



Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and the Kabbalah

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Abstract. Medieval Jewish mysticism was a multiform project in which Maimonides played different roles, for different mystical streams, and at different times. Maimonides' impact on Kabbalah was such that understanding the histories of both medieval Jewish philosophy and mysticism requires a more integrative approach than is usually adopted. The investigation into the activities of Abraham Abulafia as Maimonidean commentator and publicist undertaken here illustrates this point.

Al-Andalus redivivus

Maimonides emerged as a major figure in Jewish thought and religious life in a period of unprecedented Jewish cultural rebirth, which was marked by an openness toward theological and especially philosophical ideas, and, in particular, as these ideas were mimetic of Arabic learning. Yet exposure to Arabic thought also made this into a time of perplexity, which also meant that the “perplexed” required “guidance.” However, the most creative center for Jewish–Arab cultural interaction, Al-Andalus, had been decimated. The Almohade invasions of the twelfth century brought with them destruction, forced conversion, but also Jewish emigration, included that of Maimonides' family. This last event was fateful for subsequent Jewish culture.

Innumerable essays and books have discussed Maimonides' writings and much attention has been paid to the controversies surrounding them and their historical setting. Yet little has been said to clarify the history of the diffusion of these works and their reception in different periods, regions, and intellectual circles. By this, I do not mean the history of when Maimonides' great philosophical work, the *Guide of the Perplexed*, arrived in a new location, the cataloguing of which people constituted its readership, and the kind of commentaries that it provoked or the differences between them. These issues, however important, are the building blocks of a greater edifice. And this was the gradual emergence of the *Guide of the Perplexed* as a canonical text. Any process of canonization relates not only to contextual issues,

but also to the processes of diffusion. With these concerns in mind, let us turn to the first wave of the *Guide*'s reception in European climes.

European supporters of Maimonidean philosophy at the beginning of the thirteenth century were members of what might be called a "secondary elite," intellectuals of Andalusian origin who had emigrated to the Christian Spanish North after the Almohade invasion of the Andalusian South. Maimonides and his family crossed to Africa and then moved East to Egypt. Families like the ibn Tibbons and the Kimhis found refuge in Southern France. The reception of the *Guide* in these (still) Arabic speaking Jewish intellectual circles in Southwestern France closed, figuratively speaking, a cultural gap: the two wings of Andalusian Jewish culture destroyed by the Almohades decades earlier reestablished communication, reanimating cultural affinities created in the distinctive cultural milieu of Muslim Spain.¹ What stands out is not their mastery of Arabic, but the shared propensity for Arabic philosophy. For this reason, Andalusian intellectuals, even in France, translated, publicized, disseminated, and defended Maimonides' *Guide*, itself composed in Arabic.² They carried on their activities, however, in the presence of imposing – and indigenous – rabbinical figures, whom I would call a "first elite," and which was exceedingly influential. It suffices to mention Abraham ben David of Posquierres, Meshullam ben Jacob, Moses ben Nahman (Nahmanides), and Jonah Gerondi, who approached Maimonidean philosophy cautiously. The Andalusian intellectuals touting Maimonides thus faced considerable, and active, resistance, against which they could not prevail, and even more so, because the "first elites" opposing them were supported by Rabbinic authorities in Germany and Northern France. The first steps of the *Guide* in Europe were accompanied by controversy and suspicion. It achieved quasi-canonical status only by the mid-thirteenth century.

Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* is the first sustained attempt to interpret Judaism in philosophical terms, and it was certainly the most influential, as both the "Great Eagle's" followers and opponents well understood. Kabbalists, too, whose writings would gradually come to dominate Spanish Jewish culture during the thirteenth century, felt the enthusiasm the *Guide* generated – and the turmoil as well.³ Yet even among Kabbalists in southern France, a more positive attitude toward the *Guide* gradually emerged, by about the middle of the thirteenth century, and which would flourish toward the century's end and through the beginning of the fourteenth. This reevaluation parallels a widening interest in the *Guide* that extended beyond the circles of the Andalusian refugees. In the brief period between 1270 and 1290,

commentaries on the *Guide* multiplied in both philosophical and Kabbalistic camps. During no other period, have so many commentaries on the *Guide* been produced. This was the result of two distinct processes. The first was the respite from the enmity the initial controversy over the *Guide* had generated and which the second controversy at the end of the thirteenth century would rekindle. Second, and requiring some explanation, commentaries on the *Guide* must be seen as part of the surge in Kabbalistic literature written at this time, a period I have designated elsewhere as Kabbalistic lore's "window of opportunity."⁴

Some thirteenth century Kabbalists and the *Guide*

By and large, the scholarly picture of relations between Maimonidean views, especially as sustained by his philosophically orientated followers, and the basic Kabbalistic outlook has stressed discord rather than possible concert.⁵ Discord is an appropriate term to describe many of the encounters between Maimonidean thought and that of the early theosophical-theurgical Kabbalists. I have pointed out elsewhere the divergence between the two kinds of thinking and argued that many early Kabbalistic discussions came together where they tacitly criticized Maimonides' understanding of focal issues in Jewish esotericism.⁶ By contrast, it is clear that by the second half of the thirteenth century, Maimonidean thought had decisively influenced ecstatic and linguistic Kabbalah. Again elsewhere I have surveyed the different intellectual maneuvers that were typical of these brands of Kabbalah in appropriating Maimonidean views.⁷ Here, however, I will concentrate on issues related to the sociology of knowledge, specifically, how the *Guide* achieved its status and spread in both Kabbalistic and non-Kabbalistic circles.

However, to begin with a more cultural observation, the places in France that Maimonides' *Guide* reached were centers of intensely creative Jewish culture. Some works of Jewish philosophy had already been translated from Arabic, Neoplatonic thought was known from a variety of sources,⁸ and some Kabbalistic traditions had already been handed down in the family of Abraham ben David of Posquierres. While dramatically influential, the *Guide*'s reception was very complex, not the least given this rich and variegated background. The following statement of R. Jacob ben Sheshet, a Kabbalist active in Catalonia during the second third of the thirteenth century, illustrates the point well. R. Jacob was dealing with Maimonides' interpretation of a Midrashic statement:

God was contemplating the Torah,⁹ and he saw the essences¹⁰ in Himself, since the essences were in the [attribute of] Wisdom,¹¹ [and] he discerned that they are prone to reveal themselves. This version I heard in the name of R. Isaac son of the R. Abraham of blessed memory.¹² And this was also the opinion of the Rabbi, the author of [*The Book of*] *Knowledge* [Maimonides], who said that God, knowing Himself, knows all the existent [creatures].¹³ Nevertheless, the Rabbi was astonished – in part 2, chapter 6 of the *Guide* – at the dictum of our sages that God does not do anything before He contemplates His retinue,¹⁴ and he quoted there Plato’s dictum that God, blessed be He, contemplates the intellectual world, and He emanates from there the emanation [that produces] reality.¹⁵

Maimonides has pointed out the affinity between a rabbinic understanding of creation by God’s self-contemplation and a Platonic view, an observation of historical note, since various scholars attribute a Platonic origin to the rabbinic view.¹⁶ Yet where is Maimonides headed? Surely, he was “astonished” for more than one reason, possibly hinting at the anthropomorphic implication of the verb “to look” in both the rabbinic and Platonic dicta, but also possibly implying that the identity between the two views raises questions about the Jewish origins of a view he rejects.

However, the Neoplatonic background of the statement by R. Isaac the Blind, the founder of ben Sheshet’s Kabbalistic school, pushed him to neglect Maimonides’ reservation and, instead, to emphasize Platonic-Kabbalistic lines of thought, by doing which, he no doubt believed he was keeping faith with a tradition he had learned from his teachers, but also with the rabbinic position, both backed by the authority of Plato. Maimonides’ Aristotelian revolution¹⁷ thus created problems: its difference from the rabbinic position is explicit, as well as from that of Plato; it also parts ways with Kabbalistic tradition.

Yet Ben Sheshet in fact had conflated two different Maimonidean passages: the first, in the *Mishneh Torah*, where his argument (stemming ultimately from Themistius) presents God as comprising the forms of all existent beings, which God may then cognize by an act of self-intellection;¹⁸ the second, in the *Guide*, where Maimonides vigorously opposes the “simplistic” interpretation of the Midrashic dictum that God created the world by contemplating the Torah as the blueprint of the reality. Ben Sheshet considers these two views identical, and he is surprised that Maimonides inconsistently accepts the first while rejecting the second. In its place, Ben Sheshet accepts the position of

R. Isaac the Blind, which is less concerned with divine self-intellection¹⁹ and is presented before introducing the two Maimonidean views. The truth of Maimonides' second view is implicitly rejected, whereas he accepts Plato's dictum as correct; he had quoted it from the *Guide* only in order to refute it.

