

A SEAL WITHIN A SEAL: THE IMPRINT OF SUFISM IN ABRAHAM ABULAFIA'S TEACHINGS

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And he said that the Messiah is soon to come for he is already born, and he continued along these lines saying and I am that man. . . . And he said that he is the seventh of the prophets and he commanded him to go to Rome to do all that he did. . . .¹

For a significant period of his life, Abraham Abulafia (ca. 1240-90) believed that he was not only a prophet but also the expected messiah, and he worked hard to foster that belief among both Jews and Christians in southern Italy, Sicily, Greece, and Catalonia. Born in Navarre, he spent most of his creative life in other parts of the Mediterranean world, where he likely came across the teachings of the late twelfth-century Calabrian abbot Joachim of Fiore. Appropriated and reinterpreted by certain elements in the Franciscan Order, these teachings on the end of times influenced Abulafia's self-perception and helped him portray himself and his mission in terms that he hoped would be attractive to both Jews and Christians. His messianic timetable and view of the redemption and its aftermath owes much to Joachite conceptions as propagated by these Franciscans.²

Yet, there are ideas and concepts that appear in his oeuvre that cannot be explained by his Christian contacts, nor do they seem to be rooted in the Jewish tradition. Indeed, they seem to suggest a very different origin, which in the context of his place of birth and upbringing should be immediately apparent. The presence of Islam in the Iberian Peninsula, the geographical proximity between the adherents of the different faiths and centuries of cultural and religious symbiosis,

¹ *Sefer ha-Haim*, in *Metzoref ha-Sechel*, ed. A. Gross (Jerusalem: n.p., 2001), 83.

² See H. Hames, "From Calabria Cometh the Law and the Word of the Lord from Sicily: The Holy Land in the Thought of Joachim of Fiore and Abraham Abulafia," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 20, no. 2 (2005): 187-99; and my forthcoming book, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder: Abraham Abulafia, the Franciscans and Joachimism* (Albany: State University of New York Press).

raises the intriguing possibility that some of Abulafia's teachings may have had their roots in Isma'ili theology and Sufism. Indeed, what I explore here is the possibility that Abulafia was acquainted with the works of ibn al-'Arabi and that central pillars of his thought might have their beginnings in the corpus of the Great Sheikh. A central theme in the writings of the latter, particularly in the last great work written while he was in the west, the *Book of the Fabulous Gryphon* (*Anqā' Mughrib*), deals with the Seal of sainthood, the perfection of man and the acquisition of knowledge and prophecy. Ibn al-'Arabi's belief in his own elevated state of "the Perfect Man" and in his being the Seal of Muhammad led him to an appreciation of his own messianic role in the fast approaching end of history and the knowledge of what would happen in the aftermath. The way Abulafia makes use of the seal imagery as signaling the acquisition of knowledge and the end of history seems to bear the imprint of ibn al-'Arabi and suggests a more than casual acquaintance with his work.

Muhammad b. Ali ibn al-'Arabi was born in Murcia during the month of Ramadan in 1165. His family moved to Seville in 1172 due to the arrival of the Almohads, and probably served as soldiers in the *jund*, the Caliph's standing army. It is possible that ibn al-'Arabi also served for a year in the army; though it is clear that by 1184 he had embarked on the Sufi path. This was to take him to the Maghreb and around Andalusia for eighteen years until he finally left the West for the East in 1202. His spiritual awakening clearly began before his formal conversion to the path, as is illustrated by the famous story of his encounter with Averroes in Cordoba as well as ibn al-'Arabi's own evidence that it was Jesus, a figure with whom he had great affinity, who was his first spiritual master and who inspired his conversion of the heart. Ibn al-'Arabi reports that he was told by a mysterious interlocutor, the Imam of the Left, probably Jesus, to trust only in God and not be guided by any particular spiritual master as he pursued the path to sainthood. However, his *Ruh al-quds* (Epistle of the Spirit of Holiness), composed in Mecca in 1203, presents a wonderful mosaic of Sufis who dotted the landscape of Andalusia during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and includes the biographies of some fifty-five Sufis with whom ibn al-'Arabi interacted.³ After embarking on the spiritual path and until he left Andalusia for good, ibn al-'Arabi practiced asceticism. The writ-

³ See Muhyiddin ibn al-'Arabi, *Sufis of Andalusia: The "Ruh al-Quds" and "al-Darrat al-Fakhirah,"* trans. R. W. J. Austin (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971).

ing of the *Fabulous Gryphon* was marked by a vision he had in Fez informing him that he had reached the supreme state of Muhammadan sainthood. This work was also his farewell bow to the West: after its completion, which was accompanied by a farewell tour of Andalusia, he left, never to return. After performing the hajj, he started writing his enormous *Meccan Revelations* (*Futuhat al-Makkiyah*), which he continually revised. He also composed his famous treatise on prophethood and metaphysics, *The Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fusūs al-hikam*). In the East he married and had children, traveled widely, and taught, living for almost a decade in Seljuqid Konya (Turkey) and finally moving to Damascus, where he enjoyed the patronage of the Ayyubid princes and where he died in November 1240.⁴

Abraham Abulafia was born in 1240, the year ibn al-‘Arabi died, which corresponds to the year 5000 in the Hebrew calendar, the start of the sixth millennium, a year of apocalyptic expectation in some Jewish circles, and, according to him, the year of the renewal of prophecy.⁵ Awakened by the spirit of the Lord when he was twenty years old, Abulafia set out to find the mythical Sambation River, where he presumably hoped to find the lost ten tribes of Israel. Growing up in a world concerned with the onslaught of the Mongols, and possibly considering them related to the lost tribes, this voyage to the Holy Land clearly had apocalyptic undertones. Unable to proceed beyond Acre because of the battle of En Jalut between the Mamluks and the Mongols, which effectively ended the Mongol threat to the West anyway, Abulafia returned to Greece, southern Italy, and then Catalonia and Castile, where he studied and taught Maimonides’ *Guide for the Perplexed* (*Ḍalalāt al-hairin*) and acquired an extensive knowledge of *sefrotic* Kabbalah. Following a revelation in late 1270 and on the basis of his earlier studies, Abulafia started to develop his teachings based on *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Creation) a mystical understanding of the *Guide for the Perplexed*, and

⁴ This potted biography is based on G. T. Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood in the Fullness of Time: Ibn al-‘Arabi’s “Book of the Fabulous Gryphon”* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 12-48; C. Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ‘Arabi* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993); S. Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier: The spiritual life and thought of Ibn ‘Arabi* (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 1999); A. D. Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

⁵ See *Sefer ha-Edut*, in *Metzoref ha-Sechel*, 62, in which Abulafia states that in the year 5000 AM (1240 CE), the year he was born, the name by which God wishes to be known was revealed, indicating the start of prophecy. For apocalyptic events around 1240, see Y. Yuval, “‘Two Nations in Your Womb’: Perceptions of Jews and Christians” (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2000).

