

A JUDAEO-ARABIC POEM ATTRIBUTED TO
ABU HĀMID AL-GHAZALI
Un poema en judeo-árabe atribuido a Abu Hāmid al-Ghazali

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Resumen: Un poema judeo-árabe, conservado sólo en el Ms. St Petersburg, Russian National Library Heb II A73, resume lo esencial de la doctrina expuesta por Abu Hamid al-Ghazali en el tratado *al-Ma'arif al-'aqliyya*. Sin embargo, el poema utiliza esta doctrina para mostrar que “nuestro maestro Moisés”, conocido también como *kalim Allah*, representa la cumbre de la profecía humana. De aquí que nosotros consideremos que dicho poema fue escrito por un judío, uno de los muchos que estudiaron y admiraron los escritos de al-Ghazali.

Abstract: A Judaeo-Arabic poem, preserved uniquely in MS St Petersburg, Russian National Library Heb II A73, recapitulates the essentials of the doctrine espoused in Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's treatise, *al-Ma'arif al-'aqliyya*. However, the poem exploits this doctrine in order to show that “our master Moses”, known also as *kalim Allah*, represents the apex of human prophecy. Hence, we argue, the poem was penned by a Jew, one of many who studied and admired the writings of al-Ghazali.

Palabras claves: al-Ghazali. Judeo-árabe. Filosofía medieval. Lengua. Emanación. Profecía

Key words: al-Ghazali; Judaeo-Arabic; medieval philosophy; language; emanation; prophecy

Ms. St Petersburg, Russian State Library, Evreiskii II A 73, ff. 39a-40b, contains a poem in thirty lines attributed “li-Abi Hāmid al-Ghazali”. The first line begins, “*al-farq bayna al-nuṭq wa-l-kalam wa-l-qawl fi 'ilm dhawi al-ifham*”. As we shall see, the poem certainly depends heavily upon the treatise written by Abu Hāmid al-Ghazali, *al-Ma'arif al-'Aqliyya wa-l-Asrar al-Ilahiyya*.¹ However, we have found no indication that al-

* I acknowledge with gratitude the comments of Binyamin Abrahamov, Frank Griffel, Kenneth Seeskin, and Josef Stern to drafts of this paper.

1. See Bouyges-Allard (1959), 37 (entry no. 26). Cabanelas (1956) remains the only study to date of the work published in a Western language. I have used the edition of 'Abd al-Karim al-'Uthman, Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1963, which contains a useful introduction.

Ghazali composed the poem under consideration here.² Moreover, as we shall argue, it is very plausible that the author of the poem was a Jew. Even if our hypotheses of Jewish authorship should one day be falsified, the congeniality of the poem to Jewish beliefs and sentiments cannot be gainsaid.

We shall be concerned here with *al-Ma'arif* only to the extent necessary for the interpretation of the poem. Weighty and intriguing questions, such as the pedigree of the specific theory of emanation expounded in *al-Ma'arif*, or the proper place of the work within al-Ghazali's lifelong engagement with "neoplatonism", will receive little or no attention. We shall begin with a description of the manuscript, followed by some remarks on Hebrew versions of al-Ghazali's writings. Following that we shall offer a synopsis of the main themes of the poem as we understand them; and we shall display our arguments for Jewish authorship. After these *proemia* we shall present a translation and commentary of the poem itself.

The Manuscript

MS. St Petersburg, Russian National Library Evreiskii II A 73, in forty folia, comprises Hānokh ben Shlomo Qunṣṭāntīni's *Mar'ot Elohim* (*Visions of God*), copied at Aleppo in 1384. *Mar'ot Elohim* is a full philosophical commentary of the epiphanies of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah; though heavily indebted to Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, it does not follow it slavishly.³ The frontispiece contains a short Hebrew hymn, otherwise unknown, ????? ??? ????? . The poem attributed to al-Ghazali is found at the end of the volume, on ff. 39a-40b. There does not seem to be any connection between the Judaeo-Arabic poem and the treatise of Qunṣṭāntīni. Nonetheless, we shall argue that the

2. There is no mention of it all in Bouyges-Allard (1959). Indeed, Bouyges-Allard seem rather skeptical concerning with regard to all of the poems ascribed to al-Ghazali. They reject the authenticity of the qasida, *qul li-ikhwan* (no. 245), to be discussed below. They refute the claim of others that the work (as yet unidentified) called *Asrar al-mu'amalat* was a collection of poems. In a note to entry 217, which sums up poems attributed to al-Ghazali by earlier bibliographers, they cite "l'erudit arabe Yaqut" who wrote that al-Ghazali composed no poems at all. By contrast, Margaret Smith (1944), devotes the first part of chapter six to "al-Ghazali as poet and his views on poetry".