This confrontation between Aristotle and Plato in this early Kabbalistic text well exemplifies one of the main developments in medieval Jewish thought. Medieval Jewish thinkers appropriated a variety of Greek views, which came to inform the contents of Jewish speculative thought and, at times, point to the relationship between competing trends. Maimonides, the greatest Jewish exponent of Aristotle, had to oppose Aristotle's master, Plato, which in turn generated opposition to Maimonides himself. I offer another example, in which a Neoplatonic view is privileged over that of Maimonides. In his *Hassagot on the Guide*, to which we will return below, R. Joseph Gikatilla writes:

Ma`aseh Merkavah is the divine science and it requires an explanation; if it is the divine science [then] there is nothing material in it and it depends on God and the angels ... But it is worthwhile to know why Ezekiel's Account of the Chariot comprises three worlds also according to the view of our master Moses, blessed be his memory. But our view is that *Ma`aseh Merkavah* is the secret of the [emanative] concatenation²⁰ of all the things and their sustenance, each from the other, from the first emanation²¹ to the navel of the earth, and the matter of the *Merkavah* is "for there is high one who watches over him who is high; and there are yet higher ones over them" [Eccl. 5:7].²²

Unlike Maimonides' more static vision of *Ma`aseh Merkavah*, Gikatilla's interpretation is informed by the concept of the great chain of being, which connects every link to the next.²³ Exploiting the Hebrew meaning of *Merkavah* as a complex of different components, Gikatilla introduces the topic of *shalshelet*, a chain, a term that served Kabbalists to point to the concept of uninterrupted emanation.²⁴ By adopting this Neoplatonic way of thinking, Gikatilla distanced himself from Maimonides' Aristotelian stance. This reservation, however, is only the start of Gikatilla's move toward a "linguistic" interpretation of *Ma`aseh Merkavah*.²⁵

Shifting spiritual interests

It was only in the last third of the thirteenth century that a Spanish philosopher first composed a commentary on the *Guide*, R. Shem Tov Falaquera. Like their French predecessors, the members of the new wave of Maimonideans in the Iberian and Italian peninsulas were “secondary elites.”²⁶ According to Abraham Abulafia, a Kabbalist and commentator on the *Guide*, those who were engaged in studying the *Guide* were searching for modes of thought that went beyond what was to be had in rabbinic literature. Abulafia wrote this in 1291, at the end of his literary career. He categorized four approaches to Judaism in his time:

The third group . . . consists of the sages of the Talmud who studied the wisdom of philosophy and comprehended fully the view of the philosophers. But they could not make peace with what they knew from the Talmud, which is why they pursued the second path in order to put their minds at rest. They alighted on the path of the sages of inquiry, those called philosophers, yet their minds were still not at rest, and they had to trouble themselves to find a third way, which perhaps would give them intellectual peace. Then they found the path of the sages of the first Kabbalah,²⁷ which is that of the sages of the *sefirot*. And when they heard their opinions and were told wondrous secrets concerning them,²⁸ they were delighted, and accepted them, and they said to each other: “Until here shall we come and not go beyond it.” And then their opinion was settled on the [“sefirotic”] Kabbalah.²⁹

Even though this fourfold categorization is overly rigid, and was composed after a sharp controversy between Abulafia and R. Shelomo ibn Adret, a Kabbalist *and* talmudist, Abulafia’s description still merits close analysis as a key better to understand post-Maimonidean developments. Abulafia’s leitmotif is the unquenched intellectual thirst of people who experimented with one mode of religious knowledge or another. Uneasiness with rabbinic materials led some to embrace philosophy; in turn, disappointment with philosophy aroused interest in the Kabbalah. This thirst for more advanced forms of knowledge was not new. Rabbi Bahya ibn Paquda’s *Sefer Hovot ha-Levavot* makes this clear. Nevertheless, this sharp delineation of four groups is found nowhere in earlier sources. Maimonides may have intended his book for perplexed individuals in the Islamic environment, but these intentions would have been similarly valid in Christian Spain and Italy, too, where

it would not be wrong to label a group of scholars, corresponding to the “second elite” above, as *Hakhmei Moreh ha-Nevokhim*, the sages of the *Guide of the Perplexed*.³⁰ This name, I suggest, is also applicable to the thinkers who instructed Abulafia himself in the secrets of the *Guide*.

These spiritual seekers, members of the “secondary elite,” constituted a group more intellectually flexible, creative, and sometimes more itinerant than members of the “first.” Some of those who become Kabbalists – after being Maimonideans³¹ – formed the highly productive core of the circle that may be named that of the “innovative” Kabbalah. Abulafia’s description reveals that Kabbalists are not by definition thinkers who opposed the *Guide*, but those who, through its study, could not satisfy their spiritual quest. Thus, they portray the *Guide* as one element in a spiritual itinerary that might culminate in the theosophical, or even the ecstatic, Kabbalah. Though sometimes they call philosophy and especially the *Guide* by strongly negative terms, such as an “illness,”³² they saw both as supplying essential elements, including “negative theology,” for arriving at sublime religious experience.³³ Abulafia thought it necessary to transcend the *Guide*’s fascination with negativity, but he did not propose its obliteration. Philosophy, especially the *Guide*, should be integrated into the more comprehensive path leading to ecstatic experience.

Abulafia’s own Odyssey included a transition from the study of the *Guide* to the creation of a linguistically oriented Kabbalah, which he believed leads to prophecy.³⁴ His actions were idiosyncratic, though not unique. Preceding Abulafia’s transition to a stance less consonant with Maimonidean views was R. Isaac ben Abraham ibn Latif’s *Sha`ar ha-Shamayyim*, written in 1238, clearly under the enchantment of the *Guide*. Yet already here Neoplatonic influences are crucial.³⁵ Eventually, ibn Latif distanced himself from the *Guide* and embraced a more symbolic mode of expression, close, but not identical to that of the theosophical Kabbalah.

Kabbalistic commentaries on the Guide

Kabbalists, therefore, contributed to the circulation of ideas found in the *Guide* regardless of whether they agreed with them. This was true even in Maimonides’ own family, where mystical leanings were not hidden.³⁶ There were even Muslim³⁷ and Christian³⁸ mystics who studied the *Guide*. During the thirteenth century, Kabbalists composed five commentaries on the *Guide*, three by Rabbi Abraham Abulafia,³⁹

one by Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla,⁴⁰ and a fifth, though anonymous, which discusses issues pertinent to the *Guide*, yet has affinities to Abulafia's Kabbalah.⁴¹ A spurious (anonymous) letter claims that Maimonides engaged in Kabbalah and astral magic,⁴² and an otherwise unidentifiable pseudepigrapha presents views close to those of the young R. Joseph Gikatilla.⁴³ In the same period, Jewish philosophers composed only three commentaries on the *Guide*: two in Italy, those of R. Moshe ben Shlomo of Salerno⁴⁴ and R. Zerahiah Gracian ben Shealtiel Hen,⁴⁵ respectively, and a third in Christian Spain, the *Sefer Moreh ha-Moreh* of R. Shem Tov ben Joseph Falaquera. It is noteworthy that neither Provence, where Maimonides' greatest admirers were active, nor Christian Spain was the locus of the composition of the first full commentaries on the *Guide*.

Abulafia composed one of his three commentaries in Italy, where he also studied the *Guide* with R. Hillel of Verona, and taught it as well, in Capua. It was in Italy, too, that a controversy broke out between radical and moderate interpretations of the *Guide* in the last decades of the thirteenth century,⁴⁶ although many of the participants had Spanish connections. This was true of Zerahiah and Abulafia, as well as of R. Hillel of Verona, who had most likely been a student in Christian Spain. Italy was strictly the host – or, to reformulate: its own achievements in scholastic philosophy aside, Italy was dependent on Spanish masters when it came to studying and disseminating the *Guide*, and for Kabbalistic learning, too.

If the numerical advantage of Kabbalistic over philosophical commentaries on the *Guide* in the thirteenth century says anything, it is that in the thirteenth century some students viewed Maimonides as closer to mysticism than we have previously thought. Alexander Altmann⁴⁷ and Gershom Scholem⁴⁸ dedicated important studies to mystical interpretations of Maimonides. But the issues remain wide open, as does the special desirability of studying them, not the least because scholars have recently pointed to passages in the *Guide* having a mystical bent. Our knowledge of thirteenth century intellectual, historical, and even philological innovation will be measurably increased.⁴⁹

An important question in weighing the relative importance of Kabbalistic to philosophical commentaries on the *Guide* is whether the Kabbalistic commentaries are extant in unique or multiple manuscripts, and whether this is also true of philosophical commentaries. The figures at my disposal are tentative, yet I believe representative. Based upon the catalogue of the Institute of Microfilms of Hebrew Manuscripts at the Jewish National and University Library, I would say that manu-

scripts containing Kabbalistic commentaries are more numerous than those containing thirteenth century philosophical commentaries. Only two manuscripts preserve Abulafia's first commentary on the *Guide*, *Sefer ha-Ge'ulah*, in the original Hebrew, and then in mutilated and fragmentary condition. A Latin translation prepared by Flavius Mithridates preserves this work almost entirely.⁵⁰ Abulafia's second commentary, *Sefer Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, survives in about eleven manuscripts, and his third commentary, *Sefer Sitrei Torah*, survives in twenty-nine manuscripts, as well as in a Latin translation by Mithridates. By contrast, no manuscript preserves Gikatilla's *Hassagot*. Philosophical commentaries are extant in fewer manuscripts: that of Moses of Salerno in seven, Zerachiah's in eight, and ibn Falaquera's, twelve, or a total of twenty-seven. One cannot say with certainty that these figures properly represent the overall cultural map. They may be meaningful for only limited regions – here, Italy – but even so, they do suggest the need to reconsider current notions of the *Guide's* reception.