a particular (re)reading of the scriptures. Toward the end of 1276, Abulafia received a further vision which inspired him to believe that he was the expected messiah.⁶ This was the backdrop for his extensive messianic and apocalyptic activity and prophetic writings in the following years. Intensive preparation and further visions led to Abulafia's famous attempt to meet the pope, Nicholas III, who happened to die on the very night before Abulafia hoped to meet with him (August 22, 1280); this messianic activity continued until late 1285, not without opposition from within the Jewish world spearheaded by Solomon ibn Adret.⁷ Towards the end of the latter year, Abulafia had another revelation which caused him to see things in a different light. Although the apocalyptic elements remain in the period leading up to 1290, which he strongly believed was the year of redemption, his messianic claims, while present, are more subdued and seem to indicate a realization that his messianic potentiality would only be apparent to all at the time of the redemption. It is perhaps not a coincidence that Abulafia bows off the historical stage in late 1290 or early 1291 when what he predicted did not come about, though what exactly happened to him remains a mystery.⁸

The connections between Kabbalah and Islam have received more attention than is generally acknowledged.⁹ Some of this research has been based on the presumption that historical and temporal closeness

⁶ *Sefer ha-Yashar*, in *Metzoref ha-Sechel*, 99-102. This vision, which has gone unnoticed, is crucial for evaluating the changes in Abulafia's self-perception at different stages of his life. It also helps to date some of Abulafia's works, particularly the different parts of *Sefer ha-Ot*. See Hames, "Three in One or One that is Three: On the dating of Abraham Abulafia's *Sefer ha-Ot*," *Revue des Etudes Juives* 165 (2006): 1-2.

⁷ See M. Idel, "The Rashba and Abraham Abulafia: The Story of an Ignored Kabbalistic Polemic," in *Atara v'Haim: Studies in the Talmud and Medieval Rabbinic Literature in Honor of Professor Haim Zalman Dimitrovsky*, ed. D. Boyarin et al. (Jerusalem: Magnes 2000), 235-51.

⁸ There is no detailed study of Abulafia's life, though the general outline is well known. See A. Jellinek, *Beth ha-Midrash* (Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1967), 3:xl-xlii (cites the biographical passage from *Otzar Eden Ganuz* with a few notations); G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 119-55; Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), 52-56; and the various articles and books on Abulafia cited here in the notes by Moshe Idel. For a fuller bibliography of Idel's writings on Abulafia, at least through 1997, see D. Abrams, *Bibliography of the Writings of Professor Moshe Idel: A Special Volume Issued on the Occasion of His Fiftieth Birthday* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 1997). See also Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretations* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002); and E. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia—Kabbalist and Prophet: Hermeneutics, Theosophy and Theurgy* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2000).

⁹ See G. Anidjar's claim in his article "Jewish Mysticism Alterable and Unalterable: On Orienting Kabbalah Studies and the 'Zohar' of Christian Spain," *Jewish Social Studies* 3

in the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa suggest either common sources or influence, mainly of Islamic conceptions, on the emerging Kabbalah—for instance, with regard to *Sefer ha-Bahir* (Book of Clarity).¹⁰ Other research has been much more text oriented and has shown affinities between the textual traditions of different streams of Islam, particularly Isma'ilism and Sufism, and Kabbalistic texts.¹¹ In its broadest sense, Kabbalah, which incorporates materials taken from such diverse fields as Hermeticism, astrology, magic, Neoplatonism, and Aristotelianism, can be seen to have borrowed ideas and concepts from the Muslim traditions with which it interacted either directly in Spain or indirectly through translations which made their way from the East and the South into Christian Europe.¹²

Moshe Idel has suggested that Abraham Abulafia's ecstatic Kabbalah was influenced by Sufism and focuses on his notion of *hitbodedut* (seclusion and concentration), which may have been taken from the twelfth-century jurist, theologian, and mystic, al-Ghazali or other sources.¹³ He also suggests that the reason for the positive reception of ecstatic Kabbalah in Palestine in the late thirteenth century, notwithstanding the ban placed by Solomon ibn Adret on Abulafia's works in Catalonia, was its similarities

(1996): 89-157; and Idel's reply, "Orienting, Orientalizing or Disorienting the Study of Kabbalah: 'An Almost Absolutely Unique' Case of Occidentalism," *Kabbalah* 2 (1997): 13-47. See also the comments of M. G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 2:202 n. 1, regarding Gershon Scholem.

¹⁰ R. Keiner, "Ibn al-'Arabi and the Qabbalah: A Study of Thirteenth Century Iberian Mysticism," *Studies in Mystical Literature* 2, no. 2 (1982): 26-52; M. McGaha, "The *Sefer ha-Bahir* and Andalusian Mysticism," *Medieval Encounters* 3, no. 1 (1997): 20-57; D. Ariel, "'The Eastern Dawn of Wisdom': The Problem of the Relation between Islamic and Jewish Mysticism," in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, ed. D. Blumenthal (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1985), 2:149-67.

¹¹ See, for example, Y. Liebes, "How the Zohar was Written," in "The Age of the Zohar," special issue, *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 8 (1989): 1-72; and Liebes, "Shlomo Pines and Kabbalah Research," in *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday* (in Hebrew), ed. M. Idel, W. Z. Harvey, and E. Schweid, *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 9 (1990): 21-22; S. Pines, "Shi'ite Terms and Conceptions in Judah ha-Levi's *Kuzari*," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980): 165-251; Pines, "Medieval Doctrines in Renaissance Garb? Some Jewish and Arabic Sources of Leone Ebreo's Doctrines," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. B. Cooperman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 365-98; and R. Keiner, "The Image of Islam in the Zohar," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 8 (1989): 43-63 (of English section).

¹² See, for instance, Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 33-102.

