

Cyclical Time in the Ismāʿīlī Circle of Ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ (Tenth Century) and in Early Jewish Kabbalists Circles (Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries)

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1 Introduction

The central goal of this article is to point out the fertility of comparative discussion of doctrines of cyclical time among early Ismāʿīlī circle, the one which is represented in the writings of Ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ [henceforth Ikhwān] of the tenth century, and the circles of early Kabbalists of the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. The claim I seek to support here is that by juxtaposing the doctrines of cyclical time in the expressions of Ikhwān's writings with the writings of early Jewish Kabbalists, it is possible to achieve progress in understanding these doctrines. The Ismāʿīlī and Jewish authors usually related to the contents of doctrines of cyclical time in their writings as bodies of esoteric knowledge, and the intentionally presented them in a fragmented and obscure manner.¹

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1 On the topic of esoterism in the Ikhwān see Godefroid De Callataÿ, "Sacredness and Esotericism in the Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Safāʾ," in *Al-Kitāb: La sacralité du texte dans le monde de l'Islam*, eds. D. De Smet, G. de Callataÿ and J. Van Reeth, Bruxelles – Louvain-la-Neuve – Leuven, Peeters, 2004, pp. 389-401; Michael Ebstein, "Secrecy in Ismāʿīlī Tradition and in the Mystical Thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī", *Journal Asiatique* 298.2 (2010), pp. 320-329; Yves Marquet, *La philosophie des Ikhwan al-Safa'*², Paris-Milan, SÉHA-Archè, 1999, pp. 449-453. On esoterism and oral transmission in the school of Nahmanides see the extended discussion

In this context, the phenomenological, comparative investigation that is central to this article can, in my opinion, help somewhat to close the gaps in our understanding of the doctrine of cyclical time in the writings under discussion. However, I cannot pretend to have overcome the considerable difficulties involved in clarifying these matters. I hope that the new comparative perspective that I propose below can contribute to progress in our understanding of the difficult subject under discussion. In this article, because it is the first, developed presentation of the subject, I chose to concentrate on the similarities between Ikhwān's doctrine of time and that of the Kabbalists, in order to demonstrate the importance and productivity of the proposed comparison. A broader presentation of the subject would require greater detail and focus on the difference, not only the difference between Ikhwān's doctrine and that of the Kabbalists, but also the differences between Ikhwān's cyclical time and the versions of this doctrine in the writings of other Ismāʿīlī authors, as well as the differences among the various versions of the doctrine of cyclical time in the writings of the Kabbalists.

The State of Research

Comparative research on Ismāʿīlī literature and Kabbalistic literature has not thrived so far. The 1920s and 1930s, when Gershom (Gerhard) Scholem laid the foundations of his revolutionary research into Kabbalah, were also the decades when a number of scholars, led by Wladimir Ivanow, initiated modern research into the important Ismāʿīlī stream of Shīʿī Islam. Since that time these fields of research advanced in almost parallel lines, with much to little contact between them. This was despite awareness among some scholars of the great potential

in Moshe Idel, "We Have No Kabbalistic Tradition on This," in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, ed. I. Twersky, Cambridge-Mass., Harvard University Press, 1983, pp. 51-73; Daniel Abrams, *Kabbalistic Manuscripts and Textual Theory: Methodologies of Textual Scholarship and Editorial Practice in the Study of Jewish Mysticism*, Los Angeles, Cherub Press, 2010, pp. 198-223; Moshe Halbertal *By the Way of Truth: Nahmanides and the Creation of Tradition*, Jerusalem, Machon Shalom Hartman, 2006, pp. 297-333 [Hebrew]. On the cyclical time doctrine as a central secret in Nahmanides' thought see Haviva Pedaya, *Nahmanides: Cyclical Time and Holy Text*, Am 'Oved, Tel-Aviv, 2003, p. 210 [Hebrew]. See also *ibid.*, 25, 86, 106-109, 126-127, 192-193. On esoteric writing in 'Azriel of Gerona see Bezalel Safran, "Rabbi Azriel and Nahmanides: Two Views of the Fall of Man," in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, ed. I. Twersky, Cambridge-Mass., Harvard University Press, Cambridge-Mass., 1983, pp. 75-76. On the use of the technique of esoteric writing in *Sefer ha-Temuna*, see Gershom Scholem, *The Kabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah and of Abraham Abul'afia*, Jerusalem, Academion, 1965, p. 29. [Hebrew]; *idem*, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, Philadelphia-Princeton, Jewish Publication Society-Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 461.

inherent in comparative research between these two fields. To illustrate this matter, I will present one example that can, in my opinion, demonstrate how much has been missed and how many opportunities have been wasted by failure to exploit the simultaneous progress in scholarship in Kabbalah and in Ismā'īlī Shī'ism. The example I have chosen touches directly on the subject of the conception of cyclical time, the topic of this article.

Gershom Scholem devoted a chapter to the Kabbalistic adaptation of cyclical time known as “the Sabbatical cycles doctrine” (*Torat ha-Shemīṭot*) in a monograph that deals with the origins of Kabbalah. The early Hebrew version of the work appeared in 1948, and the later, expanded German version, which was later translated into French and English, appeared in 1962. In both the early and later version, there is a reference to an article by Wladimir Ivanow of 1931. The reference touches upon a parallel between the conception of the eighteen thousand worlds in the context of the doctrine of cyclical time in an Ismā'īlī work of the mid-thirteenth century, which is attributed to Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, and its appearance in a commentary on the Torah from the end of that century by the Kabbalist Baḥya ben Asher.² Ivanow's article includes a synopsis of *Rawḍa-yi taslīm*, a central work in the theology of the Nizārī stream, one of the two central streams in post-Fatimid Ismā'īlī Shī'ism (from the end of the eleventh century on). The synopsis to which Scholem refers shows that the Ismā'īlī Islam work refers both to the parallel between the six days of creation and also the six historical periods since Adam. Furthermore, there is a reference to the seven cycles of seven thousand years that join together in a cycle of 49,000 years, at the end of which will come “the great resuscitation,” or “the resuscitation of resuscitations” (*qiāmat-e qiāmāt*).³ All of these

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- 2 Gershom Scholem, *The Beginnings of Kabbalah (1150-1250)*, Jerusalem and Tel-aviv, Schocken, 1948, p. 180, n. 2 [Hebrew]; idem, *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1962, p. 400, and n. 192; idem, *Origins*, pp. 452, and n. 210, 465. The references in Scholem are to Wladimir Ivanow, “An Ismailitic Work by Nasiru'd-din Tusi,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 3 (July 1931), pp. 548-549 (in the early Hebrew version. In the expanded translated versions the reference is only to p. 548, where the matter of the 18,000 worlds is mentioned). For other references to Ismā'īlī Islam in Scholem, see idem, *Origins*, 192, 422; idem, *The Kabbalah in Gerona*, Jerusalem, Academ, 1964, pp. 220-222 [Hebrew]. The matter of the 18,000 worlds is mentioned already in *Umm al-kitāb*. The early layer of this treatise is a product of radical Shī'ī circle in ninth-tenth centuries Iraq. It reached us only through a Persian translation which was preserved by Ismā'īlī- Nizārī communities. See Sean W. Anthony, “The Legend of ‘Abdallāh ibn Saba’ and the Date of *Umm al-Kitāb*,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 21.1 (2011), pp. 28-29.
- 3 In 1950 Ivanow published the first printed edition of *Rawḍa-yi taslīm* with an English translation (*The Rawdatu't-Taslīm: Commonly Called Tasawwurat by Nasiru'd-din Tusi*, ed. and tr.

characteristics have parallels in the early formulations of the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles. Yet Scholem, in his abovementioned discussions, brought to the fore only one matter: that of the 18,000 worlds, which appears relatively rarely in the writings of both Ismāʿīlī Shīʿism and the Kabbalah. By diverting the readers' attention to a relatively marginal matter, while ignoring more important and more prevalent details, Scholem missed an opportunity to present more fully the fascinating parallels between the formulation of the doctrine of cyclical time in the Ismāʿīlī work attributed to Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, one of the greatest Muslim intellectuals and scientists of the Middle Ages, and the Jewish Kabbalists of the same period.⁴

The transition from the founding generation of scholars such as Scholem and Geogres Vajda in Kabbalah,⁵ and Ivanow and Henry Corbin in the study of Ismāʿīlī Shīʿism, to the present generation of scholars, shows that the trend toward comparative research continues to languish. Although the subject under discussion has been on the scholarly agenda for more than sixty years, until now very little has been done to promote it. Sara O. Heller Wilensky, Amos Goldreich and Yehuda Liebes published articles that were interesting but short and narrow in scope during the 1980s, and these can only be regarded as promising but modest beginning.⁶ In addition, contemporary scholars of Kabbalah,

W. Ivanow, Leiden, Brill, 1950). A new edition, which also contains an English translation, based on other of the better manuscripts, to which Ivanow had no access when he published the first edition, was published in 2005 by S. J. Badakhchani. See *Paradise of Submission: A Medieval Treatise on Ismaili Thought. A New Persian Edition and English Translation of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī's Rawḍa-yi taslīm*, ed. and tr. S. J. Badakhchani, London, I. B. Tauris, 2005, pp. 16 (Persian), 20, (English), par. 11; 78-79 (Persian), 68 (English), pars. 169-170; 80 (Persian); 69 (English), par. 175 for the passages relevant to the discussion here.

- 4 According to Hermann Landolt in his introduction to the 2005 edition of *Rawḍa-yi taslīm* (pp. 2, 5-8), Ṭūsī was involved in preparing the work, but he is apparently not the sole author or even the main author. For a general survey of the vast intellectual and scientific work of Ṭūsī see: H. Daiber – F. J. Ragep, “Al-Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-Dīn,” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*², vol. 10, pp. 746-752.
- 5 Georges Vajda, *Judah ben Nissim Ibn Malka, philosophe juif marocain*, Paris, Larose, 1954.
- 6 Amos Goldreich, “The Theology of the Iyyun Circle and a Possible Source of the Term ‘Aḥdut Shava’,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6.3-4 (1987), pp. 141-156 [Hebrew]; Sara O. Heller-Wilensky, “The First Created Being in Early Kabbalah and Ismaʿīlian Source,” *Binah* 3 (1994), pp. 65-77 (published first in Hebrew in 1989); Yehuda Liebes, “Shlomo Pines and Kabbalah Research,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 9 (1990), pp. 21-22 [Hebrew]. See also Sara O. Heller-Wilensky, “Messianism, Eschatology and Utopia in the Philosophical-Mystical Stream of Thirteenth Century Kabbalah,” in *Messianism and Eschatology—a Collection of Essays*, ed. Z. Baras, Jerusalem Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 1984, p. 230, n. 38a [Hebrew]; Joseph Dan, *History of Jewish Mysticism and Esotericism*, vol. 9: *Kabbalists in Spain in the Thirteenth*

including Moshe Idel, Haviva Pedaya, and Martelle Gavarin have pointed to the potential inherent in comparative research into early Kabbalah and Ismā'īlī Shī'ism⁷—but without entering the thick of the matter.

At the same time, when one begins to survey developments in research into the Kabbalistic Sabbatical cycles doctrine itself, the progress in the transition from the earlier generation of scholars to the present one is more encouraging: the earlier generation of scholarship in the Sabbatical cycles doctrine in early Kabbalah was misled by an error regarding the dating of *Sefer ha-Temuna* (the Book of the Image). Gershom Scholem attributed this anonymous work to the early circle of Kabbalists who were active in Gerona in the first half of the thirteenth century. Scholem did contribute fascinating and enduring insights to understanding the Sabbatical cycles doctrine in early Kabbalah, but most of these insights were focused on *Sefer ha-Temuna*. Other formulations of this doctrine, in early Kabbalistic writings, did not receive proper attention from him. This is mainly because of his erroneous early dating of *Sefer ha-Temuna* as representing an ostensibly early—but full and very well-worked out—formulation of the Kabbalistic Sabbatical cycles doctrine, such that seemingly made it superfluous to devote real attention to fragmentary and partial mentions of this doctrine in the writings of other Kabbalists.⁸ As a result, Scholem's discussion of the Kabbalistic Sabbatical cycles doctrine remains

Century, Jerusalem, Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2013, pp. 286-288 [Hebrew]. See now the new contribution of Michael Ebstein and Tzahi Weiss, "A Drama in Heaven: 'Emanation on the Left' in Kabbalah and a Parallel Cosmogonic Myth in Isma'ili Literature". *History of Religions* 55. 2 (2015), pp. 148-171.

- 7 Moshe Idel, "The Sefirot above the Sefirot", *Tarbiz—a Quarterly for Jewish Studies* 51.2 (1982) [Hebrew], pp. 270-274; idem, "Jewish Mysticism and Islamic Mysticism", *Maḥanaim—A Quarterly for Studies in Jewish Thought and Culture* 1 (1992), p. 29 [Hebrew]; Martelle Gavarin, "The Conception of Time in the Works of Rabbi 'Azriel," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6.3-4 (1987), p. 318 [Hebrew]; Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 21-23, 39-40. See also Harvey J. Hames, "A Seal Within a Seal: The Imprint of Sufism in Abraham Abulafia's Teachings," *Medieval Encounters* 12.2 (2006), pp. 171-172; Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, "Kabbalah and Science in the Middle Ages: Preliminary Remarks," in *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, ed. Gad Freudenthal, *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, New-York, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 497; Shlomo Pines, "Shī'ite Terms and Conceptions in Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980), pp. 243-247. Shlomo Pines made a pioneering contribution to research in the connections between Shī'ī thought (especially Ismā'īlī thought) and Jewish thought of the Middle Ages. He also sought to encourage his students to continue to develop this direction of research.
- 8 There were also other factors underlying Scholem's focus on *Sefer ha-Temuna*. The great interest that Scholem had in the later development (from the seventeenth century on) of the Sabbatean movement is one of the factors that focused Scholem's attention on this book.

partial and flawed.⁹ Nevertheless, Scholem can be credited with having had a penetrating and clear estimation of the importance of the Sabbatical cycles doctrine, as one of the deepest and most interesting doctrines that appeared in the framework of early Kabbalah.¹⁰ This estimation, of which Scholem was an outstanding advocate, is not universally accepted by scholars.¹¹ The flaws in Scholem's treatment of the Sabbatical cycles doctrine have gradually been corrected as a result of the efforts of the scholars of Kabbalah who succeeded him. Moshe Idel (following the initial contributions in this matter on the part of Ephraim Gottlieb) freed scholarship from the error regarding the dating and location of *Sefer ha-Temuna*, placing it in the mid-fourteenth century and probably outside the borders of Spain. This correction enabled Idel to trace the general outlines of the historical development of the Sabbatical cycles doctrine in early Kabbalah, pointing out the various schools and periods in the development of this doctrine.¹² Haviva Pedaya contributed an extensive study of cyclical time in the school of Nahmanides. This study is the most penetrating treatment of the Kabbalistic Sabbatical cycles doctrine to appear thus far.¹³ Several decades

According to Scholem, *Sefer ha-Temuna* laid the conceptual foundations that were later exploited and developed in a decidedly antinomian direction in Sabbateanism.

- 9 Scholem, *The Kabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 1-84; idem, *Beginnings*, pp. 176-193; idem, *Origins*, pp. 460-474; idem, *Kabbalah*, Jerusalem, Keter, 1974, pp. 52, 112, 120-122, 336. On *Sefer ha-Temuna* see also Nicolas Séd, "Le Sefer ha-Temunah et la doctrine des cycles cosmiques," *Revue des Etudes Juives*, 126 (1967), pp. 399-415. Late in his life Scholem admitted his error regarding the early dating of *Sefer ha-Temuna*. A correction that he made by hand was entered in the English translation from the German edition of his book on the origins of the Kabbalah, which was published a few years after his death. See Scholem, *Origins*, pp. 460-461, n. 233 (as well as the comments by R. J. Z. Werblowsky, the editor of the English edition, pp. xiii-xiv in the introduction).
- 10 Scholem, *Beginnings*, p. 177.
- 11 Among contemporary scholars of Kabbalah, Joseph Dan stands out as arguing for the relative marginality of the Sabbatical cycles doctrine in the overall picture of the development of early Kabbalah. See his discussion of this subject. He criticizes Haviva Pedaya, arguing that she greatly exaggerated the importance of this doctrine in the thought of Nahmanides. See Joseph Dan, *History of Jewish Mysticism and Esotericism, vol. 8: The Gerona Circle of Kabbalists*, Jerusalem, Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2012, pp. 297-298 [Hebrew] (esp. 297, n. 84, where he admits with reservations that Gershon Scholem and Ephraim Gottlieb were closer to Pedaya's position than to his own on this subject).
- 12 Moshe Idel, "The Kabbalah in Byzantium: Preliminary Remarks," in *Jews in Byzantium: Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures*, eds. R. Bonfil; O. Irshai; G. G. Stroumsa and R. Talgam, Leiden, Brill, 2012, pp. 677-686, 691-693.
- 13 Pedaya, *Nahmanides*. Also on the doctrine of cyclical time in Nahmanides, see idem, "The Great Mother: The Struggle between Nahmanides and the Zohar Circle" in *Temps i espais*

earlier, in his short academic career, Ephraim Gottlieb managed to contribute important, brief discussions of several directions of development in the framework of the Sabbatical cycles doctrine in early Kabbalah, which did not receive proper emphasis in Scholem's research.¹⁴ What emerges from this is that the study of the Sabbatical cycles doctrine in early Kabbalah is still in the stages of searching and consolidation. Scholars have not yet succeeded in presenting a detailed and full account of the emergence and development of this important Kabbalistic doctrine.

When we turn to research on Ismā'īlī literature and its connection with Kabbalah, we must mention the pioneering remarks of Paul Kraus in the early 1930s regarding the possibility of the influence of the Kabbalistic doctrine of the *sefirot* on the cosmology of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, an important Ismā'īlī thinker of the early eleventh century.¹⁵ Daniel De Smet, the leading scholar of al-Kirmānī's thought in our generation, has more recently taken up this matter again. De Smet is aware of the possible repercussions regarding the connection between this central Kabbalistic doctrine and the doctrines of the Ismā'īlī author. He is also aware of the fact that, according to the prevalent opinion in scholarship on the Kabbalah, the main development in the doctrine of the Kabbalistic *sefirot* is posterior to al-Kirmānī's time.¹⁶ Another, more lively academic discussion, which has a connection to the development of early Kabbalah in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, relates to the phenomenon of the technique of the combination of letters in Ismā'īlī works of the eleventh century, and the connection between the Ismā'īlī use of this technique

de la Girona jueva, ed. Silvia Planas i Marcé, Gerona, Patronat del Call de Girona, 2011, pp. 311-327; Chayim J. Henoch, *Ramban: Philosopher and Kabbalist*, Northvale, N.J., Jason Aronson, 1998, pp. 358-387; Halbertal, *By the Way of Truth*, pp. 141-142, 212-219.

- 14 Efraim Gottlieb, *The Kabbalah in the Writings of R. Bahya Ben Asher Ibn Ḥalawa*, Jerusalem, Qiryat Sefer, 1970, pp. 233-237 [Hebrew]; idem, *Studies in the Kabbalah Literature*, Tel-Aviv, Bet ha-Sefer le-mada'e ha-Yahadut, 1976, pp. 24-25, 332-339 [Hebrew]. Working outside the academia, Israel Weinstock published in the same period his studies on the subject of the doctrine of Sabbatical cycles. See Israel Weinstock, *In the Circles of Revelation and Concealment: Studies in the History of Philosophy and Esoterism*, Jerusalem, Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1969, pp. 151-241 [Hebrew].
- 15 Paul P. Kraus, "Hebräische und syrische Zitate in ismā'īlītischen Schriften", *Der Islam* 19 (1931), p. 262.
- 16 Daniel De Smet, *La quiétude de l'intellect: Néoplatonisme et gnose ismaélienne dans l'oeuvre de Ḥamīd ad-Dīn al-Kirmānī (x^e/xI^{es})*, Leuven, Peeters, 1995, pp. 304-307. See the parallel discussion in Idel, "The Sefirot above the Sefirot," pp. 270-274. On early harbinger of the development of the Kabbalistic theory of the *sefirot* in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in a Jewish work of the tenth century, before the time of al-Kirmānī, see Elliot R. Wolfson, "The Theosophy of Shabbetai Donnolo, with Special Emphasis on the Doctrine of Sefirot in His Sefer Ḥakhmoni", *Jewish History* 6 (1992), pp. 297-301.

and a parallel technique in Jewish works, especially in *Sefer Yeşirah* (Book of Formation). The scholars who have dealt with this matter, including Georges Vajda, Heinz Halm, Daniel De Smet, and Steven Wasserstrom, have pointed out the close connection of Ismā'īlī authors, such as Ja'far ibn Maṣṣūr al-Yaman (d. c. 957), Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 934) and al-Kirmānī with the conceptions and terminology of *Sefer Yeşirah* and early Jewish commentaries on that work.¹⁷ Compared to this, the matter of the similarity and closeness of the doctrine of cyclical time in Ismā'īlī authors to Kabbalistic literature has not yet received attention from scholars of Ismā'īlī Shī'ism.

A pioneering study of the Ismā'īlī doctrine of cyclical time, one which is still relevant, is that of Henry Corbin, who played a part similar to that of Scholem's in the study of the doctrine of Kabbalistic Sabbatical cycles, in that he was the scholar who emphasized the importance of the cyclical conception of time in the framework of the development of Ismā'īlī theology. Several of Corbin's important contributions to the study of the matter of cyclical time in Ismā'īlī Islam were first made public in lectures at the Eranos conferences in Ascona during the 1950s and 1960s. These lectures were published in the proceedings of the conferences, sometimes along with lectures on Kabbalah by Gershom Scholem, and they were later translated into English and published with the title of *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*.¹⁸ This book continues to serve as an introduction to the subject of cyclical time in Ismā'īlī lore, among others, for scholars of Kabbalah who are interested in this subject. Scholem and Corbin maintained a close and long-lasting connection, and they shared considerable closeness in the fundamental assumptions of their scholarship.¹⁹ Considering

17 Georges Vajda, "Les lettres et les sons de la langue arabe d'après Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī", *Arabica* 8.2 (1961), pp. 113-130; Heinz Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der Frühen Ismā'īliyya*, Wiesbaden, Steiner, 1978, pp. 39, 48-50, 52, 57, 64-65; idem, "The Cosmology of the pre-Fatimid Ismā'īliyya", in *Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought*, ed. F. Daftary, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 79-80; Steven M. Wasserstrom, "Further Thoughts on the Origins of 'Sefer Yeşirah,'" *Aleph* 2 (2002), pp., 206-211, 215-220; De Smet, *La quiétude de l'intellect*, pp. 302-304. See also Steven M. Wasserstrom, "Sefer Yeşira and Early Islam: A Reappraisal", *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3.1 (1993), pp. 1-30 for the claim that *Sefer Yeşirah* itself was written in the ninth century in a milieu close to that of early Shī'ī Islam, the same milieu from which Ismā'īlism sprung.

18 Henry Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, London, Kegan Paul, 1983. See also idem, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, London, Kegan Paul, 1993, pp. 84-90.

19 On this matter at length, see Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999 (esp. pp. 52-66). In this context, it is interesting to quote from a letter of condolence that Scholem sent to Corbin's widow in 1978: "For me [Henry] was not only a friend and a fellow but a man who devoted a life to understand, to penetrate as a scholar, a world as

the centrality of the study of Shī'ī Islam, including the study of its Ismā'īlī stream in Corbin's scholarship, one may wonder why the friendship between him and Scholem and their similar views did not create a true bridge between the study of spiritual tendencies within Shī'ī Islam and spiritual tendencies in Judaism, especially in Kabbalah. Corbin was a scholar with extraordinary vision and verve. In his research he presented a broad synthesis without giving too much attention to the nuances and historical complexities involved in the topics he dealt with. This approach is revealed in his discussion of cyclical time in Ismā'īlī literature, in the way that he grinds together the variations that the two central currents—the Nizārī and the Ṭayyibī—of post Fātimid Ismā'īlism, from the twelfth century on.²⁰ In his research one finds no true consideration of the Ismā'īlī cyclical time doctrine in its formative period (the end of the ninth and the tenth centuries).²¹ The doctrine of cyclical time of early Ismā'īlī authors, including focus on historical time and the messianic tone characteristic of it, were discussed by Paul Walker, Shin Nomoto, Farhad Daftary and Daniel De Smet.²² The tenth century was when the esoteric Ismā'īlī circle

near to the one which I had devoted my own as anybody I could imagine. We were in the truest sense honest and possibly the first excavators of the esoterical imagination such as Islamic and Jewish gnose. Of all the speakers at Eranos it was he to whom I felt the greatest affinity . . . His passing away means to me the loss of a spiritual brother" (Quoted in Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*, 255, n. 3).

- 20 In this context see Daniel De Smet, "Éléments chrétiens dans l'ismaélisme yéménite sous les derniers Fatimides: le problème de la gnose ṭayyibite", in *L'Égypte fatimide son art et son histoire*, ed. M. Barrucand, Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1999, p. 47. For a separate discussion of cyclical conception of time in the literature of the Ṭayyibī and Nizārī streams, see Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines*², Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 269-275 (on Ṭayyibī), pp. 380-382 (on Nizārī). See also Daniel De Smet, *La Philosophie ismaélienne: un ésotérisme chiite entre néoplatonisme et gnose*, Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 2012 pp. 157-168 (on Ṭayyibī); Christian Jambet, "Appendix: A Philosophical Commentary", in *Paradise of Submission: A Medieval Treatise on Ismaili Thought. A New Persian Edition and English Translation of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī's Rawḍa-yi taslīm*, ed. and tr. S. J. Badakhchani, London, 2005, pp. 234-242 (on Nizārī).
- 21 Regarding the formative period of Ismā'īlism, Corbin maintained that there had been an earlier, preliminary stage in its development, which he called "proto-Ismā'īlī". This view was not adopted by the central stream of contemporary scholarship. See Corbin, *History*, pp. 74-76 in comparison with Wilfred. Madelung, "Ismā'īliyya", *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*², vol. 4, p. 203.
- 22 Paul E. Walker, "Eternal Cosmos and the Womb of History: Time in Early Ismaili Thought," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 9,3 (1978), pp. 355-366; Shin Nomoto, *Early Ismā'īlī Thought on Prophecy According to the Kitāb al-İṣlāḥ by Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. ca.322/934-5)*, PhD dissertation, McGill University, 1999; Farhad Dartary, "Cyclical Time

of Ikhwān al-şafā' was active. The Ikhwān's doctrine of cyclical time has been studied in detail by Yves Marquet and Godefroid De Callataÿ.²³ For reasons that are explained below, the analyses given by those scholars are limited and partial. They took excellent note of certain aspects of cyclical time in the works of the Ikhwān, but other, no less important aspects, remained beyond the range of the discussion they proposed. In this context, it appears to me that a central innovation in my arguments below lies in the use of Kabbalistic literature and scholarship on it to reveal an alternative esoteric concept of cyclical time in Ikhwān's works, to which the scholars who investigated them have not paid attention until the present.

In the margins of this discussion of the state of research, I would like to note that a significant part of the relevant Kabbalistic literature is still in unpublished manuscripts. This article is based on a number of central and relatively well known works, which have been published and discussed in the scholarly literature. Along with these, there are many manuscript works that have been studied little if at all, and they can certainly shed further light on the subject at hand.²⁴ Regarding Ismā'īlī literature as well, far fewer works have been published than remain in manuscript. Within the Ismā'īlī community

and Sacred History in Medieval Ismaili Thought", in *Continuity and Change in the Realms of Islam: Studies in Honour of Professor Urbain Vermeulen*, eds. K. D'hulster and J. Van Steenberghe, Leuven, Peeters, 2008, pp. 151-158; Daniel De Smet, "Adam, premier prophète et législateur? La doctrine chiite des ulū al-'azm et la controverse sur la pérennité de la šarī'a", in *Le shī'isme imāmīte quarante ans après: hommage à Etan Kohlberg*, eds. M. A. Amir-Moezzi, M. M. Bar-Asher and S. Hopkins, Turnhout, Brepols, 2009, pp. 187-202.

23 Yves Marquet, "Les Cycles de la souveraineté selon les épîtres des Iḥwān al-Şafā'", *Studia Islamica* 36 (1972), pp. 47-69; idem, *La philosophie*, xi-xv, pp. 419-428; Godefroid De Callataÿ, *Annus Platonicus: A Study of World Cycles in Greek, Latin and Arabic Sources*, Louvain, 1996, pp. 137-149; idem, "World Cycles and Geological Changes according to the Brethren of Purity", in *In the Age of al-Fārābī: Arabic Philosophy in the Fourth/Tenth Century*, ed. P. Adamson, London, Warburg Institute, 2008, pp. 179-193.

24 In this context see, for example, a quotation cited by Moshe Hallamish, from an anonymous manuscript that he attributes to Yosef Ben Shalom ha-Ashkenazi: "Know that all things will rise up from level to level, and this next third Sabbatical cycle, which is of (the *sefira* of) *Tiferet* (splendor), the jinnis will rise up to the level of humans and enter in the place of the rank of Edom" (See M. Hallamish's introduction to *Perush le-farashat Bereshit*, Jerusalem, Magnes, 1984, p. 12, n. *7). These words are very interesting because of the general similarity between them and the conception of the rolling and progress from level to level in the framework of Ikhwān's doctrine of cyclical time. On this see *Rasā'il ikhwān al-şafā'*, ed. Buṭrus Bustānī, Beirut, Dār Şādir, 1957, vol. 3, p. 47; vol. 4, pp. 210-211, 236, 378-379; Aḥmad Ibn 'Abd Allah, (attrib.), *Al-Risāla al-jāmi'a*, ed. Muşţafā Ghālib, Beirut, Dār Şādir, 1974, pp. 170-174, 218-219 and the discussion in Godefroid De Callataÿ, *Ikhwan*

there was a living tradition of manuscript copying almost until the present. However, the publication in print of Ismāʿīlī works developed only in the past three or four generations. Like scholarship in Kabbalah, so, too, scholarship in Ismāʿīlī literature suffers from an abundance of faulty printed editions, which were prepared negligently and do not reflect the manuscripts accurately. To no less (and perhaps greater) a degree as in scholarship in Kabbalah, research in Ismāʿīlī Islam is a relatively new field, still far from being able to present a detailed scholarly account, based on all the available material (not to mention the material that is still hidden in Ismāʿīlī libraries and is still beyond the reach of scholars).²⁵

Ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ's' Writings as a Major Point of Reference for the Comparative Discussion of the Ismāʿīlī Doctrine of Cyclical Time and that of Early Kabbalah

In my opening remarks I already explained that, with respect to the Ismāʿīlī side of the discussion, the article focuses on the circle of Ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ. I chose to focus on the literature of this circle as the most relevant Ismāʿīlī corpus for comparison with Kabbalistic literature on the topic of cyclical time at this preliminary stage of research. The reason for this choice is the relatively extensive and interesting elaboration of the conception of cyclical time found in the writings of Ikhwān circle in comparison to other (published) early Ismāʿīlī writings. This elaboration offers especially fertile possibilities for comparison with the concept of cyclical time in early Kabbalah. Another justification for choosing to concentrate first on the writings of the Ikhwān circle is connected with the uniqueness of these writings in the Ismāʿīlī landscape of the period. In comparison to their Ismāʿīlī contemporaries, whose writing is decidedly doctrinal, the Ikhwān circle appears as an anonymous school, which is careful to conceal its particular ideological identity. They present their ideas in a popular encyclopedic literary framework, which avoids any explicit Ismāʿīlī doctrinal tone. This formulation made possible the wide circulation of the works of this circle among a broad variety of readers, far beyond the circulation of other Ismāʿīlī compositions.²⁶ In this context, we should point out the great

al-Safāʾ: A Brotherhood of Idealists on the Fringe of Orthodox Islam, Oxford, Oneworld, 2005, pp. 30-33, 39-40, 94.

