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The Ontology, Arrangement, and Appearance of Paradise in Castilian Kabbalah in Light of Contemporary Islamic Traditions from al-Andalus

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Abstract: This study is a comparative analysis of the appearances of the lower and upper Paradise, their divisions, and the journeys to and within them, which appear in mystical Jewish and Islamic sources in medieval Iberia. Ibn al-‘Arabī’s vast output on the Gardens of divine reward and their divisions generated a number of instructive comparisons to the eschatological and theosophical writing about the same subject in early Spanish Kabbalah. Although there is no direct historical evidence that kabbalists knew of such Arabic works from the region Catalonia or Andalusia, there are commonalities in fundamental imagery and in ontological and exegetical assumptions that resulted from an internalization of similar patterns of thought. It is quite reasonable to assume that these literary corpora, both products of the thirteenth century, were shaped by common sources from earlier visionary literature. The prevalence of translations of religious writing about ascents on high, produced in Castile in the later thirteenth century, can help explain the sudden appearance of visionary literature on Paradise and its divisions in the writings of Jewish esotericists of the same region. These findings therefore enrich our knowledge of the literary, intellectual, and creative background against which these kabbalists were working when they chose to depict Paradise in the way that they did, at the time that they did.

Keywords: the book of Zohar; Moses de León; Castilian kabbalah; Paradise; the Garden of Eden; eschatology; Ibn al-‘Arabī; al-Futūḥāt al-Makiyyah; hekhalot; comparative mysticism

1. Introduction

In the history of Jewish literary depiction of Paradise and Hell, the second half of the thirteenth century proved a formative period. The Castilian kabbalists of the time conjured richly vivid descriptions of the aery pavilions of Paradise and the infernal rings of Hell. The most well known of these were attributed pseudepigraphically to the rabbinic sages of Antiquity and were written in a pseudo-Aramaic dialect. They were consolidated in the Zohar, the masterwork of medieval Kabbalah that would, in time, become canonical. Less famous, but also anonymous, Hebrew texts on this subject circulated during the same period. These included the treatise Seder Gan ‘Eden, and shorter visionary passages that purported to be from an ancient “Book of Enoch”, part of the ancient apocrypha associated with that biblical figure. A close reading of these works reveals their crucial role in the formation of an eschatology of the soul within the burgeoning theosophical Kabbalah of thirteenth-century Iberia. Ultimately, all these writings can be traced to a single Castilian kabbalist, R. Moses b. Shemtob de León, whose name is also inextricably bound up with the initial dissemination—and even composition—of the Zohar.

In these writings, the loci of divine retribution are treated within broader discussions on the fate of the human soul and on the emanated Godhead, both of which were influenced by the Neoplatonism of

the Arab philosophers. In these two contexts, these spaces of ultimate reward are said to correspond to aspects of the divine soul and, in turn, to emanations or hypostases—the *sefirot*—of the Godhead and its dynamic flux. The divine plane of existence therefore meets the earthly one in the eschatological Paradise, an intermediate realm that allows for passage from one side to the other. In this biplanar view of all existence, it comes as no surprise that Paradise itself is split into two halves of identical design: there is an earthly Paradise with a latitude and longitude, and a heavenly Paradise of Edenic castles in the sky. Owing to the mostly midrashic or exegetical nature of medieval kabbalistic literature, this notion of a multidimensional Paradise had to be grounded in Scriptural exegesis. In the endeavor to endow Scripture with layers of meaning that reach beyond the immediate historical-contextual one, Genesis 3 was read using allegorical, figurative, typological, and symbolic strategies in order to interpret the Garden of Eden as a spiritual realm, and even an aspect of the Godhead.

Previous scholarship has suggested that this outpouring of speculative kabbalistic writing on Paradise was a delayed amplification of a faint echo of the late antique visionary literature (the *Hekhalot* and *Merkavah* corpus), with additional input from pre-kabbalistic trends in western European Jewish esotericism. The unique characteristics of these texts, however, not only render this an oversimplification, but underscore the necessity of properly situating them historically and culturally. I have shown at length elsewhere that we can better grasp the genesis and features of this corpus in light of the scientific and geographic writing of medieval Christians and Muslims about the nature and location of the earthly Garden, which in Jewish hands often turned mythological or symbolic; the rich literature of adventures in *terrae incognitae*, with their exotic climes and fantastic creatures, such as the ever-popular romance of Alexander the Great; the medieval Jewish visionary texts describing the in-body visitation of rabbinic sages to the Garden of Eden and Gehenna; and more (Bar Asher 2019).