¹³ Idel, "*Hitbodedut* as Concentration in Ecstatic Kabbalah," in *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 103-69. On the philosophical usages of the term in the Middle Ages, see Idel, "*Hitbodedut* as 'Concentration' in Jewish Philosophy," in *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume*, 1:39-60.

with Sufi ideas already part of their mystical worldview.¹⁴ Idel is uncertain about where the points of contact between Abulafia and Sufism occurred, but he is clearly open to the possibilities of such interaction.¹⁵ In an important study, however, Haviva Pedaya shows how, within the writings of some of the Geronese Kabbalists of the mid-thirteenth century as well as in the works of Abulafia, there is a similar phenomenological approach to cleaving to the divine and drawing down divine speech (see below, n. 17). The motifs, which include elevating the intellect, the cleaving of speech to the source of all speech, describing the source of all speech in terms of a spring, and reaching the level whereby the divine speech emanates from within, are common not only to these Kabbalists but also to the works of Jewish Sufism as found in Bahya ibn Pakuda's *Duties of the Heart* and in the works of Abraham Maimuni and Obadiah Maimuni, among others. Pedaya suggests that Barcelona was a gateway for Arabic material arriving from the East, providing the Jews of Provence and Catalonia access to Sufi works. An example pertinent to this study is the origin of one of Abulafia's teachers in Barcelona, R. Baruch Togarmi, who, as his name indicates, was from Turkey. He wrote an important commentary on the *Sefer Yetzirah*, which adopts a linguistic type of Kabbalah, includes letter combinations, and shows Sufi influences regarding prophetic ecstasy.¹⁶ Yet, Pedaya focuses mainly on the transfer of material from the East and does not seem to take into account the possibility that readily accessible Sufi teachings from the Iberian Peninsula might have been an additional source for these Kabbalists.¹⁷

¹⁴ Idel, "Ecstatic Kabbalah and the Land of Israel," in *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 91-101.

¹⁵ Idel, "*Hitbodedut* as Concentration in Ecstatic Kabbalah," 106.

¹⁶ These influences may have come from the Kabbalah of Ezra of Gerona to Baruch Togarmi and from him to Abulafia. See also Scholem, *Major Trends*, 127; and Scholem, *The Kabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah and Abraham Abulafia* (in Hebrew), ed. Y. Ben-Shelomo (Jerusalem: Akademon, 1987), 106-7. See S. Blickstein, *Between philosophy and mysticism: A study of the philosophical-qabbalistic writings of Joseph Gikatilla (1248-c. 1322)* (Ph.D. diss., Jewish Theological Seminary, 1983), 92-123, suggesting that Togarmi, along with Moshe de Leon, Abraham Abulafia, and Joseph Gikatilla, constituted a Kabbalistic school or circle and wrote what Blickstein refers to as philosophical-Kabbalistical works.

¹⁷ H. Pedaya, *Vision and Speech: Models of Revelatory Experience in Jewish Mysticism* (in Hebrew) (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2002), 171-200. On p. 195, discussing Togarmi, Pedaya suggests that "he was independently influenced by Spanish Sufi works," but she does not go into any further detail in this regard. It is to be hoped that this dense but fascinating book will merit translation into English, as it is one of the most important works written in recent times about the nature of mystical experience and should be made available to a broader audience.

Ibn al-ʿArabi represents the peak of Andalusian Sufism. Growing up in the Iberian Peninsula, where the forces of Christianity were moving southward, albeit with occasional setbacks, and where the Almohads were a major presence, his was a turbulent period. What is immediately apparent is that ibn al-ʿArabi did not belong to a particular group or circle, but tried to find his own spiritual path within the multitude of possibilities available to him. Indeed, his famous work, the *Ruh al-quḍs*, a rich tapestry of Andalusian Sufism, indicates that the Sufis were not institutionalized, as was becoming fashionable in the East, but lived individual, spiritual lives. This individuality is clearly part of this Western milieu and crosses religious boundaries. Abulafia follows this model of a master with disciples, as does his contemporary Ramon Llull, a Christian mystic and missionary. All three wrote many works, were itinerant, and borrowed from diverse religious traditions.¹⁸

Al-Hakim Tirmidhi, the ninth-century author of the *Seal of Sainthood* (*Kūṭāb Khāṭm al-Awḥiyāʾ*), engaged the complex issue of the relation between prophet and holy man or saint (*walaya*, or “friendship with God”).¹⁹ He was understood by his commentators to have suggested that sainthood was in and of itself greater than prophethood.²⁰ In his *Fabulous Gryphon*, ibn al-ʿArabi follows this line, saying that, because legislative prophecy would come to an end and sainthood would eternally survive, the saint was of greater spiritual stature than the prophet.²¹ This seems to pose a problem, as it suggests that Muhammad, a legislative prophet, was of a lesser status than a saint. Ibn al-ʿArabi gets around this by adopting the doctrine worked out by Sahl al-Tustari (d. 896) of the “light of Muhammad” (*nur Muhammad*), implying that all mankind, beginning with Adam, was created from within that light, signifying Muhammad’s apotheosis and closeness to Reality.²² Thus, Muhammad in his historical

¹⁸ On Llull, see among others A. Bonner, *Selected Works of Ramon Llull (1232-1316)*, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985); and Hames, *The Art of Conversion: Christianity and Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

¹⁹ See B. Radtke and J. O’Kane, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996), 101-11. See also S. Svirī, *The Taste of Hidden Things: Images on the Sufi Path* (Inverness, Calif.: Golden Sufi Center, 1997).

²⁰ Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 138-43.

²¹ For a more modern manifestation of this issue with medieval roots, see Y. Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and its Medieval Background* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

²² One of Abulafia’s disciples wrote a book called *Ner Elohim* (The Light of God) which, though based on Proverbs 20:27, could also reflect the Islamic concept of *nur Allah*, or the “divine light,” which is the basis of the spiritual inheritance of the Imam

guise was the lawgiver; as a cosmic being, however, he is a saint, an apostle, and a prophet *par excellence*.

As a consequence, in his works, ibn al-ʿArabi differentiates among three Seals.²³ The first is the Seal of Prophethood, Muhammad, for whom the Koran was revealed and after whom no legislative prophet will come. The second is the Universal Seal of Sainthood, Jesus (as is revealed in the *Fabulous Gryphon*), who will come again at the end of times apparently for a period of forty years. The third is the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood, who, according to ibn al-ʿArabi's description in the exordium (*khutbah*) to the enormous, encyclopaedic *Meccan Revelations* (*Futuh al-Makkiyah*), is the only person able to ascend to the third and top step of the *minbar* (preaching podium) where Muhammad himself stood.²⁴ The Seal stands level with the prophet but on top of a piece of linen so as not to stand exactly where Muhammad trod.²⁵ This Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood is greater than the Universal Seal of Sainthood (Jesus) because the latter seals only the sainthood of apostles and prophets, while the former seals the sainthood of the saints themselves, distinguishing them from the apostles and prophets.²⁶

Ibn al-ʿArabi puts much emphasis on the seventh century of Islam as being a sanctified period during which the Mahdi, the messiah-like figure, will arrive. Indeed, the opening poem of the *Fabulous Gryphon*, written just prior to the start of the seventh century, seems to suggest

and the reason for adherence to him in the Shi'i tradition. The book deals with the acquisition of true knowledge by medium of Elijah who is alive and will shortly be revealed. See *Ner Elohim*, ed. A. Gross (Jerusalem: n.p., 2002), 75. The title of the book appears for the first time on p. 77. See Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 122; and U. Rubin, "Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shi'a Tradition," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 1 (1979): 43-45.