3. See the edition and study of Colette Sirat, (1976). The St Petersburg manuscript was not available to Prof. Sirat when she made her study.

poet, if he was Jewish, would certainly fit comfortably within the Maimonidean camp; this offers some connection, albeit tenuous, between the poem and the text to which it has been appended.

The poem: an interpretation

We propose the following interpretation. The author of the poem exploited the distinction that al-Ghazali draws between *nutq* and *kalam* for the purpose of extolling “our master Moses”. According to the emanationist scheme of *al-Ma‘arif*, Intellect is the “trace” of God’s *kalam*. Intellect, in turn, effuses *nutq* onto human souls. *Nutq* is the distinguishing mark of the human species, and it is a distinctly human attribute. Apparently this is so—I add the mild disclaimer “apparently” because the argument in its full logical sequence is not explicit in the poem—because *nutq* can result in knowledge only at the end of a long process that requires the use of bodily organs for speaking and hearing. A process of this sort has no place within the godhead or the intelligences. As an end result, *kalam* is also produced—but it is human speech, obviously far removed from divine *kalam*.

Moses, however, received a direct communication from God in the form of *kalam*. In other words, his link with God is so direct that it bypasses even the first hypostasis, Intellect. This insight into Moses’ special gift depends entirely upon the common Muslim epithet for Moses, *kalim Allah*, or “he to whom God spoke”; the Qur’anic proof-text is cited in *al-Ma‘arif*.⁴ Note that no mention at all is made of Muhammad; and the epithet *Musa Rabbuna*, as he is called in the penultimate line, clearly calls to mind the traditional Hebrew designation, *Moshe Rabbeinu*. All of these features argue for a Jewish authorship of the poem.

I have chosen to leave the key terms *nutq* and *kalam* untranslated. The distinction drawn between them depends so heavily upon their respective semantic fields in Arabic, and even more upon the weighty theological and philosophical baggage that each bears in the Islamic and Jewish traditions, that no word in English could be a precise match.⁵ However, I cannot entirely shirk the issue of their translation. *Kalam*, then, usually

4. See the edition of al-‘Uthman [hereafter: ed.], 52 for a description of the aggrandizement of Moses. The proof-text from Qur’an 4:173 is cited on p. 58. See also our commentary to line 29.

5. Cabanelas (1956, 25), renders *nutq* “razón” and *kalam*, “*verbum mentis* o *palabra interior*”.

means “speech” or “discourse”. In our case, however, I think that “communication” is best, as that word includes both verbal and nonverbal modes of transmission. *Nutq̣* refers to the chain of actions, beginning in thought and resulting finally in the articulation of words. Perhaps “ratiocination”, referring to thought processes leading up to audible speech, but not the sounds themselves, would be a decent choice.

The distinction between *nutq̣* and *kalam* is strikingly reminiscent of the distinction marked in Stoic logic between *logos endiathetos* (“reason stored within”) and *logos prophorikos* (“reason uttered”). On both textual and contextual grounds, it seems most promising to trace the theory expounded in *al-Ma‘arif* (and reflected in the poem) not directly to the Stoics, but rather to an echo of their view in a passage from the *Enneads* V.1.3, where Plotinus remarks, “just as a thought in its utterance is an image of the thought in soul, so soul itself is the expressed thought of Intellect.”⁶ Having said this, however, we must also take note of the fact that *al-Ma‘arif* places *al-kalima*, “the word” (from the same root as *kalam*) as the first (that is, comparable to the one in the scale of numbers) in the chain of being. It is uncreated; the first created being approaches it for enrichment, after which it transmits this bounty down to the soul (ed., 30). This suggests some connection with late classical and especially early Christian deliberations concerning the *logos*, where both the uncreatedness of the *logos* as well as analogies to the pair *endiathetos* and *prophorikos* played a significant role.⁷

