Sarah Stroumsa

Ibn Masarra and the Beginnings of Mystical Thought in al-Andalus*

Some of the crucial stages in the development of both Jewish and Christian mysticism have taken place in the Iberian peninsula. Suffice it to mention the *Zohar* on the one hand, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross on the other. That the emergence and development of mystical systems of both religions in Spain justifies a comparative study seems almost obvious. But no such study would be complete – in fact, no such study would be likely to offer a balanced or correct historical insight – without it including also Muslim Andalusian mysticism. Miguel Asín Palacios has forcefully argued for the relationship between Christian and Islamic mystics. Asín saw the roots of the Carmelite renunciation of *carismata* in the teaching of the Muslim mystic Ibn ʿAbbād of al-Rondā (d. 1389)[1]. Asín was also sensitive to Jewish-Muslim connections, but he did not dwell on their existence in the domain of mysticism, but rather in that of Neo-Platonist philosophy. In particular, he was fascinated by what he considered to be the doctrine of Pseudo-Empedocles. The search for the teachings of Pseudo-Empedocles and for his "Book of Five Substances" had begun already with David Kaufmann[2] and Solomon Munk[3], but it was mostly Asín who developed the theory of a school of thought whose hallmark is the doctrine of Pseudo-Empedocles[4]. Asín based his theory on the similarities in the thought of some Neo-Platonist thinkers, from the tenth century Muslim Ibn Masarra to the eleventh century Jew Ibn Gabirol, and up to the fifteenth century kabbalistic texts such as Elhanan ben Abraham's *Yesod Olam,* and Latin Neoplatonism in Christian Europe[5].

* The research for this study was prepared in 2002–2003, during a year at the Institute of Advanced Studies of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I wish to extend my thanks to the Institute and to my colleagues there. In particular, I am indebted to Sara Sviri, for her helpful comments on a previous draft of this paper.

1 *Miguel Asín Palacios*, Un precursor hispanomusulman de San Juan de la Cruz, in: Al-Andalus 1 (1933) 7–79; reprinted in: *Idem*, Obras Escogidas, I (Madrid 1946) 246–326.

2 *D. Kaufmann*, Studien über Salomon ibn Gabirol (Budapest 1899) 13–71.

3 *S. Munk*, Mélanges de philosophie juive et arabe (Paris 1859; reprinted Paris 1988).

4 *Miguel Asín Palacios*, Abenmasarra y su escuela (Madrid 1914) (The Mystical Philosophy of Ibn Masarra and his Followers, translated by *E. H. Douglas* and *H. W. Yoder* [Leiden 1978]).

5 For the history of the theory, see *D. De Smet*, The Influence of the Arabic Pseudo-Empe-

Asín, who called this stream of thought "the school of Ibn Masarra", relied on secondary sources – the only ones available to him then. In what follows I will focus on the figure of Ibn Masarra and attempt to identify his intellectual affinities as reflected in his own writings. I will then point to the existence of some elements in his writings which appear to have Jewish connotations; and finally, I will examine the possible implications of these elements for the evaluation of the Jewish role in the formation of mystical and Neo-Platonist thought in the Iberian peninsula.

Very little is known concerning the early stages of the introduction of speculative thought into al-Andalus. An illustration of the thick fog that covers these beginnings can be furnished by the tenth century enigmatic figure of Ibn Masarra. The enigma is not caused by the lack of biographical information, which, despite some moot points, allows us to trace his life. Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Jabalī, known as Ibn Masarra, was born in Cordoba in 883 C.E. His father ʿAbdallāh had traveled to the east, had been to Basra, where he is said to have studied with Muʿtazili theologians, and died in Mecca. Muḥammad Ibn Masarra himself also went to Mecca, *via* Kairouan[6]. He returned to al-Andalus during the reign of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III *al-Nāṣir* (912–962) where he died around the year 931[7].

What remains enigmatic, however, is the nature of Ibn Masarra's teaching. Miguel Cruz Hernández describes him as "the first Spanish-born Muslim thinker of some originality"[8]. But the question arises, what kind of a thinker? Ibn Masarra seems to be everything to everyone. The Muslim historiographers describe him as

docles on Medieval Latin Philosophy: Myth or Reality, in: *D. A. Agius* and *I. R. Netton* (eds.), Across the Mediterranean Frontiers: Trade, Politics and Religion, 650–1450 (Turnhous 1997) 225–234; *idem*, Empedocles Arabus. Une lecture néoplatonicenne tardive (Brussel 1998) 15–17.

[6] See notes 28 and 79 below.

[7] For a general overview of Ibn Masarra, his biography and the sources about him, see *Asín Palacios*, The Mystical Philosophy of Ibn Masarra; *É. Lévi-Provençal*, A propos de l'ascète-philosophe Ibn Masarra de Cordoue, in: Orientalia Suecana III (Donum Natalicium H. S. Nyberg Oblatum, Uppsala 1954) 75–83; *M. A. Makki*, Ensayo sobre las aportaciones orientales en la España musulmana y su influencia en la formación de la cultura hispano-árabe (Madrid 1968) 155–162; *Muḥammad Kamāl Ibrāhīm Jaʿfar, Min qaḍāyā al-fikr al-islāmī, dirāsa wa-nuṣūṣ* (Cairo 1976; henceforward: *Jaʿfar, Min qaḍāyā*) 182–221; *L. E. Goodman*, Ibn Masarrah, in: *S. H. Nasr* and *O. Leaman* (eds.), History of Isalmic Philosophy, vol. I (London, New York 1996) 277–293; *D. Urvoy*, Sur les débuts de la pensée spéculative en Andalus, in: Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph 50 (1984) 707–717; *R. Arnaldez*, Ibn Masarra, in: Encyclopedia of Islam, New Edition (henceforward: EI²), Vol. III (Leiden, London 1986) 868–872; *M. Cruz-Hernández*, Historia del pensamiento en el mundo islámico, vol. 2: El pensamiento de al-Andalus (siglos IX–XIV) (Madrid 1996²) 344–357; *E. Tornero Poveda*, La Filosofía, in: El retroceso territorial de Al-Andalus. Almorávides y almohades, Siglos XI al XIII, vol. 8:2 of Historia de España fundada por *R. Menéndez Pidal* y dirigida por *J. M. Jover Zamora*, coord. por *M. J. Viguera* (Madrid 1997) 587–602, on 589–590.