A further caution is that the scribes who copied these manuscripts were working in intellectual environments different from those in which the original works were composed, meaning that estimating the linkage between numbers and original motivation must remain tentative. Nonetheless, it is difficult to let go of the idea that in the thirteenth century there was greater interest in Kabbalistic interpretations than in philosophical ones. This same applies to citations from those manuscripts, although here, in particular, the research is too preliminary to draw conclusions going beyond impressions drawn from reading the manuscripts during the last two decades.⁵¹ We are indeed in the early stages of gauging the Kabbalists' contribution as interpreters of the *Guide*, and we know little more about how the Kabbalists' own writings spread or about their role in disseminating the *Guide* itself. No one was born a Kabbalist, and, as noted above, some influential thirteenth century Kabbalists had studied philosophy before embarking on the study of Kabbalah. This made them not only Maimonides' students, however at a remove, and his continuators, too, but also those who discussed his ideas, approvingly or otherwise, which only served to increase Maimonides' fame.

The *Guide's* diffusion

We may view the *Guide* as a catalyst. It did not channel dissension neatly, with philosophers and Kabbalists taking opposing sides, pro and con; philosophers like Crescas criticized the work. What the *Guide*

achieved was an intellectual awakening that prompted scholars of opposing schools to sort out their ideas. Rabbinic elites did not adopt the ancient tactic of “killing by silence,” and there were Kabbalists on both sides of the fence. What is more, exaggerated as this claim may appear, it was a Kabbalist, Abraham Abulafia, who was responsible for the first aggressive distribution of the Guide over a wide area. Study of the Kabbalah thus has much to tell us that is new about the controversies surrounding the Guide’s appearance, especially in Europe. One of Abulafia’s commentaries on the Guide, for instance, the *‘Otzar `Eden Ganuz* leaves no doubt that in many places the Guide was not received as eagerly as was the *Mishneh Torah*:

Afterwards, his intelligence did not leave him . . . but God aroused him again and he composed the treatise *The Guide of the Perplexed* . . . and when he did it, he did not do it in our language but, due to a certain circumstance, it was translated by two translators into the Holy language, and many students studied it.⁵²

Abulafia went on to say that these same students attributed to the *Guide* ideas that a close reading will not corroborate. But implicit here is a certain negativity. The students did not follow Maimonides’ recommendation to bind together the passages and sections of the *Guide* dealing with similar topics,⁵³ prompting Abulafia, in turn, to teach the *Guide* just this way. An autobiographical comment by Abulafia’s from 1286, too important not to cite in full, also indicates the *Guide*’s wide-scale diffusion:

. . . and the spirit of the Lord had aroused me and I took my wife⁵⁴ and I intended to come to the Waters of Ravenna⁵⁵ in order to study there Torah,⁵⁶ and while I was in the city of Capua, which is found at a distance of five days from Rome, I chanced upon a noble man, wise and sagacious, a philosopher and an expert physician, R. Hillel, blessed be his memory.⁵⁷ I joined him, and I studied with him a little bit the science of philosophy, and it become sweet to me immediately.⁵⁸ I made efforts to know it with all my powers, day and night. My mind did not cool down until I studied the *Guide of the Perplexed*, several times, and I also taught it in many places: In Capua, to four [students], accidentally, but they went on erroneous ways, since they were thoughtless young men, and I left them. And at Thebes [I had] ten [students] and none of them [profited

from the teaching] but they spoiled the two ways,⁵⁹ the first and the second. In Eurypo⁶⁰ four [students] and there also there was no one who profited since the thoughts of men are different from each other *a fortiori* regarding the depth⁶¹ of the wisdom and the *Sitrei Torah*, and I did not see one of them who was worthy to deliver to him even the notes of the truth as it is.⁶² In Rome [I taught the *Guide*] to two elders of the city, R. Zedaqiah and R. Yeshayah, my allies,⁶³ blessed be their memory, and they succeeded in a limited way, but they died, for they were very old. In Barcelona two [students], one of them an old one, R. Kalonymos, blessed be his memory, a venerable man, and one young man, learned and intelligent and very respected, from the aristocracy of the city, whose name was R. Jehudah, named Salmon;⁶⁴ he succeeded in a very excellent way. At Burgos two [students], a master and [his] student. The name of the master [was] R. Moses Chinfa,⁶⁵ a great man and an honorable scholar.⁶⁶ And the name of the student is R. Shem Tov,⁶⁷ also a kind and good young man, but his youth prevented him from learning. So he did not study it [the *Guide*], except for a few external traditions, neither he nor his master. In Medinat Shalom⁶⁸ two [students], one of them, R. Samuel the Prophet who received from me a few traditions, and the second, R. Joseph Gikatilla⁶⁹ . . . But in this city where I am today [1286], whose name is Sinim,⁷⁰ namely Messina, I found six persons, and I brought with me a seventh one, and they have studied it with me [again, the *Guide*] for a very short time. Everyone received whatever he received from me, more or less, and they all left me,⁷¹ with the exception of one, who is the first who was the first cause impelling each of them to study what he I taught. His name is R. Sa`adiah⁷² the son of Yitzhaq Sigilmasi, blessed be his memory.⁷³

What precisely was Abulafia teaching? Ben Zion Dinur long ago suggested that Abulafia was spreading Kabbalah.⁷⁴ Scholem's final description of Abulafia's activity during his wanderings is ambiguous; Scholem does not refer to Abulafia's *teaching* the *Guide* at all.⁷⁵ But should we read the passage, which is unique in the entire literature concerning the spread of the *Guide*, in the context of not only teaching the *Guide*, but on a second level, too, as its opening lines urge us to do, the claims of the students make sense. As I see it, Abulafia taught the *Guide* for at least seven years, and it was during this time that he composed his

three commentaries. The breadth of his didactic peregrinations as he propagated knowledge of the *Guide* was astounding, encompassing Catalonia, Castile, Greece, the Italian peninsula, and Sicily. No philosopher teaching the *Guide* could match this record. In addition, Abulafia alone taught the *Guide* following two methods. At first, he taught its simple meaning, reading it chapter by chapter, line by line. But then he began to introduce advanced students to mystical and esoteric interpretations of topics as he found them in the *Guide*.⁷⁶

Abulafia also lists more city-names than he does students, which he does disregarding the chronological order of his travels, which at times seem to be presented in reverse order. He begins the list with Capua, where he stayed in 1264 and later on in early 1280, yet only further down does he mention the Greek cities he visited a year earlier. His stays in Catalonia and Castile came long before his second stay in Italy and Greece. But, then, Abulafia's intention was not, or so it seems, to write an orderly travelogue; it was to talk about students and his teaching methods. This likely explains why he names only those students who successfully absorbed his teaching, or some part of it (we shall return to its content below). He reports failures without names. The successes appear in the second half of the list, the failures in the first. The list also ends with the name of R. Joseph Gikatilla, who is introduced as an accomplished disciple. Consequently, the list does is gradated according to a scale of increasing success.

It is also clear that the principal successes were in Christian Spain, the failures in Greece and to a lesser extent Italy. Some of the Spanish students are described as very successful, others less, but none a failure. The progressive weakening corresponds to the levels and intensity of Jewish intellectual activity moving from West to East, the western centers being the strongest and most receptive, the eastern ones, especially in Byzantine zones, the weakest.⁷⁷ The higher number of students in the East, fourteen, as compared to six in both Italian and Spanish regions, possibly points to repeated failing attempts. No less, if not more, probable is that the greater numbers who approached Abulafia in the East may have been a function of his attractiveness to the smaller Eastern communities, where opportunities to study with scholars of renown were few, whatever these scholars' intellectual interests. As one moved westward to Italy and, of course, Spain, intellectual possibilities grew apace. Though the number of students Abulafia attracted in the West was lower, they seem to have been specially talented or simply inclined to his brand of learning and teaching style.

There was also the matter of intellectual climate. In Christian Spain, interest in Kabbalah was growing precisely when Abulafia was wandering through the region, the late seventies of the thirteenth century. In Italy and Byzantium, the kind of mysticism then current in Spain was as yet, one imagines, unknown. Abulafia himself was relatively unconcerned with the theosophical Kabbalah of his Spanish contemporaries, although he was instrumental in spreading some of its literary products in Italy about 1280.⁷⁸ Yet Abulafia's own brand of mysticism, which combines Maimonidean metaphysics and psychology with the Ashkenazi mystical practice of combinations of letters, strikes one as out of stride for areas where Maimonidean theology had penetrated less successfully than it had in Spain. Moreover, where Maimonidean writings had penetrated Italy, they had done so in their philosophical guise; admittedly, the writings of R. Menahem ben Benjamin Recanati were soon to presage a mystical turn.⁷⁹ In Spain, during the second half of the thirteenth century, some of the younger Jewish intelligentsia were searching out spiritual alternatives.

