

**THE JEWS OF SPAIN  
AND THE  
EXPULSION OF 1492 /**

*Edited by*

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## A Crisis of Categories: *Kabbalah* and the Rise of Apostasy in Spain

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*Most of these recoveries of the sacred point to a type of cosmic religion that disappeared after the triumph of Christianity, surviving only among the European peasants. Rediscovering the sacredness of Life and Nature does not necessarily imply a return to "paganism" or "idolatry." Although in the eyes of a Puritan the cosmic religion of the southeastern European peasants could have been considered a form of paganism, it was still a "cosmic, Christian liturgy." A similar process occurred in medieval Judaism. Thanks mainly to the tradition embodied in the Kabbalah, a "cosmic sacrality," which seemed to have been irretrievably lost after the rabbinical reform, had been successfully recovered.*

—Mircea Eliade<sup>1</sup>

### I

The major thesis of this paper is that Spanish Kabbalah is connected with the anti-Maimonidean movement (1180-1240) and the pietistic doctrines penetrating the Iberian Peninsula from France and Germany.<sup>2</sup> The connection of the Kabbalah with the anti-Maimonidean movement was already proposed by the great Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz (1817-1891).<sup>3</sup> In what concerns Spanish Kabbalah in particular, not only did it originate in the same circles in southern France that have been actively fostering the anti-Maimonidean movement, but it took its first foothold precisely in the same region that had been the hotbed of anti-Maimonidean activities in Sepharad: Catalonia, principally in the cities of Gerona and Barcelona.

Tactically, the anti-Maimonidean movement may be seen as a drive designed to discredit the standard philosophical interpretations of Judaism, in order to invest the new mystical doctrines with authority. The goal of the anti-Maimonideans was to extend the hegemony of the "French Rabbis"—i.e., those Rabbinic circles carrying on the traditions of central and northern France and Germany—into Spain. Thus the intimate relation between "Kabbalah," "French Rabbis," and the "anti-Maimonideans." R. Joseph ben Todros Ablu'afya (twelfth and thirteenth centuries), one of the earliest Spaniards to join the anti-Maimonidean movement, chided the Maimonideans for being wrathful at "our French Rabbis," and not "follow[ing] in the footsteps of the sages of the Kabbalah."<sup>4</sup>\*

An essential element of the Kabbalah movement at the time is that "our French Rabbis" must be regarded as the supreme religious authority of all Jews, including

those of the Iberian Peninsula. "[O]ur French **Rabbis**" are described as those "from whose waters we drink, and in all the confines of the land, we live by their **mouth**."<sup>5</sup> Hence the importance of the Kabbalah, since "all the sages of the Kabbalah whom I saw, or I heard their words or read their works, follow in the paths of our French **Rabbis**."<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, the Maimonideans undermined "the foundations of the **Kabbalah**,"<sup>7</sup> and obliquely "speak ill of our French **Rabbis**."<sup>8</sup> The Maimonideans are urged to recant and "rely on the sages of the Kabbalah . . . because all that the sages of the Kabbalah have planted are flourishing **trees**, full of trustworthy **seeds**."<sup>9</sup> To defy the sages of the Kabbalah constitutes insubordination against God: no one "should either rebel against the Almighty, or confront the sages of Kabbalah."<sup>10</sup>

More critically. Unless accepting the new esoteric ideology of the Kabbalah as a categoric *a priori*, nothing "heretical" could be found in the Maimonidean tradition. Consider the case of the saintly R. Jonah of Gerona (ca. 1200-63), a pupil of the revered mystic R. Isaac the Blind (son and disciple of **Maimonides'** nemesis, R. David of **Posquières**), and R. Solomon of Montpellier. He had the distinction of introducing German pietistic ideology to Spain." R. David Qamhi (ca. 1160-ca. 1235)—the most learned Jew in Western Europe at the **time**—**reported** that in his zeal for this new ideology R. Jonah did not shrink from informing and collaborating with the Church (a capital offense in Judaism) in the destruction of some of **Maimonides'** works. In a letter addressed to R. Judah **al-Fakhkhar** (d. 1235), the leader of the anti-Maimonideans in Toledo, R. David Qamhi **wrote**:<sup>12</sup>

My intention is not to denounce you or debate with you, but to apprise you as to **whom** you have chosen and proclaimed to be righteous, **wise**, and unblemished. Whereas in **fact**, he [R. Jonah] is evil and unlearned, since **he** had passed into wickedness, **perverted** his ways, and became an informer and an enemy collaborator. **Thus**, his latter actions revealed the purpose of his earlier actions. May the heavens reveal his sin and **the** earth rise against him! Because when he had realized that the Rabbis in France had **rejected** him and regarded him as an unlearned person, and recognized him as the bearer of false testimony, he turned **to** the graven images and idol worshipers [i.e., the **Church**], and implored of them and they consented to assist him since he was denouncing **the Jews**.<sup>1</sup> First, he went to the Franciscans **telling** them: "Look, most of our **people** are heretics and unbelievers, because they **were** duped by **R. Moses** of Egypt [**Maimonides**] who wrote **heretical** books. You exterminate your heretics, also exterminate ours!"

Thereafter, they ordered the burning of those **books**, which **were** the *Book of Knowledge* (the first part of the *Mishne Tora*) and the *Guide*. His uncircumcised **heart**, however, did not rest until he also **told** the same words to **the** Dominicans and **the** clergy. Finally, the words **reached** the Cardinal [Romanus]. **Consequently**, **the Jews** in Montpellier and those **associated** with them **fell** into **grave danger**, becoming **the** ridicule and scorn of the **gentiles**. This heinous slanderer **went** out from town to town, saying: "**Look!** the Law of the Jews is finished, since they had **become** two sects, and there is no other religion **except** for our own religion."

The same testimony was obliquely confirmed by two members of the ibn **Hasdai** family. In a letter composed by R. Abraham ibn Hasdai and his brother Judah (early thirteenth century) addressed to the Communities of Castile, **Aragon**, Navarre, **and León**, it was **reported**, how in their zeal to ban the works of Maimonides, R. Jonah <sup>8</sup>

circle had approached the highest echelons of the Christian clergy, "and they were crying and begging the predicators . . . to pass judgment on the other **works**, and by their orders they made a large fireplace" to bum **Maimonides'** books."\* They argued that since they were so diligent destroying the works of Christian heretics, they should do the same with the works of Jewish **heretics**.<sup>15</sup> A contemporary, R. **Samuel Saportas** (thirteenth century), although not mentioning the burning of **Maimonides'** work, explicitly mentioned how the writings of Maimonides were brought to the tribunals of the Church for **judgment**.<sup>16</sup>

The anti-Maimonideans did not condemn this type of behavior. R. Joseph **Abul-afya** explained that R. Jonah had been opposed simply "because he had raised the flag of the **Kabbalah**,"<sup>17</sup> implying thereby that in such a circumstance he was justified in taking extreme measures. Concerning the actual burning of Maimonides' works, it was not deliberate, but rather things "ensued" (*nitgalgelu*) in this **manner**,<sup>18</sup> and he urged the Maimonideans to accept the situation and not defy "the sages of the **Kabbalah**."<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, in a letter addressed to R. Qamhi, R. Alfakhkhar wrote that R. Solomon of Montpellier had sent his disciple R. Jonah on a mission "to avenge the vengeance of the Lord" (*linqom et niqmat ha-shem*).<sup>20</sup> Therefore, nothing could be wrong in either denouncing Jewish matters to the Church **authorities**, or burning Maimonides' works. "He had saved the Holy Writings from *your fire*"<sup>21</sup>—implying that to save the Scripture, from Maimonidean interpretation, actions as these were justified.

Alluding to a Rabbinic principle whereby an object which is required to be burned by law is to be regarded as burned, R. Alfakhkhar argued that "it [the *Guide*] warrants burning" (*lisrefa hu 'omed*),<sup>22</sup> and thereby the actual burning could not be regarded as a sacrilege. He wrote to a confidant: "and the fire upon the altar was devouring it [the *Guide*], in order that the children of Israel should not prostitute after it."<sup>23</sup>

The celebrated R. Solomon ibn Adret (ca. 1235-ca. 1310), who pronounced the ban against the Maimonideans in Barcelona (July 26, 1305), was very clear on this point: ". . . because in that city are those who write iniquity about the Tora, and if there would be a heretic writing books, they should be burnt as if they were the books of **sorcerers**."<sup>24</sup> R. Alfakhkhar also offered a defense for R. Jonah's appeal to the Church for assistance. R. Solomon of Montpellier was desperate and found himself **alone**.<sup>25</sup>

And it came to pass that when he saw that all of you had conspired against him [i.e., that they did not accede to his demands], and was almost defeated, he was so much afraid of the rebels, who had surrounded him like bees, since they had not come to assist God, to assist God among the mighty.

This is why he had to send his disciple R. **Jonah**.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, R. Solomon ibn Adret **asked**:<sup>27</sup>

Could I blame people who are not of the covenant [i.e., Christians] if they would stretch their hands against this corruption and blaspheme the people of our Law, and they [i.e., Christians] just like us, would open their mouth [to speak against them]?

