe Tamar, who was active in Salonica in the second half of the fifteenth century. He was a grandson to Zekharia Cohen Tsedek and a disciple of Shabbetai b. Malkiel Hacohen, whose works testify to a knowledge of logic and the sciences and an intense preoccupation with the works of Ibn Ezra. On several occasions, Menahem cites glosses by Shabbetai Hacohen on Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Torah.

Menahem Tamar, who also wrote a supercommentary on Ibn Ezra, was familiar with Moskoni's supercommentary. In the introduction to his own work, he writes:

> And many scholars in Israel rose up and interpreted his [Ibn Ezra's] words, each according to his wisdom, although I have seen only two or three of them in brief. And now, as I write, I have before me only one, and that is R. Leon's who is known as Moskoni, who in many places has stumbled, as I shall prove in the proper place. In most cases, he follows the words of the author [Ibn Ezra], except in his extreme verbosity.[15]

Tamar's disapproval of Moskoni's verbosity is surprising, as he himself wrote a rambling, wordy supercommentary, devoted mostly to linguistic and grammatical questions. Moskoni, who claimed to be descended from a dynasty of Byzantine scholars adept in Ibn Ezra's secrets, frequently digressed in his supercommentary to offer sharp criticisms, such as "but this too is one of R. Moskoni's incorrect explanations"; "R. Judah Moskoni discussed this at great length, dropped into hell, and delved into deep waters without bringing up anything."[16]

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[14] Based on his own testimony in the introduction to *The Book of Josippon*, published in *Otsar Tov* (1867–1868), 20, l. 6. On Judah Moskoni see Moritz Steinschneider, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Heinrich Malter and Alexander Marx (Berlin: M. Poppelauer, 1925), 536-570; Uriel Simon, "Interpreting the Interpreter: Supercommentaries on Ibn Ezra's Commentaries from 1275 to 1400" [Hebrew], in *The Bible in the Light of its Interpreters*, ed. Sarah Japhet (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1994), 373-396; Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, 205-213. Excerpts from his commentaries appear in an appendix, 293-350.

[15] Ms. Leiden, Warner 29, 1b. The end the quotation is a critique of Moskoni's excessive verbosity. On Menahem Tamar, see Salomon A. Rosanes, *History of the Jews in Turkey* [Hebrew], vol. 1 (Tel Aviv: n. p., 1930), 33. Tamar was related to the Kalkish family, and he quotes "our teacher Elisha Kalkish, our kin, of blessed memory" (Ms. Leiden, Warner 29, 63a). In ibid., 260b, Menahem Tamar cites "my master and forebear, my mother's father, our teacher, R. Zekharia Cohen Tsedek. Another bitter controversy over Ibn Ezra's commentary erupted between Shabtai Malkiel Hacohen and Mordecai Comtino. See Rosanes, *History of the Jews in Turkey*, 31-32.

[16] Ibid., 4a.

Moskoni was not the only traveler to western lands. Among other wandering rationalists from Byzantium is Shemariah b. Elijah Ikriti, philosopher and biblical and talmudic commentator from Negroponte, active mainly in the first half of the fourteenth century, who probably wandered to Italy and Spain. Moskoni is known to have studied under Shemariah. Abraham b. Judah Leon of Candia, author of the philosophical work *Arbaʿah Turim*, also went to Spain (after 1375), joining the circle of Hasdai Crescas in the last quarter of the century.[17] Other peripatetic scholars include Shabbetai Hacohen [Balbo?], a devoted rationalist active in the second half of the fourteenth century, who went east in search of wisdom.[18] In any event, Shemariah Ikriti, Abraham b. Judah, and Judah Moskoni are surely models of philosophers who wandered from Byzantium to the homelands of Spanish culture. Kalkish's critique, then, written around the time these scholars were active, was probably expressive of concern and protest at this westward drift of young scholars. These wanderings in search of wisdom are added to the general "exile" forced upon many Jews due to historical events, such as the fall of Constantinople.

Receptiveness and Moderation

The controversy over philosophy in Spain and Provence produced two types of traditionalists. One type denied that rationalism had any authority and sought to undermine its very foundations, including the philosophical authority of Maimonides. Thinkers of this type were particularly in evidence during the disputes of the 1230s. The second type recognized the achievements of rationalism and venerated Maimonides, but avoided the more extreme manifestations of radical philosophy. Such thinkers were particularly prominent toward the end of the thirteenth century.[19] Traditionalists of the second type often offered a combination of philosophy and Kabbalah, or at least expressed their regard for mystical lore. Most evident among Byzantine-Jewish thinkers were representatives of the second type. A

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[17] See Shalom Rosenberg, "The *Arbaʿah Turim* of Rabbi Abraham bar Judah, Disciple of Don Hasdai Crescas" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (1984): 525–526.

[18] See Shalom Rosenberg, "A Philosophical Meeting in Jerusalem at the End of the Fourteenth Century" [Hebrew], *Shalem* 4 (1984): 417-427.

[19] See Schwartz, ""R. Kalonymus' *Mesharet Moshe*," 311-325.

rationalist like Shemariah Ikriti presented moderate philosophical positions, such as a comprehensive defense of the concept of creation.[20] Judah b. Shemariah, who came from Ashkenaz to Greece, fiercely denounced "the accursed philosophers" who taught the world was eternal.[21] It is characteristic that a rationalist critic of kabbalistic teachings, Moses Ashkenazi, appeared in the wake of the migration from Central European lands to Byzantium. A typical Byzantine rationalist ,Michael Balbo, who engaged in a vigorous polemic with Moses Ashkenazi in 1466, combined his rationalism with a vigorous defense of Kabbalah.[22] Balbo was an influential figure in Candia, widely renowned as a thinker and a philosopher. Ephraim Kupfer pointed out that Balbo represented an indigenous Byzantine group of rationalists, against whom Moses Ashkenazi tried to organize scholarly circles in Candia.[23] The impression, then, is that Balbo advocated a moderate Byzantine rationalism, resisting external influence. Byzantine ratio-

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[20] See Colette Sirat, "A Letter on the Creation by Shemarya ben Eliah Ikriti" [Hebrew], *Eshel Beer Sheva* 2 (1980): 199-227; Aaron Ahrend, "A Philosophical Commentary on the Kaddish by R. Shemariah b. Elia Ikriti" [Hebrew], *Da'at* 43 (1999): 43-51; idem, "A Commentary on the Scroll of Esther by R. Shemariah b. Elijah Ikriti" [Hebrew], in *Studies in Bible and Education Presented to Prof. Moshe Arend*, ed. Dov Rapel (Jerusalem: Touro College, 1996), 33–52; idem, "On Byzantine Aggadic Exegesis: The Introduction and Conclusion of the Book *Amaziyahu* by R. Shemarya b. Eliah Ikriti" [Hebrew], *Pe'amim* 91 (2002): 169-175.

[21] "Let the accursed philosophers be shamed for saying that the world had existed together with the Lord, may He be exalted, as a rider on his horse, rather than one preceding the other," in Leah Naomi Goldfeld, "Commentary on the Torah by Judah b. Shemariah, in a Genizah Manuscript" [Hebrew], *Qovets al-Yad* 10 (1982): 147, ll.12–14. Judah even took exception to Maimonides, whom he accused of inclining "toward the words of the philosophers who believe in the eternity [of the universe]" (ibid., l. 7). The only surviving remnants of Judah's works are a few Genizah fragments, and we know nothing of his life. There is no connection between him and the Shemariah Ikriti noted above.

[22] See Ephraim Gottlieb, *Studies in Kabbalah Literature* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1976), 370-396; Aviezer Ravitzky, *Al Da'at ha-Makom: Studies in the History of Jewish Philosophy* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Keter, 1991), 182-211. On Balbo's literary activity, see also Joseph Hacker, "The Ottoman System of Sürgün and its Influence on the Jewish Society in the Ottoman Empire in the Fifteenth-Seventeenth Centuries" [Hebrew], *Zion* 55 (1990): 45-48. The combination of Halakhah and Kabbalah in the rationalism of Greek lands was pointed out at length by Israel Ta-Shma, "On Greek-Byzantine Rabbinic Literature of the Fourteenth Century" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 62 (1993): 102; idem, *Ha-Nigle she-ba-Nistar: The Halakhic Residue in the Zohar* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv-Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1995), 78.

[23] Ephraim Kupfer, "Concerning the Cultural Image of Ashkenazi Jewry and Its Sages in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 42 (1972-73): 126.

nalists, while fiercely challenging the authority of Plato and Aristotle, would sometimes turn out to be faithful adherents of Maimonides. Some Byzantine thinkers expressed strong reservations about philosophical authority, while frequently making reference to philosophical sources in their own works. These characteristics epitomize a specific type of "average" Byzantine rationalist represented by Kalkish, who found a connection between original sin and philosophy:

> We learn this from Adam, when he ate of the tree of knowledge and was corrupted by overeating of this desirable food, as Scripture states, "and they perceived that they were naked" (Genesis 3:7). Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself to them, because they were corrupted, and therefore, "they sewed together fig leaves" (ibid.). But Aristotle, Plato, Galen, Abu-Bakr al-Saigh,[24] Anesgoris,[25] Ibn Aflah, Magesti[26] and the other Greek philosophers all wore fig leaves and their words cannot be trusted for they are void, their words are vain; therefore "hold fast to discipline, do not let go" (Proverbs 4:13).[27]

This passage is an example of Kalkish's heated attacks on classical and Muslim philosophers. He regularly referred to Aristotle by various derogatory names.[28] He clearly expressed his opinion that "in the worship of God, may He be exalted, there is no logic, nor circumspection, nor cleverness."[29] Nevertheless, judging from his quotations, his philosophical library was quite rich. He had particular regard for Maimonides, "man of God" and "chief shepherd" [*abir ha-roʿim*].[30] He considered Maimonides, as philosopher, a bastion of defense against the lethal influence of radical philosophy. Moreover, when Kalkish wanted to explain the dangers inherent in unrestrained philosophical inquiry, he cited no less than Aristotle's *Metaphysica* ("a root from the fruit of wisdom") and Maimonides' *The Guide of the Perplexed*.[31] He in fact encouraged scholars to study Maimonides' work carefully,

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[24] Referring to Ibn Bajja.

[25] Probably Anaxagoras.

[26] Presumably Ptolemy, author of *Almagest*, as he is mentioned after the astronomer Ibn Aflah.

[27] *Even Sappir*, Ms. Paris 727, 41b.

[28] For example, *ha-mahavil* [maker of hot air], *Even Sappir* 38a, or "the well-known fickle one" (ibid., 39b), and others.

[29] Ibid., 24a.

[30] Ibid., 45a.

[31] He referred to Maimonides' works as "a barrier against calamity and a shield and armor for educated people, to save them from the pit of commotion and raise them from the morass, that is, Aristotle and Plato" (*Even Sappir*, 25b).

reading it in an esoteric but balanced, cautious spirit:

> You must know, O scholars of Israel, my teachers and brethren and masters, that many people have been perplexed by the book of our teacher [Maimonides], either because of their laziness and the elevation of their spirit or because of the weakness of their mind, since they did not understand his precious hidden words. In general, most of them have not plumbed the depths of his scattered secrets, comparing his chapters with one another and examining his seemingly contradictory statements. For our teacher and master scattered his dew and fresh showers in his famous chapters, for the benefit of those who safeguard the sacred lore.[32]

Kalkish conveyed an appreciation for Maimonides as a philosopher that was widespread among moderate Byzantine scholars. Elsewhere, this zealous thinker wrote:

> The guardian of Israel keeps His promise to his elected holy nation, which is His sheep and His flock, / and He brought them out of narrow confines to the open spaces, lest His Torah be forgotten among His seed, / and in the midst of our exile restored splendor and integrity to the man of God, our master, Moses son of R. Maimon, may he rest in peace, chief among the shepherds, to be a treasure among all people on earth and stand before Him.[33]

Though zealous, then, Kalkish was clearly no anti-rationalist. In this context, note that both talmudic scholars and uneducated persons were targets for fierce social criticism in *Sefer ha-Kanah* and *Sefer ha-Peli'ah*, but nowhere in these works have I found criticism of philosophers in general or Jewish rationalists in particular.[34]

Let us return now to expressions of admiration for figures viewed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as typical rationalists. Ibn Ezra also earned a great deal of respect in Byzantium, though his commentators and readers were aware of his radical allusions. Byzantine circles must have been influenced by reports of the admiration in which Ibn Ezra was held by Spanish thinkers. Kalkish observed that the teachings

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[32] *Even Sappir*, 3a.

[33] Ibid., 45a.

[34] On the social criticism in these works, see Michal Kushnir-Oron, *The Peli'ah and the Kanah: Their Kabbalistic Elements, Their Religious-Social Position, and Their Literary Formulation* [Hebrew] (Ph. D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1980), 321–332. In contrast to *Even Sappir*, these works contain no philosophical discussions, and even typically philosophical terms are extremely rare. See, e.g., *Sefer ha-Kanah* (Cracow, 1894), 53b ("intelligent soul" in a kabbalistic context).

of this enigmatic exegete also required caution and esoteric study. "I shall reveal the secrets of the statements of Ibn Ezra as I have understood them and scatter them in my introductions wherever necessary, according to their content and my own discretion."[35]

The Torah commentaries of Dosa and Meyuhas b. Elijah (first half of the fourteenth century) also agreed with Ibn Ezra's views, though Meyuhas did not quote him directly.[36] Ephraim ben Gershon decries in his homilies those who enunciate the actual spelling of the divine name in a poem he ascribed to Ibn Ezra, which had apparently entered the prayer ritual. Ephraim, who wandered around various cities and settled in Istanbul in 1469, concludes:

> Hence, with your permission, I warn you and all students of Torah that this poem of R. Abraham should no longer be recited. Should you ask whether he wrote it for nothing, I do not say so. He was indeed a great sage, as we are told by R. Moses ben Maimon in the will he left his son, R. Abraham, telling him: "Do not bother your mind with anything but our own writings and that of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, because he was as Abraham our father, of blessed memory." In his [Ibn Ezra's] wisdom, he wrote the poem to show his powers, because his interests were many, but not in order to let fools amuse themselves with His holy names and enunciate the letters.[37]

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[35] *Even Sappir*, 16a. On the admiration for Ibn Ezra, see Israel Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature*, vol. 5 (Cleveland : Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1974) ch. 1; Bowman, *The Jews in Byzantium*, 134. On Ibn Ezra as viewed in fourteenth century Spain, see Dov Schwartz, *The Philosophy of a Fourteenth-Century Jewish Neoplatonic Circle* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute 1996).

