FORMAL FRIENDSHIP IN THE MEDIEVAL NEAR EAST

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FRIENDSHIP as a social institution and spiritual bond, and not merely as a more or less passing human relationship, was known to various civilizations. From the Bible we might remember that King David had an official companion styled "friend of the king," and so did his son King Solomon.[1] Their eldest sons, the crown princes, too, had their official friends whom they consulted in difficult hours.[2] The friendship between David and Jonathan, the son of King Saul, is to be understood against this background. Jonathan, the crown prince, chose David as his permanent companion, because, as the Bible says, he loved him as his own self,[3] an expression echoed in the writings of the Greeks, and later the Arabs. Jonathan, the Bible tells us, stripped himself of his robe, his armor, his belt, and his sword, and put all this on David. Jonathan's attire represented his personality. By donning it, David became Jonathan, the two fused into one. This formal act of the conclusion of a friendship had a name. It was designated by the term "covenant," *berīt*, the same word that the Bible uses for the bond between husband and wife.[4]

Besides this formally concluded friendship between two individuals the Bible knows of groups bound together by ecstasy and prophetic rapture induced by music. We read about them in the stories of Samuel and Saul. The procedure of initiation into the group was the opposite of what we have just met with in personal friendship. The novice was expected to be carried away by the enthusiasm of the group, to be seized by the spirit, until he forgot himself and threw off all his clothing, piece after piece, and stood naked among the prophesiers day and night; in other words, he divested himself of his individuality, he became one with the group and was possessed by the spirit.[5]

Within the group there was room for formal *personal* friendship, namely between master and disciple, between the leader of the group and his prospective successor. The First Book of Kings tells us that the future prophet Elisha originally was a farmer, himself ploughing his fields and supervising the work of his farmhands when the prophet Elijah, as was his habit, appeared suddenly and cast his mantle upon him, meaning, as in the case of David and Jonathan, that the two had become one.[6] A similar act was performed in the Biblical wedding: the bridegroom spread his robe, or rather the skirt of his robe, over his future life-companion, symbolizing what is written in the Book of Genesis: "They become one flesh."[7]

I have presented the Biblical material on formal friendship in some detail because, as we recognize today more and more, it is illustrative of the ancient Near East in general. The medieval Near East, the one dominated by Islam, was an extremely complex and diversified civilization inasmuch as it absorbed the traditions not only of the ancient Near East, but those of the Greeks and, of course, the pre-Islamic Arabian nomads as well. The social history of this civilization, formerly somewhat neglected, has aroused much interest during the last two decades. Formal friendship, by which I mean a fixed, lasting, and strongly emotional relationship cutting through the bonds of family, clan, or tribe, and mostly called *ṣuḥba* in Arabic, was a typical phenomenon of this Near Eastern medieval civilization, tinged by Islam.

In this paper I shall try to study this institution as it was practiced among the common people. For such an undertaking we have an excellent source in the documents of the so-called Cairo

[1] David's friend: 1 Chronicles 27: 33, in a list of officials and dignitaries. In 2 Samuel 15: 37, and 16: 16–17, conceived as a friend owing special allegiance. Solomon's friend: 1 Kings 4: 5. This "friend" was a son of the prophet Nathan to whom Solomon owed his throne.

[2] Amnon, the firstborn of David: 2 Samuel 13: 3. Rehoboam, son of Solomon: 1 Kings 12:8. His friends became his servants who "stood before him."

[3] 1 Samuel 18: 3 See *ibid.* 18: 1–4.

[4] Malachi 2: 14.

[5] 1 Samuel 10: 5–6, and 19: 20–24.

[6] 1 Kings 19: 19–21.

[7] Genesis 2: 24. See Ruth 3: 9.

Geniza,[8] a treasure trove of manuscripts written mostly during the tenth through the thirteenth centuries and found originally in Old Cairo. At that time Old Cairo was the hub of the Islamic world. The Mediterranean and the India trades converged there.[9] Therefore, the Geniza contains information about major sections of the medieval Near East. The writers and recipients of these letters and documents were mostly, albeit not exclusively, Jewish. But most of the material is written in the Arabic language, and, as the terms used prove, the social notions expressed in it, were, as a rule, not specific to any particular group, but belonged to the general environment of the writers concerned.

The unique value of this material for the historian consists, of course, in its documentary character; it represents life, unlike books, where the personality of the author, his knowledge, aims, and capacities come between reality and the reader.

