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A DRAMA IN HEAVEN:
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ISMĀʿĪLĪ LITERATURE

Most Westerners as well as many Muslim Sunnites associate the Shiite tradition with politics and religious radicalism. This unfortunate misconception is due, above all, to the Iranian revolution of 1979, which witnessed the rise to power of modern Shiite fundamentalism.¹ However, since its inception in the first two centuries of Islamic history and to this very day, the Shiite world has exhibited significant esoteric and mystical tendencies. In fact, in its very essence, the Shia may be viewed as an esoteric and mystical tradition in Islam, the emergence of which perhaps predates the rise of Sunnite mysticism, including Sufism.²

The esoteric and mystical dimensions of the Shiite tradition are particularly evident in the Ismāʿīliyya, which first appeared as a separate Shiite fac-

We would like to thank the *History of Religions* readers of this essay and also Jeremy Brown for their helpful comments.

¹ See Etan Kohlberg, “The Evolution of the Shiʿa,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 27 (1983): 109.

² See Henry Corbin, *En Islam Iranien: Aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, 4 vols. (Paris: Galimard, 1971–1972), and *History of Islamic Philosophy*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (London: Kegan Paul, in association with Islamic Publications, 1993); Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, trans. David Streight (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), and *La religion discrète: Croyances et pratiques spirituelles dans l’Islam Shiʿite* (Paris: Vrin, 2006), translated into English as *The Spirituality of Shiʿi Islam: Beliefs and Practices* (London: Tauris, in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2011).

tion in the second half of the ninth century CE.³ These dimensions merit an interreligious examination, especially vis-à-vis medieval Jewish mysticism. Indeed, various scholars in the field of Jewish studies have demonstrated the existence of links and affinities between the Ismāʿīlī tradition and Jewish mystical philosophy, Jewish mysticism, and the kabbalah, primarily in Spain and in the Yemen.⁴ Other scholars as well have called attention to the potential benefits latent in this line of research.⁵ In addition to their phenomenological significance, the similarities between the Ismāʿīlī tradition and medieval Jewish mysticism are important from a historical perspective and may be explained against the geopolitical background of the western Mediterranean in the tenth to twelfth centuries. It was during this long period—between 909 and 1171 CE, to be more precise—that the Fatimid Empire ruled in North Africa and in several areas of the Islamic east. The dominant Ismāʿīlī caliphate was extremely productive in its philosophical, theological, mystical, eso-

³ On the Ismāʿīlīs, see Farhad Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs: Their History and Doctrines*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). On the Ismāʿīliyya as both an esoteric and mystical tradition, see Michael Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlī Tradition*, *Islamic History and Civilization* 103 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), esp. 21–27.

⁴ See Shlomo Pines, “Nathanaël ben al-Fayyūmī et la théologie Ismaélienne,” *Revue de l’Histoire Juive en Égypte* 1 (1947): 5–22, and “Shīʿite Terms and Conceptions in Judah Halevi’s Kuzari,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980): 165–251; Ehud Krinis, “The Idea of the Chosen People in Judah Halevi’s al-Kitāb al-Khazarī and Its Origins in Shīʿī Imām Doctrine” [in Hebrew] (PhD diss., Ben-Gurion University, 2008), translated into English as *God’s Chosen People: Judah Halevi’s Kuzari and the Shīʿī Imām Doctrine* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014); Georges Vajda, “Les lettres et les sons de la langue Arabe d’après Abū Ḥatīm al-Rāzī,” *Arabica* 8 (1961): 113–30, and “Un opuscle Ismaélienne en transmission Judaeo-Arabe,” *JA* 246 (1958): 459–66; Sara O. Heller-Wilensky, “The ‘First Created Being’ in Early Kabbalah: Philosophical and Ismāʿīlian Sources,” *Binah: Studies in Jewish History, Thought and Culture* 3 (1994): 65–77; Alfred L. Ivry, “Ismāʿīlī Theology and Maimonides’ Philosophy,” in *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society, and Identity*, ed. Daniel Frank, *Études sur le Judaïsme médiéval* 16 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 271–99; Amos Goldreich, “The Theology of the *Iyyun* Circle and a Possible Source of the Term ‘*Aḥdut Shava*’” [in Hebrew], in *The Beginnings of Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Europe*, ed. Joseph Dan, *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1987), 141–56; Moshe Idel, “The *Sefirot* above the *Sefirot*” [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 51 (1982): 270–77; David R. Blumenthal, “An Example of Ismaili Influence in Post-Maimonidean Yemen,” in *Studies in Judaism and Islam, Presented to Shelomo Dov Goitein*, ed. Shelomo Morag, Issachar Ben-Ami, and Norman A. Stillman (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1981), 155–74, “On the Theories of *Ibdāʿ* and *Taʿthīr*,” *Die Welt des Islams* 20 (1980): 162–77, and “An Illustration of the Concept of ‘Philosophic Mysticism’ from Fifteenth Century Yemen,” in *Hommage à Georges Vajda: Études d’histoire et de pensée Juives*, ed. Gerard Nahon and Charles Touati (Louvain: Peeters, 1980), 297–99, 303–7; Ronald C. Kiener, “Jewish Ismāʿīlism in Twelfth Century Yemen: R. Nethanel Ben Al-Fayyūmī,” *JQR* 74 (1984): 249–66; see also Yizhak Tzvi Langermann, “Cultural Contacts of the Jews of Yemen,” in *Contacts between Cultures*, vol. 1, *West Asia and North Africa*, ed. Amir Harrak (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1992), 282–83.

⁵ See, e.g., Yehuda Liebes, “Shlomo Pines and the Study of Kabbalah” [in Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 9 (1990): 21–22; see also Moshe Idel, “Ashkenazi Esotericism and Kabbalah in Barcelona,” *Hispania Judaica Bulletin* 5 (2007): 112 n. 135.

teric, and scientific literary output,⁶ and it seems to have had an impact on the religiopolitical sphere and on the intellectual scene in al-Andalus, that is, Muslim Spain.⁷

As to Jewish mysticism from the ninth to the twelfth centuries, the situation is rather different. In contradistinction to the flourishing of writings in the Ismāʿīlī world, this era can be defined as the “black hole” of Jewish mysticism, given that we know very little about Jewish mystical literature or Jewish mystical writers during this period.⁸ As has been previously suggested by scholars, and as we hope to show in this article, medieval Ismāʿīlī literature can shed some light on certain elements and processes in the obscure prehistory of medieval Jewish mysticism and kabbalah.⁹

⁶ See, e.g., Farhad Daftary, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliography of Sources and Studies* (London: Tauris, in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2004); Farhad Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Ismāʿīli History and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., *Ismāʿīlī Contributions to Islamic Culture* (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977).

⁷ See Pines, “Shīʿite Terms,” 218 n. 289, and Shlomo Pines, “La longue récession de la Théologie d’Aristote dans ses rapports avec la doctrine Ismaélienne,” *Revue des Études Islamiques* 22 (1954): 20, repr. in Shlomo Pines, *Studies in the History of Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Sarah Stroumsa, *Collected Works of Shlomo Pines* 3 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1996), 390–403; Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus*. As to the Jewish neoplatonic philosopher Isaac Israeli, who was active in Fatimid North Africa of the tenth century, and his relation to both the Ismāʿīlī world and Andalusī Jewish thought, see Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 73–74; Alexander Altmann and Samuel Miklos Stern, *Isaac Israeli: A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century*, *Scripta Judaica* 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1958).

⁸ On Jewish mysticism between the Geonic period and the end of the twelfth century, see, e.g., Itamar Gruenwald, “Jewish Mysticism’s Transition From Sefer Yetsira to the Bahir” [in Hebrew], in *The Beginnings of Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Europe*, ed. Joseph Dan, *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1987), 15–54; Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3–13, and *The Exegetical Imagination: On Jewish Thought and Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 22–40; Arthur Green, *Keter: The Crown of God in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Reimund Leicht and Joseph Yahalom, “Sefer Zeh Sefer Toledot Adam: An Unknown Esoteric Midrash on Genesis 5:1 from the Geonic Period,” *Ginzei Qedem: Genizah Reserch Annual* 4 (2008): 9–82; Klaus Herrmann, “Jewish Mysticism in the Geonic Period: The Prayer of Rav Hammuna Sava,” in *Jewish Studies between the Disciplines: Papers in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of His 60th Birthday*, ed. Klaus Herrmann, Margarete Schlüter, and Giuseppe Veltri (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 187–217; Ephraim Kanarfogel, *Peering through the Lattices: Mystical, Magical and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000); Rina Drory, *The Emergence of Jewish-Arabic Literary Contacts at the Beginning of the Tenth Century* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Hakkibutz Hameuchad, 1988), 25–28; Ronit Meroz, “The Middle Eastern Origins of the Kabbalah,” *Journal for the Study of Sephardic & Mizrahi Jewry* 1 (2007): 39–56; Elliot R. Wolfson, “The Theosophy of Shabbetai Donnolo with Special Emphasis on the Doctrine of *Sefirot* in His *Sefer Hakhmoni*,” *Jewish History* 6 (1992): 281–316, and *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 148–60; Tzahi Weiss, “The Reception of Sefer Yetsirah and Jewish Mysticism in the Early Middle Ages,” *JQR* 103 (2013): 26–46.