[36] See Michael Katz's introduction to Meyuhas' commentary on Deuteronomy (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1968), 11; Shlomo Spitzer, "Information about Rabbi Dosa the Greek from His Work on the Torah" [Hebrew], in Meir Benayahu, ed., *Studies in Memory of the Rishon le-Zion R. Yitzhak Nissim*, vol. 4, *Lurianic Kabbalah and Documents* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1985), 183. Meyuhas' dates were determined by Ta-Shma, "On Greek-Byzantine Rabbinic Literature," 112. Meyuhas' commentary does not stray from the plain meaning of the text and from halakhic matters (ibid., 113). The philosophical references all relate to elementary midrashic ideas, such as the importance and merits of the Land of Israel.

[37] Ephraim b. Gershon, *Homilies*, London Ms., British Museum 379, 288b-289a. Elsewhere, Ephraim cites an allegorical-rationalist exegesis from the will erroneously ascribed to Maimonides, and concludes: "All this, the teacher explained in the will he left at his death to R. Abraham, his son, and the scholar will peruse this and find it, because he, blessed be his memory, commented there on matters of vast import, and opened the eyes of the blind to look at the Holy Sanctuary" (ibid., 117b). Ephraim called himself "the homilist physician" (ibid., 308a, and similarly in 75a). On Ben Gershon, see Ta-Shma, *Ha-Nigle she-Banistar*, 80-81; Hacker, "The Ottoman System of Sürgün," 41-45, 49-50.

Ephraim relied on the will ascribed to Maimonides to praise Ibn Ezra, and his endorsement of the will conveys his attempt to integrate the approaches of both sages. According to Ephraim, Ibn Ezra wrote the poem for the perfect sages, and the multitude transgressed by reciting it.

The enormous admiration for Maimonides requires no evidence. Mordechai Comtino (1402–1482) defended Maimonides' views of sacrifices and prophecy against Nahmanides' critique.[38] Comtino was something of an exception in Byzantine thought. His writing is often cautious and spare, and he wrote scientific works in such fields as logic, astronomy, and so forth. He complained of Nahmanides' sharp language, which he considered inappropriate in regard to such great figures as Abraham ibn Ezra and Maimonides. Nevertheless, Comtino's critical attitude toward Ibn Ezra aroused the wrath of Shabbetai b. Malkiel Hacohen, who criticized him on several points. Balbo also expressed admiration for Maimonides, "for there is none so discerning and wise," although he defended kabbalistic teachings far removed from the Maimonidean spirit.[39] Finally, note also the Karaite Elijah Bashyazi (c. 1420-1490), exiled from Adrianople after the Ottoman occupation, who also venerated Maimonides and Ibn Ezra.[40]

While Ibn Ezra and Maimonides were indeed prominent objects of admiration for both fanatics and moderates, they were not the only ones. Kalkish expressed his admiration for another rationalist who played an important role in the controversy on philosophy in Spain and Provence during the first half of the thirteenth century: Jacob Anatoli of the Tibbon family. According to Kalkish, Anatoli's homiletical work *Sefer Malmad ha-Talmidim* was intended "to instruct the people of the Lord, the Jews, to teach them proper ways and perfection and proper conduct, as does any author, and to interpret the laws of the incomparable Torah and its institutions, a lofty and

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[38] Mordechai Comtino, *Perush al ha-Torah*, Ms. Paris 265, 13a, 25b–26a, and so forth. On Comtino see Jean-Christophe Attias, *Le commentaire biblique: Mordekhai Komtino ou l'hermeneutique du dialogue* (Paris: Cerf, 1991).

[39] Ravitzky, *Al Da'at ha-Makom*, 192.

[40] See Daniel J. Lasker, "Maimonides' Influence on the Philosophy of Elijah Bashyazi the Karaite" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (1984): 405-425. On Bashyazi see Zvi Ankori, "Elijah Bashyachi: An Inquiry into His Traditions concerning the Beginnings of Karaism in Byzantium" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 25 (1956): 44-65, 183-201, and particularly 196-198.

hidden explanation."[41] Comtino referred favorably to such rationalists as Moses Narboni. Menahem Tamar praised Moses Narboni for his profound understanding of the thought of Ibn Ezra, also noting that Comtino had quoted from Narboni's commentary to *The Guide of the Perplexed* 2:30.[42] While Narboni wrote a commentary on *Shi'ur Qomah*, his philosophical views and his exegesis of *The Guide of the Perplexed* in relation to the Creation and certain other issues were undoubtedly quite radical.

Kalkish and Balbo thus represent the "average" Byzantine rationalist. While both were apprehensive of excessive "philosophizing," they both tried their hand at massive philosophical writing (Kalkish also wrote on Kabbalah). Their philosophical caution did not prevent them being receptive to ideas from rationalist sources. This rationalist model also aptly describes Judah b. Shemariah, who combined scientific and philosophical scholarship with criticism of radical ideas.[43] Rationalists who were not attracted to Kabbalah generally embraced a typical (simplistic) Maimonidean model and went no further. Here is a brief illustration, from Comtino's discussion of the purpose of the Torah:

> Know that the purpose of the giving of the Torah was to endow us with eternal life… And I will explain through a true example: We know that the end for which man was created is to remain eternal so that he may not be lost, but this cannot happen without reaching communion with one's Creator, until one becomes eternal in His eternity, and that is impossible unless one apprehends the intelligibles, and first—becomes pure in the moral virtues… Given that the true purpose is incomprehensible, since the immortality of the soul and how it is immortal cannot be known without much study, one is presented with another purpose and told: If you adopt a certain virtue as men usually do, and one is then offered the purpose of honor among men. The same is true of the study of the sciences, insofar as one does not know their benefit before one studies them, and therefore one will not strive to study them because of the effort involved—therefore one is offered a different purpose.[44]

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[41] *Even Sappir*, Ms. Paris 727, 19b. Kalkish quoted from the introduction to Anatoli's book (Lyck, 1866), 2.

[42] On references to Moses Narboni in Comtino's works, see Attias, *Le commentaire biblique Mordekhai Komtino*, 36. Menahem Tamar's comments appear in his supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Torah, Ms. Leiden, Warner 29, 14b, in connection with a particularly enigmatic passage in Ibn Ezra's commentary on Genesis 3:24. Tamar refers to Comtino's commentary on Ibn Ezra's *Yesod Mora*.

[43] Ta-Shma, "On Greek-Byzantine Rabbinic Literature," 110; and see above, n. 21.

[44] Comtino, Torah commentary, Ms. Paris 265, 78b.

This passage is based mainly on Maimonides' non-philosophical writings, such as the introductions to his Mishnah commentary and to *Perek Helek*. Another reflection of the special nature of Byzantine rationalism is the detailed reference to Saadiah Gaon's apocalyptic-messianic approach (concerning the resurrection of the dead) in a homiletic work including a group of homilies from 1424-1425, which occasionally relies on Maimonides' *Guide*. Surely there can be no more contrasting teachings than Saadiah's messianic theory and Maimonides![45] The Byzantine rationalist, however, did not hesitate to combine these opposites in order to create an apparent picture of unity and generality.

An additional instance from Ephraim ben Gershon's homilies, which were delivered several years after those in the previous anthology, is the allusion to ancient wisdom. Ephraim formulates a rule stating that the apprehension of God's unity depends upon knowledge of logic and the study of three sciences: physics, mathematics, and metaphysics. And he concludes:

> It is impossible to learn the truth of God's unity without studying all these sciences, or at least without studying the writings of our teacher Saadiah Gaon in his *Book of Opinions* and in his commentary on the Torah, or the writings of Rabenu Bahyah in his book *Hovat ha-Levavot*, or the writings of the leader, our teacher Moses, the masterly philosopher, in his prodigious book. From these three giants, a man in whom the spirit of God is[46] may come to know some of the proofs and the strong and incontrovertible demonstrations attesting to the truth of His unity.[47]

Maimonides' rejection of the type of evidence adduced by Saadiah Gaon and by Bahyah in his tough controversy with the *mutakallim* (Moslem theologians) did not prevent Ephraim ben Gershon from including them in this exchange. Quite the contrary, Ephraim's definite recommendation is to study the writings of these three thinkers and set their respective proofs side by side. In his homilies, Ephraim resorts extensively to kabbalistic materials and to many rationalist allegories, and unhesitatingly enters into repeated public discussions about Kabbalah. In one homily he proclaimed, "this time I will not

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[45] Mark Saperstein and Ephraim Kanarfogel, "A Byzantine Manuscript of Sermons: A Description and Selections about Prayer and the Synagogue" [Hebrew], *Pe'amim* 78 (1999): 171.

[46] According to Genesis 41:38.

[47] Ephraim ben Gershon, *Homilies*, London Ms., British Museum 379, 312a.

speak at length of Kabbalah and philosophy, and will deal with simple matters."[48] He could not hold back, however, and did include kabbalistic material adding a weak apology: "Do not blame me, although I did say at the outset that I would not speak at length about Kabbalah."[49] Despite his deep attachment to Kabbalah and its diffusion, however, Ephraim did not hesitate to endorse a radical rationalistic-allegorical interpretation. He opens a long rationalistic-allegorical exegesis of the kings' war in Abraham's time as follows: "Because these four kings represent a an extremely deep matter at the esoteric level, hinting at the four elements, and the five hint at the five senses."[50]

This exegesis fits the interpretation of Levi ben Abraham (four humors and five senses), which evoked the wrath of Abba Mari and his group in a late thirteenth century controversy.[51] Another extreme rationalist of the early fourteenth century, David ibn Bilia, formulated an interpretation resembling the one Ephraim would suggest (four elements and five senses).[52] Ephraim, as noted, saw no contradiction between the public dissemination of esoteric teachings and the radical rationalist doctrine then inflaming areas of Provence and Spain, combining them in ways rather improbable for any Spanish or Provençal rationalist.

Finally, note that even the anti-philosophical polemics of the Karaite Aaron b. Elijah were not an indication of anti-Aristotelianism. On the contrary, his teachings constituted "a stage in the development of Karaite philosophy in its transition from *Kalam* to Aristotelianism,"[53]

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[48] Ibid., 245a.

[49] Ibid., 247b.

[50] Ibid., 171a.

[51] See also A. S. Halkin, "The Ban on the Study of Philosophy" [Hebrew], *Perakim* 1 (1967-1968): 38, 40; idem, "Yedaiah Bedersi's Apology," in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Alexander Altman (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967), 170.

[52] See Dov Schwartz, "Epigrams (Siyyurin) of R. David Ibn Bilia" [Hebrew], Kiryat Sefer 63 (1990-1991): 639.

[53] Daniel J. Lasker, "Nature and Science according to Aaron ben Elijah the Karaite" [Hebrew], *Da'at* 17 (1986): 42. For a survey of the philosophical teachings of Aaron b. Elijah (d. 1369) see Isaac Husik, *A History of Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966, 362-387. Note that Kalkish saw a hankering after philosophy as a special characteristics of the Karaites: "For they all inclined to the opinions of Aristotle, Galen, Plato and their associates, and they seem humble but are hypocritical, and hallucinating fools, like dumb dogs that cannot bark; thus they are Zadok and Boethus, and the cloud (*anan*!) removed itself from them, and the word to the wise will suffice" (*Even Sappir*, 26a).

clearly indicating it was drawing closer to Maimonidean philosophy.[54] This development, too, may be ascribed in some degree to the conceptual climate of Byzantine-Jewish rationalism.

Obviously, the implication is not that no radical rationalists were to be found in Byzantium, particularly rationalists who traveled to the homelands of Spanish culture or were influenced by it, like Moskoni. Kalkish himself complains of those who advocate radical rationalist positions, contrary to the conceptions of Creation and Divine Providence. Such thinkers are imitating the Gentiles:

> "Lest you be lured into their ways" (Deuteronomy 12:30)—this means that one should not become like them, but that the Jews should be distinct in their opinions and recognizable by their dress. And he similarly says, "I have set you apart from other peoples to be mine" (Leviticus 20:26), and our master, the rabbi [Maimonides], explained this to mean that one should not wear gentile dress, but rather wear the special Jewish dress as customary among our holy ancestors, may they rest in peace,[55] not as in these inferior, flawed generations, who have changed their ancestors' dress and replaced their honor with their dress and the forelock of the hair on their heads, as customary among the nations who attach themselves to Baal Pe'or, and all the more so with fragmentary opinions replacing the belief in Creation and Divine Providence, upon which belief relies. And I say no more.[56]

Even if this is merely the routine protestation of a scholar castigating his contemporaries for their faults, it is plausible that radically inclined rationalists were active in Byzantium. Owing to their isolation and the distance from the centers of radical rationalism in Spain and Provence, however, these individuals never coalesced into a well-defined, recognized ideological circle. Exegeses of Ibn Ezra's com-

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[54] On Aaron ben Joseph's closeness to Maimonides' theory of attributes, see Lasker, "Aaron b. Joseph," 123. Aaron did justify, however, many approaches resting on Mutazilite tenets, as was typical of Karaite views from the tenth to twelfth centuries.