Before trying, however, to discuss what the Geniza tells us about formal friendship, I must survey, if only in the very barest outline, what Arabic literature has to teach us about the subject, so that the Geniza material may be seen in its proper perspective.

Friendship was of little import in the heroic age of the Arabs, in pre-Islamic Arabia. Pre-Islamic poetry contains some noble verses on friendship,[10] but we would look in it in vain for a pair like Achilles and Patroclus, on whose brotherly love the whole story of the Trojan war was geared.

We learn about the social institution of the boon companions, *nadīm*, mostly two, who shared the revelries of a poet or hero and served also as his lookouts and guards on his amorous nightly adventures.[11] These two boon companions are mentioned, however, most prominently in stories about the Arab kings of Hira, who were under Persian domination.[12] Thus it is likely that the nadim, together with the wine and the singing girls, came to the Arabs from Persia, where, as we shall presently see, the ancient Near Eastern institution of the friends of the kings had remained fully alive.

The negligible role of friendship in pre-Islamic Arabia is to be explained by the preeminence of the bonds of blood and kinship. Or, as the Arab poet has explained it:

> Take for your friend whom you will in the days of peace. But know that when fighting comes your kinsman alone is near.[13]

Formal friendship, ṣuḥba, came into the Arab world with religion, with the Islam of Muhammad. Conversion was conceived as a personal bond between the new believer and the founder of the religion. It was symbolized by a handclasp, the joining of hands by which the ancient Arabs used to confirm a contract or a convenant. Muhammad's adherents were called his friends or com-

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[8] Pronounced *ghenēeza*. About the Cairo Geniza as a source for social history see S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967) 1: pp. 1–28, 395–400.

[9] For the Mediterranean trade see *A Mediterranean Society* 1: pp. 148–352, 437–490. A collection of three hundred and forty documents from the Cairo Geniza related to the India trade is being prepared for publication. A preliminary report in S. D. Goitein, *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden, 1966), pp. 329–360.

[10] I found this pair of verses rather impressive:

> "Make friends with noble men,
> If you can find a way to their friendship.
> And drink out of their cup,
> Even if it is poison right down to the dregs."

T. Nöldeke, *Beiträge zur Kenntnis der Poesie der alten Araber* (Hanover, 1864), p. 79, calls this "ein herrliches Verspaar." The poet happened to be Jewish, but there was no substantial difference between Jewish and pagan pre-Islamic poets. The term for concluding a friendship, used here twice, is *ikhā'*, literally, "taking as brother," see note 14, below.

[11] The institution of the boon companions was so well established that many a poem would open with an address in the dual number to two anonymous persons. The most famous case is, of course, the Mu'allaqa, or prize poem, of Imru'u l-Qays, the father of pre-Islamic poetry, whose introductory phrase *qifā nabki*, "you two, stand still, let us cry," has become a catchword for classical, outmoded poetry to the young Arab today.

[12] The first such pair were the two companions of Jadhīma, a vassal of Ardashīr, the founder of the Sasanid dynasty, see R. A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs* (Cambridge, 1956 [reprint]), pp. 34–35. The interesting point in this story is that Jadhīma originally had been too proud to admit anyone to his drinking bouts except two stars, which implies, of course, that the two boon companions had been a long-established institution. The most illustrious (and notorious) king of Hira, Mundhir III (sixth century), ordered his two boon companions to be buried alive. The ceremonies performed at their tombstones gave rise to a famous story of a pair of pre-Islamic heroes, see R. A. Nicholson, *A Literary History*, pp. 43–44.

[13] *Hamāsa of Abū Tammām*, ed. G. Freytag (Bonn, 1828 ff.), p. 327. See also R. A. Nicholson, *Literary History*, p. 84.

panions, *aṣḥāb*, or, in relationship to each other, brothers, *ikhwān*.[14]

From that time on, spiritual bonds of the greatest variety became the base of sustained personal relationships transcending family attachments, the strongest being those connected with Islamic mysticism known as Sufism. According to the developed theory of Sufism only a specific and lasting relationship with one single master can initiate a novice properly into the Path of Truth. It cannot be learned from books, nor by changing from one master to another.[15] The most sublime stage of this relationship is the self-effacement of the disciple in his master, as when Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī, the greatest mystical poet writing in the Persian language, concluded his poems not with his own pen name, but with that of his master.[16] The two symbolic acts of initiation practiced by the ancient prophets of Israel, namely, the clothing of the novice with the mantle of the master and, conversely, the throwing away of all clothing in the ecstasy induced by music, were most prominent features of Sufi life, but there is no historical connection between these *ancient* Near Eastern and *medieval* Near Eastern practices.