[8] El pensamiento de al-Andalus 344 ("... el primer pensador musulmán muladí con ideas en cierto modo originales"). A similar appreciation (with similar reserve) is implied by Lévi-Provençal, who describes Ibn Masarra as "the initiator of the force of philosophical speculation and of a movement of ideas," cf. *E. Lévi-Provençal*, Historia de la España musulmana – La vida religiosa e intelectual 309–321, on 314.

a recognized legal authority (*faqīh*)[9]. But they also say other things about him, which suggest more philosophical interests: that he held views close to those of the Mu'tazila[10]; it is insinuated that he made use of [Aristotelian?] logic[11]; that he withdrew with his adepts to a retreat in the Cordobese *Sierra*[12], where he led an ascetic life; that he was a *bātinī*[13], an ambiguous term that may indicate either ṣūfī or ismaili affiliations[14]. As a source for his thought we find mentioned his own travels to the east (as well as those of his father), with possible encounters with mu'tazili scholars[15]. But he is also said to have met ṣūfī masters, and to have been influenced by the thought of early Muslim sufis, such as al-Junayd, Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī, and Sahl al-Tustarī.

The seemingly contradictory information provided by medieval Muslim historiographers is reflected in modern scholarship, where much speculation has been published concerning Ibn Masarra's philosophical tendency. He is variously described as a Mu'tazili theologian[16], a mystic[17], a Neo-Platonist philosopher

[9] He is thus introduced in the title of one his works in the unique manuscript (but see note 13 below); cf. Chester Beatty Library, Ar. 3168, fol. 175 (Henceforward: D); *Ja'far, Min qaḍāyā,* 348). I wish to express my thanks to the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin for the permission to use the manuscript, and to Prof. David Wasserstein, for his help in procuring it.
According to Ibn Ḥayyān, Ibn Masarra was versed in the basic Mālikī code of law, the *mudawwana*; cf. *P. Chalmeta* et al. (eds.), Al-Muqtabas [V] de Ibn Ḥayyān (Madrid 1979) 20ff.

[10] Cf. *H. Bū 'Alwān* (ed.), Ibn Ṣā'id *al*-Andalusī, *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt al-umam* (Beirut n.d.) 73 (regarding his views on the divine attributes); *Al-Muqtabas V* 27 (regarding the accusation of Ibn Masarra's followers of adhering to the doctrine of the created Qur'ān).

[11] This seems to be the insinuation of Ibn Ḥayyān, who accuses Ibn Masarra of crafty use of *manṭiq*; cf. *Al-Muqtabas V.* 20ff.

[12] It is interesting to note that according to *Takmila* p. 339, this Cordoban retreat was a replica of the house of Māriya, the Prophet's Christian concubine, in Medina; cf. *Asín Palacios,* The Mystical Philosophy 38.

[13] Cf. Ibn Ṣā'id, 73. On the title page of another work of Ibn Masarra, he is introduced as "*al-shaykh al-'ārif al-muḥaqqiq*", thus indicating his association with ṣūfī gnosis; cf. D fol. 129; *Ja'far, Min qaḍāyā,* 310–311.

[14] On the meaning of this term, see further below. *Al-Wansharīsī* (*al-Mi'yar,* X [Fez 1897] 443–444, accuses Ibn Masarra's followers of shiite ("rafidite") affiliations; cf. *M. Fierro,* "Los Mālikies de al-Andalus y los dos árbitros (*al-ḥakamān*), in: Al-Qantara 6 (1985) 79–102.

[15] Ibn Ḥayyān (*Muqtabas* 32) says (citing *Ta'rīkh al-'ulamā'*) that Ibn Masarra was "known to uphold a mu'tazili doctrine" (*ma'rūf bi-madhhab min al-i'tizāl*) and that he had spent time in the encounters with mu'tazili diaclectic theologians, heresiographers and polemicists (*wa-'ishtaghala bi-mulāqāt al-mutakallimīn wa-aṣḥāb al-maqālāt wa-ahl al-jadal min al-mu'tazila*). The credibility of the accusation of mu'tazilite inclinations diminishes when the author continues to say that "he demonstrated asceticism, piety, and withdrawal from people's company" (*i'tizālan li'l-nās*).

[16] Cf., for instance, *M. Fierro,* Heresy in al-Andalus, in: *S. K. Jayyusi* (ed.), The Legacy of Muslim Spain (Leiden 1992) 895–908, on 900 (regarding Ibn Masarra's youth); *E. Tornero,* Nota sobre el pensamiento de Abenmasarra, in: Al-Qantara 6 (1985) 503–506, on 504.

[17] Cf. *S. Stern,* Ibn Masarra, Follower of Pseudo-Empedocles – an illusion, in: Actas del IV Congresso de estudos árabes e islâmicos, Coimbra-Lisboa, 1 a 8 de setembro de 1968 (Leiden 1971) 325–337, rep. in: *Idem,* Medieval Arabic and Hebrew Studies, ed. *F. Zimmermann* (London 1983) V. For Stern (326–327), Ibn Masarra "was a Sūfī, not Neoplatonic philosopher. There existed a 'school' of Ibn Masarra – but his followers, too, were Sufis, not Neo-

with *bāṭinī* tendencies[18], a follower (or the founder) of the so-called pseudo-Empedocles school[19], a Fatimid missionary[20], or a number of combinations of the above mentioned possibilities.

Ibn Masarra's own writings were considered as lost until 1972, when Muḥammad Kamāl Ibrāhim Jaʿfar published two of his works[21]: *The Book of The Properties of Letters* (*Kitāb Khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf*) and *The Epistle on Contemplation* (*Risālat al-iʿtibār*)[22]. Jaʿfar's publication could have provided a basis for a less impressionistic evaluation of Ibn Masarra. But in fact, although two of Ibn Masarra's original works are now available, much of the scholarly discussion continues to ignore them[23].

The difficulty in classifying Ibn Masarra is usually blamed on the scarcity of our sources. This impediment certainly exists, even after the publication of the two treatises. But the difficulty may, to some extent, be inherent to Ibn Masarra's thought, which does not lend itself easily to classification in the currently used molds, as well as to our own preconceived ideas.

Even a cursory examination of the two treatises published by Jaʿfar reveals the peculiarity of Ibn Masarra's thought. *The Epistle on Contemplation* is in some ways reminiscent of the treatise known as "Pseudo-Jāḥiz", an early theological work of Christian origin, attributed to the Muslim theologian and literateur ʿAmr

platonic philosophers. There were ...Neoplatonic philosophers in Spain ...– but they had nothing to do with Ibn Masarra and his school."; *Makki*, Ensayo 155–161 and especially 158, also regards Ibn Masarra as "the first real hispano-muslim mystic"; *Jaʿfar, Min qaḍāyā* 192, sees his work as typically ṣūfī , as well as "a *bāṭinī*- Cabbalsitic style". *Cruz-Hernández*, on the other hand (Historia 346) insists on the absence of any typically sufi doctrine in Ibn Masarra's thought.