25 See Daniel De Smet, "Les Bibliothèques Ismaéliennes Et La Question Du Néoplatonisme Ismaélien", *The Libraries of the Neoplatonists*, ed. Cristina D'Ancona, Leiden, Brill, 2007, p. 481; Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1988, pp. 17-20; Abrams, *Kabbalistic Manuscripts*, pp. 6, 10, 15.

26 Yves Marquet, "Ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ," *The Encyclopedia of Islam*², vol. 3, p. 1073.

popularity of the writings of the Ikhwān circle among the general class of educated people, and in particular among the Jews, during the tenth to twelfth centuries, a time when Judeo-Arabic served as the main language of theoretical writing among the Jews there.²⁷ Knowledge of Arabic was also preserved among Jewish elite circles in Christian Spain during the thirteenth century and the first decades of the fourteenth century, when Hebrew replaced Arabic as the language of theoretical writing. A degree of passive and sometimes active knowledge of Arabic was retained not only in the Jewish communities of Castile such as Toledo, which was known as a center of Arabic culture for generations after its conquest by the Christians in 1085,²⁸ but also in Gerona and Barcelona, in the kingdom of Aragon, that is to say, the Jewish communities where the doctrine of cyclical time received its first systematic development. In Barcelona, which was an important port whose commercial connections included the Muslim East, at that time there was a Jewish center for the study of Arabic, which depended, among other things, on the large library of the Ibn Ḥasdāy-Bonsenior family. In 1316, Kalonymus Ben Kalonymus (d. after 1328), who acquired his mastery of Arabic in the center in Barcelona and drew upon the collection of Arabic books there, produced a Hebrew translation of the allegorical literary dispute between the representatives of the animals and the representative of humans, that consist the main part of the long twenty-second epistle of *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ*, entitled “The Epistle of the Animals.”²⁹ Thus it appears that Ikhwān writings were available and current among the Jews of Catalonia during the period when the doctrine of cycle time received renewed

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- 27 Regarding the reception of Ikhwān by Jewish authors in Spain and beyond, see the survey of Mauro Zonta, “Linee del pensiero islamico nella storia della filosofia ebraica medievale (parte prima)”, *Annali dell’Università degli studi di Napoli* 57.1-2 (1997), pp. 130-144. Regarding the findings of fragments of manuscripts of the Ikhwān’s works in the Cairo Geniza and in the Firkovich collections, see Ehud Krinis, “*Al-Risāla al-jāmīʿa* and its Judeo-Arabic Manuscript”, in *Islam: identité et laterite: Hommage au Guy Monnot*, ed. M. A. Amir-Moezzi, Turnhout, Brepols, pp. 313-331.
- 28 Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition: The Career and. Controversies of Ramah*, Cambridge-Mass, Harvard University Press, 1982, pp. 14-20.
- 29 In this context see Yom Tov Assis, “On the Language and Script of the Jews of Spain as an Expression of Their Religious and Cultural Identity”, *Pe’amim—Studies in Oriental Jewry* 132 (2012), pp. 66-79, 96 [Hebrew]. Two earlier Hebrew translations of the same epistle seem to be lost: one by certain Rabbi Yoel and the other by Ya’acov ben El’azar (flourished in the first decades of the thirteen century). See Lenn. E. Goodman. and Richard McGregor, (eds. And trans.), *The Case of the Animals versus Man before the King of the Jin: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistle 22*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 3.

impetus and development among the Kabbalists there. In this context, it is most likely that ‘Ezra of Gerona, the senior member of the first generation of Kabbalists of Catalonia, was of great importance. In the writings of this Kabbalist the first explicit and earliest presentation of the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles appears, with its two focuses of the cosmic Sabbatical and Jubilee. ‘Ezra apparently knew Arabic well and played the role of intermediary in presenting mystical and philosophical doctrines with Muslim roots to the early Kabbalists in his country.³⁰ Several other important Kabbalists in Spain, including Nahmanides, Yosef Gikatilla, and Baḥya Ben Asher, were apparently able to read Arabic.³¹ Yitshaq demin ‘Akko’s (Isaac of Acre) life story offers an interesting example of bridging the gap of language and culture between the Levant (which, after the Mamluk conquest of Acre in 1291, was under complete Muslim rule again) and Spain in the West, where the Muslim presence was waning.³² In this context Yiṣḥaq Ibn Laṭif should also be mentioned, a Castilian Jewish author who was active as early as the first half of the thirteenth century, and who taught a version of the doctrine of cycle time. Ibn Laṭif was an exceptional thinker, who cannot be placed in any school. He knew Arabic, and his broad and eclectic education also included the Ikhwān literature. It appears that he can be seen as a transitional figure between the ideas of Ikhwān and those of the early Kabbalists in Spain.³³

These indications of the special connection of Jewish authors to the Ikhwān circle are, in my opinion, sufficient justification for placing that circle first in line for comparison with Kabbalistic works, as the first step in the necessary

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- 30 See the important discussion in Haviva Pedaya, *Vision and Speech: Models of Revelatory Experience in Jewish Mysticism*, Los Angeles, Cherub Press, 2002 [Hebrew], pp. 191-200.
- 31 See Raphael Jospe, “Ramban (Nahmanides) and Arabic”, *Tarbiz—a Quarterly for Jewish Studies* 57.1 (1987), pp. 67-93 [Hebrew]; Mark Verman, *The Books of Contemplation: Medieval Jewish Mystical Sources*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1992, pp. 130-131; Moshe Idel, “Ashkenazi Esotericism and Kabbalah in Barcelona,” *Hispania Judaica Bulletin* 5 (2007), p. 74; Goldreich, “Iyyun Circle,” pp. 148-149.
- 32 See Paul B. Fenton, “The Judeo-Arabic Commentary on ‘Pirquey de-Rabbi Eli‘ezer’ by Judah b. Nissim Ibn Malka with a Hebrew Translation and Supercommentary by Isaac b. Samuel of Acre,” *Sefunot: Studies and Sources on the History of the Jewish Communities in the East* 21 (1993), pp. 115-165 [Hebrew]; Eitan P. Fishbane, *As Light Before Dawn: The Inner World of a Medieval Kabbalist*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009, pp. 13-12, 30-28, 44-42, 252-259.
- 33 See Sara O. Heller-Wilensky, “Isaac Ibn Laṭif, Philosopher or Kabbalist?”, in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. A. Altmann, Cambridge-Mass., Harvard University Press, 1967, pp. 185-223; idem, “Messianism”, idem, “The First Created Being”, Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah*, Jerusalem, Keter, 1974, pp. 53-54.

extended comparative analysis of the subject of cyclical time among the circles and currents of Ismā'īlism and Kabbalah.³⁴

The Historical Background: Ikhwān al-şafā'

The doctrine of cyclical time as formulated by Ikhwān al-şafā' was given relatively extensive expression (though this, too, is intentionally partial) in a work entitled *al-Risāla al-jāmi'a* (*The Comprehensive Epistle*).³⁵ Important though partial and more laconic references to this doctrine are also dispersed in a collection of fifty-two Epistles called *Rasā'il ikhwān al-şafā'* (*The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*).³⁶ These two works were composed by a circle of contributors who preferred to remain anonymous. The exact identity and date of the members of this circle is disputed. The authors of the Ikhwān al-şafā' writings referred to themselves as part of a Shī'ī circle that identified with the most general Shī'ī goals. The content of their writing clearly reflects an affinity with the (non-uniform) worldview of the Ismā'īlī circles of the time. Samuel M. Stern and other scholars provided the basis for the position according to which the worldview of the authors of Ikhwān writings was unique, giving expression to an Ismā'īlī circle with an independent orientation of its own. As such, they are not to be subordinated to any of the separate Ismā'īlī circles and centers of activity that existed throughout most of the tenth century, until the consolidation of most of the Ismā'īlīs under the control of the Fāṭimids in the last decades of that century.³⁷ Regarding the personal identity and location of the

34 The focused and limited discussion here does not include, at this stage, detailed discussion of major issues. Among these should be mentioned the messianic horizon, the matter of the gradual rise of souls in the upper realms, and the transmigration of souls in bodies. These subjects are extremely relevant to both Ikhwān and the Kabbalists and have significant consequences with respect to their doctrines of cyclical time.

35 References to *al-Risāla al-jāmi'a* (henceforth: *al-jāmi'a*) throughout this article are to Muşţafā Ghālib's edition (*al-Risāla al-jāmi'a*, ed. Beirut, Dār Şādir, 1974) unless indicated otherwise.

36 For the history of printed editions of *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-şafā'* (henceforth: *Rasā'il*), see Ismail K. Poonawala, "Why We Need an Arabic Critical Edition with an Annotated English Translation of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-şafā'*", in *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity—The Ikhwān al-şafā' and their Rasā'il: An introduction*, ed. N. El-Bizri, Oxford, I. B. Tauris, 2008, pp. 33-57. References to *Rasā'il* throughout the article are to the Beirut edition (ed. Buṭrus Bustānī, 4 vols., Dār Şādir, 1957).

37 Samuel M. Stern, *Studies in Early Isma'ilism*, Jerusalem, Magnes. 1983, pp. 174-176; Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival During the Buyid Age*, Leiden, Brill, 1986, pp. 175-178; De Callataÿ, *Brotherhood*, pp. 96-101. Another view in modern scholarship is that of Yves Marquet and Abas Hamdani, according to which the authors of the Ikhwān literature acted under the protection of the Fāṭimids.

authors of the Ikhwān al-ṣafā' writings, the dominant opinion among scholars until recently was based on findings first presented in extensive fashion by Stern, according to which the Ikhwān al-ṣafā' writings were written by a circle of scholars and courtiers from Baṣra, some of whose names were revealed by rival scholars of the time (c. 980), and they included Abū Hayyān al-Tawhīdī (d. 1023) and al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025).³⁸ In recent years more evidence has accumulated, showing that the Ikhwān al-ṣafā' writings were already in circulation in the first half of the tenth century. Most of this evidence comes from al-Andalus of that time, so that the picture emerging from various studies, especially those of Maribel Fierro, point to the existence, in various and diverse channels of an Ismā'īlī "window of opportunity" during the period from the rise of the Fāṭimids in North Africa in 909 until the waves of persecutions of the "Masarraes", supporters of Ibn Masarra (d. 931), the last of which took place in Cordoba in 961.³⁹ The existence of this "window of opportunity" and its closing are evident in the biography of the Ismā'īlī poet, Ibn Hānī' al-Andalusī (d. 973).⁴⁰ In this context, the current scholarship of Sarah Stroumsa, Sara Sviri, Michael Ebstein, and Godefroid De Callatay is particularly important. These studies point out the central place filled by the Ikhwān al-ṣafā' writings in the Ismā'īlī "window of opportunity" in al-Andalus in the tenth century.⁴¹

See Abas Hamdani, "The Arrangement of the *Rasā'il ikhwān al-ṣafā'* and the Problem of Interpolations", in *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity—The Ikhwān al-ṣafā' and their Rasā'il: An introduction*, ed. N. El-Bizri, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 86-88.

- 38 Stern, *Studies in Early Isma'īlism*, pp. 155-176; Kraemer, *Humanism*, pp. 165-178; De Callatay, *Brotherhood*, 3-10. The two scholars who have made the greatest effort to date the Ikhwān works are Yves Marquet and Abas Hamdani. Marquet's research on this subject has led him to the conclusion that Ikhwān works were composed approximately between 900 and 965, whereas Hamdani places the time of their composition to 873-909. See Marquet, "Ikhwān al-ṣafā'", pp. 1072-1073; Hamdani, "Arrangement", pp. 91-92.
- 39 See Maribel Fierro, "Bāṭinism in Al-Andalus: Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī (d. 353/964), Author of the 'Rutbat al-Ḥakīm' and the 'Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm' (Picatrix)", *Studia Islamica* 84 (1996), pp. 98-109; idem, "Plants, Mary the Copt, Abraham, Donkeys and Knowledge: Again on Bāṭinism During the Umayyad Caliphate in al-Andalus", in *Difference and Dynamism in Islam: Festschrift for Heinz Halm on his 70th Birthday*, eds. H. Biesterfeldt and V. Klemm, Würzburg, Ergon, 2012, pp. 125-126, 131, 135, 138-139, 143-144.
- 40 See Farhat Dachraoui, "Ibn Hānī' al-Andalusī," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*², vol. 3, pp. 785-786.
- 41 Among others, see Sarah Stroumsa, and Sara Sviri, "The Beginnings of Mystical Philosophy in al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra and his Epistle on Contemplation", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 36 (2009), pp. 201-253 (esp. p. 210, n. 37); Michael Ebstein and Sara Sviri, "The So-called Risālat al-Ḥurūf (Epistle on Letters) Ascribed to Sahl al-Tustarī and Letter Mysticism in al-Andalus," *Journal Asiatique* 299.1 (2011), pp. 224-228; Godefroid De

This direction of research corrects the opinion that had been prevalent until recently among scholars, according to which the Ikhwān al-şafāʾ writings did not reach al-Andalus until the eleventh century.⁴² They also show that the Ikhwān al-şafāʾ writings played a formative and important role in the development of Andalusian mysticism, as a development with unique identifying marks distinguishing it from early Şūfī mystical trends in the Muslim East.⁴³

A Remark Concerning the Scope of the Ikhwān al-şafāʾ Corpus and its Study

Before proceeding to review the historical background of the Kabbalistic literature discussed in this article, some remarks must be made regarding the extent of the literary corpus of the Ikhwān al-şafāʾ circle as it has come down to us. As noted in the previous section, this corpus includes the extensive work, *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-şafāʾ*, and the complementary work of *al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa*. There is also another work that has been published under the title of *Jāmiʿat al-jāmiʿa*.⁴⁴ There are clear signs that this last work is not authentic and dates probably from at least two hundred years after the time of the Ikhwān: unlike the varied diffusion of the *Rasāʾil* and the *al-Jāmiʿa*, this work has been preserved in only a small number of manuscripts originating from certain Ismāʿilī communities in Syria. *Jāmiʿat al-jāmiʿa*'s rigid language is different and inferior in comparison to the equally fluent and rich language of the two other works. The work under discussion makes use of terms foreign to the Ikhwān writings (such as “the middle resurrection” [*al-qiyāma al-wuṣṭā*]). Some of its chapters were copied word for word from *al-Jāmiʿa*.⁴⁵ In the *Rasāʾil* we find quite many references to the *al-Jāmiʿa*, while in *al-Jāmiʿa* we find many references to the *Rasāʾil*.⁴⁶ But there is no mention whatsoever to the *Jāmiʿat al-jāmiʿa* in neither of these two works. Therefore, it can be safely assumed that the work titled *Jāmiʿat al-jāmiʿa*

Callataÿ, “Magia en al-Andalus: *Rasāʾil Ijwān al-Şafāʾ*,” *Rutbat al-Ḥakīm y Gāyat al-Ḥakīm/Picatrix*,” *al-Qantara*, 34.2 (2013), pp. 297-344.

42 For example, see Stern, *Studies in Early Ismaʿilism*, pp. 173-174; De Callataÿ, *Brotherhood*, pp. 109-111.

43 On this see Michael Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-ʿArabi and the Ismāʿilī Tradition*, Leiden, Brill, 2014, pp. 1-4; Ebstein-Sviri, ‘Letter Mysticism in al-Andalus’, p. 233.

44 This work was first published by ʿArif Tāmīr in 1959 (*Jāmiʿat al-jāmiʿa*, ed. Beirut, Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt).

45 See for example *Jāmiʿat al-jāmiʿa*, ch. 30-31, 46.

46 See the discussion of Jamīl Şalībā in the introduction to his edition of the *al-Jāmiʿa*: Maslama al-Majrīṭī, (attrib.), *Al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa*, Damascus, Imprimerie du Progrès, 1949, 1951, vol. 1, pp. 10-13.

does not belong to the Ikhwān circle.⁴⁷ Consequently, the relevant historical context for discussion of this work is the matter of the reception of the doctrines of Ikhwān and its interpretation in later Ismāʿīlī groups.

Further, regarding *al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa*, unfortunately for this work, in the titles of its two printed editions, the first by Jamīl Ṣalībā (Damascus, 1949-1951) and the second by Muṣṭafā Ghālib (Beirut, 1974), it is not attributed to the Ikhwān circle but to other authors. Ghālib, a Syrian Ismāʿīlī editor, clung to the tradition of his community, which attributes the *al-Jāmiʿa* to Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd Allāh who was, according to the Ismāʿīlī tradition, the second in the list of Ismāʿīlī Imāms active clandestinely during the ninth century.⁴⁸ Ṣalībā, in contrast, in the introduction to his edition, adduced proof that *al-Jāmiʿa* was written by the Ikhwān circle, but in the title of the edition he chose, for some reason, to retain the erroneous (as he himself had demonstrated in detail!) attribution of the epistle to the Andalusian author, Maslama al-Majrīṭī (d. 1007 or 1008). It appears that the erroneous attribution by Ṣalībā and his predecessors (including the eminent bibliographer Karl Brockelmann),⁴⁹ led some scholars who referred to Ikhwān to ignore *al-Jāmiʿa* during the generation following publication of Ṣalībā's edition. At the same time, scholars who recognized that *al-Jāmiʿa* belonged to the Ikhwān corpus did not make the serious use of it, which it merited, in the framework of research into Ikhwān thought. Ian Netton's unjustified deprecated evaluation of the *al-Jāmiʿa* in comparison to the main corpus of the *Rasāʿil* is symptomatic of this.⁵⁰ Reference to *al-Jāmiʿa* on the part of most scholars of Ikhwān in the past two generations since its first publication has been quite rare or very limited. Thus, for example, Yves Marquet does not refer substantially to *al-Jāmiʿa* except in a chapter of twenty

47 On the inauthenticity of *Jāmiʿat al-jāmiʿa*, see the comment in Abas Hamdani, "Brethren of Purity, a Secret Society for the Establishment of the Fatimid Caliphate: New Evidence for the Early Dating of their Encyclopedia", in *L'Egypte fatimide son art et son histoire*, ed. M. Barrucand, Paris, Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 1999, p. 73, n. 3.

48 See Pines, "Shīʿite Terms", p. 229. On the attribution of all the epistles of Ikhwān al-ṣafā' to the Imām Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd Allāh by the important fifteenth century Yemenite Ismāʿīlī author Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn, see Husain F. Hamdani, "Rasāʿil Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā' in the literature of the Ismāʿīlī Taiyibi Da'wat," *Der Islam* 20 (1932), pp. 292-294.

49 See Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur—Erster Supplementband* 1, Leiden, Brill, 1937, pp. 431-432.

50 See Ian R. Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists—An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-ṣafāʿ)*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1982, pp. 2-3. Also Abdul Latif Tibawi, "Ikhwān aṣ-ṣafāʿ and their *Rasāʿil*—A Critical Review of a Century and a Half of Research", *The Islamic Quarterly* 5 (1955), pp. 41-43.

pages in a work of 600 pages devoted to the philosophy of Ikhwān al-şafāʾ.⁵¹ Another type of example can be found in Seyyed H. Nasr. In his work on the Islamic cosmological theories, in the part devoted to Ikhwān, he frequently refers to and cites *al-Jāmiʿa*.⁵² Nevertheless, his frequent references are of no real use. Nasr refers to the *al-Jāmiʿa* merely as additional material parallel to what is found in the corpus of the *Rasāʾil*. He is not aware of the dimensions of development and innovation that the complementary work of the *al-Jāmiʿa* adds to the cosmological theory of Ikhwān.⁵³ Carmela Baffioni is one of the few contemporary scholars to give attention to the importance of the *al-Jāmiʿa*. In the beginning of her article devoted *al-Jāmiʿa*, she points out the relative failure to consider this central and complementary epistle in comparison to the intensive treatment by scholars of the corpus of the other epistles.⁵⁴ The great potential inherent in *al-Jāmiʿa* for expanding and deepening the horizons of our understanding of the thought of Ikhwān and beyond it began to be realized only in recent years.⁵⁵

The Historical Background: Early Kabbalah

Scholars of Kabbalah agree that the early circles of Kabbalists in Catalonia were the ones who gave the cyclical time conception known as “the Sabbatical cycles doctrine” (*Torat ha-Shemīṭot*) its first explicit and systematic formulations. However, the scholars disagree as to whether this doctrine was original with those circles or an explicit expression of an existing doctrine that had been conveyed esoterically to the Kabbalists in Catalonia from earlier Jewish mystical circles who were active in Provence and Ashkenaz (north France and

51 Marquet, *La philosophie*, pp. 383-403.

52 Seyyed H. Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*², New-York, Random House, 1978, pp. 25-104.

53 On this see Krinis, “*Al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa* and its Judeo-Arabic Manuscript”, pp. 318-323.

54 Carmela Baffioni, “Uso e rielaborazione degli autori classici nella *Risāla al-ġāmiʿa*”, in *La diffusione dell'eredità classica nell'età tardoantica e medievale*, ed. Alfredo Valvo, Alessandria, Edizioni dell'Orso, 1997, p. 1. For another recent article dedicated to the *al-Jāmiʿa* see Paola Carusi, “Alchimia islamica e felicità nel *Risala gamiʿa* inalterabilità delle sostanze e pace dell'anima”, in *Le felicità nel Medioevo: atti del convegno della Società Italiana per lo Studio del Pensiero Medievale*, eds. M. Betteini and F. D. Paparella, Louvain-la-Neuve, Fédération internationale des instituts d'études médiévales, 2005, pp. 277-296.

55 In this context see Carmela Baffioni, “The Role of the Divine Imperative (*amr*) in Ikhwān al-Şafāʾ and Related Works”, *Isharq* 4 (2013), pp. 46-70; Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*; Krinis, “*Al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa* and its Judeo-Arabic Manuscript”. See also the general remarks in Daniel De Smet, “Philosophy and Intellectual Traditions: Introduction”, *The Study of Shiʿi Islam*, eds. F. Daftary and G. Miskinzoda, London: I. B. Tauris, 2014, pp. 556-557.

the Rein valley).⁵⁶ The Kabbalists identified in scholarship with the Gerona School—‘Ezra Ben Shlomo, ‘Azriel (flourished in the beginning of the 13th century), and Ya‘aqov Ben Sheshet (flourished in the middle of the 13th century), are regarded as the first to have given systematic expression to the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, in concise formulations of a general character.⁵⁷ In parallel, over a number of generations, the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles received redoubled emphasis in the work of Nahmanides (Moshe Ben Nahman, d. 1270) and especially among Kabbalists who regarded themselves as followers of his Kabbalah.⁵⁸ These Kabbalists were active at the end of the thirteenth century and in the first decades of the fourteenth century, mainly in Catalonia. Among them were the students of Nahmanides’ disciples, of whom the central Kabbalists were Shlomo Ben Adret (d. 1310) and Yiṣṣḥaq Ben Todros: Shem Ṭov Ibn Gaon, Yehoshu‘a Ibn Shu‘aib, Meir Ibn Avi Sahulah, and Baḥya Ben Asher Ibn Ḥalawa. Other authors of that time should be mentioned, who were strongly connected to the Kabbalah of Nahmanides and interpreted it, such as Yiṣṣḥaq demin ‘Akko, Menaḥem Reḳanati, and the anonymous author of *Ma‘arekhet ha-Elohut* (*The Divine Apparatus*) who was possibly also a student of the disciples of Nahmanides.⁵⁹ The Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles was developed profoundly and radically in the anonymous *Sefer ha-Temuna*. The author of that book apparently was active outside of Spain (in the Byzantine lands, in Moshe Idel’s opinion), but his teaching is connected to that of the Spanish Kabbalists of the same age, such as Shalom Ben

56 Moshe Idel, Moshe. “The Jubilee in Jewish Mysticism”, in *Millenarismi nella cultura contemporanea—con un’appendice su yovel ebraico e giubileo Cristiano*, ed. E. I. Rambaldi, Milano, Franco Angel, 2000, pp. 216-217; Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 32, 92-93; idem, “The Great Mother”, p. 316, n. 8.

57 Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 49-50.

58 Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 19, 32, 209-210, 327, 401, 405, 413. In the thought of Nahmanides, the cyclical principle of the return of things to their initial state, a formative principle of the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, received wonderful expression in his interpretation of the halacha that begins *Sefer Yeṣirah*. The first letter in the Torah is a *beit*, and the last letter is a *lamed*, spelling the word “*bal*” (here, cessation). According to Nahmanides, this combination alludes to the overturning of the divine will of the Creator, in turning back from the direction of expansion and creation to the direction of retraction and the return of things to their original state. See Gershon Scholem, *Studies in Kabbalah* [I], Tel-Aviv, ‘Am ‘Oved, 1998, pp. 87-88 [Hebrew]; Moshe Idel, *Rabbi Menaḥem Recanati The Kabbalist*, vol. 1, Tel-Aviv, Schocken, 1998, pp. 89-90 [Hebrew], and also on this matter Scholem, *Origins*, p. 449; Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 235-236, 282-283, 400-401; Halbertal, *By the Way of Truth*, pp. 213-214.

59 Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 61-62.

Yosef Ashkenazi and David Ben Yehuda ha-Ḥasid.⁶⁰ These three schools—that of Gerona, that of Nahmanides, and that of *Sefer ha-Temuna*⁶¹—represent the important developments that took place in the Kabbalistic Sabbatical cycles doctrine in the early stages of its presentation and development in the framework of the Kabbalah's worldview.⁶² The puzzling and marvelous work, *Sefer ha-Temuna*, which represents the latest development of the three schools, brought the development of this Kabbalistic doctrine to its peak. It is what gave explicit and impressive (though also obscure) expression to the far-reaching possibilities implicit in this special doctrine.⁶³

The Time Framework of the Doctrines of Cyclical Time

Time as it is known in the stories of the Bible and the Qur'ān is historical, and it is focused on the permanent presence of a personal God, a divinity with continuous and varying emotional connections with individuals and families, rulers and prophets, tribes, nations, and kingdoms. The pattern of historical time, which expresses relations of God's personal providence for humanity and God's chosen people from the first generations to the latest ones, was conceived of in

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- 60 Moshe Idel, "Some Concepts of Time and History in Kabbalah", in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Yerushalmi*, eds. E. Carlebach, J. M. Efron and D. N. Myers, Hanover-Mass., University Press of New England, 1998, p. 168; idem, "Jubilee", p. 215; idem, "Kabbalah in Byzantium", pp. 682-686, 693-691; Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 62; Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, p. 111. The Kabbalah scholar Yehuda Liebes consider these two Kabbalists as well as Bahya Ben Asher among the *Sefer ha-Zohar* (*The Book of Splendor*) circle of authors. See Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, Albany, State University of New York Press, pp. 1993, 90-95, 126-134.
- 61 The anonymous commentary that was appended to the printed editions of *Sefer ha-Temuna* also belongs to that school and that period, and it is a vital addition for understanding the world view which is phrased enigmatically in *Sefer ha-Temuna* itself. See Scholem, *Beginnings*, p. 181; idem, *The Kabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 24-25; idem, *Origins*, p. 473. In addition, various works were influenced by *Sefer ha-Temuna*, such as *Sod Ilan ha-ašilut* and others. See Scholem, *The Kabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 22-23; Idel, 'Kabbalah in Byzantium', p. 686.
- 62 This historiographical sketch is based on that presented by Idel. See Idel, "Jubilee", p. 215. See also Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 98-119. On the development connected with the Kabbalistic Sabbatical cycles doctrine later than the composition of *Sefer ha-Temuna*, see Michal Kushnir-Oron, *The Sefer ha-Pel'ah and the Sefer ha-Kanah: Their Kabbalistic Principles, Social and Religious Criticism and Literary Composition*, PhD dissertation, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1980, pp. 294-300 [Hebrew]; Bracha Sack, *The Kabbalah of Rabbi Moshe Cordevero*, Beer-Sheva, The Ben-Gurion University Press, 1995, pp. 267-290 [Hebrew].
- 63 Scholem, *Beginnings*, p. 192; idem, *Origins*, p. 474; Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 209-210, 212.

these basic traditions as the full pattern of time, appropriate and adequate to cover the history of humanity. In comparison to this, a different conception of the world, more complex and sophisticated ontologically and cosmologically, expressed, among others, in the Ikhwān writings and in Kabbalah, raised God up to sublime heights and completely omit the personal aspects of His being.⁶⁴ This conception of the world which is a theosophical conception, places spiritual entities of the upper world in the focus of the dynamic that creates, garbs, and administers the dimension of time in the material, human world.⁶⁵ This complex spiritual being is described by Ikhwān by means of a series of Muslim terms whose origin is in the Qur'ān (*amr, kalima, qalam, lawh, 'arsh and kursī*, etc.), as well as by means of philosophical and Neoplatonic terms such as "Universal Intellect" and "Universal Soul."⁶⁶ In Kabbalah, this supreme spiritual essence is described by means of the symbolic system of the ten *sefirot* with their many appellations.⁶⁷

In this context, it is important to point out that the divine nature of the upper world in the worldview of most of the Kabbalists, and its non-divine nature for the Ismā'īlī authors, including Ikhwān, is less dramatic a fact than might appear at first sight. Both the Kabbalistic and the Ismā'īlī systems are theosophical by nature.⁶⁸ We find, on the one hand, the Kabbalists making parallels between the divine world of the *sefirot* and Neoplatonic hypostases, especially between the three upper *sefirot* and the Universal Intellect.⁶⁹ On the

64 Ian R. Netton, *Allāh Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology*, London, Routledge, 1989, pp. 17-44; Halbertal, *By the Way of Truth*, pp. 14-16, 179, 218, 351-350.

65 Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 96-102, 145, 152-153.

66 Michael Ebstein, "The Word of God and the Divine Will: Ismā'īlī Traces in Andalusī Mysticism", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 39 (2012), pp. 262-267.

67 Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 96-116; see *ibid.*, p. 108 on the division between the three upper *sefirot* and the seven "sefirot of the building" below them, a division which is of great importance in the context of the Sabbatical cycles doctrine. See De Smet, *La quiétude de l'intellect*, p. 306 for the parallel between this Kabbalistic division and the inner division of the ten intellects in the doctrine of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī.

68 On theosophy been early Kabbalah major characteristic see Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*³, New York: Schocken, 1995, pp. 205-206. On the Ismā'īlī thought been characterized by theosophical discourse see Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus*, p. 24.