To my knowledge, the cited passage from *'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz* has no parallel among extant itineraries of itinerant Jewish teachers. Abulafia traversed unusually large distances, and he did so during at least sixteen years. No less unprecedented (both before, and, for that matter, afterward) was Abulafia's concentration on the *Guide*, not to mention that he was the first to propagate a specifically Kabbalistic interpretation. His teaching, as said, encompassed both the traditional line by line approach, seeking out the plain sense of the text. But it extended, too, to a mystical probing of "the depths of wisdom" and the *Sitrei Torah*. Since some of the students were taught the second way of reading the *Guide*, we may see in the propagation of the esoteric reading of the *Guide* the first attempt to disseminate Kabbalah beyond Spain, the stronghold of this lore in the second half of the 13th century. Abulafia's was, in fact, the first form of specifically medieval mysticism taught in Italy, Sicily, and Greece. His journeys to these lands and his teaching of his own brand of ecstatic Kabbalah there via an esoteric interpretation of the *Guide* mark the initial spread of the Kabbalah beyond its Iberian birthplace.

The passage from the *'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz* that we have been examining bears witness to all this. Its implications also transcend the importance of Abulafia's pioneering role. As the first exponent of Kabbalah in areas where the classical forms of Spanish Kabbalah, whether Catalan or Castilian, were unknown, Abulafia ensured the later influence of ecstatic Kabbalah in both Italy and Byzantine territories. From

his descriptions, it is clear, too, that many of Abulafia's students were young and that they were personally attracted to the wandering mystic, indeed, seemingly at first sight, with tension arising only later on. We should also note that as (probably) the first known text to describe teaching mystical traditions to the young, this selection from the from 'Otzar `Eden Ganuz reminds us that in the Kabbalah's initial stages, age was not yet the impediment preventing the teaching of advanced esoteric traditions that it would become toward the thirteenth century's end – although Abulafia did think that some of his students were too young fully to appreciate what he taught. Others, he deemed unworthy of the *Guide's* profounder understanding, specifically, his students in Peloponese. The resistance Abulafia encountered on occasion may be attributable not to the student's age, but, as with the already well-known R. Moses of Burgos, to membership in the "first elite."

Abulafia mentions no outside opposition to his teachings; students and master alone determined their content. However, this is not certain. At Capua, the Jewish community may have come between Abulafia and his students, eventually alienating them. Nonetheless, though the fruits of his efforts were meager, when all is said and done, Abulafia did not resort to verbal acidity. Rather, he seems to have reacted to the generally cold reception accorded his mystical doctrines with a measure of stoicism, which also suited his perception of the "human condition." He may have also sensed failure in propagating his idiosyncratic esotericism, which he attempted to do by teaching what he called the "supernal Kabbalah."⁸⁰ Yet even he thought teaching on this level should be reserved for those who had already completed a more traditional course of the *Guide's* study. Success or failure aside, however, there is no denying that judging by the reach of even his exoteric teaching, Abulafia contributed substantially, perhaps more than anyone else, to the *Guide's* broad distribution.

A literary genre

Abulafia, it turns out, was critical of most of his students; R. Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla was a rare, although not the sole, exception. In turn, Gikatilla is the only student who mentions Abulafia by name. In one of his earlier Kabbalistic writings, *Sod ha-Niqqud*, he mentions "Rabbi Abraham, the teacher of the intellectual things," or according to another version, "Rabbi Abraham, the eye of the intellectual light."⁸¹ The first phrase in Hebrew is *Moreh ha-sikhliyut*, which may point to Abulafia's teaching the *Guide*, whose Hebrew title is *Moreh ha-*

Nevokhim. Abulafia finished his first commentary to the *Guide*, the *Sefer ha-Ge'ulah* in 1273;⁸² Gikatilla apparently wrote *Sod ha-Niqqud* before 1274.⁸³ Returning to Abulafia, he described Gikatilla, as follows:

... R. Joseph Gikatilla, may God, the keeper of the degrees, keep him,⁸⁴ and he doubtless succeeded in a wondrous way concerning what he has studied under my guidance, and he added much from his strength and knowledge and God was with him.⁸⁵

As Abulafia pointed out, his former student became a prolific Kabbalist, although eventually he shifted to a linguistically oriented Kabbalah unlike that of Abulafia. In the interim, Gikatilla composed a commentary on the *Guide*.⁸⁶ Was it the composition of this treatise, or at least his acceptance of the *Guide*'s importance, that elicited Abulafia's sympathetic attitude? It is also possible that Abulafia never knew of Gikatilla's commentary, the intermittent contacts between the two scholars possibly accounting for affinities between their commentaries: both, for example, used the *gematria*: *temunah*=*partzuf 'Adam*.⁸⁷ Still details like this one count for little. Nahmanides, too, notes this *gematria*, but he learned it from the work of R. Eleazar of Worms.⁸⁸ More significant are literary similarities. Neither Abulafia nor Gikatilla comment on the *Guide* following Maimonides' order. Rather, in distinction to normally point by point philosophical interpretations, both worked thematically – albeit Gikatilla is less concerned than Abulafia with disclosing the secrets purportedly scattered throughout the *Guide*, which Abulafia did systematically. It should be added that in his *Hassagot*, as his commentary is known, Gikatilla is far more critical toward the *Guide* (although he is not wholly dismissive of it) than Abulafia.

Gikatilla knew the *Guide* intimately, and his critical acumen was great, enabling him to speak sharply of Jehudah Al-Harizi's translation of the *Guide* into Hebrew. He points to at least four errors,⁸⁹ and, in a fifth reference, he claims Al-Harizi did not understand Maimonides.⁹⁰ Such a criticism, it should be noted, points to the circulation of the *Guide*'s Arabic original among Spanish Kabbalists. By contrast, Abulafia never mentioned mistakes in the Hebrew translation of the *Guide* – he generally relied on ibn Tibbon's translation – although, as just noted, Abulafia, as a rule, was less critical in matters concerning the *Guide* than was Gikatilla. Abulafia also seems to have had no qualms in adopting interpretative techniques Maimonides himself recommended. Here, at least, it was not cardinal for Abulafia that the *Guide*, as he saw it, did not contain the ultimate revelation of the Torah's secrets, or

that, in his estimation, its esoteric doctrine was of lesser value than his own (Kabbalistic one). In the *Sefer Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, Abulafia claims the misunderstandings of the *Guide* might be avoided, should students:

. . . inquire in this book in a worthy fashion, as he [Maimonides] commanded us to do in his “Instruction,” namely, to connect its chapters to each other and interpret each and every word found in its discussion. Even when those words were unrelated to the intention of a chapter, they [its students] would wholly understand his [Maimonides] intention.⁹¹

This suggestion paraphrases Maimonides’ recommendations at the start of the *Guide*.⁹² But Abulafia really meant to explain why many readers failed to understand the *Guide*; his intention was also to justify his special form of inquiry. The words of a second (anonymous) Kabbalist seem to be moving in this same direction. Like Abulafia, this writer, too, adopted a topical, rather than chapter by chapter, arrangement to parse the *Guide*:

I had already told you in *Malmad*⁹³ that it is not my intention to copy what is self-evident from the book without any innovation, and this is the reason I shall include many chapters [from the *Guide*] in one gate, and sometimes I shall include the matter of one chapter in many gates.⁹⁴

But it was Abulafia who led the way. Subtly, he was staking his claim to interpretative monopoly: only he and his followers understood the *Guide* correctly. He was posing not only as the *Guide*’s (principal) disseminator, but also as the sole interpreter with a grasp of Maimonides so profound that he was equipped to write incisive commentaries.

The *Guide* as the basis of an esoteric tradition

Yet the *Guide*, in fact, is an esoteric book; Maimonides presumably never revealed a code enabling readers to elucidate the secrets to which the *Guide* constantly alludes. Nevertheless, as late as the end of the thirteenth century, Joseph Caspi claimed he had heard there was an oral tradition that contained these secrets, and that he had personally traveled to the East to put his hands on it, but to no avail.⁹⁵ The source of Caspi’s information is unknown. However, in two of his commentaries on the *Guide*, Abulafia claims that he was privy to these traditions. In

the *Sefer Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, Abulafia wrote that the *Guide* might confuse those who misunderstood its author; however, this applied neither to him nor to:

“... those who *received* from the truth of the words of the divine books.⁹⁶ For he, and they, had saved their souls, and it suffices to both him, and them, that their intention is the same. And for me, the modest student, who received from his book [the *Guide*] according to my accomplished masters,⁹⁷ blessed be their memory.⁹⁸”

The term translated as “those who *received*,” *ha-mequbbalim*, Abulafia used principally to denote Kabbalists. Yet sometimes by “reception” he meant a mode of acquiring knowledge distinguished from independent study or from learning acquired through exercising the intellect.⁹⁹ This meaning he clarifies in another passage from the *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, one of the major handbooks dealing with the path to prophecy, in which he classifies oral Kabbalistic traditions as the lowest form of Kabbalah:

In order to understand my intention regarding [the meaning of] *qolot* [voices] I shall hand down to you the known *qabbalot*, some of them having been received from mouth to mouth from the sages of [our] generation, and others that I have *received* from the books named *Sifrei qabbalah*, composed by the ancient sages, the Kabbalists, blessed be their memory, concerning the wondrous topics;¹⁰⁰ and other [traditions] bestowed on me by God, blessed be He, which came to me from *ThY* [the Hebrew letters *tof*, *yod*] in the form of the “Daughter of the Voice,”¹⁰¹ these being the higher *qabbalot*.^{102,103}