In this study, I set out to demonstrate the importance of another, oft-neglected context in the scholarly study of Spanish Kabbalah, namely, the neighboring Islamic cultural milieu of al-Andalus. Thinkers there had a deep well to draw from in delineating the sights and sounds of Paradise and cataloging its divisions and degrees: the Quran, the hadith literature, and the more contemporary legends, especially concerning Muhammad's night journey to Jerusalem and thence to the celestial Garden (*al-'isrā' wa-'l-mi'rāj* [Quran 17:1]). Informed by medieval Islamic theology and philosophy, which absorbed neo-Aristotelian and Neoplatonic conceptions of the soul's immortality, the Andalusians tended to spiritualize the Garden and assign it an eschatological role.

It is my contention here that the writings of one prolific Andalusian in particular, Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī (1165–1240), who died in Damascus in 1240, can throw new light on these kabbalistic treatments of Paradise. In his *Meccan Revelations* (*al-Futūḥāt al-Makiyyah*), Ibn al-'Arabī distinguishes between a physical Garden for the body and a spiritual one for the soul, which accords with Neoplatonic ontology and the Platonic dualism of body and soul. The earthly Garden is not a place to enjoy mere pleasures of the flesh but to bask in bliss of the spirit, to experience spiritual ecstasies that culminate in beholding the divine light—and even God Himself—in a celestial gathering.

This study consists of four parts. First, I briefly survey the state of scholarship on the historical background of medieval Jewish mystical writing about Paradise; the influence of Islamic sources on speculative writing about Paradise in Western Europe; and the possible connections between Ibn al-'Arabī's works and kabbalistic literature. In the following section, I enumerate the main elements of the terrestrial and celestial Paradises in Castilian Kabbalah of the second half of the thirteenth century, and of Ibn al-'Arabī's comprehensive and complex writing on the paradisiacal Gardens, particularly in his *Meccan Revelations*. After setting this stage, I dedicate the next part of this study to the many and major similarities between the two. Finally, I explore potential literary contacts that would account for these convergences, given the absence of any historical evidence that medieval Jewish esotericists of the thirteenth-century Iberian Peninsula read the Arabic writings of contemporary Islamic mystics and esotericists. These are meant to pave the way for further scholarly consideration of possible literary contacts between the kabbalists of northern Spain and the Andalusian mystics to the south.

2. Literature Review

The Zoharic and related literature depicts Paradise as consisting of stations, gradations, or levels which, recruiting an ancient term, are often called *hekhalot* (lit. “palaces”). Gershom Scholem surmised that the rich kabbalistic descriptions of these *hekhalot* originated with the first kabbalists, who to his historiographical thinking were active in late twelfth-century Provence and owed some debt to the contemporary mysticism of the “German Pietists” (Scholem 1934; 1945; Dan 1968). Recent scholarship, however, has questioned Scholem’s broader historiographical assumptions and theories, with ramifications for his narrower speculation on topics such as this as well (Bar Asher 2019). Isaiah Tishby pushed back the source of inspiration for the Zohar’s *hekhalot* (and angelology) to the *Hekhalot* literature of late Antiquity, while also speculating that another unknown source was used (Tishby 1989; cf. Dan 1993; Elior 2010; Dan 2017). However, a careful reading of the pertinent Zoharic material reveals stark differences from the ancient visionary literature, and quite limited conceptual, terminological, or literary borrowing (Idel 2005; Bar Asher 2019). It is possible that a number of works on the periphery of the *Hekhalot* literature, grouped by their kinship in genre and dating, might have helped frame the kabbalistic imagining of Paradise, and these are *Seder Rabbah di-Vereshit* (Schäfer 2004), *Massekhet Hekhalot / Ma’aseh Merkavah* (Jellinek 1853; Farber 1987), and others (Busi 1996). Along the same lines, scholars have proposed linking the Zoharic portrayal of Paradise to medieval elaborations of a Talmudic legend, in which a very much alive sage, R. Joshua b. Levi, enters the Garden of Eden (Ginzberg 1913; cf. Gaster 1893). Recent studies have looked at how Franco-German versions of this legend developed in connection with Christian accounts of journeys to the next world and with the intensifying Jewish valorization of martyrdom (Shepkaru 2002; Kushelevsky 2010). One scholar has further proposed that this legend was a critical source given a kabbalistic spin in the Zohar (Perry 2010). In trying to account for Iberian phenomena, this explanation privileges the literary output of western Christendom, mediated through Midrash produced specifically in the cultural sphere of Ashkenaz.