69 Yişhaq demin 'Akko, *Me'irat Eynayim*, ed. Amos Goldreich, PhD dissertation, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1984, pp. 3, l. 14; 71, ll. 22-31; 93, ll. 17-18; Judah ben David. He-Ḥasid, *The Book of Mirrors/ Sefer Mar'ot ha-Zoveot*, ed. Daniel C. Matt, Chico—CA, Scholars Press, 1982, p. 15, ll. 16-18. See also Scholem, *The Kabbalah in Gerona*, pp. 279-280, 303; Gavarin, "Conception of Time," p. 313.

other hand, the prevalent tendency among Ismāʿīlī authors, including Ikhwān, is to interpret God's epithets and descriptions in the Qurʾān as applying to the hypostases of the upper world, thus bestowing on these hypostases a divine aura.⁷⁰ An extremely relevant example of this matter, which touches significantly upon the doctrine of cyclical time, appears in a statement in which the Ikhwān authors point to the Active Intellect (which in their system is identical with the single Universal Intellect) as "the face of God that will not wear out or change or be finished."⁷¹ This statement is a kind of interpretative reference, an allusion in this instance, to a number of verses in the Qurʾān that relate to "the face of God" as the only entity that is immune to the catastrophe that will destroy all of creation.⁷² There is significant similarity between this interpretation of the Qurʾān in the Ikhwān, in which the authors identify, in the spirit of their particular doctrine of cyclical time, the "face of God" with a supreme cosmological entity, and one of Nahmanides' interpretations. Nahmanides interprets Psalms 148, 13, "for His name, His alone is sublime" (JPS translation) in the context of the Kabbalistic doctrine of cyclical time, as directed at the ordained annihilation of all of creation and its details, which are mentioned throughout this psalm (including the angels and the heavenly host), and the survival of only the upper level of the theosophical system.⁷³

The worldview expressed in the writings of the Ikhwān al-şafāʾ circle and the circles of early Kabbalists is characterized by a combination of the adoption of a new, complex theosophical conception, with connections to Neoplatonism, such as that which moves on the axis of relations of the upper spiritual realm and the lower material realm, and retention of apocalyptic, eschatological tendencies. This combination affected the significant expansion and development of the conception of time: to the classical conception that emphasizes the point of departure of Creation and the final point of the horizons of eschatological, apocalyptic ages, a strong cyclical element has been added. This cyclical element becomes a central component with respect to the development and perfection of the instruments of time needed to represent

70 In this context see Goldreich, "Iyyun Circle," pp. 145-155; De Smet, *La quiétude de l'intellect*, p. 307, n. 472; Nomoto, *Early Ismāʿīlī Thought*, pp. 225-229, 232-236.

71 *Al-Jāmiʿa*, p. 240.

72 Cor 28, 88: "There is no god except Him. Everything will perish except His Face. To Him belongs the Judgment and you will be return to Him"; 55, 26-27, "Everyone on it (i.e. on earth) perishes. But the Face of your Lord, which is full of glory and honour, endures." (Alan Jones translation).

73 Moshe Ben Nahman (Nachamnides) *Kitvei Ramban*, 2 vols., ed. Chaim D. Chavel, Jerusalem, Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1963-1964, vol. 1, pp. 189-190.

the complex interaction that exists between the upper-spiritual world and the lower, material realm in the theosophical frameworks under discussion. The dimension of innovation of the cyclical doctrine of time in Ismā'īlī (as well as in few other streams of early Shī'ism) and in the early Kabbalah in relation to messianic, apocalyptic, and eschatological tendencies in Judaism and Qur'ānic Islam is intended to bring these tendencies into a cyclical, broad, and far more complex framework of time. In the early frameworks of time of the traditions under discussion, messianic, apocalyptic, and eschatological developments were regarded as final goals, bringing close or actualizing the end of days. In comparison to this, the framework of the cyclical doctrine of time of the Ikhwān circle and of the Kabbalists, these developments are presented as intermediary stations on the road to the comprehensive goal, far higher and more distant, of elevation and return to the source in the supreme spiritual stratum.⁷⁴

The model of cyclical time of early Kabbalists is based on the basic Biblical structure of the seven days of Creation, on the seven weeks plus one day cycle of “the count of the barley offering” (*sefirat ha-'Omer*) linking Passover and Pentecost in the Hebrew calendar,⁷⁵ and especially on the seven-year Biblical cycle, culminating in the Sabbatical year (*shemīṭah*), and the seven times seven-year cycle that culminates in the fiftieth, Jubilee (*yovel*) year. The agricultural, proprietary, and economic values typical of the Biblical pattern, combining Sabbatical years and the Jubilee, as a unique structure marked by the complete release of slaves and the return of land to its original owners is strong proof of God's actual sovereignty over the land and people of Israel.⁷⁶ All of this is interpreted in the relevant Kabbalistic wrings in accordance with a far more intensified and expanded conception of time. In the framework of this conception, the cyclical relation of Sabbatical-Jubilee is translated into seven cycles of seven thousand years, where the accumulation of the great Sabbatical

74 See for example, *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, in *Sefer 'Amudei ha-Kabbalah* II, Jerusalem, Nezer Sharga, 2005, p. 258.

75 See for example, *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, p. 321; *Me'irat 'Eynayim*, p. 168, ll. 3-5; in addition, the Feast of Tabernacles has special importance, as it deviates from the weekly pattern and finishes on *Shemini 'Aseret* (The Assembly of the Eighth Day). This assembly is a symbol of the great Jubilee, where everything is stopped (*ne'ešar*). See Moshe Ben Naḥman (Nachamnides), *Perush ha-Ramban 'al ha-Torah (Nahmanides' Commentary on the Torah)*, ed. Chaim Dov Chavel, 2 vols, Jerusalem, Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1959, Lev 23, 36 (p. 157). See also Henoch. *Ramban*, pp. 384-386.

76 Gerald J. Blidstein, “Yovel: Ideology and History in Rabbinic Law,” in *Millenarismi nella cultura contemporanea—con un'appendice su yovel ebraico e giubileo Cristiano*, ed. E.I. Rambaldi, Milano, Franco Angel, 2000, pp. 187-198.

cycles lead to the final goal of the return to the source, which is summed up in a great Jubilee of fifty thousand years.⁷⁷ The cyclical agricultural pattern of Sabbatical years and the Jubilee, in its daring and intensified formulation, therefore served the Kabbalists of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as a means to turn away from and break out of the restrictions of historical time familiar from the Bible and from the Jewish tradition. This turning away and this breaking out were needed because these Kabbalists wished to express their worldview in terms of time, including the theosophical and eschatological complexity that characterize it.⁷⁸

In comparison, in the Ikhwān literature, the unusual, intensified cyclical time, that which assimilates the continuity of known and documented history into a single chapter of a far great extension, was expressed in two distinct patterns of time: cyclical time, which is measured according to the regular movements of heavenly bodies, time that reflects astronomical and astrological knowledge, time whose long cyclical units are measured in terms of 36,000 and 360,000 years;⁷⁹ and the second type of cyclical time, where the elementary cyclical unit is a 1,000 years. The primordial, eschatological units of the days of creation, each of which represents a 1,000 years, form a week of 7,000 years. The cyclical time unity of 7,000 years contains the full scope of historical development, carrying with it decidedly messianic and eschatological meanings. Beyond that, there is the most comprehensive and inclusive unit of time: 50,000 years. This unit reflects the full cycle, of which the Creation is the starting point, while the destruction of Creation and the elevation of spiritual entities and their return to their primordial source is the end point. Of the two systems of cyclical time in the Ikhwān al-şafā' literature, the second is the focus of our interest here. This is because of the emphasis on the principles of

77 For example see *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, pp. 318, 320-321.

78 Idel, "Jubilee", pp. 231-232; Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 381-382.

79 According to the astrological knowledge accepted in their period, the Ikhwān combine three cycles in the framework of historical astrology: the cycle of 20 years is parallel to a generation in the ordinary sense of the word. Cycles of 240 and 960 years are the historical cycles, the first of which is connected to the rise and fall of dynasties, and the second, more important historical cycle, which heralds the advent of the legislating prophets who bears with him a new religious teaching. Beyond these are longer cycles, such as those of 3,000 and 9,000 years, which are regarded as being connected to important climatic and geological changes. The 36,000 and 360,000 year cycles comprehend the great processes of destruction and renewal that characterize cosmological changes. See in this context, *Rasā'il*, vol. 2, pp. 92; vol. 3, pp. 251, 266-267; *al-Jāmi'a*, Şalibā edition vol. 1, pp. 321-324. See also in this context Marquet, "Les Cycles", De Callatāy, *Brotherhood*, pp. 40-43; idem, "World Cycles."

elevation and return to the source as a fundamental principles of this system, and also because of the similarity in the use of time units of 1,000, 7,000, and 50,000 years, which are parallel to those that appear in the Kabbalistic doctrine of the Sabbatical cycles, including the eschatological and theosophical meanings embodied in the use of these units.

Two complementary principles of this conception see worthy of emphasis: the first is the elevation of the spiritual entities connected to matter, from their material mode of being to a spiritual mode of being, an elevation which is a return to the source, includes the joint return of “the world soul” and the individual souls that are worthy of it to the source of their high spiritual being.⁸⁰ The second principle refers to the complete, final redemption, the redemption that will be actualized with the folding the upper spiritual world back into itself, severing the connection between it and the lower, material world.⁸¹ This will be a theosophical act that brings the material world back to its hylic condition, without form or vitality. Thus, from the point of view of matter, the return to the source is return to the point of departure of its non-being or chaos before Creation.⁸² In the *Ikhwān* this eschatological goal, which takes place with the completion of the great cycle, is the destination and high point of the parallel between the universe, taken as macro-anthropos (*insān kabīr*), and man, taken as microcosmos (*‘ālam ṣaghūr*): just as with man, taken as a microcosmos, the departure of the soul from the body is the death of the body and the salvation of the soul; thus in the universe, taken as macro-anthropos, the departure of

80 *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, p. 37; *al-Jāmi'a*, pp. 488-489. See the words of Yiṣḥaq demin 'Akko on this matter (*Me'irat Eynayim*, p. 177, ll. 11-14): “and look at the Jubilee, which is entirely spiritual, because the scriptures did not command us to do any action except to restore everything to what it was of old and to return every branch to its root from all of reality from the emanated to the created. And to abolish all the created on it, to return all the corporal to the spiritual, search and find. Therefore it is called holy, because all of it alludes to the (*sefira* of) *Binah*, which is completely spiritual, like the soul for the body.” And see also his words (*ibid.*, p. 179, ll. 30-31) about the *sefira* of *Binah* as “the soul of all souls” (*neshamah le-khol ha-neshamot*) in the context of the great Jubilee; *ibid.*, p. 182, ll. 19-20: “it hints that the souls of the righteous return to the place from which they were emanated, and that will result in the end.” And also his words on the name the “Saporta Kaballah” (*Qabalat Saporta*), *ibid.*, pp. 217, ll. 4-5; 237, l. 17. See also *Mar'ot ha-Zoveot*, p. 107, ll. 15-29; Baḥya Ben Asher, *Rabenu Baḥya 'al ha-Torah*, 4 vol., Bene Beraq, 1992, Lev 26, 11 (p. 144): *Sefer ha-Temuna*, in *Torat ha-Qanah*, Jerusalem, Nezer Sharga, 1998, pp. 84, 137-138, 169-161. Also Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 439-445.

81 See *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, pp. 333, 350-351. In this context see also *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, 398; vol. 2, pp. 24-25, 133, 476-477; vol. 3, pp. 35, 213, 216.

82 *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, pp. 353-355; *al-Jāmi'a*, p. 489; *Rabenu Baḥya* on Lev 18, 29 (p. 97). Also De Callataÿ, *Brotherhood*, 32, 39-40; Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 234-235.

“the soul of the world” (*naḥs al-ʿālam*) from the “general body” (*al-jism al-kullī*) bears within it death and destruction of the material world and the salvation of its soul.⁸³ In a similar fashion, in the writings of the Kabbalist Yişḥaq demin ʿAkko, the great Jubilee is the time when both man, who is microcosmos (*ʿolam qaṭan*), and the seven lower “*sefirot* of the building” (*sefirot ha-banyan*), which are macro-anthropos (*adam gadol*) are liberated “and receive a reward from the High King.”⁸⁴ In both cases, the doctrine under discussion bears with it a clear emancipatory message. The component of spiritual redemption is an essential part of it.⁸⁵

2 The Distinction Between the Circular-Cosmological and the Elevational-Theosophical Patterns of Cyclical Time

Central to the proposed discussion here is the phenomenological distinction between two distinct patterns of cyclical time: the circular-cosmological and the elevational-theosophical patterns. The Kabbalah scholar Haviva Pedaya distinguish here between the “repetition of,” (Heb. *ḥazarah ʿal*) or the cyclical-circular pattern, versus the “return to,” (Heb. *ḥazarah el*) or the return to the source pattern.⁸⁶ Moshe Idel, another Kabbalah scholar, wrote in this context

83 *Rasāʾil*, vol. 3, pp. 333, 350-351. Also see in this context *Rasāʾil*, vol. 1, p. 398; vol. 2, pp. 24-25, 133, 476-477; vol. 3, pp. 35, 213, 216.

84 *Meʿirat ʿEynayim*, p. 180, ll. 15-20. See Ehud Krinis, “The Philosophical and Theosophical Interpretations of the Microcosm-Macrocosm Analogy in Ikhwān al-şafāʾ and Jewish Medieval Writings,” in *Lésotérisme shīʿite, ses racines et ses prolongements*, eds. M. A. Amir-Moezzi, M. De Cillis, D. De Smet and O. Mir-Kasimov (forthcoming).

85 Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 18-20, 31, 380-382, 451; idem, “The Great Mother”, pp. 312, 327. An interesting expression of the emancipatory aspect of the doctrine of Sabbatical cycles can be found in the negative meaning given to the term *temura/temurot* [change/changes] in the thinking of Yosef Ben Shalom Ashkenazi. For him this term not only connects with the specific meaning of the transmigration of souls in bodies, but also with the more general meaning of processes of composition and decomposition in the matter. For him, redemption it grasped as “departure from the darkness of change.” Full redemption such as this can only be attained at the great Jubilee, in the general process of the elevation to the *sefira* of *Binah* that is beyond any change. See *Perush le-Farashat Bereshit*, pp. 46, ll. 11-47, l. 1; 49, ll. 4-5; 72, ll. 8-22.

86 Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 33-36, 412-413. See the epithet “*teshuvah*” [return, repentance] as a common term for the *sefira* of *Binah* in the framework of the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, as an epithet which points to the identification of this *sefirah* as the source and goal of the movement of return to the source.

about the distinction between “cosmological time” and “cosmogonic time.”⁸⁷ Detailed presentation of this distinction between two conceptions of cyclical time, which are essentially different from each other, is necessary by way of introduction. I believe it will pave the way to understanding of the similarities and differences between the doctrines of cyclical time of Ikhwān and the Kabbalists.⁸⁸ Moreover, it makes a necessary tool for confronting with different approaches and opinions that have taken hold in the study of Ikhwān literature and the Kabbalah, a grip that greatly limits and reduces our ability to get the most out of the comparative discussion of the issue of cyclical time in the two theological corpora under discussion.

The phenomenological distinction between these two patterns of cyclical time proves to be vital in the context of thorough clarification of the texts. This clarification takes note of the clear connection between the Kabbalistic Sabbatical cycles doctrine (*Torat ha-Shemīṭot*) and the elevational-theosophical pattern. Further, the finding that emerges from study of the Ikhwān writings shows the existence of both types, that of the circular-cosmological and that of the elevational-theosophical, one beside the other, and sometimes one within the other, in discussions dispersed within the Ikhwān writings they discuss the issue of cyclical time.⁸⁹ These discussions are marked by the use of many units of cyclical time, most of which are connected with astrological and astronomical data. In the writings of Jewish Kabbalists it is possible to locate a cyclical doctrine with a clearer and more distinct unifying identity, corresponding with the characteristics of the elevational-theosophical pattern, a doctrine formulated by means of the few units of 1,000, 7,000, and 50,000 years. As noted, these units of time also appear in the Ikhwān’s discussions of cyclical time.⁹⁰ In the hands of the comparative researcher, the doctrine

87 Moshe Idel, “Sabbath: On the Concepts of Time in Jewish Mysticism”, in *Sabbath: Idea, History, Reality*, ed. G. J. Blidstein, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, Beer-Sheva, 2004, pp. 58-59.

88 Shalom Rosenberg, in the brief but fascinating remarks he devoted to the distinction between the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles and the doctrines of cosmic cycles accepted in antiquity and the Middle Ages, anticipated the discussion that I develop extensively below. See Shalom Rosenberg, “Return to the Garden of Eden: Remarks on the History of the Idea of Restorative Redemption in Medieval Jewish Philosophy”, in *The Messianic Idea in Jewish Thought*, Jerusalem, The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982, p. 40 [Hebrew].

89 *Rasā'il*, vol. 2, p. 233 (a series of 1,000, 12,000, 36,000, 360,000, and 50,000 years); 3, 250 (a series of 7,000, 12,000, 51,000, and 360,000 years).

90 See especially *al-Jāmi'a*, p. 444, the place where the Ikhwān propose a concise formulation that binds together the three units of 1,000, 7,000 and 50,000 years in a tight system that stands on its own.

of cyclical time in the writings of Kabbalists of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as a doctrine with a clear and distinct identity on the general phenomenological level, can play a useful role in clearer understanding of the issue of cyclical time in the Ikhwān writing of the tenth century.

Below I present a number of points, which, in my opinion, are important for sharpening the phenomenological distinction between circular-cosmological and the elevational-theosophical patterns in the formulations of cyclical time in the Ikhwān writings and those of the Kabbalists.

The Traditional Basis and the Scientific Basis

In the elevational-theosophical pattern, the units of cyclical time are based on interpretations of the sanctified religious tradition, whether or not the data are anchored in nature and science. The source of authority of the cyclical time units in doctrines of this type is the religious tradition relevant to the authors. Thus, for example, the Ikhwān anchor the cyclical units of 1,000 years in the concept of the 1,000 year day as it appears in the Qur'ān,⁹¹ and the cyclical unity of 50,000 years is based on the concept of day of 50,000 years, which also appears in the Qur'ān.⁹² In both cases, the context of mention of the unique time units in the Qur'ān is that of ascent of existence and/or exalted beings (the angels and the spirit) toward God. The time unit of 7,000 years is based on a *ḥadīth* tradition attributed to the prophet of Islam: "The age of the world is 7,000 years. I have been sent in the last millennium (*'umr al-dunyā sab'at ālāf sana, bu'ithtu fī ākhar alf minha/ fī ākharha alfan*)."⁹³

In the Kabbalistic literature that deals with the conception of cyclical time, Psalms 90:4, "For in Your sight a thousand years are like yesterday that has passed," serves as proof text for the unit of 1,000 years,⁹⁴ whereas another verse in Psalms 105, 8, "the promise He gave for a thousand generations," is regarded

91 Cor 32:5: "He directs the affair from heaven to earth; then it goes up to Him in a day, the measure of which is a thousand years of your counting" (Alan Jones translation). See also Cor 22, 47, and *Rasā'il* vol. 3, p. 219.

92 Cor 70:4: "the angels and the Spirit ascend to Him in a day, the measure of which is fifty thousand years" (Alan Jones translation). See also *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, p. 37; vol. 2, p. 135; *al-Jāmi'a*, Ṣalībā edition, vol. 1, pp. 316-317.

93 *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, p. 219; *al-Jāmi'a*, pp. 358, 444. A variation of this utterance is included in a *ḥadīth* transmitted by Ibn Ziml. This *ḥadīth* was considered as unreliable by Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 965), one of the leading Sunnī *ḥadīth* scholars in the Ikhwān's days. See Muḥammad Ibn Ḥibbān, *Al-Majrūhin min al-muḥaddithīn*, Riyadh, Dār al-Ṣumay'ī, 2000, vol. 1, pp. 414-416.

94 Menaḥem Recanati, *Pirush ha-Recanati*, ed. Amnon Gross, Aharon Barzani u-veno, 2003, *Parashat "Behar"* (p. 135); *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, p. 320; *Me'irat 'Eynayim*, pp. 10, l. 31; 31, ll. 14-15; *Rabenu Bahya* on Gen 2,3 (p. 35).

as an authority for the unit of 50,000 years.⁹⁵ The Talmudic tradition attributed to Rav Qatina: “Six thousand years shall the world exist, and one [thousand, the seventh], it shall be desolate,”⁹⁶ serves as a central proof of a framework of 7,000 years in the way it was interpreted in the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical years cycle.⁹⁷

In comparison, the time unites of the circular-cosmological pattern do not require confirmation from scripture, from sources of divine revelation, or from oral traditions. They can depend on data taken from observational science, based on human experience. Thus, for example, the Ikhwān base the use of the unit of 36,000 years on data from the astronomical-astrological writings of Ptolemy, from the second century CE, while the unity of 360,000 years is taken from the Arabic astrological school of the eighth and ninth centuries (in this case the data comes from Indian and Persian astrological writings). In this context, it is notable that the Ikhwān do not devote any effort to trying to anchor these data in verses from the Qurʾān or Ḥadīth traditions. They are mentioned emphatically as data taken from the Greek, Persian, or Indian non-Islamic scientific tradition.⁹⁸

95 See also Deut 7, 9; 1 Chron 16, 15. See also ‘Ezra. Ben Shlomo, *Perush Shir ha-Shirim*, in *Kitvei Ramban*, ed. Chaim Dov Chavel, vol. 2, Jerusalem, Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1964, vol. 2, p. 539; Ya‘aqov Ben Sheshet, *Meshiv Devarim Nekhoḥim*, ed. Georges Vajda, Jerusalem, ha-Aqademyah ha-Leumit ha-Yisreelit le-Mada‘im, 1968, pp. 93, ll. 36-37; 168-169, ll. 168-172; Meir Ibn Avi Sahulah, (attrib.), *Biur le-Ferush ha-Ramban ‘al ha-Torah*, in *Oṣar Mefarshei ha-Torah*, Warsaw, 1875, p. 26b; *Ma‘arekhet ha-Elohut*, p. 318; *Me‘irat Eynayim*, p. 179, ll. 23-24; *Rabeinu Baḥya* on Gen 2, 3 (p. 35); Ex 21, 6 (pp. 174-175); Lev 25,8 (p. 135). In this context the essential difference should be pointed out between the conception of the Jubilee of the long cosmic continuum (the “macro-chronological,” in Idel’s terms), and the conception of the Jubilee in *Book of Jubilees* which relates to a historical period of time (“micro-chronic”). The Jubilee in *Book of Jubilees* indicates a sequential unit of measurement within history. We do not find either the Kabbalists or Ikhwān making similar use of the micro-chronological unit of the Jubilee. See Idel, “Jubilee,” p. 209. On the conception of time in *Book of Jubilees*, see James C. Vanderkam, “Studies in the Chronology of the Book of Jubilees”, in *From Revelation to Canon: Studies in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Literature*, Leiden, Brill, 2000, pp. 520-544.

96 *Babylonian Talmud*, tractate *Sanhedrin* p. 97a; *Rosh ha-Shana*, p. 31a.

97 *Perush Shir ha-Shirim*, p. 539; *Meshiv Devarim Nekhoḥim*, pp. 94, 73-74; *Ma‘arekhet ha-Elohut*, pp. 318-320; *Me‘irat Eynayim*, pp. 31, ll. 9-11; 179, ll. 6-9; *Biur le-Ferush ha-Ramban*, p. 28a.

98 *Rasā’il*, vol. 2, pp. 40-42; vol. 3, pp. 111-113; *al-Jāmi‘a*, pp. 400-401. Also De Callataÿ, *Annus Platonicus*, pp. 122-123, 126, 138-145, 150.

Corporal Motion and Spiritual Motion

In a doctrine of the circular-cosmological pattern, the cycle is usually based on measurement of the time of the actual revolutions of corporal bodies—one or more heavenly bodies—from a certain starting point on the map of the canopy of heaven to their return to the same place, as a consequence of the repeating process of their orbital movement. Thus, for example, in the Ikhwān writings, the cycle of 36,000 years ends and begins anew with the closing of the cyclic movement of the fixed stars against the ecliptic. The 360,000 cycle is the length of time in the Ikhwān writings at which a conjunction is created among the various circular movements of the seven planets, when they come together at the opening degree of the constellation of Aries. From the scientific-astrological point of view, the identification of points of conjunction like these is a vital heuristic tool for calculating the place of the planets, a calculation based on measuring the time that has passed since the same conjunction.⁹⁹

By way of comparison, in the cyclical conception of the elevational-theosophical pattern, the time is measured in terms of the movements of entities that are essentially spiritual, the individual souls and the Universal Soul in the teaching of Ikhwān, or the divine *sefirot* in the Kabbalistic doctrine of the Sabbatical cycles.¹⁰⁰ The measurement relates to the movements of these entities in the the upper spiritual realm and between the upper spiritual realm and the lower corporal realm, over a period of 1,000, 7,000 or 50,000 years. From the structural perspective, the Kabbalists who adopted the doctrine of the Sabbatical cycles agreed on a pattern according to which the movement of spiritual elevation, which is expressed in the concluding stage of the great Jubilee cycle of 50,000 years, is greater and more dramatic than that which is expressed in the concluding stage of the 7,000 year Sabbatical cycle. The details of this pattern are in dispute. Thus, for example, the author of *Maʿarekhet ha-Elohut* advocates an approach according to which the elevation of the great

99 David Pingree, *The Thousands of Abū Maʿshar*, London, Warburg Institute, 1968, pp. 27-28. Behind the reference, typical of the astrological view under discussion, to the cyclical conjunction of heavenly bodies as the original point of departure, the return to which is a return to the point of the original position in the heavenly realm, lies the aforementioned heuristic tool. This should be taken into account in this respect, in order to avoid erroneous identification of the concept of the original position in the astrological approach, with the concept of creation or origination in the theological sense as the point of beginning of creation and time.

100 See the remark of Gershom Scholem in the context of the doctrine of Sabbatical cycles (Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 120): "The main point of this doctrine is that it is the *Sefirot* and not the stars that determine the progress and span of this world." See also *Rabenu Bahya* on Gen. 2:3 (pp. 38-39).

Sabbatical cycle is that of the *sefirah* of *‘Aṭarah/Shekhinah* (the lowest tenth *sefirah*) to the *sefirah* of *Tiferet* (the sixth *sefirah*), while in the great Jubilee, the body of the seven lower *sefirot*—“*sefirot* of the building”, ascent to the *sefirah* of *Binah* (the third *sefirah*).¹⁰¹ In comparison to this, in David Ben Yehuda ha-Ḥasid’s writings, the elevation of the seven *sefirot ha-Binyan* to *Binah* already takes place in the great Sabbatical cycle, whereas the great Jubilee is marked by the drawing in of all the *sefirot* to the supreme *sefirah*, that of *Keter ‘elyon*.¹⁰² Baḥya Ben Asher presents a similar approach to that of David Ben Yehuda ha-Ḥasid regarding the nature of the ascent in the great Sabbatical cycle, but he goes even farther in presenting the process of the ascent in the great Jubilee as the elevation of all ten of the *sefirot* into of the *ein sof* (the infinite realm of the divine).¹⁰³

In the Ikhwān writings, one can locate the same principled structured approach, according to which the elevation that is actualized at the end of a great cycle of 50,000 years is the dramatic and conclusive act of elevation, in comparison to which the event that is actualized at the end of a cycle of 7,000 years is an interim, less dramatic event. From the point of view of the Ikhwān, the event that occurs at the end of a cycle of 7,000 years is one of the elevation to the Universal Soul along with of all the individual souls that are worthy. The realization of this event is apparently bound up with the simultaneous death of all the creatures on earth.¹⁰⁴ This matter is connected in the Ikhwān’s view to the characterization of the end of this cycle as the Day of Judgment when all the souls of that cycle are put on trial before the Universal Soul, which appears before them.¹⁰⁵ However, the elevation that takes place at the end of the 50,000 year cycle is that elevation of the Universal Soul, which bears with it all the individual souls that are worthy, out of the total of intermediary cycles, into renewed conjunction with the Universal Intellect, while it leaves some of the souls behind, condemning them to destruction, along with the total destruction of the world.¹⁰⁶ Blurring of the distinction between the elevation that takes place at the end of the intermediary cycle of 7,000 and the more

101 *Ma’arekhet ha-Elohut*, pp. 314, 318, 320-321, 326-327.

102 *Mar’ot ha-Zoveot*, pp. 104, ll. 30-105, l. 1; 224, ll. 5-11.

103 *Perush Rabenu Baḥya* on Num. 10:35 (p. 46). See also on this entire matter: Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 380-388; idem, “The Great Mother”, p. 313.

104 *Al-Jāmi’a*, pp. 53, 330.

105 *Rasā’il*, vol. 3, pp. 219-220, 442; *al-Jāmi’a*, pp. 67, 88, 197, 357-358. See also De Callataÿ, *Brotherhood*, pp. 31-32.

106 *Al-Jāmi’a*, pp. 51-52, 76, 148, 488-489. See especially *Rasā’il*, vol. 2, p. 135; *al-Jāmi’a*, Ṣalibā edition, vol. 1, p. 317.

comprehensive elevation that occur at the end of the great cycle of 50,000 years, a blurring that characterizes the Kabbalists' discussion of this matter, also appears in the Ikhwān. According to some of their descriptions, it appears that the elevation of the Universal Soul to the Universal Intellect also takes place at the stage of transition between the intermediary cycles, although in this case the elevation and conjunction are less sweeping and dramatic, in the sense that it is not combined with the total destruction of the material world.¹⁰⁷

The Heavenly World: Between Perpetually Abiding and Transience and Destruction

In the circular-cosmological pattern, the cycle is based on a dynamic of cause and effect relations, which exist between the circular motion of the heavenly bodies-spheres and the stars that comprise the upper part of the corporal world, and the immobile, lower part of the corporal world, the domain of the terrestrial world. The fundamental assumption here is the permanence and abiding of the world of the spheres and the stars, including certain spiritual entities connected to it such as the "spirits" (Arab. *ruḥāniyyāt*) or the "ministers" (Heb. *sharim*). The permanent abiding of this world assures the permanence of the movement of its components.¹⁰⁸ Correspondingly, the catastrophic aspect accompanying the completion of the long-range cycles such as those of 36,000 and 360,000 years, is confined to the domain of the terrestrial world.¹⁰⁹ The well-known descriptions of the destruction of the world in the framework of the circular-cosmological pattern, by means of "an inundation of water," and "conflagration of fire," do their destructive work by turns,¹¹⁰ they can only seize what touches upon the level of the terrestrial world, where water and fire are two of the four elements. They cannot touch the realm of the world of the spheres and the stars, where the different and separate material of which it is composed protects it against such a catastrophe. Thus the Ikhwān and the Kabbalist Bahya Ben Asher share a position according to which the matter of

107 *Al-Jāmi'a*, pp. 53, 127-128.

108 Gad Freudenthal, "Cosmology: The Heavenly Bodies", in *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy: From Antiquity through the Seventeenth Century*, eds. S. Nadler and T. Rudavsky, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 302.

109 *Al-Jāmi'a*, p. 284. The Ikhwān argue here that the fine matter of the sphere and its delicate essence, combined with its balanced nature, cause the Universal Soul to cling to it and safeguarding it from the changes that inflict the terrestrial realm. This manner assures its eternal survival and existence of the spheres realm in the best situation. See also *Rasāʾil*, vol. 2, pp. 40-42.