This is one of the few instances where Abulafia explicitly mentions his “receipt” of oral traditions without mentioning the *Guide*; he had already attributed a relatively low status to orally transmitted lore in an earlier work, where he defines the term *mevin* as denoting a higher status than that of the *hakham* who studies books: “If he *receives* it from the Kabbalah, that is to say from one who has himself obtained it from contemplating the Divine Names or from another Kabbalist, than he is called *mevin*.”¹⁰⁴

If we accept this reading of *mequbbalim*, then Abulafia claims that he received a tradition, which may not be Kabbalistic, but which nevertheless deals with the secrets of the *Guide*. Since one receives the secrets from another person, this form of cognition is lower than the

receipt of secrets from above, by means of a personal experience. And in a later commentary, Abulafia mentions “transmitters,” *moseirim*, of these traditions.¹⁰⁵ Even more explicitly, he asserted that he committed to writing: “all the secrets found in this book [namely the *Guide*], just as we have received them from the mouth of the sages of the generation, our masters, may God keep them alive.”¹⁰⁶

There is no doubt that Abulafia envisaged his special esotericism as different from that of Maimonides. Testifying to this is his first commentary on the *Guide*: “the path of the *Guide*, and [another one] according to my own path, that is the path of Kabbalah . . . the paths of Kabbalah which are the secrets of *Sefer Yetzirah*.”¹⁰⁷ This classification imposes a higher form of esotericism, the Kabbalistic one, on Maimonides’ path, and by definition, Maimonides’ path of secrets, and their receipt, is inferior to Abulafia’s Kabbalah.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, at least in one case, Abulafia established a deep affinity between the secrets of the *Guide* and his type of Kabbalistic discussions. In the introduction to *Sitrei Torah*, his most important commentary on the *Guide*, Abulafia confesses that,

There is a tradition in our hands [*qabbalah be-yadeinu*] concerning the number of all the chapters in each and every part of the three parts of the book . . . and their secret [numerical value of] “three degrees” [shalosh ma`a lot], whose secret is like of three meals [*shalosh se`udot*], whose sign is the names 26, 65, 86, and the entire number of the chapters of the first part is 75,¹⁰⁹ and that of the second part 48,¹¹⁰ and of the third part 54,¹¹¹ and the combination of their letters is “the knowledge [*mad`a*] of *Hen*.” And the sum of the three is 177, and their secret is ‘three degrees’ which are like the secret of “three meals,” whose sign is three names 26, 65, 86, and their numerical value is *Gan`Eden*.¹¹²

Abulafia’s manipulation of the Hebrew notations of the numbers of the chapters in the three parts of the *Guide*: `H, MH, ND, become *Mada`ha-Hen*, which may be translated as the “science” or “knowledge” of “grace,” the latter term assumedly an acronym for *Hokhmat Ha-Nistar*, the science of secrets. Already previously to Abulafia, Nahmanides had used the phrase *Yod`ei Hen* to specify experts in esotericism.¹¹³ Abulafia thus introduced a name for the *Guide* that a number of Kabbalists would employ regularly to refer to the Kabbalah itself. Abulafia also capitalizes on a form of discussion found in the *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah* composed by his own teacher Rabbi Barukh Togarmi, as well

as in Gikatilla's *Ginnat 'Egoz*. In Togarmi's formulation: "The incantation of the language is the secret of *Gan 'Eden*, known from the three meals – 26, 65, and 86 – incumbent upon the individual to eat on Sabbath, [during] day and night."¹¹⁴

This compact passage, like Abulafia's, is based upon a *gematria*, namely, on the affinities between the numerical values of the different phrases constituting this citation. The basic figure is 177, which is the *gematria* of *Gan 'Eden*, as well as the three divine names, the Tetragrammaton (26), 'Adonai (65), and 'Elohim (86). This is also the case of the phrase "Day and night" – *Yomam va-laylah*. Moreover, according to one particular way of calculating the phrase, "three meals," the *shalosh se`udot*, amounts to 1176, which was understood as $176 + 1 = 177$, while the phrase *hashba`at ha-lashon* is 1178, which was to be understood as: $1178 = 178 - 1 = 117$. In the spirit of Togarmi's thought, and presumably that of Abulafia, too, Gikatilla wrote: "The three names, whose secrets are 26, 86 and 65, are the secret of the stages of the intellectual degrees, and are called by the general name of Garden of Eden. By means of understanding them, one enters the Garden of Eden while alive."¹¹⁵

Though concerned with the intellectual accomplishments that are the three degrees Abulafia to which refers on various occasions, Gikatilla, like Togarmi, does not mention the *Guide* or the number of its chapters. All the authors mention the Kabbalistic calculation of the three divine names, the meals, and *Gan 'Eden*, but the notion that the *Guide* and its chapters have something to do with the *gematriot* of 177 appears nowhere. Thus, insofar as $Gan 'Eden = 177 = shalosh se`udot$ is concerned, Abulafia's claim that he received a tradition is confirmed. This, however, has nothing to do with the *Guide*, meaning that if Abulafia did "receive" a tradition, it reached him from outside Togarmi's circle, or at least part of it did. Abulafia, less interested in magic than Togarmi and Gikatilla, ignored the former *gematria* of the "incantation of language."

But what is the significance of describing the chapters of the *Guide* as pointing to *Gan 'Eden* and as the knowledge of the secrets, *Mada` ha-Hen*? According to Gikatilla's interpretation of the three names, they are a clue for entering Paradise while alive. Abulafia often described the prophetic experience, the ultimate goal of his Kabbalistic system, as reaching an eschatological state.¹¹⁶

I am [he wrote] the angel of the God of Hosts, so and so, and it is the secret of *Gan 'Eden* that accounts for three names, YHWH, 'Adonai 'Elohim, whose vowels are the prince

of *Gan `Eden*. And he will tell him: “I am the tree of life, the Garden in Eden from the East.” And he will understand that God has sent to him His angel in order to help him by instruction, and to accustom him in the strong love of the Creator by announcing to him the truth of the essence of the tree of life that is within the Garden, and he is the “prince of *Gan `Eden*.”¹¹⁷

Like the three divine names amounting to the number 177, the 177 chapters of Maimonides’ *Guide*, too, constitute a way to enter Paradise, which means a way to acquire mystical revelation. When interpreted Kabbalistically, therefore, the *Guide* becomes a medium of mystical technique.

Yet does the equation of the numbers of the chapters of the *Guide* to the gematria of *Gan `Eden* and to the three divine names imply that for Abulafia, the *Guide* is essentially a treatise dealing with God? If so, following Nahmanides, Abulafia may have taken the idea that it is possible to read the entire Bible as a continuum of divine names¹¹⁸ and applied it to the *Guide*. However, although Abulafia often employs this technique in his commentary on the Pentateuch,¹¹⁹ I have never seen it in his commentaries on the *Guide*. But the above passage does, in fact, relate to the *Guide*. The “angel of the *Gan `Eden*” an expression already found in ancient Jewish mystical literature, stands, I believe, for the Active Intellect, which plays a key role in Maimonides’ and Abulafia’s theories of prophecy. The angels, like other images such as the “tree of life” in the passage above, constitute the visual representation created by the imaginative capacity (of the mind) on the basis of the intellectual content derived from the Active Intellect.

In other words, if the above interpretation of the passage is correct, we may assume that through cognizing the three divine names, the mystic is able to attain the *summum bonum* of the *Guide*, a revelation stemming from the Active Intellect.

Secondary elites

One of the conclusions suggested by the above discussion (it may easily be widened) is that interaction between the “two elites” was not hindered by the polarity of philosophy and kabbalah, nor by the antagonism one might imagine this polarity would create. It must be noted that a philosopher might become a Kabbalist, but not vice versa. Besides, differences in modes of intellectual conceptualization, which

might be extreme and must not be ignored, were surely amplified by the sociology of knowledge in the Middle Ages. From the few cases from which it is possible to learn how Abulafia conceived of his audience, it becomes clear that he labeled as excellent students who accepted his views. Those who rejected them, he called inadequate; this stands out in the case of R. Jehudah Salmon (a success) and R. Moses of Burgos (who, we recall, resisted). In addition, for instance, at Palermo, Abulafia hastened to note the high social status of some of his students, even those to whom apparently he did not teach the *Guide*.¹²⁰ He was clearly seeking legitimacy.