The present study argues that to better grasp the depiction of Paradise in Castilian Kabbalah we should look not to western Christendom but to the western Islamicate. Already a century ago Miguel Asín Palacios called attention to Islamic influence on the speculative depictions of Paradise in Western Europe, more specifically on those found in Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy* and its sources (Asín Palacios 1919). To account for similarities between the epic poem and Islamic literary traditions about Muhammad’s miraculous night journey, he hypothesized that none other than Ibn al-‘Arabī was the conduit by which Dante or his Christian sources learned of those traditions. Shared motifs include the geometric design of Paradise as eight concentric circles, the nearly endless subdivisions, and the moral yardsticks dictating one’s assigned place (see also Gardiner 1989). In spite of Asín Palacios’ insistence on the closeness between Dante’s vision and Islamic tradition, the closer one examines the two the more one finds resemblances too general to be meaningful or no resemblances at all. Indeed, for over a century, scholars have taken many opportunities to pick apart his assumptions and findings (Cerulli 1949; Silverstein 1952; Gabrieli 1953; Cantarino 1965; Corti 2001; Ziolkowski 2007). Among other things, they have criticized his overemphasis on the contribution of Islamic sources to Dante’s *Divine Comedy* at the expense of earlier Christian visionary literature (Silverstein 1952; Himmelfarb 1983).

Even if Ibn al-‘Arabī cannot be fingered as Dante’s cultural ambassador, that does not mean he left no literary footprint in medieval Christendom. It has been surmised that copies of his works arrived in Europe from the East and were available to Christians in the second half of the thirteenth century in Catalonia (such as Ramon Llull) (Carra de Vaux 1923; Albarracín 2016). Of even greater relevance to this study, Ariel Bension, following on the work of Asín Palacios, claimed that Ibn al-‘Arabī himself was influenced by ancient Jewish visionary literature, Aggadah, and Geonic literature, and that although the Zohar’s authors were familiar with this material, they preferred “the distinctive Spanish garments in which Ibn Arabi clothed the ideas he took from them” (Bension 1932, p. 48). Although his speculation has no firm basis, and again the similarities—at best—belong to general form rather than to specific content, it has provoked scholars into rethinking what we know about these two bodies of

thought and their possible interrelationship. Today, we fortunately have more recent studies that point to the need to reassess the relationship between Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings and medieval theosophical Kabbalah (Sviri 1996; McGaha 1997; Pedaya 2002; Wolfson 2008; Ebstein 2014), as well as those that pinpoint parallels between his oeuvre and the Zohar (Kiener 1982; Wolfson 1990). It is my hope that the present study, working in this same direction, further demonstrates the necessity and fruitfulness of reading kabbalistic literature with Ibn al-‘Arabī in mind.

3. Depicting Paradise in Castilian Kabbalah and in the Mystical Writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī

The mostly anonymous Castilian kabbalistic texts from the period in question, set in a distinctly poetic and midrashic style, immerse the reader in a lush earthly Garden with borders and bowers, and provide the celestial schematics of the many-citadeled heavenly Garden. Although the powers of description and the specifics vary from one composition to the next, the tie that binds them all is the fundamental conceptualization of Paradise as split between two planes, with a Garden of Eden below and a Garden of Eden above. In these accounts, the two are structured in ways that resonate with the complex configuration of the emanated Godhead and of the heavenly hosts.