It must be borne in mind that the ultimate concern of *al-Ma‘arif* is not *kalam*, nor is it *nutq̣*. Rather, it is the status of the letters (*al-hāruḥ*), in the context of the debate within Islam concerning the status of the Qur’an. The mainstream is in agreement that the Qur’an is uncreated; *al-Ma‘arif* angrily rejects the Mu‘tazilite claim to the contrary (Ed., 57). The problem of the letters is less simple. After reviewing the various opinions—that

6. Plotinus (1984, 19). For a concise and clear account of the place of this pair of terms in Plotinus’ thought, especially in contrast to its role in Philo, see Graeser (1972, 35); see note 1 for some instances of this distinction in pre-Stoic Greek philosophy.

7. A concise discussion replete with references to primary sources is available in the entry on “The Logos” in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, section IV, available on-line at <<<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09328a.htm>>>. For Jewish acquaintance with Christian teachings in an Islamic environment, see the text and study published by Leon Nemoy (1945). Concerning *al-kalima* as *logos* in Islamic thought, see Walker (1993, 42-43).

they too are eternal, or they are created, or some (i.e., those of the Qur'an) are eternal and others not—*al-Ma'arif* decides upon a compromise solution: the letters are *qadim*, but in the sense of ontological, rather than temporal, priority. Put more precisely, from among the five sorts of priority (*qidam*) on al-Ghazali's list, they possess priority in rank (*martaba*) but not in time (*zaman*); as such they belong to the class of created beings (*muhdathat*)⁸. The entire treatise, including the discussion of the series of emanations from *kalam* to *nutq*, and further downward (i.e., becoming more material) to writing and letters, was written in order to justify the stance taken with regard to the letters.

According to my interpretation, the Jewish poet deliberately omitted the sections on letters and writing. The debate over the stature of the Qur'an and its letters was of no interest to him. Instead, he skillfully rephrased the discussion of *nutq* and *kalam* with a specific purpose in mind. Appropriating the distinction drawn in *al-Ma'arif* between *nutq* and *kalam* as well as the traditional Muslim epithet for Moses, *kalim Allah*, he crafted out of al-Ghazali's book a verse whose climax is the special stature of the Jews' greatest prophet.

In addition to the distinction between *nutq* and *kalam*, several other important notions present in the poem are taken over from *al-Ma'arif*; we display them here. Numbers following citations in Arabic letters refer to pages in the edition, while those following the Judaeo-Arabic phrases refer to line numbers in the poem. A few other borrowings, which seem more literary than philosophical, are discussed in the commentary.

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8. Ed., 87-107; the five sorts of priority are listed on p.103, and the final solution stated on p. 106.

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Finally, there may be a Jewish subtext as well. The role of speech, writing and letters in cosmogony exercised some Jews very much, particularly when they took up the interpretation of the early Hebrew text called *Sefer Yesira*, or *Book of Creation*.⁹ Commentators on that tiny and recondite text differed strongly on the question of the function of letters. Some felt that they are purely a mnemonic tool, necessary only in order to preserve knowledge, whereas others held that they possess intrinsic and very special spiritual properties.¹⁰ As it seems to me, our poet is taking a definite stand against the trend of thoughts exhibited, for example, by Judah Hallevi in the section of his *Cuzari* devoted to *Sefer Yesira*.¹¹ The special and limited role of divine speech, its inaudible and totally immaterial character, and the denial of any role to the letters, all of which are expressed in the poem, seem quite incompatible with the type of opinions espoused by Hallevi and those who read *Sefer Yesira* as he did.

The poem: a conspectus

(1) Presentation of theme. (2) *Nutq̄* is the "root" of *kalam*. (3-5) *Nutq̄* is the nobility of humanity. It is the reason for its maintenance, but also the cause for its responsibility before God. (6-7) *Nutq̄* is an efflux onto the soul from Intellect, an efflux that manifests itself in a word overflowing with meaning. (8-9) Intellect is a solitary substance ennobled by the Holy One, and it is the trace of God's *kalam*. (10-13) A thought may be enunciated potentially; but only when it becomes an ordered arrangement

9. There still is no clear consensus concerning the book's dating, its defining characteristics, or the type of sources with which it should or can be profitably compared. For an up-to-date account see the essays by Steven Wasserstrom, David Shulman, and the present author in *Aleph: Historical Studies in Science & Judaism*, 2 (2002), 169-221 all of which were written in response to Liebes (2000).