²³ Actually there are four seals: the fourth is the Seal of Children, who will be the last human to be born. See C. Addas, *Ibn ʿArabi: The Voyage of No Return* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2000), 46; and M. Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ʿArabi* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 125-27.

²⁴ *Meccan Revelations* has 560 chapters, a number chosen deliberately to signify the Hijra year that ibn al-ʿArabi was born and the year that the seal was revealed—1165 CE. See Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 531. See also ibn al-ʿArabi, *The Meccan Revelations*, ed. M. Chodkiewicz (New York: Pir Press, 2002), 1:17.

²⁵ There is a suggestion, admittedly in the late but very popular work *Fusus al-Hikam*, that the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood is even greater than Muhammad, as this seal incorporates the subsets of both prophets and apostles who are also *awliya* (saints). See Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 605. See also ibn al-ʿArabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, ed. R. W. J. Austin (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1980), 65-70.

²⁶ Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 603.

that the Mahdi will appear in 1284.²⁷ At the end of the work, ibn al-ʿArabi suggests that this Seal will receive its “developmental form” in 560 AH, the year of his birth (1165 CE), and his perfection will be after 600 AH—in other words, after the start of the seventh century.²⁸ Although in this work ibn al-ʿArabi does not expressly identify himself as the Muhammadan Seal—indeed, this is something he would only do in the East—it seems clear that he identifies himself as the Fabulous Gryphon of the title of the book, a “sun rising in the West,” the renewer appearing as the seventh Islamic century was to begin.²⁹ This means that he also considered himself related in some way with the Mahdi, the messiah-like figure, who, according to the tradition, would come from the West. While the Mahdi was generally identified in the Shiʿite tradition as coming from the line of the prophet, the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood is superior to the Mahdi, being of spiritual lineage and closeness to the prophet Muhammad. While in the *Fabulous Gryphon* the Seal of the saints is clearly Jesus, the imagery related to the Mahdi is subsumed into the figure of the Gryphon. The identification of ibn al-ʿArabi with the Fabulous Gryphon seems to indicate, what would be clearly expressed later, that he was superior to both the latter in status and achievement, a perfect man, the renewer for the seventh century, who would bring a new teaching to the East.³⁰

This assumption is further supported in that, according to an oft-recurring account in his writings, ibn al-ʿArabi learned from the prophet Hud in a vision while still in Cordoba in 586 AH (1190 CE) that he was the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood.³¹ Ibn al-ʿArabi used poetry

²⁷ Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 233 (the text around n. 42).

²⁸ See Elmore’s comment that, according to the Zohar, Noah’s age of six hundred at the time of the flood indicated his perfection. *Islamic Sainthood*, 532 n. 46. See also *Zohar ha-Menukad* (Jerusalem: Yerid ha-Sefarim, 1998), 1:360.

²⁹ This is based on the well-known tradition of the appearance of a renewer of the tradition who would appear at the start of each hundred years. Al-Ghazali was the renewer of the sixth century AH. See Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 3, 189.

³⁰ Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 163-95.

³¹ See Addas, *Ibn ʿArabi*, 48. Though not mentioned specifically, ibn al-ʿArabi reportedly told his disciples that it was this vision that clarified his status as the Seal. Hud is one of the twenty-seven prophets mentioned in the Qurʾan.

Interestingly, in the prologue to his *Legenda maior*, Bonaventura, almost a contemporary of ibn al-ʿArabi and a leading theologian, describes Francis of Assisi as having imprinted on his body Christ crucified. Christ is described as *signaculum similitudinis Dei viventis* (the seal of the likeness of the living God). However, here the seal is clearly Christ imprinted on Francis and is not a personal state or status. See *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, ed. R. J. Armstrong et al. (New York: New City Press, 2000), 2:527-28.

to convey his most esoteric teachings, and it is in *Al Dīwān al-Kabīr* (Great Diwan) that we find him expressly saying this: "I am the Seal of the Saints just as it has been shown / That the Seal of the Prophets is Muhammad / The specific Seal, not the Seal of General Sainthood / For that is Jesus the Assisted One."³² In another place, ibn al-ʿArabi says that the Seal bears the same name as the prophet Muhammad, again referring to himself, given that his first name was Muhammad.³³

Abulafia used the imagery of the "seal" in different ways in his works. Based on *Sefer Yetzirah*, which he regularly cites and comments on, the seal is to be found in a mythical-magical form as sealing or limiting creation.³⁴ These are seals found at the six cardinal points of the universe with different combinations of the three letters of the Tetragrammaton (the ineffable four-letter name of God found in the Bible and pronounced "Jehovah," or *Yud Heh Vav Heh*, with two *He*'s). These seals are reminiscent of the seven sealed books found in the Christian book of Revelation in that when the seals are opened chaos erupts.³⁵ In Abulafia's works, the seal also refers to the Active Intellect, which gives shape to all created beings.³⁶ Yet, echoing ibn al-ʿArabi, he also uses the imagery of the seal to describe both the apogee of spiritual attainment and the historical process. Abulafia, in a manner similar to ibn al-ʿArabi, links external events with internal processes as the macrocosm and the microcosm come together. Although Abulafia's conception of the perfect man is essentially Maimonidean, he, like ibn al-ʿArabi, sees the external historical circumstances as mirroring internal processes

³² Cited by Addas, *Ibn ʿArabi*, 47. Another example can be found on p. 48.

³³ Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 55-59.

³⁴ See Y. Liebes, *Ars poetica in Sefer Yetzira* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Schocken Publishing House, 2000), 177-89. *Sefer Yetzirah* is a short enigmatic text, difficult to date or explain, which was considered to have been composed by Adam or Abraham and was interpreted by the Kabbalists in the thirteenth century as revealing the secrets of creation.

³⁵ *Ve-Zot le-Yehudah*, ed. A. Gross (Jerusalem: n.p., 1999), 29. Abulafia talks about "undoing the knots of the seals"; by doing so, God told him when the exile would end and the redemption begin. Here, the usage is reminiscent of Revelation.