110 *Rasāʾil*, vol. 2, p. 148. Also De Callataÿ, *Annus Platonicus*, pp. 15ff, 119-120.

the heavens is different by nature from that of the terrestrial world. It is uniform, stable, and permanent by nature of its creation. By extension, both the Ikhwān and Bahya explain the predicted collapse of this matter and the heavenly objects made of it according to the elevational-theosophical pattern, as testimony to the action of the decree of the divine will, against which neither nature and its laws can abide.¹¹¹ Behind these statements regarding heavenly and terrestrial matter stand the assumptions of the Aristotelian worldview, according to which the laws of physics that apply to the heavenly world are different from those that apply to the earth.¹¹²

Compared to this, the elevational-theosophical pattern is one in which the dynamics of cause and effect take place between the upper spiritual world and the corporal world in its entirety. This dynamic operates on the basis of downward and upward movement of the entity or entities from the spiritual world in relation to the corporal world, with both its heavenly and terrestrial strata. Here the catastrophic aspect that characterizes the end of the cycle is not limited to the level of the terrestrial world, but it also applies to the stars and spheres and their matter. Accordingly, the catastrophic aspect that accompanies the completion of the long cycles in the elevational-theosophical pattern, in the writings of Ikhwān and of the Kabbalists, is general and comprehensive: at the time of the conclusion of the great cycle, the terrestrial and heavenly realms collapse and cease to exist altogether.¹¹³ In the Ikhwān this comprehensive and absolute collapse of the universe is explained from its mechanistic aspect, as chain reaction caused by the immediate cessation of the movement of the all-encompassing sphere, upon whose movement the existence of both the heavenly and terrestrial worlds depends. However, regarding the explanation of the essential, metaphysical aspect of this issue, cessation of the action of the all-encompassing sphere and destruction of the corporal worlds and that which derives from it, these are the result of the pulling and ingathering by the Universal Soul of its forces from the realm of matter and raising it up and separating from it, as the realization of its end and purpose.¹¹⁴ Similarly, among the

111 *Rasā'il*, vol. 2, pp. 46-47 in comparison to *Rabenu Bahya* on Num 10, 35 (p. 45).

112 Freudenthal, "Cosmology", pp. 304-309.

113 *Perush ha-Ramban* on Levit 18, 25 (p. 110). Also Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, 250-252; idem, "The Great Mother", p. 314.

114 *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, pp. 448-447; vol. 2, p. 35; vol. 3, pp. 255, 333, 340-339, 354; *al-Jāmi'a*, pp. 354-355, 359-360. The Universal Soul is described by the Ikhwān as the angel responsible for the movement of the sphere. Thus Universal Soul moves the sphere, and because of its supremacy, precedence, and superior power can also stop its movement. See *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, pp. 328-329; vol. 4, pp. 202-203.

Kabbalists the lowest *sefirah*, the *Aṭarah/Shekhinah* which rules the universe, is described as a factor that provides power and moves the all-encompassing sphere.¹¹⁵ By extension, in some of the writings of the Kabbalists, the cessation of life in the universe in the seventh millennium of the great Sabbatical cycle are explained as a result of cessation of the flow of abundance from the lowest *sefirah* to the corporal entities below.¹¹⁶

Between Renewal and Elevation

Renewal is a decided characteristic of the circular-cosmological pattern of time: in this pattern, the terrestrial world is destroyed and renewed time after time because of the circular-cyclical regularity inherent in it. The purpose of circular-cosmological doctrine such as that formulated by the Ikhwān, is the perpetuation of the terrestrial world by renewal. The orbital movements of the heavenly bodies, including the destructive consequences when they complete their cycle, serves in this doctrine as a factor leading to the renewal of terrestrial material existence and of the control of the world by the Universal Soul.¹¹⁷

In comparison, in the doctrines of the elevational-theosophical pattern, the ultimate purpose is connected to a supreme and more comprehensive regularity than that which is based on the movements of heavenly bodies. The highest goal is connected here to the opposite image of bringing matters to stability and repose. This purpose is bound up with nullification of the movement of life on the earth and the cessation of the orbital motions of the heavenly bodies, which are connected to the perpetuation and renewal of that life.¹¹⁸ In the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, the practical content of the Biblical commandments to observe Sabbatical years and the Jubilee, namely the cessation of agricultural labor on the land and leaving it in a situation of fallowness and repose, serves as the basis for identifying the emancipatory aspect of this doctrine with the rest of the divine forces active in the created

¹¹⁵ *Rabenu Bahya* on Deut 26, 1-2 (p. 146).

¹¹⁶ *Perush Shir ha-Shirim*, p. 518; *Me'irat Eynayim*, pp. 31, ll. 11-13; 240, ll. 25-27; *Rabenu Bahya* on Levit 25, 23 (p. 135). Also Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 323-324. In comparison to this, the destruction that takes place as a result of the elevation of the seven 'building' *sefirot* to the mother *sefira* of *Binah* is described in these writings as the return of the created world to its zero point, as chaos (*tohu va-vohu*). See *Me'irat Eynayim*, pp. 31, ll. 13-15; 126, ll. 31-33; *Rabenu Bahya* on Num 10, 35 (p. 45); *Pirush ha-Recanati, Parashat "Behar"* (p. 140).

¹¹⁷ *Al-Jāmi'a*, Ṣalībā edition vol. 1, p. 321. Here the Ikhwān point out that the heavenly constellation that indicates the 360,000 year cycle causes the renewal of the affair or command of the Universal Soul (*wa-huwa ḥudūth amr al-naḥs al-kullīya*). See also *al-Jāmi'a*, pp. 398-400. See De Callataÿ, *Annus Platonicus*, pp. 39-40, 66-67.

¹¹⁸ *Al-Jāmi'a*, pp. 51-52, 411.

world. It becomes evident that the situation of rest in the upper realm of the *sefirot* world, entailing the cessation of activity in the lower realms, is the purpose of the process of elevation and returning to the source. Thus the upper realm are freed from the yoke of the lower ones. The full expression of this central emancipatory message is found in *Sefer ha-Temuna*.¹¹⁹ The aforementioned goal is attained by the movement of theosophical elevation, which severs the spiritual entities from their connection with lower matter and restores them to their upper spiritual source. In the *Ikhwan*, this purpose is achieved by means of the elevation of all the worthy partial souls to the womb of the Universal Soul, and, in the wake of this, the elevation of the Universal Soul to a situation that recreates the original full conjunction with the Universal Intellect.¹²⁰ In the Kabbalistic doctrine of the Sabbatical cycles, movement toward the goal is grasped as a process of the elevation of the souls of the righteous and of all the Jews and of the *sefirot* of the building (the seven *seferiot* down from that of *Hesed* [grace] to that of *Aṭarah/Shekhinah*) back to the bosom of their mother, the *sefirah* of *Binah* (the third *sefirah* of the hierarchy of the ten *sefirot* of the Jewish Kabbalah), or to an even higher level in other Kabbalistic versions of this process.¹²¹

The Regularity of Nature: Continuity versus Change

In the circular-cosmological pattern, the world that comes into being again in the wake of the destruction decreed against the terrestrial world with the completion of the previous cycle is the continuation of the previous world, which was destroyed, in the sense that the same natural-astrological regularity

119 *Sefer ha-Temuna*, pp. 67, 75-76, 109-111. In this book elevation is explained as a process of turning inward, being swallowed up, and being stored. See especially the use of the term “sheath” (*nartiq*). See pp. 142, 148, 161-162. See also Gershom Scholem’s important remarks regarding the manner in which this central tendency of *Sefer ha-Temuna* places it on the opposite ideological pole from that of *Sefer ha-Zohar*. Scholem, *The Kabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 74-80 (esp. p. 77). See also *Perush Shir ha-Shirim*, pp. 480, 511, 518; *Ma’arekhet ha-Elohut*, pp. 317-318, 320; *Me’irat ‘Einayim*, pp. 165, ll. 26-27; *Mar’ot ha-Zoveot*, pp. 103, ll. 9-16; 104, l. 25, 104, l. 3; *Pirush ha-Recanati, Parashat “Behar”* (p. 135). See also Haviva Pedaya, “Sabbath, Saturn, and the Diminution of the Moon—the Holy Compound: Sign and Image”, in *Myth in Judaism*, ed. H. Pedaya, Jerusalem, Mossad Bialik, 1996, pp. 178-191 [Hebrew]; idem, *Nahmanides*, pp. 210, 352-354, 405, 451.

120 *Rasā’il*, vol. 3, p. 37; *al-Jāmi’a*, pp. 51-52, 488-489.

121 See for example: *Sefer ha-Temuna*, pp. 109, 133; *Ma’arekhet ha-Elohut*, pp. 314, 318, 320-321, 326-327 (the elevation to the *sefira* of *Binah*); *Me’irat ‘Einayim*, p. 31, ll. 13-14 (the elevation to the *sefira* of *Hokhmah*), *Mar’ot ha-Zoveot*, pp. 104, ll. 30-105, l. 1; 224 ll. 5-11 (the elevation to the *sefira* of *Keter*); *Rabenu Bahya* on Num. 10:31 (p. 46 the elevation to the level of *Ein Sof*).

applies to it as to its predecessor, which is the constant and permanent regularity that prevails in the terrestrial world.¹²²

In comparison to this, in the cycles of elevational-theosophical pattern, as expressed in the Ikhwān writings and those of the Kabbalists, in the regularity determined by the spiritual realm, the action of a higher order than the natural astrological regularity is expressed. As a result, the nature of reality that prevails in the world of the new cycle can differ essentially from that prevailed in the previous cycle. With the Ikhwān, a change of this kind is described as a transition from the world of “the cycle of disclosure” (*dawr al-kashf*) to world of “the cycle of concealment” (*dawr al-satr*) and vice versa. In the current world familiar to us, the world of “the cycle of concealment,” natural, astrological regularity prevails, whereas the “cycle of disclosure,” is ruled by an entirely different regularity. According to the Ikhwān, in the transition from “the cycle of concealment” to “the cycle of disclosure” the heavenly domain, that of the spheres, the constellations, and the stars, remains untouched. However, the inner relations among the factors of that world undergo a radical change: the instability that characterizes these relations—which is described by the familiar laws of astrological science, namely the constant cyclical change between the constellations that represent beneficial influences and those that represent damaging influences—is annulled. The beneficial constellations remain in a manner that guarantees for those with a human-rational form (who alone, and not the animals, exist in the reality of this cycle) the stability of harmonious existence throughout the entire “cycle of disclosure.”¹²³ In the elaborated formulations of the Kabbalistic doctrine of the Sabbatical cycles, each world that rises and reaches its end within seven thousand years is under the influence of a one of the seven “*sefirot* of the building.” Consequently the nature or reality is different from world to world, according to regularity dictated by the dominant *sefirah* in each world. Thus, the nature of the world of the cycle under the dominance of the *sefirah* of *Ḥesed* (Grace) is entirely different from the nature of the world of the cycle under the influence of the *sefirah* of *Din* (Stern Judgment), and so on.¹²⁴

122 *Rasāʾil*, vol. 2, pp. 40-42; *al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 400-401. The doctrine of constant return of the stoic thinkers, according to which every great cycle is an exact duplicate of the one before it, is an extreme version of this principle. See David E. Hahm, *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology*, Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1977, pp. 185-199.

123 *Al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 75, 88. See The words of the tenth century Ismāʿīlī writer al-Sijistānī in this context: Iṣḥāq ibn Aḥmad al-Sijistānī, *Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt*, ed. ʿĀrif Tāmīr, Beirut, Al-Maṭbaʿa al-Kāthūlikiya, 1966, p. 182.

124 This is the way things are according to the theories of some Kabbalists, including David Ben Yehuda ha-Ḥasid. See *Marʾot ha-Zoveot*, pp. 102, ll. 16-23; 106, ll. 13-20. Primary among these Kabbalists is the anonymous author of *Sefer ha-Temunah*. See the detailed accounts

The Cosmic Drama

Central to the drama of cyclical time in the elevational-theosophical pattern in the writings of the Ikhwān (predominantly in *al-Risāla al-jāmi'a*) is the Universal Soul. The Universal Soul is an entity situated in the interstice between the world of the supreme intellect and the corporal world, and it is drawn to both of these worlds.¹²⁵ This bi-directional attraction of the Universal Soul, which expresses its dual countenance, is the cause of vacillation in time. At the basis of this vacillation lays dynamic of pairing of opposites (*muzdawija*), expressed as binary alternation between the “fine” (*latīf*) spiritual element of existence, whose source is in the upper realm, and the “coarse” (*kathīf*) material element of existence whose source is in lower realm.¹²⁶ The bi-directional attraction of the Universal Soul to both of those elements explains the binary vacillation which divide the 7,000 year cycle. The reciprocal relations between the upper, spiritual dimension of existence and its material dimension are translated into alternation between cycles of opposing nature—the turning of the Universal Soul downward toward the “coarse” (*kathīf*) element of matter and its immersion in it is translated as “the cycle of concealment” (*dawr al-satr*), whereas its turning upward toward the Universal Intellect is translated as “the cycle of disclosure” (*dawr al-kashf*).¹²⁷ This kind of cyclicity express a prolonged absence of absolute determination between spirit and matter. In the time framework of 7,000 years, dominance in determining the nature of reality changes hands: the material, “coarse” aspect of existence has the upper hand for a certain time, and afterward the spiritual, “fine” aspect has the upper hand for the subsequent time.¹²⁸ In the thought of the Ikhwān, as in

of this matter in *Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 95-118. This conception is connected to another important conception in *Sefer ha-Temuna*, according to which the primordial, highest Torah is actualized differently in each Sabbatical cycle. See *ibid.*, pp. 68, 97-84, 142. See also Scholem, *The Kabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 46-67; *idem*, *Origins*, pp. 466-474.

125 *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, pp. 185-186; *al-Jāmi'a*, pp. 240-243, 249, 495. See De Callatay, *Brotherhood*, pp. 19-20.

126 *Al-Jāmi'a*, pp. 84-85. The Ikhwān compare the binary alternation between these opposite cycles to transitions between day and night. See *al-Jāmi'a*, pp. 410-411, 463. On the use of the term “pairing of opposites” (*muzdawija*, *izdīwāj*) in one of the earliest Ismā'īlī works, see *The Kitāb al-Rusūm wa'l-izdīwāj wa'l-tartīb* Attributed to 'Abdān (d.286/899): Edition of the Arabic Text and Translation by Wilferd Madelung and Paul E. Walker, in *Fortresses of the Intellect—Ismaili and other Islamic Studies in Honour of Farhad Daftary*, ed. O. Ali-de-Unzaga London, I. B. Tauris, 2011, pp. 115 (English translation), 161-162 (original Arabic).

127 *Al-Jāmi'a*, pp. 243, 495, 499-500.

128 On the cyclical pattern of the week combining the component of destination with the cyclical motive, see the words of al-Sijistānī, important Ismā'īlī author contemporary with

that of other Ismāʿīlī authors of their time, these changes are made according to a six-seventh division: the historical epochs of the six legislating prophets (*aṣḥāb al-sharāʿiʿ, ruʿasāʾ, nuṭaqāʾ*)—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad which are likened to the six days of Creation,—are included in “the cycle of concealment,” whereas the post-historic epoch, an era compared to the seventh day of creation, is the time of “the cycle of disclosure.” This era begins with the appearance and mission of the Ismāʿīlī messiah (*al-qāʾim*) known as “the seventh” (*al-sābiʿ*). His mission is connected with the disclosure and promulgation of the esoteric truths of the religion, which had been reserved to the chosen few throughout “the cycle of concealment.” The events of the end of days, the Day of Judgment and the Resurrection (*al-qiyāma*) are also connected with this seventh era. The nature of “the cycle of disclosure” is described in the Ikhwān’s writings as nature ruled absolutely by spirituality and intelligence, and nullification of the influence of materiality and corporality.¹²⁹ In *al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa* the Ikhwān mention three cycles explicitly: “the first cycle of disclosure” (*dawr al-kashf al-awwal*), relates, according to the logic explained above, to the final stage of an earlier spiritual cycle of 7,000 years. After it comes “the cycle of concealment” (*dawr al-satr*), which relates, as noted, to the present epoch, which began with the mission of Adam and is now in the age of the mission of Muḥammad. After it, with the expected advent of the Ismāʿīlī messiah, another “cycle of disclosure” will begin, which will recreate basic characteristics of the previous “cycle of disclosure.”¹³⁰

the Ikhwān. See *Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt*, p. 191: “and similarly, the aim of the days is for the seventh (the seventh day stands under the sign of the messianic figure who comes after the six legislative prophets) and afterward they will return to their point of departure”. See also De-Callataÿ, *Brotherhood*, pp. 31-33.

129 *Rasāʾil* vol. 3, pp. 315-319, 442; *al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 66-70, 88-90, 123, 148, 406-410, 463-465, 497-499. See also Shafīque N Virani, “The Days of Creation in the Thought of Nasir Khusraw”, in *Nasir Khusraw: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, eds. S. Niyozov and R. Nazariev, Khujand-Tajikistan, Noshir Publications, 2004, 74-83; Daftary, *Cyclical Time*, pp. 151-158; De Callataÿ, Godefroid, “Astrology and Prophecy: The Ikhwān al-Safāʾ and the Legend of the Seven Sleepers,” in *Studies in the History of the Exact Sciences in Honour of David Pingree*, eds. Ch. Burnett, J. P. Hogendijk, K. Plofker, M. Yano, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2004, pp. 766, 770; idem, *Brotherhood*, pp. 31-33; Marquet, “Les Cycles”, pp. 51-52.

130 *Al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 66-68, 72-76, 84-87, 406-407, 464. See also *Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt*, pp. 181-183 for a similar tripartite structure in the work of al-Sijistānī. See also, in this context: Ishāq ibn Aḥmad al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-maqālīd al-malakūtiyya*, ed. Ismail K. Poonawala, Tūnis: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmi, 2011, p. 313. Also Walker, Paul. E., *Early Philosophical Shīsm: The Ismaili Neoplatonism of Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 139-140; Heinz Halm, “Dawr”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*², vol. 12, Supplement, pp. 206-207. In the tenth and eleventh century a polemic was waged among the ranks of the of the

In the longer run of the cyclical movement, the Ikhwān paint a picture of the individual souls, all of which must appear once every 7,000 years before the Universal Soul, which is revealed to them and judges them on the Day of Judgment that takes place at that stage. Nevertheless, this judgment is not final. Certain individual souls are condemned and judged at that stage to prison (*ḥabs*). They wait in their imprisonment until coming of “the day of the second (i.e. next) act” (*yawm al-faṣl al-thānī*)—a similar event of the appearance of the souls before the Universal Soul and their judgment, which takes place, as implied here, after the passing of a similar cycle of years.¹³¹ The final verdict and decisive conclusion will be achieved only at the end of more comprehensive cycle.¹³² The Universal Soul’s escape from alternation between “fine” spirituality and “coarse” materiality, with the transitions between the concealment and disclosure cycles that result from it, arrives at the end of the dramatic elevation of the Universal Soul. In that elevation it retraces its full, original conjunction with the Universal Intellect and returns fully to the upper world, which is its source and first dwelling place.¹³³ This return liberates the Universal Soul from its attraction to the world of matter, and it is its redemption and resurrection.¹³⁴ This process of return to the source, in which the Universal Soul actualizes the purpose intended for it and attains redemption is set by the comprehensive and inclusive cycle, the one that apparently lasts 50,000 years.¹³⁵ The discussion of the doctrine of cyclical time, which includes an explicit indication of the great cycle of seven 7,000 year cycles, a

Ismāʿīlī authors regarding the nature of the period of Adam. Some Ismāʿīlī authors of the time took the position that Adam was not a legislating prophet, and his period belonged to “the cycle of disclosure” that preceded the present “cycle of concealment”. In contrast, the Ikhwān took the opposite position, according to which Adam was a legislating prophet, and his age began the present “cycle of concealment.” See *al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 406-407, 463. On the dispute, see Daniel De Smet, “Loi rationnelle et loi impose: Les deux aspects de la sārīa dans le chiisme ismaélien des x^e et x1^e siècles,” *Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph*, 61 (2008), pp. 515-544; idem, “Adam.”

131 *Rasāʿil*, vol. 3, pp. 219-220; *al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 84, 357, 410-411, 457. On the Kabbalistic conception of the transitional time between the sixth and seventh millenniums of the Sabbatical cycle as a time of judgment and decree of the Jews and the nations, see *Marʿot ha-Zoveot*, p. 106, ll. 22-107, l. 9.

132 *Al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 488-489.

133 *Rasāʿil*, vol. 3, pp. 353-354; *al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 486-489.

134 *Rasāʿil*, vol. 2, pp. 49-50; vol. 3, p. 333; *al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 55-57, 355 (The “appointed day” when the Universal Soul assembles back and seats all the powers emanated from her previously is “the coming of the time of the sealing and completion of perfection” [*wa-jāʿa waqt al-khitām wa-tamma al-tamām*]).

135 See esp. *Rasāʿil*, vol. 2, p. 135, in comparison to *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 37; *al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 55-57.

cycle that is completed in 50,000 years, does not appear in the Ikhwān's writings but rather in *Rawḍa-yi taslīm*, an Ismāʿīlī-Nizārī work of the thirteenth century, which was mentioned at the beginning of this article. A detailed comparison, for which this is not the place, would probably bring out significant similarities between the discussion of this matter offered in *Rawḍa-yi taslīm*, and that which is presented in the Ikhwān's *al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa*. The similarity in the framework and details of the discussion leaves little room for doubt that *al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa* was an important source for *Rawḍa-yi taslīm* on this matter.¹³⁶ Thus it appears that *Rawḍa-yi taslīm* completes the formulation and presents the required relation between the 7,000 year cycle and that of 50,000 years, whereas the Ikhwān refrain from explicitly stating it.

In the writings of the Kabbalists, as in those of the Ikhwān, the cyclical aspect of the elevational-theosophical pattern is manifest most decidedly in the term of the 7,000 years. In Kabbalistic literature the lower *sefirah*, that of *ʿAṭarah/Shekhinah*, is assigned a task similar to that of the Universal Soul in the theory of the Ikhwān, both in the sense that it is a supreme factor that sustains and guides the corporal world,¹³⁷ and also in the sense that it deviates from the world of the upper *sefirot* and is attracted to the lower, corporal world. This dangerous deviation of *ʿAṭarah/Shekhinah* downward toward the corporal world, with the consequences that undermine order, demand a compensating movement to stabilize the system.¹³⁸ Like the Ikhwān, among the

136 See *al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 66-70, 84-88 in comparison to *Rawḍa-yi taslīm*, pp. 78-82, (Persian text), 68-71, (English translation), pars. 172-180. To my opinion, *al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa* exerts also a considerable influence on Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's concept of the Divine Command (*amr*). See Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Contemplation and Action: The Spiritual Autobiography of a Muslim Scholar—A New Edition and English Translation of Sayr wa-sulūk*, ed. and tr. S. J. Badakhchani, London, I. B. Tauris, 1999, pp. 9-14 (Persian text), 34-43 (English translation), pars. 23-35. See also Krinis, "Judeo-Arabic Manuscript", pp. 319-323 in comparison with Herman Landolt, "Khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (597/1201-672/1274), Ismāʿīlism and *Ishrāqī* Philosophy", *Ishraq* 4 (2013), pp. 364-368.

137 *Maʿarekhet ha-Elohut*, pp. 119-120, 122-123, 123-124, 182, 209, 228, 273-274; *Meʿirat ʿEinayim*, p. 76, ll. 27-28; *Recanati, Parashat "Beshalah"* (p. 46).

138 Among the authors of Nahmanides' school, the tendency of *ʿAṭarah/Shekhinah* to deviate from the upper world of the *sefirot* and be drawn down to the lower corporal world, and the efforts needed to block this tendency, were given an esoteric, symbolic ritual formation in what they sometimes called "the secret of the citron" (*sod ha-etrog*). See *Perush ha-Ramban* on Levit 23, 40 (p. 159); *Pirush ha-Recanati, Parashat "Breshit"* (p. 159); *Maʿarekhet ha-Elohut*, p. 328. See also Idel, *Recanati*, pp. 215-231; Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 223-224, 405; Halbertal, *By the Way of Truth*, pp. 181-183, 252-252, 259. The ritual aspect implicit in this secret is connected to the central theurgical aspect in the Kabbalists' worldview. The Ikhwān, in contrast, as was the way with the Ismāʿīlis in general, do not

Kabbalists the cyclicity of 7,000 years cycle is marked by a binary opposition according to a six-seventh division.¹³⁹ Among the Jewish Kabbalists this division expressed in the difference between the first 6,000 years of the cycle and the seventh millennium, which concludes it. The first 6,000 years are grasped as a period of historical-material reality and activity, which reach their peak in the sixth millennium, into which all the historical-material events of the days of the messiah and the resurrection of the dead are compressed.¹⁴⁰ The Ikhwān, as noted, attach these eschatological events to the realm of seventh in the six-seventh division of the 7,000 year time framework.

From a chronological point of view, the Ikhwān's use of the six-seventh division within the 7,000 year framework is more ambiguous and elusive than the Kabbalistic one. The Kabbalistic approach is supported by the Talmudic saying of Rav Qatina, who clearly points to the line of division between the domain of the six and the domain of the seventh: "Six thousand years shall the world exist, and one [thousand, the seventh], it shall be desolate." The Ikhwān's approach is supported by the saying ascribed to the prophet of Islam: "The age of the world is 7,000 years. I have been sent in the last millennium." If the prophet of the Islam, who is the sixth and last among the legislating prophets, appears in the seventh and last millennium, then where, chronologically, should the line be drawn between his period and the awaited period of the messianic figure of the "the seventh"? The Ikhwān address this question mainly with some vague astrological hints which scholars so far have been unable to decipher in a satisfactory manner.¹⁴¹

In the six-seventh division of the Kabbalists a special emphasis is placed on the function of the sixth and final unit of the area of six, as an intermediary unit through which the gradual transition is made to the opposite area, that of the seventh. *Me'irat Einayim* and *Sefer ha-Temunah* present a particularly radical formulation of the sixth millennium as a transitional time that gradually prepares the ground for the reality of the cessation of life, which will reign in the seventh millennium. *Sefer ha-Temunah* especially dwells upon

attribute theurgical significance to ritual. In this matter there is therefore an important difference between the world view of the Kabbalists and of the Ismā'īlis, though this is not the place to expand on it.

139 See Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 16-17, 92-93 for the background of the six-seventh pattern in Jewish thought.

140 *Perush Shir ha-Shirim*, pp. 514-515; *Kitvei ha-Ramban*, vol. 2, pp. 303-305; *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, pp. 258, 312, 314; *Perush Rabenu Bahya* on Deut 30, 16 (pp. 165-166).

141 See Marquet, "Les Cycles", pp. 61-69; De Callataj, "Astrology and Prophecy", idem, *Brotherhood*, pp. 41-58.

descriptions of the slowing of the movement of the spheres during the sixth millennium, until they stop completely in the seventh.¹⁴² Compared to the first 6,000 years of the cycle, the seventh and last period is the millennium of the cessation and rest of the forces of the world of matter, which are bound up with cessation of the life processes in it. By extension, this time is that of the pleasure of souls and removal of the evil impulse. The descriptions of this situation in Kabbalistic literature are parallel in important respects to the descriptions of the spiritual existence in “the cycle of disclosure” of the Ikhwān literature.¹⁴³

An important expression of the six-seventh division characteristic of the doctrine of Sabbatical cycles is found in the conception common in the school of Nahmanides. In the doctrine of the Kabbalists of Nahmanides' school, the seventh millennium of the cycle is marked by the elevation of the lowest *sefirah*, *ʿAṭarah/Shekhinah*,¹⁴⁴ which is in the closest and most direct contact with the corporal world, to the primary state of conjunction with the *sefirah* of *Tiferet*. This view distinguishes between the historical time of the Sabbatical cycle, time in which the *sefirah* of *ʿAṭarah/Shekhinah* is dominant, and the eschatological time that inherits the place of historical time in the course of the sixth millennium of the great Sabbatical cycle, with the rise to dominance of the *sefirah* of *Tiferet*. This process is concluded with the entry of the

142 *Me'irat ʿEinayim*, pp. 239, ll. 28-240, l. 29; *Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 96, 129-141. See also Rosenberg, “Return to the Garden of Eden”, p. 51, n. 33. The depiction in *Sefer ha-Temunah* of the sixth millennium of the Sabbatical cycle as a transitional link of liminal time is complemented by the way that the book characterizes the seventh and final Sabbatical cycle of the great Jubilee. This cycle, which is under the aegis of the passive and latent *sefirah* of *Yesod* (Foundation), functions as a transitional link toward the total cessation and repose of the great Jubilee. See *Sefer Ha-Temunah*, p. 111. See also Haviva Pedaya, “The Six Millennium: Millenarism and Messianism in the Zohar”, *Daʿat—A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah* 72 (2012), p. 70 [Hebrew]; Scholem, *Beginnings*, 187; idem, *The Kabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 68-69, 79-80; idem, *Origins*, pp. 469-470.

143 ʿAzriel of Gerona, *Perush ha-Agadot le-Rabbi ʿAzriel*², ed. Yeshayahu Tishbi, Jerudalem, Magnes, 1983, pp. 11-12; *Perush Shir ha-Shirim*, pp. 480, 511, 518; *Marʿot ha-Zoveot*, pp. 106, ll. 20-107, l. 9; 136, ll. 13-16; 143, ll. 15-19; 200, ll. 8-12. Among the Kabbalists who adopted the doctrine of Sabbatical cycles there was a dispute regarding the extent of the destruction beginning in the seventh millennium of the cycle. Some of them believed that the destruction would apply to organic life processes, while heaven and the earth continued to exist; others believed that the destruction would be total. See the detailed discussion in Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 333-337 and the sources referred to there.

144 *ʿAṭarah* or *Aṭeret* (crown) is the main term used in the Nahmanides school for the lowest *sefira*, which is identified with the *Shekhinah* of the Sages. See Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 163, 361.

seventh millennium of the great Sabbatical cycle.¹⁴⁵ An interesting parallel to this version of the Kabbalistic doctrine of the Sabbatical cycles, which is built on the axis of relations between the lowest *sefirah* of *ʿAṭarah/Shekhinah* and the upper *sefirah* of *Tiferet*, can be found in the pattern of the Ikhwān. The cyclical-restorative structure of the relations between *ʿAṭarah/Shekhinah* and *Tiferet* in the school of Nahmanides begins from the conjunction of *ʿAṭarah/Shekhinah* with the *sefirah* of *Tiferet* at the primordial point of departure before the Creation; it continues with the fall of *ʿAṭarah/Shekhinah* from that situation of conjunction as a fundamental process that underlies the cyclical movement of lower time, the time of Creation; and it concludes with the elevation of *ʿAṭarah/Shekhinah* to renewed attachment to the *sefirah* of *Tiferet* in the course of return to the time domain of the seventh of the six-seventh division in the range of the cycle of 7,000 years. These stages have parallels in the descriptions of the relations between the Universal Soul and the Universal Intellect in the writings of the Ikhwān. However, among the Kabbalists who taught this pattern of relations between *ʿAṭarah/Shekhinah* and *Tiferet*, the component of crisis and fall received more emphasis than that which appears in the characterization of the relations between the Universal Soul and the Universal Intellect in the Ikhwān. The Kabbalistic approach creates a distinction between the intermediate process in which *ʿAṭarah/Shekhinah* rises up to *Tiferet*, and the full process of elevation of *ʿAṭarah/Shekhinah* together with the other “*sefirot* of the building” (including *Tiferet*) to the *sefirah* of *Binah*, which is on the highest stratum of the hierarchy of the *sefirot*, a process of elevation that characterizes the great Jubilee. This general description, with the distinction included in it between the two processes of elevation, is clearer than that which appears in the Ikhwān writings, where the difference between the elevation at the end of the intermediary cycle of 7,000 years and the elevation at the end of the great cycle of 50,000 years is blurred, as in both cases the matrix is that of relations between the Universal Soul and the Universal Intellect.¹⁴⁶

According to a different version of the doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, taught by other Kabbalists of that time, in the period of the seventh millennium, not only the *sefirah* *ʿAṭarah/Shekhinah* but also all seven “*sefirot* of the building”, which have contact with the material created world rise toward conjunction

145 Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 317-320.