Common opinion notwithstanding, the anti-Maimonideans did not represent a more "authentic" version of Judaism, but the projection of Christian religious values and attitudes. In a letter to R. Alfakhkhar, R. MeshuUam of Lunel (ca. 1175-ca. 1250), stressed the fact that those who support Maimonides' *Guide* are thoroughly observant of the Law, "And if their heart follows the *Guide*, as they were inspired by heavens, they are God fearing and uphold His Law."<sup>28</sup>

The same point was made by R. David Qamhi. In a letter addressed to R. Alfakhkhar he stresses the fact that the anti-Maimonideans were not more punctilious in the observance of the Law,<sup>29</sup> and their view was not grounded on Rabbinic sources and Jewish values. Challenging him to allow him to come to Toledo and debate the case on the basis of the Talmud, R. Qamhi wrote:<sup>30</sup>

We are not protesting against them [who informed to the Church], but against you! If we would have the Talmud between us and you, we know that we would be [proven] right, and from it we would rebut you and present our case before you **cyca**. We are **the** ones who strengthen the Law, rely on the teaching of the Rabbis of blessed memory, and give aid without deceit.

[We are **the** ones] who rise **early** in the morning and stay late at night in the House of the Lord, and stand with awe and reverence as it is [fit] for **Israel**. [We are] punctilious in the words of the Scribes, who teach the Law, not like the words of [those] rebels. Concerning the *aggadot*<sup>31</sup> we explain them in accordance to the **laws** and (rational) evidence, since they are bonded to reason and allude to wisdom, as we **were** taught by our predecessors the *Ge'onim* [heads of the Babylonian academies], such as our teacher Sherira (ca. 906-1006) and our teacher Hayye (939-1038), and our teacher Isaac Alfasi (1013-1103), and the rest of the *Ge'onim*, the pillars of the world and the foundations of the earth.

Concerning the *aggadot*, we depend and rely on their teachings and words, not on others! We have inherited the legacy of our Patriarch Abraham, about whom the Lord testified, "In order that he should direct his children and family [to practice charity and justice]\*\* (Gen. 18:19). Our houses are wide open for travelers and those in need of **rest**. We toil in [the study of] the Tora day and night. We support the poor **secretly**, we distribute alms at all times and hours. Among us there are some who **consecrate** books for [the benefit] of the poor who need [those books], and pay **the[ir]** fee to study **Scripture** and Talmud. Are these to be called "transgressors of the Law"?

R. Alfakhkhar refused to have R. Qamhi come to Toledo, and defend his position.

R. Joseph **Abul'afya** explained that R. Qamhi was expelled from the city, "in compliance with the decree of our French **Rabbis**."<sup>32</sup>

**Actually**, the anti-Maimonideans were responding to a mimetic impulse, emulating the persecuting practices and religious ideology current in their Christian environment." This is how R. Solomon ibn Adret justified the ban against the anti-Maimonideans:<sup>34</sup>

Go into the far lands **inhabited** by **the** Canaanites [an allusion to the Christians], and all the gentiles would have **punished** them [the Maimonideans] as heretics even for a single heresy or abomination that they had written in **their** books . . . and they would have lied them up with vine branches and **incinerated them** till they turn to powder.

R. Jonah was not reprimanded for this behavior. Rather, he was invited to preach

in Toledo, where he remained until his death, teaching the values and ethical principles of this new **ideology**.<sup>35</sup>

Responding to their own intellectual and spiritual bent, modern historians nonchalantly dismissed the preceding sources and the implications therein. Because of their own agenda, too painful to be analyzed in this paper, modern historians refrained from pointing out the connection between the triumph of the anti-Maimonideans, the rise of Kabbalah, the spread of pietistic doctrines, and the decay of Jewish learning and Jewish leadership in Spain, leading to mass conversions, and the Expulsion in 1492.<sup>36</sup> Ever since Y. Baer, it had become a **truism** that Jewish apostasy was the direct result of "secular **acculturation**," i.e., the adoption of the traditional values of old Sepharad—"Averroism" in **particular**.<sup>37</sup>

According to current dogma, the routing out of philosophy and secularism, and the subsequent rise of Kabbalah and pietism, should have resulted in the strengthening of Judaism and Jewish institutions: historical facts must be subordinated to this categoric principle. Yet, the opposite was the case. Soon after the ban against the Maimonideans was pronounced in Barcelona and the new mystical lore started to displace the traditional values of old Sepharad, Jewish leadership faltered, given rise to anti-Semitic riots throughout Spain.

By the time of the Black Plague (1348), the most important *aljamas* in Catalonia and Aragon were destroyed, including Gerona, the birthplace of Spanish Kabbalah, and Barcelona, where the ban against the Maimonideans was pronounced less than fifty years earlier. A short time later a series of massacres (1391-1412) decimated most of the *aljamas* in Spain. During that period many Jews were forced or chose to convert to escape **death**.<sup>38</sup> There were some Jews, however, who converted to Christianity out of conviction and religious devotion.

The triumph of the anti-Maimonidean ideology and the subsequent spreading of the Kabbalah from Catalonia to Castile (thirteenth-fifteenth centuries), as a factor in this type of conversion, is yet to be properly evaluated. It will be seen that this new ideology impacted the rest of Iberian Jewry in three specific areas: de-authorization of the tradition stemming from the *Ge'onim* and old Sepharad, the promotion of practices and beliefs close to Christian society, and the introduction of doctrines that appeared to be akin to those of the Christian Church.

## II

In old Sepharad, *halakha* (Rabbinic law) regulated all aspects of private and public life. This law was based on the Talmud in accordance with the interpretation and traditions transmitted by the Academies of the *Ge'onim* and their disciples. Even Maimonides (1135-1204), the most independent legal mind to come from the Golden Age of Spain, stipulated in the Introduction to the *Mishne Tora* that in rendering the law he would be following the interpretation of the Talmud, "as it has been taught by the *Ge'onim* in all of their works." Therefore, as long as the tradition of the *Ge'onim* and old Sepharad was venerated and supported by the Jewish communities, there could be little hope for the new ideology to **rule** supreme.

The vicious attacks against Maimonides constituted, in fact, a repudiation of the tradition of the *Ge'onim* and old Sepharad. Beneath the theological and pious **noise**,

an essential element in the strategy of the anti-Maimonideans was the de-authorization of the *halakha* and tradition developed over the centuries by the masters of old Sepharad and the *Ge'onim*. Upon the triumph of the anti-Maimonideans, the tradition of the *Ge'onim* was practically wiped out in Spain. Soon it became displaced by the new Talmudic teachings and *pilpul* methodology developed in France.<sup>39</sup>

With amazing speed, in a matter of years the old libraries containing ancient copies of the Talmud stemming from the Academies of the *Ge'onim* vanished. Consider the case of the famous Academy of Lucena, headed by R. Isaac Alfasi and R. Joseph ibn Megas (1077-1141). It had been moved to Toledo,<sup>40</sup> together with its library, and was still in use at the time of R. Meir Abul'afya (ca. 1170-1244).<sup>41</sup> A few years later, by the second half of the thirteenth century, "Sephardic copies of the Talmud" (*gemariyot sefaradiyot*) i.e., written according to the textual tradition of old Sepharad, were a rarity in Spain.

The tradition received from the *Ge'onim* and the masters of old Sepharad was known by the generic term *qabbala*.<sup>42</sup> It is no coincidence that, simultaneously, the new mystics vacated this term from its original semantic content (= legal tradition received from the judicial authorities from Talmudic and Ge'onic times), and appropriated it to convey the new esoteric teachings emanating from the north. Displacement of the Ge'onic *qabbala* came about in subtle ways, so as not to arouse the ire and suspicion of the public. The following example will suffice.

In a question addressed to R. Solomon ibn Adret, concerning Maimonides' opinion that the world will last for eternity, he stipulated the principle that although one may interpret some passages in the Scripture allegorically, what was received as tradition (*qabbala*) must be accepted in its literal sense:<sup>43</sup>

. . . Because truly, many Scriptural verses spoke in an allegorical manner. However, when something had been received by us (*mequbbal be-yadenu*) why should we cancel the tradition (*ha-qabbala*), even when philosophical investigation had warranted its invalidation.

Accordingly, he explained a passage mentioned in the Talmud in the name of R. Qatina (third and fourth centuries) that, "The world will be for six thousand years, and one [thousand, it will be] wrecked,"<sup>44</sup> to mean that at the end of the year 6(XX) the world [earth? universe? cosmos?] will be destroyed:<sup>45</sup>

You may explain [this passage] as you wish, at any rate you see that according to that sage, the world will function in its ordinary way for 6,000 years, and "one [thousand, it will be] wrecked"—meaning, that it would not function in its ordinary way, but in an inferior and faulty way, on account of the constitution of the material world. Because they would only designate with the term "wrecked" (*ha-horban*) something which becomes faulty and inferior, not something that becomes better. And we find no one in the Talmud disagreeing with him.