⁹ See, in addition to the references above in nn. 4–5, Idel, “The *Sefirot*,” 270–77; and Daniel De Smet, *La quiétude de l’intellect: Néoplatonisme et gnose Ismaélienne dans l’oeuvre de Hamīd*

I. THE FALLEN DEMIURGE

The North African Fatimid Empire held close ties with the Ismāʿīlī community in the Yemen, which had already been founded toward the end of the ninth century.¹⁰ And it is a Yemenite Ismāʿīlī work that is of special interest to the current discussion. This work, titled *Kanz al-walad* (The treasure of the child), was written in Arabic by the Yemenite Ismāʿīlī author Ibrāhīm b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥāmīdī (who died in the year 1162 CE.).¹¹ Al-Ḥāmīdī was the religious leader of the Ṭayyibī community in Yemen,¹² the Ṭayyibīs being a small though important Ismāʿīlī faction that had split off from the Mustaʿlī branch after 1130 CE.¹³ In *Kanz al-walad*, al-Ḥāmīdī presents the reader with a cosmogonic myth that is quite rare and radical in the landscape of medieval Islamic mysticism. The myth, termed “the drama in heaven” by H. Corbin, recounts the crisis in the divine world of the ten intellects, a crisis that generated the creation of the lower, physical worlds and that set in motion human sacred history.¹⁴

According to al-Ḥāmīdī, the intellects comprising the divine world were initially equal to one another in terms of their spiritual rank, after the Creator had created them “all at once” (*ḍafʿa wāḥida*). However, it was the first intellect, or “the first created being” (*al-mubḍaʿ al-awwal*), that first realized and acknowledged the divinity and unity of the Creator. The second intellect, who had emanated from the first and who is therefore termed “the first emanated being” (*al-munbaʿith al-awwal*), quickly followed suit, recognizing both the oneness of the Creator and the supremacy of the first intellect.¹⁵ In contradis-

ad-Dīn al-Kirmānī (*Xe/XIe s.*), *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 67* (Louvain: Peeters and Departement Oosterse Studies, 1995), 288–307.

¹⁰ For the religious and political history of this community, see Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, index, s. v. “Yaman.”

¹¹ Ibrāhīm b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥāmīdī, *Kitāb kanz al-walad*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ghālib, *Bibliotheca Islamica 24* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1971).

¹² More precisely, he was a *dāʿī muṭlaq* (unrestricted propagandist), the highest rank in the hierarchy of the Ṭayyibī *dāʿwa* (summoning [to the truth], propaganda). The latter term designates both the propagation of the Ismāʿīlī teachings and the organization that is responsible for this propagation.

¹³ The Mustaʿlī branch itself as well as its rival, the Nizāriyya, were formed during the succession dispute following the death of the Fatimid imām-Caliph al-Mustaʿlī bi-llāh in the year 1094 CE. See Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 238–300.

¹⁴ See Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 84. For Corbin’s studies of this myth and of Ṭayyibī thought in general, see the references in Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 610 n. 96 and, for a general summary of this myth, 269–75; see also Daniel De Smet, “Éléments chrétiens dans l’Ismaélisme yéménite sous les derniers fatimides: Le problème de la gnose Ṭayyibite,” in *L’Égypte Fatimide: Son art et son histoire; Actes du colloque organisé à Paris les 28, 29 et 30 mai 1998*, ed. Marianne Barrucand, *Islam 1* (Paris: Presses de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1999), 45–53; see also Bernard Lewis, “An Ismaili Interpretation of the Fall of Adam,” *BSOS* 9, no. 3 (1938): 691–704.

¹⁵ Note that the term *ibḍaʿ* (from the same root as *al-mubḍaʿ*), signifying creation *ex nihilo*, has its roots in the circle of the ninth-century Arabic philosopher al-Kindī and is quite common in Ismāʿīlī neoplatonic writings. *Ibḍaʿ* typically refers to the creation of the universal/first intellect by God, whereas *inbiʿath* (from the same root as *al-munbaʿith*) designates the emanation of the uni-

tion, the third intellect, called “the second emanated being” (*al-munba‘ith al-thānī*), while admitting the supremacy of the first intellect, failed to acknowledge the unity of the Creator as well as the precedence of the second intellect over him:

The second emanated being¹⁶ praised the first created being, sanctified him, glorified, honored, and exalted him. However, he did not testify as he had done concerning the divinity of the Exalted One, glory be to him. This was in a way of excessiveness,¹⁷ unmindfulness, and neglectfulness, and was carried out neither intentionally nor deliberately. He was also unmindful of the first principle that serves as the basis for everything: he did not devote himself to his companion who had preceded him by his action, i.e., the first emanated being, and did not acknowledge his precedence and superiority. He was thus perfect in his own self, but imperfect in his action, for he did not attain the second perfection with all its duties and boundaries.¹⁸ He therefore remained in his state of potentiality which is his first perfection—i.e., life, which is the source of all and is their first perfection. . . .

Then the first emanated being began summoning¹⁹ that world to [the truth]. Some responded and repented, praising, sanctifying, and glorifying both him [the first emanated being] and him to whom he was summoning them and guiding them [the first

versal soul (or the second intellect) from the universal/first intellect. See Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 95 n. 64 and the references there.

¹⁶ That is, the third intellect.

¹⁷ Or exaggeration, *‘alā sabīl al-ghuluww*. In other words, the third intellect viewed the first created being as God Himself. Al-Ḥāmidī is perhaps alluding here to early Shiite sects which, among other radical notions, deified ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (Muḥammad’s cousin and son in law) and the imams (“leaders”, see the following note) and were therefore termed by later heresiologists *ghulāt* (exaggerators). On this term, see Heinz Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der frühen Ismā‘īliya: Eine Studie zur islamischen Gnosis* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1978), 142–68, and *Die islamische Gnosis: Die extreme Schia und die ‘Alawiten*, Die Bibliothek des Morgenlandes (Zurich: Artemis, 1982); Matti Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects*, Contemporary Issues in the Middle East (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988); Hossein Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi‘ite Islam: Abū Ja‘far ibn Qība al-Rāzī and His Contribution to Imāmite Shi‘ite Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 1993), 19–51. On the problems related to the use of the term *ghulāt*, see Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, 129–30.

¹⁸ On the term “boundary,” see also n. 22 below. As to “the second perfection” (*al-kamāl al-thānī*), based on the teachings of his Ismā‘īlī predecessors and in line with medieval Arabic philosophy in general, al-Ḥāmidī posits two forms of perfection: “the first perfection” (*al-kamāl al-awwal*) that pertains to man’s physical existence, and “the second perfection” that concerns his spiritual, intellectual, and ethical dimensions. However, contrary to most medieval Arabic philosophers, al-Ḥāmidī views “the second perfection” as dependent upon the recognition of the imams. According to the Shia, the latter, who are descendants of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and of his wife Faṭīma (the Prophet’s daughter), are the sole legitimate leaders of the Islamic community and are the ultimate mediators between God and man. Thus, the perfection of the intellects in the upper, spiritual world, which depends upon their recognition of the celestial hierarchy, reflects the perfection in the world of man, which likewise depends upon the believer’s recognition of the hierarchy in human society. See also Daniel De Smet, “*Perfectio prima—perfectio secunda* ou les vicissitudes d’une notion: De S. Thomas aux Ismaéliens Ṭayyibites du Yémen,” *Recherches de théologie et de philosophie médiévales* 66 (1999): 254–88.

¹⁹ *Al-da‘wa*, see n. 12 above.

created being]. . . . Those who responded formed parties, one party after another, [altogether] seven parties. They became consecutive ranks, one after the other, every rank following the former one. . . . These are the seven emanating intellects to which allusion has been made. . . .

The second division refrained from responding. All were perplexed. They devoted themselves neither to the Creator nor to the [first] created being, nor to any one of the two emanated beings. This was due to their own imagination which was formed on the basis of unmindfulness, neglectfulness, and doubt, not because someone had acted upon them; for evil has no source in creation [i.e., in the world of the ten intellects]. Hence, the second [emanated being], who, being unmindful of the action incumbent upon him, remained in his state of potentiality, acted from his own self, by means of his own self, and within his own self; not as a result of an intention of the first [intellect] nor of the second [intellect], and in accordance with justice and the sentence of wisdom.

The emanated intellects whose forms existed were organized in ranks according to their response to the first emanated being. Then, with the light of their Creator, they shined upon the tenth [intellect];²⁰ and out of compassion, mercy, and justice, they turned towards him, granting him support and succor, and informing him of that concerning which he had failed.²¹ This was intentional, owing to his sanctification of the venerable boundary [the first created being].²² He perceived what they had informed him, repented, and returned [to the Creator], acknowledging that concerning which he had been neglectful. This is spiritual Adam, who has no body.²³

²⁰ That is, the second emanated being who had fallen from his initial rank as the third intellect to the bottom of the divine world; on this fall, see also al-Ḥāmidī, *Kitāb kanz al-walad*, 83, 132.

²¹ In other words, they informed him of the Creator's divinity and of the superiority of the first emanated being (ibid., 83).

²² The fallen, tenth intellect is shown compassion and forgiveness and is prevented from falling outside the divine world due to the fact that he had sanctified the first intellect; see ibid. The term "boundary" (*ḥadd*; also "limit," "border") signifies both the spiritual entities in the upper worlds and their equivalents in the world of man—the prophets, the imams, and the Ismā'īlī *dā'wa* organization. In the Ismā'īlī worldview, these various celestial and earthly entities are all organized in a hierarchal manner. Accordingly, in addition to acknowledging God's unity, the believer must recognize the hierarchies that make up the universe and humbly accept his own rank in them.