The concept of a split-level Paradise preceded the Castilian kabbalists in the works of the Catalanian kabbalist R. Moses Nahmanides (1194–1270). He formulated the theory of mirrored Gardens in his discussions of divine recompense, the most extensive of which can be found in the concluding chapters of his *Torat ha-Adam* (Nahmanides 1964, pp. 264–311). It is almost certain that his thinking was shaped by medieval Jewish Neoplatonism found in works like *Kitāb ma’ānī al-naḥs* (late 11th cent.), which lays out a two-stage theory of divine retribution under the influence of Arabic sources. Another key element in Nahmanides’ account is the concept of the soul donning a “garment” after the body dies, which sprang from a robust theory about the divine source of the human soul and its postmortem fate (Scholem 1955; Cohen-Aloro 1987; Wolfson 1990; Perani 1996; Bar Asher 2013). The Zohar and de Léon’s Hebrew writings greatly elaborate this concept of a spiritual “garment” that allows the soul to pass from one Paradise to the next, with souls putting on and removing “garments” continuously for a person’s entire lifetime, that is to say, even in this world. Passage between Gardens is also rooted in a singular theosophical exegesis of the Tree of Life in Genesis 3, which is identified as the axis mundi by which the human soul moves between ontological planes (Yisraeli 2010).

The lengthy Aramaic sections devoted to Paradise that are scattered throughout the Zohar share a basic architectural plan of seven *hekkhalot* or gradations arranged hierarchically, which correspond to the seven ascending potencies on the sefirotic tree of kabbalistic theosophy (Zohar I:38a–39b; II: 244b–262b). Other shorter literary units appear throughout the Zohar’s homilies on the Torah, as well as in the corpus known as *Midrash ha-Ne’elam*, printed alongside the body of the Zohar or as a separate work. Similar depictions appear in the Hebrew writings of Moses de Léon, in the passages on the “courtyards of the World to Come” in his *Sefer ha-Rimmon* (Moses de Leon 1988), in fragments of “the Book of Enoch” in *Mishkan ha-’Edut* (Moses de León 2013; Reeves and Reed 2018), and in *Seder Gan ‘Eden* attributed to the rabbinic sage R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus (Jellinek 1855; Scholem 1990; Moisés de León 2007). I have characterized, categorized, and chronologized these texts elsewhere, where I emphasize their common foundations and record their differences (Bar Asher 2019).

Visually speaking, there is much worthy of note in de Léon’s writings. First, there is a kind of travelogue of a celestial journey to the firmament atop the Garden, with movement between the four rings of heaven, each of which is located at a different cardinal endpoint, is colored by a separate hue, and is under the charge of an appointed angel who calls out letters of the Tetragrammaton. Another unique and new image is of Paradise constructed with three rings of concentric walls, with different groups of people inhabiting the intermural and adjoining courtyards. The walled-off spaces beginning with the curtain wall and ending in the innermost sanctum represent an ascending hierarchy of reward and of the spiritualization of the soul. The groups enumerated by de Léon as denizens of these precincts include “the pious of the nations”, “those martyred by the regime”, “innocent schoolchildren”, the profoundly righteous who did some wrong, the penitent, and more.

He also links Jewish religious praxis and his theosophical views with the populations designated for the ranked courtyards of Paradise. We are even told of the Messiah's future encounters with some of these groups, as in the dramatic account of the Messiah leaving the *hekhāl* called "the bird's nest", garbed in apocalyptic vengeance, to exact recompense from slayers of the righteous (Liebes 1993; Wolfson 1994).

Beside the visual aspects, these works have particular ideas in common: paradise having preexisted Creation, the two Paradises possessing the same form or model, and an axis mundi joining the two that allows for bidirectional movement. Moreover, the supernal Paradise and its multiple dimensions symbolize or otherwise represent the *sefirot* of the Godhead as conceived by theosophical Kabbalah, which also correspond to the earthly Paradise with its brick-and-mortar subdivisions. Furthermore, the divisions of the Garden, the population assignments, and the movement from one arena to another express a static or dynamic state of the *sefirot* reverberating through lower levels of existence. Theurgic shifts within Paradise, whether engendered by movement between the two planes or by the apocalyptic deeds of the Messiah, play a central role in kabbalistic literature and set it apart from all other Jewish eschatological or visionary writing. We should also mention the narratives and stories included in the Zohar's homilies on the Torah that include treks and mystical ascents to the lower Paradise or to the precincts of Heaven (Idel 1982; Meroz 2000; Wolski and Carmeli 2007). Most of these have a mythological cast, where an individual or fellowship on an expedition is turned into clothed spirits wandering from a physical place to the spirit-realm of divine forms.