³⁶ The seal is compared to the act of sexual union based on b. Talmud Nidda, fol. 31b, in which the sex of the fetus is determined by whether the male ejaculates first or last. For Abulafia, the male, or raised seal, is the Active Intellect; the female, the imprint of the seal, the soul. See Idel, *The Mystical Experience of Abraham Abulafia* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), 146-47. Idel cites from Abulafia's *Imrei Shefer*, but the idea also appears in *Otzar Eden Ganuz*, ed. A. Gross (Jerusalem: n.p., 2000), 372, 377. See also B. Naor, "'A Raised Seal and Sunken Seal' in the Teachings of Abraham Abulafia and Lubavitsch," *Sinai* 107 (1991): 54-57. For the seal as Active Intellect, see *Otzar Eden Ganuz*, 373—"And in the world of the intellects, the Active Intellect in the image of a seal in the middle of all the Intellects"—as well as 381.

within man; thus, external redemption goes hand in hand with internal perfection.³⁷

In his Torah commentary written in late 1288, in the section dealing with the Exodus from Egypt, from which one can extrapolate about the future redemption, Abulafia writes: “[A]nd the seal of the sixth day is Jesus the Nazarene, but the seal of the seventh day, who is half the Name, is the power of the King Messiah.”³⁸ The meaning of this is based on numerical values (*gematria*): in this case, the Hebrew for “the sixth day” (*yom ha-shishi*) is numerically equivalent to the name of Jesus (*Yeshu ha-Notzri*) (i.e., 671/672); the Hebrew for “the seventh day” (*yom ha-shevi*) is equal to “the King Messiah” (*Melech ha-Mashiah*) (453). In addition, while the first letters of both Jesus’ name and the sixth day (*yod* and *heh*) are the first two letters of the Tetragrammaton, the King Messiah eclipses the power of Jesus and the sixth day in that, when the first letters of the last two words that describe the sixth day in Genesis 1:31 (*yom ha-shishi*) are combined with the first letters of the two words that start the verses dealing with the Sabbath in Genesis 2:1 (*Va-yechulu Ha-shamayim*), one gets the whole Tetragrammaton. This implies that, though the power of Jesus derives from half of the Tetragrammaton, the true messiah has knowledge of the whole and most powerful divine Name.

Between 1279 and 1283, at the peak of his messianic activity, Abulafia wrote prophetic books for which he also wrote enigmatic commentaries. In the commentary to *Sefer ha-Melitz* (Book of the Interpreter), the last of these books, he writes: “[Y]ou know that the noun ‘messiah’ refers to three things: First, messiah refers to the true Active Intellect. . . . And the man who will redeem us from our exile among the nations using the *potentia* emanated upon him from the Active Intellect will be called ‘messiah.’ And ‘messiah’ also refers to the material, human, hylic intellect which is the redeemer and savior of the soul and all its excellent spiritual powers from the rulers of the body and their subjects, powers, and insatiable desires.”³⁹ In other words, for Abulafia the redemption

³⁷ On Maimonides’ conception of the perfect man, see Y. Leibowitz, *The Faith of Maimonides* (Tel Aviv: MOD Books, 1989), 58-63. See also text around n. 39 below.

³⁸ *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, ed. A. Gross (Jerusalem: n.p., 2001), 125. In another work, Abulafia writes: “*Yom ha-shishi* [the sixth day] [is] Jesus the Nazarene, *yom ha-shevi* [the seventh day] [is] the King Messiah, [both] have half of the name of the full Name [i.e., the Tetragrammaton].” *Mafteah ha-Hochmot*, ed. A. Gross (Jerusalem: n.p., 2001), 64.

³⁹ *Sefer ha-Melitz*, in *Metzoref ha-Sechel*, 19.

is something that happens in three dimensions—the heavenly, the historical, and the individual.⁴⁰ Abulafia is convinced that he himself brings together these three dimensions: he is the seal of the seventh day, the King Messiah, who receives the divine efflux; he is the historical messiah who will bring the exile to an end; and he is, like ibn al-‘Arabi, the perfect man in that he has reached the highest stage of prophecy and has perfect knowledge of the divine name.⁴¹ For Abulafia, a Jew living among a Christian majority, Jesus, the so-called Messiah and Son of God, was his nemesis; therefore, Jesus could not be given the positive role allotted him by ibn al-‘Arabi. Given that things occur on different planes, Jesus, aside from being a quasi divine and a historical figure, also represents the imagination as well as all that is material and negative.⁴² Therefore, Abulafia’s task as Messiah is to combat Christ, dethrone the historical Jesus—that is, Christianity—and defeat the internal Jesus, allowing people to overcome their imaginations and unite with the Active Intellect; thus, he becomes a perfect man.⁴³

In the fourth of the aforementioned commentaries on his prophetic books, *Sefer ha-Edut* (Book of Testimony), Abulafia writes: “The seal of the exile of Israel has ended to a thousand cubits, and [I] sealed [the

⁴⁰ This is an adaptation of the three dimensions central to *Sefer Yetzirah*: Olam (universe), Shana (time), and Nefesh (the soul).

⁴¹ See Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 388-459, for the main part of the *Fabulous Gryphon*. See also W. C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-‘Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 31-38.

⁴² On this issue, Abulafia and ibn al-‘Arabi diverge. The former adopts Maimonides’ perception of the imagination which he believes hinders the intellect and has to be overcome to attain true knowledge, whereas, for the latter, imagination is a highly elevated and positive power in man and in the cosmos. See O. Leaman, “Maimonides, Imagination and the Objectivity of Prophecy,” *Religion* 18, no. 1 (1988): 69-80; and Pines, “The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja and Maimonides,” in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 82-109. See also the many references to imagination in ibn al-‘Arabi’s writing translated by Chittick, *Ibn al-‘Arabi’s Metaphysics of the Imagination: The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

⁴³ “And the issue is that he [the Messiah] will stand up to him [Jesus] and will inform everyone that what he [Jesus] said to the Christians that he is a god, the son of God and a man, was a total lie. For he did not receive any power from the Special Name, but all his strength is dependent on the image of the *Teli* which is crucified (*talui*) on the Tree of Good and Evil Knowledge. And the Messiah is crucified on the Tree of Life, which is the foundation upon which everything depends. And Jesus had a physical crucifixion because he crucified himself on a physical tree. And the Messiah is crucified these eighteen years on a spiritual thing, which is the divine intellect, and there remains two years of the period of his crucifixion.” *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, 130-32. Here are two of the three dimensions: in heaven, Jesus is crucified on the tree of knowledge, while the true Messiah is on the tree of life; in this world, Jesus is crucified on a tree, while the Messiah is crucified on a spiritual tree—and for a period of eighteen years.

exile] with a seal in the image of truth (*emet*). . . . The seal of the exile of Israel is complete, and the reason is because the true Name (*Shem emet*) has been revealed. . . . And it is all the seal of truth; you are also the children of Israel. Be reconciled with us now, so that the acclaimed Temple can be built.”⁴⁴ This apocalyptic passage, which presents an irenic view of reconciliation with the other religions at the end of times, portrays the Messiah as sealing the exile, bringing it to a conclusion. For Abulafia, the word *emet*—truth—holds within it the date of the forthcoming redemption (1290 CE), which is to be brought about by knowledge of the true Name of God.⁴⁵ This Name can only be fully known once a person has reached the level of prophecy, or perfection. Indeed, as Abulafia, who is the Messiah, states, the object of the prophetic books is to teach knowledge of the perfect name.⁴⁶ Thus, the earthly redemption expected in 1290 is intimately connected with individual perfection based on knowledge of the divine name, and it is the Messiah who seals the exile. Moreover, the complete structure of the prophetic books reflects this, as there are six, and a seventh one called *Haftarah* (Additional) or *Hotam ha-Haftarah* (Seal of the Addition), which is “like the image of a seal for the six books and it does not seal the last one only, but each and every one of them.” This seventh book, which Abulafia requested be read every Sabbath in the synagogue after the Torah reading, deals with achieving prophecy through knowledge of the Name.⁴⁷

Moreover, in a work written in late 1285, Abulafia writes: “Seal

⁴⁴ *Sefer ha-Edut*, in *Metzoref ha-Sechel*, 74, 77-78 (with reference to MS Roma Angelica 38, 18v-19r). The enigmatic phrase “a thousand cubits” (*elef amot*) is actually a cryptic reference to the Ark in the Holy of Holies which contained within it the stone tablets. See *Otzar Eden Ganuz*, 378.