²³ Al-Ḥāmidī, *Kitāb kanz al-walad*, 67–69:

ثم إن المنبعث الثاني سبح المبدع الأول وقدمه ومجده وشرفه وعظمه ولم يشهد بما شاهده به للمتعالي سبحانه من الإلهية فكان ذلك على سبيل الغلو وهو سهو وغفلة بلا قصد ولا عمد ثم سها أيضا عن الأصل الأول الذي عليه المعمول إذ لم يلتزم بصاحبه السابق له بفعله الذي هو المنبعث الأول ولم يعترف بسبقه ويفضله فكان كاملا في ذاته ناقصا في فعله إذ لم يتم له الكمال الثاني بجميع حقوقه وحدوده فقام بالقوة التي هي كماله الأول من الحياة التي هي أصل الجميع وكمالهم الأول [. . .] ثم وقعت الدعوة لذلك العالم به فأجاب البعض بالتلبية والإنابة والتسبيح والتقدیس والتمجيد له ولمن دعاهم إليه ودلهم عليه [. . .] وتناظر الذين أجابوا فئة بعد فئة سبع فئات فكانت مراتب متقاطرة الأول فالأول كل مرتبة عن الأولى [. . .] وهي التي أشير إليها بالعقول السبعة الانبعثانية [. . .] والقسم الثاني توقف عند الإجابة وتحرير الكل ولم يلتزم منهم أحد لا بالمبدع ولا بالمبدع ولا بأي المنبعثين وذلك منهم لهم تصور سهو وغفلة وشك لا بفعل فاعل بهم إذ لا أصل للشر في الإبداع فكان فعل الثاني القائم بالقوة في السهو عن فعل ما كان يجب فعله عليه من ذاته بذاته في ذاته لا بقصد قصده الأول ولا الثاني بموجب العدل وقضية الحكمة وترتيب العقول الانبعثانية الموجودة صورها بإجابتهم للمنبعث الأول ثم أشرقت بنور بارئها وأقبلت على العاشر تؤيده وتمده وتعرفه بما قصر عنه تحننا ورحمة وعدلا وذلك الإقبال عليه بقصد سبب الحد الجليل وتقديسه له فظن لما عرفوه به فتاب وأناب وأقر بما غفل منه وهو آدم الروحاني المتجرد عن الجسم [. . .]

According to al-Ḥāmidī's cosmology, it is the fallen, tenth intellect who, thanks to the divine support granted to him by the higher intellects, governs the lower worlds. However, despite his salvation, the negative outcomes of his failure could not be contained:

During the summoning, that world was divided into the right side which is the world of command, the angels who are close [to God]. Their forms are spiritual, intellectual, luminous, and full of light; they are supported by the sun of creation and by the moon of emanation,²⁴ the lights of both, as well as their brightness and blessings, shining upon them. They are in the quarters of holiness; every [intellect] praises, sanctifies, adores, extolls,²⁵ and exalts the intellect that precedes him, the one to whom he is adjacent and whom he follows. They are safe from the great horror,²⁶ they are tranquil and merry.

The second division was to the left side, as a result of their failure to respond, their persistence in not returning [to the Creator], their doubt, polytheism, and deviation from the true path; for they did not devote themselves to him whose rank was contiguous to theirs [i.e., the second intellect], though they had been summoned from him and by him. They did not respond to the first emanated being together with those who had responded and returned [to the Creator]; nor did they recognize the venerable and honored boundary [the first created being]; nor did they devote themselves to any of the intellects that occupied the seven ranks. This was deliberate [on their part] and intentional, resulting from haughtiness and pride. They became blind and deaf; they slipped, went astray, and fell from the abode of subtlety to the existence of density.²⁷

²⁴ That is, by the first and second intellects.

²⁵ *Wa-tahlīl wa-takbīr*, literally, to say *lā ilāh illā llāh* (there is no God but Allāh) and *allāh akbar* (Allāh is the greatest).

²⁶ *Al-faza' al-akbar*, i.e., judgment day; see Qur'ān 21:103.

²⁷ Al-Ḥāmidī, *Kitāb kanz al-walad*, 79–80:

وكان انقسام ذلك العالم عند وقوع الدعوة إلى ذات اليمين الذين هم عالم الأمر الملائكة المقربون الذين صورهم روحانية عقلية نورانية شعشعانية موبدين بشمس الإبداع وقمر الانبياء بشرقهم أنوارهما وضيائهما وبركتهما فيم في حجرات القدس في تسييح وتقديس وتهليل وتكبير وتعظيم لكل سابق على لاحقه وتاليه آمنون من الفرع الأكبر مطمئنون فاكهون والقسم الثاني إلى ذات الشمال لتخلفهم عن الإجابة وإصرارهم عن الإنابة وشكهم وشركهم وإلحادهم إذ لم يلتزموا بالذي تليهم رتبته وقد دعوا منه وبه ولا أجابوا المنبعت الأول مع من أجاب وأجاب ولا عرفوا الحد الجليل المعظم ولا التزموا بأي العقول من أهل المراتب السبع وكان ذلك عمدا قصدا تكبرا وتجبرا فعموا وصموا وزلوا وهبطوا وضلوا وهبطوا من دار اللطافة إلى كون الكثافة

Note that the notion whereby created beings are divided into two groups, that of the left and that of the right, has its origins in the Qur'ān and in its classical exegesis. According to the Islamic tradition, on judgment day, the righteous ones will be given the books in which their deeds are recorded in their right hands, whereas the evil ones will be given their books in their left hands; see Qur'ān 56:8–9, 27, 41; 69:19, 25. The theme of left-right in Islamic literature demands a separate discussion; suffice it to say that the cosmogonic and theosophical aspects of this theme that are characteristic of al-Ḥāmidī's thought are lacking in the Qur'ān and in its classical exegesis. Elsewhere in al-Ḥāmidī's work (*Kitāb kanz al-walad*, 97), the left side is also called "the world of creation" (*‘alam al-khalq*). The terms "the world of command" (mentioned at the beginning of this passage) and "the world of creation" are a recurring motif in medieval Islamic philosophy and mysticism, and

Al-Ḥāmidī goes on to describe how the sinful division of the left,²⁸ termed “the third emanated being” (*al-munba‘ith al-thālith*), fell from the divine world and evolved into matter and form (*hayūlā wa-ṣūra*), thereby functioning as the origin of the corporeal worlds:

[The third emanated being] became dense and turned into two: matter and form. Form is the life that is alluded to by [the term] “the sensory soul,” and matter is “the growing soul.” . . .²⁹

Matter and form are the third emanated being, which refrained from responding. For the second division, which persisted [in its sinning] and was haughty, became dark, all being mixed with all; it became two, double things mixed together, the beginning of space and time.³⁰

This “drama in heaven” is clearly analogous to the earthly battle between the Ismā‘īlī community or the Shia at large and their evil foes, the Sunnites. Al-Ḥāmidī draws a parallel between the first and second intellects, on the one hand, and the “speaker prophet” (*al-nāṭiq*) and his “foundation” (*asās*), respectively, on the other.³¹ The forces of the left, who failed to acknowledge the high rank of the second intellect, correspond to the companions (*ṣaḥāba*) of the Prophet Muḥammad, the majority of whom did not acknowledge the

are particularly typical of Ismā‘īlī writings; see, e.g., Diane Steigerwald, “L’ordre (*amr*) et la création (*khalq*) chez Shahrastani,” *Folia Orientalia* 31 (1995): 163–75. Note also that the phrase “creation and command” appears already in the Qur’ān 7:54. On the division of the cosmogonic forces into “the right side” (“the world of command”) and “the left side” (“the world of creation”), see also al-Ḥāmidī, *Kitāb kanz al-walad*, 65–66, 97, 108.

²⁸ Al-Ḥāmidī (*Kitāb kanz al-walad*, 295) explicitly refers to these cosmogonic events as “the first sin among the spiritual ones” (*al-khaṭi‘a l-ūlā fi l-rūḥāniyya*).

²⁹ Or *al-naḥs al-ḥisiyya* and *al-naḥs al-nāmiya* (ibid., 112, 127), as is more common in medieval Arabic philosophy.

³⁰ Ibid., 86–87:

[...] وتكثف وصار شينين هيولى وصورة فالصورة هي الحياة المشار إليها بنفس الحس والهيولى هي نفس النماء فالهيولى والصورة هما المنبعث الثالث المتوقف عن الإجابة وذلك أن القسم الثاني الذي أصر واستكبر أظلم وأمتزج الكل بالكل وصارا شينين مزدوجين ممتزجين أول المكان والزمان [...]

³¹ According to Ismā‘īlī teachings, human history comprises seven cycles. Each cycle is inaugurated by a “speaker prophet” who is responsible for formulating and delivering to mankind a *sharī‘a*, a holy divine law, though there are diverse opinions as to the status of the *sharī‘a* in the first cycle (that of the “speaker prophet” Adam) and in the last one (the messianic age); see Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs*, index, s.v. “nāṭiq”; and Daniel De Smet, “Adam, premier prophète et législateur? La doctrine Chiite des *ūlu al-‘azm* et la controverse sur la pérennité de la *sharī‘a*,” in *Le Shi‘isme Imāmīte quarante ans après: Hommage à Etan Kohlberg*, ed. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, Meir Michael Bar-Asher, and Simon Hopkins, Bibliothèque de l’École des Hautes Études, Sciences Religieuses 137 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 187–202. Each of the seven “speaker prophets” is followed, in turn, by a “foundation” (also called “legatee,” *waṣī*, and “silent one,” *ṣāmit*) who is responsible for the *bāṭin*, the inner, esoteric aspect of religion. Muḥammad, for example, was the “speaker prophet” in the sixth cycle (the cycle of Islam), and his “foundation” was ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (see Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs*, index, s.v. “asās”).