[55] Based on Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Idolatry, 11:1: "One should not walk in the ways of the Gentiles, nor resemble them whether in dress, in hair or the like, as Scripture says, 'You shall not follow the practices of the nation…' [Leviticus 20:23], and it is said, 'nor shall you follow their laws' [Leviticus 18:3], and it is said, 'Beware of being lured into their ways' [Deuteronomy 12:30]; all these have one meaning, admonishing one not to resemble them. Rather, the Jew should be distinct from them and recognized by his dress and his other actions, as he is distinct from them in his knowledge and his opinions. As Scripture says, 'I have set you apart from other peoples' [Leviticus 20:26]."

[56] *Even Sappir*, Ms. Paris 727, 39b.

mentary on the Torah in mid-fourteenth century Spain created a circle of radical rationalist thinkers who consistently advocated the eternity of the world, a philosophically motivated antinomianism (challenging the authority of Halakhah), asceticism, and other radical concepts.[57] But in Byzantium, none of the material I have examined points to the existence of such an active radical group. True, Moskoni did support the eternity of the universe in his supercommentary on Ibn Ezra,[58] and Menahem Tamar favored this interpretation as the one fitting Ibn Ezra:

> "As in 'and cut down,' etc."[59] That is to say, this is an explanation of the phrase "and cut them in pieces" (Ezekiel 23:47). And his saying "to cut or to set a boundary" [*le-shum gevul nigzar*]—that is an explanation of "God created," and his words here are self-understood. Yet, inasmuch as the rabbis interpret his words [as referring] to creation *ex nihilo*, and their intent is desirable in order not to weaken people's faith, I shall not be a base fellow who gives away secrets.[60]

This statement by Menahem Tamar is by no means his final word on the subject, for he frequently proclaims the truth of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, and his views merit deeper study. In any event, the chronological gap between Moskoni and Tamar militates against any suggestion that their comments represent a continuous radical tradition. As noted, the "average" rationalist held moderate views and shunned the philosophical and antinomian radicalism found in much of the writing of Spanish and Provençal scholars of the time. Comtino, for instance, wrote a commentary on the *Guide*, explaining Maimonides' doctrine according to a creation as such. Often, rationalists even took up kabbalistic ideas or expressed their appreciation for them. A future study may reveal radical currents and sub-currents in Byzantine rationalism as well, but the well-established, dominant presence of moderate rationalism is a fundamental fact in studies of Byzantine-Jewish thought in the late Middle Ages.

What, then, is the difference between Spanish-Provençal moder-

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[57] See Dov Schwartz, *The Philosophy of a Fourteenth-Century Jewish Neoplatonic Circle* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1996).

[58] Ibid., 112-113.

[59] Ibn Ezra's Commentary on Genesis 1:1. See Leo Prijs, *Abraham ibn Ezra's Commentary on Genesis 1–3: Creation and Paradise. First Critical Edition with Introduction, Explanation and Notes* [Hebrew] (London: n. p. 1989), 6-7.

[60] Based on Proverbs 11:13. Quoted from Tamar's supercommentary on Ibn Ezra, Ms. Leiden, Warner 29, 5b.

ate rationalism and its Byzantine version? Regarding its times and its contents, moderate rationalism resembles the traditionalists' stance in the late thirteenth century controversy, when Rashba and his court issued a ban on the study of sciences for the young. Yet, the writings of Rashba, Abba Mari, and their faction reveal they are not as committed to Aristotle and to the *Guide* as is Kalkish, for instance, who cites them and refers to them directly and consistently. They were not involved in a systematic philosophical endeavor resembling that of Balbo, who was nevertheless a passionate advocate of Kabbalah. They certainly did not deliver philosophical-allegorical homilies in public, as did Ephraim b. Gershon, who was fundamentally a kabbalist and applied himself to the spread of Kabbalah in many Byzantine communities. Byzantine Jews in the late Middle Ages, then, tried to imitate Spanish-Provençal culture while lacking a stable foundation that would have compelled them to identify with a particular camp. This Byzantine character, as noted, lacks originality, but is not identical to the prevalent Spanish-Provençal style.

Elitism and Esoteric Writing

Byzantine rationalism, then, emerges as somewhat unique. And yet, the moderate rationalism that evolved in Byzantium was not free of the elitism that routinely characterized post-Maimonidean rationalism in Spain, Provence, or Italy. Let us consider the stylistic aspects common to Spanish and Byzantine rationalism. Kalkish wrote:

> As to the ignorant, they should clearly be punished with much wine to cause their belly to distend.[61] And of them Scripture says, "Oh, those who are so doughty as drinkers of wine, and so valiant as mixers of drink" (Isaiah 5:22), and of them it is explained, "Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (Isaiah 22:13). And they make all their days festivals, and that is what Scripture denounced, saying, "Yea, all tables are covered with vomit and filth, so that no space is left" (Isaiah 28:8). See, O scholars of our times, how the prophet, may he rest in peace, denounced them when he saw their evil, filthy deeds, like so much evil-smelling dung, to throw it in their faces to make them evil-smelling, so that scholars should avoid them lest they too become evil-smelling from them, like "Dead flies turn the perfumer's ointment fetid and putrid" (Ecclesiastes 10:1), for they are an abomination and their women are like swarming

[61] Based on Numbers 5:22.

> things, as you see in all generations. So, he who keeps apart from them will become holy, by virtue of "You shall be holy" (Leviticus 19:2).[62]

The distinction between the educated and the ignorant is a given existential situation. Following Maimonides in the introduction to his Mishnah commentary, Kalkish declared that the purpose of the "multitude" was to be of benefit to the elect, who realize themselves. "But the wisdom of God, may He be exalted, decreed that the educated are few and the ignorant many, to serve them and minister to them, so that they might conduct their learning without hindrance. But in messianic times, if we merit them, many will walk about and wisdom will multiply."[63] While Kalkish's censure related, as this passage shows, to keeping company with the ignorant because of their dissolute behavior, he was equally critical of those who approached philosophical secrets without prior preparation. After all, such persons are eager to understand divinity, which is beyond human understanding. Kalkish lamented that his contemporaries, devoid of knowledge, study the writings of the Christian scholastics:

> And the fools who arise in these generations, who have eyes but cannot see,[64] have drunk from the waters of the Christians and reveal their nakedness in their dress, and proclaim their folly, their rashness, and their stupidity and know their Creator, for in their hurriedly acquired and borrowed knowledge, they believe they are potentially perfect, but they lack knowledge and are blind to the sight of wisdom, and ask how and what, acting as if they possessed real divinity. They are the foxes that spoil the vineyard of the world.[65]

We find an interesting elitist point of view in the writings of Shemariah Ikriti. He argued, in general, that "the prophets sent to the multitude to educate them should not speak to them of spiritual matters, for they are not fit for them."[66] In the introduction to his commentary on the Song of Songs, he did not hesitate to voice sharp criticism of King Solomon for his carnal desires. Shemariah proposed an

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[62] *Even Sappir*, Ms. Paris 727, 104a.

[63] Ibid., 18b. The ideal of the dissemination of knowledge in messianic times is also Maimonidean (*Code*, Laws of Kings, chs. 11–12, and so forth), as has been frequently discussed in the literature.

[64] Based on Jeremiah 5:21; Psalms 115:5, 135:16.

[65] Based on Song of Songs 2:15. Quotation from *Even Sappir*, 107a.

[66] Long commentary on Song of Songs, Ms. Paris 897, 62a. Cited from Aaron Ahrend's introduction to his forthcoming edition of Shemariah's commentary on the Aggadah. I am indebted to him for his permission to publish it here.

interesting innovation, "a wonderful and deep thing in the quality of Solomon's soul, which is practically inaccessible to the ignorant; only those whose eyes are wide open." This innovation suggests one must distinguish between the roles of the upper, intellectual level of the soul (*neshamah*) and the animate levels (*nefesh*, *ruah*), regarding their responsibility for a sinful deed and the consequent harm. Shemariah envisages a situation in which the lower levels satisfy their desires but the upper level remains unharmed, as it is not an integral part of the animate levels and in fact survives after their disappearance. Hence, Solomon's harem of women harmed him only toward the end of his life, when the balance was disturbed and his upper level—the *neshamah*—was also impaired.[67] This bold and unusual idea is characteristic of Shemariah's thought, which deserves methodical study. His commentary had to be hidden from the "multitude" probably because of its antinomian implications.

The elitist attitude is also evident in the homilies addressed to the broader public. Ephraim ben Gershon distinguishes between the multitude and the sages on several occasions. For instance, when speaking of the reason for blowing the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah, he says: "You have learned that the blast evokes the sigh that a person should sigh for his sins. This is the popular reason, however, and it is the truth."[68] Beside the popular reason, however, the homilist offers a "rational reason," resting on an interpretation of the original sin as an excessive contemplation of divine wisdom and a consequent confusion of the mind. Without any qualms, Ephraim drew a distinction between the masses and special individuals when addressing his public. In a eulogy "on the death of a scholar," Ephraim proclaimed: "There is a difference between scholars and ignorant people, as the ascent of man over beast."[69]

Another episode that brings out the philosophical elitism of the Byzantine rationalists is associated with the name of Moses Kapuzato (Moses "the Greek"), who also insisted on the need to conceal

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[67] Based on his commentary on Song of Songs, published in *The Five Scrolls with Ancient Commentaries* [Hebrew], ed. Yosef David Qafih (Jerusalem, 1962), 22-23. See Dov Schwartz, "Notes on Shemaria Ikriti's Commentaries on the Song of Songs" [Hebrew], in *Joseph b. David Qafih Memorial Volume*, ed. Zohar Amar and Hananel Seri (Ramat-Gan: The Bar-Ilan University Campus Rabbi's Office, 2001), 319-332.

[68] London Ms., British Museum 379, 48a.

[69] Ibid., 181b.

the secrets of wisdom from the ignorant. Kapuzato, a philosophical biblical exegete active in the second half of the fifteenth century, was a rationalist zealously opposed to the Karaites. He criticized Ibn Ezra's comments in connection with the three angels who appeared to Abraham (Genesis 18:1). Ibn Ezra cites an interpretation according to which "The Name [that appeared to Abraham] was three people, He is One and He is three, and they do not separate." Kapuzato rejected this explanation saying, "they forgot [the verse], 'The two angels arrived in Sodom…' (Genesis 19:1)." In Kapuzato's opinion, Ibn Ezra should not have rejected this interpretation. On the contrary, he argued, this is a profound epistemological conception, relying on the idea of the uniformity of intelligent apprehension (intellect—intellectually cognizing subject—intellectually cognized object) in the perception of divinity. In brief, the distinction between the apprehending cognition, the apprehended object, and the process of apprehension exists only at the extra-divine level. In intra-divine apprehension, no distinction prevails between the three components of the apprehension process. Therefore, irrespective of whether the number of angels mentioned was two or three, the events described took place in accordance with human, not divine, cognition. This is known, Kapuzato argues, to everyone seeking knowledge, but not to the unenlightened. This was why the Torah was obliged to use the angels as a parable:

> Indeed the multitude, because of their folly, are incapable of understanding it as it is worthy of being understood, for it is not in the power of that multitude and therefore they have stumbled upon it. But this does not happen to them alone, and in each and every nation, this happens to the wise with the multitude. This is why the prophets saw fit to conceal the truth of some opinions in parables and opinions fit for the multitude, and to keep silent in some others, as you see at the beginning of Genesis and in connection with the tree of life and the tree of knowledge and the secret of the Garden of Eden and the mysteries of prophecy and the secrets of the mysteries of the Torah. So do not think that there is any other reason, Heaven forbid, that the secrets of the mysteries of Torah and the mysteries of Kabbalah are concealed for any reason other than these.[70]

[70] Cited (in the name of "Moses the Greek") in Comtino's commentary on the Torah, Ms. Paris 265, 25a; also cited by Israel Zinberg, *History of Jewish Literature* [Hebrew], vol. 3 (Tel Aviv: Sherberk, 1958), 18 [not included in the English translation]. See also Rosanes, *History of the Jews in Turkey*, 33; Attias, *Le commentaire biblique Mordekhai Komtino*, 34.

After quoting Kapuzato's critique, Comtino defends Ibn Ezra's exegesis. His main argument is the need to negate the Christological interpretation, which considers the three *personae* as a single entity. Indeed, Christian scholastics relied on the epistemological perception just described to "prove" the unity of the godhead despite the doctrine of the Trinity.[71] The polemical struggle was complicated by the fact that, at the time, important theologians of the Eastern Church placed emphasis on the doctrine of the denial of divine attributes.[72] In any event, Kapuzato explained that parables were directed specifically to the uneducated, who lacked the capacity for profound speculative apprehension.

Let us now turn to a few remarks on esoteric material in Byzantine-Jewish writings. In my brief survey of the emergence of astral-magic traditions in Byzantium, I noted that Judah Moskoni, in his supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's Torah commentary, presented such esoteric material as a fitting interpretation for Ibn Ezra's secrets.[73] This approach also involves intellectual elitism, as well as a degree of esoteric writing. Paradoxically, Moskoni presents the rational reason that Maimonides offers for the law of the scapegoat as the one that is actually intelligible to the multitude, namely, as the exoteric level.[74] The gist of the rational reason is that the people, witnessing the ritual of the scapegoat, are terrified. On the other hand, the elite and the enlightened continue to ponder the reasons for the minute details of the commandment, that is, the esoteric level:

> In any event, should you say that the additional action in the secret of the scapegoat ritual, beyond its atonement role, suffices for the masses,

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[71] Elsewhere, Comtino raised a classical anti-Trinity argument, saying that the Christians were explaining reality not on its own merits but as dictated by prior assumptions: "They allow reality to be influenced by their opinions and are themselves not influenced by reality, as has happened to Christian truth today. They have accepted belief in the Trinity and established it, and reality had to be reformed in accordance with their views and verify their views in false ways, and they had to believe those ways and verify them with false premises, and think them true. This brought them to their belief in the Trinity, which they founded upon falsehood, and it was a snare that removed them from truthfulness. That is the reason for 'You shall not worship their gods, for that would be a snare to you'" (Comtino, commentary on the Torah, 89a). See Daniel J. Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York: Ktav, 1977), 45-104.