146 Shem Ṭov Ibn Gaon, *Keter Shem Ṭov*, in *Sefer ʿAmudei ha-Kabbalah 1*, Jerusalem, Nezer Sharga, 2001, pp. 59-60; *Maʿarekhet ha-Elohut*, pp. 314, 320-321; *Perush Rabenu Bahya* on Deut 28, 10 (p. 149); *Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 73. See *al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 240-243. See also Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 227, 382-383.

and merging with their “mother” *sefirah*, the *sefirah* of *Binah*.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, what is common to these Kabbalists and to those of the school of Nahmanides, and indirectly the circle of the Ikhwān, is the conception that the elevation of spiritual existences, which is set in motion in the framework of 7,000 cycles, neither exhausts nor determines the opposition and the vacillation between the process of descent toward the lower created, corporal realms and the process of ascent toward the upper spiritual realms. This dynamic will be exhausted at the end of the comprehensive cycle of 50,000 years, in the framework of which the Kabbalists endow the Biblical symbol of the Jubilee with the meaning of the return of spiritual existences to their source and origin in the upper world. A good expression of the distinction between the cycle of the great Sabbatical as one of renewal, and the cycle of the great Jubilee as a cycle of exhaustion is found in a Kabbalistic Midrash sometimes attributed to Rashba (Rabbi Shlomo Ben Adret), Nahmanides’ great disciple: “For it says regarding the Sabbatical year, ‘Your harvest’s aftergrowth you shall not reap, and your grapes of untrimmed vines’ (Lev 25, 5), to an allusion to the occurrence of harvest, that we have a share in the land, for the world will return to its previous state . . . but regarding the year of Jubilee, which alludes to the great Jubilee, it mentions ‘nor gather in from its untrimmed vines’ (Lev 25, 11), to hint that the land does not belong to us permanently, for it goes out free on the Jubilee, and will not be owned any longer. Therefore, it states the growth is hers.”¹⁴⁸

In conclusion, the elevational-theosophical pattern in the formulations of the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists, with the differences mentioned, expresses a cosmic drama that moves on two axes: the first axis is that of oppositional relations between matter and spirit, and the downward and upward attractions of the exalted spiritual entities central to the drama. This axis is activated in the framework of 7,000 year cycles. The second axis is that of the teleologically that brings the drama to a final conclusion, with the separation of the exalted spiritual entities from their connections to lower entities of the corporal world and their return to the source in the upper world. This axis is actualized in a comprehensive cycle of 50,000 years.

In comparison, the circular-cosmological pattern is expressed in a drama rooted on a primeval view of the world, which is concerned with natural,

147 *Me'irat Einayim*, p. 126, ll. 31-33; *Mar'ot ha-Zoveot*, p. 104, ll. 30-105, l. 1.

148 *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, p. 329. See *Keter Shem Tov*, p. 59; *Biur le-Ferush ha-Ramban*, p. 27b; *Rabenu Bahya* on Exod 23, 10 (pp. 179-180), Levit 25, 10 (p. 136); *Pirush ha-Recanati, Parashat "Behar"* (p. 140). See also *Rabenu Bahya* on Numb 10, 35 (pp. 44-46). Also Henoch, *Ramban*, pp. 381-382.

organic relations of opposition and reconciliation that characterize the cycles of life and death, growth and withering—a cycle that keeps moving on and on without any final conclusion.¹⁴⁹ Here, the contribution of the developed doctrines of cyclical time of the circular-cosmological pattern, like that which appears in the writings of the Ikhwān, is in the application of the cycles of life and death typical of this pattern to the mundane world in general. The anchoring of these cyclical doctrines in an astrological-astronomical worldview makes the difference in this case: the astrological-astronomical view of the world is evident both in the way it raises the heavenly world above the terrestrial realm and points to the heavenly world and the relations that exist within it as the causal source of everything that takes place in the terrestrial realm,¹⁵⁰ and also in the sophisticated ability to calculate the cyclical movements in the heavenly world, which exceed in length those that can be attained by the sensual perception that is not assisted by systematic-scientific means. These two characteristics of the astrological-astronomical worldview join together in sophisticated formulations and revised the circular-cosmological pattern: the superiority of the heavenly world and the total dependence of the terrestrial world upon it, and the possibility of calculating long-range cycles that give decided expression to this dependence are the substructure that underlies the possibility of predicting the great dramatic process that these doctrines describe, the process of a long and comprehensive cycle in the heavenly world as a cycle bearing within it the total destruction and total renewal of life in the terrestrial world.¹⁵¹

Thus, it appears correct to assume that the inner rhythm of the six-seventh division, with the binary opposition inherent in it, is a rhythm whose roots do not go back to the astrological-astronomical tradition with its primeval roots. Rather, it relates to the ancient Hebrew tradition. In this tradition the basic religious distinction between holy and profane is applied effectively, with great influence, in the domain of time, in the singling out and preference for the seventh unit of time, the Sabbath, in relation to the six units of time preceding it. This is in the pattern of time of the week, a pattern that has

149 *Al-Jāmi'a*, pp. 398-403. On the primeval roots of the circular-cosmological conception of time in various cultures, see Bruce Lincoln, *Myth, Cosmos and Society: Indo-European Themes of Creation and Destruction*, Cambridge-Mass., Harvard University Press, 1986, pp. 127-140; Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, New-York, Harper, 1959, pp. 51-92.

150 Freudenthal, "Cosmology", pp. 312-318.

151 *Rasā'il*, vol. 2, pp. 40-42; *al-Jāmi'a*, Ṣalībā edition vol. 1, pp. 310-311; *al-Jāmi'a*, pp. 400-401.

no basis in nature and lacks the primordial feeling of life.¹⁵² The Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles expanded and applied this basic distinction of the Jewish religion between sacred and profane to the framework of the “millennia week.” Here the sanctity of the seventh millennium is expressed as a time of the rule of pure spiritual existence in relation to the prior six millennia, the profane historical time and the rule of material existence. Similarly, in the Ikhwān’s conception of cyclical time, the distinction between sacred and profane, between spirit and matter, is expressed in the sanctity of the seventh epoch, the epoch included in the “the cycle of disclosure,” in relation to the six prior ages, which are included together in the “the cycle of concealment” of the profane historical time.¹⁵³

Upper Time and Lower Time

In the Ikhwān writings and those of the Kabbalists, underlying the elevational-theosophical pattern is an attitude toward the existence and influence of the dimension of supreme, primordial time. In the Ikhwān, the realm in the upper world in which time tends toward stasis is identified with the hypostasis of the Universal Intellect and that of the *amr/kalima* situated at the top of the cosmological hierarchy.¹⁵⁴ Among the Kabbalists, this realm is identified with the three upper *sefirot* in the hierarchy of the world of *sefirot*. According to ‘Azriel of Gerona, within these three upper *sefirot*, despite their relative stasis, there

152 Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Seven Day Circle: The History and Meaning of the Week*, New-York, Collier Macmillan, 1985, pp. 6-26.

153 See in the particular the words of the Ikhwān in *Rasāʾil*, vol. 3, p. 442. In this passage the authors take note of customs adopted in the prophetic framework of the laws, to set apart one day of the week for rest and for gathering to worship God. These customs are like hints and allusions to eschatological events connected to the end of 7,000 years, when the individual souls will stand in judgment before the Universal Soul. In a Fāṭimid-Ismāʿīlī work of middle of the tenth century, the Sabbatical year and the laws of reversion of property and the freeing of slaves that characterize it, as well as the Sabbath day and the laws of rest that typify it are interpreted as alluding to the relation between the six legislating prophets (*nuṭaqaʾ*), the beginners of eras (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad) to “the Seventh” that is, the Shīʿī messianic figure of the *Qāʾim*, and the special era that his future appearance heralds. See Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān (attrib.), *al-Risala al-mudhhiba*, in *Khams Rasāʾil Ismāʿīlīyya*, ed. ʿArif Tāmir, Salamiyya, Dār al-Anṣāf, 1956, p. 44. On this Ismāʿīlī work see Daniel. De Smet, “The *Risala al-Mudhhiba* Attributed to al-Qadi al-Nuʿman: Important Evidence for the Adoption of Neoplatonism by Fatimid Ismailism at the Time of al-Muʿizz?”, in *Fortresses of the Intellect—Ismaili and other Islamic Studies in Honour of Farhad Daftary*, London, ed. O. Ali-de-Unzaga, I. B. Tauris, 2011, pp. 309-341.

154 *Al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 240, 243, 250.

exists a flow of primordial time.¹⁵⁵ In this context, the conception presented by *Sefer ha-Temunah* of “terrible exalted days” is very interesting. These days are “sealed and hidden within [the *sefirah* of] *Hokhmah* (Wisdom).” According to *Sefer ha-Temunah*, out of one hundred and fifty exalted days included in the three upper *sefirot*, the *sefirah* of *Binah* gathers up fifty of the days and imparts them to the *sefirot* below it, and these are actualized during the cycle of the great Jubilee. The one hundred and fifty exalted days will join together in a process of elevation within the three upper *sefirot*, of which the goal is the highest *sefirah*, that of *Keter* (Crown).¹⁵⁶ The tension and dynamism built into the worldview of the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists, between the upper dimension of existence, a dimension above and beyond matter, and lower, material existence, are translated, among other things, into the important insight that the dimension of time: the time which is valid in the upper, non-material world, is separate and different from the time that applies in the corporal world.¹⁵⁷

The sense of time in the corporal world, that which is perceived and observed in human experience, is characterized by constant changes of season, many relatively rapid changes and cycles. All of these are the consequence of process of constant movement typical of the heavenly stratum of the corporal world, and the processes of becoming and ceasing to be of the elements typical of its terrestrial stratum.¹⁵⁸ In comparison to this, the time that typifies the upper non-corporal dimension of existence is conceived in the writings under discussion as being of infinitely greater length than that of the time characteristic of its lower, corporal dimension. This upper time is notable in particular for the small amount of movement and change in it.¹⁵⁹ Its pulse rate is far slower than the pulse of lower time.

An assumption shared by the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists regarding the interaction between these two different dimensions of time underlies the conception of cyclical time of elevational-theosophical pattern.¹⁶⁰ Both the Ikhwān

155 Gavarin, “Conception of Time”, pp. 312-313.

156 *Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 69, 102, 114, 143, 163, 168. See also the words of Yiṣḥaq demin ‘Akko: “The gate the faces east hints at *Binah*, because the three upper [*sefirot*] are called ‘primordial days’ (*yemei qedem*) ‘primordial heavens’ (*shemei qedem*), while the seven [*sefirot*] which constitute the building are called days of the world (*yemot ‘Olam*)” etc. (*Me’irat Einayim*, p. 175, ll. 31-34). See also *Ma’arekhet ha-Elohut*, pp. 295-296, 315, 322; *Keter Shem Tov*, p. 5. Also Scholem, *The Kabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 37; Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 19-20, 263-264.

157 *Rasā’il*, vol. 3, pp. 353-355; *al-Jāmi’a*, pp. 240-243, 410-411, 485-489. For the Kabbalist insight on this matter see Weinstock, *Studies*, pp. 172-173.

158 *Rasā’il*, vol. 3, pp. 249-250.

159 *Rasā’il*, vol. 3, pp. 352-353; *al-Jāmi’a*, pp. 51-52, 411.

160 Regarding the Kabbalists, see Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 32-33.

and the Kabbalists used the units commonly used to measure the passing of cyclical time in the lower world, especially the unit of the “day,” to measure the upper time as well. This use of units of cyclical time such as the “day” testifies to the special nature of synchronization between the two systems of time, which move at entirely different paces:¹⁶¹ the constant movement of a “day” in the time dimension of the upper world, which tends toward stasis, when it is projected on the dimension of time in the lower world, is translated into concepts of time immensely longer than a “day” in the concepts of time in the lower world. The 1,000 years “day,” the 7,000 years “week,” the 50,000 years “day,” are units that express clearly the considerable gap necessitated by the synchronization between the pace of upper time, slow and without many developments or changes, and the pace of lower time in the multi changeable corporal world. The upper time dictates the most important and essential cyclical changes for the existence of the lower created world at a special tempo of its own, a tempo that does not depend on the movement of heavenly bodies.¹⁶² In other words, the twenty-four hour day, which measures the diurnal motion of the all-encompassing sphere, and the “day” of one or fifty thousand years are expressions of the action of two separate systems of time, with entirely different tempo.¹⁶³

161 Psalms 90, 4, “For in Your sight a thousand years are like yesterday that has passed,” serves as an early proof text for a “day” of a thousand years, already expressing the matter of synchronization, though differently from the medieval texts under discussion here. The verse points to the gap between God’s sense of time and the human sense of time as a kind of psychological matter based on the great gap between God’s life expectancy and that of human beings.

162 *Sefer ha-Temunah* offers a particularly interesting example in the context of the lack of coordination between the pace of lower time and that of upper time: according to this work, the sixth millennium of the Sabbatical cycle is a transitional period. Hence it is increasingly influenced by the upper time, rather than the lower time. This influence is expressed in a slowing down of the movement of the spheres, and as a result, a slowing down of the course of the lower time. See *Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 111.

163 *Al-Jāmiʿa*, p. 483. The Ikhwān point here to the six days of Creation as primordial days, days that cannot be compared to the days conditional upon the existence of the sun and the moon. Regarding a similar conception among the early Kabbalists, see Scholem, *The Kabbalah in Gerona*, p. 279; Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 213-214, 216-225. In the Ikhwān, “the first day of the assembly” (*yawm al-ʿarḍ al-awwal*) is the day of the formation of the primordial “covenant” (*mīthāq*) between God and man and his seed [see Cor 7, 172], as well as the day of resurrection (*yawm al-qiyāma*), are not days of the world that is subject to the movement of lower time, but each of them is a “day” included in the movement of the Universal Soul. See *al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 359-360. For the Ikhwān’s explanation regarding the units of the days of the week of 7,000 years as primordial units of time, as seven “lines” written on the primordial “preserved tablet” (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*), see *al-Jāmiʿa*,

Like the elevational-theosophical pattern, in the circular-cosmological it is possible, for example, to find the use of the time units of “day” or “year” in relation to much longer periods of cyclical time, which go beyond the limits of living human experience. In the ancient doctrines that preceded the appearance of the circular-cosmological pattern in the writings of the Ikhwān, use of the unit of the “year” (“the great year”) is common to indicate the extent of the great cycle, whereas in the Ikhwān the term “day” is used to indicate that cycle. However, in the case of the circular-cosmological pattern, the justification for the exceptional use of the time units of “day” and “year” is apparently based on the desire to please the ear and make the long cyclical units of time attractive to readers. The units are known and confirmed by scientific observation but exceed by far the scope of human life experience. Creation of the connection between them and the far shorter units of cyclical time, such as the year and the day, is a move intended to bring them closer to the limited sense of time characteristic of the reader’s life. In any event, the conception of time expressed in the astronomic-astrological formulations of the circular-cosmological pattern acknowledges only one dimension of time, that which is determined by the movements of heavenly bodies, which determine the movement of the lower dimension of time. The twenty-four hour day of the diurnal motion of the all-encompassing sphere and the “day” of 360,000 years both belong to a single system of time, which is measured by means of the movements of the heavenly bodies.¹⁶⁴ These movements determine many cycles of various length in the material world, from the short cycle of the day to the cycle of 360,000 years.¹⁶⁵ In comparison, in the elevational-theosophical pattern, movement in the upper non-corporal world, which moves the primordial upper time, determines cycles for the corporal world, and these are measured solely by periods of thousands of years. This testifies to the special nature of this dimension in relation to the dimension of tangible time.

Time as Monad or Circle

In the elevational-theosophical pattern in the Ikhwān writings and also in the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, the comprehensive extent of the

pp. 498-499. On the distinction between a “day of the days of the world” and a “day of the days of the divine encirclement (*dā’ira*) . . . the intellectual circuit,” see *Rasā’il*, vol. 4, p. 209.

164 Evidence of this can be found in the way that the astrologers of that period calculated the longest cycles not only in years but also in twenty-four hour days. See Pingree, *Abū Ma’shar*, p. 29 ff.; De Callataÿ, *Annus Platonicus*, pp. 151-152.

165 *Rasā’il*, vol. 3, 249-253; *al-Jāmi’a*, Ṣalībā edition 1, pp. 320-222.

cycle is 50,000 years, and this serves as the absolute boundary restricting the measure of the dimension of lower time from both sides—that of the beginning and that of the end. Thus, from the perspective of time of the corporal world, one cannot relate to this period as a cycle,¹⁶⁶ inasmuch as its starting point marks the beginning of the period of the dimension of corporal time with the inception of Creation, whereas its final point marks the termination of the existence of this time, when the created world reaches its end. As this occurs, the process of synchronization mentioned above between upper and lower time also ends. The elevation of the upper entities, which condition lower time (the Universal Soul in the doctrine of the Ikhwān, the seven “*sefirot* of the building” in the doctrine of the Kabbalists), back into the upper realm, which is beyond the created world (the realm of the world of the intellect in the Ikhwān doctrine, the realm of the three upper *sefirot* in the doctrine of the Kabbalists) at the end of this comprehensive process, signify a departure and transition from the realm of lower time to the realm of primordial, upper time. In addition, it marks the removal and nullification of the dimension of lower time and the perpetuation of the upper dimension as standing and acting on its own.¹⁶⁷ The seven cycles of seven thousand years that combine into a sum of fifty thousand years are seen together as a monad—a full and closed unit of time that exhausts within itself the full dynamic of the development of lower time, the time of the created world. In the Ikhwān, in this context we find the statement according to which the point where the processes of life are entirely exhausted is the final goal of the movement of time. Upon achieving this goal, the powers of the Universal Soul are gathered together and rise upward. In this situation all the souls of those who excelled in their bodily life will gain freedom and elevation.¹⁶⁸ The anonymous Kabbalist who wrote *Ma’arekhet ha-Elohut* uses the argument of his predecessor, ‘Ezra of Gerona, that the destruction in the seventh millennium of the great Sabbatical cycle is one that does not

166 See the Kabbalistic Midrash attributed to Rashba above and also Gottlieb, *Bahya*, pp. 234-235.

167 In this context see *al-Jāmi’a*, p. 444 for the distinction made by the Ikhwān between “the day equivalent to a thousand years” and the tradition of the Prophet regarding the extension of seven thousand years, as units that are actualized in the framework of the historical time of “the age of the world” (*‘umr al-dunyā*), in comparison to “the day that is equivalent to fifty thousand years,” which concerns “the cycle of the end of days” or “the cycle of the world to come” (*dawr al-ākhirā*). See also *al-Jāmi’a*, pp. 359-360.

168 *Rasā’il*, vol. 3, p. 37.

apply to lower time.¹⁶⁹ However, the great Jubilee will occur, according to him, “at the end of all time.”¹⁷⁰

The closed and complete nature of the cumulative time of seven great Sabbatical, as a monad, is clarified in the school of Nahmanides by means of the distinction between “one matter,” which is “part of the encirclement” (*me-klal ha-heqef*) of the time of the created world as a time bounded and restricted, measured by the combination of the seven cycles of the great Sabbatical, and “another matter,” which is “beyond the encirclement,” (*me-ḥuṣ la-heqef*) meaning a matter that relates to the existence of the time of the upper entities, who are not subject to limitation and containment in the framework of the time of the created world. The transcendence of these entities and their return to the source are the matter of the great Jubilee.¹⁷¹ It appears likely that the use of the terms *heqef* or *haqafah* (encirclement) in the writings of the Kabbalists of Nahmanides’ school in this context and others is related to the abundant and systematic use made by the Ikhwān of the term “encirclement” (*dā’ira*, plural: *dawā’ir*). In this matter it seems that it is possible to point to a historical link between these parallel terms: the Andalusian author Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī (d. 1127), borrowed the systematic position of the term “encirclement” from the Ikhwān and made it into the cornerstone of his work, *Kitāb al-dawā’ir al-wahmiyya* (referred to in scholarship as *Kitāb al-ḥadā’iq*). This work by al-Baṭalyawsī was translated into Hebrew several times during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and was well known by Jewish authors, including Kabbalists, under the title *Sefer ha-’Agalot Hara’ayoniot* (The Book of the Ideal Circles).¹⁷² With the Ikhwān (and in al-Baṭalyawsī himself, following them) the term, “encirclement” mainly is used in cosmological context. At the same time, one also finds it in them used in the context of cyclical time. An important example of such use can be found in the parallel drawn by the Ikhwān between the circumambulation of the black stone in the sanctuary of the *Ka’ba* by

169 *Ma’arekhet ha-Elohut*, p. 318: “For time will remain, though there will be a destruction without man or beast.” See also Gottlieb, *Studies*, p. 334.

170 *Ma’arekhet ha-Elohut*, p. 354. See also the focus on the elements of the closing and the exhausting of time in the descriptions of the great Jubilee in *Sefer Ha-Temunah*, pp. 109-111.

171 *Keter Shem Tov*, pp. 6, 56-57. See also *Ma’arekhet ha-Elohut*, pp. 325, 327, 329; *Me’irat Einayim*, pp. 1, ll. 18-19; 12, ll. 19-22; 26, ll. 9-11; 165, ll. 11-13; *Biur le-Ferush ha-Ramban*, p. 27a-b. See also Scholem, *Origins*, pp. 463-464; Idel, “Jubilee”, pp. 221-222; Halbertal, *By the Way of Truth*, pp. 215-216.

172 Ayala Eliyahu *Ibn al-Sid al-Baṭalyawsī and his place in Medieval Muslim and Jewish Thought*, PhD Dissertation, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2010, pp. 66-69, 81-85, 89-90, 94-96, 99-101, 105, 107-110, 112-120, 139-140 [Hebrew].

believers and the comprehensive process of cyclical time.¹⁷³ The Kabbalists, for their part, made similar symbolic use of the term “encirclement” (*haqafah*), in the parallel they drew between the custom of circumambulation the altar in the Temple during the festival of the Tabernacles (*Sukkot*) and the processes of time that of the encirclement of cosmic time measured by the great Sabbatical and Jubilee.¹⁷⁴

Completion of the cycle of 50,000 years is directed and hints at return to the wholeness that is already found beyond what takes place in lower time, in the sense of elevation and return to the source that is connected to upper time. In Nahmanides’ school the important starting point for dealing with this matter is the way in which Nahmanides wove into his introduction to his commentary on the Torah the Midrash about the “fifty gates of wisdom”, “all of which were given to Moses except one.”¹⁷⁵ Following Nahmanides, the Kabbalists speculated that the forty-nine gates are included in the seven “*sefirot* of the building”, while and the fiftieth unattainable gate belong the mother *sefirah* of *Binah*. In the context of the doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, the meaning of this identification is that, of the fifty, only those forty-nine “gates” that correspond to the seven cosmic Sabbatical, those that touch upon the action of the seven “*sefirot* of the building,” are the ones that actually are at work in the lower time, the time of the Creation. The additional unit, the “fiftieth gate,” is the unit that is already beyond and above the time of the created world. This conception does not exclude the possibility in principle of the renewal of lower time, as a consequence of the additional descent of entities from the upper spiritual realm down into the material realm, in the sense of an entirely new creation. At the same time, the distinction regarding the “gates of wisdom” helps us to understand the meaning of the reluctance among the authors of Nahmanides’ school and other Kabbalists to enter into a discussion of the Jubilee and what was beyond it: the transcendental meaning of the typological number, 50,000,

173 *Rasāʿil*, vol. 2, pp. 39-40. In this instance the comparison relates to the circular-cosmological pattern of the Ikhwān.

174 *Babylonian Talmud*, tractate *Rosh ha-Shana* p. 21b. See *Maʿarekhet ha-Elohut*, pp. 322-323; *Biur le-Ferush ha-Ramban* p. 27a-b; *Keter Shem Tov*, p. 58. See also Pedaya Nahmanides, p. 390, n. 17, and Heller-Wilensky, “Messianism”, pp. 228, 230, n. 38a.

175 *Perush ha-Ramban*, introduction (pp. 3-4). See his interpretation of Levit 25,2 (*Perush ha-Ramban*, p. 167): “And perhaps our Rabbis were alluding to this when they said, ‘fifty gates of wisdom were created in the world, and all of them were conveyed to Moses except one’, because every Sabbatical cycle is one gate to the house, and behold all existence from beginning to end He proclaimed to him [i.e. to Moses] except for the holy Jubilee. And this number is hinted at in the Torah in the interpretation of the count of the barley offering (*sefirat ha-Omer*) and in the counting of the Jubilee.”

goes beyond the combination of seven repetitions of the cyclical process of seven thousand years.¹⁷⁶ As such it communicates with the realm of the three upper *sefirot*, which, in the Kabbalah of Nahmanides' school, are regarded as a realm above and beyond our attainment in this world, as a realm limited to the attainment of the seven lower *sefirot*.¹⁷⁷ Thus, among the Kabbalists who were active in the first half of the thirteenth century, Ya'aqov Ben Sheshet of Gerona is the only one who presented an explicit position regarding the renewal of the world after the Jubilee, despite his statement that this matter "is forbidden to reflect on."¹⁷⁸ Two or three generations later, under the growing influence of the Kabbalah of the circle of *Sefer ha-Zohar*, a number of Kabbalists were already found in Spain who presented alternative interpretations to the above-mentioned characterization of the great Jubilee as conclusive and exhaustive.¹⁷⁹

At this point lies an important difference regarding the nature of time between the circular-cosmological and the elevational-theosophical patterns of cyclical time: as long as they may be, the time units of the circular-cosmological pattern, as representing a single dimension of time, can always be combined. That is, they can be included in longer periods of time. Thus the Ikhwān can even present the longest extent of cyclical time mentioned by them, the period of 360,000 years, as a "day" in a far greater extension of time.¹⁸⁰ In the conception of time of this cyclical pattern, the time of the corporal world is unlimited and never reaches completion or conclusion.¹⁸¹ The eternity of this

176 That is to say, from the Kabbalists' point of view (and possibly also from that of the Ikhwān) the 50,000 years of the great cycle doesn't correspond with the lower time's 50,000 years, since the great cycle's fiftieth and last millennium completely belongs to the domain of the upper time.

177 *Kitvei aa-Ramban* vol. 2, p. 303; *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, pp. 132-135, 137, 260-261, 278-279, 324, 326; *Me'irat Einayim*, pp. 110, ll. 6-7; 240, ll. 27-30; *Biur le-Ferush ha-Ramban*, 27b; *Mar'ot ha-Zoveot*, pp. 49, ll. 4-6; 54, ll. 17-55, l. 1; 79, ll. 14-18; *Pirush ha-Recanati, Parashat "Emor"* (p. 110); *Parashat "Behar"* (p. 144); *Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 111. See also Scholem, *Origins*, pp. 462-463; Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 136-142, 144, 179-182, 393-395, 398-399, 455; idem, "The Great Mother", pp. 320-324.

178 *Meshiv Devarim Nekhoḥim*, p. 94, ll. 68-70; also *Pirush ha-Recanati, Parashat "Behar"* (p. 139).

179 With these Kabbalists, including Yosef ha-Ba me-Shushan ha-Bira and Yosef Angelet, the symbol of the Jubilee with the elevation accompanying it is actually connected with renewal and beginning. Echoes of these interpretations are found in the commentaries on the Torah by Baḥya Ben Asher and Yitsḥaq demin 'Akko, authors whose eclectic tendency led them to including a variety of approaches in their commentaries. See in this context: Idel, "We Have No Kabbalistic Tradition", p. 64, idem, "Jubilee", p. 223 ff.; Pedaya, "The Six Millennium", p. 54, n. 14.

180 *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, p. 251; *al-Jāmi'a*, Ṣalībā edition, vol. 1, p. 321.

181 *Rasā'il*, vol. 2, pp. 40-42; 3, 251; *al-Jāmi'a*, pp. 400-401.

time here rests upon the assumption of the constant, infinite movement of the heavenly bodies, as part of determined regularity that is always valid.¹⁸² In comparison, in the elevational-theosophical pattern, the indication that upper time, eternal, comprehensive time, contains and limits the lower time,¹⁸³ enables the limitation and nullification of the dimension of lower time, as a move connected to the definition of the path of existence of the corporal world as moving from the starting point of Creation to the point of conclusion of the cessation of movement and life in this world.¹⁸⁴

3 Other Aspects of the Elevational-Theosophical Pattern in the Writings of the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists

Apocalypticism and Eschatology

A common feature of the apocalyptic and eschatological aspects of the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists in the context of the cyclical time doctrine, lies in the collective characterization of the way to salvation of the spiritual entities. In the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists the salvation of the Universal Soul (Ikhwān), of the “*sefirot* of the building” (the Kabbalists), and of the worthy individual souls—the concluding and final stage of the elevational-theosophical pattern—is characterized as a *collective* salvation.¹⁸⁵ The concluding discussion in this matter in the writings of the Ikhwān compares the collective elevation of the individual souls together with the Universal Soul to the process of general evaporation of water from the sea. Evaporation leaves behind drops for which there is no need, and which need not be taken into consideration.¹⁸⁶ The collective

182 *Al-Jāmiʿa*, p. 403 regarding the statement that the movement of the sphere “does not change with the prolongation of time and does not deviate with the passage of days.” See also *Rasāʾil*, vol. 3, p. 251; *al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 400-401. See De Callatay, *Annus Platonicus*, p. 71.

183 *Al-Jāmiʿa*, p. 486.

184 On the limitation and allocation of time in the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, see Scholem, *The Kabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 73.

185 On the emphasis on the collective aspect in the Ikhwān see *Rasāʾil*, vol. 3, p. 37; *al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 441, 488-489. For more on the collective, emancipatory aspect of the conception of the great Jubilee in Kabbalistic sources, see Yehoshuʿa Ibn Shuʿaib, *Derashot ʿal ha-Torah*, Kraków, 1573 (reproduction: Jerusalem, 1969), *Parashat “Behar u-Beḥuqotai”* (p. 55b); *Maʿarekhet ha-Elohut*, p. 327; *Meʿirat ʿEinayim*, p. 217, ll. 5-9; *Marʾot ha-Zoveot*, p. 207, ll. 15-29; *Rabenu Bahya* on Levit 26, 11 (p. 144).

186 *Al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 488-489. Regarding other early Ismāʿīlī expressions of restorative-collective motive of the fall of the Universal Soul from its original place and its return to it along with the souls of the believers, see Madelung, “Kawn al-ʿAlam”, p. 31; De Smet, “The *Risala al-Mudhhiba*,” pp. 326-327, 329.

aspect of the full redemption in the conception of the Kabbalists' doctrine of Sabbatical cycles is expressed in the use of the quotation from the Rabbis, "The Son of David will not come until all the souls in the *guf* [lit., "body," the place where unborn souls dwell] are all gone".¹⁸⁷ In the framework of the doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, this statement is interpreted as relating to the actualization of all the souls worthy of salvation. In the developed approach of this interpretation, each Sabbatical cycle has a *guf* (body), in the sense of a certain quota or reservoir of souls, whose redemption is meant to be actualized in the course of that cycle, while the great Jubilee sets the concluding, inclusive epoch, in which the collective redemption of all souls is achieved (great weight is given to the conception of transmigration in the details of this conception). The great Jubilee (which is identified with the theosophical stratum of the mother *sefirah*, that of *Binah*) brings back into itself all the souls that left it and were distributed into the *gufim* (bodies) of the various Sabbatical cycles.¹⁸⁸ The collective return movement of the souls is parallel to the collective return of the "sefirot of the building", as the Kabbalists interpret it in their symbolic interpretations of the Biblical commandment (Deut 22, 6-7) of "sending away the mother-bird from the nest," (*shiluaḥ ha-qen*) as a collective return of the "children-birds" (the seven "sefirot of the building") to the bosom of the "mother" (the *sefirah* of *Binah*).¹⁸⁹ In the collective, emancipatory formation of the great Jubilee, in the framework of the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, an important place is occupied by marking the great Jubilee as the point of ingathering and liberation of all the transmigration of the souls.¹⁹⁰ It appears that in this point as well there is a general parallel between the approach of the

187 *Babylonian Talmud*, tractate Yevamot, p. 62a.