high status of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (the cousin and son in law of Muḥammad) nor his right to inherit the Prophet as leader of the Muslim community. To be exact, al-Ḥāmidī differentiates between two groups among the forces of the left: one group did acknowledge the high spiritual status of the first intellect, yet kept this belief hidden; whereas the second group did not even acknowledge this. These two groups parallel the division among the companions of Muḥammad: various companions willingly believed in the Prophet yet did not follow ʿAlī, while others were “hypocrites” (*munāfiqūn*), in other words, they did not truly believe in Muḥammad and hence, their conversion to Islam was not sincere. The first group among the forces of the left, that is, those who secretly acknowledged the status of the first intellect, were placed in “the highest ranks of nature, in the celestial spheres; they are the sensory soul alluded to by [the term] ‘form.’” The second group, which did not acknowledge any of the ten intellects, became “the world of generation and corruption, the growing soul alluded to by [the term] ‘matter.’”³²

Al-Ḥāmidī dedicated much of *Kanz al-walad* to describing the emergence of the physical world and, in particular, the evolution and progression of human sacred history. This history, comprising numerous cycles, is marked by the ferocious battle between the forces of good (the imams and their followers in each generation)³³ and the forces of evil (their rivals); the final victory will only be achieved in the messianic age. Yet how is this battle linked to the “drama in heaven” described above? A detailed answer to this question will fall beyond the scope of this article; suffice it to say that the restoration of the divine world to its initial state becomes the responsibility of the Ismāʿīlī believers themselves. By means of their faith and religious deeds, and especially by the adherence to their imams and the *daʿwa* leaders, the Ismāʿīlīs are able to reestablish the pristine order in the upper world of the ten intellects. Throughout the many cycles of human history, the spiritual “forms” (*suwar*) of the imams and their followers are all gradually assembled together into one single form that constitutes a nonphysical, luminous figure. The organs of this figure are composed of the spiritual forms of the Ismāʿīlī community. According to al-Ḥāmidī, this figure eventually ascends to the divine world, more precisely, to the level of the tenth intellect, which, as described above, had fallen from his initial rank as the third intellect. This process enables the tenth intel-

³² Al-Ḥāmidī, *Kitāb kanz al-walad*, 98–99 (... في أعلى مراتب الطبيعة التي هي الأفلاك الذين هم نفس الحس المشار) (...). On the fall of the forces of the left and their division into matter and form, see also 102, 104–5, 108–10, 112, 117, 127, 132–33, 152, 295–97. Note that in al-Ḥāmidī’s work (*ibid.*, 109, 132), the first group among the fallen forces of the left, i.e., those who acknowledged the high status of the first intellect and therefore became “life,” “form,” and the celestial spheres, is designated as Eve, the spouse of “spiritual Adam” (the tenth intellect).

³³ On the imams, see n. 18 above.

lect itself to rise to its original rank, thus restoring the divine world to its original, pure state.³⁴

Al-Ḥāmidī's cosmogonic myth, cosmology, and soteriology were elaborated upon by other Ṭayyibī authors in subsequent generations.³⁵ Much of this rich Ṭayyibī tradition still awaits research (not to mention the many manuscripts awaiting publication);³⁶ yet *Kanz al-walad*, written approximately a century before the kabbalistic text that will be examined in what follows, will be sufficient for the purposes of the current discussion.

II. ANGELS, DEMONS, AND CELESTIAL WARS

There are several affinities between al-Ḥāmidī's work and various kabbalistic texts, primarily those that discuss the concept of "emanation on the left." The most significant affinities are (1) the integration of a mythical worldview with a cosmological scheme of ten emanating entities (*sefirot* in kabbalah), a scheme influenced (at least to some extent) by Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism,³⁷ (2) the separation between the first three emanations and the later seven ones, and (3) the perception of evil as originating in the divine world and as existing independently of or parallel to it.

The notion of an independent evil realm existing side by side with the divine world is considered to be one of the most important innovations of kabbalistic literature.³⁸ Although the innovative nature of this kabbalistic notion

³⁴ For more detailed descriptions of this process, see the references above in n. 14.

³⁵ See, e.g., anon., *Masā'il majmū'a min al-ḥaqā'iq al-ʿāliya wa-l-daqa'iq wa-l-asrār al-sāmiya*, and ʿAlī b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Walīd, *Risālat al-ṭāḥ al-wal-tabyīn fī kayfiyyat tasalsul wilādatay al-jism wa-l-dīn*, in *Gnosis-Texte der Ismailiten*, ed. Rudolf Strothmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1943), 4–158; ʿAlī [b. Muḥammad] Ibn al-Walīd, *Kitāb al-dhakhīra fī l-ḥaqīqa*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Aʿzamī (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1971); al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī Ibn al-Walīd, *Risālat al-mabda' wa-l-ma'ād*, in *Trilogie Ismaelienne*, ed. Henry Corbin, *Bibliothèque iranienne* 9 (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1961), 99–130; Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn, *Kitāb zahr al-maʿānī*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ghālib (Beirut: al-Muʿassasa l-Jāmiʿiyya lil-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 1991).

³⁶ See the relevant manuscripts in Ismail K. Poonawala, *Bibliography of Ismāʿīlī Literature* (Malibu, CA: Undena, 1977); Adam Gacek, *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of the Institute of Ismaili Studies* (London: Islamic Publications, 1984–85); Delia Cortese, *Ismaili and Other Arabic Manuscripts: A Descriptive Catalogue of Manuscripts in the Library of the Institute of Ismaili Studies* (London: Tauris, in association with Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2000), and *Arabic Ismaili Manuscripts: The Zāhid ʿAlī Collection in the Library of the Institute of Ismaili Studies* (London: Tauris, in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2003).

³⁷ On the neoplatonic influence referred to here, see De Smet, *La quiétude*, 290–302. Note that the term *sefirot* was adopted by the kabbalists from the enigmatic treatise "The Book of Creation" (*Sefer yetzirah*). However, whereas in the Book of Creation this term signifies the system of decimal counting, for the kabbalists it came to indicate the scheme of the ten emanating entities. On this matter, see, e.g., Yehuda Liebes, *Ars Poetica in Sefer Yetzira* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 2000), 12–15.

³⁸ On the perception of evil in early kabbalistic sources, see, e.g., Joseph Dan, "Samael, Lilith and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah," *AJSR* 5 (1980): 17–40, and *History of Jewish Mysti-*

has been called into question by a number of scholars,³⁹ it is nevertheless clear that it was a central theme in medieval kabbalah, more so than in any other genre of Jewish literature. In fact, this notion was articulated by the kabbalists in diverse ways, from their earliest compositions in the late twelfth century to this very day.

In kabbalah, the link between the forces of evil and the left side of the divine world has two main aspects. First, schematically speaking, the world of the ten *sefirot* or emanations is separated in many kabbalistic teachings into three vertical divisions: the right division, representing the *sefirot* of mercy or “grace” and “benevolence” (*hesed*); the left division, representing the *sefirot* of severity or divine justice (*din*); and the middle division, which includes the *sefirot* that maintain the balance between the first two divisions. This balance enables both the upper and lower worlds to continue existing. Second, the left side is often viewed in kabbalistic literature as the abode of an alternative, evil system that parallels the *sefirot*, or, more commonly, it is viewed as “the other side” (*sitra ahra*), that is, as an evil realm existing outside Divinity proper. The origination of the evil forces in the left side is explained by the kabbalists in different ways; according to their explanations, the evil forces emanated

cism and Esotericism, 9 vols. (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2013), 9:1–221 (in Hebrew); Asi Farber-Ginat, “‘Qelipah qodemet lapri’—lesheelat motsaah shel havayat hara hametafizit bamahshavah haqabalit haqdamah” (“The shell precedes the fruit”: The question concerning the origin of the metaphysical evil in early kabbalistic thought), in *Myth in Judaism*, ed. Havivah Pedayah, Eshel Beer-Sheba 4 (Beer-Sheba: Ben-Gurion University Press, 1996), 118–42; Martelle Gavarin, “The Problem of Evil in the Thought of Rabbi Isaac Sagi Nahor and His Disciples” [in Hebrew], *Daat* 20 (1988): 29–50; Avishar Har-Shefi, *The Myth of Edomite Kings in Zoharic Literature* [in Hebrew] (Los Angeles: Cherub, 2013), 17–20; Moshe Idel, “The Evil Thought of God” [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 49 (1980): 356–64; Yehuda Liebes, “The Messiah of the Zohar: On R. Simeon Bar Yohai as a Messianic Figure,” in *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. Arnold Schwartz, Stephanie Nakache, and Penina Peli, SUNY Series in Judaica (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993), 64–67; Haviva Pedayah, “‘Flaw’ and ‘Correction’ in the Concept of the Godhead in the Teaching of Rabbi Isaac the Blind” [in Hebrew], in *The Beginnings of Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Europe*, ed. Joseph Dan, Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought 6 (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1987), 185–220; Michael Schneider, “The Myth of Satan in the Bahir” [in Hebrew], *Kabbalah* 20 (2009): 287–343; Gershon Scholem, “Sitra Ahrah: Good and Evil in the Kabbalah,” in *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), 56–87, *Kabbalat rabbi yaaqov ve-rabbi yitshaq bney rabbi yaaqov hacohen* (The traditions of R. Jacob and R. Isaac the sons of R. Jacob Hacohen), Madaey hayahadut 2 (Jerusalem: Hamadpis, 1927), 182–85, 244–64, and *Leheqer qabbalat rabbi yitshaq ben Rabbi Yaaqov Hacohen* (A study in R. Isaac Hacohen’s Kabbalah) [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: 1934, a collection of reprints from *Tarbiz* 2–5, 1931–1934); Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of The Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, trans. David Goldstein, 3 vols., Littman Library of Jewish Civilization (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 2:509–29; Elliot R. Wolfson, “Left Contained in the Right: A Study in Zoharic Hermeneutics,” *AJSR* 11 (1986): 28–32; Michal Kushnir-Oron, *Sha’ar Harazim by Todros b. Joseph Abulafia: Edited from the Manuscripts with an Introduction and Annotations* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1989), 25–29. Note that in contradistinction to the Arabic transliteration in this article, we have used for the Hebrew a simplified form of transliteration.