Of more immediate interest, however, are the cases where Abulafia, by his own admission, failed. In the passage from '*Otzar `Eden Ganuz*, he dismisses the four students he had in Capua in early 1280 as young men bent on pursuing error. Their youth is not the issue. Already in his commentary on the *Guide* dedicated to those four students, written six years earlier, he wrote that

I am today in the city of Phonon,¹²¹ and four precious stones joined my academy ... God bestowed upon these four children knowledge and intelligence in order to understand every book and science, and this is the reason I brought them as close as I could and I invented for them the names Daniel, and Hananyah, Mishael and `Azaryah, and I called the latter Zekhariah.¹²² They are children with no deficiency, good-looking and understanding every science and knowing knowledge and with the capacity to stand in the palace of the king ... and those four children ... when they came to shelter under the wings of the Shekhinah, false witnesses ... attempted to seduce them from the table of the Lord, the God of Israel, to keep them from being nourished from the splendor of the Shekhinah,¹²³ at the time when other men consume grass¹²⁴ ... and they came and implored and asked me to interpret the secrets of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, together with some secrets of the Torah which are in my hands, dealing with very profound matters,¹²⁵ so that they should have validation, merit, voice, and one to recommend them in order to extract some wisdom for which their souls were greatly striving, to know it and comprehend its essence in order to know their Creator. And they implored me very much to this effect ... and I, because of my love for them, did not desire to turn them down. I fulfilled their desire according to their wish,

and I composed this commentary for them and for those like them.¹²⁶

Thus, Abulafia started rather early in his career to teach youths, whom he calls *yeladim*. He taught them by following the text of the *Guide* line by line, as well as through the more advanced method that is best exemplified in the book, the *Sitrei Torah*, which he wrote at these youths' request. Years earlier, about 1273, he had taught Gikatilla this advanced method – Gikatilla himself then a youth of 25 – which we saw Abulafia also taught, at about the same time, to the Spanish R. Shem Tov and R. Jehudah Salmon. Some of his Sicilian students, too, might have been young; he mentions that their fathers had been his students. A good part of Abulafia's students were, then, young, perhaps early adults searching out religiosity going beyond standard (rabbinic) definitions. Some of them, beside Jehudah Salmon of Barcelona, who, nevertheless, wrote nothing that may be classed as Kabbalistic, may have belonged to the "first elite." Gikatilla, who did write much, belonged, I would argue, to the "secondary elite."

However consciously, Abulafia was transmitting advanced procedures of studying the *Guide* conforming to his version of the Kabbalah. No wonder that his teaching – which aspired to transform his young students into mystics nourished from the divine splendor – elicited strong negative reactions, which is typical of reactions to new forms of religious knowledge and experience. In Abulafia's case, the resistance was repeated, and it was no doubt provoked, as in Capua, by the very appearance of the *Guide* on the Mediterranean's northern shore. Question after question must have arisen, and, in particular, when the *Guide*'s exposition was couched in Abulafia's extreme mystical terms. Though he claimed that his students remained faithful to his message and that this prompted him to compose his commentary, what he writes in the later '*Otzar `Eden Ganuz* indicates the opposite. The desertion, if only temporary, of his students from Messina suggests that he had problems holding onto the allegiance of students drawn from even the "secondary elite."

Disclosure and repercussions

Yet, I believe that the estrangement of his students so shortly after they began studying with him has little to do with the *Guide* per se or with Abulafia's special mode of instruction. The real sticking point was his conviction that the end was near – albeit he expressed

this idea in non-conventional terms – and that this justified disclosing secrets,¹²⁷ including individual eschatological strategies, but mostly hints to Abulafia's personal messianic role.¹²⁸

Whatever brought Abulafia to commit the secrets he believed to be the esoteric dimension of the *Guide* to writing, their disclosure, however complete, raised hackles outside Kabbalistic circles. As Steven Harvey has suggested to me orally, the earlier philosophical authors who dealt with the *Guide* were careful not to violate Maimonides' severe warning not to reveal his secrets. This was certainly true of the philosophical commentaries contemporary with Abulafia that were mentioned above.¹²⁹ Once the Kabbalists began disregarding this caution, subsequent philosophical commentaries did not cavil to divulge the *Guide's* secrets. That this was likely the case with Joseph Caspi and Moshe Narboni, whom, we may assume, were acquainted with Abulafia's writings,¹³⁰ which would strengthen Harvey's point. If future research reinforces this observation, it will be possible to conclude that Kabbalistic interpretations of the *Guide* (regardless of their extent) did more than ease the way for the book's reception in Kabbalistic circles. They also influenced the development of Jewish thought as a whole, and even beyond. Wirszubski has demonstrated how the Latin translation of two of Abulafia's commentaries on the *Guide* affected the early Christian Kabbalah – to the extent that Christian Kabbalists confer upon Maimonides the title of Abulafia's teacher to whom Maimonides revealed secrets directly.¹³¹ The image of *Maimonides mysticus* in Christian circles represents the enduring seductiveness of Abulafia's (literary) Kabbalistic charms.

The point should be clear, as, in fact, I have already broached it in other studies of Maimonides' impact on Kabbalah. To better understand the histories of both medieval Jewish philosophy and mysticism requires adopting a more integrative approach. I am confident that its findings will erase lingering doubts that medieval Jewish mysticism was a not variegated undertaking, and that in this undertaking the Great Eagle played different roles, for different schools, and at different times.

Notes

1. As we know, Maimonides and Samuel ibn Tibbon communicated in writing.
2. Isadore Twersky, *Studies in Jewish Law and Philosophy* (New York, 1982), 180–202; Aviezer Ravitzky, "Samuel ibn Tibbon and the Esoteric Interpretation of the *Guide of the Perplexed*," *AJS Review* 6 (1981), 87–123; Gad Freudenthal, "Les Sciences dans les Communautés Juives Médiévales de Provence: Leur Appropriation, Leur Role," *Revue des Études Juives* 152 (1993), 29–50.

3. On the Maimonidean controversy and its background see, among others, Bernard D. Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition* (Cambridge, 1982), esp. 39 and 147 n. 1 and the literature cited; Azriel Shohat, "Concerning the First Controversy on the Writings of Maimonides," *Zion* 36 (1971), 27–60 (Hebrew); Gershom G. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Princeton, 1987), 393–414.
4. Moshe Idel, "Kabbalah and Elites in Thirteenth-Century Spain," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 9 (1994), 5–19 and Idel, "The Kabbalah's 'Window of Opportunities,' 1270–1290," in Ezra Fleisher, Gerald Blidstein, Carmi Horowitz, and Bernard Septimus, eds., *Me'ah She'arim, Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memory of Isadore Twersky* (Jerusalem, 2001), 171–208.
5. See Idel, "Abulafia's Secrets of the *Guide*: A Linguistic Turn," in A. Ivry, ed., *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism* (London, 1997), 269–270.
6. Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," 35–54; and *Absorbing Perfections: On Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven, 2002), 272–313.
7. "Abulafia's Secrets of the *Guide*."
8. See Alexander Altmann, *Aspects of Judaism* (Tel Aviv, 1983), 91–97 (Hebrew); Scholem, *Origins*, index, sub voce "Neoplatonism."
9. Cf. *Genesis Rabbah* I:2. See also Idel, "The Sefirot above the Sefirot," *Tarbiz* 51 (1982), 265 n. 131 (Hebrew).
10. *Havvayot*. On this term see Scholem, *Origins*, 281, Idel, "Sefirot," 240–249.
11. *Hokhmah*.
12. On this important master of early Kabbalah see Scholem, *Origins*, 248 and following.
13. *Mishneh Torah* (henceforth=MT) *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* II:10.
14. *Pamalia*.
15. *Sefer ha-'Emunah ve-ha-Bitahon*, ch. 18 in H. Chavel, ed., *Kitvei ha-Ramban* (Jerusalem, 1964), 2: 409; Idel, "The Sefirot," 265–267.
16. See the literature cited by Sara Heller Wilensky, "Isaac ibn Latif – Philosopher or Kabbalist?," in Alexander Altmann, ed., *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge, 1967), 188–189 and especially note 26.
17. Influenced by Themistius; see note 18, below.
18. See Salomon Pines, "Some Distinctive Metaphysical Conceptions in Themistius' Commentary on the Book Lambda and Their Place in the History of Philosophy," in J. Wiesner, ed., *Aristoteles Werk und Wirkung, Paul Moraux Gewidmet* (Berlin, New York, 1987), 177–204, especially 196–200.
19. I assume that the Geronese Kabbalists conceived the sefirotic realm as not identical with the divine essence, hence, as "extradivine" ideas; see Harry A. Wolfson, "Extradeical and Intradeical Interpretations of Platonic Ideas," *Religious Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA, 1965), 27–68; and W. Norris Clarke, "The Problem of Reality and Multiplicity of Divine Ideas in Christian Neoplatonism," in Dominic J. O'Meara, ed., *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought* (Norfolk, 1982), 109–127.
20. *Sod hishtalshelut kol ha-devarim*.
21. *Me-'Atzilut rishonah*; this term recurs in the short treatise, see e.g., fols. 20b, 24ab and similar ones, like *ha-ne'etzal ha-rishon* (see e.g., fols. 26a, 30a), should be explained as the result of the influence of an Ismailiah view. See Sara Heller