The Talmudic passage in question is cryptic. If one were to explain that the world was actually destroyed, then the expression "one [thousand]" will make little sense. On the other hand, if one were to explain "wrecked" (*harib*) in the sense of "devastated," "ravaged," but not actually "annihilated," then the expression "one [thousand]" could refer to the period of time in which the world would remain in a



state of devastation. Thus, in order to explain "destroyed" to mean annihilation of the world, R. Solomon ibn Adret had to explain "one [thousand]" in a **figurative way**:<sup>46</sup>

What you asked, "how could those thousand [years] be measured, since there is no time without the orbiting of the spheres?" This would have been true if one would have taken this subject in its precise sense (*'al sad ha-kivvun ha-amitti*).

More seriously. The view that the above doctrine had been accepted by all the Talmudic authorities is untrue. There are other Rabbinic sources, already mentioned by R. Samuel Saportas, stating that the world is **eternal**.<sup>47</sup>

It is a remarkable fact that, in his lengthy discussion, R. Solomon ibn Adret failed to mention the *qabbala* of the *Ge'onim* and sages of **old Sepharad** concerning the interpretation of *aggadot*, that is, the non-legal passages from the Talmud. From **Se'adya Ga'on** (882-942) down the chain of tradition, the *Ge'onim*—including Sherira, Hayye, and their disciples R. **Hanan'el** (d. 1055/56) and R. Nissim **Ga'on** (ca. 990-1062) maintained that *aggadot* may be explained figuratively and could even be **dismissed**.<sup>48</sup>

R. Samuel Saportas, quoted copiously from the early authorities, had established the principle that the *aggadot* may be interpreted figuratively or dismissed altogether.<sup>49</sup> The great legal experts of old Sepharad, including R. Isaac **Alfasi**<sup>50</sup> and R. Judah **al-Bargeloni** (late eleventh century),<sup>51</sup> as well as the renowned poet R. Judah ha-Levi (ca. 1075-1141), had unanimously accepted this **tradition**.<sup>52</sup> As R. David Qamhi wrote to R. Alfakhkhar, the tradition to explain the *aggadot* figuratively was not a new invention, introduced by trouble rousers, but a doctrine stemming from the highest Rabbinic authorities, from whom the most fundamental Rabbinic teachings, including the text of the Talmud and its interpretation, had been received by all **Israel**:<sup>53</sup>

Concerning the *aggadot* we explain them in accordance to the laws and [rational] evidence, since they are bonded to reason and allude to wisdom, as we were taught by our predecessors the *Ge'onim* [heads of the Babylonian **academics**], such as our teacher Sherira and our teacher Hayye, and our teacher Isaac Alfasi, and the rest of the *Ge'onim*, the pillars of the world and the foundations of the earth.

R. Samuel Saportas pointed out that on this matter there was unanimity among the *Ge'onim*. Since Judaism never recognized a higher **post-Talmudic** authority than the *Ge'onim*, their view on this matter cannot be **challenged**:<sup>54</sup>

And behold, all of the great *Ge'onim* of our Tora agree that there are *agadot* that were expressed figuratively, as you saw [from the preceding quotation] from R. Nissim *Ga'on* of blessed memory, who wrote clearly on this matter. In addition to him, many *Ge'onim*, the fathers of the Talmudic legacy and the *qabbala*—and there is nothing higher than their words to measure them by—[conform to this principle]. Especially R. Hayye *Ga'on*, who wrote lengthily on this matter in his commentary to *Hagiga*.

Confronting the French Rabbis for disregarding the tradition of the *Ge'onim*, he remarked:<sup>55</sup>

I am very astonished at you, O superior scholars, that you have cast these matters behind

your back! What is more wondrous in all this, is that you have damned whoever does not explain **the** words of our Rabbis and their *aggadot* in accordance with Rashi.

The absence of any mention of the *qabbala* of the *Ge'onim* by R. Solomon ibn Adret is particularly awkward, in light of the fact that to sustain his eminence in Judaism (as *the* supporter of tradition) he used in that *responsum* the term *qabbala* and its derivatives no less than twenty-seven times. We are apprised not only about the importance of "the *qabbala* held in the hands of Israel from the mouth of their **sages**,"<sup>56</sup> but also that "the *qabbala* that was received one generation after the other till our teacher Moses," and "the true ***qabbala***," which "was received by **us**,"<sup>57</sup> as well as the value and authority of "the *qabbala* which is in the hands of the old men and old women of our **people**."<sup>58</sup>

Within this context, the omission of all mention of the *qabbala* of the *Ge'onim* and the sages of old Sepharad meant that their tradition was inferior to "the *qabbala* which is in the hands of the old men and old women of our people." (Since the entire Rabbinic tradition, as well as the corpus of Rabbinic text, had come to the Diaspora from the Academies of the *Ge'onim*, to dismiss their *qabbala* rendered the entire edifice of Judaism suspect).

Indeed, to make sure that no attentive reader would miss the point, R. Solomon ibn Adret declared at the opening of his *responsum* that he would have nothing to say to "the heretics who maintain that the impossible has a permanent **nature**."<sup>59</sup> This is a direct quotation from the *Guide* (III, 15). Elsewhere, he equated this view with those heresies "which are forbidden to be heard, even more to be pronounced."<sup>60</sup> In his view, the whole premise of the *Ge'onim* and the sages of old Sepharad, that it is legitimate to study the physical sciences and Tora, is an oxymoron. Because\*

... all of their words are built upon (the validity of) nature, however, since **the** most basic element in humans is dust, they would be forcefully pulled to nature. . . . **Truly**, it is impossible to join two opposites [Tora and nature] together.

It follows that the entire civilization of old Sepharad and the *Ge'onim* must be dismissed as illegitimate and **unworthy**.<sup>62</sup>

A similar approach was followed by the saintly R. Asher (ca. 1250-1321), originally from Germany, who was appointed spiritual leader of Toledo. Echoing the words of R. Solomon ibn Adret, he wrote to R. Israel de Toledo (d. 1321), secretary of the Court and one of his staunch **supporters**.<sup>63</sup>

But the science of philosophy is natural, and **they** [the sages of old Sepharad] were **very wise**, and determined **every** item according to its nature. But **from** so much **wisdom** they went deep and **they became** corrupt. And **they** were forced to **repudiate the** Law of **Moses**, because all **the** Law is not natural. . . . And **whoever** would **enter** from the beginning in this science [philosophy] would **never** be able to escape from it, and to bring into his heart the science of the Law, . . . And consequently **he** would twist the Law, **because** they are mutually **exclusive** and are not compatible **with one another**.

The same attitude prevailed even in matters that had nothing to do with "philosophy." The hounding of R. Jacob of Valencia is a point of case.

Following the tradition of the *Ge'onim* and the Rabbis of old Sepharad, **this** Rabbi prohibited in his home town the usage of a certain public thoroughfare (*maboi meful-*

*lash*) on the Sabbath unless a real door was appended to one of its entrances. **I**ncidentally, R. Solomon ibn Adret had maintained the same position. Somehow, R. Asher disagreed with the above and believed that it was permitted to be used on the **S**abbath. Accordingly, he wrote to R. Jacob that if he would not recant, "I am excommunicating you. If you would have been at the time of the Sanhedrin they would have put you to death."

To make sure that he would comply with his demand, R. Asher wrote to some of his confidants, "And there is a religious commandment to excommunicate him throughout all the Communities of Sepharad. And also that he should be condemned to death, as with the law of a rebellious **judge**."<sup>64</sup> R. Asher threatened R. Jacob, "by authority of our lord the king (*be-mišvatadonenu ha-melekh*) that he should pay a thousand coins to the governor of the **city**."<sup>65</sup> It should be noted that, at one time, R. Asher had dismissed the entire judicial authorities preceding him in Toledo as illegitimate, because they had acted, "by the authority of the king" (*be-khoah ha-melekh*).<sup>66</sup>

An important judicial innovation introduced by this new ideology was to authorize lending money to Christians with interest. Popular opinion notwithstanding, the Rabbinic authorities had prohibited this practice, except in some limited circumstances. Accordingly, Jews in old Sepharad were not professional money lenders. Although the Tora does indeed permit lending money with interest "to the alien" (*lanokhri*) (Deut. 23:21), members of the host country should not be regarded as "aliens."

The fact that the Jew receives favors from the host country establishes an ethical obligation prohibiting the treatment of the gentile population as "aliens." In a different context, R. David Qamhi had **written**:<sup>67</sup>

Certainly, if a gentile had done favors and goodness to the Jew, the Jew is duty bound (*hayyab*) to do with him favors and benefit him. And to **lend** money without interest is a greater favor than to give a gift, as many are more embarrassed to accept a gift than to borrow.

Following Talmudic legislation, Maimonides prohibited lending money with interest to gentiles, except in some limited circumstances. "I do not know what is the legal basis for our practice to lend them [the Christians] money [with interest]," wrote R. Nissim of Gerona (ca. 1310-ca. 1375).<sup>68</sup>

On the other hand, R. Asher had been a professional money lender in his native Germany. Generally, business transactions are prohibited in the festive days between the Holidays (*hoi ha-mo'ed*). Consequently, the custom in Germany among "those who feared the Lord" was to prohibit such transactions during those days. Assuming that other Jews would surely not be among "those who feared the Lord," R. Asher recounted that he had allowed members of his own household to lend money with interest during that period for fear that the gentile might go to another Jew, and they would lose a **client**.<sup>69</sup>

And I permitted in my house to lend money to a gentile with interest, who was used to come regularly to my house to borrow, because if they would not lend him, he would go to the house of another Jew who would lend him, and would lure him to become his client, and this would constitute a loss.