188 *Biur le-Ferush ha-Ramban*, p. 34a; *Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 75, 93, 110, 136-137, 142, 163. See also Pedaya *Nahmanides*, pp. 439-443.

189 See *Biur le-Ferush ha-Ramban*, p. 33b; *Me'irat 'Einayim*, p. 237, ll. 9-18; *Rabenu Bahya* on Deut 22, 7 (pp. 119-120); Henoah, *Ramban*, pp. 386-387; Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 398-399; idem, "The Great Mother", pp. 312-315, 323-324. See the definition in the Ikhwān of the Universal Soul as the "mother," which is the source of the individual souls, to which they return at the end of the cycle of their emanation in the physical world (*al-Jāmi'a*, p. 250). Whereas, in relation to the *sefirot* beneath it, the *sefira* of *Binah* is characterized as a mother, in relation to the individual souls it is characterized as "the soul of all souls" (*neshamah le-kol ha-neshamot*). See *Me'irat 'Einayim*, pp. 75, l. 4; 101, ll. 19-20; 179, ll. 28-32; 182, ll. 19-20; 237, l. 17; *Mar'ot ha-Zoveot*, p. 200, ll. 8-11; *Pirush ha-Recanati, Parashat "Bereshit"* (p. 52).

190 *Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 59, 96, 109-111, 125, 160-162; *Me'irat 'Einayim*, p. 179, ll. 32-38; *Biur le-Ferush ha-Ramban*, p. 34a; *Pirush ha-Recanati, Parashat "Noah"* (p. 166); *Parashat "Behar"* (pp. 144-145). See also Scholem, *Origins*, p. 390; Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 444-445.

Kabbalists and that of the Ikhwān regarding the definition of the end of the great cycle in the elevational-theosophical pattern as the concluding point of goal and liberation of all the transmigration of souls.¹⁹¹

The unique manner in which the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists treated the question of time is a translation into comprehensive theosophical time terms of the uncompromising demand of the eschatological-apocalyptic trends to bring about a clear determination of the struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil in favor of the former. This, in the framework of a comprehensive conception of cyclical time that expands the conception of historical time and binds it up with the theosophical-spiritual dimension. The full solution of the struggle between good and evil is radical in the way it binds together the necessity of the end of the dimension of lower time and the total destruction of the corporal world, along with the elevation of the souls of the representatives of the forces of good in this temporary corporal world—the faithful Shīʿa in the Ikhwān, the righteous and all the Jews in the Kabbalists—into their salvation and rest in the spiritual world. At the heart of the Ikhwān’s cyclical conception dwells the Shīʿī distinction between those loyal to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and his legitimist successors (the imāms of his progeny) and those who rejected this specific loyalty (*walāya*). This matter, which appears as a struggle embracing all of history between those loyal to God’s chosen of all generations, Adam and his successors, the prophets, and those loyal to Satan (*Iblīs*), receives an extensive description in *al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa*.¹⁹² In my opinion, this refutes the assumption that there exists a “universal return” in the framework of the thought of the Ikhwān.¹⁹³ Even though the Ikhwān indicate the universal source of human souls, the possibility of return to the source is reserved only for those who acknowledged the truth of the Shīʿī worldview as represented and spread by the order (*daʿwa*) of the Ikhwān al-şafāʾ, the loyal of the Shīʿī messiah (*al-Qāʾim*, *al-Sāʿibī*).¹⁹⁴ In the writings of most of the early Kabbalists, the particularistic conception that denies the possibility of salvation as a possibility given in principle to all of humanity is formulated unequivocally. These Kabbalists distinguished the divine souls of the people of Israel, which alone were taken from the *sefirah* of *Binah*, and they alone would return to it, from the non-divine souls of those who belongs the ‘nations of the world’ (*umot ha-ʿolam*), whose source was in the world of the “separates”

191 De Callataÿ, *Brotherhood*, p. 30.

192 *Al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 66-128, 166-170.

193 See their explicit statements in this context: *al-Jāmiʿa*, Şalibā edition, vol. 1, pp. 316-317.

194 In this context see, among others, *Rasāʾil*, vol. 2, p. 183; vol. 3, p. 45; vol. 4, p. 82; *al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 55-57, 87-88, 146-147, 176, 199-203, 464-466.

(*ha-nifradim*) of the Creation. Souls of this inferior origin cannot have a part in the process of return to the source in the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, which is directed toward the great Jubilee. The return is guaranteed to souls whose source is in the divine stratum beyond the created world, and these are only Jewish souls. The souls of the 'nations of the world' are destined for final destruction with the advent of the great Jubilee, which is the time of the destruction of the strata of the created world from which they are derived.¹⁹⁵ The Ikhwān's doctrine of cyclical time and that of the Kabbalists, each in its own way (pre factum with the Kabbalists and post factum with the Ikhwān), contain an antagonistic message that polarizes humanity into two camps: those of the saved, who will be redeemed completely at the absolute eschatological goal inherent in the end of the great cycle; and, in contrast, the camp of the unredeemed, which draws the marrow of its life and ability to exist and survival from corporal existence, which will be nullified with the accomplishment of the absolute, final eschatological end goal of cyclical time.

From the idyllic traits used by the Ikhwān in their description of the former and future cycles of disclosure (*dawr al-kashf*), and from the similar features given by the Kabbalists to existence in the seventh millennium of the Sabbatical cycle, and those that the author of *Sefer ha-Temunah* gives to descriptions of the former Sabbatical of the *sefirah* of *Ḥesed* and the coming Sabbatical of the *sefirah* of *Tiferet/Raḥamim*, one may not conclude that the forces of evil are overcome in the course of these cycles, but, rather, that they are only *postponed*.¹⁹⁶ These forces will renew their activity in the transition from cycle to cycle. The absolute victory of the action of the forces of evil is a matter reserved for the horizon of the end of the great cycle of 50,000 years. Nahmanides' school attributes this to the rule of the Torah (Num 29, 12-35) regarding the gradual decline in the number of oxen sacrificed every day during the seven days of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*) festival (from thirteen on the first day to seven on the seventh). According to the authors of Nahmanides' school, this rule is translated into a formulation of the progressive aspect of the course

195 See in this context *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, pp. 254-255, 275; *Keter Shem Tov*, pp. 38, 51-52; *Rabenu Bahya* on Exod. 20:7 (p. 148); *Pirush ha-Recanati, Parashat "Pinḥas"* (p. 104); *Perush le-Farashat Breshit*, pp. 269, ll. 5-13; 270, ll. 5-23; *Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 111, 163. See also Moshe Hallamish, "The Kabbalists' Attitude to the Nations of the World", *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 14 (1998), pp. 289-311 [Hebrew].

196 In this context see *al-Jāmi'a*, pp. 53, 73-76, 85-88, 122-128, 148, 196-197, 411-412; *Perush ha-Agadot*, pp. 11-12; *Perush Shir ha-Shirim*, pp. 480, 511, 518; *Mar'ot ha-Zoveot*, pp. 106, ll. 22-107, l. 9; 136, ll. 13-16; 143, ll. 15-19; 200, ll. 8-12; *Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 95-98, 101-104. See Joseph Dan, *Apocalypse Then and Now*. Tel-Aviv, Yedioth Ahronoth Press, 2000, pp. 151-152 [Hebrew].

of cyclical time in the great Sabbatical cycle. The progression from Sabbatical to Sabbatical gradually weakens the power of the forces of evil that are embodied by the nations of the world and the ministering angels responsible for them. These gradually decrease from Sabbatical to Sabbatical. Nevertheless, the total extinction of these forces is reserved for the act of the great Jubilee, symbolized by the eighth day of festival of the Tabernacles.¹⁹⁷ According to some of the Kabbalists who held by the doctrine of the Sabbatical cycles, the cyclical process of Sabbatical cannot bring about the extirpation of the element of evil from reality because the source of evil is in a *sefirah* placed high in the hierarchy of the seven “*sefirot* of the building”, which are active in the created world, the *sefirah* of *Din* (Stern Judgment) and this assures the existence of the element of evil as long as these seven *sefirot* continue to act creatively. Hence, the nullification of the influence of the power of evil and liberation from it are to be attained with the cessation of the creative action of the seven “*sefirot* of the building”, and the *sefirah* of *Din*, which is the harshest of them, as part of their collective rising up to the mother *sefirah* of *Binah* in the framework of the great Jubilee.¹⁹⁸

The classical messianic and apocalyptic approaches to the problem of evil are based on a sharp division between prior eras and the present when evil prevail, and the future era of which will be completely good. In addition there is the classical eschatological approach, which rests upon the division between the righteous, who will be transferred to the Garden of Eden, and the wicked, who will be isolated in hell. From the point of view expressed in the formulations of the elevational-theosophical pattern in the writings of the Ikhwān and of the Kabbalists, those two kinds of approaches are not regarded as complete solutions of the problem of evil.¹⁹⁹ These and similar approaches are seen only

197 *Keter Shem Tov*, p. 57; *Me'irat 'Einayim*, p. 165, ll. 30-32; *Pirush ha-Recanati, Parashat "Emor"* (p. 123); *Parashat "Pinhas"* (p. 104); *Biur Lefirush ha-Ramban, Parashat "Emor"*, p. 27a. See also Henoch, *Ramban*, pp. 361-362; Idel, “Jubilee”, p. 222. The author of *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut* voices a divergent claim, according to which the power of the ministering angels of the nations will already end on the seventh day of the holiday (i.e. at the seven Sabbatical cycle). See *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, p. 324. See also Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 424-425.

198 In this context see the fascinating explanations of *Pirush ha-Recanati, Parashat "Bo"* (p. 29) (s.v. “*Qadesh Li Bekhor*,” “*Ki Behozeq Yad Hoşiani*”). See also *Me'irat 'Einayim*, pp. 26, ll. 9-11; 29, l. 3; 241, ll. 3-4; *Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 153-154; *Derashot 'al ha-Torah, Parashat "Behar u-Behuqotai"*, p. 55b.

199 The Ikhwān and Kabbalists frequently use eschatological terms prevalent in their religious traditions, terms that relate to the messianic age, the day of judgment, the resurrection of the dead, paradise and hell, life in the world to come. The difficulty in coping with

as intermediate solutions actualized in the cycles of time and the transitions between them. The absolute solution to the problem of evil is found outside of the course of lower time and outside of the created world. In this context the Ikhwān emphasize that complete redemption, when the Universal Soul will return to its primary place, which is reserved for it in the spiritual world, where it dwelled before being connected with matter, is a situation whose actualization is not to be expected except in a very distant time, after the passage of long, cyclical times, at the point when the corporal world will be destroyed, and all the creatures living in it will die at once.²⁰⁰ The Ikhwān and the anonymous Kabbalist who wrote *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut* employ the parallel terms of "the great resurrection" (*al-qiyāma al-kubrā*) and "the great day of judgment" (*yom ha-din ha-gadol*) with the intention of creating a distinction between the eschatological redemption concealed in the near way of the cyclical development of time, and the greater and more significant redemption hidden in the distant end of the cyclical development.²⁰¹ In Nahmanides, concern with the issue of reward in his famous eschatological work, *Sha'ar ha-Gemul* [The Gate of Reward]²⁰² is characterized by emphasis on the intermediate stages that are actualized in the course of time of the great Sabbatical, and with merely allusive relation to the final eschatological goal, which depends on the great Jubilee as a matter that lies beyond the range of the discussion.²⁰³ In this respect, Nahmanides' hymn, "*Me-rosh Mi-qadmei 'Olamim*" (From the Earliest Beginnings of the Worlds) is especially important. In this hymn, by means of poetical devices, Nahmanides permitted himself to present his esoteric position regarding the full cyclical journey of the soul. This journey begins with the descent of the individual soul from its upper source and its entry in the

the accumulation of traditional conceptions and terms that are connected with the eschatological horizon is well known in both Jewish and Muslim literature of the period under discussion. However, it receives additional complexity with the introduction of new elements in the writings of the Ikhwān and Kabbalists, which touch upon the eschatological considerations peculiar to the doctrine of cyclical time. On this matter there is quite a bit of confusion, which is caused as a result of the application of these traditional eschatological terms both in the stages that are connected with the end of the present cycle and the transition to a new cycle, and also to the final comprehensive stage that actualizes the return to the source. See Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 203, 314-332.

200 *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, p. 354; *al-Jāmi'a*, pp. 330, 489. See *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, p. 37; *al-Jāmi'a*, pp. 55-57, 487-489. See also Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 127, 136.

201 *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, p. 328; in comparison to *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, pp. 447-448; vol. 2, p. 49; vol. 3, pp. 339-340; *al-Jāmi'a*, p. 51.

202 *Kitvei ha-Ramban*, vol. 2, pp. 274-311.

203 *Ibid.*, p. 306.

anthropomorphic structure of the image of God's body of the seven lower "sefirot of the building" and the form of the human body, which is parallel to that structure. The journey ends with the nullification of the anthropomorphic structure in the upper and lower realms, "at the time when things return to their source," (*be-'et yashuvu ha-devarim le-havayatan*) viz. at the great Jubilee. This date is the final one in which the individual souls return, together with the elevation of the seven lower "sefirot of the building", to their source in the *sefirah* of *Binah*.²⁰⁴ Hence, Nahmanides holds an open and detailed discussion of the intermediary eschatological stages that are actualized in the time period of the great Sabbatical cycle, whereas the highest eschatological goal that is hidden in the great Jubilee is mentioned by him in brief, poetically, and allusively. In contrast, *Sefer ha-Temunah* presents a detailed discussion, in which the preponderance of the eschatological dimension passes openly and emphatically to the end goal of the great Jubilee. In this matter great importance is to be ascribed to the identification made in *Sefer ha-Temunah* of the great Jubilee with the "days of the highest messiah" (*yeme mashiah 'elyon*) and the use of the expression "the supreme Egypt" (*mişrayim ha-'elyonah*) and "the primordial redeemer" (*ha-go'el ha-rishon*) in the context of the great Jubilee, and the general elevation that is summed up the *sefirah* of *Binah*. The radical idea that all intermediary reality, which is not the ultimate redemption that is hidden in the great Jubilee, is a kind of exile, is demonstrated in *Sefer ha-Temunah* by pointing out the absence of the letter 'nun' (which has the numerical value of fifty, equivalent the fiftieth year of the Jubilee) from the acrostic of

204 See *Kitvei ha-Ramban*, vol. 1, 392-394 and the English translation, "Hymn On The Fate Of The Soul", trans. by T. Carmi. In *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse*, London, Penguin, 1981, pp. 394-396. See also Moshe Idel, "Nishmat Eloha—On the Divinity of the Soul in Nahmanides and his School", in *Life as a Midrash: Perspectives in Jewish Psychology*, eds. S. Arzy, M. Fachler, and B. Kahana, Tel-Aviv, Yedioth Ahronoth, 2004, pp. 346, 349-355, 368 [Hebrew]; Pedaya, "The Great Mother", p. 328, n. 29. See *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, p. 328: "For all the rivers flow to the sea, which is 'Aṭarah . . . For all will sojourn there, for it is the Garden of Eden, and they will enter the Bond of Life, which is *Tiferet*, and they will enter the World to Come, which is *Yesod*, because *Aṭarah* is included in it, and from it they will return with the whole building at the end of time to the third [i.e. *Binah*], which is the essence of the gathering, and there everything will stop." These words mean that the eschatological stages of the Garden of Eden, the Bond of Life, and the World to Come, as intermediary and temporary stages of the elevation of the souls, will lose its separate existence at the phase of the elevation when the *sefirot* that are identified with them return to their source in the *sefira* of *Binah* "at the end of time," that is, at the great Jubilee. See also *Rabenu Bahya* on Gen 1, 14 (p. 23); on Levit 18, 29 (pp. 96-97).

Psalms 145.²⁰⁵ The ultimate, absolute redemption, in comparison to which all other redemptions are exile, is the hidden redemption concealed in the highest level of existence (i.e. the *sefirah* of *Binah* and the two other supreme *sefirot* above it), those that are beyond the dominion of lower time.

This matter is connected in the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists to the eschatological model that directs the course of the gradual elevation of souls through additional worlds, which are intermediary stages in the transition from the low stage, which is that of their mundane existence, to the highest end goal stage, which is attained at the end of the great cycle.²⁰⁶ The intermediary stages in this gradual transition, which are identified with eschatological terms that are typical to the Jewish and Islamic traditions, are conceived here as rungs in a ladder. With completion of the process of the elevation of all the souls worthy of it at the end of the great cycle, the ladder and its rungs will have served the purpose. There is no longer any need for it, and it is nullified. In the Ikhwān, this nullification is expressed in the ascension of the Universal Soul and the elimination of the corporal heavenly realm, which served as a dwelling for the souls in intermediate stages. Among the Kabbalists, this elimination is expressed in the ascent of the *sefirot* that had served as a dwelling for the souls in the intermediate stages to their source in the *sefirah* of *Binah*. The image of “the ladder of ascension” (*sullam al-mi’rāj*, *sulam ha-’aliyya*) is an important eschatological image in medieval literature. The Ikhwān and the Kabbalists in their wake employed it in the framework of their conception of gradual ascension.²⁰⁷

205 In this Psalm each verse begins with a different letter of the alphabet, in order, but there is no verse beginning with the letter ‘nun.’ See *Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 76, 118, 122, 133, 136-138. See also Idel, “Jubilee”, pp. 229-230.

206 *Rasā’il*, vol. 1, pp. 207, 225-226; *al-Jāmi’a*, pp. 488-489; *Keter Shem Tov*, p. 72; *Me’irat Einayim*, p. 217, ll. 7-10; *Rabenu Bahya* on Gen 1, 14 (p. 23) and on Deut 19, 2 (pp. 102-103).

207 See *Al-Jāmi’a*, p. 62, for the appearance of this image in the writings of the Ikhwān in the context under discussion. The ladder of ascension of the Ikhwān is not the stable Neoplatonist ladder, referred to by Alexander Altmann in his article on the motive of the ladder of ascension in medieval Hebrew and Arabic literature (Alexander Altmann, “The Ladder of Ascension”, in *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism*, Ithaca N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1969, pp. 44-46). In a broad perspective, one that takes into account the cyclical doctrine of time of the Ikhwān and its consequences, the image is of a folding ladder. See the discussion in Godefroid De Callataÿ, “Philosophy and Bāṭinism in al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra’s *Risālat al-i’tibār* and the *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*”, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 41 (2014), pp. 270-275; idem, *Brotherhood*, pp. 28-29; Stroumsa-Sviri, “Epistle on Contemplation”, p. 230. The fact that Altmann, in the aforementioned article, did not notice the explicit appearance of the image of “the ladder of ascension” in the Ikhwān writings can be understood against the background of the prevalent neglect of *al-Risāla al-Jāmi’a* in scholarship.

Apocalypticism and Neoplatonism

The end goal of the doctrine of cyclical time of the elevational-theosophical pattern is bound up with severing the connection between the spiritual realm and the corporal world, by the elevation of spiritual entities to their upper source. As such it is a goal that *does not* accord with the worldview of Neoplatonic philosophy. Plotinus, the founder of Neoplatonism, does recognize this possibility. In his work on eternity and time, Plotinus touches upon the possibility of the ascent of the Universal Soul, in the sense of the entire turning of the Soul toward the world of the upper Universal Intellect, as a movement bound up with its total separation from its connection with the lower corporal world. However, in the context discussed by Plotinus, this possibility arises and is considered hypothetically, solely as a theoretical experiment, whose purpose is to demonstrate the dependence of time on the action of the Universal Soul and not on the movement of the heavenly spheres.²⁰⁸ Now, this possibility of ascension, which appears in Plotinus only as a hypothesis which cannot be actualized in any existing situation, appears in the formulations of the elevational-theosophical pattern of the doctrine of cyclical time in the writings of the Ikhwān al-şafā' and Jewish Kabbalists as the determined and desired end goal of the development of existence. These formulations express the tendency to take the road not taken by Plotinus and his followers. The gap that appears between the tendency of the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists and the tendency of Neoplatonism on the topic under discussion is significant, seeing that the adaptations and translations Neoplatonism in Arabic and Hebrew left a significant mark on the worldview of the Ikhwān, and to a different degree on the worldview of the Kabbalists as well. The possibility that opened up before the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists, actually to take the road, which, from Plotinus' point of view was merely a theoretical possibility, is connected intimately with the apocalyptic-eschatological elements present in the worldview of the formers and absent in the worldview of the latter. By extension, it also is a consequence of the essential differences in the conception of time: in Plotinus the conception of time is built on the axis of equation between the dimension of time and the dimension of eternity. Eternity, as opposed to time,

208 *Plotinus Enneads with English Translation* by A. H. Armstrong, Cambridge-Mass., Harvard University Press, Book 3, 7, 12, pp. 342-345. See also John F. Callahan, *Four Views of Time in Ancient Philosophy*, Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 1948, pp. 134-135; Andrew Smith, "Eternity and Time", in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. L. P. Gerson, New-York, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 212-213; Pauliina Remes, *Neoplatonism*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008, p. 90.

is a constant present, complete and full and lacking change.²⁰⁹ Unlike this, in the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists, the conception of time is built on the axis of upper time, unlimited time that is not dependent upon material bodies, and lower time, the limited time of material bodies. Unlike Neoplatonic eternity, the upper time is imbued with a dynamism of transition from past to future. At the same time, this dynamism is independent, with an entirely different pace and extent from those that characterize the movement of lower time. The clear departure of the Ikhwān from Plotinus' definition of time is expressed in the way the dimension of upper time, which is called "eternity" (*dahr*) is associated in their writings with the movement of the Universal Soul, whereas Plotinus pairs eternity with the level of the world of the Universal Intellect.²¹⁰ The dimension of lower time (*zamān*) is defined in the Ikhwān according to the movement of the sphere (like Aristotle) and not according to the movement of the Universal Soul, as with Plotinus.²¹¹ In that the Universal Soul is a dynamic entity, the dimension of upper time of the Ikhwān is dynamic. Thus it can be spoken of in the plural as "eternities" (*duhūr*).²¹²

In its cosmological context, the Ikhwān's conception of time connected with the elevational-theosophical pattern, is divided into three levels. The highest is that between the level of *amr/kalima* and the level of the Universal Intellect. This highest level is the closest to the basic characteristics of the Neoplatonic concept of eternity in that it is entirely outside of time.²¹³ The second level is that of relations between the Universal Soul, with its dual double faced (*dhū ṭarafayn*) nature, with the Universal Intellect, on the one hand, and the corporal world, on the other. This level is the foundation of upper time. The third level is that of relations in the corporal world between the heavenly spheres and the earth. This level is founded upon the infusion of the forces of the Universal Soul into matter, and it is the basis of lower time.²¹⁴ In the writings of the important Kabbalistic theoretician, 'Azriel of Gerona, we find a distinction essentially parallel to the second and third levels of the Ikhwān. 'Azriel distinguishes between "the order of these times, [when] the years are uncountable"²¹⁵—to indicate the upper, dynamic, but unlimited time—and

209 Callahan, *Four Views of Time*, pp. 90-91; Smith, "Eternity and Time", p. 202.

210 Smith, "Eternity and Time", p. 199.

211 Ibid., pp. 210-211.

212 *Al-Jāmi'a*, pp. 486 (the general definitions of the upper and lower time), 489 (the particular definitions of the upper time).

213 *Al-Jāmi'a*, pp. 240, 243, 250.

214 *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, p. 234.

215 Compre *Bereshit Rabba*, ed. Judah Theodor and Chanoch Albeck, Jerusalem, Vahrman Books, 1965², vol. 1 ch. 3, sect. 7, p. 23.

“the limited times . . . which are of the power of the limited order”—to indicate the lower time.²¹⁶

To continue this discussion, the Ismāʿīlī and Jewish authors under discussion understand the cosmological complementary movements of procession and reversion differently from the way they are understood by Plotinus and the Neoplatonists following him: for the Neoplatonists, the cyclical process of the movement of procession and reversion is eternal and a-temporal. The return element contained in it is like reflective and contemplative movement, constantly valid and never reaching exhaustion.²¹⁷ These basic cosmological movements check and balance each other in a manner that preserves the stability of the cosmological level and the constant existence of the lower and upper worlds alongside one another.²¹⁸ In comparison to this, among the Ismāʿīlī authors and the Kabbalists, whose doctrine of time was that of the elevational-ethosophical pattern, the movement of procession, and, even more than that, the movement of reversion, take place in dimensions of lower and upper time and express the dramatic break and change that takes place on the theosophical level.

In the history of Ismāʿīlī thought, the most decided formulation of the crisis and fall in the movement of procession of the cosmological level was presented in the mid-twelfth century in the work, *Kanz al-walad* by the important early Ṭayyibī author, Ibrāhīm ibn al-Husayn al-Ḥāmidī (d. 1162). In characterizing the crisis and fall of the third separate Intellect to the level of the lowest, tenth intellect, al-Ḥāmidī relates to a system of ten separate Intellects, a

216 *Perush ha-Agadot*, pp. 102, ll. 4-20; 113, ll. 15-21. See also *Maʿarekht ha-Elohut*, 323-324 and Elliot R Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau—Kabbalistic Musings on Time, Truth and Death*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006, pp. 84-86; Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 256-258. Regarding the ancient sources for the primordial-eschatological conception of time of the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists in Jewish apocalyptic literature and Zoroastrian literature, see Shlomo Pines, “Eschatology and the Concept of Time in the Slavonic Book of Enoch”, in *Types of Redemption*, eds. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and C. J. Bleeker, Leiden, Brill, 1970, pp. 77-83.

217 See the classical presentation of this subject in Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*², ed. E. R. Dodds, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1963, pp. 28-43. See also *Kitāb al-iḍāḥ li-Arsitūʿālis fiʾl-khayr al-maḥḍ* (=Die pseudo-aristotelische Schrift ueber das reine Gute bekannt unter dem Namen Liber de Causis, ed. Otto Bardenhewer, Freiburg im Breisgau, Herdersche Verlagschandlung, 1882), p. 87. Also Arthur H. Armstrong, “Plotinus”, in *Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967, pp. 250-251, 255, 260-261; Radek Chlup, *Proclus: An Introduction*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 64-69; Remes, *Neoplatonism*, p. 52.

218 Arthur H. Armstrong, “Gnosis and Greek Philosophy”, in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas*, eds. U. Bianchi et al., Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1978, pp. 95-97, 117-122; idem, “Plotinus”, p. 263.

system first presented in the framework of Ismāʿīlī theology in the early eleventh century in the work of Hamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-ʿaql*. Daniel De Smet, a major scholar of the thought of al-Kirmānī, suggested that in this instance al-Ḥāmidī explicitly expressed a matter that al-Kirmānī sought to conceal.²¹⁹ In early Kabbalah, the most decided formulation of the crisis and fall in the movement of the procession in the theosophical level touches upon interpretation of the secret of “diminution of the moon” (*miʿuṭ ha-levanah*) in the school of Nahmanides. This secret is connected to the fall of the *sefirah* of *Aṭarah/Shekhinah* from its high original place near the *sefirah* of *Tiferet* to the lowest level of the order of the *sefirot*.²²⁰ The affinity between the elaboration of the component of crisis and fall in Nahmanides’ school and its earlier elaboration in Ismāʿīlī theology is expressed, among other things, in that the opposing movement of reversion, which goes into action in a the cyclical movement of time, is like a reparation and healing of the crisis that took place in the stage of procession.²²¹ The subject of the crisis in the movement of procession in the Ikhwān is complex, and this is not the place to go into the details.²²² As with the Kabbalists, in the Ikhwān as well, this matter is bound up with Adam’s sin, which is none other than an expression of a breakdown in the upper realms.²²³ The extended discussion in *al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa* of the processes of procession and reversion of the Universal Soul is formulated so that the matter of the fall receives explicit expression only with respect to the final stage of the movement of procession. This is the stage in which the powers of the Universal Soul expand from the heavenly world toward the center of the

219 Daniel De Smet, “Al-Fārābī’s Influence on Hamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī’s Theory of Intellect and Soul”, in *In the Age of al-Fārābī: Arabic Philosophy in the Fourth/Tenth Century*, ed. P. Adamson, London, Warburg Institute, 2008, pp. 144-145. For a different interpretation of al-Ḥāmidī’s relation to al-Kirmānī Tatsuya Kikuchi, “The Resurrection of Ismāʿīlī Myth in Twelfth-Century Yemen”, *Israʿaq* 4 (2013), pp. 353-359.

220 Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 359-379; Halbertal, *By the Way of Truth*, pp. 143-148, 154, 177, 231-232.

221 See the remarks in Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 22-23, regarding the great similarity between the Ismāʿīlī approach and that of the Kabbalists. See also Goldreich, “Iyyun Circle”, pp. 151-152.

222 Among those details, the Ikhwān’s inclination to portray the process of procession and reversion with images akin to the ‘hydraulic model’ (a term coined by the Kabbalah scholar Jonathan Garb) deserves special attention. See *Rasāʾil*, vol. 3, pp. 202-204, 353-354; *Al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 241-243. On the ‘hydraulic model’ in early Spanish Kabbalah see Jonathan Garb, *Manifestations of Power in Jewish Mysticism: From Rabbinic Literature to Safedian Kabbalah*, Jerusalem, 2005, pp. 74-104 [Hebrew].

223 De Callataÿ, *Brotherhood*, pp. 26-28; Safran, “Fall of Man”.

earth.²²⁴ Regarding the movement of reversion, the Ikhwān are more explicit in emphasizing the catastrophic aspect of this movement, as a movement that collapses and destroys the lower orders of the terrestrial and heavenly realm together. Nahmanides' words in his commentary on the Torah, which point to the catastrophic event that accompanies the movement of reversion, which is actualized at the great Jubilee, is similar in content to that presented by the Ikhwān. Like the Ikhwān, Nahmanides also points to the collapse of the order of the heavenly corporal realm as an event that sweeps and collapses the order of the lower corporal world, which depends on it.²²⁵ The cessation of the corporal world and the catastrophic events that lead to this cessation are therefore prominent characteristics of the movement of reversion, in the framework doctrine of the elevational-theosophical pattern in both the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists. The framework here is a temporary one, and the processes of procession and reversion that are relevant to it move the created world toward its goal and completion. This conception, and what derives from it, is entirely foreign to the Neoplatonic worldview.²²⁶

Last point for discussion, returning back to the circular-cosmological pattern of cyclical time, which has clear resonances in the writings of the Ikhwān. We find dramatic events in it, which are bound up with the destruction of the world and its renewal, which are certainly connected to eschatological possibilities. The circular-cosmological pattern suggests, in its astrological-astronomical formulations, a way of situating the eschatological events and processes of religious traditions within a scientific-rationalist framework. This placement is bound up with blunting the component of the apocalyptic end

224 *Al-Jāmi'a*, pp. 486-489, esp. 487-488.

225 *Perush ha-Ramban* on Levit 18, 25 (p. 110). See also *Perush le-Farashat Breshit*, pp. 127 ll. 9-12; 129, ll. 11-14 and Haviva Pedaya, *Name and Sanctuary in the Teaching of Rabbi Isaac the Blind: A Comparative Study in the Writings of the Earliest Kabbalists*, Jerusalem, Magnes, 2001, pp. 250-252 [Hebrew]; idem, "The Great Mother," p. 314.