The matter was different with regard to another type of formal friendship, the friends of the kings. The Persian dynasty of the Sasanids continued this ancient institution, similarly to what the Hellenistic rulers and Roman emperors had done before. The Muslim ideas about kingship were largely molded by the Sasanid heritage, wherefore the problem of the friends of the kings is copiously ventilated in Islamic literature.[17] In a most remarkable memorandum submitted to Manṣūr, the second Abbasid caliph (754–775), called "Book of Companionship," a Persian nobleman, Ibn al-Muqaffa', surveys the types of persons who should become a caliph's intimates. I have discussed this memorandum in my book *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* under the title "A Turning-point in the History of the Muslim State." "Turning-point," because it was not the aristocrats recommended by Ibn al-Muqaffa', but the technocrats so much more needed by the Muslim state of those days who finally became the caliph's confidants.[18]

A third source for thought on friendship in Islam was Greek philosophy and rhetorics which reached the Arabs in many different ways. The most detailed exposition of the topic is found in Miskawayh's book named "Training of the Character," the classical and most influential treatise on Islamic ethics. Man is by nature a social being. Consequently, his intrinsic and highest destination, spiritual perfection, can be reached only through association with a congenial friend.[19]

It is a law of sociology that notions alive in the upper classes filter down in the course of time and through adequate transformation to the broader masses of the population. As the writings of the Cairo Geniza show, it was not different with the idea of ṣuḥba. Terms coined for the description of this relationship by religion, statecraft, or philosophy, became part and parcel of the daily speech of the common people. Ṣuḥba itself became a most important institution; it was indeed the organizational backbone of international trade.

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[14] "The true-believers are brothers," Koran **49**: 10. Also 9: 12. In order to emphasize that the new brotherhood of religion cut through the bonds of tribal allegiance, the prophet Muhammad concluded formal brotherhood between each Muslim member of his own tribe and one of the Muslims of Medina, to where he emigrated. This was called *ikhā'*, see n. 10, above, and n. 22, below.

[15] An idea to be found in many works on Sufism, especially in the concluding chapter of al-Qushayrī's *Risāla*, which is superscribed: "Instruction for the Novice."

[16] See now the important article "Djalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī" by H. Ritter and A. Bausani in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (*second edition*, Leiden, 1965) **2**: pp. 393–397. This self-effacement of the great poet in his master, an almost obscure man, is the more remarkable as recent discoveries have proved how deeply Jalāl ad-Dīn was indebted to his own father, an outstanding author. See A. J. Arberry, "Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmi," *Islamic Studies* 1 (Karachi, 1962): pp. 89–105.

[17] Our knowledge of Sasanian history is derived to a very large extent from Islamic sources. This fact makes research in the Iranian influence on Islam extremely complicated, or, as G. E. von Grunebaum has put it: "In some ways, the Persian components of Islamic civilization are more difficult to separate out than the Hellenic precisely because they are more fully integrated and have become effective on so many levels." *The Cambridge History of Islam* (Cambridge, 1970) **2**: p. 501.

[18] S. D. Goitein, *Studies* (see n. 9), pp. 149–167. See "Ibn al-Muqaffa'" in *Enc. of Islam*[2] (1968) **3**: pp. 883–885, by F. Gabrieli.

[19] *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*, ed. C. K. Zurayk (Beirut 1967), who provided also an English translation (Beirut, 1968). French translation by Mohammed Arkoun, *Miskawayh, Traité d'Éthique* (Damascus, 1969). See also: M. Arkoun, *Contribution a l'étude de l'humanisme arabe au iv/xeiècle: Miskawayh, philosophe et historien* (Paris, 1970). A contemporary of Miskawayh, at-Tawḥīdī, wrote a treatise on friendship, which is deeply influenced by Greek thinking. An excellent study of it is found in Marc Bergé, "Une Anthologie sur l'amitié d'Abū Ḥayyān at-Tawḥīdī," *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* **16** (Institut Français de Damas, Damascus, 1961), pp. 15–58.