³⁹ See, e.g., Schneider, “Myth of Satan,” 287–88; Dan, “Samael.”

either before, after, or during the emanation of the *sefirot*, specifically from the third or fifth *sefirot* of *binah* (wisdom) and *gevurah* (severity) respectively, which both belong to the division of divine justice.

While discussions concerning the ontological nature of evil within Divinity figure in various kabbalistic sources, the most important milieu in which this issue was developed was that of Rabbi Isaac Hacoen, his disciple Rabbi Moses of Burgos, and Todros b. Josph Abulafia, who were active in the second half of the thirteenth century in Castile, Spain. In their rather eclectic treatises, one may find some of the most explicit and significant descriptions of the way in which the evil powers emanated from the divine world. And it is precisely the eclectic nature of these works that is of particular interest to the current discussion: the fact that Rabbi Isaac Hacoen, Rabbi Moses of Burgos, and Todros b. Josph Abulafia incorporated in their treatises diverse traditions concerning the nature and emanation of evil indicates that these treatises do not necessarily reflect their authors' own innovations, but should rather be perceived as evidence for the existence of earlier Jewish speculations on the question of evil, speculations about which we know very little and that would later be developed by various kabbalist writers.⁴⁰

Among the different traditions that are found in their works, the most relevant one for our discussion is the tradition concerning the emanation of evil forces from the third *sefirah* of *binah* or *teshuvah* (repentance), which is located in the left division of the *sefirot* system. This tradition appears in a treatise of Rabbi Isaac Hacoen that was later titled "Concerning the Emanation on the Left" (*Maamar [teshuvah] al haatsilut hasmalit*).⁴¹ In a section of this work that aims at explaining "how the armies of the accusers in the heaven are organized" (*maarekhet tsevaot hameqatregim asher bashamayim*), it is said that these evil forces

were all created from one emanation (*atsilut*) that had emanated from the power of *teshuvah*. This emanation is a screen (*masakh*) separating the emanation of all the holy grades [= the ten *sefirot*], which have no alien emanations among them, [from all other emanations]; the former are all separate, pure, refined, and golden (*tsehubot*) grades, engraved from the power of the will (*ratson*) [of] the hidden Lord. The separating screen, which emanated from the power of the emanation of *teshuvah*, had initially emanated on condition that different kinds of emanations would emanate from

⁴⁰ For a recent discussion on the origins of their traditions, see Ram Ben-Shalom, "Kabbalistic Circles Active in the South of France (Provence) in the Thirteenth Century" [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 82, no. 4 (2014): 569–605.

⁴¹ See Rabbi Isaac Hacoen, *Maamar (teshuvah) al haatsilut hasmalit*, in *Kabbalat rabbi yaaqov ve-rabbi itshaq bney rabbi yaaqov hacoen*, ed. Gershom Scholem, Madaey hayahadut 2 (Jerusalem: Hamadpis, 1927), 244–64.

it—for both good and bad, for existence and eternal establishment as well as for everlasting bareness and disgrace.⁴²

From the separating screen called “Mesukhiel” emanated the souls of the good angels.⁴³ However, while these souls were still hidden and in their state of potential existence,

a world emanated from alien forms and corrupting imaginations (*mitsurot zarot u-midimyonim mashhitim*). The name of the head of [this] emanation, a commander [or leader, *sar*] of all the soldiers, was “Qamtiel.” These are the cruel ones who began to accuse (*leqatreg*) and confuse the emanation. Immediately a herald (*karoziel*) came out from the commander of *teshuvah* called “Karoziel” and “the divine voice of *teshuvah*” (*bat kol hatshuvah*), saying, “Mesukhiel, Mesukhiel, destroy what you have created; gather your emanations to yourself; for the King of all Kings, the Holy One blessed be he, does not desire that they exist in the worlds for the same emanation [by] which they had emanated.” They then returned to their initial state and were obliterated; as they emanated, so did they cease to be.⁴⁴

It was only after the consecutive emanation and destruction of two more evil worlds,⁴⁵ made up of two additional evil commanders (Bliel and Itiel) and their respective armies, that the good angels finally came into existence. These angels included seven armies led by seven commanders, “from whose power heavens and stars emanated; those who are wise in the field of medicine (*vehakhmey harefua*) call these ‘the seven planets.’”⁴⁶ However, at this point, seven parallel commanders emanated all at once, headed by Samael: Zaafiel,

⁴² *Ibid.*, 249:

[...] כולם נבראו מאצילות אחד נאצל מכה התשובה ואותו אצילות מסך מבדיל בין אצילות כל המעלות הקדושות ולא אצילות זרות עמן, כלם מעלות נבדלות זכות צרופות צהובות חקוקות מכה הרצון האדון הנעלם. והמסך המבדיל הנאצל מכה אצילות התשובה נאצל מתחלה על תנאי שיתאצלו ממנו מיני אצילות הן לטובה הן לרעה הן לקיום ולהעמדה נצחית הן לשממון לדרואן עולם.

⁴³ Elsewhere (*ibid.*, 260), Mesukhiel is said to have been the seventh leader or commander (*sar*) emanating from *teshuvah*.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 249–50:

[...] נאצל עולם אחד מצורות זרות ומדמונים משחיתים. שם ראש האצילות שר על כל החיילים קמטיאל אלה הם האכזרים שהתחילו לקטרטג ולבלבל האצילות ומיד יצא כרוז מאת שר התשובה הנקרא כרוזיאל ונקרא בת קול התשובה ואמר מסוכיאל מסוכיאל החרב מה שבראת אסוף אצילותך אליך לפי שאין רצון מלך מלכי המלכים הקב"ה שיתקיימו בעולמות לאותו האצילות שנאצלו, חזרו כבתחלה ונמוחו ומעין אצילותם היתה אפיסתם.

⁴⁵ This is in accordance with the famous Midrash mentioned by Hacothen (*ibid.*, 250) that states that before the creation of our world, God “used to construct worlds and destroy them”; see, e.g., *Bereshit Rabbah* 9:2.

⁴⁶ Hacothen, *Maamar*, 250: וכוכבים וחכמי הרפואה קוראים להם ז' כוכבי לכת.

Zaamiel, Qatsafiel, Ragaziel, Avriel, and Meshulahiel.⁴⁷ These are “the commanders of jealousy and hate” (*sarey hakinah ve-hasinah*). Consequently, a fierce war ensued between the seven good angels and their armies, on the one hand, and the seven evil commanders and their forces, on the other. This war will continue until the end of time.⁴⁸

Two points are worth emphasizing here. First, according to several passages in Hacoheh’s treatise, the ongoing battle between the evil and good emanations ultimately results from the actions of Lilit, Samael’s spouse:

I will give you a hint: the reason for all the jealousies between the aforementioned [evil] commanders and the [good] commanders of the seven factions, the factions of the holy angels who are called “the guardians of the walls” (*shomrey hahomot*)—what arouses jealousy and hate between the organized [forces] of heaven and the soldiers that are the armies on high—is one form (*tsura*) that is unique to Samael: Lilit. She is like the image of a female’s form; Samael is like the form of Adam, and Lilit is like the image of Eve. Both of them were also born a spiritual birth with two faces,⁴⁹ in correspondence with the form of Adam and Eve below and above;⁵⁰ two forms of twins. Samael and Elder Eve [= Lilit, *havah savta*], who is “northern,”⁵¹ emanated below the divine throne (*kise hakavod*). The sin caused this fool [Lilit] [to act] for the sake of her shame and disgrace, in order that she may be destroyed and bear no fruit above. Because of the northern one [Lilit], who was born under the divine throne, the legs of the latter collapsed and became a bit shorter, and the smell of each one reached the other: the smell of the male reached the female and the smell of the female reached the male, through Gamaliel and the ancient snake Nahashiel.⁵² Ever since, the snakes gained power and received the form of biting snakes.⁵³

⁴⁷ According to another passage (*ibid.*, 260), ten evil emanations emanated after or from the seven good emanations that had initially emanated from *teshuvah* (*u-min hazayin va-hala neetslu eser katot hatigrah*). Three of these evil emanations were destroyed (i.e., Qamtiel, Bliel, and Itiel), whereas the remaining seven engaged in a continuous battle against the seven good angels.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 250–51.

⁴⁹ That is, they were born androgynous, a notion reflected in various traditions that are found in both rabbinic and kabbalistic sources.

⁵⁰ That is, in the upper, spiritual and in the lower, corporeal worlds.

⁵¹ Both Samael and Lilit are called “Northern,” based on the verse in Joel 2:20 and on the Midrash (for a reference, see Hacoheh, *Maamar*, 251 n. 4).

⁵² On these figures, see Hacoheh, *Maamar*, 252 n. 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 251–52:

אמנם ארמו לך כי סבת כל הקנאות אשר בין אלה השרים הנזכרים ובין השרים מן' כתות, כתות המלאכים הקדושים הנקראים שומרי החומות, היא המעוררת הקנאה והשנאה בין מערכת השמים והחיללים שהם צבא המרום היא צורה אחת מיוחדת לסמאל והיא לילית והיא כדמות צורת נקבה וסמאל כמו צורת אדם וליילית כדמות חוה. וגם שניהם נולדו תולדה רוחנית דופרצונים כנגד צורת אדם והוה ממטה ומעלה שתי צורות תאומים. וסמאל והוה סבתא היא צפונית הם אצולים תחת כסא הכבוד והעון גרם לאולת הזאת למען בוששה ולמען כלימתה למען תחרב ולא תעשה פרי למעלה כי היתה סבה גורמת באמצעות הצפונית שבבראת תחת כסא הכבוד שנתמוטטו ונתמעטו קצת רגלי הכסא והגיע ריח אלו לאלו ריח של זכר לנקבה וריח של נקבה לזכר באמצעות גמליאל ונחש הקדמוני נחשיאל. מאז ועד עתה גברו הנחשים ונעשו צורת נחשים נושכים [. . .]