[72] See Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600–1700)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 258-259.

[73] Schwartz, *Astral Magic*.

[74] *Guide of the Perplexed* 3:46.

> what will you do with its secret with regard to the perfect ones, for they will say to you: What is the secret of its ritual for all such whose souls are not affected, unless as absolute proof and adequate demonstration?[75]

Perfect people, then, know that only magic-astral reasons provide a complete explanation for the details of the scapegoat ritual. The proper disposition for the act of astral magic, which involves many details, is the profound secret contained in Scripture; and Ibn Ezra's enigmatic words allude precisely to that secret. In addition, Moskoni stated that various Byzantine scholars had studied Ibn Ezra's most abstruse secrets; he may, in fact, have been hinting at the existence of a Byzantine esoteric-exegetical tradition concerning Ibn Ezra's enigmatic writing.

Alongside the moderate image of Byzantine rationalism, therefore, we find other traditions involving the transmission of philosophical secrets and elitist ideas, disdainful of the multitude and the common man. According to the available material, it would appear that the radical-esoteric traditions did not produce structured rationalist circles of thinkers, as happened in far-off Spain and Provence, although a considerable amount of manuscript material is still awaiting study.

Limits and Environment

A distinction must be drawn between Byzantine rationalism before, during, and after the expulsion from Spain. The many Spanish refugees inundating the Ottoman Empire expanded the scope of creative genres and led to new developments in both content and style. The phenomenon is particularly evident in the literature of rationalist homiletics. This genre experienced impressive growth in fifteenth-century Spain, with the appearance of large-scale homiletical works such as Isaac Arama's *Akedat Yitzhak* and the homilies of Shem Tov b. Joseph ibn Shem Tov, as well as monographs that had clearly begun as sermons, such as *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*.[76] After the expulsion, numerous

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[75] Moskoni, supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Torah, Leviticus 16:8. See Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, 343. Note that, according to Maimonides himself, there is no reason for the largely arbitrary *details* of the commandments. Believers in astral magic, however, could not possibly accept such an argument.

[76] A manuscript of this work was discovered in Candia in 1469 (Ms. Vatican 257). See Joseph Hacker, "The Sephardi Sermon in the Sixteenth Century: Between Literature and Historical Source" [Hebrew], *Pe'amim* 26 (1986): 108-127.

works of this genre, some on quite a large scale, were written in various major Byzantine communities, such as Istanbul and Salonica. While some homiletical works (such as those of Ephraim b. Gershon and the anonymous preacher whose sermons are preserved in Ms. Cambridge Add. 1022) were written before the expulsion, the literature became much richer in its wake.[77]

The unique characteristics of Byzantine-Jewish rationalism may be attributed to the special cultural climate of the area that, although remote from the centers of Spanish culture, strove to prove its prowess in the relevant fields of activity. After the expulsion, with the subsequent massive influx of Spanish culture, a change took place. The synthetic model, which combined denunciation of radical philosophy with sympathy for its more moderate trends, gave way to more extreme models, including an all-out attack on philosophizing in general.[78] Nevertheless, the limits of knowledge were broadened, and the refugees brought with them to Byzantium an extensive corpus of Arabic and scholastic literature.

In addition, consideration should be given to other phenomena, such as the struggle against Karaism, still active in the fifteenth century.[79] Echoes of the Karaite threat and its influence may have spread as far as Spain, since we find anti-Karaite polemics in Spain even in the fourteenth century, although Karaism in Spain was already in decline by then.[80] Moreover, the impoverished Jewish communities of Byzantium found themselves embroiled in the conflicts between the

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[77] See Joseph Hacker, "Patterns of the Intellectual Activity of Ottoman Jewry in the 16th and 17th Centuries" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 53 (1984): 569-570. In this article, Hacker describes the arrival of the refugees, bringing their writings and their culture with them. He points out that "among the Romaniots in the Empire, and especially in Istanbul, there were great, renowned scholars by no means inferior to the Spanish scholars in their intellectual capacity and knowledge" (602-603). On Ephraim b. Gershon and the anonymous preacher see Ta-Shma, *Ha-Nigle she-Banistar*, 80-81; Hacker, "The Ottoman System," 41-45, 49-50; Saperstein and Kanarfogel, "A Byzantine Manuscript of Sermons."

[78] See, for instance, Joseph Hacker, "R. Jacob b. Solomon ibn Habib: An Analysis of Leadership in the Jewish Community of Salonica in the Fourteenth Century" [Hebrew], *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, vol. 2 (1976): 124.

[79] See Jean-Christophe Attias, "Intellectual Leadership: Rabbanite-Karaite Relations in Constantinople as Seen through the Works and Activity of Mordekhai Comtino in the Fifteenth Century," in *Ottoman and Turkish Jewry: Community and Leadership*, ed. Aron Rodrigue (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1992), 67-86.

[80] For an example of such polemics, see the works of Israel Israeli. See Nahem Ilan, *"Pursuit of Truth" and "A Path for the Many": Studies of the Teachings of R. Israel Israeli of Toledo* [Hebrew] (Ph.D. diss: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1999).

Ottomans and the Christian empire. The condition of the communities in the empire itself was far from ideal. While the well-known appeal of Isaac Zarfati to European Jews to emigrate to Byzantium paints a moderate picture of official attitudes to the Jews, various scholars have challenged the accuracy of this evidence.[81] The fear of a decline in spiritual creativity is clearly evident in Kalkish's writings: "As a stranger in the Cretan community, I awoke from the sleep of my folly and laziness before the Holy Ark should be taken away."[82] The result, as we have seen, was a degree of rationalism that combines receptivity and moderation, as well as rational and non-rational traditions. The combination sometimes gave rise, paradoxically, to fierce attacks on philosophers, on the one hand, and the adoption of radically rational positions, on the other. In any case, Byzantine rationalists invested their creative efforts in areas that occupied Spanish-Provençal culture, but with recourse to a limited philosophical library and in an atmosphere of geographical and spiritual isolation.

Further research is necessary on circles and centers of Jewish-Byzantian rationalism. For instance, we know of fruitful philosophical activity in Candia,[83] continuing well into the fifteenth century, and the philosophical approach developed there deserves further study. Karaite intellectual activity in various centers produced a variety of philosophical doctrines, some of which await examination. Contacts with Ashkenazi Jewry enriched Jewish-Byzantine thought in various directions, which also deserve scholarly efforts. These are only some of the indications of Byzantine scholarly interest in philosophizing in different fields, which was responsible for vigorous rational creativity in late medieval Byzantium, despite its remoteness.

In the next chapter, I will attempt to demonstrate the application of these conclusions to a realm of ideas that occupied a central place in both Spanish-Provençal and Byzantine culture: astral-magic theology.

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[81] See Zvi Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. 4 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1956), 271–274; Hacker, *Jewish Society in Salonica and Environs*, appendix 1; idem, "The Ottoman System."

[82] *Even Sappir*, Ms. Paris 727, 26b.

[83] Balbo, for instance, was active in the Candia center. A considerable amount of material survives in manuscript. See, for instance, Ms. Vatican 225, copied in Candia in 1458, which includes both philosophical and kabbalistic works written in a philosophical style. Similarly, Ms. Vatican 345 was copied there in 1451, with commentaries on Averroes and Avicenna's canon. See also above.

CHAPTER EIGHT

MAGIC, ASTROLOGY, AND THEOLOGY IN LATE MEDIEVAL BYZANTIUM

Prior to the mid-fourteenth century, no extensive magic-astral exegeses of biblical sources or of Ibn Ezra's Torah commentary had been included in the literature. The phenomenon of thinkers wandering westward enabled astral magic to enter Byzantium as a theological concept. Ibn Ezra had preoccupied Byzantine thinkers and a tradition of supercommentaries was widespread in Byzantium,[1] probably contributing to the interest in the astrological and magic-astral views of this enigmatic exegete.

I would now like to examine certain features unique to the astral magic conceptions of a few Byzantine thinkers, beyond angles common to east and west. My perspective is comparative rather than historical-developmental. Here, too, the description should be treated with some reserve, in view of the paucity of the available material; nevertheless, what does exist reflects an interesting viewpoint, rather different from that of Spanish-Provençal culture. After considering the features typical of Byzantine Jewish culture, I shall point out a few characteristics it shares with the philosophical culture of the west.

Unique Features

The specifically Byzantine features of magic-astral conceptions in late medieval times were not necessarily an outcome of originality and profundity, but rather the result of remoteness and lack of sources. Lacking sources, thinkers sometimes entered into elementary discussions of astrological and magic-astral issues. Remoteness from the

[1] Evidence of an extant tradition of concern with Ibn Ezra's mysteries is that Eliezer ben Mattatia's commentary, written in the thirteenth century, was widespread in Byzantium. See Abraham David, "Notes on the History of Eliezer b. Mattatia he-Hasid, a Palestinian Sage" [Hebrew], in *From the Collections of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts* (Jerusalem: The Jewish National and University Library, 1995), 35.

centers of theological debate and interpretation in Spain and Provence led to the formation of integrative and syncretistic perceptions that combined, as it were, a variety of positions.

An Unknown Science

The scarce material available to Byzantine thinkers in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries left its mark in all three fields of astronomy, astrology, and astral magic, as attested by the the following statement by Elnathan b. Moses Kalkish:

> The great scholars of medicine wished to know the reason for limiting the day of sickness to the seventh, the seventeenth and the twenty-first, and could not find a resting-place for their feet,[2] for this science depends on the median conjunction, on correct knowledge. And who is there today, whether gentile or Jew, who knows the secret of astronomy, with proper knowledge, to know and recognize immediately when a sickness occurs and under what sign one should erect a building and perform an action in accordance with the celestial configuration, to allay the reason of the sickness and its height and strength.[3]

Lack of astronomical knowledge necessarily implies inability to heal and to apply magic-astral measures. Moreover, Kalkish's main complaint refers to ignorance of astrology and magic. As noted, Spanish thought viewed astral magic as an ancient wisdom that had disappeared without a trace.[4] The traces, however, relate to the theological interpretation that had founded ritual on the principles of astral magic, whereas Kalkish was speaking of practices of astral magic in *medicine.* Healing with amulets was then a discipline taught at western universities and, in some ways, an integral part of the medical curriculum.

Kalkish considered a knowledge of astronomy necessary for astral magic. Together with other Byzantine thinkers he tried, as it were, to "reconstruct" astronomical and astrological knowledge by extensively recording the stars' influences.[5] The fact that evidence of a lack of magic-astral sources is no longer common by the fifteenth century provides some indication of the dynamics of Byzantine Jewish thought at the turn of the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries.

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[2] According to Genesis 8:9. See Ibn Ezra on Genesis 8:5.

[3] *Even Sappir*, Ms. Paris 727, 32b.

[4] See above, 000 (ch. 4, part 1).

[5] *Even Sappir*, 35a–b; Comtino, Commentary on the Torah, Ms. Paris 265, 104a–106a.

Science or Craft?

As is clear from the above passage, Kalkish considered healing by astral-magic means both important and efficient. Contemporary doctors, he complained, did not know how to "study the science of astronomy with its experiential basis, that is, the astrolabe, to know the hours and minutes when the sickness has begun to act in accordance with the decree of the heavenly configuration."[6] Thus, astral-magical healing was considered a "special, great science." Kalkish, however, was not merely content with healing by such means and held that these magical arts made it possible to vanquish the laws of nature altogether, as follows from his explanation of Elijah's ascent to heaven, which he contrasted with the actions of Balaam:

> On the matter of Elijah who flew in the air in the wind, it should be said that he was familiar with the power of the Supernal, knowing how to receive the power of the Great Luminary, and he enunciated the Ineffable Name, [which] moved him and the air propelled him in his body and moved him and made him fly. Balaam the magician, however, did this through demons who led the Great Luminary to him in his body and made him fly, for the demons are familiar with this science and their will is done everywhere and they have the power of the planets in whatever matter they desire.[7]

Astral magic was therefore the key to understanding wonder-working, whether for good or for bad, for Kalkish also explained the actions of the Egyptian magicians in this way. Sorcery was seen to be a "science" [*hokhmah*] almost always associated with the "supernal configuration" [*ha-maʿarakhah ha-eliyonah*]. Elsewhere, Kalkish listed thirty-two paths, identifying them, in the style of ecstatic Kabbalah, with intelligences of different kinds. He ends the list as follows: "The thirty-second path is called the worshiped intelligence, so called because it is an object of worship to all those who use the action of the seven planets."[8] Hence, using astral powers through various rituals was seen as genuinely

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[6] *Even Sappir*, 33a.

[7] Ibid., 97a. For a similar association on Elijah "flying in the world as a bird" ["*poreah ba-olam ketsippor*"], see the Midrash on Psalms 8:7.

[8] Ibid., 75a. On the foundations of ecstatic Kabbalah in this passage, see Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Albany: SUNY, 1988).

divine knowledge, and Kalkish, as we have seen, complained that few Byzantine sources were available for it.