18 cf. *Tornero*, Noticia 49; *Cruz-Hernández*, Historia 346.

19 *Asín*, Abenmasarra, passim; *Tornero*, Nota sobre el pensamiento 504.

20 *Jaʿfar, Min qaḍāyā* 183.

21 *Jaʿfar, "Min muʾallafāt Ibn Masarra al-mafqūda, Majallat kulliyyat al-tarbiya,"* 3 (1972) 27–63 (*non vidi*); *Jaʿfar, Min qaḍāyā* 300–360. A new edition of Ibn Masarra's two works is currently being prepared by Sara Sviri and me.

22 This epistle is probably identical with the one entitled *K. al-Tabṣira*; cf. *Jaʿfar, qaḍāyā* 300–306; *idem, Min al-turāth al-falsafī li-ibn Masarra* (Cairo 1982) 11–15. A third work of Ibn Masarra, The Monotheism of those Whose Knowledge is Certain (*Tawḥīd al-mūqīnīn*), mentioned by *Shams al-Dīn al-Qurṭubī* [d. 1173], is still not extant; Cf. *Cruz-Hernándes*, Historia 345.

23 Thus Arnaldez can still say in 1986 that none of Ibn Masarra's works has survived; cf. Ibn Masarra (note 7 above) on 869, col. 1. In 1996 Goodman (who cites Jaʿfar in his bibliography) can still say ("Ibn Masarrah", p. 279) that, "of his writings, only the titles survive". In 1993 and in 1998 Tornero thus justly felt the need to draw attention to the texts published 20 years earlier; cf. "Noticia sobre la publicación de obras inéditas de Ibn Masarra", in: Al-Qanṭara 14 (1993) 47–64; *idem*, A Report on the Publication of Previously Unedited Works by Ibn Masarra, in: *M. Fierro* and *J. Samsó* (eds.), The Formation of al-Andalus, Pt. 2: Language, Religion, Culture and the Sciences (Aldeshot, Hampshire 1998) 133–150. De Smet (1998) refers to the texts only briefly, as an afterthought; see my review of his *Empedocles Arabus* in: Journal of the American Oriental Society 122 (2002) 94–97, on 95.

b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiz (d. 869)[24]. The bulk of Ibn Masarra's work is dedicated to the elaboration of the argument that the detailed contemplation (*i'tibār*) of the world and of the marvels of nature indicates the existence of a wise creator. This is a basic tenet of the Mu'tazila, and in this sense, Ibn Masarra's *Epistle* can be seen as close to the world of Mu'tazilī *kalām*. But, despite the Epistle's name and the bulk of its content, Ibn Masarra's work goes beyond advocating the merits of contemplation. Its main thesis, presented from the outset, is the agreement of rational speculation and revelation, a thesis that is not formulated explicitly in the Pseudo-Jāḥiz, and is not developed systematically by the Mu'tazila (although they would definitely concur with it). The Aristotelian philosophers (*falāsifa*) in the Orient are familiar with the thesis, but they, like the Mu'tazila, do not dwell on it continuously. Ibn Masarra's *Epistle of Contemplation* states this position in an unusually forceful and clear way[25]. Moreover, his pointed formulation of this thesis introduces a line of thought which was to gain a particular popularity among Andalusi Aristotelian philosophers, and which is attested in the writings of Ibn al-Sayyid al-Baṭalyawsī and Ibn Ṭufayl, Averroes and Maimonides[26].

But Ibn Masarra is not an Aristotelian philosopher, just as he is no mu'tazilī theologian. Ibn Masarra's terminology and argumentations are often reminiscent of the *Epistles of the Pure Brethren* (*Rasā'il Ikhwān al-ṣafā'*). To cite just one conspicuous example, we may mention his frequent use of formulas such as: "May God guide us and you"[27], a formula that has become almost a *siboleth* of the *Epistles*. In this context, it seems that Ibn Masarra's description in Muslim sources as *bāṭinī*, a description which modern scholars have usually interpreted as referring to his esoteric mystical teaching, may in fact point to (or rather, also point to) possible influences of Fatimid Neo-Platonism, which at that precise moment was establishing itself in north Africa[28].

The *Epistle on Contemplation* is thus an admixture of elements that, in the analysis of medieval Muslim texts, we usually identify as Mu'tazilī, Aristotelian, or Neo-Platonist. Of course, we can argue that some of the elements are more conspicuous than others (although the balance of elements may vary from one paragraph to the other). Nevertheless, it would be misleading to impose on the

[24] Cf. *D. Z. Baneth*, A Common source for Baḥyā ibn Paqūda and al-Ghazālī, in: Magnes Volume (Jerusalem 1938) 23–30 (in Hebrew).

[25] Ibn Masarra begins the *Epistle* by citing "one of the books" according to which "he who attempts to comprehend by contemplating the world, ascending from that which is below to that which is above, will find exactly what the prophets indicated, descending from that which is above to that which is below" (*lā yajidu al-mustadrik mā (?) al-i'tibār min asfal al-'ālam ilā al-a'lā illā mithla mā dallat 'alayhi al-anbiyā' min al-a'lā ilā al-asfal).*

[26] For a discussion of some of these parallels, see Cf. *Ja'far, Min qaḍāyā* 159ff.

[27] E.g. "*waffaqanā 'llāh wa-iyyāka*" (*Ja'far, Min qaḍāyā* 348). Similar expressions appear also in the Book of Properties, e.g. "*arshadanā 'llāh wa-iyyāka*" (ibid. 322, 324).

[28] The Fatimids conquered Kairouan in 910, whence they advanced until the conquest of Cairo in 969. Ibn Masarra has studied in Kairouan during the Fatimid reign, although the dates are not certain, see note 79 below.

treatise a rigid classification, which obliterates the significance of the nuanced picture.

Ibn Masarra's other treatise, *The Properties of Letters*, corroborates this impression, although the admixture it offers is different. Only rarely can we see in it the marks of Mu'tazili influence, and distinctly Aristotelian elements are also infrequent. The predominant tone in the treatise discloses clear mystical and Neo-Platonist inclinations. The only Muslim author cited explicitly by Ibn Masarra is the ninth century mystic Sahl al-Tustāri (d. 896)[29]. The Neo-Platonism of Ibn Masarra's treatise is, however, closer to that of the Isma'īlī (Fatimid) brand than to rigorous Plotinian Neo-Platonism. The title of the treatise, which dwells on the "properties" of letters, suggests preoccupation with notions that, in other contexts, were often associated with alchemy and with magic practices. This branch of science flourished in al-Andalus and was favored by the Ismailis[30].