Ibn al-'Arabī's intense preoccupation with eschatology and the afterlife is evident from a number of his works, which exerted immense influence on subsequent Islamic thought (Chittick 1988; Chodkiewicz 1986). In his voluminous *Meccan Revelations*, he works the many names and descriptions of Paradise in the Quran and the hadith tradition into a very creative and complex architecture of divine reward. An analysis of the relevant material shows that the book contains two adaptations of a hadith tradition, according to which Paradise is divided into seven or eight Gardens (*jannāt*) given names from Quranic verses (el-Ṣaleḥ 1971; Gardet 1960; Porter 2007; Abdel Haleem 2017). The underlying hadith is attributed to 'Abd Allāh Ibn 'Abbās, companion of Muhammad. One widespread version enumerates seven gardens (the ordering changes among tradents), whereas the version recorded by Al-Kisā'ī (al-Kisā'ī [1922] 1923, p. 17) includes an eighth (Tamari 1999; Lange 2017).

Ibn al-'Arabī inserts this reworked hadith about seven or eight Gardens into a framework of more basic divisions. First of all, he posits an ontological and epistemological bifurcation of paradisiacal reality: there is a sensible (*maḥsūsa*) and "coarse" Paradise, and an abstract (*ma'nawīyya*) and "rarefied" Paradise, which are conceived of in the same way that body and soul are integrated into a single entity (Ibn al-'Arabī 2010, p. 65). In addition, Paradise has a certain vitality, which is why it is called the "the abode of the living" (*al-darr al-ḥayawān*). In this connection, Ibn al-'Arabī invokes a hadith about four of Muhammad's loyal followers for whom the Garden yearned. In like fashion, he writes about four mystical-spiritual conditions (*aḥwāl*) that transmute the Garden in the presence of four types of people fit to enter: Muhammad, "the folk of the conditions", the faithful, and the heretics, including those who reject the existence of a sensible Garden. It bears noting here that in his *Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*), Ibn al-'Arabī interprets Quran 89:30, in which Allah invites the soul into his Garden, in mystical terms. Entry to the Garden is compared to man entering his own soul, whereby he gains two kinds of knowledge: "knowledge of Him through yourself, and knowledge of Him through yourself, with respect to Him, not to you" (Ibn 'Arabī 1946, p. 7; Abrahamov 2015, p. 61).

On top of this biplanar model, Ibn al-'Arabī further divides Paradise into three loci of reward, all termed "Gardens" and housing different groups in accordance with their degree: (1) the Garden of Divine Specification (*jannat ikhtisās*) "entered by children who have not reached the limit of deeds . . . from the time of birth until they complete six years. [. . .] the mad who have not had the rational faculty, the folk of cognitive *tawḥīd*, the folk of the gaps [between prophets]"; (2) the Garden of Inheritance (*jannat mīrāth*) "attained by all those I have mentioned as entering the Garden and by the faithful. It is the places that would have been designated for the folk of the Fire had they entered [the Garden]";

and (3) the Garden of Deeds (*jannat al-a'māl*), “within which people dwell in keeping with their deeds”, achievements, and mystical attainments (Chittick 1998, p. 399). The third, the Garden of Deeds, is further subdivided into degrees and divisions, and it is here that we find the seven- or eightfold division of walled gardens, the highest of which is termed the Garden of Eden (*jannat 'adn*). It is the description of this Garden that is among the theosophical pinnacles of the rich account of Paradise in Ibn al-'Arabī, because located in this supernal garden is the citadel that houses the Dune (*al-kaṭīb*) by which people will behold the “Truth”, meaning Allah (Ibn al-'Arabī 2010, pp. 65, 371).

Another main theme is the relationship between the observance of Sharia and the sites of specific recompense in these Gardens. A central hadith, repeatedly cited by Ibn al-'Arabī from the collection of al-Bukhārī, states that the Garden has eight gates (Lange 2016) that correspond to the eight central directives of Islam (prayer, charity, fasting, jihād, and more). Entrants to Paradise are directed to the gate that fits their deeds: devotees of prayers are assigned to the gate of prayer, devotees of jihād to the gate of jihād, and so on (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 2001, vol. 10). In Ibn al-'Arabī's spiritual conception of the Garden, the layout of the eight gates integrates with a mystical conception of the Garden and of entering it, whereby the commandment kept becomes a kind of mystical key that unlocks one of the Garden's gates. The eight gates further parallel the eight limbs on which the commandments devolve (*al-taklīf*), and being among the devotees of a particular commandment allows one to enter through the gate that corresponds to the limb that performed that commandment (Ibn al-'Arabī 2010, p. 371). In this context, he elaborates on the mystical states of human activity attained by each limb at the same time and by existing simultaneously in two places. He characteristically illustrates this by drawing on his own experiences of mystical illumination and split consciousness.