This was also Judah Moskoni's perception, who considered it a sign of "disrespect" to offer merely an astrological interpretation of the High Priest's vestments. For Moskoni, these vestments were not only astrological tools but also talismans. In his view, "the makings of the ephod and the breastplate… [are] imitations of secret things from the craft of the heavens and, in general, from the middle and supernal worlds."[9] Moskoni also insisted that every prophet, with the sole exception of Moses, had occasionally needed the *Urim* and *Thummim* as astral-magical tools in order to discharge their duties.[10]

Mordechai Comtino, however, repeatedly portrayed astral magic as a form of idolatry and denied it any efficacy. His negative attitude to the field may well have inspired his definition, which oscillates between "science" and "craft" (*melakhah*). According to Comtino, men were punished for Adam's sin by having their years shortened, "so that they should not fully understand the science of the constellations."[11] As a consequence, Comtino also held that bringing down spirituality on amulets was merely a craft. He strongly disagreed with Ibn Ezra's well known interpretation of Laban's *terafim*. Ibn Ezra had proposed three explanations, one of which identified the *terafim* with an astrological instrument, such as the astrolabe, the other, with a talisman. Comtino asked: On the one hand, Ibn Ezra decides in favor of an astral-magic explication; on the other, Ibn Ezra goes on to explain that Rachel feared her father would discover Jacob's escape route by consulting the stars, implying that the *terafim* were not astral-magical instruments:

> As to the *terafim*: some say that they are an instrument made to tell the time. And some say that astrologers have the power to make an image at certain times to draw down supernal force. And R. Abraham b. Ezra… said that the truth is that they are of human shape, made to receive supernal force. And to explain why Rachel stole them he said that her father Laban was proficient in astrology, and she feared that he would examine the constellations to find out their escape route. Now I do not know how his two statements may be harmonized, for the images made to receive supernal force are intended to anticipate the future or

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[9] *Even ha-Ezer*, London-Montefiori Ms. 49, 204b; Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, 209–210. This passage is cited in p. 302.

[10] *Even ha-ʿEzer*, 373 a–b.

[11] Comtino, Commentary on the Torah, 15a.

> the present, as known in the science of talismans; while the instruments through which one examines the constellations are instruments that show the ascendant together with the other cusps and houses that are near and that coincide with the aspects of the stars according to the latitude of the place, insofar as their place is known by calculation for the time of the question or for the time of nativity, in order to know the future or the present.…[12]

Comtino finally decided in favor of the astrological rather than the astral-magical interpretation, for exegetical reasons; but the point is that he considered the attraction of spiritual power as a "science" [*hokhmah*]. Elsewhere, however, Comtino describes astral magic as a "craft" (*melakhah*) or "active craft" (*melekhet pe'ulah*). He distinguishes between two types of "crafts": techniques for knowing the future and techniques for influencing future events. Of the second type he writes: "Hence the group who make images to receive supernal power to effect good or bad, as they think."[13] He denies the efficacy of such techniques on many occasions, such as the following:

> "Moses made a copper serpent" (Numbers 21:9)—because he found it written in the book of talismans that when the end of the constellation of Sagittarius emerges from twenty degrees and more and the moon is there in conjunction, if one makes a three-dimensional copper serpent and engraves certain inscriptions upon it in the likeness of the letters of the person bearing them, then the serpents will flee from him, and if a person bitten by a serpent looks at it he will live—[because of this] people thought that is why this serpent was made. But that thought is nonsense; for this was done in the hour of wrath, and it cannot be thought that it was done at a propitious time and that it was mounted on the standard when necessary, for it is not written in Scripture, "Put the serpent on a standard," only "Make a serpent" (Numbers, 21:8). And one should not ask why, for the Lord's thoughts are profound.[14]

Thus, Comtino rejected the explication of the copper serpent as a talisman. Though on one occasion Comtino referred to the use of talismans as a science, he frequently denied the efficacy of that "science," presenting it as little more than a technique. It would seem clear that, in his public discourse, Comtino was inclined to deny the reality of

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[12] Ibid., 36b; Ibn Ezra offers his explanation in his commentary on Genesis 31: 19. See also Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, 73–74.

[13] Comtino, Commentary on the Torah, 99b.

[14] Ibid., 146a. See also Mauro Zonta, *La 'Classificazione delle Scienze' di Al-Farabi nella Tradizione Ebraica* (Venezia: Silvio Zamorani Editore, 1992), 27-28.

astral magic, his use of the term "science" merely reflecting an existing tradition on a realm of knowledge that he himself rejected.

The perception that astral magic was a "science" persisted even after the cultural switch of the mid-fifteenth century in Byzantium. This is illustrated by the attitude of Menahem Tamar, who also described astral magic in those terms when explaining Ibn Ezra's statement that "it is known that [Laban] changed [Jacob's] wages, that he should take the speckled [sheep] only":

> It would seem that this changing is known to us by logical deduction, although not explicitly mentioned in the Torah when it took place, but since Jacob related it to his wives we know it is true. Perhaps he had in this connection another science concerning the constellations or the separation of the sheep, or it was by Divine Providence, which seems the most probable; therefore Scripture says thereafter, "God has taken away [your father's livestock…]."[15]

Tamar presents three alternative explanations of Jacob's action: (1) astral magic; (2) deception, or perhaps use of natural means; (3) Divine Providence. Tamar prefers the third alternative, but all the same presents the first as a "science." Elsewhere, Tamar presents Maimonides' view on the purpose of the commandments, including magic-astral elements. In his view:

> Observing the commandments has two objectives. One is to amend the political collective, which is the welfare of the body. The other is to contemplate the reason for the commandment, so that the educated person who grasps it might receive the abundance of the commandment, which is the welfare of the soul.[16]

According to Maimonides, the welfare of the soul means contemplating the true opinions. By contrast, the welfare of the soul for Tamar means knowledge of the commandment's utilitarian dimension—receiving the abundance. The commandments, then, are perceived as recipients for lowering abundance.

In sum: Comtino's wavering between defining astral magic as a "science" or as a "craft" is interesting and worthy of attention. A thinker's definition of a concept reflects his general attitude to that concept. True, one frequently finds Moskoni using the expression "craft

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[15] Ibn Ezra, Commentary on Genesis 31:7; Tamar's commentary *ad loc.*, Ms. Leiden, Warner 29, 42b.

[16] Ibid., 112b, and also ibid., 184a. Tamar ascribes this approach to Ibn Ezra.

of the heavens" [*melekhet shamayyim*], which in Hebrew is reminiscent of the expression "work [making] of the Tabernacle" [*melekhet ha-mishkan*]. Ostensibly, the term craft refers more to a technical rather than a distinctively intellectual realm. Substantively, however, Moskoni was undoubtedly convinced that bringing down spirituality was a "science."

Magic of the Name

An interesting combination of astral magic and magic of names appears in Kalkish's writings and Ephraim Ben Gershon's homilies. Ibn Ezra's writings are the source of this magic combination,[17] and Kalkish and Ephraim Ben Gershon applied it broadly for hermeneutical and homiletical purposes. As noted, Kalkish argued that Elijah flew in the air in the wind,[18] and was made to fly after enunciating the Ineffable Name.[19] Kalkish explained this midrash as meaning that the combination of the "supernal power" and the use of the name enabled Elijah to fly. Ephraim has lengthy homilies on Purim, and wrote on the celestial situation leading to the chain of events mentioned in the Book of Esther:

> Benevolent and malicious stars vied and fought with each other, and Saturn and Mars in their great and resolute power think of vanquishing Israel, while Jupiter and Venus were impotent and could not stand up to them. Esther, then, needed the help of He who is higher and stronger than all the high and strong stars, and mentioned in her question the special name, blessed be He, the God of Israel who defeats and destroys the astrological rules, and can humble and void the power of the stars. She [Esther] wanted to approach this matter by making a feast. And it is known that through the power of this name, the supernal descend and the nether ascend. [20]

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[17] See Aviezer Ravitzky, "Maimonides and his Disciples on Linguistic Magic and the 'Folly of Amulet Writers'" [Hebrew], in *Jewish Culture in the Eye of the Storm: Jubilee Book in Honor of Yosef Ahituv*, ed. Avi Sagi and Nahem Ilan (Tel Aviv and Ein Tsurim: Hakibbutz Hameuhad and the Yaakov Herzog Institute, 2002), 431-458. The combination of astral magic and magic of the name in the fourteenth century appears, for instance, in *Megillat Setarim*. See *Iggrot ha-Rambam* (Lipsia, 1859), 35c-d. See Gershom Scholem, "From Philosopher to Kabbalist: A Legend of the Kabbalists on Maimonides" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz: The Maimonides Book* 6 (1935): 94-95; Moshe Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," in *Studies in Maimonides*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 79.

[18] See *Midrash on Psalms* (Buber edn.), 8:7.

[19] *Even Sappir*, 97a.

[20] Homilies, London Ms., British Museum 379, 5b.

Esther's acts are described as defensive magic, intended to cancel the negative emanation. The feast is described as a preparation toward the magical act, but the core of the deed is the use of the divine name. The logical basis for this activity is that God rules over the celestial forces. Communion with God, then, enables individuals to transcend their stellar destiny. The communion, however, depends on the ritual of the divine name.

Indirectly, Ephraim validates the magic of the name through the features and punctuation of the letters, which he notes in detail and at length while weaving in several kabbalistic and mystical motifs. He writes, for instance, "*hirik* [a diacritic mark] hints that it can shatter and destroy the course of the sign."[21] The power of the written word joins the power of the spoken word. Ephraim further argues that prayer is informed with exalted powers.[22] He describes the divine emanation that can be drawn down through blessings in a unique kabbalistic style, presenting those blessed as "recipients."[23] Prayer and

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[21] Ibid., 21b. The review of the letters' characteristics and their punctuation begins at 20b. See, for instance, Yair Zoran, "Magic, Theurgy, and the Knowledge of Letters in Islam and their Parallels in Jewish Literature" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 18 (1997): 19-62. On the magic of the divine name and its punctuation in Jewish mysticism see, for instance, Moshe Idel, "On Devotion in the Shmoneh Esreh Prayer of Isaac the Blind" [Hebrew], in *Massu'ot: Studies in Kabbalistic Literature and Jewish Philosophy in memory of Prof. Ephraim Gottlieb*, ed. Michal Oron and Amos Goldreich (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1994), 25-52. In the same volume, see Ithamar Greenwald, "The Writing, the Letter, and the Tetragrammaton: Magic, Spirituality, and Mysticism" [Hebrew], 75-98.

[22] "Since prayer has the power to change nature" (Homilies 139a). See, for instance, Abraham Elkayam, "Between Referentialism and Performativism: Two Approaches in Understanding the Kabbalistic Symbol" [Hebrew], *Da'at* 24 (1990), 29ff.

[23] "This is the hundredfold that Isaac found (according to Genesis 26:12) and what he was blessed with are a hundred wells around the gates of justice, from which the blessing, the abundance, and the emanation flow to all creatures, through Israel's praying of the one hundred blessings. Hence, you will find in the Tabernacle one hundred sockets for one hundred pillars, a socket for each pillar (Exodus 38:27), and you will not find one socket that had no recipient for pillars. The mystery of the pillars is known to be in the hooks, and the evidence is: the hooks of the pillars (Exodus 38:11, 17), and the mystery of the middle line and the God of Jacob, since this is how each one in Israel will be blessed in one hundred kinds of blessings, and abundance, and emanation. Each one in Israel should recite one hundred blessings every day (TB Menahot 43b); in other words, every blessing has a wellspring and a place from which it flows and emanates" (Homilies 142b). Ephraim ben Gershon described the order of the emanation as an abundance that the blessings draw from the *sefirah* of *tiferet* ("the middle line," "the God of Jacob") to the *sefirah* of *malkhut* ("the gates of justice") and from there to the person pronouncing the blessing. He does

blessings, acts fundamentally verbal, are presented as a source for drawing down emanation in various modes. According to Ephraim ben Gershon, the use of the divine name thus neutralizes the harmful influence of the stars, and the Book of Esther is reinterpreted in light of this principle.

An Intermediate Position

Two main camps crossed swords over the question of astral magic in late thirteenth-century Provence. Conservatives recognized popular magic in its various forms, but rejected astral magic. Rationalists rejected the forms of popular magic but ascribed great importance to magic-astral practices. While most rationalists rejected popular magic, many kabbalists dabbled in it and legitimated it, at least theoretically. Kalkish was a Byzantine kabbalist, but he nevertheless took an emphatically rationalist position. We have already seen that, despite the fierce attacks on philosophers, Kalkish was appreciative of real metaphysics such as that of Aristotle in his writings. The following attack on believers in popular magic is phrased in philosophical terms:

> I have heard, and it has also been brought to my ears concerning the sorcerers of this generation, inferior upstarts, that they have chosen a [divine or magical] name by themselves and that they write amulets to cure people frightened by spirits. These people imagine that they will thereby call off demons and be healed from their sickness and their imagination, as in the prophecy of the renowned prophets upon whom rests the spirit of the Lord and in whom is the supernal spirit, who loudly proclaim that these things have appeared to them in visions. But these people are foolish and mad, full of delusions, with filthy brains… For the supernal powers are prevented from bestowing prophetic abundance upon us. Where is the wisdom of the ignorant fools, who roar like rash leopards?[24]

The argument against popular magic proceeds as follows: Those who write charms and pose as prophets hinder the authentic attraction of prophetic abundance ("the supernal powers are prevented…"). In other words, popular magic supersedes "intellectual" magic, that is, the bringing down of spirituality. This style does not prevail among Spanish and Provençal kabbalists. On the contrary, there were tradi-

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not renounce the theurgic effects of sacrifices and prayer—*keruv ha-sefirot* [bringing the *sefirot* closer], and makes explicit statements to that effect in 147b.