Even a cursory reading of Ibn Masarra's two extant texts thus reveals the fact that the convenient classifications, to which we have become accustomed in the study of Muslim thought in the Orient, will not suffice here. We can, for sure, recognize the impact of the various schools of thought. But whatever Ibn Masarra's sources may have been, he mixed them in such a way that the outcome does not neatly fit any of the "schools".

To the extent that Ibn Masarra is indeed at the origin of Andalusian philosophical thinking, we must assume that the philosophical traditions he started would also follow patterns that are different from those adopted in the East. We must also bear in mind that the common language (Arabic), the common philosophical and scientific curriculum, and the shared libraries facilitated a closely-knit exchange between Jewish and Muslim intellectuals. This holds true regarding the Islamic world in general, but it is even more so in the Andalusi context, where the intellectual impact of the Christian community was relatively marginal in this period[31]. A relative independence of Andalusi thinkers from eastern patterns should therefore be our working hypothesis, not only regarding Muslim thought, but also regarding Jewish philosophy and mysticism.

Students of Judaeo-Arabic philosophy are, of course, well aware of the tight links between it and its Muslim counterpart. For students of Muslim philosophy, however, the connection imposes itself less forcefully. The influence of the majority culture on minorities may indeed be less self-evident, and we tend to forget that dialogues and exchanges are, by definition, reciprocal. In the case of Ibn Mas-

[29] Ibn Masarra cites several times from Sahl's *Epistle on Letters* (*Risālat al-ḥurūf*). This text was also published by *Muḥammad kamāl Ja'far, Min al-turāth al-ṣūfī* (Cairo 1974) 317ff.

[30] Cf. *T. Fahd*, s.v. *Ḥurūf ('ilm al-)*, in: EI², vol. III 595–596.

[31] On the relative intellectual weakness of the Christian community in al-Andalus in the early period, see, for instance, *D. Urvoy*, Pensers d'al-Andalus, la vie intellectuelle à Seville et Cordoue au temps des empires berbères (fin XIe siècle – débuts XIIIe siècle) (Toulouse 1990) 29, 33; Cf. Also *B. F. Reilly*, The Contest of Christian and Muslim Spain, 1031–1151 (Cambridge/Mass., Oxford 1992) 17–18.

arra, however, the commonality cannot be ignored, since there are intriguing, and hitherto unnoticed, indications of the impact of Jewish thought on his work.

The possible presence of Jewish elements in Ibn Masarra's thought was suggested already by Asín Palacios, who drew attention to a passage in Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī's *Meccan revelations*. In this passage, according to Asín, Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1204) cited Ibn Masarra as saying that the four angels who carry the divine throne are in the form of a man, a lion, an eagle, and an ox. Asín pointed out the obvious dependence on Ezekiel, and on Jewish (and Christian) speculations on the Chariot[32].

Almost a century later, Miguel Cruz-Hernández and Emilio Tornero examined the extant texts of Ibn Masarra and pointed out the fact that such a description does not appear in his discussions of the divine throne[33]. The question then arises as to the source of the discrepancy: did Ibn ʿArabī impute to his predecessor a description that the latter never wrote, or did he have access to some other writings of Ibn Masarra, in which such a description did appear?

A closer look at Ibn ʿArabī's text, however, shows that Ibn ʿArabī does not really attribute such a description to Ibn Masarra. The text in question reads:

"As for the throne, which is the royal chair, God has angels who carry it on their shoulders. In our present day, they are four[34]... . Regarding the forms of these four porters, *things were said which seem to approximate* the sayings of Ibn Masarra. *For it was said* that one [of the porters] is in the form of a man, the other in the form of a lion, the third in the form of an eagle, and the fourth in the form of an ox."[35]

Ibn ʿArabī does not attribute the description of the porters to Ibn Masarra. He only says that this description is reminiscent of what Ibn Masarra had said. What Ibn Masarra did say is cited by Ibn ʿArabī a bit earlier, where he says:

"We were told that Ibn Masarra al-Jabalī ... had said: The throne which they carry is the Dominion[36]. [The dominion] consists solely of body, spirit, sustenance and rank[37]. For Adam and Isrāfīl are [in charge] of the forms[38], Gabriel and Muḥammad – in charge of the spirits, Michael and Abraham – in charge of liveli-

32 Cf. *Asín* 77 n. 13, who cites *Munk*, Mélanges 492. Asín himself (*Abenmasarra* 99, note 1) describes Ibn ʿArabī's imagery here as "algo cabalístico".

33 Ibn Masarra refers to the four angels in his *Book on the Properties of Letters (Min Qadāyā* 340); cf. *E. Tornero*, A Report on the Publication 14; *idem*, Noticia 60.

34 The allusion is to the Qurʾānic verse: "On that day, eight above them shall carry your Lord's throne" (Q. 69:17).

35 Al-futūḥāt al-makkiyya, ed. *Uthmān Yaḥyā* and *Ibrāhīm Madkūr* (Cairo 1972) 355 (#557).

36 *Mulk*.

37 As the following lines make clear, the "rank" refers to the position in the Hereafter.

38 "Forms" here in the sense of corporeal forms, the forms of the bodies.

hoods,[39] Mālik and Riḍwān[40] – of the retribution and reward. The Dominion contains only the things he has mentioned."[41]

It is not very clear, in this passage, where exactly Ibn Masarra's words end and where Ibn ʿArabī's interpretation begins. Nevertheless, we can safely say that Ibn Masarra is referring to four categories of being as the carriers of the throne, and that either he himself or Ibn ʿArabī identify them with pairs of angels and prophets. Either way, we can see how Ibn ʿArabī regarded Ibn Masarra's statement as close to the description in Ezekiel, which he – not Ibn Masarra – had heard[42].

The dissociation of Ibn Masarra from Ibn ʿArabī's description of the divine throne does not, however, put to rest the question of Ibn Masarra's Jewish contacts, since his own writings oblige us to raise it again.

The Book of the Properties of Letters belongs, according to its title, to the genre of letter speculation[43]. In the Introduction, however, it is presented by the author as a study of God's "beautiful names" (*al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*) and His attributes[44]. The two axes, of attributes and letters, are maintained throughout the book. At times, Ibn Masarra discusses the cosmogonic power of letters. On other occasions, Ibn Masarra identifies the letters with God's names, that is to say, His attributes. If we compare this book to the writings of a near contemporary, the Ismaili author Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, for instance, we will find that for the latter, in his *Kitāb al-zīna*, God creates *with* the letters, and the letters are the archetype of the created things. On occasions, this is also the case of Ibn Masarra, who identifies some of the letters with the tools which God used in the process of creation (the pen, the ink, etc.). But mostly, for Ibn Masarra the letters are closely associated with God the creator Himself, since they are identified with His attributes. In this category, two passages deserve our attention.