226 In this context see the fascinating remarks of the Kabbalah scholar, Asi Farber-Ginat, regarding Moshe de Leon, the important Kabbalist who was active in Castile in the last decades of the thirteenth century, in whose writings appears explicit and articulated opposition to the doctrine of the Sabbatical cycles and the conception of the return to the source that typifies this doctrine. According to Farber-Ginat, Moshe de Leon is the author in whom is found that balance rhythm of movements of procession and reversion consistent with the Neoplatonism approach. See Asi Farber-Ginat, "The Shell Precedes the Fruit—On the Question of the Source of Evil's Metaphysical Essence in Kabbalistic Thought", in *Myth in Judaism*, ed. H. Pedaya, Jerusalem, Mossad Bialik, 1996, pp. 131, 137-138 [Hebrew]; also Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 324, 330, n. 27, pp. 445-446, 450-452.

typical of these traditional views.²²⁷ A far more radical option, the total and final destruction of the corporal world, destruction that indicates the end of time, is entirely foreign to a cyclical conception such as this. In this sense, a doctrine of time that belongs to the circular-cosmological pattern can coexist with a stable metaphysical-cosmological picture of the world such as that of the Neoplatonists, who believe in the parallel and constant existence of the upper world, the eternal, a-temporal world of the non-corporal entities and the Universal Intellect in the first instance, along with the eternal-temporary world of the corporal entities, while the Universal Soul and the partial souls constantly play the role of intermediary between these worlds.²²⁸ In the Neoplatonist worldview, the movement of elevation is one that liberates the elevated soul from the grip of time, but concomitantly it leaves undisturbed the dimension of time and the order of existence connected to it.²²⁹ In the writings of the Ikhwān, the astrological-astronomical formulation of the doctrine of time in the circular-cosmological pattern walks hand in hand with the Neoplatonist trend that typifies the exoteric stratum of these writings. In comparison, in the framework of the conception of time of the elevational-theosophical pattern in the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists, the movement of elevation of the aforementioned Neoplatonic type is identified with the intermediary stages that take place within the limited transitions of lower time. In contrast, the elevation that summarizes and finalizes the cycle fully is described here in an apocalyptic fashion, which is clearly not Neoplatonism, as bound up in the crisis of existence and the destruction of its corporal part.²³⁰

227 *Rasā'il*, vol. 2, p. 148; *al-Jāmi'a*, p. 197. See esp. *Rasā'il*, vol. 2, p. 40; *al-Jāmi'a*, p. 400. The classical eschatological concepts of Islam regarding the resurrection of the dead (*al-ḥaṣhr wa'l-nashr wa'l-qiyāma al-kubrā*) are placed here in the framework of circular-cosmological time, which is paced by the orbital movements of the heavenly bodies, and according to it they occur again and again. Among twelfth to fifteenth century Jewish authors a similar explanation of the resurrection of the dead is found. See Rosenberg, "Return to the Garden of Eden", pp. 53-63 (esp. p. 55, n. 47, where Rosenberg relates to the possibility that the Ikhwān were the source to which Abraham ibn 'Ezra refers in this context). See also *al-Jāmi'a*, pp. 409-410.

228 Armstrong, "Plotinus," pp. 250, 252, 255-256.

229 *Ibid.*, pp. 256, 258-263. For a broad and detailed discussion of the adaptation of the Neoplatonism conception of elevation in the thought of medieval Jewish writers, including the earliest Kabbalists, see Adam Afterman, *Dvequt: Mystical Intimacy in Medieval Jewish Thought*, Los Angeles, Cherub Press, 2011 [Hebrew].

230 See the remark of S. A. Arjomand regarding the general characteristic of the apocalyptic vision: "The apocalyptic vision is a powerful means for transcendentalizing the normative order. Order is no longer identified with cosmos and nomos but requires a radical

Revealing the characteristics of the elevational-theosophical pattern of the doctrine of cyclical time and the structural logic peculiar to it enables us to re-evaluate the place of Neoplatonism in the ideological framework of the world of the Ikhwān and of some of the early Kabbalists in Spain. Such a re-evaluation is especially necessary regarding to scholarship in the thought of the Ikhwān, where prevalent opinion maintains that they were characteristic representatives of Arabic Neoplatonism. A typical representative of this opinion is Ian Netton, who claims that the Ikhwān were a circle of Neoplatonists who adopted certain Ismāʿīlī traits.²³¹ Exposure of the elevational-theosophical pattern in the Ikhwān fits well with additional manifestations of central aspects of the thought of the Ikhwān, which clearly deviate from the framework of medieval Arabic Neoplatonism. In this context, the use of the terms of the Divine Imperative (*amr*) and the Divine Word (*kalmia*) in the writings of the Ikhwān to indicate the hypostasis that stands above the hypostasis of the Universal Intellect is equally important. In the esoteric stratum of the Ikhwān writings (which receives only fragmented formulation, though it is more explicit in *al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa*) the *amr/kakima* receives actual existence, as the hypostasis which embodied the divine will and placed above the Universal Intellect. This development gives the cosmology of the Ikhwān more dynamism in comparison to parallel Neoplatonic cosmology in Arabic culture of their period, including the contemporary Ismāʿīlī authors.²³² In the history of Jewish Kabbalah, one may point to a somewhat similar development: in the Provençal Kabbalah of the second half of the twelfth century and the early thirteenth century, the hypostasis of *Maḥshavah* (Thought/Wisdom), which contains outlines of the Neoplatonic Universal Intellect, is placed at the head of the hierarchy of the *sefirot*. In comparison, the appearance of Kabbalah in Catalonia in the first half of the thirteenth century was accompanied by the theoretical development of placing the highest hypostasis, which is embodied in the divine will, above the hypostasis of divine thought, in a manner that deviates from the course of earlier Provençal Kabbalah.²³³

break with both.” (Said A. Arjomand, “Islamic Apocalypticism in the Classic Period”, in *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism: Volume 2: Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture*, ed. B. McGinn, New-York, Continuum, 1999, p. 108).

231 See esp. Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists*, pp. 107-108.

232 See Krinis, “Judeo-Arabic Manuscript”, and also Pines, ‘Shīʿite Terms”, p. 226; Ebstein, “Secrecy”, p. 321, n. 33; Baffioni, “Divine Imperative,” pp. 57-70.

233 Scholem, *Beginnings*, pp. 140-141; idem, *The Kabbalah in Gerona*, pp. 171-236; idem, *Origin*, p. 435.

Scholars of early Spanish Kabbalah, in the past generation have increasingly tended to point out, in great detail, the opposition between ‘Ezra and, even more, ‘Azriel as major spokesmen for the Neoplatonic approach typical of the Kabbalists of Gerona, and Nahmanides, as the most important and influential proponent of the approach opposed to Neoplatonism, typical of a separate circle of Kabbalists sometimes identified by scholars as “the Kabbalah of Barcelona.” This relatively new tendency, of which Moshe Idel is the outstanding and most vigorous spokesman, appeared in Kabbalah scholarship as a counter-tendency to that of Gershom Scholem and his approach, which include Nahmanides as a member in the Neoplatonist circle of the Kabbalists in Gerona.²³⁴ Emphasis of the elements of cyclicity and return to the source as common to the Kabbalistic worldview of ‘Ezra, ‘Azriel, and Nahmanides enables us to realize that, despite all the differences in emphasis and detail, ‘Ezra, ‘Azriel, as well as Nahmanides and the later Kabbalists of Barcelona, share with one another a most substantial feature of their Kabbalistic worldview, viz. the placement of the return to the source as the final goal of the course of time and the world of the *sefirot*. To the degree that this common feature proves in depth to deviate from the spirit of Neoplatonism, both the early characterization by Scholem regarding the common Neoplatonist tendency of the Kabbalists of Gerona, and also the contrary characterization by Idel regarding the division on this matter between the Kabbalah of Gerona and that of Barcelona, prove to be problematic and inadequate. From the viewpoint of the doctrine of Sabbatical cycles and the central ideological trends inherent in it, the Kabbalists in Catalonia who advocated it, the Rabbis from Gerona, and, after them, the Rabbis from Barcelona, stand together on one side of a major ideological division of the early Kabbalah. On the other side of this barrier a counter-tendency took hold, originating in Castile and receiving its outstanding expression in the writings of Moshe de Leon and central parts of *Sefer ha-Zohar*, which presented an alternative conception of the place of time in the Kabbalistic worldview.²³⁵

234 Moshe Idel, “Nahmanides: Kabbalah, Halakhah, and Spiritual Leadership”, in *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership in the 13th Century*, eds. M. Idel and M. Ostow, Northvale-NJ, Jason Aronson, 1998, pp. 15-96; also Yair Lorberbaum, “Nahmanides Kabbalah on the Creation of Man in the Image of God”, *Kabbalah—Journal of Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 5 (2000), pp. 287-326 [Hebrew]; Safran, “Fall of Man”; Afterman, *Dvequt*, pp. 227-333.

235 Pedaya, Nahmanides, pp. 413-414, 450-451; idem, “The Great Mother”. In the long term, the increasing influence of *Sefer ha-Zohar* on the world of Kabbalah led later Kabbalists (such as Moshe Cordovero), who continued to adhere to the doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, to

4 Concluding Remarks

In the final part of this article I wish to take note briefly of further consequences of the distinction between the elevational-theosophical pattern and the circular-cosmological, as well as the directions for research implied by this distinction, which demand further discussion and development. This is in the broad perspective of the comparative discussion of the subject of cyclical time in of Ismāʿīlī and in Kabbalah literature.

The Reductionist Tendency in Scholarship on Cyclical Time in the Ikhwān

In scholarship on cyclical time in the Ikhwān, the effort to combine the various cyclical data that appear in the Ikhwān writings within a single framework of explanation is expressed decidedly in the reductionist interpretation of Yves Marquet, the prominent scholar of the thought of the Ikhwān in the previous generation. The initial assumption of Marquet's interpretation is the absolute dominance of astrological-astronomical regularity in the Ikhwān's conception of cyclical time.²³⁶ Regarding the "traditional" cyclical data of 1,000, 7,000, and 50,000 years, which do not have astrological or astronomical explanations in the writings of the Ikhwān, Marquet employed "approximations." He pointed to the existence of an astrological-cyclical time unit of 960 years as the basis for approximating the traditional cyclical units: for the 1,000 year unit only a relatively small rounding up was needed (especially since 960 solar years equal 990 lunar years in the Muslim calendar).²³⁷ The difficulty and artificiality bound up with the method of approximations is more evident in the approximation needed for the unit of 7,000 years. The one suggested is seven cycles of 960 years, which comes to a time unit of 6,720 years. The arbitrary nature of Marquet's method of approximation is even more conspicuous in his treatment of the longest unit of traditional cyclical time, that of 50,000 years, which the Ikhwān connect with the "fifty thousand year day" that is mentioned in the Qurʾān. Since this unit does not contain a multiple of the unit below it (that of 7,000 years), Marquet chose to replace it with a unit of 49,000 years, which is consistent with the pattern of multiples of seven. He suggested an

make far-reaching changes in it, to make it accord with the tendencies of *Sefer ha-Zohar*. See Sack, *Cordevero*, pp. 279-290.

236 Marquet, *La philosophie*, pp. 407-438.

237 See *Rasāʾil*, vol. 3, p. 266 where the Ikhwān speaks of a cycle of 'approximately' (*bi'l-taqrib*) one thousand years.

approximation of 47,040 years ($960 \times 7 \times 7$),²³⁸ even though the unit of 49,000 years is not mentioned anywhere in the writings of the Ikhwān. Marquet's method of approximations, with the artificiality and arbitrariness it entails, and with its distance from the spirit of classical astrology, a doctrine that claims to be precise, was accepted by Godefroid De Callataÿ—the leading scholar in our generation on the topic of cyclical time in the Ikhwān.²³⁹ The position of Marquet and De Callataÿ on this matter reflects the leading approach in scholarship, which gives decisive weight to astrology in the cyclical time conception of the Ikhwān.²⁴⁰ By making the distinction between the circular-cosmological pattern and that of the elevational-theosophical one it is possible to get free of this arbitrary and unconvincing approach. The distinction enables us to see that the Ikhwān writings offer two different and separate models of cyclical time: one is the one-dimensional cyclical model based on the astrological-astronomical dynamic between the corporal heavenly world and the corporal mundane world. The second model espoused by the Ikhwān, along with the first, is one that combines two different dimensions of time and in which a central place is given to the dynamic among spiritual entities found above and beyond the heavenly world. In this complex model, the regularity of the higher order, which is based on the dynamic among supreme spiritual entities, sets, limits, and determines the power and validity of the astrological regularity that depends on the constant orbital movement of heavenly bodies.²⁴¹

238 Marquet, "Les Cycles", pp. 55-56; idem, *La philosophie*, pp. xi-xiv, 397-399, 597.

239 De Callataÿ, *Brotherhood*, pp. 41-42. In this context it is instructive to note that Marquet made no similar effort to ground the cycles of 36,000 and 360,000 years, for example, with a basic time unit of 960 years. He could have claimed that the former cycle is an approximation of a cycle of 34,560 years, and that the second is an approximation of a cycle of 345,600 years. The cycles like those of 36,000 and 360,000 years are "respected," in that they are backed by scientific astrological calculations in the tradition of the era. Hence, they do not require the reductive process that Marquet applied to the "detached" cycles, less backed by the astrological tradition of the era—the cycles of 1,000, 7,000, and 50,000 years.

240 De Callataÿ presents a fascinating survey of the various stages in the eschatological concepts of the Ikhwān and the connection of these stages to their cyclical-teleological conception of time. See De Callataÿ, *Brotherhood*, pp. 28-33. De Callataÿ's insights on this central matter have made an important contribution to research. Evidently, De Callataÿ's failure to relate to the teleological cycle of 50,000 years in the Ikhwān prevented him from presenting here a clearer distinction between of this teleological cyclicity and the perpetual cyclicity of the astrological-astronomical model in Ikhwān writings.

241 *Rasā'il*, vol. 2, pp. 46-47 in comparison with *Perush Rabenu Bahya* on Numb. 10:35 (p. 45).

The presence of two separate conceptions of cyclical time in the Ikhwān literature, whose inner logic and basic data are incompatible, can be explained in several ways. One explanation derives from the scholarly convention that accepts the way in which the Ikhwān literature presents itself as the creation of a fellowship of authors. Thus it is possible to assume that various conceptual tendencies were current among this group of writers, and it was not always possible to reconcile them. This can sometimes be the case with a single author, and, ever the more so, among a number of writers in cooperation. The eclecticism characteristic of the Ikhwān circle supports this explanation.²⁴² Another (preferable in my opinion) explanation for the existence of two conceptions of cyclical time in the Ikhwān derives from the repeated emphasis in the Ikhwān literature of the esoteric character of the circle of authors and their way of composing their works. The astrological-astronomical worldview, upon which the circular-cosmological pattern of time is based, is strongly emphasized in the Ikhwān writings and occupies a relatively central place in presenting the picture of the world formulated in them. In comparison to this, the presentation of the elevational-theosophical pattern of time, with its strong apocalyptic tone, is more concealed and fragmentary. It seems that the circular-cosmological pattern belongs to the exoteric side of the authors' worldview, whereas the elevational-theosophical belongs to the esoteric side. This explanation is supported in that while the circular-cosmological pattern is given relatively detailed presentation in the corpus of *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-şafāʾ*, the elevational-theosophical pattern receives more significant development in the supplementary epistle, *al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa*, which is regarded by the authors as a work dedicated to the important esoteric aspects of their worldview.²⁴³

The Reductionist Tendency in Scholarship on the Doctrine of Sabbatical Cycles in Early Kabbalah

The adoption of a reductionist tendency, albeit less drastic than that in research in the Ikhwān literature, also characterizes scholarship on cyclical time in Kabbalah. Kabbalah scholars tend to diminish the unusual character of the appearance of the doctrine of cyclical time in the early circles of Kabbalists. They do so especially in the way they make this development dependent on cyclical data that appear in the work *Megillat ha-Megalleh* (The Scroll of the Revealer) by Abraham Bar Ḥiyya, a Jewish author active in Catalonia in the first half of the twelfth century, two or three generations before the appearance of

242 Marquet, "Ikhwān al-şafāʾ", pp. 1075-1076.

243 See esp. *Rasāʾil*, vol. 1, p. 46; *al-jāmiʿa*, p. 91. See also the discussion in Krinis, "Judeo-Arabic Manuscript", pp. 318-319.

Kabbalah there. In the first chapter of his work, Bar Ḥiyya presents a selection of astrological-astronomical calculations from various traditions, regarding “the measurement of the days of the world.” It should be mentioned that according to Bar Ḥiyya’s system, these calculations are superfluous.²⁴⁴ Along with calculations of billions and millions of years, of the Indian *Kalpa* and *Mahā-Yuga* cycles, and cycles of 36,000, 360,000, and 12,000 years, Bar Ḥiyya presents two additional calculations, which were not common in the Arab astrological tradition of the time: one of these is that of astrological cycles of 7,000 years, which end with the destruction of the world after 49,000 years, and its restoration during the following thousand years, that is, after 50,000 years. According to the second calculation, the 7,000 cycle is divided into seven astrological sub-cycles of 1,000 years. In the seventh and last millennium of the cycle (ruled by the planet Saturn), life on earth is destroyed and renewed in the eighth millennium, i.e. the first millennium of the following cycle (when the world again returns to the rule of the planet Jupiter).²⁴⁵ The outward similarity between these two astrological calculations presented by Bar Ḥiyya and the basic data of the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, as well as the proximity in time and place between him and the first Kabbalists, led scholars of Kabbalah to emphasize the astrological background and the role of Bar

244 Abraham Bar-Ḥiyya, *Megillat ha-Megalleh*, eds. A. Poznanski and J. Guttmann, Berlin, Mekize Nirdamim, 1924, p. 11, ll. 30-13, l. 7.

245 *Megillat ha-Megalleh*, p. 10, ll. 33-11, l. 29. See the discussion of this passage in Rosenberg, “Return to the Garden of Eden”, pp. 43-46. The various data presented by Bar Ḥiyya in the passage under discussion in *Megillat ha-Megalleh* are borrowed, almost entirely, from Arabic sources, most likely including the Ikhwān writings. Another important source that could have been available to bar Ḥiyya is the *Kitāb al-falāḥa al-nabaṭiyya* (The Nabatean Agriculture) by Abū Bakr Ibn Waḥshiyya (late ninth century-early tenth century). In that work, which is mentioned by Jewish authors of Bar Ḥiyya’s time (including Judah Halevi and Maimonides), a cyclical conception of time appears in which each cycle is 7,000 years and under the sway of one of the planets. The cosmological conception of the world presented in *Kitāb al-falāḥa al-nabaṭiyya* is consistent with the assumptions underlying the circular-cosmological pattern. See *L’Agriculture nabatéenne: traduction en arabe attribuée à Abu Bakr Ahmad b. Ḥalī al-Kasdani connu sous le nom d’Ibn Wahshiyya (IV/x^e siècle)*, ed. Toufic Fahd, 3 vols., Damascus, Institute français de Damascus, 1993-1998, vol. 1, p. 9. See Jaakko Hameen-Anttila, *The Last Pagans of Iraq: Ibn Wahshiyya And His Nabatean Agriculture*, Leiden, Brill, 2006, pp. 98-99, 109-118. See also Husain F. Hamdani, *The Doctrines and History of the Ismā’īlī Da’wa in Yaman as based on Dā’ī Idrīs ‘Imād u’-Dīn’s ‘Kitāb Zahr u’l-Ma’ānī’ and Other Works*, PhD dissertation, University of London, 1931, pp. 178-180 for similar astrological formulations in an Ismā’īlī work of the fifteenth century.

Ḥiyya in transmitting them as two central complementary components in the consolidation of the doctrine of Sabbatical cycles by the Kabbalists of Spain.²⁴⁶

The distinction between the pattern of the elevational-theosophical and the circular-cosmological pattern helps us to free ourselves from the tendency prevalent among scholars of Kabbalah to restrict the sources of the Kabbalistic doctrine of cyclical time to an astrological worldview, and especially to the astrological data mentioned by Bar Ḥiyya.²⁴⁷ Further, this distinction helps us recognize the appearance of the Kabbalistic doctrines of Sabbatical cycles in the world of Jewish thought of the thirteenth century as a particular development, whose debt to common and prevalent astronomical-astrological knowledge of the time was not at all essential.²⁴⁸

The Common Astrological-Astronomical Tradition

Above I have tried to point out what seemed to me to be a flaw in the prevalent efforts in scholarship to reduce the doctrines of the elevational-theosophical pattern in the writings of the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists to the circular-cosmological pattern. In scholarship on the Ikhwān literature, this is a matter

246 Daniel Matt formulates this approach in a single condensed sentence in his introduction to the edition of *Mar'ot ha-Zoveot*: “[The doctrine of the *Shemīṭot*] was based on astrological ideas mediated to the Kabbalists through the writings of Abraham Bar Ḥiyya.” (p. 31). Joseph Dan expresses himself in similar spirit, adding the Kabbalists not only drew the extent of the cycles, but also the principle of the return of things to their source from bar Ḥiyya (Dan, *Gerona Circle*, p. 295). Dan's claim is not supported by the presentation of the subject in Bar Ḥiyya.

247 For more nuanced arguments than those of Matt and Dan regarding the central place of the astronomical and astrological views in the development of the doctrines of Sabbatical cycles, including the formulations of Abraham Bar Ḥiyya see Scholem, *Beginnings*, pp. 179-180, 186; Idel, “Time and History in Kabbalah”, pp. 168-170; idem, “Jubilee”, pp. 212-213; idem, “Kabbalah in Byzantium”, pp. 684-885; Halbertal, *By the Way of Truth*, pp. 212-213, 216, 218. It should also be mentioned that the approach taken by Bar Ḥiyya himself relates to the seventh day of history not as a period of the destruction of organic life, as in the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, but, on the contrary, as a period of the Messianic events and bodily resurrection of the dead on earth. See *Megillat ha-Megalleh*, p. 19, ll. 11-20.

248 Haviva Pedaya is aware of the way in which the presentation of cyclical data in Bar Ḥiyya is inconsistent with their presentation in the writings of the Kabbalists. See Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 214-217, 229-230, n. 21. Among scholars, Shalom Rosenberg is the one who emphasized the uniqueness of the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, and thereby explained the similarity between it and the theories of cyclical time based on a scientific astrological-astronomical view as a formal and non-essential similarity. See Rosenberg, “Return to the Garden of Eden”, p. 40.

of reduction to a pattern that appears in the writings themselves, whereas in scholarship on the early Kabbalah it is a matter of reducing it to a pattern that appears in Jewish writings which were close in time and place to the raising of the Kabbalah in Spain. In the Ikhwān writings, the data upon which the formulations of cyclical time of the circular-cosmological pattern are based are taken from the accepted and known tradition of Arabic astrological-astronomical science, among whose foremost representatives were Māshāallah ibn Atharī (d. 815), Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Khwārizmī (d. c. 850), and Ja'far ibn Muḥammad Abū Ma'shar (d. 886). This tradition absorbed a variety of other traditions: Greek, Hellenistic-Hermetic, Indian, Persian, and others. The Ikhwān explicitly express their debt to this tradition,²⁴⁹ which was well known to a number of Jewish writers who were active in the generations prior to the appearance of the Kabbalah, and who found interest in astrology and astronomy.²⁵⁰ Among these authors were Abraham Bar Ḥiyya, who has already been mentioned, and his important younger contemporary Abraham ibn 'Ezra (d. c. 1164).²⁵¹ The appearance of the conception of time of the circular-cosmological pattern in Arabic literature, including that of the Ikhwān, and at a later stage in Jewish literature, is decidedly an expression of a shared scientific knowledge that crossed the boundaries of religious identities.

In comparison to this, Ikhwān and the Kabbalists connect formulations of the elevational-theosophical pattern of cyclical time to the basic sacred texts of their religion. This is a clear sign that both the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists regarded this pattern of cyclical time as the very essence of their particular

249 See *Rasā'il*, vol. 4, pp. 288-289. On the treatment of the long cycles of time in the classical Arabic astronomical-astrological tradition as a continuation of the earlier traditions, see Edward S. Kennedy, "The World-Year Concept in Islamic Astrology", in *Studies in the Islamic Exact Sciences*, Beirut, American University of Beirut, 1983, pp. 351-371; Pingree, *Abū Ma'shar*; De Callataÿ, *Annus Platonicus*; idem, 'Brotherhood', pp. 41-44, 79.

250 Freudenthal, "Cosmology", pp. 330-338.

251 On the great interest of Ibn 'Ezra in this matter see Shlomo Sela, *Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science*, Leiden, Brill, 2003 (for the most relevant discussion see pp. 162-168). Ibn 'Ezra, who was also a prolific and influential commentator on the Bible, dispersed quite a few obscure hints in his commentaries on the Bible regarding the doctrine of cyclical time. Later authors, who wrote commentaries on Ibn 'Ezra's commentary on the Torah, understood these hints as relating to the circular-cosmological pattern. See in this context Rosenberg, "Return to the Garden of Eden", pp. 46-49; Shlomo Sela, *Astrology and Biblical Exegesis in Abraham Ibn 'Ezra's Thought*, Ramat-Gan, Bar-Ilan University Press, 1999, pp. 253-256 [Hebrew] (and the discussion there of the Indian cyclical data that Ibn 'Ezra presents in his work, which reached us only in Latin translation); Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 215-216.

religious tradition, and it is the formulation whose secret is connected directly for them to the redemption reserved for the faithful believers in that particular tradition.

The Interpretive Struggle in the Streams of Jewish Thought in the Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries

In Jewish thought from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, one of the most fascinating expressions of the dynamic between the elevational-theosophical pattern and the circular-cosmological pattern is the ideological struggle between two separate camps: the camp of Kabbalists who adopted the doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, who developed a worldview appropriate to the elevational-theosophical pattern, and presented the termination of the great cycle of 50,000 years as the essence of the return to the source—departure from the corporal world, ascension over it and overcoming it; and in parallel to this, other authors, especially those belonging to the school of Abraham ibn ʿEzra, used the great cycle of 36,000 years as a basis for a worldview corresponding to the characteristics of the circular-cosmological pattern as a pattern for the constant renewal and restoration of the world, time after time. This pattern made it possible to present a naturalistic solution to the resurrection of the dead, with no need for the miraculous intervention of God, a solution that suited the rationalistic approach.²⁵² As an interpretive consequence of this disagreement we find representatives of both camps using the Biblical term “a thousand generations” (*elef dor*) as a proof text for calculating the great cycle in each respective doctrine: the Kabbalists hold that the Biblical generation is fifty years, and the rationalists, thirty-six years.²⁵³

The Trend of Integration in the Streams of Ismāʿīlism in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries

In the Ikhwān writings, the tension between the two patterns of cyclical time—elevational-theosophical pattern, with the drive to elevation and escape the corporal creation that typifies it, and the circular-cosmological pattern, with

²⁵² Rosenberg, “Return to the Garden of Eden”, p. 55, n. 47.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 45-63. In this context the innovative geological-chemical theory of Ibn Sīnā should be mentioned as well. This theory had the characteristics of the circular-cosmological pattern of cyclical time. On this theory and its echoes in Jewish thought of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries see Gad Freudenthal, “(AL-)Chemical Foundations for Cosmological Ideas: Ibn Sīnā on the Geology of an Eternal World”, in *Physics, Cosmology and Astronomy, 1300-1700: Tension and Accommodation*, ed. S. Unguru, Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991, pp. 55-66.

the infinite cyclical revolutions that characterizes it, remains in force, and almost no effort was made do dispel it.²⁵⁴ Such an effort was made in the framework of the developments of the conception of cyclical time in later currents of Ismā'īlism, the Nizārī stream and the Ṭayyibī stream that were consolidated organizationally and conceptually during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This effort was expressed, among other things, in the attempt to integrate the incompatible data of the great cycles that last 50,000 and 360,000 years.²⁵⁵ The conception of time of these later streams tends to relate to the great cycles of 50,000 and 360,000 years as units within far more extensive cycles. This enlargement of the scope of time does not obviate the goal of return to the source and full redemption. Rather it places that goal immeasurably farther away, on a horizon of billions of years. Thus an almost infinite expanse is created for implementing the impetus for renewal and cyclical repetition typical of the circular-cosmological pattern.²⁵⁶ However the way of attaining this goal here becomes not only much long but also complex and far more stratified in stages.²⁵⁷

254 See for example the formulation in the *al-Jāmi'ā*, Ṣalībā edition, vol. 1, p. 321 (includes in a sub-chapter missing in a large part of the manuscripts of *al-Jāmi'ā*). This formulation relates to an mysterious and extraordinary long cycle of an unknown number of repetitions of a 360,000 year cycle as a unit of time that already belongs to the area of the supreme and eternal (*dahr*) dimension of time. In the parallel formulation in *Rasā'il* there is no reference to the matter of eternal time. See *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, p. 251. See also De Callataÿ, *Brotherhood*, pp. 32-33.

255 See De Smet, *La Philosophie ismaélienne*, pp. 166-167 regarding such an effort in the Ṭayyibī stream.

256 In the Nizārī stream, the lengthening and profusion of cycles is attained by use of the conception of 18,000 worlds-cycles, very much like the lengthening that appeared in a certain variant of the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles in the same period (see the beginning of this article). In the Ṭayyibī stream, the aforementioned lengthening is attained by repetition of the long cycle of 360,000 years 360,000 times (according to De Callataÿ, it might already be possible to find an allusion to such a lengthening in the Ikhwān. See De Callataÿ, *Brotherhood*, pp. 32-33). See also the discussion in Corbin, *Cyclical Time*, pp. 37-58, 80-81.

257 In the Ṭayyibī stream, the increased complexity is the result of the combination of its cyclical conception with the cosmology of the hierarchy of the ten intellects, which was first presented in the Ismā'īlī framework of the early eleventh century by the Fātimid author Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī. See Wilfred Madelung, "Cosmogony and Cosmology in Isma'īlism", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 6, pp. 323-325; De Smet, "Al-Fārābī's Influence."

Directions in Early Islam

The distinction between the different types of temporal cyclicity makes it possible to be free of the reduction characteristic of the patterns of thought prevalent among scholars of the Ikhwān literature and of the Kabbalah regarding the conception of cyclical time in the corpora under discussion. Freeing ourselves in this way opens us up to other possible sources of the formulations of cyclical time in the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists. These directions of research, which are not restricted to the astronomy and astrology, lead us to a shared heritage and to contacts between Islam and Judaism. The parallel between the seven days of Creation and the thousand year days of history fit together in a cycle of 7,000 years of the existence of the world, is an approach whose early sources appear in ancient Jewish apocalyptic literature.²⁵⁸ This ancient Jewish conception was adopted, circulated, and developed especially among early Christian authors,²⁵⁹ but it also left its mark on the Rabbinical tradition of late antiquity.²⁶⁰ In the early Muslim tradition the doctrine that allotted 7,000 years to the existence of the world is occasionally identified as a tradition characteristic of the Jews.²⁶¹

In contrast, it appears that the span of 50,000 years was established by the Qurʾān. It appears to me that mention of this specific span in the sacred book

258 *Second Book of Enoch*, ch. 33, sec. 1-2 (*The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, ed. R. H. Charles, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1913, vol. 2, p. 451). See also Jonathan Smith, "Ages of the World," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 1, p. 130.