It is a sad fact, bordering on the pathological, that the most powerful reason for Jewish hatred and countless massacres, was Jewish money lending. Since all the gentile had to do to cancel his loan was to charge the Jew with some anti-Christian activity, money lending encouraged such accusations. What was more distressing was the fact that the real usurer was (he king, not the Jew. Since at any time the king could and in fact did demand of the Jew the money that he wanted, Jewish money lending invariably ended in (he royal coffers.<sup>70</sup>

In old Sepharad, Jewish life, both individual and communal, centered upon the Law and Rabbinic jurisprudence, and the belief in the sanctity and validity of their tradition going all the way to the Talmud through the chain of the *Ge'onim*.<sup>71</sup> Within this specific context, discrediting the tradition of the *Ge'onim* and old Sepharad had the effect of **de-authorizing** the most sacred institutions of Jewish life: if the Rabbis of old Sepharad were illegitimate and their tradition corrupt, what would guarantee that the new ideology would not be the same?

More disturbingly. The new ideology directly corroborated the Christian contention that Jewish tradition in general, and Rabbinic tradition in particular, were corrupt and untrustworthy: if the tradition of the *Ge'onim*, who were the link between the Talmud and the rest of the Jewish Diaspora, cannot be trusted, what about the Talmud itself? Indeed, one of the most revolutionary ideas promoted by the new ideology was that Jewish law must be subordinated to another, more superior, form of spirituality.<sup>72</sup>

The **Mishna**—the highest authority of Jewish law—was identified with "darkness." One of the fathers of (he new mysticism declared "that darkness is the Mishna" (*she-ha-hoshekh zu ha-mishna*).<sup>73</sup> Similarly, the *Zohar* declared that Moses' "sepulchre is the **Mishna**."<sup>74</sup> Whatever the esoteric meaning of these passages may be,<sup>75</sup> how do they differ—within the semantic context of Christian Spain—from the basic dogma repeated *ad nauseam* that the old Law was not only dead but also deadly?

### III

The new ideology obliquely validated Christian religious thinking. Without knowing, the anti-Maimonideans were promoting ideas and beliefs that were placing the Jews in a position of strategic vulnerability *vis a vis* Christianity. Because this new ideology brought the Jewish population very close to the patterns of thought and demeanor of the Christian population, it facilitated Jewish acculturation to the social majority, and acceptance of their canons of (ruth and thinking.

Supreme among the ideas introduced by this movement was belief in all forms of magic and demonology. Belief in magic permeated ancient and medieval society. Although the Scripture and the Rabbis opposed magic and demonology,<sup>76</sup> many Jews, even among the learned and pious, were influenced by the general trend of (heir times,<sup>77</sup> and either rationalized or tried to circumvent these prohibitions.<sup>78</sup> The Rabbis endeavored to prevent the people from following these gentile practices. On this fundamental issue, Professor Lieberman wrote:<sup>79</sup>

The mirror of Rabbinic literature reflects a continuous war between the Rabbis and the masses. The Rabbis warned the townspeople not to follow the way of the Gentiles, not to adopt the Hellenistic manner of life, but most bitterly they fought the superstitions of

the ignorant country people. The history of this fight of the Rabbis against the **Gentile** manner of life and popular superstitions is recorded in almost every branch of Rabbinic literature.

Their efforts not always bore fruits, particularly among the masses and the uneducated.<sup>80</sup>

But it is hardly possible that the great masses of the Jewish people in the big towns conducted themselves in conformity with the idealistic views of the Rabbis. . . . The ignorant people . . . adopted their neighbors' belief in magic, astrology, and all kinds of superstitions in defiance of Written and Oral Laws.

Prudently, some of these practices were tolerated: witch-hunting was never popular among Jews.

However, unlike Christianity, even those Jews who indulged in magic and demonology never supposed spiritism to be a fundamental principle upon which the entire edifice of Judaism rests. Simply stated: One can be a good Jew although not believing in spiritism, but one cannot accept Christianity unless accepting the validity of magic and demonology, thereby confirming Jesus' ministry. "In the New Testament," writes one of the leading psychiatrists of our time, "Jesus is the conqueror of demons, the exorcist, who at the end of time will render the Devil and his demons powerless (1 John 3:8)."<sup>81</sup> What was truly revolutionary of the new ideology, from the point of view of Rabbinic tradition, was not the recognition of magic and demonology, but that these deviations were elevated to a dogma, indispensable for salvation.

The central figure of the Catalan tradition was the saintly R. Moses ben Nahman (1194-1270), known by the acronym Ramban. With perhaps the exception of such towering figures as that of his relative R. Jonah, and R. Asher, no one in Christian Spain could vie with him in wisdom and sanctity. His opposition to the Maimonideans in general, and Maimonides in particular, was not grounded on a specific Talmudic source, but on his conviction of the validity of "the science of necromancy."

What truly angered him about Maimonides was not his alleged espousing of **Aristotelianism per se**—Ramban himself made reference to Aristotle throughout his works—but the fact that he had the impudence of classifying sorcery and witchcraft as "lies and falsehood."<sup>82</sup> Referring to the Maimonideans as "those who pretend to be wise and emulate the **Greek**,"<sup>83</sup> Ramban ascertained that the falsehood of that position could be demonstrated on the basis of "the science of necromancy" (*hokhmat ha-negromansiya*).<sup>84</sup> For Ramban magic and demonology constitute the very basis of religion and spirituality. To deny necromancy is to deny the very foundations upon which human relations with the divine are established.

Accordingly, he did not hesitate to substantiate his views on the basis of what the science of necromancy had **demonstrated**.<sup>85</sup> Ramban also was an ardent believer in the "ancient and authentic sciences" of chiromancy and chiromancy. To substantiate their validity, he recounted the exploits of a Byzantine Jew who had received this wisdom "from the German pious" (*haside ashkenaz*), "and could tell by looking at the physiognomy marvelous things."<sup>86</sup> He was also familiar with "the science of magic and augury."<sup>87</sup> Through the pietistic circles in Germany, he became acquainted

with **demonology**,<sup>88</sup> and was appraised as to the various activities of **demons**.<sup>89</sup>

Ramban conceived of Moses as a superior master in the science of witchcraft and necromancy. After enumerating some of the areas in which Moses excelled, Ramban **added**, "higher than all that, was that he knew all types of witchcraft, and from there he would ascend to the spheres, to the heavens and their **hosts**."<sup>90</sup> King Solomon, too. "was expert in **witchcraft**, which was the wisdom of Egypt."

Ramban's belief in necromancy contributed to the shaping of his notions about the Tora. The legible text of the Tora itself, is marginal to the subtext composed of magical names which constitute the very "soul" of the Tora. In a study, penned either by him or a member of his circle, it was taught of the Tora that "it is not only empty as in its common sense (*reqanit ki-fshutah*), but it also has a soul (*neshama*)."<sup>92</sup>

This notion underlies the radical principle that "the whole Tora in its entirety are names of **God**."<sup>93</sup> There is a subtext to the Tora made up of the letters forming the Hebrew text, not as they are currently divided into words, but consecutively written without any space between them. The subtext may be recombined to form secret names of God with super-magical power. The legible text was transmitted in writing to Moses and he gave it to the people. The hermetic subtext comprising the **holy** names God transmitted to Moses **orally**.<sup>94</sup> Somehow, this hermetic reading was now in the possession of Ramban and his associates.

"In every section of the Pentateuch," he ascertained, "there is the name by which that thing was created or made, or how that theme was **realized**."<sup>95</sup> King Solomon's wisdom came through possession of these **names**.<sup>96</sup> Moses was able to bring about the ten plagues and split the sea because of the special name that was revealed to him.<sup>97</sup> Knowledge of a certain name would allow an individual to resurrect the **dead**,<sup>98</sup> or produce "the secret miracles which are made for the **pious**."<sup>99</sup> "It is well known to **many**," certified Ramban, concerning knowledge of one of these names, "that it was used by the pious of the generations who knew it to kill and to resurrect, to desolate and to destroy, to demolish and to **annihilate**, to build and to **plant**."<sup>100</sup>

Ramban's anger at the Maimonideans was twofold. First, in denying occultism and demonology, they were stubbornly denying what was patent and obvious to all. Second, it constituted a denial of the very basis of faith, and therefore it was the rankest of all heresies. Worse than the pagans in pre-Mosaic **times**:<sup>101</sup>

Because the sciences in those days were all spiritual, concerning the **subjects of demons** and witchcraft, and the types of **incense** for the **forces of heaven**. . . Although **they wanted** to benefit themselves by worshiping the sun, moon, and **constellations**, and **they would build** for them **images** to receive the **heavenly power** . . . At any **rate**, at the time of Moses our **Teacher**, may he rest in **peace**, there was no **one** [as] wicked or [as] **heretical** who denied these

Ramban was an ardent believer in astrology. "I believe," wrote Ramban. "that it is prohibited to go against the **astrological signs**. [and to **rely**] on a miracle." Jewish **law** is unequivocal on this **matter**.<sup>101</sup> The Talmud *Yerushalmi* relates how a proselyte, who had been an astrologer **before converting**, thought to refrain from taking a trip because he saw that the date was not auspicious according to the astrological signs. "Then he back-tracked and said; 'Didn't I fasten myself into **this** holy nation to **disconnect** myself from from these **matters**? I shall go. By the name

of my Maker!" <sup>104</sup>Ramban's belief on this matter follows from his general theory of magic.