4. Convergences between the Paradisiacal Accounts of Castilian Kabbalah and of Ibn al-'Arabī

There is no historical evidence whatsoever that thirteenth-century Jews living in northern Spain had any familiarity—even secondhand—with the work of Ibn al-'Arabī. Yet, there is no denying the profound similarities found in the Zohar, the Hebrew writings of Moses de Léon, and the other anonymous Hebrew compositions traced to his pen, which I enumerate below. I will return to the challenging question of how to explain this in the next section.

First, all these works exegetically and ontologically split Paradise in two. The twofold Paradise of Ibn al-'Arabī is quite close to the duality formulated by Nahmanides and developed by subsequent kabbalists; at the very least, all base themselves on the same Neoplatonic worldview. The same is true of the distinction made by the later kabbalists in assigning physical delights to one place and spiritual ecstasies to another, all the while presenting the spiritual and physical within a unified paradigm. In kabbalistic theosophy, this facilitated linking the sensual earthly Garden and its various sites with the supernal Garden and its *hekhalot* or precincts, which then correspond to aspects of the Godhead.

Second, this ontological divide gave rise to an interesting conception in which the soul is dominant in Paradise and the body persists as a kind of tagalong. In this context, it is fitting to reproduce a citation from an unknown work of Ibn al-'Arabī by the later Egyptian scholar and mystic 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rānī, one of the most important expositors of *Meccan Revelations*. Initially, he says that “the bodies of the folk of the Garden are covered and wrapped in their spirits, so that the spirits are the body's garment”, and then he attributes the following to Ibn al-'Arabī: “some of the revelationists erred in saying that spirits are not gathered in without bodies, as they discerned from the transformation of the folk of the Garden according to their will” (al-Sha'rānī 1959, p. 670). The opinion he rejects maintains that on the day of resurrection only the spirits or souls will be gathered in. This might have been the position of the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'), who believed that the Garden is a spiritual realm and that the resurrection is when souls are gathered in (Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' 1957, p. 41). The opposing view affirmed by Ibn al-'Arabī, according to which bodies persist while encloded by shapeshifting spirits, calls to mind the notions of wearing a spiritual “garment” developed in multiple directions by thirteenth-century kabbalists. While there is a self-evident difference in the details of this

eschatological ontology, I think they are adopting a similar approach to a problem that was inherent to their shared worldview.

Third, the two corpuses divide Paradise into three separate sections arranged hierarchically, which mostly aligns with distinct groups of people. Here even the likeness in the particulars is intriguing. Ibn al-'Arabī places adherents of other religions and the “folk of the gaps” in the Garden of Divine Specification, and de Léon likewise puts “the pious of the nations” and converts in the outermost courtyard. Ibn al-'Arabī mentions “children who have not reached the limit of deeds” and de Léon includes “innocent schoolchildren”, a motif further developed in the fantastical figure of R. Gaddi'el Na'ar of Seder Gan 'Eden.

Fourth, the kabbalistic works divide the innermost circle of Paradise into seven divisions, which correspond to individual or group attainments in religious observance (punctilious observance of the commandments, acts of kindness, Torah study, etc.). This resembles Ibn al-'Arabī's descriptions of Paradise, where one of eight religious directives meticulously observed takes on a spiritual-eschatological significance and is molded into a key that unlocks a gate of Paradise.

Fifth, Ibn al-'Arabī places the Garden called “Eden” (*jannat 'adn*) at a sublime rung of existence because it is theosophically linked to his belief that there the “Truth”, Allah, is revealed to his servants through the Dune. This begs comparison to the theosophic idea of the supernal Eden in thirteenth-century Kabbalah. Furthermore, Nahmanides wrote of an “apprehension” that “is called Eden, which is called ‘the bundle of the living’” (Nahmanides 1964, p. 297), which is the divine repose of souls, and Ibn al-'Arabī wrote about the divine nature of Eden and even used the name given it by Allah, “the abode of the living.”