Compare *ibid.*, 262–64.

How exactly the erotic relationship between Samael and Lilit caused the war between the forces of good and the forces of evil is unclear. One tradition in Hacoheh's treatise mentions "a great jealousy" between Samael and Ashmeday, king of the demons, over the younger Lilit (*lilit zeirta*), the wife of Ashmeday;⁵⁴ this jealousy brought about a war, which also involved a dispute between the younger and elder Lilit. Yet here too, the relation between the romantic quarrels of the demons, on the one hand, and the battle between them and the good angels, on the other, is not given any clear explanation.

The second point in need of emphasizing is that in Hacoheh's treatise it is said that all emanations are spiritual and have no corporeal forms whatsoever.⁵⁵ Moreover, it is stated that in essence, the evil emanations on the left are only relatively evil, since they ultimately originate in the divine world itself, more precisely, in the third *sefirah* of *binah*:

Their intention is [directed] at the Lord of all, who has created them according to his will and volition from the root of the aforementioned emanations that had emanated from the power of the emanation of *teshuvah* . . .

Their foundation and work is true and honest; they utter no dishonest words, nor are there any lies or falsehood among them.⁵⁶

According to another explanation, God created two worlds: first, he created the world of the ten *sefirot*, "a world which is all good" (*olam shekulo tov*); and then he created a world "which is all bad" (*olam shekulo ra*). Concerning the latter, it is stated that

although it has no share in the world which is all good, its emanation does not begin in a bad emanation; this is what we said at the beginning of our discussion, namely, that he chooses only good. And [even] if after that good, he created from it a bad [world], our understanding does not grasp the depth of this hidden secret, for it is sealed.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid., 260–61.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 252–55.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 250–51:

[. . .] אמנם כוונתם לאדון הכל שבראם כרצונו וחפצו משורש האצילות שזכרנו למעלה אשר נאצלו מכה אצילות התשובה. [. . .] אמנם יסודם ועבודתם באמת ובתמים אין עולה בפייהם ואין שקר וכזב ביניהם.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 259:

ואנפי"י שאין לו חלק ונחלה בעולם שכלו טוב, אין התחלת אצילותו מאצילות רע והוה מה שאמרנו בתחלת דברינו שאינו בוחר זולתי בטוב. ואם אחר הטוב ההוא יצר רע ממנו אין דעתנו משגת עומק הסוד הזה הנעלם כי חתום הוא.

III. SIMILARITIES

Having analyzed al-Ḥāmidī's cosmogonic myth and Hacoheh's traditions concerning "the emanation on the left," we are now in a better position to compare our two texts. We will first highlight the similarities and then the differences between them (Sec. IV), and conclude with a discussion of the historical value of these similarities and differences. This final discussion will likewise include a few methodological observations on the notion of "influence."

To begin with, both the twelfth-century al-Ḥāmidī and the thirteenth-century Rabbi Isaac Hacoheh present us with a cosmological scheme of ten emanating entities: in al-Ḥāmidī's work, these are the ten intellects; and in Hacoheh's treatise, these are the ten *sefirot*. More significantly, in both cases the intellects or *sefirot* are perceived as dynamic and mythic figures. Now the scheme of ten intellects was introduced into the world of medieval philosophy by the famous Muslim philosopher al-Fārābī, who died in 950 CE.; this scheme was then adopted by the well-known Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 1037 CE.),⁵⁸ and was incorporated by his Ismā'īlī contemporary, Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (died after 1020 CE.), into his own theological system.⁵⁹ From al-Kirmānī, who was active in Fatimid Egypt (among other areas), the notion of ten intellects passed on to the Ṭayyibī-Ismā'īlī tradition in the Yemen. To the best of our knowledge, al-Ḥāmidī, who predated Hacoheh by about a century, was the first writer to integrate the cosmological scheme of ten emanating beings into a mythic framework, such as would later become the hallmark of many kabbalistic systems.⁶⁰

Furthermore, in the mythic cosmogonies of both al-Ḥāmidī and Hacoheh, a crisis occurs at the third level of the divine hierarchy, be it the rank of the third intellect (al-Ḥāmidī) or that of the *sefirah teshuvah/binah* (Hacoheh). This crisis involves or results in the emanation of evil forces, which are placed on the left side of the divine world.⁶¹ Thus, in both works a dualist system is

⁵⁸ See the discussions and references in Majid Fakhry, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 111–66; David C. Reisman, "Al-Fārābī and the Philosophical Curriculum," and Robert Wisnovsky, "Avicenna and the Avicennian Tradition," both in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 52–71, 92–136.

⁵⁹ See De Smet, *La quiétude*; Paul E. Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī: Ismaili Thought in the Age of al-Ḥākim* (London: Tauris, in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 1999).

⁶⁰ See De Smet, *La quiétude*, 304–7, where a comparison is drawn between the ten *sefirot* of kabbalah and the ten intellects of al-Kirmānī. However, it is only in al-Ḥāmidī's work that the ten intellects are perceived as mythic entities, in a very similar way to what one finds in many kabbalistic writings.

⁶¹ Note that in Hacoheh's treatise (*Maamar*, 250), the emanation of the seven evil commanders and their armies is said to have occurred "in one moment and by means of one [divine creative] saying" (*berega ehad u-veamaamar ehad*). Similarly, al-Ḥāmidī (*Kitāb kanz al-walad*, 66, 133) emphasizes that the whole cosmogonic process that he describes in his work—"from the moment when the world of creation [*ʿalam al-ibdāʿ*, that is, the world of the ten intellects] appeared by

conceived in which the forces of good are in constant conflict with the forces of evil. This conflict originates in the divine world itself, it is manifested on earth and in the framework of human history, and it will only be resolved at the end of time. However, the dualist system is ultimately created by the one and same God and, accordingly, the evil emanations within it are in essence good. Al-Ḥāmidī stresses that “evil has no source in creation [in the world of the ten intellects]”;⁶² and similarly, in Hacoheh’s treatise it is emphasized that “the world which is all bad” originates in a good rather than in a bad emanation.⁶³ In addition, in both works it is claimed that the intentions of the evil protagonists were initially positive: the third intellect, according to al-Ḥāmidī, simply desired to attain a rank that was not his, that is, the rank of the second intellect; and Samael, according to Hacoheh, “was not called evil by nature, but rather only wished to attach himself [or devote himself, *lehittadabek*] and to draw ever closer to an emanation that was not of his kind.”⁶⁴ It seems that al-Ḥāmidī and Hacoheh were seeking to preclude a more radical understanding of their dualist myths, one that would posit an absolute evil bereft of any positive qualities; or perhaps they were trying to mitigate and moderate an already existing, radical tradition of this sort.

It is also significant that our Shiite and Jewish authors view the conflict in the divine world as the source and as the reflection of the earthly battle between the Shiite-Ismaʿīlī community and their Muslim Sunnite rivals (al-Ḥāmidī) or between the Jewish people and *Edom*, that is, the Christians (Hacoheh). This battle, in its worldly and spiritual dimensions, will only end at the messianic age; hence the importance of eschatology and messianism in both works.⁶⁵ One may add that the notion of “a chosen community”—an

means of the [divine creative] word ‘be!,’” to the crisis in the divine world, to the emergence of the celestial spheres and the sublunar world itself—occurred faster than “the glance of an eye” (*ka-lamḥ al-baṣar*, to which al-Ḥāmidī adduces the verse in Qurʾān 54:50). The notion according to which creation (at least the creation of the upper, spiritual worlds) takes place all at once through God’s creative word appears in other Ismaʿīlī works as well; in these works, the phrase *ka-lamḥ al-baṣar* and the verse in Qurʾān 54:50 appear as well. See, e.g., Samuel M. Stern, “The Earliest Cosmological Doctrines of Ismaʿīlism,” in *Studies in Early Ismaʿīlism*, Max Schloessinger Memorial Series 1 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983), 13; Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ wa-khullān al-wafāʾ*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1957), 3:352. On *kun* (be!) and its importance in Islamic mysticism, see Sara Sviri, “*Kun*—the Existence-Bestowing Word in Islamic Mysticism: A Survey of Texts on the Creative Power of Language,” in *The Poetics of Grammar and the Metaphysics of Sound and Sign*, ed. Sergio La Porta and David Shulman, Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture 6 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 35–67; on *kun* in Ismaʿīlī thought and Andalusī Sunnī mysticism, see Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 33–76.

⁶² See above at 153.

⁶³ See above at 162.

⁶⁴ Hacoheh, *Maamar*, 251: לא נקרא רשע מפני עצמו אלא שהוא רופא להחיותם ולהתקרב בקרבה גדולה אל אצילות שאשי מני.