According to his theory, images are essential to manipulate the spirits controlling the stars. In this manner, the spirits could be foiled to respond in accordance with the images, while the stars continue in their usual **trajectory**.<sup>105</sup> He also believed in, and was a practitioner of, astrological **medicine**. There is a relationship between the distribution of power in the zodiac and the human body. He and R. Solomon ibn Adret permitted the usage of astrological images, like that of a lion to cure the right kidney, or of a virgin for the left **kidney**, etc. Ramban informed us that the same practice was held by some "**philosophers**"—probably simple necromancers—"who drew into the images spirit and **speech**."<sup>106</sup>

To appreciate the impact of such a view on Old Sepharad, it will be well to remember that some of its most distinguished scholars considered this type of activity to be idolatrous. The celebrated commentator R. Abraham ibn 'Ezra (1089-1164) wrote that to draw zodiac forces into images is "close to idol worship."<sup>107</sup> Explicitly, he declared the manufacturing of "zodiac images to draw down the astrological forces" is a transgression of the third **commandment**.<sup>108</sup>

According to Maimonides, in Rabbinic literature the term *selem* ("image," in contra-distinction to *pesel*, "idol") refers to a zodiacal **image**.<sup>109</sup> Ancient idolators would build zodiacal **images**.<sup>110</sup>

. . . and imagined that the astral power would flow down onto those images, and that those images would talk, and teach, and make understand, and inspire, I mean the people, and make their utility known to the people.

Ramban referred negatively about R. 'Abraham ibn 'Ezra and Maimonides, and would not see himself constrained by their view." Nonetheless, when **commenting** on the ten commandments, Ramban himself seems to have regarded zodiac images as a type of **idol**.<sup>112</sup> And yet, he did not refrain from manufacturing and permitting the use of zodiacal **images**.<sup>113</sup>

The reason that Ramban practiced astrological medicine (rather than scientific medicine as in Old Sepharad) is that, as a direct corollary of his belief in spiritism, he could not regard nature as an operative **force**.<sup>114</sup> The world is controlled by mysterious, supernatural forces, rather than by ordinary nature. The premature death of an embryo, for instance, is as wondrous as any of the miracles of Scripture: in both cases the hand of the Lord had directly intervened against nature. This is an article of faith: it pertains to the very essence of the Tora. Belief in the Tora necessitates the total denial of **nature**.<sup>115</sup>

. . . no one has a portion in the Tora of Moses our Teacher, may he rest in peace, unless he believes that all of our things and actions, all of them, are **miracles**—not involved with nature or the procedure of the world.

It follows, that "No one can believe in the Tora and in the validity of nature, at **all**."<sup>116</sup> The only difference between "hidden miracles" and the more obvious ones, is that with the latter the change of nature is **conspicuous**.<sup>117</sup>

A direct consequence of **Ramban's** view on spiritism was the proximity of proph-

ecy and magic. They have parallel functions: one is operative in the Holy Land through prophets, whereas the other is operative outside the land of Israel through augurs and magicians. According to Ramban, the biblical injunction against magic is effective in the land of Israel and for Jews alone; it was formulated in connection with the Jews entering the land of Israel (Deut. 18:9). At the time the Jews were not in the need of magic because they had prophets:"

[S]ince they have no need for it, **because [God] will send to them prophets there**. . . . The **gentiles, however**, must learn about their future from **sorcerers** and magicians.

Although the Tora describes "astrologers, augurs, and sorcerers" as the "**abominations (to'abot)** of the nations" (Deut. 18:9), referring to them as "**God's** abomination" (*to'abat*), and God had expelled the Canaanites from the Holy Land "**because** of these abominations (*to'abot*)" (Deut. 18:12), Ramban assured us that in reality "astrology and augury are not abominations, and God did not expel the Canaanites because of it, since everybody desires to know his future."

After examining different techniques of augury, like the flight and cry of birds and some astrological signs, Ramban remarked "all these are not an abomination (*to'eba*) among the nations;" directly challenging Maimonides, he added: "but should be considered as wisdom of **them**."<sup>119</sup> According to this logic, with the absence of prophecy Jews are no longer forbidden to delve into necromancy and the **supernatural**.<sup>120</sup>

In his survey of the Rabbinic way of coping with superstition and magic among the masses and the **uneducated**, Professor Lieberman showed how **occasionally**, when the Rabbis believed that it would be difficult to uproot some superstitious practices, they changed their content and gave them a religious **meaning**.<sup>121</sup>

The Rabbis of Babylonia did not fight this superstition, but, on the contrary, sanctioned it by endowing it with a religious character. . . . The same may be said of many other ceremonies . . . they may have had their origin in popular superstitions, **but** the Rabbis reinterpreted them until **they** were transformed into ceremonies with true religious content.

The new ideology worked in the opposite direction. A principal objective was to endow Jewish symbols and rituals with true magical character and content.

#### IV

The ideology promoted by the rabbinic authorities in Catalonia came dangerously close to Christianity.

In the Introduction to his Commentary to the Pentateuch, Ramban taught that the entire Tora consists of names of God, whereby the letters of the text are to be divided and combined not according to the standard reading, but according to some mystical subtext.

In what appears to be a random **example**, but from the perspective of normative Judaism was in fact a devastating new challenge, Ramban read the first three words of the Tora (*bereshit bara 'elohim*) as *berosh yitbera 'elohim*, "at the **beginning** was created **God**."<sup>122</sup> The same example is repeated **elsewhere**.<sup>123</sup> One could argue that Ramban meant by this the *sefira Keter*, which is called *Qadmon*, "the earliest," or "first **one**"<sup>124</sup>—**something** more or less akin to the Prime Mover who according



to some mystics is not God, but the source of **multiplicity**<sup>125</sup>—or *sefira Bina*.<sup>126</sup> Be that as it may, within a Christian semantic environment such a doctrine could be used to challenge Jewish belief in absolute monotheism.

More hazardous was the trinitarian doctrine discussed by R. Solomon ibn Adret. It may have been intimated by Ramban, who maintained that the secret name of God consisting of seventy-two letters is to be divided into segments each containing three **letters**.<sup>127</sup> In a *responsum* in which R. Solomon ibn Adret defended "the true mystical traditions which are in the hands of the sages of Israel," i.e., his contemporaries in the regions of **Catalonia**, southern France, and Germany, he quoted approvingly a trinitarian doctrine which was supposed to elucidate "the mystery" (*ha-sod*) of the prayer addressing God as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of **Jacob**"—rather than "the God of Heavens and **earth**."<sup>128</sup>

By the first third of the thirteenth century, Jewish apostates to Christianity had already interpreted this doxology as a Jewish manifesto of the Christian **trinity**.<sup>129</sup> The explanation discussed by R. Solomon ibn Adret centered on the three Hebrew letters B-R-K, making the word *BaRuKh* ("blessed"). Following a technique used by Ramban and other authorities in **Gerona**,<sup>130</sup> these letters could be switched to read *RoKheB* ("mounted"), *BeKhoR* ("first bom"), and *KeRuB* ("cherub"). *RoKheB* stands for God the "Provident and Savior" (*Mashgiah wu-Maṣṣil*). *BeKhoR* stands for God's dominion and greatness. *KeRuB* symbolizes the intellect to which one ought to cleave. All three are one: *BaRuKh*.<sup>131</sup>

Possibly, this was an allusion to the three first *sefirot*. Trinitarian doctrines, particularly in relation to the three first *sefirot* circulated among some mystical circles in Germany, France, and **Spain**.<sup>132</sup> The famous mystic R. 'Azriel of Gerona maintained that God created the universe, "with three names of His great **name**,"<sup>133</sup> a reference to the first three *sefirot*.<sup>134</sup> Likewise, he explained that the term '*amen*, consisting of the three consonants '*MN*, actually meant '*aMeN*, '*uMaN*, and '*iMuN*, paralleling *sekhel* ("reason"), *maskil* ("rational"), and *muskal* ("reasoned"), which also are "three names of a single **essence**."<sup>135</sup>

The "names" are not simple appellations of the deity, but real persona within the **divinity**.<sup>136</sup> Interestingly, R. 'Azriel also referred to God as *Rokheb*,<sup>137</sup> and identified *Kerub* with the *Shekhina* ("Divine presence").<sup>138</sup> It is also possible that *Bekhor* here refers to the "primeval light that emanated from God . . . before the creation of the world," from which the other two *sefirot* were **generated**.<sup>139</sup>

Again, whatever esoteric explanation one would wish to give to the above, within the semantic context of the time, it would have been impossible not to associate *RoKheb* with the "Father," *BeKhoR* with the "Son," and *KeRuB* with the "Holy Ghost": all three being One in *BaRuKh*. The appellation *Bekhor*, "first bom" implying the birth of the deity, is patently Christian. Christian Scripture designates Jesus "the first bora" (see Rom. 8:29; Heb. 1:6; Col. 1:18), and "the First bom of all Creation" (Col. 1:15). It is not difficult to imagine that in a dense Christian environment, like that of fourteenth-century Spain, this appellation could easily be connected with Ramban's doctrine that somehow, "at the beginning was created **God**."<sup>140</sup>

In their pursuit of the new ideology the school of Catalonia promoted ideas and beliefs that tended to dissipate many of the fundamental differences between Judaism and Christianity. In addition to the **preceding**, the notion (hat "one can be depraved within the mandate of (he **Law**"<sup>141</sup> appears to **support**, within the dense Christian environment of the time, the Christian position about the inadequacy of the Law and the need for a New revelation to attain human **perfection**. There were other elements of this new ideology that appeared to undermine the authority of the Talmud and Jewish law.