- Wilensky, "The 'First Created Being' in Early Kabbalah and its Philosophical Sources," in Sara Heller Wilensky and Moshe Idel, eds., *Studies in Jewish Thought* (Jerusalem, 1989), 261–275 (Hebrew).
22. Venice, 1574, fol. 19d.
 23. David Blumenthal, "Lovejoy's Great Chain of Being and the Jewish Tradition," in M. Kuntz, ed., *Jacob's Ladder and the Tree of Life* (New York, 1986), 179–190.
 24. See there, fol. 21d, where Gikatilla combines Jacob's ladder with the emanative chain; see also *Ginnat 'Egoz* (Hanau, 1615), fol. 46b; the pseudepigraphical chapters attributed to Maimonides stem from Gikatilla's circle, "Tish`ah Peraqim mi-Yihud," Georges Vajda, ed., *Qovetz `Al Yad* (Jerusalem, 1950), 15: 109, 112–113, 126–127; idem, *Sha`arei 'Orah*, J. ben Shlomo, ed. (Jerusalem, 1970), 1: 195, 199; and especially Moshe Cordovero's *Pardes Rimmonim* XXVII, ch. 2; II, fol. 59c. See my forthcoming, *Enchanted Chains*.
 25. See Idel, "Abulafia's Secrets of the *Guide*."
 26. See Idel, "Kabbalah and Elites," 5–19.
 27. Namely the theosophical Kabbalah, which is identical with the third group, while the fourth is constituted by the Kabbalah of the divine names advocated by Abulafia.
 28. The *sefirot*.
 29. Ms. Paris BN 777, 9; printed by Adolph Jellinek in *Philosophie und Kabbala*, 37.
 30. Ms. Paris BN 777, 5; Jellinek, *Philosophie und Kabbala*, 35.
 31. The second group is described as involved in the study of Maimonides shortly beforehand in Abulafia's passage.
 32. Ms. Paris BN 777, 5; Jellinek, *Philosophie und Kabbala*, 8.
 33. *ibidem*, 8.
 34. See Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany, 1987).
 35. See Sara Heller Wilensky, "The Dialectical Influence of Maimonides on Isaac ibn Latif and Early Spanish Kabbalah," in Moshe Idel, Z.W. Harvey, and E. Schweid, eds., *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem, 1988), 1: 289–306 (Hebrew), and "Messianism, Eschatology and Utopia in the Philosophical-Mystical Trend of Kabbalah of the 13th Century," in Zvi Baras, ed., *Messianism and Eschatology* (Jerusalem, 1984), 221–238 (Hebrew); see above, notes 16, 21.
 36. See, among others, Paul Fenton, ed. and trans., *The Treatise of the Pool, al-Maqala al-Hwadiyya by Obadyah b. Abraham b. Moses Maimonides* (London, 1981); idem, "Obadyah et David Maimonide," *Deux traites de mystique juive* (Paris, 1987); idem, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham ha-Hasid, the Jewish Sufi," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 26 (1981), 47–72; idem, "The Literary legacy of Maimonides' Descendants," in J. del Rosal, ed., *Sobre la Vida y Obra de Maimonides* (Cordova, 1991), 149–156; idem, "A Mystical Treatise on Perfection, Providence and Prophecy from the Jewish Sufi Circle," in D. Frank, ed., *The Jews in Medieval Islam* (Leiden, 1995), 301–334.
 37. See Ignaz Goldziher, "Ibn Hud, The Mahomedan Mystic, and the Jews of Damascus," *Jewish Quarterly Review* (OS) 6 (1894), 218–220.

38. There are numerous studies on the impact of Maimonides on Meister Eckhart; see most recently Yosef Schwartz, "Between Negation and Silence: Maimonides in the Latin West," *Iyyun* 45 (1996), 400–406.
39. See Alexander Altmann, "Maimonides' Attitude toward Jewish Mysticism," in Alfred Jospe, ed., *Studies in Jewish Thought* (Detroit, 1981), 200–219; Chaim Wirszubski, "Liber Redemptionis – the Early Version of R. Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalistic *Commentary on the Guide of the Perplexed* in the Latin Translation of Flavius Mithridates," *Divrei ha-Akademia ha-Le'umit ha-Israelit le-Mada'im* (Jerusalem, 1970), 3: 139–149, which will be cited below from its reprinted form in Ch. Wirszubski, *Between the Lines, Kabbalah, Christian Kabbalah and Sabbateanism*, Moshe Idel, ed. (Jerusalem, 1990), 135–149 (Hebrew); Gershom Scholem, *The Qabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah and of R. Abraham Abulafia*, Y. Ben Shlomo, ed. (Jerusalem, 1969), 118–120 (Hebrew); Moshe Idel, *Abraham Abulafia's Works and Doctrine* (Ph.D. Thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1976), 8–12 (Hebrew); Aviezer Ravitzky, "The Secrets of the Guide to the Perplexed: Between the Thirteenth and the Twentieth Centuries," *Studies in Maimonides* (Cambridge, 1990), 172–177.
40. See Georges Vajda, "Un chapitre de l'histoire du conflit entre la Kabbale et la philosophie," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 22 (1956), 127–130; idem, "Deux Chapitres du 'Guide des Egares' Repenses par un Kabbaliste," *Melanges Offerts à E. Gilson* (Paris, 1959), 51–59; and Ephraim Gottlieb, *Studies in the Kabbalah Literature*, J. Hacker, ed. (Tel Aviv, 1976), 105–106, 110–117 (Hebrew). On Gikatilla and the *Guide*, see also See Moshe Hayyim Weiler, "Inquiries in R. Joseph Gikatilla's Kabbalistic Terminology and His Relation to Maimonides," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 37 (1966), 13–44 (Hebrew) and the numerous notes to references to the *Guide of the Perplexed* in Asi Farber, "A New Fragment from R. Joseph Gikatilla's Preface to *Ginnat 'Egoz*," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981), 158–176 (Hebrew).
41. See e.g., Ms. Oxford Bodleiana 1649, fols. 200a–221b; Ms. New York, JTS, 2324.
42. See Idel, "Abulafia's Secrets of the *Guide*," 313–319.
43. "Tish'ah Peraqim mi-Yihud," Georges Vajda, ed., *Qovetz 'Al Yad* 5 (15) (1950), 105–137; idem, "Le traité pseudo-Maimonidien: 'Neuf chapitres sur l'unité de Dieu," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 28 (1953), 83–98.
44. Joseph B. Sermoneta, "Moses of Salerno's and Nicholas of Giuvinazzo's Remarks on the *Guide of the Perplexed*," *Iyyun* 20 (1979), 212–240.
45. Ya'aqov Friedman, "R. Zerariah ben Shaltiel Hen's *Commentary on the Guide of the Perplexed*" in Shlomo Pines, ed., *Memorial Volume to Ya'aqov Friedman* (Jerusalem, 1974), 3–14 (Hebrew); Aviezer Ravitzky, *'Al Da'at ha-Maqom, Studies in the History of Jewish Philosophy* (Jerusalem, 1991), 153–155, 212–219, 234–243 (Hebrew); idem, "Secrets of the Guide," 162–163.
46. See Isaac E. Barzilai, *Between Reason and Faith: Anti-Rationalism in Italian Jewish Thought 1250–1650* (The Hague, 1967), 32–57.
47. "Maimonides' Attitude toward Jewish Mysticism."
48. "Me-Hoqer li-Mequbbal," *Tarbiz* 6 (1935), 334–342 (Hebrew); "Maimonides dans l'oeuvre des Kabbalistes," *Cahiers juifs* 3 (1935), 103–112.

49. Abraham J. Heschel, *Prophetic Inspiration After the Prophets: Maimonides and Other Medieval Authorities*, Morris M. Faierstein, ed. (Hoboken, NJ, 1996); David Blumenthal, "Maimonides' Intellectualist Mysticism and the Superiority of the Prophecy of Moses," *Studies in Medieval Culture* 10 (1981), 51–77; Alfred L. Ivry, "Neoplatonic Currents in Maimonides' Thought," in Joel Kraemer, ed., *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies* (Oxford, 1991), 115–140; idem, "Maimonides and Neoplatonism: Challenge and Response," in Lenn E. Goodman, ed., *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought* (Albany, 1992), 137–155; idem, "Isma`ili Theology and Maimonides' Philosophy," in Daniel Frank, ed., *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society, and Identity* (Leiden, 1995), 271–299; Herbert Davidson, "Maimonides on Metaphysical Knowledge," *Maimonidean Studies* 3 (1992/93), 49–103. See also note 40, above.
50. See Wirszubski's and my studies referred at in note 39, above.
51. See my remarks on the quotes from Abulafia's commentaries on the *Guide* in Idel, *Abraham Abulafia's Works*, 8–12 and the pertinent footnotes.
52. *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, Ms. Munchen 405, fol. 46b.
53. See below, note 91.
54. From Greece, where he had recently married her.
55. In Jellinek there is a mistake, repeated by all other scholars who copied Abulafia's text: *Meimei Retzoni*.
56. On his wandering for the sake of studying Torah see also Abulafia's *Sitrei Torah*, Ms. Paris BN 774, fol. 120a.
57. Hillel died several years after the composition of this passage, and I assume that the last phrase is an addition of a later scribe.
58. Compare precisely the same imagery in one of Abulafia's followers, R. Nathan ben Sa'adya Harar, the author of *Sefer Sha`arei Tzedeq*, J.E. Porush, ed. (Jerusalem, 1989), 22–23.
59. Of understanding the *Guide*.
60. A place in the Peloponese.
61. On depth as pointing to secrets see Moshe Idel, "Secrecy, Binah and Derishah," in H. Kippenberg and Guy Stroumsa, eds., *Secrecy and Concealment* (Leiden, 1995), 327, note 84 and below note 136.
62. On the transmission of "headnotes" as part of Jewish esotericism see Moshe Idel, "Transmission in the Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah," in Yaacov Elman and I. Gershoni, eds., *Transmitting Jewish Traditions: Orality, Textuality, and Cultural Diffusion* (New Haven, 2000), 138–164.
63. *Ba`alei Beriti*. This phrase points to the existence of tensions between Abulafia and other persons in Rome or Italy.
64. Abulafia addressed one of his most interesting epistles to this author, who became one of the judges of the Barcelona Jewish community in Abulafia's lifetime; see Adolph Jellinek, ed., *Auswahl kabbalistischer Mystik* (Erstes Heft) (Leipzig, 1853), 1–28.
65. *Yehayehu le-`Ad*, "Let Him live forever."
66. See Gershom Scholem, "R. Moshe me-Burgos, *Talmido shel R. Isaac ha-Kohen*," *Tarbiz* 3 (1932), 258–286; 4 (1933), 54–77, 207–225; 5 (1934), 50–60, 180–198, 305–323 (Hebrew).