Finally, these works share another motif, the wondrous tree planted in the Garden: for the theosophical kabbalists, this is the Tree of Life (*eṣ ha-ḥayyim*), and for the tradition used by Ibn al-'Arabī, this is the Ṭūbā Tree (*šajarat ṭūbā*). Asín Palacios, the reader will recall, sought to link the blueprints of Paradise in the works of Ibn al-'Arabī and Dante. To that end, he argued that the eschatological *Candida Rosa* of the Divine Comedy is parallel to the supernal Ṭūbā Tree of Islamic tradition (Asín Palacios 1919). The basis for this parallelism is ultimately the precedence given to the geometric architecture of Paradise, which supposedly is reflective of a cosmology to which both authors subscribed. I propose that we not lose sight of the stress Ibn al-'Arabī placed on the moral hierarchy of the Garden and its eschatological, and perhaps even theosophical, import. In his account, the architecture of the Gardens and their subdivisions are founded on the special status of Muhammad's *umma*, the absolute superiority of the prophet, and the matchlessness of Allah's messenger among all creations. It seems to me that comparing the Ṭūbā Tree to the eschatological Tree of Life of the theosophical kabbalists is more productive than the rather formal parallelism with Dante's *Candida Rosa*. More specifically, these kabbalists envision the Tree of Life as the source of the human soul, and Ibn al-'Arabī writes: “Know that the Ṭūbā Tree among the Gardens is like a man with respect to his children; in the same way Allah planted it by hand and made it, He blew into it from his spirit, in the same way he did with Mary, into whom He blew from His spirit, which is how Jesus could resurrect the dead and cure the blind and leprous” (Ibn al-'Arabī 2010, p. 371). In this way, the Ṭūbā Tree, like the Tree of Life, has a similarly etiological role with respect to the human soul emerging from God

5. Possible Literary Contacts between Castilian Kabbalah and Ibn al-'Arabī's Writings

So far as we know, it can be said about Castilian kabbalists and Ibn al-'Arabī's writings that never the twain did meet. Yet, we have observed many striking similarities between the works. To try to account for this, I will explore their joint philosophical heritage, touch on the possibility of an early medieval transfer of ideas, and argue that the Castilian kabbalists knew of a book with similar content to Ibn al-'Arabī's.

Both bodies of writing examined above exhibit similar ontological and psychological assumptions. Their biplanar conception of Paradise is squarely grounded in the ontology of medieval Neoplatonism. The view of reality as a continuum that gradually shifts from the “coarse” to the “rarefied” comes from

the same body of thought, and is expressed in their writing through the bidirectional movement between the two Gardens and the theories of an “enclotted” soul. The underlying psychology assumes the Platonic dualism of body and soul, which entails distinct eschatological fates for each of the two, and so we end up with more than one Paradise. Additionally, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s philosophico-mystical writing and that of the Castilian kabbalists both tie the plane of the Godhead to these lower ontological-cosmological dimensions of reality. In other words, the idea of multiple planes of existence, with their respective pleasure Gardens, is integrated with a complex doctrine of emanation, in which there is a long chain of unified being. What is perhaps most noteworthy is that in all of this Castilian Kabbalah and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought are much closer to each other than either of them are to other medieval Jewish or Muslim thought, including the rationalist Mu‘tazilah schools and their Jewish elaborations and the Aristotelian Islamic philosophy of al-Farabi, Avicenna, or Maimonides. When one considers the fact that the kabbalists were mainly interpreting their own canonical literature (Scripture, Talmud, and Midrash) and Ibn al-‘Arabī his (the Quran, its early interpretation, and hadith literature), the affinity between what resulted from each is remarkable. Several scholars have formulated the theory, which has yet to be fully worked out, that Iberian Jewish thinkers, kabbalists included, were familiar with Neoplatonic writings, especially of the Ismaili variety, in Arabic (Pines 1980; Goldreich 1987; Ebstein and Weiss 2015; Krinis 2016). Although no study has investigated kabbalistic use of specific Arabic texts in the areas of divine retribution and eschatology, such a study is expected to yield rich results, given the high concentration of similarities found in our phenomenological and terminological comparison of a relatively limited sample.