**Consider**, for example, the view that with the **destruction** of the Temple the judicial authority of the Jewish Court came to an **end**,<sup>142</sup> and that the sages in the Rabbinic period had no biblical authority to legislate.<sup>143</sup> An important factor **undermining** the traditional legal texts of Judaism was the belief that religious duties may be grounded on personal endeavor, rather than on biblical judicial **authority**.<sup>144</sup> The introduction of hermeticism, as an **overwhelming** factor of Jewish spirituality, further dissipated the importance of legal tradition.

The Catalonian ideology spread to Castile. By the fourteenth century, belief in magic had found wide acceptance even among the intellectual circles in Castile. As **with** Ramban, Moses, the spiritual father of **Judaism**, is represented as a master magician. Rabbis of the stature of Samuel ibn Zarza, Solomon ibn **Ya'ish**, Ezra Gategno, Shem Tob ibn **Shaprut**, Solomon Franco, Joseph Tob **'Alem**, Shem Tob ibn Mayor, and Solomon **Alconstantin**, applied neoplatonic lore and rabbinic knowledge to justify and accommodate different aspects of magic and the occult, from astrology, **augury**, and demonology, to spiritism, chiromancy and **chirognomy**.<sup>145</sup>

A more devastating effect was accepting plurality as valid Jewish monotheism. It was further strengthened by those who maintained that the ten "mystical spheres" (*sefirot*) represent the very essence of God. Many had adopted the doctrine of R. Menahem Recanati (late thirteenth century-early fourteenth century), that prayers ought to be directed to a specific *sefira*, rather than to God Himself. Spanish mystics went into great intellectual contortions to explain how belief that the essence of God is made up of ten *sefirot* does not contradict Jewish monotheism.<sup>146</sup>

Referring to the doctrine of the ten *sefirot* expounded by R. Solomon ibn Adret, the famous mystic R. Abraham **Ablu'afya** (1240-after 1291), **remarked**:<sup>147</sup>

Accordingly, let me inform you that the masters of mysticism [and] the *sefirot* thought to profess the unity of God, and **escape** the doctrine of trinitarianism, and [in fact] they made him **ten**. In the same fashion that the gentiles say "He is **three** and the **three** are **one**," some **masters** of mysticism say that the **divinity** is **ten sefirot** and the **ten** are **one**.

It is **clearly, therefore**, the argument that "(Whereas) the Christians believe in the Trinity, the mystics believe in the Tertiary (= ten *sefirot*)."<sup>148</sup>

Jewish apostates continued to interpret the doxology "the **God** of **Abraham**, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." as a **manifesto** of the **Mystery** (*ha-sod*) of the Christian trinity until the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>149</sup> In Spain there circulated works from **Ashkenazic** mystical circles, **professing** that the trinity represents the most perfect form of monotheism. **Christians** referred to these trinitarian doctrines

in their polemics against Jews. R. Solomon ibn Verga (d. ca. 1520) reported one such argument from a Jewish apostate:

But the trinity is not polytheism but simple monotheism to those who understand. And I saw three great men from the Ashkenazic sages and I learned from them in the books of mysticism, and I saw how from there it becomes evident how the trinity is monotheism. And according to these words I asked them [the Jews]: Who are then better, you or your forefathers?

Kabbalistic doctrines directly influenced the famous apostate Abner de Burgos (1260/70-ca. 1347). Although he was acquainted with the philosophical literature of the time, in matters of religion he shared the views of the anti-Maimonideans, "that philosophy . . . is forbidden to those who believe in the **Tora**."<sup>152</sup> His personal ideology, as well as his language and style, conforms with those who had rejected the role of philosophy in spiritual matters.<sup>153</sup> Not only did he quote approvingly from "the sages of the **Kabbalah**,"<sup>154</sup> but his trinitarian notions appear to be related to the Kabbalistic doctrines of the school of Gerona, and the Castilian mystic R. Joseph Chicatilla (1248-ca. 1325).<sup>155</sup>

It is quite possible that, at the end of his days, Ramban himself sensed the perils involved in some of these Kabbalistic **doctrines**.<sup>156</sup> This is why he tried to disassociate himself from some of the doctrines that he had expounded. Unlike the other mystics of Gerona, Ramban stipulated at the end of the Introduction to his Commentary to the Pentateuch that the actual meaning of the "secrets of the Tora" cannot possibly be learned by reading his book, but must be orally taught:

Behold, here I am faithfully assuring and properly counseling whomever is looking at this book not to apply opinions or develop concepts concerning any of the allusions which I write about the secrets of the Tora. I am thereby letting him know in truthfulness that my words will not be known at all by any mind or intelligence, except from the mouth of a Kabbalist sage to the ear of a receiver who can understand. On [this] opinions are an iniquity, and ideas a harmful sacrilege which prevent any benefit.

It is important to note that whereas other Kabbalists in Gerona countered with disciples, furthering their ideas, it is not known of anyone who regarded himself as a pupil of Ramban in **Kabbalah**.<sup>157</sup>

Trinitarian doctrines **continued** to flourish among Iberian Jews, particularly among the followers of Shabbetai Sebi (1626-76). A most forceful exponent of trinity in Judaism was the heretic Nehama Hayyon (ca. 1655-ca. 1730).<sup>158</sup>

A final note ending in a question. Those who had studied the psychological mechanism of demonology explain that it is an unconscious **projection**. Since the subject experiencing the demon could not possibly admit that those feelings are his, the demon is experienced as an outside object:<sup>159</sup>

Because it often appears as something unconscious that is independent of, and often counter to, my conscious intentions, it is experienced as something happening outside of me. That is the demons. As Paul says, they cause me not to do the good that I would do and to carry out the evil that I would not (Rom. 7:19). Since they often thwart my will, I experience them as alien to my ego. Thus there is a strong tendency to set them up outside myself. The danger there, of course, is that they then elude my ability to deal with them. In that case, they can easily transform into my neighbor.

Anti-semitism, ethnic hatred, and religious persecution may be the effect of demons that one segment of the population projects onto another. It is a widespread phenomenon still operative in our times.<sup>160</sup>

**The conception of the enemy as a demonic being, a veritable incarnation of the powers of evil, has also survived until our own days. *The psychoanalysis of these mythic images that still animate the modern world will perhaps show us the extent to which we project our own destructive desires upon the "enemy."***

And now the question. In spite of all the accusations hurled by the anti-Maimonideans against the "heretical" interpretations of the Scripture by the Maimonideans, repeated *ad nauseam* by a host of uncritical historians, there is yet to be found a single manuscript from that early period (1180-1240), substantiating any of their claims.

Some Maimonideans may have converted in the crises facing Iberian Jewry during the last two centuries before the Expulsion, but this was the effect of the pressures and disillusionments of the time,<sup>161</sup> in no way related to any "Maimonidean" doctrine.<sup>162</sup> From all the abundant documentation of that period, there is not a single case of a Maimonidean that could serve as a counterpart to Abner de Burgos or Pablo de Santa Maria (ca. 1350-1435). Is it not perhaps possible that just as the Christians were projecting their own demons onto the "other" (the Jews), the anti-Maimonideans, too, responding to a mimetic impulse, were projecting their own demons onto their own "other" (the Maimonideans)?

#### NOTES

1. Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1969), Preface.

2. On the penetration of pietistic ideology into Spain, see the article cited below in n. 11.

3. For a discussion of his view, see Moshe Idel, *Maimonide el la mystique juive* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1991), pp. 11-14.

4. "Milhmet ha-Dat." In *Jeshurun*. I. Kobakak, Ed. (Bamberg: 1875), VIII, p. 30.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

11. On the school of Isaac the Blind, see Gershom Scholom, *Ha-Qabbala be-Probans* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 5746/1986). and *Reshit ha-Qabbala* (Jerusalem: 5708/1948), pp. 99-126. On the life and ideology of R. Jonah, see the eminent article of Israel Ta-Shma. "Hasidut Ashkenaz bi-Sfarad: Rabbenu Yona Crondi. ha-'ish wu-fa'olo." In *Galut 'Ahar Gola* (Jerusalem: Machon Ben Zvi. 1989).

12. *'Iggerot Qena'ot*, in *Qobes Teshuvot ha-Ramham* (Leipzig: 5619/1859). Pt. III, p. 4c.