10. Some passages from this debate are discussed by Vajda (2002, 83-84 and esp. n. 3).

11. See below, comment to line 23.

of sounds, is it then language, where ideas are expressed in the letters. *Kalam* is the most perfect attribute of the soul. (14-22) (Human) *kalam* and *nutq* do not apply to our recognition of God (a totally isolated, personal movement) but rather to actions necessary for communicating thoughts to others. The process begins in the mind, eventually producing audible sounds that register themselves onto other people's ears. The end result is that the listener now knows something that he had not known before. (23-24) *Nutq* is a human trait, *kalam* a divine attribute. (25-28) Divine efflux onto those whom He honors is *kalam*; ideas are transmitted without the use of sounds or letters. (29-30) God bestowed upon Moses soundless *kalam*, thereby glorifying him.

Al-Ghazali in medieval Jewish literature: Some Observations

Hebrew translations of al-Ghazali's writings had a major impact upon Jewish thought. By far the most repercussive of these was his *Maqasid al-Falasifa*, which was translated several times, furnished with a number of commentaries, and served generations of Jews as a basic textbook of philosophy and natural science (Harvey, 2001). Moritz Steinschneider devoted nearly thirty pages of his monumental *Die hebraeischen Uebersetzungen des Mittelalters* to a thorough survey of the translations and commentaries of the *Maqasid* known to him, and some twenty pages to other writings of al-Ghazali that were transmitted (1893-1 296-348). The epochal contribution of Steinschneider has yet to be digested, let alone reassessed and advanced. Some of al-Ghazali's writings, in their original Arabic, were transcribed into Hebrew letters; here too scholarship has not moved much beyond the lists prepared by Steinschneider (1893-2, 348); Langermann, 1996, 148-149).

A full discussion of the Ghazalian texts that found a significant Jewish readership is well beyond the purview of the present study. We would, however, like to make some brief remarks concerning some treatises that Jewish literary traditions have connected, rightly or wrongly, with the name of al-Ghazali. The first of these is a collection of philosophical questions and responses, translated into Hebrew by Isaac ben Nathan of Majorca in the mid-fourteenth century. Steinschneider's disciple, Henry Malter, published this text with a German translation and copious notes (Malter, 1896). Malter could not identify an Arabic original; in his notes he adduces numerous and lengthy parallels from *al-Maqasid*. Malter entertained the possibility that this is not an authentic work, but rather an

artificial compilation, based in large measure on *al-Maqasid*; however, he concluded that there are no grounds at all for rejecting the attribution to al-Ghazali.

The authenticity of this work (dubbed “the Hebrew *ajwiba*”) was rejected by D. B. MacDonald and, following him, by Montgomery Watt.¹² Bouyges-Allard, on the other hand, considers the question of authenticity to be as yet unsettled (Bouyges-Allard, 1959 no. 85, 93-94). One of the unusual (for al-Ghazali) features of this tract is the lengthy and detailed astronomical section. Malter recognized this, asserted that those portions were borrowed from al-Farghani, and pretty much left the matter there (Malter, (1896). IX-X). However, Bouyges-Allard call attention to an as yet unstudied astronomical compendium attributed to al-Ghazali which may prove useful in resolving the problem (Bouyges-Allard, 1959, no. 303, 159-160). Nasrollah Pourjavady has very recently discovered a text of al-Ghazali that overlaps considerably with Malter's edition; further study of its relationship to the Hebrew text is required before any definite conclusions can be drawn.¹³

I have not made a close study of these questions and answers. However, it seems to me that any new look at them would have to at least raise the possibility that this pseudepigraph (if indeed its attribution to al-Ghazali is mistaken) is the work of a Jew. Its ascription to al-Ghazali would then be further evidence of the high standing of that scholar among Jews.

