AL-QIRQISĀNĪ ON THE OCCULT SCIENCES

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In the Karaite indictment of Rabbanite practices the tendency toward mysticism among some Rabbanite scholars, the popular use of occult devices (incantations, charms, amulets, etc.), the superstitious notions current among the Rabbanite commonalty, and the alleged lack of zeal on the part of the Rabbanite leadership in suppressing such practices have always stood high and go back to very early times, perhaps as early as the lifetime of the titular founder of Karaism, Anan ben David (second half of the 8th century). It was therefore perfectly natural for one of the major scholars of the golden age of Karaite literature (10th–11th century), Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī (second quarter of the 10th century), to devote considerable space to this subject in his voluminous Arabic code of Karaite law entitled Book of Lights and Watch Towers (Kitāb al-anwār wal-marāqib).

This subject is discussed in Chapters IX–XI of the sixth part (“discourse,” Arabic maqālah) of the Book of Lights, which deals with civil and criminal law and with the order of the liturgy. Chapter IX, of unusual length, deals with witchcraft, its nature, and its validity, and here the author finds himself in no difficulty in proving to his own satisfaction that any form of witchcraft is illicit. His argument runs, in brief, as follows:

1) The popular Rabbanite idea that miracles can be performed by anyone who gets hold of the “Name of Cleanliness” (the Ineffable Name of God) or of the “Name of Uncleanliness” (the secret name of Satan) leads to denial of all genuine prophecy, since it suggests that there is no real difference between the true God-inspired prophet (who performs genuine miracles) and the impostor (who uses trickery in performing quasi-miracles). This is tantamount to arrant heresy.

2) Those who disparage Biblical miracles (whom we would today call rationalists) say that these miracles can be explained in a

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01 Cf. Mann, Texts and Studies, 2:55–57, 74–94.
02 Edited by L. Nemoy (New York, 1939–45), 5 volumes.
perfectly natural way. Some natural substances have seemingly miraculous powers, e.g., the magnet's ability to attract iron without actually touching it first. Surely not all such extraordinary substances are already known to us — there may be many more of them still unknown. It is therefore possible, they say, that the Biblical miracles may have been the work not of genuine inspired prophets but of men persistent enough or lucky enough to have discovered some of these hitherto unknown natural substances, whose effect appeared miraculous to everyone else. The answer to this is obvious: would Almighty God have authorized Moses to use fraudulent tricks to prove his true and divinely inspired mission? Surely not. Moreover, outstanding Gentile scholars, such as Hippocrates, Aristotle, and Galen composed books on both the natural sciences and black magic — had they known of any substances that could have duplicated the Biblical miracles, they would have recorded them and exposed the trickery of the Hebrew prophets, seeing that these scholars did not regard them as true prophets.03

3) The argument that unknown natural factors may explain the prophetic miracles is not convincing. We postulate that all human creatures must eventually die, even though we have not first examined all of mankind in every part of the world, however inaccessible to us. One might equally well argue that somewhere, in a far corner of the earth, unknown to us, there are human beings who are immortal — an idea that we nevertheless insist is absurd. Yet the two propositions are quite similar — if one is absurd, so is the other. The same objection applies to all similar arguments suggesting allegedly unknown natural substances which cause seemingly miraculous phenomena.

4) The argument that since Pharaoh's magicians had duplicated some (not all) of Moses' miracles by trickery, his miracles also must have been fraudulent, is faulty in several ways: a) were this so, Pharaoh, with the help of his magicians, could have easily exposed Moses' trickery, without going to the trouble of causing the magicians to duplicate them; b) the assertion that Scripture itself does not expressly characterize the magicians' performance as trickery is mistaken, since Scripture does describe their feats with a term variously interpreted but un-

03 Since Hippocrates, Aristotle, and Galen were not Jews.
doubtedly implying something hidden or kept secret, which in this case must imply trickery.