The first passage discusses the four words of *basmala*, the opening formula of the Qurʾān:

[39] Livelihood (*rizq*), as Ibn ʿArabī promptly explains in the following lines, is equal to sustenance (*ghadhāʾ*).

[40] One would have expected here another pair, of prophet and angel, rather than two angels. The natural candidate for the prophet in this pair would have been Jesus, whose Islamic image fits the eschatological phase. It seems, however, that the customary pairing of these two angels overruled the structure of the passage.

[41] *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* 348 (#545).

[42] Ibn ʿArabī could have heard this description in his youth in the Iberian peninsula, or later in Damascus, or anywhere else in his travels.

[43] On this genre and the place of Ibn Masarra's work in it, see *D. Gril*, La science des lettres, in: *M. Chodkiewicz* (ed.), Ibn ʿArabī, Les Illuminations de La Mecque (Paris 1988) 412–436.

[44] *Purificación De la Torre* (in her Introduction to *Ibn Barraŷān, Šarḥ asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusnā [comentario sobre los nombres más bellos de dios]* [Madrid 2000] 25–26) regards the *K. al-Zīna* by the Ismaili missionary Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 933) as the first to combine God's names with letters. She considers al-Qushayrī (d.1072) to be the first ṣūfī author to have written on God's names, and Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) as the first andalusi one. In all three categories, however, Ibn Masarra precedes these authors.

"... Each one of God's names has ranks in its essence[45], except the Greater Name, which encompasses the highest names and attributes.

... The other names have, in themselves, ranks, and there are grades in their essences. They are combined or separated for the sake of their reception by the created beings. They are either general or particular, according to their nobility, and they are either apparent or concealed, according to their subtleness, within the cluster of names[46]. The most general [cluster] is: 'In the Name of God, the merciful, the compassionate.' This is the first rank of knowledge, the highest and most noble one.

[This cluster] encompasses the subtleties of the Qur'ān and the fine concepts thereof, because it is [composed of] the Hidden Name, by which God is truly known; of [the name of[47]] Godhead, by which the generality of His names are known; of [the name] 'The Merciful', [by which] the division of His attributes is made apparent; and of [the name] 'The Compassionate' [by which] their apparent nature and their specificities are made clear according to [their] degrees."[48]

"The hidden name by which God is truly known" is understood by the editor of the text, Ja'far, as identical with the word God (*Allāh*). This seems indeed the most natural way to understand the expression in a Muslim text[49]. The context, however, makes it clear that the Hidden Name *(al-ism al-muḍmar)*, the ineffable name of God, is the very word "name" (*ism*). In Sunni Islam, "there have never been observed a taboo respecting the name of God"[50], that is to say, no reticence to pronounce it. But the idea of an ineffable name, which is above all other names, is quite common in Shiite sources[51]. In none of these sources, as far as I know, does the word "name" become this ineffable name. One is inevitably reminded here of the Jewish custom to substitute the name of God (and not only the Tetragrammaton) with the word "the Name" (*ha-Shem*)[52].

Following the discussion of the *basmala*, the next "cluster" to be discussed is the opening *sūra* of the Qur'ān, the *fātiḥa*, which according to Ibn Masarra con-

[45] "*La-hu fī dhātihi marātib.*" This could indicate an inner division of each name, but also the fact that each name has its own rank.

[46] *Jawāmi' al-asmā'*, i.e., clusters rather than each one on its own.

[47] The structure changes here abruptly, although the text probably intends to offer a parallel analysis for the four names. Thus we should either understand the text as if it says: "wa-min *X*, *allādhī bi-hi...*" (as suggested above); or omit the words "by which..." (*allādhī bi-hi)* in the first sentence, and translate: "because from the hidden name – God is made truly known" etc.

[48] Cf. *Ja'far, Min qaḍāyā* 313–314; D, fols. 132–133.

[49] According to Gimaret (who cites al-Baghdādī), this is also the most common Sunni identification; cf., *D. Gimaret*, Les noms divins en islam (Paris 1988) 89–90, and see below, note 64.

[50] *F. M. Denny*, Names and Naming, in: The Encyclopedia of Religion, vol. 10, ed. *M. Eliade* (New York, London 1987) 302.

[51] See *G. Vajda*, Les lettres et les sons de la langue arabe d'après Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, in: Arabica 8 (1961) 113–130, on 124; *Gimaret*, Noms divins 88.

[52] Cf. Art. God, Names of, in: *R.J. Zwi Werblowsky* and *G. Wigoder* (eds.), The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion (New York, Oxford 1997) 278; and see also *Gimaret*, Noms divins 86, regarding the impact of *isrā'iliyyāt* on the preoccupation with *the Ineffable Name.*

tains twelve divine names[53]. He then declares his intention to move on to the discussion of the *fawātiḥ*[54], the fourteen "mysterious letters" that appear at the beginning of 29 Quranic chapters[55]. According to Ibn Masarra, these letters reveal the inner meaning (*bāṭin*) of the Quranic revelation. These letters are indeed the subject of most of the remaining part of the treatise. The remaining fourteen letters of the Arabic alphabet, which reveal its exterior meaning (*ẓāhir*), are not discussed in it.

The letter *alif* is granted a separate discussion, as the first letter of the Alphabet[56]. Thereafter Ibn Masarra discusses the letters in clusters, and as a rule, he groups them as they appear at the beginnings of the Quranic chapters. The first cluster, however, is the only cluster that does not follow this rule. It treats five letters: *hā'*, *hamza*, *alif*, *waw*, and *yā'*[57]. One should first of all note the puzzling inclusion of the letter *waw*, which does not belong in the *fawātiḥ* at all[58]. The other four letters do belong in the *fawātiḥ*, but in the Qur'ān they are not grouped together but rather with other letters. We must therefore look for another reason for their treatment as a group[59], but such a reason is not easily found. Three of the letters are the *mater lectionis*, but the fourth (*hā'*) is not considered to belong in this category in Arabic, and indeed Ibn Masarra himself explicitly says that the number of *mater lectionis* is three[60]. In some ṣūfī works, the letter *hā'* is discussed in the context of respiration techniques and of the origin of the letters in the various locations of the vocal tracts[61]. Such considerations, however, are treated separately by Ibn Masarra, and the letter *hā'* does not appear there[62]. In the Muslim/Quranic and Arabic context this cluster thus remains unexplained. In a Jewish and

53 Cf. *Ja'far, Min qaḍāyā* 315.

54 Cf. *Ja'far, Min qaḍāyā* 316 ff. As the analysis of the *fawātiḥ* forms the bulk of the treatise, one wonders whether the preceding discussion of the *fātiḥa* may not be an afterthought, by association, due to the similarity of the Arabic term.