The second treatise I should like to call attention to is *Moznei ha-Iyyunim*, “The Balance of Inquiries”. In this instance as well we are confronted with a text that is certainly a translation—indeed, at least two different translations are extant—whose Arabic original has not been identified. Here, however, the similarity ends. To begin with, there is considerable confusion in the Hebrew sources as to whom the treatise should be ascribed. Most manuscripts do not name anyone as the author, and among the numerous citations, the name of Ibn Rushd is mentioned at least as often as that of al-Ghazali as the author. Clearly the work was

12. Watt, 1952, 30, following the earlier rejection of D.B. MacDonald, [EI (1), II, 157]

13. *Majmu'ah-ye Falsafi-e Maragha: A Philosophical Anthology from Maragha Containing Works by Abu Hamid Ghazzali, 'Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani, Ibn Sina, 'Umar ibn Sahlan Savi, Majduddin Jili, and others*, facsimile edition with introductions in Persian and English by Nasrollah Pourjavady (Teheran: Iran University Press, 2002), pp. 63-99 (under the title “*Masa'il al-madnun*”).

written by neither.¹⁴ The misattribution to al-Ghazali probably stemmed from the similarity of the title to some other writings of al-Ghazali, mainly in the field of logic, in which the word “balance” appears. Indeed, in a Hebrew version of *Mishkat al-Anwar*, one of his logical works is called *Moznei ha-‘Iyyun*.¹⁵

A few manuscripts name Jacob ben Machir as the translator; most do not name any translator. Jacob was a grandson of Samuel Ibn Tibbon. However, Samuel’s son Moses already cites *Moznei ha-‘Iyyunim*, which he ascribes to Ibn Rushd. Moreover, he cites it in a unique document in which he defends his father’s *Yiqawu ha-Mayim* against the critique levelled by one of his nephews—very possibly, Jacob ben Machir!¹⁶ It is interesting that Moses Ibn Tibbon, who translated many Averroean works into Hebrew, should have been so impressed by *Moznei ha-‘Iyyunim* and, in addition, to have had no doubts about its attribution to Ibn Rushd.

Portions of *Moznei ha-‘Iyyunim* are lifted straight out of al-Baṭṭalyawsi’s *al-Hāda’iq* (another Islamic work that enjoyed great success among Jews) and the *Rasa’il Ikhwan al-Sāfa’*.¹⁷ However, no source has yet been identified for some of the peculiar cosmological and cosmogonic doctrines espoused by *Moznei ha-‘Iyyunim*, and these in particular deserve further and deeper study.

Al-Ma‘arif was certainly known to Jewish audiences, at least by title, thanks to the reference of Ibn Ṭufayl in his philosophical romance, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*. As I understand it, Ibn Ṭufayl reports that he is well-acquainted with *al-Ma‘arif*; hence he can conclude that it is not an esoteric book, as the hints it contains do not go beyond al-Ghazali’s other writings. Here is the passage, in the translation of Lenn Goodman [I have added the Arabic book titles in square brackets]:

“In his *Gems of the Qur’an* [*Jawahir al-Qur’an*] Ghazali said that he had written certain esoteric books which contain the unvarnished truth. So far as I know no such book has reached Spain, although some claim that certain books we have received are in fact this hidden corpus. Nothing could be further from the truth. The books in question are *Modes of*

14. This is the conclusion, which I heartily endorse, of Binyamin Abrahamov, (1995).

15. Ms Vatican ebr. 209, f. 71b.

16. Ms Parma De Rossi 1393 [Richler 1543], f. [99]a. *Moznei ha-‘Iyyunim* is not named here, but the very same point is made in Moses’ treatise on providence, and there *Moznei ha-‘Iyyunim* is cited by name. See Z. Diesendruck, 1936, 364.

17. A precise accounting of these borrowings is given by Abrahamov (1995).

Awareness [*al-Ma'arif al-'aqliyya*] and *The Smoothing, the Breath of Life, and Related Problems* [*Kitab Madāṭun al-Sāghir; Kitāb al-Maqsād al-Asna fi Sharh Asma'i Allah 'l-hūsna*]. Granted that these books contain many hints, they still add little to what is disclosed in his better known works.”¹⁸

Hāyy circulated widely in a Hebrew translation (whose authorship remains to be established) accompanied by the commentary of Moses Narboni. (Steinschneider, 1893-1, 363-368). A transcription of the Arabic text into the Hebrew alphabet has also been identified (Langermann, (1996), 158).