5) The argument that whenever Pharaoh’s magicians did duplicate a miracle of Moses, their feat must have been as miraculous as his, as in the case of their rods having turned into serpents, is likewise untenable, because in the Hebrew text of the verse “And they (the magicians’ rods) became serpents” (Exod. 7:12), the word “serpents” is not the direct object of the verb “became” but is preceded by the preposition “unto,” which in such a construction implies in Hebrew not identity with, but only similarity to, as in “And the hearts of the people melted and became as (literally: unto) water” (Josh. 7:5)—the hearts surely did not actually turn into liquid water, but rather lost their solid firmness. Similar explanations on the ground of trickery are applicable to the other instances where the magicians seemed to duplicate Moses’ miracles. Particularly significant is the fact that while the magicians were seemingly able to duplicate some of the plagues inflicted by Moses upon the Egyptians, they were unable to provide relief from them—only Moses could do this.04

6) As for the witch of En-Dor supposedly resurrecting Samuel from the dead, the fact is that Scripture does not actually say that she did so, nor did she herself state that she did so. All that Scripture does say is that Saul heard a voice asking, “Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?” (1 Sam. 28:15). Saul himself did not actually see Samuel, for he had to ask the witch, “What seest thou?” (1 Sam. 28:13), to which she replied, “An old man” (1 Sam. 28:14)—she did not say, “I see Samuel.” The only possible rational explanation is that the whole performance was fraudulent: she had recognized Saul immediately upon his arrival—everyone in Israel had seen him more than

04 Cf. Aaron the younger ben Elijah (14th century), צ"ע וייס, ed. Franz Delitzsch (Leipzig, 1841), p. 173: “Just as Moses’ prophecy is unlike (בבדלא) the prophecy of the other (Hebrew) prophets, so is his testimony (ועזרוהו) exalted (נשבך) above the testimony of the other prophets . . . Also Moses’ signs (ראהות) are not of the same type (מקימי) as the signs of the others, for they are more mighty (ךךפיים) and strong . . . The truth is that a prophet cannot demonstrate the truth of his mission (לא זדך) except by a sign or a wonder which involves a change of nature (שуй הזדך).” Aaron then proceeds (pp. 173–74) to discuss the difference between true and false prophets.
once, and he was conspicuous by his tall and majestic figure—and she pretended at first not to have recognized him in order to obtain his explicit permission to ply her expressly forbidden craft in his case. The rest was all make-believe, and she disguised her voice to make it sound as if it was that of the resurrected Samuel. As for her prediction that Saul would soon die, the witch, being an intelligent woman and well aware of Saul’s precarious situation at that time, could not but conclude that his days were numbered. No prophetic foresight was involved here.

7) As for the Scriptural reference to a pseudo-prophet as foretelling “a sign or a wonder” (Deut. 13:2), which subsequently does indeed come to pass, two observations are pertinent here. First, Scripture does not always stamp would-be prophets with the adjective “false,” just as it does not always stamp heathen gods with this adjective—the reader is expected to understand this from the context. Secondly, since the false prophet receives no support from the one and only true God, the only signs and wonders that he can invoke are natural phenomena: he can predict only torrential rain, hail, snow, earthquake, and the like, which do in fact occur from time to time, however infrequently. If he guesses rightly, he gains his nefarious purpose; if he misses, all he risks is being called a liar. If God prevents his prediction from being realized, no harm is done; if not, it must be that God is testing Israel’s steadfastness in the faith, as well as their ability to recognize such quasi-signs and wonders which are not marks of true prophecy; further proof of genuine God-inspired mission is required, and if the would-be prophet goes so far as to advocate overtly disobedience of God, that alone is prima facie evidence that he is an impostor.

The extraordinary length of this indictment of witchcraft testifies to the seriousness with which al-Qirqisānī regarded this practice. The two following chapters, which deal with the two lesser occult practices, augury and astrology, are much shorter, and these practices are dismissed rather patronizingly as silly superstitions. The only guess that I can offer to explain this discrepancy is that to an early Karaite savant like al-Qirqisānī witchcraft was not only a mere superstition but also a serious trespass across the line which separates piety from impiety, as well as man from God. “Miracles and wonders” (אהובות ווסתרים), al-Qirqisānī seems to have thought, are the sole prerogative of Almighty God, performed directly by
Himself or indirectly through His authorized agents, the true prophets. They cannot be duplicated by human tricksters however knowledgeable, skilled, and quick of hand they may be. Any mortal who pretends otherwise would thus be laying at least a partial claim to divinity, which is of course a flagrant violation of the First Commandment. Not so the augurer and the astrologer, who base their prognostications on the flight of birds, the positions of the stars, and similar natural phenomena created by God—they can only express their own questionable and conjectural interpretations of the progress of these phenomena. These interpretations are worthless, sure enough, but they are not blasphemous, unlike the claims of the practitioners of witchcraft. The conclusion flowing from these considerations would seem to be that the consistent and unyielding opposition of Karaite scholars to witchcraft was dictated not so much by hardheaded rationalism and pragmatism as by their belief that such practice endangers the very validity of the First Commandment, which is the cornerstone of the Mosaic faith. This may explain why al-Qirqisānī placed his discussion of the occult sciences in the sixth part of his work, which covers nine of the Ten Commandments (the remaining Commandment of the Sabbath is discussed in the preceding—fifth—part of the work).