⁶⁵ Concerning *Kanz al-walad*, see above; as to Hacoheh’s treatise, see *Maamar*, 253, 258, 261, 263–64.

elect minority that enjoys an intimate relationship with God and, consequently, suffers the persecutions of jealous enemies only to be saved in the messianic age—this notion is common to both the Jewish and Shiite medieval traditions, particularly in their mystical and esoteric formulations.⁶⁶ Perhaps the common conception of a historical crisis and future redemption may help us understand why al-Ḥāmidī's *Kanz al-walad* shares another idea with Hacoheh's work (or with many other kabbalistic and rabbinic sources, for that matter): that of the believer's ability and responsibility to assist the divine world in its process of rehabilitation. As stated above, al-Ḥāmidī perceives the restoration of the divine world to its pristine state as dependent upon the faith and actions of the Ismā'īlī believers themselves. This idea is extremely radical when compared to other conceptions of man-God relationship in medieval Islamic mysticism; viewing the divine world as having gone through a crisis and, therefore, as being in desperate need of man's help would indeed appear as sheer blasphemy to most mystics in Islam. However, the perception of man's active and even theurgic role vis-à-vis the divine world is commonplace in traditions from the rabbinic period onward and particularly in kabbalah.⁶⁷ A passage from Hacoheh's treatise will serve to illustrate the similarities in this context between the worldviews of al-Ḥāmidī and Hacoheh:

We have also received [a tradition] concerning this matter according to which the attribute of *malkhut* [kingdom] has, in addition, three heads (*rashim*) in the image of three pillars (*amudim*).⁶⁸ The latter carry her [*malkhut*], perform her work, and guard her from all sides. In fear and in silence, trembling, they turn the chair (*hakise*) from one emanation to the other until [they reach] *yedid hashem*,⁶⁹ who shows her his fondness and kisses her through *yesod olam*.⁷⁰ From there the commanders of *hesed* and *gevurah* receive her in fear and in great, awe-inspiring, wondrous silence, while

⁶⁶ See, e.g., Krinis, "Idea of the Chosen People," and "Galut and Ghayba: The Exile of Israel and the Occultation of the Shī'ī Imam-Messiah—a Comparative Study of Judah Halevi and Early Imāmi-Shī'ī Writers," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 40 (2013): 245–99; Meir M. Bar-Asher, "On Judaism and the Jews in Early Shi'ī Religious Literature" [in Hebrew], *Peamim* 61 (1994): 16–36.

⁶⁷ See, e.g., Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 156–99; Yehuda Liebes, "De natura Dei: On the Development of the Jewish Myth," in *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism*, trans. Batya Stein, SUNY Series in Judaica (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993), 1–64; Charles Mopsik, *Les grands textes de la Cabale: Les rites qui font dieu; pratiques religieuses et efficacité théurgique dans la Cabale, des origines au milieu du XVIII^e siècle*, Collection les dix paroles (Paris: Verdier, 1993).

⁶⁸ *Malkhut* is the last and tenth *sefirah*. The view presented here, namely, that below the ten *sefirot* there are three more emanations, is rather idiosyncratic. Perhaps Hacoheh is attempting here to reconcile the scheme of the ten *sefirot* with the Jewish tradition concerning God's thirteen attributes.

⁶⁹ "The friend of God," that is, *tiferet* (beauty), the sixth *sefirah*.

⁷⁰ "The foundation of the world," the ninth *sefirah*.

trembling. *Hesed* and *gevurah*,⁷¹ who are the inner emanations, receive her, and it is as if great rivers of water gush forth from them or flares of fire, the flame of God. She becomes hidden among them and concealed from all emanations, until the commander of *binah* and his soldiers come; they receive her in fear and in sublime silence, trembling, until they bring the chair to the divine throne, which is ascribed to *teshuvah*, whence his greatest soldiers appear. The commander of *hokhmah*⁷² presides over all. In tremor, shuddering and trembling excessively, they place the chair in the bosom of ancient *hokhmah*. The latter receives her with the words “Come, bride,” playing with her like a father who plays with his only daughter among sons. *Rom hamaalot*⁷³ causes his blessing to flow on her through the father, for not every emanation is permitted to see spiritually and to perceive in a supreme way save through *hokhmah* and *binah*. Having received the blessing and playing, she bows down and prostrates herself before the awe-inspiring, sublime, and unique divine throne; the chair of *malkhut* then rolls and turns through all the unique commanders, returning again from one emanation to the other, as in the beginning. She finally resides between the two cherubs that are her arms.⁷⁴

This great, powerful flow, which is a pleasure for the inner souls and happiness for the spiritual bodies—all this was [true] when the land of Israel was still inhabited and the holy people were settled on it, when the [earthly] temple was aligned with the [heavenly] temple, one corresponding to the other; the [earthly] high priest officiated in correspondence with the [heavenly] high priest in holiness, purity, and fear, trembling, knowing how to concentrate his complete intention on each and every emanation, the external as well as the inner ones, causing a divine flow by the secret of the holy seraphim. . . . The poets [Levites] as well, in accordance with their rank and perception, concentrated their hearts on God,⁷⁵ placing their fingers on the openings and cords of the violins, which arose songs and melodies. Then the blessing was aroused and the *shekhinah*⁷⁶ rested upon them—each person according to his work and perception. It was then that the earthly Jerusalem and the earthly temple became the desire and delight of all nations, and the fear of [Jerusalem’s] inhabitants governed all those who saw it and heard about it.⁷⁷

⁷¹ “Grace” and “severity,” the fourth and fifth *sefirot*, respectively.

⁷² “Wisdom,” the second *sefirah*.

⁷³ “The highest grade,” either *keter* (crown, the first *sefirah*), or perhaps *hokhmah*.

⁷⁴ That is, *netsah* (eternity) and *hod* (majesty), the seventh and eighth *sefirot* respectively. The upper *shekhinah* (see n. 76) parallels the lower *shekhinah* that rests in between the cherubs, above the holy ark in the temple; see Hacoheh, *Maamar*, 247 n. 1.

⁷⁵ *Hamaqom*, literally, “the place.”

⁷⁶ The *shekhinah* was identified in kabbalah with the tenth *sefirah*, *malkhut*.

⁷⁷ Hacoheh, *Maamar*, 246–47:

ועוד קבלנו בזה כי למדת המלכות עוד ג' ראשים והם בדמות ג' עמודים נושאים אליה עובדים עבודתה ושומרים משמרתה מסביב ומסבבים הכסא ביראה וברעדה ובשתיקה מאצילות לאצילות עד ידי ה' המחבבה והמנשקה באמצעות יסוד עולם ומשם מקבלות אותה שרי החסד והגבורה ביראה וברעדה ושתיקה גדולה נוראה נפלאה. והחסד והגבורה שהם האצילות הפנימי מקבלים אליה ומתגלגלים מהם כדמות נחלי מים אדירים וכדמות רשפי אש שלהבת יי. והיא נסתרת ונעלמת ביניהם מכל אצילות עד בוא שר הבינה וחייליו ומקבלים אותה ביראה ורעדה ושתיקה נשגבה עד הגיעם הכסא אצל כסא הכבוד המיוחס אל התשובה ומשם יופיעו רבי חייליו. ושר החכמה על כולם. ומניחים הכסא ביוע ברדת וברעדה יתירה בחזק החכמה הקדומה ומקבלה בלשון בואי כלה ומשתעשע בה כאב המשתעשע עם בתו יחידה בין הבנים. ורום המעלות משפיע ברכתו בה באמצעות

According to this passage, the flow of divine abundance upon the Jewish people and the world at large through the tenth *sefirah* of *malkhut* is dependent on the existence of the earthly temple in Jerusalem and on the ritual performed therein by the high priest. In other words, the religious activity of the Jewish people directly influences the condition of the divine realm and, specifically, it enables the ascension of *malkhut* to the uppermost echelons of that realm. As mentioned above, the notion of man's influence on the divine sphere is characteristic of the kabbalistic worldview, and the description of *malkhut*'s ascension to the upper levels of the divine world is well known in kabbalistic literature.⁷⁸ This description brings to mind the eschatological fate of the fallen, tenth intellect in al-Ḥāmidī's *Kanz al-walad*: this fate is directly linked to the religious-historical circumstances of God's chosen community, the Ismā'īlīs. The ascension of the tenth intellect will occur at the end of time with the advent of the messianic figure of the Shia—the *mahdī* (the rightly guided one) or *qā'im* (he who rises), who will reestablish Shiite rule over the entire world.

IV. DIFFERENCES

Any comparison between two texts must take into account the differences between them; often, these differences are no less significant than the similarities. What are the diverging points between Hacoen's treatise and al-Ḥāmidī's work?

In terms of literary style and thematic, al-Ḥāmidī's *Kanz al-walad* is a long, well-structured, and coherent work, in line with the conventions of medieval Arabic philosophical and theological literature. In contradistinction, Hacoen's treatise is short,⁷⁹ unorganized, and eclectic; it is quite evident that Hacoen was attempting to integrate diverse traditions drawn from various sources, written as well as oral ones. Thus, Hacoen states that he found the

האב כי אין רשות לכל אצילות לראות ולהשיג שום ראייה רוחנית ולא שום השגה עליונית זולתי באמצעות הכמה ובינה. ואחר קבלת הברכה והשעשועים סרעת ומשתחזה לפני כסא הכבוד הנורא הנשגב המיוחד ואז כסא המלכות מתגלגל וסובב באמצעות כל השרים המיוחדים וחוזרת חלילה מאצילות לאצילות כבתחלה ושוכנת בין שני הכרובים שהם זרועותיה. ותוקף השפע הגדול הזה שהוא עונג הנשמות הפנימיות ושמתת הגויות הרוחניות, כל זה היה בזמן שארץ ישראל בישובה ועם הקדש יושבים עליה ומקדש כנגד מקדש מכון זה כנגד זה כהן גדול משמש כנגד כהן גדול בקדושה ובטהרה ביראה וברעדה יודע לכיין כונה שלימה בכל אצילות ואצילות חיצוניים ופנימיים ומשפיע בסוד שרפי קודש [...] וגם המשוררים כפי מעלתם והשגתם מכוונים באצבעותיהם בנקבי הכנורות והנימון המעוררים השיר והניגון מכוונים לבם למקום ואז הברכה מתעוררת והשכינה שורה עליהם איש כפי עבודתו וכפי השגתו, ואז ירושלם ומקדש של מטה תאווה והמדה לכל העמים ואימת יושביה ויראתם מושלת על כל רואיה על כל שומעיה [...].