Particular pertinent to the present study is the evidence of Jewish interest in al-Ghazali's poetry. The very last item in Steinschneider's lengthy account of translations of works by al-Ghazali deals with a poem urging his confreres not to mourn for him when he is gone. Abraham Gavison translated it into Hebrew and published it in his *'Omer ha-Shikhahā* (Steinschneider 1893-1, 347-348). Thirty-odd years after Steinschneider's book appeared, Hartwig Hirschfeld found among the papers in the Cairo genizah a poem, Arabic in Hebrew letters, attributed to “the imam, the philosopher Abu Muḥammad”. Hirschfeld published the text under the title “A Hebraeo-Sufic Poem,” and he correctly surmised that the author's real name was Abu Ḥāmid Muḥammad, that is, our al-Ghazali, but he did not notice that the poem was the very same item described by Steinschneider (Hirschfeld, 1929, 168-173). In fact, not a few copies of that poem exist in Arabic letters, as well as a commentary.¹⁹

18. *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, (1991, 102). I have added the Arabic titles in parentheses, as Goodman's renditions may not be transparent to all readers. Compare the Spanish translation of A. Gonzalez Palencia, cited by Cabanelas (1956, 20-21), and the French version in Gauthier, 1900, 13-14.

19. Pedersen (1931). One of the manuscripts listed by Pedersen, London BL Or. Add. 7561, f. 86, was noted by Steinschneider, (1893-1) (under the signature British Museum 754). Bouyges-Allard (1959, no. 245, 145-146), classify this poem as spurious; see above, n. 2, concerning their general disinclination to ascribe poetic verse to al-Ghazali.

The Judaeo-Arabic Poem

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The Poem: Translation and Commentary

[following each line, within square brackets, I exhibit my admittedly minimalist commentary]

1. The distinction between *nutq̣* and *kalam*

and the doctrine concerning the knowledge possessed by the astute
[*al-Ma'arif* undertakes to distinguish between three concepts: *nutq̣*, *kalam*, and *qawl*. One could translate the opening line thus: "The distinction between *nutq̣*, *kalam* and *qawl* in the knowledge possessed by the astute." I choose instead to treat *qawl* (which Cabanelas, 1956, 53 and *passim*, takes to mean "language") lexicographically as meaning "doctrine", and syntactically as being joined to the phrase *fi 'ilm dhawi al-ifham*, for the following reasons: (a) The theme treated in the poem (in contrast to *al-Ma'arif*) is the distinction between *nutq̣* and *kalam*. Although *qawl* appears a few times, its definition is not of major concern. (b) One of the bibliographical references to *al-Ma'arif* dubs it "*risala fi 'l-farq bayn 'l-nutq̣ wa-l-kalam*" (Ed., introduction, 16). (c) *Wa-l-qawl* begins a new hemistich.]

2. The root of *kalam* is *nutq̣* concerning items of knowledge

Thus have we been informed by a knowledgeable lexicographer
[Is *faqih 'arif* a nod to al-Ghazali, the supposed author of the poem, and certainly (according to our poet) the author of *al-Ma'arif*?]

3. The nobility of man is made known through *nutq̣*

For therein lies the nobility of ideas
[Here and at several other places I have rendered a word that is determinate in the Arabic indeterminate, because I think that that better conveys its true signification in context; literally, *al-ma'ani*, "the ideas" (or: "the meanings")]

4. And God's claim against all mortals

Which he established against them when He created
[*Nutq̣* was given to humans at creation, and it is God's claim or argument—his legal case, the basis for his reprobation and retribution—in the face of human misdeed. In other words, because humans have *nutq̣*, and *nutq̣* is capable of properly regulating our behavior, we are liable for divine justice]

5. As long as this secret remains embedded in thought

One may say of it, that *Nutq̣* is the maintenance of humanity

[*Fi hifjir al-fikr*, which I have rendered “embedded in thought”, is a literary borrowing from *al-Ma‘arif*, p. 54, where the author says that ideas, while still hidden and concealed *fi hifjir al-fikr*, are called *nutq*: *?? ? ????Q?* *?? d????S ????H?* . “This secret” refers to *nutq*.]