⁴⁵ Abulafia writes: “And the underlying meaning of the word *emet* is to reveal the secret which is learned from ‘a time, two times and half a time’ (Dan. 7:25): For when *emet* [*aleph-mem-tav*] is calculated, it comes out to be 1440 [when it is read as a number and the *mem* and *tav* are reversed—1 and 400 and 40 equals 1440] and it is called a ‘time.’ And add to it *emet emet*, which are ‘two times’ and to this total add half of *emet*, which equals 720, the full total is 5040 [1440 plus (2 times 1440) plus 720 equals 5040]. And it is the time when the cycles of the sun emerge from potentiality [*koah*, 28] to actuality [*poal*, 180]—in other words, that is when 180 cycles of 28 are completed, and when ten years are added, behold the number will be complete [*ha-kol*, 10 and 5050] . . . and it is the end of the world, . . . and 5050 years will be completed, . . . for behold *kuf-peh* [180] cycles and another ten (*yud*) years equals *ketz* [*kuf-tzaddik*, 190] and it is the secret of ‘the day of vengeance’ [*nakam*, 190]. . . .” *Sefer ha-Edut*, in *Metzoref ha-Sechel*, 64.

⁴⁶ See *Sefer ha-Haim*, in *Metzoref ha-Sechel*, 81.

⁴⁷ *Sefer ha-Yashar*, in *Metzoref ha-Sechel*, 95.

⁴⁸ This is based on Exodus 39:30, which deals with the apparel the High Priest wore

within a seal, the engraving of the seal,⁴⁸ YHVH is the man of war, YHVH is His Name [Exod. 15:3]. My intention, with regard to everything I have written in this book up to now, was to get to what I shall reveal to you here.”⁴⁹ This emphatic statement is followed by a selective and very mysterious biography, the point of which is to show that Abulafia has reached the highest spiritual level and that “in the year of Elijah [i.e., 46, implying late 1285] the prophet, God desired me and brought me into the Holy Court.” The use of the name of Elijah to refer to the year is no accident and indicates the high spiritual level Abulafia felt he had attained by virtue of being introduced into the heavenly court.⁵⁰ The passage continues:

[F]or the thing that is referred to as a seal within a seal is something which is like the world in its entirety, and what is like it [the entire world] in its entirety is mankind according to his species, and what is the image of its species is man and woman and their offspring of the different sexes, and what is like them is the body alone of this hinted-at man [i.e., Abulafia himself] and everything that he contains, and what demonstrates the whole reality and about which we have hinted is the single truth in this matter, is the entire Torah. And, therefore, it is behoved to read in the Torah, as it is the Torah that is in all these ways for us first and foremost a seal within a seal.⁵¹

The “seal within a seal” is a legal (Halachic) term used in the context of wine and how it should be sealed so as not to become “wine touched by gentile hands” and therefore unfit for drinking by Jews.⁵² Abulafia, however, uses this imagery to equate the perfect man with the Torah, which is the innermost seal. Man is the microcosm in that he contains the whole world; the most perfect man, Abulafia himself, is the seal within the seal because he knows how to read the Torah. The seal within the seal is the perfection of knowledge, which comes about when acquiring the seventh and highest level of reading the biblical text, which Abulafia achieved in late 1285. This is the seal which seals all other forms of knowledge, which are the stepping-stones on the way to achiev-

on his head: “And they made the plate of the Holy Crown of pure gold and inscribed upon it an inscription like the engraving of the seal ‘Holy to the Lord.’”

⁴⁹ *Otzar Eden Ganuz*, 368.

⁵⁰ The first part of *Otzar Eden Ganuz* is a commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah*, in which the temple is the microcosm, heaven on earth. Clearly Abulafia is playing here on the conjoining of heaven and earth through the temple. See also the following discussion, which again focuses on the microcosm and macrocosm.

⁵¹ *Otzar Eden Ganuz*, 373.

⁵² See, for instance, the discussion in b. Talmud Avodah Zarah, fol. 29b.

ing this level. This seventh level, the level of prophecy, implies knowledge that every letter in the Torah is a Name of God and means that the person has achieved the highest spiritual attainments possible and reached the level of prophecy.⁵³

While Abulafia does not distinguish between prophethood and sainthood, ibn al-‘Arabi depicts the seal of sainthood as the supreme level of knowledge, describing it as “silence (*al-sukut*), not inability (*al-‘ajz*).”⁵⁴ This seal is imprinted in the two last bricks which make up the wall of prophecy. Muhammad, as the seal of the apostles, had noted that one brick, the silver one (which represents the external law) was missing from the wall of the Ka’aba—that brick being, according to ibn al-‘Arabi, Muhammad himself.⁵⁵ According to ibn al-‘Arabi, however, the Universal Seal of Sainthood, who has to have the same vision, notices that two bricks are missing from the Ka’aba—one gold brick representing the internal perfect knowledge of the essence of things and the other, the aforementioned silver brick of the law—and that those two bricks are the Seal itself. “And he must see himself impressed in the place of those two bricks, for the Universal Seal of Sainthood is to be those two bricks. Then the wall will be complete.”⁵⁶ Hence, the Seal of Muhammadan sainthood is the perfect man who draws his knowledge of God directly from the Source.

⁵³ Abulafia describes the seventh level as entering the Holy of Holies, which is where the Ark with the Tablets of Stone was to be found. See *Otzar Eden Ganuz*, 370; and *Sheva Netivot ha-Torah*, ed. A. Gross (Jerusalem: n.p., 1999), 92. The latter is a letter written after 1285, probably closer to 1290, as Abulafia mentions having written twenty-six books and another twenty-two books of prophecy. *Sheva Netivot ha-Torah*, 130. In *Hayei ha-Olam ha-Ba*, ed. A. Gross (Jerusalem: n.p., 1999), 164-65, written in 1280, Abulafia discusses putting a “seal upon a seal” in the context of combining letters of the divine name. This is very different from what is proposed in *Otzar Eden Ganuz*.