55 On the "mysterious letters," see *A. T. Welch*, s.v. "*al-Ḳur'ān*", in EI², vol. V 412–414.

56 Cf. *Ja'far, Min qaḍāyā* 319–322.

57 Cf. *Ja'far, Min qaḍāyā* 322–323.

58 This oddity was noted already by *Tornero*, Noticia note 20.

59 Although according to Ibn Masarra's previous declaration, the subject of the discussion is indeed the mysterious letters.

60 Cf. *Ja'far, Min qaḍāyā* 320. The *alif-waw-yā'* appear also in *Dūnash Ben Tamīm's* Commentary on Sefer Yeẓira; cf. *G. Vajda*, Le Commentaire sur le Livre de la Création de Dūnaš ben Tāmīm de Kairouan (Xe siècle), Nouvelle édition revue et augmenté par *Paul B. Fenton* (Paris 2002; henceforward: Le Commentaire sur le Livre de la Création) 225–226 (text), and 80–81 (translation); in Hebrew, however, the letter *he* can be considered in the category of *mater lectionis*; see, for instance, Le Commentaire sur le Livre de la Création, ibid.; Qirqisānī, *Kitāb al-Anwār wa'l marāqib*, II 23.8 (164 in Nemoy's edition), as complemented by *B. Chiesa*, Il fenomeno del *ketiv–qere secondo Ya'qūb al-Qirqisānī (ca. 927 d. C.)*, in: *L. Cagni* (ed.), Biblica et Semitica – Studi in memoria de Francesco Vattioni (Napoli 1999) 81–94, on 93 (where *Qirqisānī* discusses the letters אוהי); cf. also Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī's *K. al-ẓīna* (*Vajda*, Les lettres 115–116).

61 *Makhārij*, cf., for instance, *L. Massignon*, La passion d'al-Hallāj, vol. I 105; *Vajda*, Le Commentaire sur le Livre de la Création 84–89.

62 See below.

Hebrew context, on the other hand, an explanation for this combination of letters readily suggests itself, as it reflects the *Tetragrammaton* (*yod he vav he*)[63] and its verbal expression as it appears in Ex. 3:14 (*aleph he yod he*).

If this explanation is accepted, one would expect the letter *he/hā'* to gain particular importance, and indeed Ibn Masarra states it explicitly, saying: "The *hā'* indicates the Essence", a clear allusion to the third person pronominal noun "He" (*hū/huwa*) and to its functioning (in both Hebrew and Arabic) as a linking copula ("He is"). Ibn Masarra's statement is in line with his previous reference to "the Name" as God's ineffable Name[64].

Of particular interest is the immediately following discussion of the letter *alif*, which is closely associated with the *hamza*.

"The *alif* itself is of three ranks: a rational soul, an animal soul, and a vegetative soul.

It has been said that the *hamza* is the intellect, which is the Will; the *alif* is the rational soul; the *waw* is the animal soul; and the *yā'* is the vegetative soul.

The *alif* is upright, the *yā'* is prostrating, and the *waw* is bowing down. This is why you find in creation these three animate forces. The living being which has a rational soul is upright, like the *alif*. That which has only an animal soul is kneeling, bowing down like the *waw*. That which has a vegetative soul is prostrating with [all] its body, for its head is only near the earth, like all plants."[65]

Because of the close association of *alif* with *hamza*, Ibn Masarra can tie the *alif* up with *waw* and *yā'*, the two other letters which, like the *alif*, serve as a graphic support (*kursī*) for the *hamza*. He assigns each of the three letters a place in the hierarchy of souls (rational, animal and vegetal). Such a comparison of these three letters with the three souls can be found in other Muslim texts[66]. Ibn Masarra also claims that the hierarchy is reflected in the very form of these letters. One can see how the graphic form of these Arabic letters may be used to justify Ibn Masarra's interpretation. What remains unexplained, however, is Ibn Masarra's puzzling statement that "The *alif* itself is of three ranks"[67]. The single stroke which constitutes the Arabic *alif* renders this statement unintelligible. In this case (as in the case

63 The three "simple" letters are associated with the *Tetragrammaton* in *Sefer Yeẓira*, I, 13. The text identifies the three as *he*, *vav*, *yod*; cf. *Saadia' al-Fayyūmī*, Commentary on the Book of Creation (*kitāb al-mabādi'*), ed. *Y. Qafiḥ* (Jerusalem 1972) 126. Dūnash, however, makes a point of identifying them with the three vowel letters (*aleph*, *vav*, yod), and then explains the relevance of the *he*; cf. Le Commentaire sur le Livre de la Création 225–226 (text), 80–81 (translation). See also *Y. Liebes*, Ars Poetica in Sefer Yetsira (Jerusalem 2000) 217–245 (in Hebrew) 19, 177.

64 Although in another passage (Cf. *Ja'far, Min qaḍāyā* 325) Ibn Masarra speaks of the letters *alif-lam-mīm* as "the pre-eternal, everlasting name, which cannot be made explicit more clearly than by saying 'He is'". The identification of *alif-lam-mīm* as "the Greater Name of God" (which is not necessarily the ineffable name) is indeed quite common in Muslim texts, see *Gimaret*, Noms divins 88 and note 8.

65 Cf. *Ja'far, Min qaḍāyā* 322–323; D fol. 140.

66 It is also found in *al-Tustārī's Epistle on Letters* 369.

67 "*Al-alif fī nasfihā thalāth marātib.*"

of the cluster as a whole), the Hebrew parallel (i.e., *aleph*, which is written in three strokes) offers a natural context in which such a statement could be made intelligible[68]. As mentioned above, the "kneeling" and "bowing down" positions can be justified also as reflections of the forms of the Arabic letters. But since in Ibn Masarra's text this development follows from the opening statement, about the three stages of the *alif*, it stands to reason to assume that the whole paragraph is inspired by the same source.

This source, I submit, must have been a Jewish speculation on the form and meaning of the Hebrew alphabet. It is noteworthy that a Jewish text in which the letters are discussed in the same way, the *Book of Creation* (*Sefer Yeẓira*) has become immensely popular in the tenth century, as attested by the proliferation of commentaries on it[69]. At least one such Commentary was written in Kairouan, around the same period when Ibn Masarra passed through this city[70].

Perhaps the clearest support for this claim can be found in the first lines of Ibn Masarra's *Book of Properties of Letters*.