The chapter on augury opens with the arguments of those who consider augury licit and refer for Scriptural evidence to Eliezer, the patriarch Abraham’s steward, who used what they regard as augury in choosing Rebekah to be Isaac’s future wife (Gen. 24); and to Jonathan, who used what they consider augury in planning his attack on the Philistines (1 Sam. 14:9ff.). There are, replies al-Qirqisānī, two kinds of actions commonly regarded as constituting augury. One kind is passive: a person leaving his house on an errand is confronted by an unpleasant sight, and taking it as an unlucky omen, turns back; or is confronted by something pleasant and concludes that his errand will be successful. Although al-Qirqisānī does not expressly say so, he appears to be implying that the use of such omens, while ridiculous, is not illicit. What is illicit is “other things”—augury by examination of parts of an animal’s carcass; by observation of the flight of birds, of the trajectory of arrows, and of the behavior of other living creatures; by casting lots, and the like. The Scriptural proof of this is Ezekiel’s (21:26) reference to the king of Babylon who “standeth . . . to use divination; he shaketh the arrows to and fro, he inquireth of the teraphim”—al-Qirqisānī comments that “some identify this term
with the astrolabe,” the predecessor of the sextant—“he looketh in the liver.” Any other type of augury is similar to these scripturally forbidden types and is therefore equally illicit. Casting of lots is not only mentioned more than once in Scripture without condemnation of it, but is even occasionally prescribed by God’s command (Lev. 16:8–10, Num. 26:52–56). Such sortilege is obviously licit, both by virtue of the divine approval thereof and by its beneficent purpose to prevent disputes among men (as described by Solomon, Prov. 18:18). As for the episodes of Eliezer and Jonathan, no augury whatsoever was involved in them—both men simply prayed to God to vouchsafe them a sign and a guideline as to how they should proceed with their tasks.

The third chapter on the occult sciences deals with “stargazing,” i.e., astrology. Here, al-Qirqisānī tells us, one must distinguish between astrology and astronomy, which latter is the scientific study of the astral bodies, their movements in the celestial sphere, and the phenomena (like eclipses) connected with them. This is licit factual science containing nothing that “might injure religious faith or lead to impiety.” What is forbidden is astrology—“the knowledge of judgments and the science of hidden things . . . [which] comes under the heading of sorcery.” The fact that some predictions made by astrologers are fulfilled is no argument to the contrary—God has forbidden the practice of astrology, and that settles the matter. It is of no import whether astrology is or is not of any substance. Even supposing that God had endowed the heavenly bodies with some influence upon earthly affairs, it is not contradictory on His part to forbid mankind to practice astrology, just as it is not absurd on His part to create unclean animals and then prohibit the consumption of their flesh. Purely scientific study of astronomy, however, with no intent to practice it or with the aim to expose its falsity, is not forbidden, as long as it does not divert the student from his obligation to study Scripture and the holy ordinances.

In these two chapters al-Qirqisānī’s arguments are clearly less convincing than those in the chapter on witchcraft. The episodes of Eliezer and Jonathan hardly involve mere requests for divine guidance, as he would have us believe—both individuals choose their alternative omens and assign to them their own interpretations, while God is not stated to have had any part in the whole process. The distinction between permissible omens and forbidden
"other things" seems also questionable—an omen is an omen, whether it is merely encountered ready-made upon leaving one’s house or is deliberately derived by observation of an animal’s liver or of a bird’s flight. His reasoning is even less convincing when he outlaws all sortilege. Confronted by the fact that casting of lots is imposed by Mosaic law for the allotment of tribal territories in the Holy Land and is spoken of approvingly in the Book of Proverbs as a means to settle disputes, he obfuscates the whole matter by offering the lame answer that there are two different kinds of lots, one permitted and one forbidden, just as there are two different kinds of arrows, one used in augury and forbidden, and one used in warfare and permitted. Forbidden lot-casting, he argues, is practiced for the purpose of predicting future events, and is in fact a kind of augury, whereas scripturally authorized lot-casting has nothing to do with augury and is in any case stamped with the divine seal of approval. In the case of an individual as intelligent and clear-thinking as al-Qirqisānī, one can almost see him squirming with embarrassment as he wrote down these two chapters. Once more, lot-casting is lot-casting, and its one and only purpose is to help a person decide what course of action to take in the near future, which clearly comes under the definition of prediction, even when scripturally authorized.