In searching for avenues of (mutual) influence, we should not set our temporal parameters too rigidly but be open to finding it centuries before any of our authors were alive. One study has compared conceptions of Paradise in the hadith literature and in Midrash, even going so far as to claim that the hadith can be traced to texts like a midrash about R. Joshua b. Levi’s entry to the Garden of Eden (Tamari 1999). Another study attempts to draw parallels between late Shiite traditions on the *mi’rāj* and ideas found in the Midrash, Talmud, and *Hekhalot* literature (Halperin 1995). Neither of the two passes historical criticism, especially due to the late dating of many of the texts involved, but together they highlight the need to reexamine early medieval literary contacts between the two faiths. With respect to the depiction of Paradise in medieval Kabbalah, pursuing these kinds of literary leads would counterbalance the preoccupation with finding precedents in Franco-German Midrash or *Hekhalot* writings that supposedly absorbed Christian ideas. For example, when it comes to the groupings in Paradise dictated by moral considerations, Castilian Kabbalah has more in common with *Meccan Revelations* than it does with any texts from Franco-Germany, where the focus on morality is said to have been the product of confronting Christian ideals like asceticism.

Another line of thinking, in which the historically plausible connection can be followed all the way from one end to the other, is that Jewish esotericists encountered Islamic literature on Muhammad’s ascent in their mother tongue. *Kitāb al-Mi’rāj* is the reconstructed Arabic title of a work translated into Castilian in 1264 at the court of King Alfonso X (the Wise). This work thickly portrays the various waystations of the celestial journeys taken by Muhammad and the archangel Gabriel. There are visions from the heavens, Paradise, and Gehenna with their diverse precincts and inhabitants, interspersed with motifs from the Quran and the hadith literature (Tottoli 2017). The parts about Muhammad’s visits to Paradise (Cerulli 1949) contain traces of many traditions that appear in the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī, who himself wrote extensively about the *mi’rāj* and celestial journeys (Morris[1987] 1988). *Kitāb al-Mi’rāj* also presents a basic layout of seven hierarchical Gardens with further subdivisions, and many Islamic traditions about Paradise take on new form, such as the entire vision dedicated to the Ṭūbā Tree, which details its massive dimensions, its exquisite fruit, and more. The account presented therein, it should be noted, only contains a latent distinction between the twofold Paradise motive (“paradise of action” vs. “paradise of presence”). Significantly, the translation of this Arabic work into the Castilian vernacular was executed by a Jewish physician named Don Abraham, who was employed by the king’s court as a translator (Heullant-Donat and de Beaulieu 1991; Gil 1985). Furthermore, it has

been suggested that the lost Arabic source was influenced partly by ancient Jewish and Christian ideas that later appeared in the visionary apocrypha or even *Hekhalot* literature (Weill 1991). It is not beyond the realm of possibility that the reintroduction of kabbalists to this ancient material via this Arabic work in translation inspired them to reimagine Paradise in all its glory, and even led them to absorb its ideas and motifs (Idel 2005; Liebes 2011). In fact, beyond the general similarity in conceptualization and imagery, the very publication of visionary literature on Paradise based on Muhammad's ascent, in the same time and place as the kabbalists discussed here, can help explain the sudden emergence of a new kabbalistic genre of Hebrew and Aramaic pseudepigraphy, in which elaborate visions of Paradise were attributed to venerated figures of Jewish tradition.

6. Conclusions

This study is a comparative analysis of the appearances of the lower and upper Paradise, their divisions, and the journeys to and within them, which appear in mystical Jewish and Islamic sources in medieval Iberia. Ibn al-'Arabī's vast output on the Gardens of divine reward and their divisions generated a number of instructive comparisons to the eschatological and theosophical writing about the same subject in early Spanish Kabbalah. Although there is no direct historical evidence that kabbalists knew of such Arabic works from Catalonia or Andalusia, there are commonalities in fundamental imagery and in ontological and exegetical assumptions that resulted from an internalization of similar patterns of thought. It is quite reasonable to assume that these literary corpora, both products of the thirteenth century, were shaped by common sources from earlier visionary literature. The prevalence of translations of religious writing about ascents on high, produced in Castile in the later thirteenth century, can help explain the sudden appearance of visionary literature on Paradise and its divisions in the writings of Jewish esotericists of the same region. These findings therefore enrich our knowledge of the literary, intellectual, and creative background against which these kabbalists were working when they chose to depict Paradise in the way that they did, at the time that they did. One hopes that the relatively uncharted territory which this study has begun to map will become well trodden and comprehensively surveyed.

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