Let me explain. Because of the enormous risks involved, people normally partook in many different business ventures simultaneously. Above and beyond these, however, any respectable trader had a ṣāḥib, or friend, on the other side of the sea who acted for him not merely as legal and business representative, but as his confidant in every respect. The list of services to be rendered by a ṣāḥib was interminable. I have drawn up such a list, a rather longish one, in my book *A Mediterranean Society*, Volume I, but it could still be expanded. The ṣuḥba was formally concluded and formally dissolved, and the words used in the correspondence were terms of friendship rather than of business. Often the ṣuḥba was based on a relationship of master and disciple, that is, a fledgling overseas trader left his home town, worked for some years under the guidance of an established merchant overseas, and, in gratitude for this education, as it was called, became his ṣāḥib after his return to his native city. In the India trade, every consignment sent to a ṣāḥib was accompanied by presents, as appropriate between friends. Since this custom was not practiced in the Mediterranean trade, it must have been learned by the Muslims and Jews from the Indians.[20]

A particular type of commercial friendship was the institution of the travel companion, *rafīq*, mentioned in numerous documents and letters, but not yet sufficiently investigated with regard to its origins and history. People endeavored to travel in groups, large or small, but each individual traveler was specifically connected with another one by far-reaching bonds of mutual responsibility. Each was supposed to know the sums of money and description of goods carried by the other, to look after him in the frequent cases of illness or other mishaps, and to take care of his possessions after his death. The thirteenth-century Spanish Muslim writer Ibn Sa'īd takes it for granted that a traveler would be imprisoned, beaten, and tortured when his rafīq died, because the local authorities would assume that the latter had left money with him.[21] A Yemenite Jew, writing from Jerusalem at the beginning of the same century, reports indeed that the government had confiscated all the belongings of his dead travel companion and that he was in great fear because of this.[22] I have not found in the Geniza a contract on travel companionship and do not expect to find one, for it was a relationship of personal confidence comparable to the ṣuḥba, not a legal obligation—despite the disastrous legal consequences it could sometimes have for a surviving rafīq.

In order to illustrate the intimate character of the commercial ṣuḥba, I reproduce here a passage from a letter written around 1020 in Qayrawān, then the capital of the country known today as Tunisia, by a merchant and communal leader to his correspondent in Cairo who had broken with him:

> I am writing to you my elder—may God protect you from what one fears and grant you what makes one happy—at the end of the month of Av [July/August when the last ships of the season sailed for Egypt.] I am sound in body, but sore in mind because of the absence of your letters, and because you neglect me and turn your mind from my affairs. All the caravans of the land and the ships of the sea have arrived, but I have not seen any letter or commission for me. Even more so: in the letters received from you by our friend So-and-so—may God keep him—no mention is made of me.
>
> Now, my lord, you know well that it is a gift of God to be favored with affection and to be close to the hearts of friends, as it is said [Genesis 39: 3–4]: "The Lord caused all that Joseph did to prosper in his hands; so Joseph found favor in his master's sight." If this heavenly favor is withheld from a man, he is forgotten by his friends, and consideration for him becomes slender. When things come to this, a believing man should not make accusations of being neglected and slighted, but thank God, as we must, for both happiness and distress. In short, God is to be praised for everything. I have made it incumbent upon myself not to trouble you by asking you to write to me or to do any business for me, as I feel that this might be a burden for you. Thus, let us wait patiently for a turn of fortune, when our friends will again be the same as they used to be, if God will.[23]

This letter, like most of the Geniza letters, is written in Arabic language and Hebrew characters. Another letter of renunciation, written in

[20] Details in *A Mediterranean Society* (see n. 9) **1**: pp. 164–169. The relationship is described there as "Friendship" or "*Informal* cooperation" in order to differentiate it from the various forms of partnerships and commendas, which were concluded through legal documents issued by a court or a notary.

[21] *A Mediterranean Society* **1**: pp. 347 and 489, nn. 9-13, where further details about the institution of the rafīq.

[22] University Library Cambridge (England), Taylor-Schechter Collection 13 J 21, f, 5, 11. 15–18, edited by S. D. Goitein in *Harel* (Tel Aviv, 1962), p. 146. This Arabian Jew does not use the term rafīq, but writes *kunt mu'ākhī*, "I concluded a brotherhood," see n. 14, above.