"[God] has sent down His book ... He, may He be exalted, sent it down as one from His perspective, divided from the perspective of His creatures. It is thus one complex as regards His essence, [but] divided to three complexes from the perspective of His creatures. The first complex is the science of divinity *(rubūbiya)*; [The second is] the science of prophecy; ... and [finally] the science of trial *(miḥna)*."[71]

The tripartite nature of the one book with which (as the treatise shows later) God created his world, is reminiscent of the three books mentioned in the first lines of *Sefer Yeẓira* ("God created His world with three books *[sefarim]: sfar, sippur* and *sefer*"). While the role of the three books in the two texts is developed in different ways, the similarity of the tripartite paradigm of the single book is striking.

[68] Later Jewish texts also develop the idea, saying that the graphic form of the *aleph* encompasses a "kneeling" *yod* and a "bowing down" *vav*. I am indebted to Paul Fenton for drawing my attention to these developments. Another aspect of the triple phonetic character of the *aleph* is alluded to by the *Midrash Alpha Beta de-Rabbi Aqiva*, ed. *A. Jellinek*, *Bet ha-Midrash* III (Jerusalem 1967[3]) 17 ("why is aleph written as one letter, and read as three"). The resemblance of the teaching of this *midrash* to the *Book of Creation* is noted by *Liebes*, Ars Poetica 178–179.

[69] On the debated question of the date of composition of *Sefer Yeẓira*, see, for instance, *S. M. Wasserstrom*, Sefer Yeẓira and Early Islam, a Reappraisal, in: Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy 3 (1993) 1–30; *Liebes*, Ars Poetica 217–245. On the early medieval Commentaries, see: *R. Jospe*, Early Philosophical Commentaries on the Sefer Yeẓira: Some Comments, in: Revue des études juives CXLIX (1990) 369–415; *M. Idel*, Jewish Thought in Medieval Spain, in: *H. Beinart* (ed.), The Sephardi Legacy, Vol. I (Jerusalem 1992) 261–281, on 263–264.

[70] Cf. Fenton's Introduction to Le Commentaire sur le Livre de la Création 10–20; and see note 78 below.

[71] *Jaʿfar, Min qaḍāyā* 311–312; D, fols. 130–131. The last complex is associated with the retribution in the Hereafter, and thus corresponds to the legal aspect of religion. The term "trial" for this complex may have antinomian undertones.

The similarity becomes even more striking when one considers the commentary on this passage, included in Judah Ha-Levi's *Kuzari*:

"*Sefer Yeẓira* ... which indicates God's unity and His divinity by different things, which are multiple from one aspect, but agree and are one from another. Among them are *sfar, sippur* and *sefer*. ... the *sfar, sippur* and *sefer* are one thing from the point of view of God, and three from the point of view of the human being. ... He created His world with three books, all three of which are one from His perpspective."[72]

Like Ibn Masarra, Judah ha-Levi (d. 1141) insists on the fact that the books with which God created His world are three only from the human perspective, but one from the divine perspective. The possibility that the similarity of the two texts results from a mere coincidence cannot be ruled out, but it seems to me very unlikely. It is quite possible that ha-Levi was familiar with Ibn Masarra's work. But the most likely explanation for the similarity in this case is an earlier Commentary on *Sefer Yeẓira* which inspired both Ibn Masarra and ha-Levi.

Ibn Masarra's interest in Judaism is, in fact, reflected in his own words, in his discussion of the cluster *alif-lam-rā'*. After stating that there are six occurrences of this cluster in the Qur'ān, which correspond to the six days of creation, Ibn Masarra adds:

"And the seventh day is the day of rest and completion. For this reason the Jews made it a Sabbath, that is to say, they rested."[73]

Unlike in the Hebrew Bible, the Qur'ānic treatment of the six days of creation does not refer to God's resting on the seventh day.[74] Nor does the Qur'ān specify in the context of creation the name of the seventh day as "*yawm al-sabt*"[75]. The association of the six days of creation with the seventh day of resting, and with the name of this seventh day, thus triggers an immediate association with the Jewish Sabbath and the Hebrew etymology of the word. Ibn Masarra could, no doubt, have found the etymology in Muslim sources, which had already processed and integrated such information via earlier Jewish traditions (*isrā'iliyyāt*). But one should note the fact that nothing in the discussion of the letters in this cluster requires a mention of the seventh day at all, let alone an elaboration on its meaning. The whole sentence is a rather uncharacteristic digression on Ibn Masarra's part, a digression that suggests preoccupation with things Jewish. Moreover, the use here of the name *yahūd* (rather than a Quranic term such as *banū isrā'īl*) seems

[72] *Kuzari* 4:25; cf. *D. H. Baneth* and *H. Ben-Shammai* (eds.), *Kitāb al-Radd wa'l-Dalīl fī'l-Dīn al-Dhalīl (al-kitāb al-Khazarī)* (Jerusalem 1977) 174–175.

[73] Cf. *Ja'far, Min qaḍāyā* 333; D fol. 153 (*wa-li-hādhihi al-'illa sabatat fihi al-yahūd ayy sakanat*).

[74] In fact, the Qur'ān rejects explicitly the idea that God should rest: cf. Q. L:38; and see *A. Rippin*, s.v. *Sabt*, in: EI², Vol. VIII 689.

[75] Although the name does appear in the Qur'ān as the day of resting, imposed on the Jews on Mt. Sinai. Cf. Q. IV:154. It also mentions the breaking of the Sabbath, and the punishment thereof, cf. Q. II: 65; IV:47, VII:163; XVI:163. In all these verses, the name *yahūd* does not appear, and the context speaks of "people of the book" or people associated with the prophets Moses and Abraham.

to indicate that Ibn Masarra does not intend this digression as an exegetical observation. Ibn Masarra's train of thought, which leads him to associate the days of creation with the Jewish Sabbath, suggests an acquaintance with contemporary Jews, with whose ways of life (and the theological explanation thereof) Ibn Masarra seems to have been familiar.

If we accept the claim that Ibn Masarra's work includes some Jewish elements, there are several possibilities to explain their presence:

One may point to the existence of Jewish influence on Islam in its formative period, and to the connections between Jews and Muslims in the Orient. The existence of some such connections and such influences are accepted by most contemporary scholars, and hardly need any proof. It can be argued that Muslim books and Muslim travelers transmitted these ideas to al-Andalus.