⁵⁴ What ibn al-‘Arabi means by “inability” is the prior level, “the realization that one cannot attain unto Realization is [itself] a Realization.” See Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 605. In Judaism, until the eighteenth century, the saint is not a category of reference. See R. L. Cohn, “Sainthood on the Periphery: The Case of Judaism,” in *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions*, ed. R. Kieckhefer and G. D. Bond (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 43-68; and P. Fenton, “The Hierarchy of the Saints in Jewish and Islamic Mysticism,” *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society* 10 (1991): 12-34 (also published in Hebrew in *Da’at* 39 [1997]: 5-22). Abulafia distinguishes between three levels of spiritual achievement, the lowest being the *tzaddik* (righteous one), then the *hasid* (the pious one), and the *nabi* (the prophet). See *Mafteah ha-Hochmot*, 26-27.

⁵⁵ Ibn al-‘Arabi reworks the well-known dream of Muhammad, who saw himself symbolically as the last brick in the wall of prophecy.

⁵⁶ *Fusus al-Hikam*, chap. 2, dealing with the Word of Seth, translated by Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 605. See n. 23 above.

In one of his works, Abulafia comments on the term *na'ar* (youth), which is actually numerically equivalent to the Arabic *sheikh* or master (both equal 320).⁵⁷ In the continuation of the passage, it turns out that this youth is Metatron, or the minister of the divine names, also known as the angel Gabriel, who reveals the wonders of prophecy.⁵⁸ Ibn al-‘Arabi reports that at the start of his journey of ascension (*mi'raj*) mirroring the prophet’s famous night journey, he met a youth at the well of Arin, who is the counterpart of the angel Gabriel.⁵⁹ This well is at the center of all things, where everything is balanced without distortion, and this youth turns out to be the ultimate source and secret of inspiration.⁶⁰ Ibn al-‘Arabi asks the youth to reveal to him the secrets of the Qur’an and the *Fatiha*, to which the youth replies: “You are a cloud over your own sun. First of all know the reality of yourself. None can understand My words except one who ascends to My Station, and none ascends to It except Me! So how is it that you want to know the reality of My Names?”⁶¹ Interestingly, this youth is also the source of the Divine Names; in addition, the youth equates the Names and the text of the Qur’an, seeming to imply that the text of the latter consists of the former. Abulafia states more than once, based on Nahmanides, that the whole Torah consists of the Names of God.⁶² Given that Gabriel was the angel who revealed the Qur’an to Muhammad, it is perhaps not surprising that this youth turns out to be Ibn al-‘Arabi’s inspiration, particularly in the context of the night journey. The point to be made here, however, is that the numerical equivalence of the terms “youth” and *sheikh*, along with the identification of the youth as (Metatron)

⁵⁷ This is so if “sheikh” is spelled in Hebrew orthography without the *yud* in the middle, which would add another ten, thus spoiling the equation. This clearly bothered some students of Abulafia, as is illustrated in the comment found in Isaac of Acre’s *Otzar ha-Haim*, cited in Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, 100-101.

⁵⁸ *Hayei ha-Olam ha-Ba*, 148. In addition, Idel claims that Metatron is actually the Active Intellect. The identification of Gabriel with Metatron in the above-cited passage is problematic and depends on how the passage is read. However, Abulafia himself cites an Ashkenazi (pictist) tradition, which suggests that Metatron has seventy names. Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, 102-3.

⁵⁹ In the Isma‘ili tradition and Islamic philosophy, Gabriel (Jibril) is understood allegorically to represent the Active Intellect, the ruling *‘aql* of the sublunar sphere. See, for instance, Al-Farabi in his *Book of Religion (Kitāb al-milla)*, cited in Al-Farabi, *The Political Writings, Selected Aphorisms and Other Texts*, trans. C. E. Butterworth (Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 111.

⁶⁰ Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier*, 116.

⁶¹ *Kitāb al-Isra’ (The Book of the Night Journey)*, (Beirut 1988) p. 57 translated in S. Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier*, 117.

⁶² See, for instance, *Otzar Eden Ganuz*, 53.

Gabriel, minister of the divine Names in the Abulafian passage, is perhaps more than just a coincidence.

In this regard, it is worth reconsidering a passage contained in the work of a disciple of Abulafia's which expressly mentions Sufi practices, the *dhikr*, or enunciation of the divine names, which is a central part of Sufi discipline, the attempt to have God continually on one's mind as one goes through daily life.⁶³ Nathan ben Sa'adiah Harar, the author of *Sha'arei Tzedek* (Gates of Justice), probably written in Palestine in 1295, focuses on the pronunciation of the name Allah during the *dhikr*, writing: "[W]hen they pronounce these letters, they direct their thought completely away from every 'natural form' and the letters of the word Allah and their diverse powers work upon them. . . . This process of removing all natural forms from the soul is called 'annihilation (*mehikah*).'⁶⁴ Annihilation is equivalent to the Arabic term *fana'*, which is the ultimate goal of the Sufi; thus, Nathan seems to be referring to Sufis who have prepared themselves well and are at a very advanced stage on the path.⁶⁵ Nathan says that, because the Muslims have no *kabbalah* (divinely revealed tradition/knowledge), they know not what they do. He then goes on to relate his own personal experience with his teacher, Abulafia, who teaches him to combine letters but warns him not to touch the "the great ineffable name," referring to the Tetragrammaton. The Tetragrammaton is the summit of the union with the divine and is the source of all knowledge and wisdom.⁶⁶ When on the eve of the Sabbath, the disciple attempts to combine the letters of the Tetragrammaton, he almost dies as his annihilation in the divine is total, and it is only his supplications before the Divine which save him as his prayers are

⁶³ For a discussion of what Sufism actually is and the importance of *dhikr*, see Chittick, *Faith and Practice of Islam: Three Thirteenth-Century Sufi Texts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 165-79, esp. p. 173. See also Sviri, *Taste of Hidden Things*, 124-44.

⁶⁴ *Sha'arei Tzedek*, ed. J. Porush (Jerusalem: Oraiyta, 1989), 21b-22a, translated in Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 3rd ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 147. The last word of the quotation is translated as "effacement," which I have emended. On the place of the authorship of this work and the identity of the author, see Idel, "R. Nathan ben Sa'adiah Harar, the author of *Sha'arei Tzedek*" (in Hebrew), *Shalem* 7 (2002): 47-58.

⁶⁵ See A. Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 309-11, 319-21. There are different levels of the *dhikr* all associated with the pronunciation of the name Allah; however, according to al-Ghazali, it is only in the third stage—the *dhikr* of the "innermost heart" (*sirr*), which is likened to the state of spiritual perfection (*ihsan*)—that self-annihilation into the divine can take place.