[23] Taylor-Schechter 12.175, ed. S. D. Goitein, *Tarbiz* **34** (Jerusalem, 1965): pp. 169–174. Joseph b. Berechiah, Qayrawān, writes to Joseph Ibn 'Awkal in Cairo.

most beautiful Arabic characters, contains far stronger wording. The writer had for some time considered giving up the friendship—similar allegations are made in other letters of renunciation—but the latest misdeeds committed against the writer by the recipient and his son had made the measure full. After all this, one is astonished to read on the reverse side: "Carry this letter to my intimate friend, the friend of my soul." No name is on the address, which was regarded in those days as an indication of greatest intimacy.[24]

The letters just referred to originated in the eleventh century. A formal contract of friendship between scholars is known to me only from a far later period. It was written in Cairo on January 2, 1564. The two partners conclude the pact for their own lifetime and that of their children and children's children; they will pray in the same synagogue (which means that they will meet at least twice a day all their lives); and, perhaps most important for them, they will lend each other any book they might possess for a duration of twenty days for the purpose of study or copying and will never conceal from each other any book they have.[25]

Similar contracts from the thirteenth century are referred to in Hebrew literature from Germany[26] and Spain.[27] Therefore, I assume that we have here a general medieval phenomenon common to the Christian and Muslim worlds. I shall be grateful for relevant non-Jewish references.

I conclude with the strangest item about friendship found thus far in the Geniza, a book of divination, written in the unmistakable hand of a prominent lawyer and court clerk who was active between 1066 and 1108. He claims possession of secret methods for guiding those seeking his advice and not being in need of horoscopes and astrological computations. Here are answers to three queries about friendship found in different parts of the booklet.

1. You have asked me which of the two of you loves his friend, ṣāḥib, more. I see that you love him more. May the Creator make the two of you love each other permanently and may not let anyone take pleasure in your failure.

2. Know that love is from God and he has granted you the love of your friend. Everything comes from God. Therefore praise and thank him that he has made you beloved by him and by everyone.

3. You have asked me which of the two of you loves his friend more. I see that the love of the two of you is even. May the Creator make your love permanent and not separate you in eternity.[28]

The reader may have wondered where homosexuality comes into all this. No doubt it must be taken into consideration. The Arabs were studious disciples of the Greeks and Persians in this matter and perhaps did not need teachers. This brand of friendship, too, had its formal aspects. A poet would mention the male object of his love by name in his poems.[29] A powerful ruler would have a favorite whose specific role was known to everyone. The Bible puts the death penalty on any form of homosexuality. But it was only natural that the environment was not

[24] Taylor-Schechter Arabic Box 41, f. 53. This letter and the one referred to in n. 23 are translated in full in the present writer's *Mediterranean People: Letters and Documents from the Cairo Geniza Translated into English* 2 (in preparation for the press).

[25] MS Firkovitch II 236, f. 5, ed. Jacob Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature* (Cincinnati, 1931) 1: pp. 472–474.

[26] J. Mann, *loc. cit.*, pp. 453–454, quotes the ethical will of Judah b. Asher b. Yehiel (born and bred in Germany, thirteenth century, emigrated to Spain), who reports that his grandfather was bound to a friend by a covenant which comprised also partnership in the religious merits accruing from a pious life. When, as was the custom, Yehiel's coffin was opened before being lowered into the grave, his friend reminded him to make sure of their common share in Paradise, whereupon a look of joy lit the dead man's face. That will is available in an English translation in Israel Abrahams, *Hebrew Ethical Wills* (Philadelphia, 1926) 2: p. 187.

[27] Dr. Meir Benayahu, author of *Azulay* (Jerusalem, 1959, where, 1: pp. 16–17, the later contracts of brotherhood are discussed) drew my attention to a pact of friendship made in Cordova, Spain, in 1317, where Jacob b. Hananel (Siqillī) and Hezekiah undertake to emigrate jointly to the Holy Land. On this pact see Alfred Freimann, "Ascher ben Jechiel," *Jahrbuch der Juedisch-Literarischen Gesellschaft* 12 (Frankfurt, 1918): p. 281 (reprint, p. 45). The text of this highly interesting pact is now easily accessible in B. Dinur, *Israel in the Diaspora* 2, bk. I (Tel-Aviv ,1965): pp. 532–533.

[28] Taylor-Schechter Arabic Box 44, f. 54. A small booklet in the hand of Hillel b. Eli, about whom *A Mediterranean Society* (1971) 2: p. 231, and *passim*. The passages translated are found on fol. 3*a*, no. 4; fol. 5*a*, no. 5; fol. 8*a*, no. 5.