[24] *Even Sappir*, 2b.

tionalists and kabbalists who believed in the magical material found in the Talmud, for instance, while rejecting astral magic.

Regarding this area, then, the feature unique to Byzantine thought was the emergence of intermediate positions, unknown or rare in contemporary Spain and Provence. This can probably be attributed to the lack of a firm tradition of magic-astral theology among Byzantine-Jewish thinkers. No well-defined philosophical circles, like those of Spain and Provence, existed in fourteenth century Byzantium, at least according to the research findings so far.

Common Features

After presenting several features unique to the thought that developed in Byzantine culture, I will now point out some elements common to the magic-astral traditions of Byzantine thinkers and Spanish-Provençal culture. Rather than on the entire range of astrological and magic-astral theology, my focus will be on issues linking astral magic and Spanish-Provençal rationalism. The list of common characteristics is followed by a broader discussion of some of them.

Astral Magic and Communion

Like Spanish philosophers of the mid-fourteenth century, Kalkish believed there was a relationship between astrology and astral magic on the one hand, and intellectual religious perfection on the other.

> Whoever is proficient in that science can do whatever he wishes, and the Lord… accepts his conjunction [*dibuko*] and the angels bring him everything; for [such persons] receive from the supernal configuration, both above and below, everything [they desire] is created [comes to pass]. This is great wisdom, blessed be the Lord who created everything in wisdom and bestowed some of his wisdom on his creatures as he willed.[25]

Conjunction with God is the result of sorcery (both astral and using names), and whoever attains it is endowed with unlimited capacities, a

[25] Ibid., 97a. See Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, 155–157. Kalkish ascribed exceptional knowledge of astral magic to Saadiah Gaon. Compare Dov Schwartz and Eliezer Schlossberg, "Studies on Saadyah" [Hebrew], in *Kiryat Sefer*: *Collected Essays*, ed. Yehoshua Rosenberg (Jerusalem: Jewish National and University Library, 1998), Supplement to Vol. 68: 187-188.

view echoing the notion of miracle as the outcome of human powers reaching communion with supernal beings.[26] Menahem Tamar voiced a similar argument more briefly, and in Ibn Ezra's style: "When a person secludes himself, he may receive supernal power and commune with the Lord."[27] This style recurs in Ephraim ben Gershon's homilies. He emphasizes at length the direct link between communion with the supremes and the drawing down of their power to the terrestrial world, as discussed below.[28]

Conjunction with God through Magical Means

The use of techniques consistent with magic-astral practice to achieve *devekut* (communion with God) for utilitarian purposes, such as evading trouble or catastrophe, features frequently in Spanish-Provençal exegesis. Comtino explained in this spirit the smearing of the Paschal lamb's blood on the Israelites' doors:

> Pay attention and know that the lintel is the supernal (*ha-eliyon*), the two doorposts are the eastern and the western, and the blood is the soul; and when the blood reaches the lintel and the two doorposts, he will commune with the supernal and be saved, and Scripture says, "while you, who held fast to the Lord your God, are all alive today" (Deuteronomy 4:4). Therefore, "He will see the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, and the Lord will pass over the door and not let the Destroyer" (Exodus 12:23).[29]

Comtino is relating here to a specific ritual, namely, the smearing of the blood on the lintel and the doorposts in order to prevent harm. It seems the "eastern" and the "western" reflect the stars,[30] whereas the "supernal" reflects God. Communion with God brings salvation from stellar decrees, and the adopted ritual reflects this principle. The symbolic interpretation links the ritual to intellectual communion, preventing the Destroyer from attaining his evil will. Tamar explains that the purpose of Balaam's seven altars was "the continuation [of

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[26] Aviezer Ravitzky, *Crescas' Sermon on the Passover and Studies in his Philosophy* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1988), 69-110.

[27] Supercommentary on Ibn Ezra, 80a.

[28] See above, 211-213.

[29] Comtino, Commentary on the Torah, 65a.

[30] Compare with Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Sefer ha-Olam*, ed. Judah Leib Fleischer (offset in *Kitvei R. Abraham Ibn Ezra*, vol. 1 [Jerusalem: Makor, 1970], 18.

the emanation], in order to prophesy."[31] The technique of the heptads, to which Ibn Ezra hints in his commentary, was thus intended to achieve prophecy.

Astral Magic and Segullot

As in Spanish-Provençal culture, Kalkish too associated astral magic with actions usually perceived as *segullot* (special properties or remedies), and revealed through the evidence of experience. In the context of a comprehensive discussion of astral magic and the magic of divine names, he wrote, "As to the wise man who said one thing and the whole field was filled with cucumbers, that means that every image existing down below also exists on high, whether trees or grasses, and that is a great secret.[32]

Menachem Tamar interpreted Ibn Ezra's hint about incense, which is usually linked to a magic-astral interpretation, as referring to its natural effects:

> He [Ibn Ezra] did not say "the incense, and so forth" Rather, he referred to the rabbinic midrash in TB Shabbat 207, where the angel of death told him this secret, as he was going up to heaven, that incense stops the plague. And the sage [Ibn Ezra] says that, if this were true, he would have said "*the* incense"; but when saying "incense," he was hinting at another incense made of remedies that stop the plague naturally. That is why he said, "a word to the wise will suffice."[33]

Tamar was apparently claiming that, besides its superior magic powers, the action of incense rests on remedies that stop the plague. The natural explanation of incense lies in pharmacology, and Ibn Ezra cloaked it in mystery. We find a similar explanation for the sacrifice that Noah offered after the flood. On Ibn Ezra's comments

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[31] Tamar, supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Torah, 265b. Tamar adds: "When he says, 'when the complete is given to the complete…' (Ibn Ezra on Numbers 23:1), he suggests that when giving seven, which is a complete number, to the complete, which is God, may He be blessed, the true completeness, a spirit of understanding will be renewed and the Holy Spirit will lie upon the person offering the sacrifice."

[32] *Even Sappir*, 97a (based on TB Sanhedrin 68a). Kalkish cites a series of experiences, beginning one of them with the words "and now hear the mystery of this matter and its action" (ibid., 128a). Nevertheless, he stated that reliance on kabbalistic doctrines and on the magic of the divine name was necessary for success in this activity.

[33] Supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Torah (Numbers 17:1), 258a. In his commentary *ad locum*, Rashi cites TB Shabbat 89a.

and on why "the pleasant odor assuages God's wrath or will attract a supreme power,"[34] Tamar writes:

> *The pleasant odor assuages the wrath*, the wrath that brought the flood, because the incense removes the mould and assuages the wrath and shines the air, as Moses said to Aaron, "take the censer… and put on incense… for wrath is gone…" (Numbers 17:11). *Or it will attract a supreme power*—it will bring down the supreme power from the place of the supreme soul, namely, abundance and communion.[35]

The source of the odor that will assuage God's wrath is in the sacrifice offered by Noah. According to Tamar's interpretation, God is appeased either by the incense or by the active drawing down of the emanation. Both options relate to the odor reaching God, namely, to the incense. Following Ibn Ezra, Tamar adds the magic-astral exegesis to the one relying on remedies, as two options explaining the action of incense.

Astral Magic and Esotericism

In Byzantium, as in Spanish-Provençal culture, it was believed that the field of astral magic should be concealed behind a veil of secrecy. Some authors spoke of "secrets" even as they wrote openly in the vein of astral-magical interpretation, while others were more circumspect. Thus, Moskoni's explanations of Ibn Ezra's commentary wrap everything in a shroud of secrecy. Here is an example from Comtino's interpretation of the plague of hail:

> You cannot argue [by analogy] from the other plagues, because in no other plague do you find [Scripture saying], "I shall spread out my hands to the Lord" (Exodus 9:29), in the spirit of [the scriptural verse], "whenever Moses held up his hand" (Exodus 17:11). For the miracle took place in the supernal regions, and I cannot explain why that happened, for it is a wondrous secret, "so that you may know that the earth is the Lord's" (Exodus 9:29) and He does whatever He wishes on earth even if that [the supernatural] is not God's [usual] action.[36]

The presentation of astral magic as a mystery recurs in the second half of the fifteenth century, in the homiletic and exegetical thought

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[34] Ibn Ezra's commentary on Genesis 8:21. Ibn Ezra comments on two denotations of the Hebrew verb *heniah*, meaning both to assuage and to attract.

[35] Supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Torah, 19b. See Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, 258.

[36] Comtino, commentary on the Torah (Exodus 9:29), 59b.

of Ephraim ben Gershon and Menachem Tamar. Ephraim resorts to magic when discussing the reasons for the commandments:

> As for the benefits of lighting it [the candelabrum], this involves a sublime mystery, namely, that the candelabrum hints at the seven planets. When they endeavored and gave it its share, the abundance of the blessing would flow onto them from the seven planets and they would not suffer from blight or rot or any other calamity effected by the stars. Because by lighting the candelabrum, they not only brought upon themselves blessing and favor, but also avoided calamity.[37]

Ephraim wrote this as a homily for the *Shemini Atseret* holiday, and considered in its context the various meanings of the number seven. His approach reflects the dialectics of rationalist homiletics, which publicly addresses the public on the one hand, and discusses matters with esoteric associations on the other. Lighting the candelabrum is thus perceived as an act meant to abate the negative influence flowing from the seven planets. Ephraim clarifies to his audience that, through this explanation, he is exposing a "sublime mystery." Esotericism, appropriate to rationalist mysteries, turns now to magic-astral mysteries.

Let us now shift from homiletics to exegesis. Tamar interprets Ibn Ezra's commentary on the tablets—"the word *Elohim* refers to the glory dwelling in an image of a body"[38]—when referring to Ibn Ezra's renowned interpretation of the *terafim* as an "image" made according to the "sages of the constellations." He concludes by paraphrasing Ibn Ezra, "and Laban called the *terafim Elohim*, and I am not permitted to explain this any further."[39] Presenting the tablets as talismans for attracting spirituality cloaks them in secrecy, ostensibly continuing Ibn Ezra's tradition of mystery. The magic-astral mysteries meant for sages and people in the know are scattered throughout Ibn Ezra's homiletics and exegesis.

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[37] Homilies, London Ms., British Museum 379, 323b.

[38] Ibn Ezra's commentary on Exodus 31:18.

[39] Supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Torah, 164b. On Tamar's interpretation of the *terafim* see Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, 214. Yet, note that Tamar's exegesis suggests no familiarity with theological and magic-astral traditions prevalent in Spain. For instance, he interprets Ibn Ezra's magic term *lishmor koah ha-kibbul* [preserve the receptivity] in terms that are not at all magical (see ibid., 309b).

Astral Magic v. Other Magic

Spanish-Provençal rationalism draws a distinction between astral magic, construed as real and to some extent scientific, and other forms of magic, unreal and exerting only psychological influence. One example is Tamar's commentary on the sorceress:

> In Saul's thought and imagination, he believed the prophet Samuel had felt sorrow about this deed, and it appeared to him that Samuel told him so. And the sage [Ibn Ezra] holds that all the witches' deeds are not real, because they are vanity;[40] hence the Torah forbade them, as Maimonides explained. And the sage [Ibn Ezra] had already mentioned this elsewhere as well when saying, "as I commented on the sorceress,"[41] but we have not seen this because we no longer have the teacher's exegeses on the minor prophets.[42] Yet, let us search for our own understanding of his view on the subject, knowing that this was also the view of David Kimchi on this issue,[43] who probably followed Ibn Ezra.[44]

The matter of the sorceress is thus explained as unfolding in Saul's imagination, and Tamar joins a rich exegetical tradition (that includes David Kimchi, Gersonides, Jedayah ha-Penini, and others), claiming that a psychological foundation underlies the literal magical layer. Kalkish also relies on this tradition, and particularly on Kimchi's psychological exegesis of the sorceress, to justify his utter rejection of any involvement in magic and devils without relying on the Kabbalah and on divine names.[45]

Astral Magic and Idolatry

Finally, Byzantine-Jewish thinkers also expressed reservations regarding the far-reaching theological implications of the action of bringing down

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[40] According to Psalms 94:11.

[41] He might be referring to Ibn Ezra's exegesis on Deuteronomy 18:1.

[42] Ibn Ezra's lost commentary on the minor prophets has been mentioned in the scholarly literature, and we need not comment on it further. See Simon, "*Peshat* Exegesis of Biblical Historiography," 197-198; Schwartz, "Did the Sun Stand Still for Joshua? On the Doctrine of Miracles, as Mirrored in Jewish Medieval Thought" [Hebrew], *Da'at* 42 (1999), 30.

[43] David Kimchi's commentary on 1 Samuel 28:24.

[44] David Kimchi, supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Torah, 123b. On an interpretation of dreams with an astral orientation in Byzantine culture see, for instance, S. V. Oberhelman, tr. and ed., *The Oneirocriticon of Achmet: A Medieval Greek and Arabic Treatise on the Interpretation of Dreams* (Lubbok, Texas: Texas Tech University Press, 1991), 167-170.

[45] *Even Sappir*, 128a.

spirituality on amulets. These reservations, particularly as expressed by Comtino, are discussed at length below.

These features, as noted, are also typical of Spanish-Provençal culture and are not necessarily a uniquely Byzantine characteristic. Some attest to discussions accompanying any attempt to absorb a magic-astral outlook in rationalist and kabbalistic thought with rationalist leanings, since many thinkers tend to integrate magic-astral views into their outlook. Communion, for instance, is an important element in a rationalist or rationalist-mystic world view, and its integration into the magical-celestial element occupied many rationalist thinkers both in Spain and in Byzantium. Just as Maimonides' views on astral magic troubled Spanish rationalists, so were they a matter of concern for Byzantines, as we will see below.