6. This *nutq*, without any deception,

Did intellect cause to flow onto souls

[*Talbis*, “deception”, literally means the act of clothing (in the transitive sense). Hence the line describes *nutq* in a manner very reminiscent of the English figure of speech, “the naked truth”; for the various forms of the Arabic root *f.y.d?*, usually rendered “emanate”, I have chosen the English equivalents “cause to flow”, “efflux”, etc., in order to preserve the double sense of flow of water and spiritual outpouring]

7. When intellect pours out a recondite idea

That efflux is a superabundant word

[In keeping with the decision explained in the comment to the previous line, I translate *fa'id?* by “superabundant”. A superabundant word overflows with meaning. It has much more packed within it than ordinary locutions.]

8. Intellect is a solitary, precious substance

Which the Holy One ennobled and made ready

[*Nafis*, “precious”, is a nice double-entendre; among the wealth possessed by Intellect is an abundance of souls (*nafs*, pl. *anfus* or *nufus*), the next “hypostasis” in the usual emanationist schemes. As we observed in the introduction, the full chain of beings does not interest our poet, though it is recorded in *al-Ma‘arif*. Indeed Margaret Smith (1944, 218) went so far as to suggest a connection between the ten emanations mentioned in *al-Ma‘arif* and the ten *sefirot* of the kabbalah.]

9. Intellect is the trace of the *kalam* of the Creator

And Soul is from the Command of the Just God

[The second half of this line alludes to the Qur’anic verse (*surat al-Isra’*, 17:85). True, that verse mentions *ruh?* but *ruh?* means there much the same thing as soul. On Jewish acquaintance with verses from the Qur’an in the writings of al-Ghazali, see Steinschneider, (1893-1, 310).

10. Until such time that it [soul] rose through the air

And He endowed it with *nutq*, soundlessly, potentially

[I must register again my debt to Frank Griffel and especially Binyamin Abrahamov for assisting me in making some sense of this difficult line. *Sa‘idat*, a verb in the third-person feminine, must refer back to *ruh?* spirit

or soul. The manuscript points the final *ta* with a *fathā*, yielding *sā‘adta*, which would make it second-person feminine; but there is no way to make sense of the line if the verb is pointed that way. The import of lines 9-10 is then as follows: Soul remains wholly a “command of God” until such time as it rises through the air or, so it seems, makes its earthly appearance. God then endows it with *nutq̄* (*antaqaha*), but this installed property remains soundless and only in potential, until the human being begins to think and to speak. The wording recalls this phrase from *al-Ma‘arif*, p. 33, which comprises the well-known simile between the soul and a bird: *????* *????*? ? *????*μ *????? ???? ?* , “His heart is like a bird, rising through the air to the ascents of nobility.” However, the line is totally out of context at this point of the poem. The second hemistich conveys the idea that *nutq̄*, though soundless, is a potentially audible locution.]

11. Then, when the sound is cut

And its letters take on order for whoever pays attention

[“Cut” i.e. chopped into distinct sounds]

12. *Kalam* becomes languages that are known

Letters make ideas clear

[“That are known”: here too the manuscript is pointed, indicating the passive voice, *tu‘raf*]

13. *Kalam* is one the attributes of soul, and its most perfect (?)

It is not the same thing while silent that it is when speaking

[Another difficult line; the final words in both hemistiches are problematic. I emend the final word in the first hemistich to *ahkamuha*; this seems simple enough. The final word in the second hemistich is more problematic; note that a *shadda* on the *lamed* is indicated in the manuscript. With no little angst, I add a *mem* to the beginning of the word, so that it reads *mukallim^{an}*, and I translate as given above. Even after these alterations, the point of this line is not altogether clear. Note that *al-Ma‘arif*, p. 45, states that *nutq̄* is one of the attributes (*sifat*) the soul, whereas the poem states here that *kalam* is an attribute of the soul.]

14. It is called neither *nutq̄* nor *kalam*

As in our saying, here is the Erudite One!