[29] An outstanding example: Ibn Sahl al-Isrā'īlī al-Andalusī of Sevilla, a convert to Islam and famous poet, whose diwān, or collection of poems, has often been printed. He mentions his young friend Mūsā (Moses) again and again in his poems, using the whole gamut of the Koranic stories about the Biblical Moses in order to illustrate the vicissitudes of his love. See *Dīwān Ibn Sahl al-Andalusī*, ed. Ihsān 'Abbās (Beirut, 1967), introduction, pp. 46–47.

without influence on the Jews of the medieval Near East, as again is proved by the Geniza.

As far as literary sources are concerned, the subject was treated extensively by J. Schirmann, "The Ephebe in Medieval Hebrew Poetry," *Sefarad* **15** (1955): pp. 55–68. Schirman quotes Jewish authors of the Karaite persuasion, writing in the ninth and tenth centuries, who deplore the pernicious influence of the Muslim higher classes, indulging in this vice, on their Jewish neighbors. He also points out that the admiration of the beautiful male youth, so common a topic in Hebrew poetry in Islamic countries during the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries, disappears entirely in the Spanish, Provençal, and Italian Hebrew poetry, written in a Christian environment in the subsequent period.[30]

The Cairo Geniza has preserved a detailed statute regulating the pilgrimage to the holy shrine of Dammūh, southwest of Cairo.[31] Among a great many other prohibitions the statute forbids that young men or a mature man with a boy should separate from the crowd, least they should get a bad reputation and become suspect; of what, is obvious.[32] Even more outspoken is a letter written on the occasion of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in September, 1052. Pilgrims from Tiberias, Palestine, and Tyre, Lebanon, had assembled for the service on the fast of the Day of Atonement, the highest Jewish holiday, when a man from Tiberias openly made overtures to one from Tyre. The amorous scene led to a fist-flight between the two groups of pilgrims and the police had to be called in. The rather childish writer goes on to describe the subsequent pilgrimage and concludes: "Never did we have more beautiful holidays." [33]

The two cases reported indicate that homosexuality was not entirely absent from Jewish Near Eastern society during the High Middle Ages, but was regarded as a despicable vice rather than a deadly crime. In view of the enormous amount of private and public correspondence and of legal material preserved in the Geniza the rarity of the references to this evil proves that it did not form the object of great social concern, while formal friendship, as we have seen, did.

In conclusion, I wish to venture a generalization. While in the Christian West the adoration of female perfection led to the cult of Mary, the mother of the Saviour, in the Muslim East "the contemplation of the unbearded"[34] and the attachment to the master were sublimated into self-effacement in the image of God. The "I-Thou" relationship of the official religions was replaced by the ecstasy of identification, of loving God as being one's own self:

Oh ye who are seeking God, seeking God,
Why do ye seek what ye have not lost?
There is no need for seeking. Ye are He ye are He.
Nothing exists besides ye. But where are ye?
Where are ye?" [35]

[30] Schirman's findings were questioned by N. Allony, "The Zevi (-Nasib) in the Hebrew Poetry of Spain," *Sefarad* **23** (1963): pp. 311–321. Allony points out that the passages discussed were either purely literary exercises, or referred to God, or were meant to be taken humorously or cynically (whatever that may mean). While it might be conceded that some of Schirmann's interpretations are open to comment, the main result of his study can hardly be questioned.

[31] About this "Synagogue of Moses" on the site of ancient Memphis see Norman Golb, "The Topography of the Jews of Medieval Egypt," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 24 (1965): pp. 255–259.

[32] Taylor-Schechter 20.117 *verso*, edited by S. Assaf, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History* (Jerusalem, 1946), pp. 160–162.

[33] Taylor-Schechter 8 J 22, f. 25, partly edited in J. Braslawsky, *Studies in our Country* (Tel-Aviv, 1954), pp. 120–121, who was, however, unable to read the relevant passage. See *A Mediterranean Society* **2**: pp. 168 and 555, n. 54.

[34] This Arabic phrase (*an-naẓar ila 'l-murd*) is the technical term for the inducement of mystical rapture by friendship with a beautiful youth. The majority of the Sufi masters strongly disapproved of this dangerous avenue to religious ecstasy, e.g., al-Qushayrī, *loc. cit.* (see n. 15, above).

[35] Verses by Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī, ed. R. A. Nicholson, *Selected Poems from the Dīvāni Shamsi Tabrīz* (Cambridge, 1898): p. 251.