But the nature of the Jewish elements in Ibn Masarra's work, as well as the circumstances of his life, seem to me to favor the possibility that he also had direct contact with Jewish scholars. As mentioned above, Ibn Masarra was known as "a *bāṭinī*", who spent some time in the already Fatimid North Africa. At the beginning of the tenth century, this region seems to have been a hotbed of new developments in Neo-Platonic thought, and Ibn Masarra's writings, as noted above, bear the mark of Fatimid Neo-Platonism. In this context, one should mention the question-marks regarding the Jewish-Ismaili milieu in North Africa[76]. A particularly telling illustration of the role of Jews in the transmission of philosophy in this milieu can be found in the autobiography of Ibn al-Haytham, an Ismaili missionary from Kairouan who was also sent to al-Andalus. Born to a respectable Shii family, Ibn al-Haytham received traditional Islamic instruction from several teachers. In the field of logic, however, his sole instructor was an otherwise unknown Jew named Yūsuf ibn Yaḥyā al-Khurāsānī, with whom he studied in Kairouan[77]. It is also in Kairouan that Isaac Israeli, the court physician of the first Fatimid caliph, 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī (d. 955) wrote his Commentary on *Sefer Yeẓira*[78]. Ibn Masarra had spent some time in Kairouan during the same period.[79]

[76] Cf. *P. B. Fenton*, The Arabic and Hebrew Version of the Theology of Aristotle, in: *J. Kraye* and others (eds.), Pseudo Aristotle in the Middle Ages (London 1986) 241–264.

[77] Cf. *W. Madelung* and *P. E. Walker*, The Advent of the Fatimids – A Contemporary Shi'i Witness (London 2001) 52, 60, 112. On the Jews of Kairouan, see *M. Ben Sasson*, The Emergence of the Local Jewish Communities in the Muslim World: Qayrawan, 800–1057 (Jerusalem 1996, in Hebrew) especially 250–252.

[78] On Isaac Israeli, see *A. Altmann* and *S. M. Stern*, Isaac Israeli: A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century (Oxford 1958); *Fenton*, Introduction 3–6. The *Commentary* of Isaac Israeli is not extant, but we may safely assume that the one written by his student Dūnash ben Tamīm reflects the school tradition. Isaac Israeli came to Kairouan to serve as the court physician of the last Aghlabid ruler, whose reign ended in 909, and he stayed to serve 'Abdallāh al-Mahdī. From Kairouan, he exchanged letters with Saadia Gaon on philosophical topics, before the latter left Egypt in 915 (cf. *Fenton*, Introduction 11). Although we do not know the date of the composition of Israeli's *Commentary*, these early discussions, mentioned by Dūnash in his *Commentary* on *Sefer Yeẓira*, may well have touched on this book.

[79] The information regarding Ibn Masarra indicates that he stayed in Kairouan either before 920 (according to Ibn 'Idhārī, who says that he studied in Kairouan with the *faqīh* Aḥmad

The possibility that Ibn Masarra's writing of a similar speculation on letters is a mere coincidence seems to me to be highly unlikely.

We can now return to our starting point, namely, the role of Ibn Masarra in the development of mysticism in the Iberian peninsula. The Influence of Ibn Masarra on subsequent Muslim mysticism is generally recognized[80]. It is now time to take him into consideration also in the study of Jewish and Christian mysticism. By way of an example, we may mention the claim that "the first philosophical writings in Spain betray a relative lack of interest in *Sefer Yeẓirah* in comparison to the central place this book occupied in the Orient" and that "it was only a non-philosophical writer, R. Judah al-Bargeloni, who undertook a full-scale exegesis"[81]. In view of its apparent impact on the first Muslim philosopher of Spain, this statement must now be qualified. On the one hand, Ibn Masarra provides the evidence that there was no lack of interest in *Sefer Yeẓira*. On the other hand, Ibn Masarra was not only a Muslim, but also a Muslim whose name acquired a dubious reputation among the ruling Muslim Sunnis in al-Andalus[82]. If Jews in al-Andalus were familiar with Ibn Masarra's letter-speculation (regardless of whether or not they also realized the impact that *Sefer Yeẓira* had on him), this in itself may have caused some reticence on their part to focus on such speculation in their writings.

It is ironic that Asín, who played such a central role in propagating the idea of a Pseudo-Empedoclean "school of Ibn Masarra", begins his book on Ibn Masarra with the statement that all Spanish philosophy comes from the Orient. "Pseudo-Empedocles" is perhaps the most Spanish story in the history of Islamic philosophy: all of its main characters are Spanish, and many of them are Jews. Indeed, one can say with certainty that Jewish thinkers played an active role in the formation and fermentation of Andalusi neo-Platonism, in its more philosophical as well as in its more mystical versions. In evaluating the parallelism of Jewish and Muslim texts from this period, Georges Vajda (who, in this context, carefully tried to avoid the claim of any influence in any direction), summed it up:

ibn Naṣār b. Ziyād [d. 920]; cf. *Iḥsān ʿAbbās* (ed.), *Ibn ʿIdhārī al-Marrākushī, Al-Bayān al-Mughrib fī akhbār al-andalus waʾl-maghrib* (Beirut 1967), or not later than 912 (cf. *Stern*, A propos de l'ascète).

[80] See, for instance, *Gril*, La Science des lettres; *C. Addas*, Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn Arabī, translated From the French by *P. Kingsley* (Cambridge 1993) 58. The study of Ibn Masarra's own works should provide more information for the evaluation of his influence.

[81] Cf. *Idel*, Jewish Thought in Medieval Spain 264.

[82] On the persecution of "the Masarris," see *M. Cruz-Hernández*, La persecusión anti masarrī durante el reinado de ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir li-dīn Allāh segun Ibn Ḥayyān, in: Al-Qanṭara 2 (1981) 51–67; 3 (1983) 482–483. The date of the persecution (after 961, that is to say, long after Ibn Masarra's death) as well as its description by the historiographers, suggest its reason or at least its context. The threat of the rising Fatimid power seems to have heightened the ruling Umayyad sensitivity to *bāṭinī* ideas (and not the other way round: that the Masarrīs have used Fatimid notions against the mālikīs; cf. *Fierro*, Los Mālikies 93, note 62). The Umayyad's Jewish subjects were probably well aware of this sensitivity, an awareness that might have effected their literary output.

»Il y a du moins, malgré toutes les divergences, une similitude de climat qui suppose, croyons-nous, un fonds commun de gnosticisme[83].»

It seems to me that one can be more affirmative. Despite all the differences, and although one cannot draw a continuous line that describes the direction of development and transmission, there is a similarity of atmosphere which presupposes a common ground of ideas, nourished by direct contacts between Muslims (both Sunnis and Isma'ili Sh'iis) and Jews. These contacts allowed for the free flow of ideas *in both directions*. Ibn Masarra, "the first Spanish-born thinker" introduced this atmosphere to al-Andalus, making it into the first manifestation of mystical thought in the Iberian peninsula.

[83] Les lettres 125.