[Another difficult line. A *marginalium* records *al-Khaliq*, “the Creator”, as a variant for *al-‘Allam*, “the Erudite One”; clearly the variant reading disturbs the rhyme. Nonetheless, the existence of the variant supplies an important piece of information, namely, that there was at least one more copy of the poem; moreover, it strengthens our interpretation that *al-*

'*Allam* refers to God. Taken together with—more precisely, in disjunction with—the following lines, I interpret the verse to mean that an individual's perception of God need not be, or, perhaps more simply, is not verbalized; perhaps one can go so far as to suggest that it is not even a clearly articulated thought. Those movements—verbalization, or the articulation of thoughts—apply only to interpersonal communication. (Perhaps *that* may include a person's dialogue with his/herself—but exploring that possibility would certainly drive us off the field and into the bleachers.) The implication would be that perception of God is always immediate and intuitive; it would also mean that this intuition is available even to those who are not gifted with prophecy.

An alternative interpretation, perhaps less removed from the central theme of the poem but beset by difficulties of its own, is possible if we make a small emendation. If we eliminate the *waw* (“and”) at the beginning of *wa-l-kalam*, then the first hemistich says, “*Nuṭq* is not *kalam*.” One could go further then and interpret *al-'allam* not as “the Erudite” and referring to God, but as a noun meaning “the sign”. We would then have to consider '*allam* as a variant of '*alama*, the word for sign. The import of the verse would be something like this: what is being described here is not simple signification, such as pointing to an object or sign, but rather, as the succeeding verses make clear, a process beginning in thought and ending in speech that conveys ideas. Though this reading may fit the context somewhat better, it seems to me forced, and I prefer the first interpretation.]

15. But rather when he says something by which he informs

Someone else about something that he has thought about

[Audible speech is necessary for interpersonal communication, but not for personal, individual cogitation and knowledge]

16. Or (!) voice proceeds from the tongue

And the expression of ideas takes on order

17. And that voice was sent out to wits

The air carries it to minds

[*Bayani* here is synonymous with *adhhani*, and I have chosen “wits” as the closest synonym in English to “minds.”]

18. By means of sound, in the auricles, these letters

Notify the listener of something that he had not known.

19. Taking off from larynxes,

And palates, and the outlet of the elements,

[“Elements”, *‘anasār*, are the material components or speech, principally air; compare this line from *al-Ma‘arif*, p. 19, *Q???? Q??G???* “Its ideas [or: meanings], naked and free of air and elements.”]

20. The engravings, remaining in the imagination,

Set out to fall upon the ear of the listener by way of sound.

[For the sake of clarity one should perhaps add that the engravings—those thoughts that have been engraved onto the mind, while remaining all the while in the imagination—can nevertheless be transmitted to someone else by means of sounds.]

21. Causes and arrangement are in the cogitative [faculty];

She governs all of this.

22. The retentive [faculty] retains it in all forms

By means of the wisdom of the Lord, the Powerful, the Potent

23. *Nutq* is one of the attributes of humanity,

But to God *nutq* is not attributed

[Contrast the phrase *al-nutq al-ilahiy* employed by Judah Halleivi, *Cuzari*, 175]

24. Rather is it *kalam* that is attributed to Him

According to the explanation given to understanding

25. When it flows out from Him Whose knowledge is hidden

To the one whose acumen he has honored

26. Then that efflux is *kalam*

The Wise One has honored him with knowledge of Him

27. One calls it, causing an efflux of ideas

Onto the intellect, an efflux that possesses moments

[*Dhi ahyan*, “that possesses moments”, is problematical. Maimonides named as one of the distinguishing characteristics of *fiyad* the fact that it is instantaneous; it does not require time, the way corporeal motion does (Langermann, 1991, 132). Perhaps the poet wishes to indicate that the very transfer or hypobasis of divine *kalam* to this world places it within time. On the other hand, if he means to say that this efflux takes effect only in rare moments of inspiration, as in Sufi thought, the more usual term would have been *awqat*.]

28. That is not sound, which is by means of instruments

Neither letters nor sounds

29. He spoke to our master Moses in direct parole

He made him hear His *kalam*, thus glorifying him

[“Spoke... in direct parole” is my attempt to render the *maf’ul mutlaq, kallama taklim^{an}*. As indicated in the introduction, this line, which paraphrases a verse from the Qur’an (4:173), is the climax of the poem.]

30. He spoke to him, by means other than audible sound,

Not by means of letters that strike upon the ears.

[The poet is taking a clear and strong stance *vis-à-vis* his Jewish audience. Moses heard no sounds, nor did “letters” play any role in his prophecy.]

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