67. The identity of this student has not been established; on the possible identity of this R. Shem Tov see Scholem, "R. Moshe mi-Burgos," 261–262.
68. *Medinat Celim* in Castile.
69. On the following sentence, skipped here, see below in the next paragraph.
70. This is an anagram of "Messina."
71. On these students see note 77, below.
72. Again, as in the case of R. Hillel, Sa`adia was still alive years after this document was composed and the phrase dealing with "his memory" is an addition of the scribe.
73. Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1580, fol. 164a–164b; printed, with some errors by Adolph Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash* (reprint Wahrman Books, Jerusalem, 1967), 3: XL–XLI. For an additional analysis of issues found in the passage see Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," 60–63 and the remarks of Dinur, note 74, below.
74. See Ben-Zion Dinur, *Israel Ba-Golah* (Tel Aviv, 1970), series II, vol. 4, 366 (twice in his footnotes).
75. *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, 110–111; less ambiguous is his remark in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1967), 127.
76. For the 36 secret topics around which Abulafia's commentaries gravitate, see Idel, *Abraham Abulafia*, 8–12.
77. Moshe Idel, "The Ecstatic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia in Sicily and Its Transmission during the Renaissance," *Italia Judaica* (Rome, 1995), 5: 330–340.
78. See Moshe Idel, "Abraham Abulafia and Menahem ben Benjamin in Rome: The Beginnings of Kabbalah in Italy," in Bernard D. Cooperman and Barbara Garvin, eds., *The Jews of Italy: Memory and Identity* (College Park, MD, 2000), 240–248.
79. On this Kabbalist's critique of philosophy and Maimonides see Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," 47–48.
80. See below, note 108.
81. See Gottlieb, *Studies*, 104.
82. See Chaim Wirszubski, "Liber Redemptionis – the Early Version of R. Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalistic *Commentary on the Guide of the Perplexed* in the Latin Translation of Flavius Mithridates," *Divrei ha-Akademia ha-Le'umit ha-Israelit le-Mada'im* (Jerusalem, 1970), 3: 139–149.
83. See Gottlieb, *Studies*, 104.
84. See the footnote of Dinur, *Israel ba-Golah*, II, 4, 366.
85. Ms. Oxford–Bodleiana 1580, fol. 164b. See Gottlieb, *Studies*, 104–105, who already pointed out the possible connection between this text and that of Gikatilla's.
86. See Gottlieb, *Studies*, 105–106.
87. See Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," 62–63.
88. Idel, there, 63, note 109.
89. *Hassagot*, fols. 19a (twice), 20d, 22b.
90. *Hassagot*, fol. 20b.
91. Ms. Munchen 405, fols. 46b–47a. See also above, note 53.
92. Pines, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 15.

93. This is the title of another short treatise of the anonymous author, found in the same manuscript.
94. *Sefer Mardea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1649, fol. 217b.
95. See the citation from *Menorat ha-Kesef*, cited in the preface of Elias Werbluner's edition of Caspi's commentaries on the *Guide* (Frankfurt a\M, 1848), III, which I could not locate in the printed edition of this work, and his preface to *Sefer ha-Musar*, published in I. Last, ed., *Asarah Kelei Kesef* (Pressburg, 1903), 2: 60.
96. The phrase is rather awkward: *me-'amitat ma'amrei sifrei ha-'Elohim*.
97. *'al pi rabbottai ha-shelemim*, a phrase whose more literal translation includes the idea of reception "from the mouth of my accomplished masters."
98. Compare however, the claim adduced below from a later commentary on the *Guide*, where the sages who introduced him into the secrets of the *Guide* are described as alive. And see the text itself in Ms. Munchen 405, fol. 47a. Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," 58.
99. See, for example, his epistle, in Jellinek, *Auswahl*, 28.
100. A list of ancient mystical books appears in a similar context in *Sheva` Netivot ha-Torah*, published in *Philosophie und Kabbala*, 21.
101. *Bat qol*. See above, at the beginning of this text, the mention of the *qolot*, voices. It is also possible that the similarity between the sounds and written forms of *qolot* and *qabbalot* is also implied in the idea that traditions coming from above are voices.
102. *'Eliyotot*. Compare Abulafia's use of the term external *qabbalot* above, in the long passage adduced from *'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*.
103. Ms. New York, JTS 1801, fol. 4b. See here Moshe Idel, "Defining Kabbalah: The Kabbalah of the Divine Names," in R.A. Herrera, ed., *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics, & Typology* (New York, 1993), 111–112.
104. According to the translation of Scholem, *Major Trends*, 137; the Hebrew original was printed there on 376, note 75.
105. *Sitrei Torah*, Ms. Paris BN 774, fol. 163b.
106. *Sitrei Torah*, Ms. Paris BN 774, fol. 117a; on the Latin version of this text, see Wirszubsky, *Between the Lines*, 46.
107. *Sefer ha-Geulah*, Ms. Leipzig 39, fol. 5b; on the Latin, glossed version of this statement, see Wirszubsky, *Between the Lines*, 143.
108. For a full discussion in a similar passage, see Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," 57–58.
109. Represented by the Hebrew letters *'ayin* and *het*.
110. Represented by the Hebrew letters *mem* and *het*.
111. Represented by the Hebrew letters *nun* and *dalet*.
112. Ms. Paris BN 774, fol. 115b; Ms. British Library Or. 4596, Catalogue Margoliouth 757, fol. 2b. See also Raphael Jospe, "The Number and Division of Chapters in the *Guide of the Perplexed*," in M. Idel, W.Z. Harvey, E. Schweid, eds., *Pines Jubilee Volume*, 1: 387–397 (Hebrew).
113. See the Introduction to his *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, Ch.D. Chavel, ed. (Jerusalem, 1959), 7, and 89, 251.
114. Published by Gershom Scholem as an appendix to his *The Qabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah*, 235.

115. *Ginnat 'Egoz*, fol. 15c.
116. See Idel, "Abulafia's Secrets of the *Guide*," 272–274.
117. Ms. Firenze–Laurenziana, II, 48, fol. 22a.
118. On this issue see Idel, "Abulafia's Secrets of the *Guide*," 307–398.
119. See Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, 101–109.
120. See his introduction to *Sefer ha-Maftehot*, his commentary on the Pentateuch, Ms. Moscow–Guensburg 133, fol. 1a, published in Idel, *Abraham Abulafia's Works*, 20.
121. Namely, Capua, in *gematria*.
122. This is one of the designations that he took for himself, as it amounts in *gematria* to Abraham.
123. *Ziv ha-shekhinah*. This Rabbinic term was interpreted in ecstatic Kabbalah as pointing to an ecstatic experience. See Moshe Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, trans. Menachem Kallus (Albany, 1989), 32–33.
124. This remark may point to anthropomorphic understandings of the divinity, influential in some circles in contemporary Italy. See Israel Ta-Shma, "Nimuqqei Humash le-Rabbi Isaiah mi-Trani," *Qiriat Sefer* 64 (1992/1993), 751–753 (Hebrew) and Ta-Shma, "The Acceptance of Maimonides' Mishneh Torah in Italy," *Italia* 13–15 (2001), 79–90.
125. *'Inyanim 'amuqim me'od*; On "depth" see above, note 61.
126. *Sitrei Torah*, Ms. Paris BN 774, fol. 120a.
127. This is so insofar as his claims regarding the disclosure of the secrets of the Torah in his introduction in the *Commentary on the Torah* is concerned; see "Abulafia's Secrets of the *Guide*," par. II.
128. See Moshe Idel, "'The Time of the End': Apocalypticism and Its Spiritualization in Abraham Abulafia's Eschatology," in Albert Baumgarten, ed., *Apocalyptic Time* (Leiden, 2000), 155–186.
129. See, here, Ravitzky, "Samuel ibn Tibbon," 105–106, 109–110 and Menachem Kellner, *Commentary on Song of Songs by Levi ben Gershom* (Ramat-Gan, 2001), 24–39 (Hebrew).
130. See Jospe, "The Number and Division," and Moshe Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany, 1989), 63–66.
131. *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism* (Cambridge, 1989), 84–109.