

KITAB AL KHAZARI

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Kitab al Khazari by Judah Halevi & Hartwig Hirschfeld

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JUDAH HALEVI & HARTWIG HIRSCHFELD

**KITAB AL
KHAZARI**

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KITAB AL KHAZARI (4)

Translated from the Arabic
with an Introduction

By

HARTWIG HIRSCHFELD, PH.D.



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PREFACE

THE invitation extended to me by the Publishers to prepare an English version of the Book *Al Khazari* has afforded me an opportunity of carrying out an intention which I had long cherished. It is now twenty years ago that my German translation of the work was published, and it is but natural that during this long interval I was able to detect a number of passages which required correction or, at least, general revision.

The character of the book justifies the translation in the interest of those who are unable to read it in the original, or in the Hebrew version. It was meant by the author to be a book for the people, and contains sufficient attractive and instructive material to interest even those readers who would skip the more abstruse passages. Its popularity is evidenced by the fact that edition after edition followed almost from the earliest days of the printing-press down to our own time. Indeed, the most elaborate edition was undertaken by a non-Jewish scholar.

The present translation was made directly from the Arabic original, as was also the case with the German translation mentioned before. I deem it desirable to make this statement in order to explain the discrepancies

between these two translations and all previous ones. Jacob Abendana's Spanish, Buxtorf's Latin, and the late Dr. D. Cassel's German translation, all follow the printed Hebrew edition which, however, already in the *editio princeps* differs considerably from the author's original. It was my endeavour to reproduce as much as possible the author's own words and to eliminate the marginal notes and comments which had crept into the text from the pens of ancient writers and readers during several centuries.

An English version of the book by E. H. Lindo exists in MS., now preserved in the library of Jews' College. A closer inspection of the same, however, revealed the fact that it follows in the main the Spanish version, and is therefore scarcely suitable for publication.

Finally, I wish to thank Mr. J. H. Loewe, who kindly assisted me in reading the proofs.

H. HIRSCHFELD.

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INTRODUCTION

'SEARCH not,' says Ben Sira, 'what is too high for thee, nor examine what is beyond thy grasp ; endeavour not to know what is hidden, nor investigate what is concealed from thee ; study what is within thy mastery, but meddle not with that which is secret.'¹ By reproducing these words in explanation of a similar saying in the Mishnah,² the Talmud (both of Babylonian and Palestinian recensions),³ and the Midrash⁴ furnish ample evidence of their inimical attitude towards metaphysical research. We shall see that the author to whose *magnum opus* this sketch is devoted made these very words his own motto. The Jewish religion is, by its nature, opposed to philosophic pursuits and metaphysical speculation in particular. Yet in spite of this, mediaeval Jewish literature has a chapter on religious philosophy which is as extensive as it is profound. So strange a fact demands an explanation, or at least an investigation.

Two factors united to draw the Jewish mind into the paths of philosophy. The first was that the Jews in the countries under Moslim rule were not behind in the scientific endeavours of their countrymen. They cultivated, in the first instance, those branches of

study which appealed to them spontaneously, such as medicine, astronomy, and kindred sciences. The result was a class of Jewish scientists in the secular sense, astronomers, mathematicians, and physicians.⁵ The most renowned of these was the philosopher and physician, Isaac Al Isrā'ili in Kairowān (9th to 10th cent.), whose philosophic writings are entirely free from religious tendencies.

In conjunction with the first factor we find the second, which was of a much more serious character, as it concerned the religious convictions of the masses. The existence of God is as much a postulate in Islām as in Judaism, but the indefinite nature of the fundamental dogmas of the former left the minds of the believers unsatisfied and depressed. Now this reveals an immense contrast between Judaism and Islām. Whilst the theology of the former developed throughout homogeneously on the basis of the Bible, leaving metaphysical questions entirely outside scholastic discussion, the full energy of the Jewish mind was allowed to fasten itself exclusively on the minutiae of religious practice. This process would probably not have been disturbed, or, in other words, Judaism would never have developed a religious philosophy, had it not been for the friction with Mohammedan theology. The latter ran much less smoothly. Islām had to fight its way from the outset. When its existence was assured, expansion by peaceful or bellicose means became one of its first duties. The forcible union of heterogeneous races and interests under one religious banner had its unavoidable consequences. By the combination of political, racial, and religious circumstances deep schisms were produced, and wide differ-

ences arose in the conception of the nature of God and His relations to man.

This led irresistibly to metaphysical speculations. These, however, were not pursued in anything like a systematic fashion till the writings of Greek philosophers, notably Plato and Aristotle, had been made accessible to the Mohammedan theologians. Philosophy called to the aid of religion produced the aid of *Kalām* (speculative theology), and a class of theologians who styled themselves *Mutakallims*. The latter found themselves compelled to supplement the teachings of the Korān by philosophic demonstrations of the existence of God, His attributes and character as Creator and Governor of the universe. They were, of course, unable to remove the stumbling-block of the Aristotelian theory of the eternity of matter, but they found an outlet by reverting to the Greek school of the Atomists, declaring the atom to have been created by God. In further adopting the Neo-Platonic theory of the emanation of spheres, they constructed a universe of the same astronomical aspect as the Ptolemaean system of planetary spheres.

This state of things also reacted on Judaism. The Karaite sect saw in the *Kalām* a convenient means of filling the gap left by their rejection of Rabbinic tradition. It even caused unrest among the Rabbanites, and threatened to taint the simple belief in the paternal government of God and His all-embracing providence, with scepticism. Positive evidence of this scepticism is given by Saadyāh, the oldest Jewish scholastic, in the introduction to his philosophic work on *Creeds and Beliefs* in the following words:⁶ 'What induced me to write this book was that I watched