13. See below, n. 26.

14. "Milhmet ha-Dat," p. 50.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
20. *'Iggerot Qena'ot*, p. 2c.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, p. 2d.
23. "Milhemet ha-Dat," p. 97.
24. *Teshubot ha-Rishba* 2 Vols., H. Z. Dimitrovsky, Ed. (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook 1990), I, Pt. I, p. 361.
25. *'Iggerot Qena'ot*, p. 2c.
26. This confirms R. David Qamhi's report that when the anti-Maimonideans failed to convince the local Rabbinic authorities, they appealed to the Church for assistance; see n. 12 above and n. 78 below.
27. Dimitrovsky, *Teshubot ha-Rishba*, I, p. 398 (ll. 47-48). Cf. nn. 33-34 below.
28. "Milhemet ha-Dat." p. 92.
29. See *ibid.*, pp. 48, 53, where they are described in quite negative terms.
30. *'Iggerot Qena'ot*, III, p. 3d.
31. That is, the non-legal passages in the Talmud. See n. 48 below.
32. "Milhemet ha-Dat," p. 40.
33. See my *In the Shadow of History: Jews and Conversos at the Dawn of Modernity* (New York: SUNY, 1992), pp. 11-12.
34. Dimitrovsky, *Teshubot ha-Rishba*, II, pp. 419-420 (ll. 24-2).
35. See *In the Shadow of History*, p. 18.
36. See *ibid.*, Ch. 1.
37. See *ibid.*, p. 235, n. 55. When I met Professor Baer for the first time in a 1961 visit to Israel, I remember asking him to name a single Jewish Averroist who had converted to Christianity.
38. On the historical links connecting these events, see *ibid.*, Ch. 1.
39. On this methodology, see Ludwig Blau, "Methods of Teaching Talmud." *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 15 (1903): 121-134; see also my "The Legal Thinking of Tosafot." *Dine Israel*, 6 (1975): l-xxii; and "Text et Société." In *La société juive à travers l'histoire*, Shmuel Trigano, Ed. (Paris: Artheme Fayard, 1992), I, 98-99.
40. See R. Abraham Zacuto. *Yohasin ha-Shalem*, Herschell Filipowski and A. H. Freimann, Eds. (Jerusalem: 5723/1963), p. 214a-b.
41. See *Maggid Mishne on Love wu-Malve* 15:1.
42. On the different connotations of this term in Sepharad, see Gerson D. Cohen, *Sefer ha-Qahbalah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1967), pp. lvi-lvii.
43. *She'elot wu-Tshubot ha-Rishba* (Bene Beraq: 5718/1958), I, No. 9, p. 4b.
44. *Sanhedrin* 97a and parallels.
45. *She'elot wu-Tshubot ha-Rishba*, I, No. 9, p. 5a.
46. *Ibid.*
47. "Milhemet ha-Dat," p. 150.
48. See my *Studies in the Mishne Tora* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1978), pp. 184-185.
49. "Milhemet ha-Dat," pp. 133-138, 151-152.
50. See *Studies in the Mishne Tora*, p. 192 n. 92.
51. See *ibid.*, p. 187.
52. See *ibid.*, pp. 185-186.
53. *'Iggerot Qena'ot*, III, p. 3d.
54. "Milhemet ha-Dat." pp. 151, 152.
55. *Ibid.*
56. *Teshubot ha-Rishba*, 1, No. 9, p. 3b.

57. *ibid.*, p. 4a-b.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 4a.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 3b-c.
60. Dimitrovsky, *Teshubot ha-Rishba*, I, pp. 296-297. See my study, "Two Models of Jewish Spirituality." *Shofar*, 10 (1992), p. 41.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 341-342. The source for this doctrine is Ramban; see n. 116 below.
62. Cf. n. 128 below.
63. *She'elot wu-Tshubot ha-Rosh* 55:9. Cf. "Two Models of Jewish Spirituality," pp. 25-30.
64. For the sources and analysis of the incident, see "Two Models of Jewish Spirituality," pp. 25-26. I hope to elaborate further on this case elsewhere.
65. *Ibid.*
66. See *In the Shadow of History*, p. 18.
67. Commentary on Psalms 15:5. Cf. Samuel David Luzzatts, *Commentary to the Pentateuch* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Horev, 1993), pp. 545-546. A similar point was made by Chief Rabbi J. H. Hertz, "The Jews and Usury," *Early and Late* (Soncino: 1943), p. 214.
68. For an analysis of this subject, see *In the Shadow of History*, p. 22.
69. *Hilkhot ha-Rosh on Mo'ed Qatan*, I, p. 24.
70. For the sources and a discussion of the subject, see *In the Shadow of History*, pp. 22-23.
71. See "Two Models of Jewish Spirituality," pp. 5-10.
72. See preceding note. For a more contemporaneous discussion of the same issue, see my "Monolingualism and Judaism." *Cardozo Law Review*, 14 (1993), pp. 1735-1736.
73. *Commentary on Tabnudic Aggadoth* (in Hebrew), Isaiah Tishby, Ed. (Jerusalem: Magness Press, 1982), p. 111.
74. *Zohar*, 3 Vols. (Lehghorn: 5618/1858); *Bereshit*, I, p. 27b; cf III, p. 244b.
75. See my *Golden Doves with Silver Dots: Semiotics and Textuality in Rabbinic Tradition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 143-144.
76. These laws were compiled by Maimonides in *Mishne Tora*, 'Aboda Zara.
77. For a discussion of this problem in Rabbinic times, see Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Feldheim. 1965), pp. 97-114.
78. The following anecdote may illustrate the kind of rationalization justifying the practice of sorcery. About fifteen years ago, I met an old man from Damascus, who told me how he and some Rabbis had performed a ritual known in Judeo-Spanish as *endulçado*, to cure a young man who had fallen sick. That man had some knowledge of Rabbinics, and when I pointed out to him that most Rabbinic authorities had prohibited this ritual as idolatrous, he responded: "You don't understand. Otherwise the boy would have died—we had to save his life." The same altitude underlied the anti-Maimonideans' justification for breaking the law: there are imperatives transcending the Law that justifies transgression of the Law. Cf n. 117 below. On the ideology underlying this type of reasoning, see my "Law and Hermeneutics in Rabbinic Jurisprudence: A Maimonidean Perspective." *Cardozo Law Review*, 14 (1993), pp. 1660-1663.
79. *Greek in Jewish Palestine*, p. 92.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
81. Alfred Ribi, *Demons of the Inner World*, Michael H. Kohn, Trans. (Boston: Shambala, 1990), p. 25 For a historical analysis of this subject, see the studies of F. C. Conybeare, "Demonology of the New Testament." *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 8 (1896): 576-608; idem, "Christian Demonology." *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 9 (1897): 59-114.
82. *Mishne Tora*, 'Aboda Zara 11:16. Cf *Letters and Essays of Moses Maimonides* (in Hebrew), Isaac Shailat, Ed. (Maale Adumim: Maaliyot Press. 5748/1988), pp. 479-480.

83. On the precise meaning of this expression, see "Two Models of Jewish Spirituality," p. 32, n. 91.
84. In **Ramban's** Commentary to the Torah on Lev 16:18, see *In the Shadow of History*, p. 233, n. 32. Cf Ramban, *Teshubot ha-Ramban*, Ch. D. Chavel, Ed. (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1975), No. 104, p. 155.
85. See *ibid.* on Ex 20:3.
86. In *Kitbe Ramban*, 2 Vols., R. Ch. D. Chavel, Ed. (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook 1965), I, p. 162.
87. See his Commentary on Ex. 20:3.
88. See his Commentary on Gen. 4:22.
89. *Kitbe ha-Ramban*, I, p. 146; cf *Teshubot ha-Ramban*, No. 104, p. 157.
90. *Perush ha-Tora*, 2 Vols., R. C. B. Chavel, Ed., Intro. (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1962), I, p. 3.
91. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
92. *Ma'amar 'al Penimiyut ha-Tora*, in *Kitbe ha-Ramban*, II, p. 468. Obviously, in a Christian environment, the term "soul" of the Tora brings to mind the distinction "letter and spirit" first applied by **Paul** (Cor. 3:6), to justify the abolition of the commandments of the Law. See "Two Models of Jewish Spirituality," p. 30.
93. Introduction to his Commentary to the Pentateuch, in *Perush ha-Tora*, I, p. 6. The same idea appears in R. Azriel, *Commentary on Tabnudic Aggadoth*, p. 76, II. 19-20.
94. Introduction, *Perush ha-Tora*, I, p. 7, cf p. 6.
95. *Ibid.* Cf R. Azriel, *Commentary on Tabnudic Aggadoth*, pp. 28, 109.
96. Cf Introduction, in *Perush ha-Tora*, I, pp. 5-6.
97. *Perush ha-Tora* on Gen. 17:1, I, pp. 98-99.
98. *Kitbe Ramban*, I, p. 168.
99. *Perush ha-Tora* on Gen 17:1, I, p. 98; cf *Kitbe Ramban*, I, pp. 191-192.
100. *Kitbe Ramban*, I, p. 168.
101. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
102. *Teshubot*, No. 104, p. 154.
103. See *Mishne Tora*, 'Aboda Zara 11:9; *Tur Yore De'a* and *Shulhan 'Arukh Yore De'a*, p. 174. Cf "Two Models of Jewish Spirituality," pp. 35-40.
104. *Yerushalmi Shabbat*, VI, pp. 9, 8d. On the correct version and interpretation of this passage, see Saul Lieberman, *Yerushalmi Ki-Fshuto* (Jerusalem: 1934), I, pp. 115-116. For a further analysis, see *idem*, *Greek in Jewish Palestine*, pp. 149-152; and his "On Adjurations among the Jews" (in Hebrew). *Tarbiz*, 27 (1958), pp. 183-184. See, however, Ramban, *Teshubot*, No. 104, p. 154, In the source cited by Professor Lieberman in *Greek in Jewish Palestine*, p. 149, astrological consultation is referred to as consulting with "the idols"; cf *ibid.*, n. 28. This coincides with Maimonides' view expressed in one of his letters, "that astrology, those matters are the essence of idolatry," in *Letters and Essays of Moses Maimonides*, II, p. 480. Cf n. 107 below.
105. See "Two Models of Jewish Spirituality," p. 35.
106. *Perush ha-Tora* on Deut. 18:9, II, p. 426.
107. Long Commentary on Ex 20:3 in *Torat Hayyim* on Exodus (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1987), I, 264b. Cf n. 104 above.
108. In his Short Commentary on Exodus, *ibid.*, p. 160b. See Long Commentary, on verse 4, *ibid.*, p. 264b.
109. *Perush ha-Mishnayot*, 'Aboda Zara 3:1.
110. Maimonides, *Dalalat al-Ha'irin* (= *Guide*), Isacchar Joel and Solomon Munk, Eds. (Jerusalem: 1931), III, pp. 29, 376, II. 23-25. See the valuable notes in the French translation