⁶⁶ Abulafia goes into great detail about the four-lettered name (YHVH) in *Hayee ha-Olam ha-Ba*, 173-84.

accepted. He then describes how “as I was speaking [with God] . . . I beheld something like the image of the anointing oil [of kingship which] anointed me from my head to my feet, and immense joy engulfed me, and I cannot describe it adequately, so spiritual and sweet was its delight.”⁶⁷

In the *Fabulous Gryphon* and in other places, ibn al-‘Arabi describes the name Allah as the name in which all the other divine names take refuge and calls it “the Greatest Name and the Most-Excellent Mighty First Principle.” In other words, Allah is the only name which includes within it all the other names.⁶⁸ In addition, Allah is the only name referred to as a “Proper Noun,” whilst all the other names are adjectives by which God can be addressed.⁶⁹ Abulafia refers to the Tetragrammaton as the “perfect noun,” whilst all the other names are clearly lesser names to be seen as stepping-stones toward the most perfect name.⁷⁰ In another place, Abulafia writes: “And he [Abulafia] intended to reveal to every man of intellect that the (divine) names rule in the world and they are all attributed to the being of the Primal Cause, but [the divine names] are like nothing in comparison with the kingship of the four-lettered Hidden Name [Tetragrammaton] which is the King of the King of Kings, and by It alone that the Lord wishes to be known.”⁷¹ Nathan, Abulafia’s disciple, clearly studied with him before moving to Palestine; his reference to the annihilation of the self when repeating the name of Allah, the “Greatest Name,” coupled together with his description of his own mystical rapture when combining the Tetragrammaton, may be a reflection of Abulafia’s integrating ibn al-‘Arabi’s methods of practicing *dhikr* into his own Kabbalistic praxis.⁷²

⁶⁷ *Sha’arei Tzedek*, 24b. Ibn al-‘Arabi deals with this experience in a work he wrote in 1212, *Kitāb al Fana’ fī’l-mushāhada* (Book of Annihilation in Contemplation).

⁶⁸ Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 365-68. See also *The Meccan Revelations*, 59-62; and Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 31-32. Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 164-65, suggests that ibn al-‘Arabi adopted different types of *dhikr* during the course of his life. In the *Meccan Revelations*, the first draft of which was completed in 1231, he writes: “This name Allah used to be the *dhikr* I practised and it was the one used by the master [‘Uryabi] through whom I entered the Way. The merit of this invocation is greater than all the merits resulting from other forms of invocation. . . .”

⁶⁹ Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood*, 365; and Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-‘Arabi’s Cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), xvii.

⁷⁰ *Hayei ha-Olam ha-Ba*, 183. See also *Or ha-Sechel*, 138.

⁷¹ *Sefer ha-Ot*, ed. A. Gross (Jerusalem: n.p., 2001), 62. The continuation of the passage reveals that the Tetragrammaton was renewed in this world in the year 5000 AM (1240 CE), the year that Abulafia was born—thus emphasizing his messianic credentials.

⁷² Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, suggests that it might be the other way around and

That Abulafia does not directly cite any of ibn al-‘Arabi’s writings is perhaps not all that surprising, given that he would be unlikely to want to openly acknowledge borrowing ideas and concepts from a source that his intended audience might consider heretical. This lack of citation of chapter and verse, however, raises the issue of what constitutes proof or evidence of cross cultural influences or borrowing. This is not an easily resolvable question, and standards of what constitutes proof differ among scholars within their own disciplines and among the disciplines themselves. Sociologists and cultural anthropologists often talk about acculturation or the diffusion of cultural traits—concepts, which, while not necessarily conclusive, are more than suggestive. Historians of religion discuss criteria such as accommodation, cultural symbiosis, and religious commonality. To these, it is possible to add geographical proximity and, in this particular incident, a long and well-documented history of cultural interaction among members of the three monotheistic faiths in the Iberian Peninsula. Since, in a discussion with important theological implications, direct quotation of a Muslim source by a Jew could be counterproductive, one would expect to find indirect evidence—the use of similar motifs in similar contexts—and this is precisely what one does find in Abulafia’s works.

The citation that opens this article indicates Abulafia’s belief that he was the seventh of the prophets, the Messiah soon to be revealed. This is a concept with strong Isma‘ili roots, in that the seventh Imam of the sixth era, that of Muhammad (who was the sixth and final enunciator of a religious law), would rise to the rank of prophet and be revealed as the Mahdi ruling over the final eschatological era and revealing the esoteric teachings of all the previous prophets.⁷³ Abulafia fulfilled this

that the author had prior knowledge of Sufism from the Palestinian ambience which he then combined with Abulafian Kabbalah. This, however, seems to be based on the premise that Sufism was more prevalent in the Middle East and is monolithic in practice and that, therefore, this method of *dhikr* was far more likely to be encountered there. However, ibn al-‘Arabi’s own depiction of the many Sufi masters to be found in Andalusia as well as other evidence which points to Barcelona and Tudela, among other places, as being centers of Sufism could perhaps change the picture somewhat. In addition, ibn al-‘Arabi is outspoken about the ways that he diverges from other Sufis in praxis and ideas. See Pedaya, *Vision and Speech*, 171-200. For Tudela, see L. P. Harvey, *Islamic Spain, 1250-1500* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 138-41.

⁷³ F. Daftary, *The Isma‘ilis: Their History and Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 139-40. The other prophets were Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. Each of these legislative prophets has a spiritual heir or executor who interpreted the inner meanings of the tradition (Seth, Shem, Ishmael, Aaron or Joshua, Simon Peter, and Ali). Only in the Mahdi are these functions united.

role perfectly in that he was the Messiah, prophet and revealer of secrets. The writings of the *Ikhwan al-Safa'* (Brethren of Purity), also of Isma'ili origin, were well known in the Iberian Peninsula and may also have influenced Abulafia's conception of universal redemption.⁷⁴ However, Abulafia's use of the seal imagery strongly suggests a familiarity with, and the adoption and adaptation of, some of the central ideas found in ibn al-'Arabi's enormous corpus.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ I. R. Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991); A. Hamdani, "A Critique of Paul Casanova's Dating of the *Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa'*"; and A. A. Nanji, "Portraits of self and others: Isma'ili perspectives on the history of religions," in *Medieval Isma'ili History and Thought*, ed. F. Daftary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 145-52, 153-60, respectively. See also Pines, "Une encyclopédie arabe du 10e siècle: Les épîtres des frères de la pureté, *Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa'*," *Revista di storia della filosofia* 40 (1985): 131-37.

⁷⁵ These points seem to suggest that the onus of proof is on the shoulders of those who would deny that Abulafia used ideas taken from the works of *Al-Sheikh al-Akbar*.