259 Richard Landes, "Lest the Millennium be Fulfilled: Apocalyptic Expectations and the Pattern of Western Chronography 100-800 CE," in *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, eds. W. Verbeke, D. Verhelst and A. Welkenhuysen, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 1988, pp. 137-211; Witold Witakowski, "The Idea of *Septimana Mundi* and the Millenarian Typology of the Creation Week in Syriac Tradition", in *V Symposium Syriacum*, ed. R. Lavenant, Roma Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1990, pp. 93-109.

260 Weinstock, *Studies*, pp. 184-185, 191-195.

261 *Sīrat sayyidina rasūl Allāh, Das Leben Muhammed's nach M. Ibn Ishaq*, 1-11, ed. F. Wüstenfeld, Göttingen 1858; reprint, Frankfurt-am-Main, Minerva, 1961, p. 371 (= *The life of Muhammad*, trans. by A. Guillaume, London, Oxford University Press, 1955, p. 252); Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, 15 vols., Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, 1984, vol. 1, pp. 382-383 (on Cor 2, 80) (= *The Commentary on the Qurʾān by Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī*, ed. and tr. J. Cooper, vol. 1, Oxford, 1987, p. 416); *Le Livre de la Création et de l'Histoire d'Abou-Zéïd Aḥmed ben Sahl el-Balkhî (de Moṭaḥhar ben Ṭahîr el-Maqdisî, attribué à Abou-Zéïd Aḥmed ben Sahl el-Balkhî)*, ed. M. Cl. Huart, Paris, E. Leroux, 6 vol., 1899-1919, vol. 2, p. 52. The translation of the words of al-Maqdisî here is: "A group of the Jews hold a tradition according to which the whole world is annihilate every six thousand years and is renewed [lit. 'returns'] in the seventh." See the reference to al-Maqdisî words in the scholarship of G. Scholem, *Beginnings*, p. 180; idem, *The Kabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 12; idem, *Origins*, p. 462.

of the new religion of Islam, whose power expanded over extensive territories relatively rapidly from the seventh century on, can explain why the combination of a 7,000 year time unit and the one of 50,000 years emerged specifically in the world of Islam. The fact that the Qurʾān provides the most important proof text for the time unit of 50,000 years is pregnant with importance not only for the authors of the Ikhwān circle, who were active in the Muslim world, but, less directly, also for the Jewish authors in Spain, which was under the cultural and political dominance of Islam until not long before the appearance of Kabbalah. Mention of the 50,000 years “day” in the Qurʾān provided an opening for dealing with various meanings of a “day” of that length. One of these meanings, that the Ikhwān reached in the tenth century, established the systematic connection, in the framework of the elevational-theosophical pattern of cyclical time, between the figure of 50,000 years, anchored in the Qurʾān, and that of 7,000 years, anchored to the tradition attributed to the prophet of Islam.

In this historical context, scholarship in the direction of detecting intermediary stages in the developments of conception under discussion in the period between the beginning of Islam and the time of the Ikhwān is important, because of the possibility that such developments contributed to the consolidation of the elevational-theosophical pattern in the Ikhwān writings. As a preliminary contribution to this desirable progress in scholarship, I shall briefly point out one direction, which touches upon the works that originated among gnostic Shīʿī circles (known as *ghulāt*), which were active between eighth and tenth centuries in Iraq. Cyclical time occupies an important place in the worldview of the gnostic trend in early Shīʿism, and cycles of 7,000 and 50,000 years are the most prominent among the formulations of cyclical time in that trend. Of special interest is the work *Kitāb al-haft waʾl-aẓilla* attributed to al-Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar al-Juʿfī (d. before 799).²⁶² In this work, the cyclical process is one of twelve cycles of 50,000 years, after which matters return to the ideal starting point. The authors of this book presents this conception while engaged in polemics against the position taken by the “the people of Kufa” (*ahl al-Kūfa*), according to which the time unit of 7,000 years is a cyclical, eschatological unit, culminating in the end of the world.²⁶³ It seems that the position of the other side of the controversy is echoed in the work *Umm al-Kitāb*, whose earliest stratum belongs to the radical Shīʿī circles in the city

262 See Mushegh Asatryan, *Heresy and Rationalism in Early Islam: The Origins and Evolution of the Mufaḍḍal-Tradition*, PhD dissertation, Yale University, 2012, pp. 140-241, 317 for an analysis of this work.

263 *Kitāb al-haft waʾl-aẓilla*², eds. ʿĀrif Tāmīr and Ignace Khalifé, Beirut, al-Maktba al-Kātūlikīya, 1970, pp. 34, 37, 39-40.

of Kufa during the period under discussion. In *Umm al-Kitāb* the present cycle, the cycle of law (*dawr-i sharīʿat*), at the end of which will come the revelation of inner truth regarding the essence of the imāms, is a cycle of 7,000 years. This cycle is apparently included in a series of seven cycles mentioned elsewhere in *Umm al-Kitāb*.²⁶⁴ Another work of that period, *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ waʾl-aẓilla* mentions a cycle of 51,000 years divided into seven cycles of 7,099 years. At the end of that great cycle, the believers once again take their place in the upper world.²⁶⁵ In these early Shīʿī writings, and in other sources from that period,²⁶⁶ the conception of cyclical time is presented against the background of a cosmological-cosmogonic description, of which the formative dynamic is not the causal dynamic between the bodies and forces of the heavenly realm and those in the lower world, but a mythical dynamic that exists between the primordial upper worlds and their inhabitants and the lower worlds to which the inhabitants fell as a result of their sins.²⁶⁷ The conception of cyclical time

264 See Anthony, "The Legend of 'Abdallāh ibn Saba' and the Date of *Umm al-Kitāb*," pp. 28-29 in comparison to *Kitāb al-ḥaft waʾl-aẓilla*, pp. 20-21.

265 Mushegh Asatryan, "An Early Shīʿī Cosmology: *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ waʾl-aẓilla* and its Milieu," *Studia Islamica* 110.1 (2015), pp. 16, sec. 5; 27, sec. 21; 30-31, sec. 26-27; 34, sec. 33; 49, sec. 54. See also 41-42, sec. 44, where the author takes note of the connection between the number forty-nine (seven times seven) and the number fifty, which indicates the completion of the cycle constructed on that multiple. The additional fifth veil is considered here as the 'supreme veil' (*al-ḥijāb al-aʿlā*). In p. 54, sec. 64 of the work, longer cycles are mentioned, including one of 360,000 years. *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ waʾl-aẓilla*, like the two other books mentioned here, is one of the early Shīʿī *ghulāt* works preserved among the Ismāʿīlī communities.

266 See the worldview of the early Shīʿī group of those faithful to Abdallah ibn Muʿawiya (d. 747), includes the use of a time unit of 50,000 years as the basic unit in a heptatonic structure tending to ascend, which is based on a large cycle of 350,000 years. See *Fruhe muʿtazilitische Haresiographie; zwei Werke des Nasīʿ al-Akbar*, ed. Josef Van Ess, Beirut, al-Maʿhad al-almānī liʾl-abḥāth al-sharqiyya, 1971, pp. 37-39. Also Patricia Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism*, New-York, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 209-210, 235-236, 251; Haggai Ben-Shammai, "Transmigration of Souls in Tenth Century Jewish Thought in the Orient," *Sefunot: Studies and Sources on the History of the Jewish Communities in the East* 20 (1991), p. 118 [Hebrew]. This cycle of 350,000 years, which is built on seven cycles of 50,000 years, reappears hundreds of years later in the aforementioned effort of the Ismāʿīlī authors of the Ṭayyibī stream to find consistency between the cycle of 50,000 years and the other great cycle that appears in the writings of the Ikhwān of 360,000 years, by adding a supplementary period of 10,000 years. See De Smet, *La Philosophie ismaélienne*, pp. 166-167. See also Hamdani, *The Doctrines*, pp. 178-180, 184-186.

267 See Yaron Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs: An Introduction to the Religion, History and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria*, Leiden, Brill, 2010, pp. 95-115 for a survey of the cosmological worldview that is expressed in the sources under discussion.

that the aforementioned sources present is inextricably bound up with the cyclical processes of the transmigration of souls. This phenomenon is of great interest for our discussion, for in early Kabbalah the transmigration of souls was brought into the presentation of the conception of cyclical time. As the presentation of the doctrine of Sabbatical cycles was refined in Kabbalistic literature, the component of the transmigration of souls assumed a more significant place.

Directions in the Ancient World and in Christianity

The detailed phenomenological distinction presented above, between the elevational-theosophical pattern and the circular-cosmological pattern, can help us to point to the degree of closeness or distance of the doctrines of cyclical time of the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists and previously formulated tendencies of cyclical time and return to the source. In the context of the circular-cosmological pattern in the writings of the Ikhwān, researchers have pointed out the similarity between it and various formulations of the concept the “great year” that were prevalent in the antiquity and the Middle Ages.²⁶⁸ Regarding the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, Gershom Scholem tried to show the similarity between central features of this doctrine and the use made by early Christian authors of the Greek term *apocatastasis* (reconstitution, restitution). In Greco-Roman pagan culture, use of this term was common in various formulations of the conception of the “great year,” in the framework of conception of cyclical time with characteristics of the circular-cosmological type.²⁶⁹ In contrast, in the writings of early Christian authors, beginning with Origen (d. 254), use of the term *apocatastasis* is assimilated into the elevational-theosophical pattern, which is anchored in the restorative eschatological conception.²⁷⁰ Aside from this important aspect common to the doctrine of *apocatastasis* from the school of Origen and doctrines of cyclical time of elevational-theosophical pattern in the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists, there are also conspicuous points of difference: One of the central characteristics of the conception of time under discussion in the school of Origen and his successors in the world of early Christian thought (such as Gregory of Nyssa and Johannes Scotus Eriugena), is the universal and non-apocalyptic aspect of the process of elevation and return to the source. In contrast, the elevational-theosophical pattern of the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists is apocalyptic in tone

268 See the comprehensive discussion of this subject in De Callataj, *Annus Platonicus*.

269 Robert Turcan, “Apocatastasis”, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 1, p. 345.

270 See the discussion in Morwenna Ludlow, *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 35-44.

and limit salvation to a chosen group.²⁷¹ In addition, the doctrine of *apocatastasis* in Origen and his successors is not formulated in defined units of cyclical time.²⁷² In comparison, the doctrine of *apocatastasis* in the prominent gnostic Valentinus, who lived about a century before Origen, shows clear signs of similarity to the aforesaid doctrines of the elevational-theosophical pattern, and especially that of the Ikhwān. Valentinus' theory shares with the Kabbalists and the Ikhwān the apocalyptic motif of destruction of the corporal world that accompanies the return. It also shares with the Ikhwān the motif of restricting the return to those who have attained supreme knowledge, with the emancipatory power inherent in it.²⁷³ The approach of the Kabbalists is different from that of the Gnostics and the Ikhwān, among other things, in the great value that the Kabbalists attribute to observing the commandments of the revealed Torah in attaining salvation for the believers, and in closing the gaps both between the lower and upper realms and within the upper realms. This significant difference is also valid regarding *Sefer ha-Temunah*, which, among

271 Regarding the Kabbalists, this statement must be modified. Few of the earliest Kabbalistic formulations of the doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, mainly these that appear in Ya'acob Ben Sheshet in his book, *Meshiv Devarim Nekhoḥim*, are formulations that can be interpreted as pointing to elevation and return to the source as a process that applies to all of existence, including the material part of it. See *Meshiv Devarim Nekhoḥim*, p. 95, ll. 75-80. See also Idel, "Jubilee", p. 218. For an effort to show a possible connection between the return to the source in Nahmanides and the Christian doctrine of *apocatastasis*, see Scholem *The Kabbalah in Gerona*, pp. 406-407; idem, *Kabbalah*, p. 127. Scholem bases this effort on an important passage in the thought of Nahmanides. He interprets Nahmanides' words in the beginning of his commentary on *Sefer Yeṣirah* (Scholem, *Studies in Kabbalah*, pp. 86-87) as meaning that the return at the great Jubilee is universal and general, like the return in the Christian theory of "universal return" (i.e. *apocatastasis*). This hypothesis is inconsistent with Nahmanides' words elsewhere in his writing (*Kitvei ha-Ramban*, vol. 1, p. 128; vol. 2, p. 268), according to which the desired eschatological reward of "life," in the meaning of the elevation of souls to the state of cleaving to the *sefirot*, is reserved for members of the people of Israel and their ancestors alone. See also Idel, "Divinity of the Soul," pp. 345, 379-380.

272 Paula Fredriksen, *Sin: The Early History of an Idea*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2012, pp. 102-112; Deirdre Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena*, New-York, Oxford University Press, pp. 94-101.

273 Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology*, Peabody, Baker Academic, 2003, p. 26; Turcan, 'Apocatastasis', p. 345. For other gnostic aspects of the Ikhwān see Geo Widengren, "The Gnostic Technical Language in the *Rasā'il Ihwān al-Şafā'*", in *Actas IV Congresso de Estudos Arabes e Islamicos*, Lieden, Brill, 1971, pp. 181-203. For similarities between the cosmology of early Ismāʿīlī thought and that of the Valentinian Gnosticism see Nomoto, *Early Ismāʿīlī Thought*, p. 203, n. 69; Halm, "The Cosmology", pp. 80-83.

the Kabbalistic works discussed here, is the closest in its formulations to the gnostic approach.²⁷⁴ In this context, another significant difference revolves around the definition of the identity of the redeemed. The Ikhwān, in a manner consistent with their gnostic approach, identify the group of redeemed with the meta-ethnic organization of those faithful to the brotherhood (*Ikhwān*) and their order (*da'wa*). The Kabbalists, in contrast, insist on identifying it with the ethnic-religious group of the people of Israel.

Gershom Scholem devoted a relatively large place to drawing parallel lines between the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, and especially that of *Sefer ha-Temunah*, and the doctrine of the three status of the school of Joachim of Fiore (d. 1202). In Scholem's opinion, in this case there is no possibility of a historical connection between the two doctrines.²⁷⁵ The common theosophical aspect of the doctrine of Joachim and that of the Sabbatical cycles is connected to the assumption that what is hidden in the interior of God must be expressed in His creation. However, Scholem is aware of the significant difference between Joachim's three status doctrine and that of the Sabbatical cycles: in Joachim's doctrine, creation expresses the full divine inner magnitude of the trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In comparison to this, among the Kabbalists, of the ten *sefirot* that express the full divine magnitude, only the seven lower ones are embodied in creation, whereas the three upper ones remain beyond it.²⁷⁶ Scholem attributes special weight to the common utopian dimension of Joachim's doctrine of status and the doctrine of Sabbatical cycles of *Sefer ha-Temunah*. In this context, Scholem insists that whereas with Joachim and his successors, the utopian dimension is meant to be actualized within history, in *Sefer ha-Temunah* this dimension will be actualized mainly not in the present historical continuum but in the transition to the following cycle. The emphasis in Joachim's doctrine is on history as the relevant temporal framework, in which the various status/eras are marked by improvement and progress.²⁷⁷ In contrast, in the doctrine of *Sefer ha-Temunah*, history is ruled by the severe *sefirah* of *Din* (Stern Judgment), and redemption is not

274 See especially *Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 147-149.

275 On the lack of historical connection between the doctrine of Sabbatical cycles and Joachim's doctrine of status, in Scholem's opinion, see Scholem, *The Kabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 18; idem, *Origins*, p. 464. See in this context Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, New-Haven, Yale University Press, 1998, pp. 55-56; Harvey J. Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder: Abraham Abulafia, the Franciscans, and Joachimism*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2007, pp. 105-106.

276 Scholem, *Beginnings*, pp. 177-178.

277 Bernard McGinn, *The Calabrian Abbot: Joachim of Fiore in the History of Western Thought*, New York, Macmillan, 1985, pp. 112-113, 153-154, 172-175, 181-182, 185-192.

found within it, but in liberation from it, in the transition to the following cycle, which is ruled by the *sefirah* of *Raḥamim* (Mercy). In this context, the utopian pattern in *Sefer ha-Temunah* is not the evolving, progressive, harmonious type presented by Joachim's doctrine of status, but rather a restorative pattern: the utopian reality that will be actualized in the coming cycle restores to a great degree the reality that prevailed in the first cycle, which was ruled by the *sefirah* of *Ḥesed* (Grace). In comparison to these utopian cycles, the present, intermediary, historical cycle is a prolonged dystopia.²⁷⁸ Thus it appears in a general assessment that the parallel features of Joachim's doctrine and that of *Sefer ha-Temunah* are few compared to the differences between them and also to the degree of structural similarity and the common conceptual climate that prevailed between the Ikhwān's cyclical doctrine of time and that of the Sabbatical cycles.²⁷⁹

Overlaps in Worldviews of the Ikhwān and Early Kabbalists

Most of the characteristics that scholars point out as typical to the worldview of ancient apocalyptic literature also appear in the worldview that is reflected in the doctrines of cyclical time of the elevational-theosophical pattern in both the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists. Among these characteristics one may mention: 1) The deterministic conception of history; 2) the view that historical development is structured and composed of stages that coalesce together in general unity; the application of a teleological view in which the final goal in the development of time is that which gives history its meaning; 3) description of the present stage of history as a fragile one in which the chosen group is weak and persecuted; 4) the adoption of an approach that advocates passive waiting in the difficult historical situation of the present, in the light of the approaching immanent change; 5) the view of redemption as intended for those who are in the 'right' camp and denied to those who are identified as not belonging to it; 6) the view of the eschatological future as a dimension that contains within it a sweeping change in the world order familiar to us in the course of history. All the above are characteristics of the apocalyptic worldview.²⁸⁰

278 Scholem, *The Kabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 20, 54-64; idem, *origins*, pp. 464-465, 467-468, 470.

279 In recent years, comparative research between the doctrines of Joachim and his followers and early Kabbalah has focused on Kabbalistic currents of the thirteenth century, which did not adopt the doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, including that of Abraham Abul'afia and the Zohar circle. See Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*; Pedaya, "The Six Millennium", pp. 64-68, 85-90.

280 McGinn, *Joachim of Fiore*, pp. 52-54.

The mood underlying the elevational-theosophical pattern of cyclical time of the Ikhwān and of the Kabbalists is therefore profoundly apocalyptic, so that it is possible to relate to these doctrines as extensions and developments of that ancient mood.

The worldview of the Ikhwān is based mainly on a number of fundamental components. One of these is the aforementioned apocalyptic component, which characterized Islam from the earliest stage of its historical appearance in the seventh century.²⁸¹ In Shīʿī Islam, including the Ismāʿīlī Shīʿī stream, the apocalyptic component received a prominent place, colored by messianic and gnostic tones.²⁸² In addition, in the Ismāʿīlī stream, from the early tenth century on, the components of Greek philosophical sciences are notable, specifically dominant component of Neoplatonism. In *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ* the scientific and philosophical components are foregrounded in the visible and prominent stratum of the authors' worldview, whereas the apocalyptic and messianic components are relatively hidden. In this context the supplementary work, *al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa* is of special importance, for it gives greater weight and detail to the Shīʿī components of apocalyptic and messianic ideas in the Ikhwān worldview.²⁸³ The focus of most scholars of the thought of the Ikhwān on aspects connected with the visible stratum of the philosophical sciences, at the expense of the apocalyptic component, goes hand in hand with neglect of *al-Risāla al-jāmiʿa*. This trend in research also has consequences regarding study of the connection between the Ikhwān and medieval Jewish thought. In the borders of the Arabic culture, the process of translation and adaptation starting by the ninth century, enabled Greek philosophical sciences to function as a kind of meta-language. Authors of various religions combined them into the traditions in which they were active. In the case of the Ikhwān, the philosophical sciences in general, and particularly Neoplatonism, were more visible and conspicuous on the surface, and therefore they constituted the more accessible stratum, which other authors, including (and especially) Jewish authors, drew

281 See the detailed treatment by the Ikhwān of the apocalyptic motifs of the Qurʾān: *Al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 437-453. For a survey of apocalyptic thought in early Islam, see David Cook, *Studies in the Muslim Apocalyptic*, Princeton, Darwin Press, 2002; Ofer Livne-Kafri, "On Muslim Apocalyptic Tradition", in *Fins de siècle—End of Ages*, ed. Y. Kaplan, Jerusalem, Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2005, pp. 47-65 [Hebrew]; Arjomand, "Islamic Apocalypticism."

282 Said A. Arjomand, "Messianism, Millennialism & Revolution in early Islamic History", in *Imagining the End: Visions of Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America*, eds. A. Amanat and M. T. Bernhardtson, London, I. B. Tauris, 2002, pp. 106-125, 355-359; idem, "Islamic Apocalypticism", pp. 258-267; idem, 'Messianism'; Cook, *Studies in the Muslim Apocalyptic*, pp. 189-229, 303-306, 330-331.

283 See esp. *al-Jāmiʿa*, pp. 201-203.

from copiously, either directly or indirectly, with an intermediate links (such as the work of al-Baṭalyawṣī or the work *Moznei ha-ʿIyunim*).²⁸⁴ Accordingly, the comparative research that discusses the connections between the thought of the Ikhwān and that of Jewish thinkers, including the Kabbalists, focused on aspects connected with the visible stratum of the philosophical sciences and of Neoplatonism in particular.²⁸⁵ Against the background of the aforesaid, the comparison between formulations of the elevational-theosophical pattern of the Ikhwān's doctrine of cyclical time to the formulations of the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles is extremely important. This comparison reveals broader and deeper areas of overlaps between the world of the Ikhwān and that of the early Kabbalists. It relates to the wider spectrum of thought of the Ikhwān as Ismāʿīlī Shīʿīs, testifying to the non-harmonious coexistence of the Neoplatonic component and the apocalyptic component, which characterizes it. To the degree that we are willing to consider the possibility of a direct connection between the Ikhwān's doctrine of cyclical time and the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, we have an explanation of the gap of three hundred years or more between the period of activity of the Ikhwān and the possible echo of the doctrine of cyclical time of the elevational-theosophical pattern among Jewish circles: during those three centuries, there were quite a few Jewish thinkers and circles, who had direct or indirect contact with the visible, Neoplatonic side of the Ikhwān's thought. However, only in the first half of the thirteenth century, with the appearance of the first circles of Kabbalists in Spain, was a situation created that made possible the richer and fuller absorption of the two important aspects of the Ikhwān's thought—the apocalyptic aspect along with the Neoplatonic aspect—among Jewish circles that

284 In this context see the words of the scholar Ayala Eliyahu (Eliyahu, p. *al-Baṭalyawṣī*, 68), according to which the Ikhwān were the main addressees of the comment by al-Baṭalyawṣī in his work, *Kitāb al-dawāʾir al-wahmiyya* (p. 21 in the Eliyahu edition): “[In the issue of the Universal Soul] they have many things, which we have abbreviated, because our purpose in this book was different.” The position of the Ikhwān regarding the ascension of the Universal Soul, separation from the corporal world, and its consequential destruction, is one of the things that the Ikhwān has to say about the Universal Soul, which were not referred to in al-Baṭalyawṣī, since they do not suit his Neoplatonic individualistic eschatological approach. See on this matter Eliyahu, *al-Baṭalyawṣī*, p. 81. Regarding *Moznei ha-ʿIyunim* and its extensive borrowing from the Ikhwān, see Binyamin Abrahamov, “The Sources of *Moznei ha-ʿIyunim*,” *Daʿat—A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah* 34 (1995), pp. 85–86 [Hebrew].

285 See for example Moshe Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines, Ladders*, Budapest, Central European University Press, 2005, pp. 167–191; Altmann, “Ladder of Ascension”, p. 44 ff.

were capable of encompassing and adapting them in a creative and unique manner.²⁸⁶ These were the circles of Kabbalists who promoted the doctrine of Sabbatical cycles.²⁸⁷

Conclusion

In *al-Risāla al-jāmi'a* we find two concentrated formulations of the concept of the return to the source: the first formulation relates to the hypostasis of Divine Imperative (*amr*) as the starting point and the point of return of the cyclical process.²⁸⁸ The second formulation relates to the Universal Intellect as

286 An illuminating precedence of this phenomenon of historical delay can be found in the work of Aḥmad Ibn al-Ḥusayn Ibn Qasī (d. 1151). Ibn Qasī, one of the most remarkable figures in al-Andalus of the Twelfth century, was active about two hundred years after the Ikhwān and only a few decades before the earliest Jewish Kabbalists of Spain. Ibn Qasī's treatise *Kitāb khal' al-na'layn wa-iqtibās al-nūr min mawḍi' al-qadamayn* (The Book on the Removal of the Sandals and the Taking of the Light from the Place of the Two Feet) is an original example of theosophical synthesis between Neoplatonic themes on the one hand and apocalyptic and messianic themes on the other hand. Ibn Qasī's work owes much to the Ismā'īlī lore in general and to the Ikhwān in particular. His work also exhibits striking points of resemblance to major Kabbalah doctrines (albeit, it seems that cyclical time is not one of them). This issue still awaits scholarly discussion. Concerning Ibn Qasī's links to the Ismā'īlī theology, see Michael Ebstein, "Was Ibn Qasī Šūfi?," *Studia Islamica*, 110. 2 (2015), pp. 196-232.

287 On the apocalyptic aspects of the doctrine of Sabbatical cycles, see Scholem, *Beginnings*, p. 186; idem, *Origins*, pp. 470-471; Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 18-19, 30-31; idem, "The Great Mother," p. 317. On the apocalyptic aspects of the Ikhwān's doctrine of cyclical time, see De Callataÿ, *Brotherhood*, p. 32. In this context see for example the use common to the Ikhwān and the Kabbalists of the Biblical (Is 34, 4) and Qur'ānic (Cor, 21,104) motive of rolling up of the heavens as part of the catastrophic, apocalyptic description that accompanies the transitional stages of the end of the process of cyclical time. In the Kabbalistic sources this process is based on a late Midrashic work, *Pirqey de-Rabbi Eli'ezer*, chap. 51. See *Recanati on Parashat "Behar"* (pp. 137-139); *Rabenu Bahya on Gen 2, 3* (p. 38); *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, pp. 339-340. See also Jacob Elbaum, "Messianism in Pirqey de-Rabbi Eli'ezer: Apocalypse and Midrash", *Te'uda* 11 (1996), pp. 263-265 [Hebrew]; Scholem, *The Kabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 8; idem, *Origins*, p. 465; Weinstock, *Studies*, p. 195. On the connection between *Pirqey de-Rabbi Eli'ezer* to early Shī'ī circles of its time (mid-eighth century), see Gordon D. Newby, "Rethinking the End of Time: Apocalypticism in *Pirqey Rabbi Eliezer* and the Biography of Muhammad," *CCAR Journal*, Fall 2000, pp. 21-25.

288 *Al-Jāmi'a*, p. 336 (Šalibā edition vol. 2, p. 6): *wa-lahu al-amr min qabl wa-min ba'd wa-minhu bad' al-khalq wa-ilayhi ya'ūdu*. See *ibid.*, p. 534. Compare: *Sayr wa-sulūk*, pp. 12, 13 (Persian text), 39, 41 (English translation), sec. 30, 32.

the starting and return point.²⁸⁹ In the Kabbalah the conception of the return to the source was given concentrated formulation in the saying that appears in various places in the writings of the Kabbalists: “Everything is from the first cause, and everything returns to the first cause” (*ha-kol min ha-sibah ha-rishonah ve-ha-kol shav el ah-sibah ha-rishonah*).²⁹⁰ Scholars of Kabbalah tried to locate the source of this saying (which some Kabbalists attribute to “The Sages of Inquiry” [*ḥakhmei ha-meḥqar*])²⁹¹ in words that appear in the speech of the philosopher in beginning of Judah Halevi (d. 1141) treatise known (in its translation from Judeo-Arabic to Hebrew) under the title *Sefer ha-Kuzari*, and, indirectly, in the Neoplatonists.²⁹² However, as I have shown above, the conception of the return to the source of the Kabbalists clearly deviates from the spirit of Neoplatonism and is not at all consistent with the Aristotelian doctrine that is expressed in the cited words of the philosopher in *Sefer ha-Kuzari*.²⁹³ The authorities of far greater conceptual proximity to the “Sages of Inquiry,” to whom the Kabbalists referred in the context of the Sabbatical cycles are the Ikhwān. My remarks above are intended to clarify this proximity between the “Sages of Inquiry,” of whom the Ikhwān are the most likely embodiment, and the Kabbalists, proximity noted explicitly by several Kabbalists.²⁹⁴

Juxtaposing the doctrines of cyclical time of the Kabbalists and those of Ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ shows that examination of the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles in the context of the Ismāʿīlī circle of the Ikhwān is a relevant field of research, no less fertile, and perhaps more so, than the comparisons with Christian literature, to which scholars of the Kabbalah have referred.²⁹⁵

289 Ibid., p. 537: *faʾl-ʿaql huwa al-mubdaʿ al-awwal ʿan mūjidihi... wa-kull mā dūnhu minhu badā wa-ilayhi yaʿdu*. See *Rasāʾil*, vol. 3, pp. 286, 425.

290 *Perush Shir ha-Shirim*, p. 539; *Meʾirat ʿEinayim*, pp. 179, ll. 26-27; 222, l. 23; *Rabenu Bahaya* on Levit 25, 10 (p. 136); *Pirush ha-Recanati, Parashat “Behar”* (p. 139).

291 This is the term that appears in *Rabenu Bahaya*.

292 *Sefer ha-Kuzari*, book 1, sec. 1 (tr. Yehudah Ibn Tibbon, Tel-Aviv, Miskal, 2008, p. 21): “and everything returns to the first cause” (*we-ha-koll shav el ha-sibbah ha-risonah*). See also Scholem, *Origins*, p. 300, n. 200; Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, p. 386.

293 See *Sefer ha-Kuzari* book 5, sec. 20 (pp. 152-154) for the discussion which that work itself devotes to this subject. See also *Dalālat al-ḥāʾirīn*, eds. S. Munk and I. Joel, Jerusalem, Y. Yunovits, 1931, book 2, ch. 48, pp. 292-294, where Maimonides adds an explanation for the Aristotelian view of causality that is formulated briefly in the words of the philosopher in *Sefer ha-Kuzari*.

294 See especially *Meʾirat ʿEinayim*, p. 55, ll. 31-35.

295 As noted above, a prominent example of this is the varied and determined effort by G. Scholem to find precedents for various aspects of the Sabbatical cycles in the *apocatastisitic* conception in Christian sources, in formulations of the conception of

This shows that in considering the parallels and precedents for the Kabbalistic doctrine of Sabbatical cycles one must now place in the forefront of scholarship the Arabic-Muslim sources that were consolidated in Ismā'īlī literature in general and particularly in that of the Ikhwān. Comparative research of the Ismā'īlī and Kabbalistic sources can enrich and sharpen our understanding of certain doctrines of these unique currents in Islam and Judaism.²⁹⁶ The present article intention is to demonstrate the fertility of such comparative research in opening new ways for the understanding of the affinities between Islam and Judaism in the context of the emerging of the Kabbalah.

the “days of creation” and their realization in history in the writings of Isidor of Seville (d. 636), and especially in the eschatological-utopian doctrine of status of Joachim of Fiore. See Scholem, *Beginnings*, pp. 177-178; idem, *The Kabbalah in Gerona*, pp. 406-407; idem, *The Kabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 15-18, 20; idem, *Kabbalah*, p. 127, idem, *Origins*, pp. 449, n. 201; 464-465, 471. See also Dan, *Apocalypse Then and Now*, pp. 141-148; idem, *Gerona Circle*, pp. 295-296.

296 See Haviva Pedaya's estimation in this matter: Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 21-23. See also Tirosch-Samuels, “Kabbalah and Science”, p. 297.