by Solomon Munk, *Le Guide des Egards*, 3 Vols. (Paris: **Maisonneuve**, 1960), HI, pp. 226-228.

111. See "Two Models of **Jewish** Spirituality," p. 32, n. 91.

112. See *Perush ha-Tora* on Ex. 20:3, p. **392**. **However**, *ibid.*, p. 393, he restricted the prohibition to the "pure intellects that are the soul of the constellation," excluding, perhaps, the zodiac forces from that injunction.

113. See *Teshubot ha-Rishba*, I, No. **167**, at **end**; Dimitrovsky, *Teshubot ha-Rishba*, I, p. **282**. I have further **developed** this subject in "Two Models of **Jewish** Spirituality," pp. 35-40.

114. On his opposition to the practice of medicine, see his Commentary on Lev. 27:11, *Perush ha-Tora*, II, p. **185**. On the basis of **the** preceding, it must be interpreted only with respect to scientific medicine, since the physician is attempting directly to affect the health of the patient on his own, contravening the will of God.

115. *Kitbe Ramban*, I, p. 153; see *Perush ha-Tora* on Gen. 17:1, and **46:15**, I, pp. 98, 254.

116. *Kitbe Ramban*, I, p. 192. See *ibid.*, p. 153; cf *Perush ha-Tora* on Ex. **6:2**, I, p. 303.

117. See *Perush ha-Tora* on Gen. 17:1, I, pp. 98-99. See "Two Forms of Jewish Spirituality," p. 41.

118. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

119. *Perush ha-Tora* on Deut. 18:9, II, pp. **427-428**. Ramban, *ibid.*, dismissed the plain sense of the Scripture. For an analysis of the argument, see "Two Models of Jewish Spirituality," p. 42 n. 133,

120. See "Two Forms of Jewish Spirituality," pp. 42-43.

121. *Greek in Jewish Palestine*, p. 106.

122. *Perush ha-Tora*, p. 6.

123. *Kitbe Ramban*, I, p. 168.

124. On this concept, see I. Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1971), I, Pt. 1, pp. 107-117.

125. See *Isaac Albalag*, George Vajda, Ed. (Paris: J. Vrin, 1960), pp. 32-39.

126. See R. Abraham de Colonia, *Ginze Hokhmat ha-Qabbala*, Adolph **Jellinek**, Ed. (**Leipzig**: 1853), pp. 41-42.

127. Introduction to his *Perush ha-Tora*, p. 7.

128. In a different context, the same question was eminently examined by R. Judah Levi, *Kuzari*, I, p. 25. Cf Commentary of R. Abraham ibn 'Ezra on Ex. **20:1**, *Torat Hayyim*, Exodus, II, p. 261b. Of course, it was totally disregarded. This is consistent with the attitude of the Catalan scholars to the traditions of Old Sepharad; cf n. **121** above.

129. See Americo Castro, "Disputa entre un Cristiano y un Judio." In his *De la España que aun no conocia* (Mexico: Finestere, 1972), III, p. 204. II, 25-27. The language is early thirteenth-century Castilian; cf *ibid.*, p. 205.

130. See n. **134** below.

131. *Teshubot ha-Rishba*, I, p. 423.

132. See R. Abraham de Colonia, in *Ginze Hokhmat ha-Qabbala*, p. 43.

133. *Commentary on Tabnudic Aggadoth*, p. 87.

134. See *ibid.*, p. 108; cf p. **109**.

135. *Commentary on Talmudic Aggadoth*, pp. 24-25; cf pp. 45, 81. This triad comprises the first three *sefirot*; see *ibid.*, p. **54**, and is the object of prayers; *ibid.*, p. 56. On the plurality of the **divinity**, see pp. 17, 56-57; on the relation of the plurality to the divinity **itself**, see p. 16.

136. This will be gathered from a close reading of *ibid.*, p. 91. U. 17-21.

137. See *ibid.*, p. 9.

138. *Ibid.*, p. 11.



139. See *ibid.*, p. 110; cf pp. 20, 25.
140. It is known that by switching the Hebrew *bara*, "created," to the Aramaic *bera*, "son," Jewish apostates to Christianity had **contaminated** the Aramaic version of the Pentateuch, Neophyti 1, and translated the first verse. "... the son of God (*bera de-'adonai*) completed the heavens and earth."
141. See *In the Shadow of History*, p. 12.
142. See "Two Models of Jewish Spirituality," pp. 19-20.
143. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.
144. See *ibid.*, pp. 7-17; *In the Shadow of History*, pp. 10-11.
145. For a highly organized and informative overview of this subject, see Dov Schwartz, "Surot Shonot **shel** Magya be-Hagut **ha-Yehudit** bi-Sfarad **ba-Me'a** ha-Yad." *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 57 (1990-1991): 17-46. On the depiction of Moses as a master magician, see *ibid.*, p. 35, n. 50.
146. See the letter of R. Isaac Mor Hayyim, in A. W. Greenup, "A kabbalistic Epistle." *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 21 (1931): 365-375. On this fundamental issue, see the illuminating article of Moshe Idel, " 'Vasi' e Sefirot" (in Hebrew). *Italia*, III (1982), pp. 89-111.
147. In *Ginze Hokhmat ha-Qabbala*, Adolph Jellinek, Ed. (Leipzig: 1853), p. 19. I am indebted to Professor Idel for calling my attention to this source, and pointing out to me that **Abul'afya** was referring to no other than R. Solomon ibn Adret.
148. Cited by R. Isaac bar Sheshet, *Teshubot ha-Ribash*, No. 157; see *In the Shadow of History*, p. 15. R. Yahya al **Qafih**, *Milhamot ha-Shem* (Jerusalem: 5691/1901), p. 45, proposed that the argument was made by Ribash himself, but he presented it in the name of a "rationalist" for fear of retaliation.
149. R. Solomon ibn Verga, *Shebet Yehuda*, Azreil Schochet and Y. Baer, Eds. (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 5707/1947). **LXIV**, p. 142; cf R. Abraham de Colonia, *Ginze Hokhmat ha-Qabbala*, p. 44.
150. *Shebet Yehuda*, VII, p. 37.
151. See Y. Baer, "The Qabbalistic Doctrine in the **Christological** Teaching of Abner of Burgos" (in Hebrew). *Tarbiz*, 27 (1958), pp. 278-289.
152. In his "Teshubot **la-Meharef**," photocopy of Parma Ms. in appendix of Shoshana G. Gershenzon, *A Study of Teshubot la-Meharef by Abner of Burgos*. Ph.D. dissertation, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, 1984, p. 303a.
153. This point had been overlooked in the final analysis in *ibid.*, pp. 64-66. What Gershenzon designates as "anti-Averroistic tendencies within the Church," may as well be designated as "anti-Maimonidean tendencies among the Jews."
154. *Ibid.*, p. 307b.
155. See *ibid.*, pp. 95-108.
156. Probably this is what R. Nissim of Gerona meant in his criticism of **Ramban's** Kabbalah; see *In the Shadow of History*, p. 15.
157. This last point was shared with me by Professor Idel in a private conversation.
158. He was confronted and refuted by the illustrious R. David Nieto, in his *'Esh Dat* (London: 1715), pp. 13a-15a, **17b-23b**.
159. *Demons of the Inner World*, p. 192.
160. Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, Philip Mairet, Trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 38, emphasis added.
161. See *In the Shadow of History*, pp. 24-27.
162. A cursory look at the lists of those who participated in the mass conversions following the famous Dispute in Tortosa (1413-1414), for example, shows that for the most part they were simple **people—butchers**, shoemakers, and **carpenters—more** susceptible to "mystical" lore than to "philosophy."