⁷⁸ See, e.g., Green, *Keter*, 151–65; Elliot R. Wolfson, *Luminal Darkness: Imaginal Gleanings from Zoharic Literature* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2007), 228–57; Tzahi Weiss, *Cutting the Shoots: The Worship of the Shekhinah in the World of Early Kabbalistic Literature* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2015, forthcoming), 51 n. 32 and bibliography.

⁷⁹ Whereas al-Ḥāmidī's work is over 300 pages long, Hacoen's treatise has just twenty pages (in the printed editions).

traditions concerning “the emanation on the left” in a booklet that the elders of the city of Arles (Provence) had once shown him. It was old “and its writing was coarse, different from our writing [*quntres ahat hi mishanim rabot u-ktivato gasah meshunah miktivatenu*].” It was written by a certain rabbi from Jerusalem named Matsliah ben Platya and was brought to Arles by Rabbi Gershon who hailed from Damascus. Hacoen adds that the material that he had found in this mysterious booklet contained exactly the same teachings as those that he later received from his brother, Rabbi Jacob Hacoen.⁸⁰ Whatever the historical reliability of these statements, it is clear from his treatise that Rabbi Isaac Hacoen derived his materials from different sources and that he endeavored (perhaps unsuccessfully) to incorporate them into one coherent system.⁸¹ Furthermore, contrary to the theosophical and theological aims of al-Ḥāmidī in *Kanz al-walad*, the main objective of Hacoen seems to be angelology and demonology; he appears to be more interested in explaining the origin of angles and demons and how one may fight or manipulate them through magical means than in any detailed theosophical discussion.⁸²

Finally, al-Ḥāmidī’s *Kanz al-walad* reflects in a clearer way various pre-Islamic “Gnostic” traditions.⁸³ For instance, al-Ḥāmidī maintains that the third intellect had sinned and fell to the bottom of the divine world, and likewise holds that our physical world originates in the evil forces of the left. These two beliefs are absent from Hacoen’s text: a cosmogonic fall is attributed neither to Samael (though he is said to have sinned) nor to the tenth *sefirah*, *malkhut* (though her ascension to the upper realm of the *sefirot* system brings to mind the final redemption of the fallen, tenth intellect in al-Ḥāmidī’s work). In addition, according to Hacoen’s treatise, our physical world emanates from the seven good angels, not from the bad ones.⁸⁴ The blunt “Gnostic” elements in al-Ḥāmidī’s work and in Ṭayyibī literature at large are not surprising: from an early stage in its formation, the Shiite world was very receptive of “Gnostic” traditions, serving as a channel through which these traditions passed into the world of Islam.⁸⁵ Conversely, the impact of Islamic

⁸⁰ See Hacoen, *Maamar*, 248–49.

⁸¹ Compare, e.g., the tradition concerning “the emanation on the left” (*ibid.*, 249–50) with that found on 260; or the tradition concerning Samael and Ashmeday (255–57) with that found on 260–61.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 252–58.

⁸³ On the problems related to the use of this term, see mainly Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2003).

⁸⁴ The demons in our world, however, are naturally all under the influence and control of Samael; see Hacoen, *Maamar*, 258.

⁸⁵ See Halm, *Islamische Gnosis*, esp. 7–26, and *Kosmologie*, 17 n. 75, 115–27, and index s.v. “Gnosticism”; Henry Corbin, “From the Gnosis of Antiquity to Ismaili Gnosis,” trans. James W. Morris, in *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, Islamic Texts and Contexts (London: Kegan Paul, 1983),

orthodoxy and theology appears to have taken its toll even on a bold author such as al-Ḥāmidī: his work is much more theological and much less mythical than Hacoheh's text, as is evident, for example, in the latter's discussions of Samael and Lilit.

V. CONCLUSION

What can we make of the similarities and differences between al-Ḥāmidī's cosmogonic myth and Hacoheh's traditions concerning "the emanation on the left"? Beyond the phenomenological interest one might find in them, what is their historical value?

On the one hand, it seems incorrect to speak here of any direct Ismā'īlī influence on Hacoheh's text or on its sources.⁸⁶ Despite the fact that al-Ḥāmidī's work is earlier than Hacoheh's treatise, an influence of the former on the latter is hard to demonstrate, as there are no traces of Arabic vocabulary or Ismā'īlī terms in Hacoheh's *Maamar [teshuvah] al haatsilut hasmalit*. On the other hand, the presence of a mythic, cosmogonic-cosmological scheme of ten emanating beings in non-Jewish sources that predate the appearance of kabbalistic literature is quite significant, especially in view of the fact that these sources belong to an intellectual tradition that is known to have had its impact on various aspects of medieval Jewish thought. In other words, while the differences delineated above (see Sec. IV) make it clear that no direct influence of one text on the other can be established, the similarities (Sec. III) prove that there is more here than a mere phenomenological or structural resemblance. It appears that in the current context we need to find a third path, as it were, one that would allow us to compare our two works and ascertain their broad historical-cultural nexus, without assuming, however, a direct impact of one work on the other.

More specifically, and as explained above,⁸⁷ there are three main elements that bind *Maamar [teshuvah] al haatsilut hasmalit* and *Kanz al-walad* together: a cosmological scheme consisting of ten emanating entities, a mythical perception of this scheme, and a dualistic or semi-dualistic conception according to which the evil powers in creation emanated at the third level and on the left side of the divine world.⁸⁸ These elements or features can hardly be

151–93; Geo Widengren, "The Gnostic Technical Language in the Rasa'il Iḥwān al-Ṣafa'," in *Actas do IV Congresso de Estudos Árabes e Islâmicos, Coimbra-Lisboa 1 a 8 de Setembro de 1968* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 181–203; Steve M. Wasserstrom, "The Moving Finger Writes: Muḡhīra B. Sa'īd's Islamic Gnosis and the Myths of Its Rejection," *History of Religions* 25 (1985): 1–29; De Smet, "Éléments chrétiens."

⁸⁶ The possibility of an Ismā'īlī influence on Hacoheh was raised by Idel, "The *Sefirot*," 270 n. 169.

⁸⁷ See above at 157.

⁸⁸ See above at 163–64.

dismissed as a mere coincidence in the history of Jewish and Islamic mystical ideas; rather, they seem to point to some form of intellectual contacts between the Jewish and Ismāʿīlī worlds.

Although the exact nature of these contacts remains unclear, there is no doubt as to their existence. It is worth drawing attention here to the Hebrew quotation that is found in the oeuvre of the aforementioned Ismāʿīlī author Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī. This quotation includes, *inter alia*, the famous rabbinical dictum according to which “the world was created by ten [divine] sayings.”⁸⁹ Al-Kirmānī interprets this saying as referring to his own cosmological scheme of ten emanating intellects; the saying, in turn, was to play a central role in kabbalah where it was linked to the concept of the ten *sefirot*. From the analyses of this curious quotation carried out by Idel and De Smet,⁹⁰ it is evident that as early as the beginning of the eleventh century, Jews and Ismāʿīlīs were exchanging traditions and ideas regarding the Neoplatonic and Aristotelian-inspired system of ten emanating beings. However, the mythic and dualistic (or semi-dualistic) dimensions of this system would only appear a century later, in the work of al-Ḥāmidī. Whether or not al-Ḥāmidī, who was indeed influenced by al-Kirmānī’s writings, was reproducing or reformulating mythic and dualistic conceptions that were already known in al-Kirmānī’s time cannot be given (as yet) a clear-cut answer. What is clear, nevertheless, is that very similar conceptions—cosmological, mythic, and dualistic—reappear in Hacoheh’s treatise in the thirteenth century. One may conclude, therefore, that one of the most important themes in theosophical kabbalah—that of the mythical ten *sefirot*—has its origins in the twelfth century, if not earlier; and that these origins cannot be fully understood without referring to the contacts between Jews and Ismāʿīlīs. Conversely, the radical thought of al-Ḥāmidī, with its roots in al-Kirmānī’s oeuvre, likewise cannot be fully fathomed without taking into account the subtle links between the Jewish and Ismāʿīlī milieus.

Hence, rather than being perceived as a “source of ___,” al-Ḥāmidī’s work should be viewed as “evidence of ___”; in other words, given the great lacuna in our knowledge of Jewish mystical traditions in the centuries leading up to the emergence of kabbalah, al-Ḥāmidī’s *Kanz al-walad* serves as a window through which we may gaze at a world that is otherwise concealed from our eyes. In this world, mystical traditions passed from the Islamic milieu to the Jewish one and vice versa; this passage occurred in the form of a cultural dialogue, giving rise to such similar yet disparate works as *Kanz al-walad* and *Maamar [teshuvah] al haatsilut hasmalit*. Certainly, these two works each derived from many different sources and incorporated diverse traditions; the

⁸⁹ See Mishnah, Avot 5:1: בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם.

⁹⁰ See the references above in n. 9.

Gnostic elements in al-Ḥāmidī's work and those dealing with Samael and Lilit in Hacoheh's treatise serve as good examples of this fact. At the same time, al-Ḥāmidī's work can be seen as a mirror reflecting intellectual processes that also occurred in the world of Jewish mysticism and that yielded a mystical discourse similar to that found in *Kanz al-walad*. Accordingly, the writings of al-Ḥāmidī and Hacoheh are products of a very similar intellectual environment, and as such shed light on one another.

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