Let us consider several typical issues in the realm of astral magic and its integration in Byzantine theology and rationalism. These issues appear in the writings of Judah Moskoni, Mordechai Comtino, and Ephraim ben Gershon.

The Harmonistic Approach: Moskoni

For Judah Moskoni, Maimonides' refusal to recognize the reality of magic (*Guide of the Perplexed* 3:46) and Nahmanides' definition of magic as a genuine science were just different—and complementary—sides of the same coin. This harmonistic position appears in Moskoni's interpretation of the scapegoat. Moskoni believed that Maimonides had merely placed more emphasis on the psychological aspect of repentance inspired by the scapegoat ritual, while Nahmanides was intent on describing the concrete, utilitarian outcome of the ritual. How did Moskoni reach this conclusion? After quoting Maimonides' explanation of the ritual, Moskoni poses several questions:

1. The scapegoat ritual was intended to atone for the Israelites' sins. How does "instilling the hearts with fear," that is, inspiring the people to repent, amount to atonement? One can hardly assume that atonement is a merely psychological concept.
2. Even if the purpose of the scapegoat ritual was to "affect the soul," this is the case as far as the "masses" were concerned. But what are the implications for a perfect man, who is not psychologically affected by the ritual?! This explanation is surely insufficient for such a person.
3. Is it possible that the detailed actions of such important persons as

the priests in the scapegoat ritual were intended merely to affect the soul?!

Moskoni, therefore, argues as follows:

> May God do thus and more to me,[46] lest I think that one of those worthy to read the words of Maimonides… in this matter should believe that Maimonides' intention regarding the said scapegoat and the secrecy of its ritual [was to say that they] are intended to instill fear in the soul so that it should be moved to repentance, and that he should not suppose of the said scapegoat and of the secrecy of its wondrous ritual that it has another, independent, primary purpose. That purpose makes it necessary for grave sins to be expiated first, through the essence and secrecy of the said wondrous ritual, and its outcome will sustain the level of the elect who know the secrets of reality. Second, and incidentally, there is the added purpose of instilling fear into the soul, that it should be moved to repentance, and its outcome will sustain the malady of the masses who are not proficient in knowledge of the secrets of reality.[47]

According to Moskoni, whoever understands Maimonides' explanation as concerned merely with psychology is doing the sage of Fustat an injustice. Maimonides concealed the essential purpose of the scapegoat ritual—its ability to counteract negative astral influence—and revealed only the incidental purpose—its psychological effect. Moskoni identifies Maimonides' "essential purpose" with the explication given by his own teacher, Shemariah Ikriti, which in turn he sees as identical to that of Nahmanides. "Know that there is no difference between the opinion of the said master regarding this secret and the opinion of Nahmanides…, except that they vary and differ from one another in their opinions explaining the words of Ibn Ezra… in this respect."[48]

This conclusion has two important implications:

1. Maimonides' "real" opinion, as Moskoni sees it, places the scapegoat ritual in a magic-astral context: it was designed to ward off the actions of the cause of desolation, expelling it to the desert, "to a place whose nature resembles the nature of the cause of deficiency and desolation."[49]
2. Shemariah Ikriti also espoused magic-astral beliefs, according

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[46] After 1 Samuel 3:17, 2 Samuel 19:14, 1 Kings 2:23.
[47] *Even ha-Ezer*, 307a.
[48] Ibid., 306b.
[49] Ibid., 307b.

> to Moskoni; for Ikriti, the scapegoat "was a sacrifice in a secret ritual, necessary to prepare the nation for success and reception of supernal influence so that the *Shekhinah* should rest upon it."[50]

Hence, astral magic also acts in a defensive manner, that is, it channels the negative "influx" onto the scapegoat. Moskoni's harmonistic position, combining the approaches of Maimonides and Nahmanides, does not obscure the astral-magical core of his explanation of the scapegoat ritual. A similar harmonistic attitude was evident in Jewish-Byzantine thought even after the Ottoman conquest, as shown by the thought of Menahem Tamar.

Negation: Comtino

We have already pointed out Comtino's rejection of astral magic as idolatry, on which I would now like to elaborate, presenting the exegetical bases of his approach. According to Comtino, "bringing down spirituality" was rejected not only in the second commandment, which prohibits idolatry, but also in the first:

> And as the configuration [of the heavens] will decree what it will, in accordance with nature, as the Creator of All allowed it, and it has no power to add or to detract anything, it is therefore useless to address any request to it, for it has no power to change. To that end [people] devised ruses, to fashion images at certain times in order to bring supernal force down to earth, by which means they will lessen the evil [that befalls them] or increase the good [that befalls them], as they believe. Therefore did the Lord begin with the very first commandment, "I the Lord am your God," meaning that your welfare depends upon me, not upon the heavenly configuration.[51]

Later, Tamar argued that the prohibition on images appears already in the second commandment, and argued that makers of images "deny sovereignty from God, may He be blessed, and deliver it to the heavenly images."[52] Comtino then claimed that the sin of the golden calf was due to an erroneous interpretation of the prohibition

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[50] Ibid., 306b.

[51] Comtino, Commentary on the Torah, 78b. Further on, Comtino wrote, "And the verse, 'You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image' (Exodus 20:3) [means] for your purposes, to bring down supernal power upon yourself" (ibid., 81a).

[52] Tamar, supercommentary on Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Torah, 123b.

on fashioning an image, as evident in the—wrong—belief that the prohibition only forbids making representations of God, but not the bringing down of astral forces.

> So it seems that of those images, which they believed could be used to bring down supernal power, some had to be fashioned in gold, and some in silver, and some in other metals, and some in wood, and some in stone, and some in dough. But apparently they believed that this image was useless unless made of gold, therefore they made all three of gold. And since Israel were content with this and believed that their will had been done and that they would survive and would not commit any violation, he [Aaron] made them an image that they believed would do good and harm, [believing that] Scripture forbade the making of a sculptured image or any likeness only of God, according to the plain meaning [of the text]; they would thereby believe that they would know concealed things, since according to the belief of the ancients, it had power to do good and harm.[53]

Thus, in Comtino's view, bringing down supernal forces was rooted in ancient idol-worship. The idolaters appointed a certain celestial body to be responsible for the various technical crafts, "just as they established Demeter for working the land, she being the god of that craft."[54] The attraction of heavenly influences came into being to take advantage of such influence, in order to ensure one's success in one's earthly affairs. According to Comtino, the monotheistic God took the place of such astral powers, and it was therefore forbidden to bring them down by magic.

Here, however, the paucity of the surviving material severely limits the possibilities of interpretation. It is indeed true that references to positive applications of astral magic are rare in Comtino's existing commentaries.[55] Whereas the abundance of material from Spanish-Pro-

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[53] Ibid., 100a.

[54] Ibid., 88b. See also Ram Ben-Shalom, "Myth and Classical Mythology in the Historical Consciousness of Medieval Spanish Jewry" [Hebrew], *Zion* 66 (2001), 456ff. Various scholars have discussed the links between the gods of mythology and the signs during the Renaissance. See, for instance, Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 238.

[55] One example relates to the story of Balaam: "[Balaam said to Balak, 'Build me seven altars here' (Numbers 23:1)—because the Lord… created seven servants in the supernal world, each having several spheres, and their common feature is that they have different paths and are eccentric, inclined to the north and the south—except for the sun. Moreover, they stand still twice and change direction—except for the two luminaries. Hence, they have different influences in the lower world, and since the

vençal culture furthered the argument that the prohibition of talismanic magic as idolatry was effective only on an exoteric level, or dependent on the practitioner's intention, we lack sufficient Byzantine material to venture such an argument. In the context of Spanish-Provençal culture, we can argue for an esoteric *tradition*, and can consequently locate various thinkers on a "map" of esoteric-exegetical use of astral magic, even though the esoteric level is only rarely evident on the surface. Although we have indeed discerned an esoteric element in the Byzantine attitude to astral magic, it is doubtful whether we can explain the prohibition in this way.

Magic and Kabbalistic Abundance: Ephraim ben Gershon

We have already noted that Ephraim ben Gershon did not think twice about including in his homilies material that is obviously kabbalistic, often describing the status and place of kabbalistic abundance in distinctly magic-astral terms. He thereby follows, to some extent, in Nahmanides' path. In a homily devoted to Abraham the physician, Ephraim describes a process that is typically theurgic:

> You who are now perusing my writings know that, when the world was created, all the supernal and nether configurations were perfected and mated in the seventh, all under one receiving and affecting form, and the entire world then became one under one master. *Tiferet* above extended below to the wellspring of the *Shekhinah*, which is in the nether world, as it is said, "The heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool" [Isaiah 66:1]. Lo and behold, God is one, and the world is one, and all is in its true ordered path, until Adam came and spoilt all channels and upset this alliance.[56]

This passage focuses on drawing the *sefirot* closer. The course of the emanation descending from *tiferet* to *malkhut* is disrupted due to the sin. Ephraim then states, "because the Sabbath is the mystery of the power stretching from the supreme *sefirot* to '*adonay*,' which is

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human soul is supernal and is supported by one of the powers of the animative soul, though not mingled with it, they determine its affairs. And since in the mystery of the calculation the third is like the seventh, he commanded [to prepare] three heptads, and when he finished giving each one its due, a spirit of knowledge rested upon him. And the erudite will understand" (ibid., 147b). According to this interpretation, the astral influx can be channeled in such a way as to receive prophecy.

[56] Homilies, London Ms., British Museum 379, 173a.

the mystery of the union of all the *sefirot*."[57] He describes the various stages or hypostases of abundance through the term *maʿarekhet* [configuration], whose kabbalistic use (*Sefer Maʿarekhet ha-Elohut*) [The Book of the Divine Configuration] originates apparently in astrology. Does this hint to the celestial configuration? In a homily to a groom, Ephraim dealt at length with the action of thought, when relating to the implications of thought during the sexual act. In this context, his description exceeds the bounds of theurgy and fits the magic-astral model of drawing down abundance to the terrestrial world:

> Know that, while the spring of water extends from a high to a low place, a power exists that can bring this water up to a high place, as against the water's wellspring. Thus do kabbalists know that thoughts originate in the rational soul, which emanates from the supreme. And thought has the power to strip off and rise and reach its source, and when reaching its source it attains communion with the supernal light from which it came, and both become one. When thought once again stretches down from on high, all becomes one line in the imagination, and the supernal light comes down through the power of thought that draws it down, and the *Shekhinah* is found down below. The clear light then spreads to the thinker's location. So did early pietists [*hasidim rishonim*] reach communion with the supremes through thought in order to draw down the supreme light, and all beings would thus grow and multiply and be blessed in accordance with the power of thought.[58]

Drawing down the light through a communion of thought during the sexual act will, for instance, affect the semen and the embryo. This model of drawing down abundance to the terrestrial realm explains why the people of Israel are holy seed. Bringing down the abundance, then, has a utilitarian dimension as well. Yet, Ephraim is not returning to the classic model of lowering the abundance, but creating an integrated theurgic-magic model. In fact, what the passage describes is the drawing of emanation from *tiferet* ("line," "supreme light") to *malkhut* (*Shekhinah*). Communion of thought brings *malkhut* down to the level of the person striving for communion, so that the abundance that emanates from *tiferet* also "comes down." The person striving for communion is thus fertilized by the divine emanation, following the bringing down of the intra-divine realm. The principle of lowering abundance through communion grants the perfects far-reaching forces

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[57] Ibid., 162b, describing the lowering of abundance onto the *sefirah* of *malkhut*, which is the seventh of the lower sefirot.

[58] Ibid., 233a.

for good and for bad. Ephraim Ben Gershon went on to explain at length Balaam's magic figure and the techniques he used:

> Know that, since the holy pietists reached communion through thought with the supremes, anything they think and intend at that time will come to pass, whether good or bad. It was on this the sages said that "he cast his eyes upon him and he became a heap of bones."[59] And it was on this matter that the sages said in Ta'anit that "she should return to the dust."[60] And so the rabbis, of blessed memory, said that "whenever the sages set their eye against one, the result was either death or poverty."[61] This is the origin of the mystery in prayer and sacrifices, which is the secret of communion with the supremes, and from here comes the accursed power of wicked Balaam, about whom they would say "he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed" (Numbers 22: 6). Hence, he [Balaam] contemplated Israel with deep consideration, so that his thought might reach communion with the supremes and made his wicked wish on Israel. For this reason, he had to be precise, "Come, I pray thee, I will bring thee to another place" (Numbers 23:27) "thou shalt see but the utmost part of them" (Numbers 23:13), because the villain had to consider for whom he intended good and for whom evil. He would then bring his thought to commune with the above and draw down the supreme power on whoever he had intended and considered, as in "the vision of the Almighty, falling down but having his eyes open" (Numbers 24:4) because he truly needed his eyes open. Hence, the villain planned to make seven altars, a bullock and a ram upon each, to bring together all the powers and sacrifice them to this thought, so as to sustain his evil thought wherever he might wish. And on this it was said about him, "And he brought him into a field of vantage" (Numbers 23:14), from which the villain could observe them to draw his evil thought upon.[62]

Ephraim builds Balaam's deeds on the communion of thought, stressing the dimension of observation. Balaam's observations have two meanings, as it were: a metaphorical meaning of study and contemplation of the object of his deed, and another resembling an evil eye.[63] Hence, Balaam's sacrifices serve both as a technique of concentration and

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[59] TB Berakhot 58a; TB Shabbat 34a; TB Bava Bathra 75a; TB Sanhedrin 100a; Midrash on Psalms, 87b.

[60] According to TB Ta'anit 24a.

[61] TB Moed Kattan 17b; TB Hagigah 5b; TB Nedarim 7b; TB Sotah 46b.

[62] Homilies, London Ms., British Museum 379, 234a-b.

[63] The action of the evil eye in Balaam's story has been explained in various ways. See, for instance, Gersonides, *Commentaries on the Torah* [Hebrew], ed. Yaakov Leib Levy, vol. 4 (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook., 1996), 127; Frimer and Schwartz, *The Life and Thought of Shem Tov ibn Shaprut*, 156-157, n. 97.

as a disposition for lowering celestial and divine forces ("draw down the supreme power"). Communion with the supremes enables their power to be lowered onto the terrestrial realm. We thus learn that the communion of thought brings down a divine emanation indifferent to the intention of its recipient; the emanation can be used to attain sacred aims, such as the holiness of the pious in their sexual act. It can also be used to hurt others, as in Balaam's act. A kabbalistic[64] and magic-astral layer join together in Balaam's story. Ephraim continued a typical Spanish outlook that Nahmanides formulated in unambiguous terms, which combines theurgic and magic-astral dimensions.

Conclusions

Although it resembles western creativity, and particularly in its Spanish-Provencal variety, we found that Byzantine creativity in the late medieval period assumes unique form. As this chapter showed, one of the fruitful expressions of Byzantine creativity is the perception of astral magic as a distinctive theological element and as typical of rationalism. In the integration of rationality and astral magic as well as in other matters, Byzantine thought both before and after the Ottoman conquest is close to Spanish rationality. Other features, such as the integration of the kabbalistic-theurgic model and the kabbalistic magic-astral model, also attest to this closeness. For instance, contrary to the cultural endeavor in Ashkenaz, which is seldom tied in any deep way to Spanish rationality, Byzantine philosophy shows deep interest in the wording and the style of this rationality. The magic-astral outlooks that are part of this rationality also substantiate this closeness to some extent. This literature, however, still awaits redemption.

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[64] According to Ephraim ben Gershon, the explanation of the *terafim* story is the impure spirit (Homilies, London Ms., British Museum 379, 95b)

EPILOGUE

ASTRAL MAGIC AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

This book considered two scientific traditions that coexisted in the late Middle Ages: the physical-Aristotelian and the tradition acknowledging phenomena such as *segullot*, magic, astrology, and alchemy. The medieval scientific mind still awaits historical research, given that many thinkers upheld both these traditions simultaneously. This phenomenon could perhaps be understood in light of the esoteric style prevalent in medieval Jewish thought,[1] which presented non-Aristotelian tradition as an esoteric layer of ideas and Aristotelian tradition as reflecting adherence to scientific conventions. According to this view, thinkers concealed their openness to scientific traditions that differed from conventional approaches because these traditions were spurned by contemporary intellectuals. I wish to deal with this issue and some of its implications at the closure of the book.

Magic and a Developmental Outlook

This book may have implications for the historiographic controversy concerning the role of the magical element in the development of the new science in the seventeenth century.[2] One of the most highly criticized developmental models relates to the thesis postulated by Frances Yates.[3] According to this thesis, the magical conceptions that enjoyed such unprecedented success in various Renaissance schools ultimately resulted in the rise of the new experimental science that flourished during the seventeenth century. The Hermetic and kabbalistic-Christian traditions directed attention to the manipulation of

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[1] Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*; Dov Schwartz, *Contradiction and Concealment in Medieval Jewish Thought* [Hebrew] (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2002).

[2] See, for instance Robert S. Westman and James E. Mcguire, *Hermeticism and the Scientific Revolution* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1977).

[3] See, for instance, Frances Amelia Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); idem, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972); idem, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).

nature. They thereby opposed the approach striving to gain insights about nature but is indifferent to controlling it or to the attainment of any utilitarian technology. These insights came into being by relying on preliminary theoretical assumptions, in the established pattern of the Aristotelian science that had been dominant for centuries. Yates goes so far as formulating a series of hypotheses stating that leading figures upholding the experimental approach knew magic-ocult sources and were influenced by them.

One of Yates' major critics is Brian Vickers. Following is a summary of his main claims and his critique:

1. Occult trends are presented in Yates's writings as the focus of Renaissance culture, but they were only one current in a rich and multivalent culture.
2. The statement that these currents made an essential contribution to the emergence of the new science is groundless, since it does not rely on concrete evidence.[4]

The issue most pertinent to our concern in Vickers' detailed critique is his discussion of Francis Bacon. Vickers emphasizes that occult movements have no scientific significance in Bacon's times[5] if their actual influence upon him cannot be demonstrated. Motifs linked to mystery, such as the wings of God, were indeed exposed in Bacon's writings, but these images had been widespread during this period and cannot be ascribed to the specific influence of any particular current on Bacon.[6] According to Vickers, a definite distinction is required between Bacon's outlook and the occult approaches: Bacon supported the ideal of knowledge for all, whereas these currents championed a

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[4] Brian Vickers, "Frances Yates and the Writing of History," *Journal of Modern History* 51 (1979), 315-316. See also idem, "On the Goal of the Occult Sciences in the Renaissance," in Georg Kauffmann, ed., *Die Renaissance im Blick der Nationen Europas* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1991), 51-93; idem, "Critical Reactions to the Occult Sciences during the Renaissance," in Edna Ullman-Margalit, ed., *The Scientific Enterprise* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), 43-92.

[5] Since his critique focuses on Yates' *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, Vickers relates to the Rosicrucian movement in particular. His comments, however, are valid for Renaissance occultism in general, as intimated at the end of his critique. See also Brian Vickers, "Francis Bacon and the Progress of Knowledge," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 95 (1992), 495-518.

[6] Vickers, "Frances Yates and the Writing of History," 311.

strong esoteric trend.[7] Vickers' conclusion is unequivocal: no proof exists of the influence of occult movements, such as the Rosicrucians, on the development of science.[8]

Vickers denies esoteric interpretations of religious thinkers, unless accompanied by explicit declarations or clear evidence. Yates claims that Bacon's opposition to alchemy and to other occult concerns relied on an esoteric trend that feared open agreement with occult approaches, whereas Vickers argues that as long as we have no cause for suspecting a witch-hunt, no such interpretation should be attributed to Bacon's approach.[9] In my view, this approach seems to play down the problematic status of magic in the centuries that preceded the Renaissance, at least in the Jewish context discussed below. The closeness of magic to idolatry resulted in its wrapping in a cloak of mystery, but magic had always played a theological and hermeneutical role in the understanding of the holy sources. In other words, a tradition of esoteric formulations concerning the magical realm could be expected.

Does this controversy involve any implications for the understanding of the Jewish world in the late Middle Ages? We know that medieval Jewish intellectuals and philosophers did not conduct experiments as such, yet magic and magic-astral practices were a foremost concern of the Jewish world at this time. In practical terms, their use was widespread for healing purposes, and theologically, a biblical hermeneutics resting on magic developed around it. Astral magic also often donned a garb of antiquity and of mystery. A brief discussion on the validity of Yates' thesis for Jewish medieval material is the topic of the next section.

Magic and Esotericism in Judaism

Occult traditions in Jewish rationalism, particularly astral magic and *segullot*, developed in an esoteric climate for a simple reason: their similarity with idolatry (particularly in the case of astral magic). Idolatry had been characterized, in this interpretation, by the drawing down of

[7] Ibid., 308-310.
[8] Ibid., 313.
[9] Ibid., 308-309.

stellar spirituality upon effigies, and opponents of astral magic accused its practitioners of idol worship.[10] But another reason that contributed to the esoteric climate cannot be ignored: the perception of magic as an (ancient) science characteristic of intellectuals. For many medieval thinkers, esoteric language is inherent to the character and style of the intellectual. These two elements of esotericism intertwine for at least three hundred years, from Judah Halevi and Abraham ibn Ezra and up until Jewish philosophy after the expulsion from Spain. When occult tradition shifted to the Kabbalah, it definitely assumed a mysterious garb.[11] Kabbalah's very nature is mystery and concealment, all the more so when astral magic thought is transferred to the drawing down of abundance from the divine, theosophical world.

The cover of mystery was accentuated even further when this issue emerged in the context of Ibn Ezra's exegetic endeavor in the fourteenth century. The pouring of a magic astral element into the very core of Jewish theology compelled an occult language. Rationalists and scientists in the mid-fourteenth century tried to decode this secret language and, in their interpretations, granted legitimation to the very act of concealment. Parenthetically, note that the phenomenon of numerous supercommentaries to Ibn Ezra's commentary on the Torah in the fourteenth century aided in the understanding of this enigmatic commentator but also created difficulties. They were helpful because, given the lack of sufficient tools to understand Ibn Ezra's language precisely, there is a certain value in a commentary written "only" two hundred years after the original. The supercommentaries, however, were written in a cultural climate unlike Ibn Ezra's Andalusian surroundings. In any event, this interpretation and the accompanying controversies[12] presented esotericism as a necessary style of the occult tradition of Jewish rationalism.[13]

The concealing style slides into Jewish thought during the Renaissance. Italy was not discussed in this book, but the other cultures that preserved the Spanish style prevalent before and after the expulsion preserved the concealment tradition in the sense that magic-astral

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[10] See above, ch. 1.
[11] See above, ch. 2.
[12] See above, ch. 4..
[13] See also Schwartz, *Astral Magic*, index *s.v.* "esoteric writing"; Moshe Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation: The Secret and its Boundaries in Medieval Jewish Tradition* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Orna Hass, 2001), 36-40.

discussions are limited, despite their vast theological implications. This book attests to entrenched magical traditions impinging on Jewish theology, although traces are widely scattered.

The discussion in Chapter Six showed that Solomon Franco was willing to declare he did not agree with Ibn Ezra's magic-astral views, and he was only concerned with their disclosure. Abraham Altabib admitted to astrological and magic-astral conceptions but objected to their exaggerated implementation. These twists and turns strengthened the esotericism of astral magic among its supporters. Applying the magic-astral models and the models of *segullot* to the most sacred theological texts, even while replacing stellar with divine emanation, points to potential opposition to revelation and enthusiastic support for concealment.

Wavering between Traditions

Many rationalist thinkers in the medieval Jewish world adopted both world views—the Aristotelian approach and the realm of experience (astrology, magic, and *segullot*)—simultaneously.[14] Thirteenth century rationalists, for instance, do not report difficulties in endorsing magic-astral healing, although a tense inner conflict seems ostensibly inevitable. The conflict was also avoided because of the compartmentalization of medicine that, as a field based on pharmacology, rests on experience. Rationalists dealing with healing knew that the techniques they used were not always compatible with Aristotelian physical laws. Maimonides' pharmacological outlook, as noted, also relied on *segullot.* The use of astral magic, however, in the sense of a step toward the recognition of astrology, is certainly incompatible with the Aristotelian tradition on which they relied. The focus of this work is on rationalists; mystics and alchemists of various types created a closed society based on their own discoveries and the ensuing theological implications. In this sense, the occult tradition developed by groups of mystics could almost be described through the term *paradigm*. These groups have left many texts on *segullot* and magical formulae.[15] It is the rationalists that concern us, however, who appreciated the Aristotelian world

[14] I use the term experience as opposed to experiment, which enables negative feedback.

[15] Various texts from the Middle Ages relating to alchemy appeared in Raphael Patai, *Jewish Alchemists* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 95ff.

view and were still not deterred from using methods belonging to the magical realm.

Many rationalists tried to dispel the tension by claiming that astrology has a bearing on the material-utilitarian realm but has no essential link with true knowledge of the universe. It is precisely such knowledge, however, that leads to the immortality of the soul. Yet, the rationalists we discussed above presented astral magic as crucial to their explanation of the biblical canon.[16] The forefather of late medieval Jewish-Aristotelian rationalism, Maimonides, had argued that the Torah teaches not only the way to the constitution of a safe and just society but also the eternal truths. Circles of fourteenth century rationalists then proceeded to base the Torah's innermost mysteries on astral magic. Nevertheless, no conflict emerged between these two world views. In most of the Jewish world, these two traditions developed side by side, and this is how they reached the threshold of the Renaissance.

The most important conclusion emerging from this book, then, is that the history of Jewish intellectual creativity from the twelfth century until the early modern period can be written not only from an Aristotelian perspective, as has been done so far in books on the history of Jewish thought. Magic, astrology, and *segullot* are legitimate criteria for rearranging the conceptual material and its pertinent interpretation.[17] An essential difference, however, characterizes the rationalists' attitude to the two views. The Aristotelian world view was perceived as inherently linked to human perfection. Knowledge of certain fields (physics, metaphysics, and so forth) enables individuals to reach the heights of the *vita contemplativa*, and in many systems also grants them immortality. Religious rationalism in the medieval world integrated this knowledge into theological perfection. By contrast, rationalists related to a world view pretending to rely on experience as an efficacious tool, and even as a model essential to the understanding of religion's ritual aspect, but generally without any direct bearing on the individual's philosophical perfection.

At various times during the Middle Ages, a form of rationalism emerged that could be called "open." Did a rationalism that adopted "experiential" and magical traditions help in the internalization of

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[16] See above, ch. 1.

[17] See Dov Schwartz, "Is It Possible to Write a History of Jewish Thought?," *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 6, 2-3 (2003), 285-300.

science among Jews in the modern period? Let us not forget that Jewish philosophy in the sixteenth century—in the Ottoman empire, in Ashkenaz, and to some extent even in Italy—relied largely on a medieval world view.[18] This interesting question demands a comprehensive study of its own.

The analysis of the experiential tradition in magic, alchemy, and astrology enables a new and refreshing interpretation of religious thought among the Jewish intellectual elites in the Middle Ages. The cultural-historical reality is thus built layer upon layer, each one exposing a rich spectrum of options for interpreting the various periods in their light. Not only is this a broadening of horizons, but perhaps an alternative way of writing the history of Jewish philosophy.

[18] See above, ch. 7, for extensive clarification of this assumption.

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