So far as I know, al-Qirqisānī’s dissertation on the occult sciences is the longest and most detailed one in the older Karaite literature, if not in Karaite literature as a whole. What could have moved him to include such a detailed discussion of the subject in his voluminous legal code? The only likely explanation that I can think of is that the early lay (nonscholarly) Karaites, being

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05 Cf. the brief discussion in Bashatchi’s (15th century) אידא המית (Odessa, 1870), fol. 85bb–86aa, a little more than half a page. On the early Karaite characterization of the Rabbanite phylacteries as an amulet see Z. Ankorī, Karaites in Byzantium (New York and Jerusalem, 1959), pp. 282–83.

06 One must keep in mind at this point the rather remarkable fact that with the exception of Anan not a single Karaite scholar is known to have been a convert from Rabbanism. Had there been such learned converts, surely they would have been mentioned by the early Karaite apologists in their polemical tracts and their missionary sermons. Indeed some at least of such converts would probably have composed apologies pro domo sua to justify their conversion, as did some Jewish converts to Islam. Hence we are driven to the conclusion—at least until now and hitherto unknown evidence to the contrary is unearthed—that whatever success Karaite propaganda may have achieved among the Rabbanite lower classes (and
human, and being originally for the most part Rabbanite converts or descendants of Rabbanite converts, and living among, or in close proximity to, nonscholarly Rabbanites and Muslims, could not but be influenced to some extent by the magical and superstitious beliefs current among these non-Karaite neighbors, whose spiritual and lay leaders tolerated these beliefs, however reluctantly. It must have taken Karaite leadership a long time to eradicate such beliefs, if they ever succeeded in doing so. Presumably they were a long way from such success in al-Qirqisānī’s time, no more than a century and a half after Anan. We should therefore not be surprised if this devout and learned man felt it his bounden duty to do his utmost by discussing the subject in great detail and marshaling the most persuasive arguments that he could find to demonstrate its illicit and sinful nature.

One more feature of al-Qirqisānī’s attitude deserves notice. He mentions the Rabbanites only twice in Chapter IX: in the first section, where he criticises their use of the secret names of God and Satan in magical formulae, and in the last section, where he condemns the practice of both “the commonal ty (al-jamā‘ah) (of the sectaries)” and the Rabbanites of seeking favors from the dead, that is to say, of making pilgrimages to the graves of their forefathers and praying there for intercession. In the rest of his discussion here al-Qirqisānī speaks only of opponents, without specifying their affiliation as either Rabbanites or Karaites. Since the practicee of superstition is a major item in the Karaite j’accuse against Rabbanism, one is bound to wonder why al-Qirqisānī let the Rabbanites off with such a mild reprimand in this instance. The only explanation that occurs to me is this: sincere and faithful

even that seems to have been quite meager as a matter of fact, and the chief factor here was presumably the temptation to escape the heavy additional taxation exacted by the Rabbanite authorities to support the Jewish bureaucracy and the academies, it did not at any time affect in the least the Rabbanite scholarly elite. The composition of the early Karaite personnel seems to have included the following elements: (1) members of earlier sects which were absorbed by the rising Karaism; (2) disaffected Jewish emigrants who moved to the mountainous regions of Iran to escape their poverty in the main Jewish center of Iraq (Babylonia); and (3) the Ananites, that is to say, those recruited by Anan himself from the Iraqi Rabbanite community, whose number was, as al-Qirqisānī explicitly tells us (Kitāb al-anwār, 1:59, line 10), small and getting smaller. Even if there were any learned individuals among this latter element, and if they did compose any literary works, none of them has reached us. All of this is of course speculation, since we have no genealogical or statistical data to substantiate it.
adherent of Karaism as al-Qirqisānī was, he was also a highly intelligent and conscientious man, as well as a profound scholar devoted to scholarly truth as he saw it. He must have known full well that the Rabbanite leadership—the professional scholars and the communal political and economic leaders—were no more believers in amulets and other superstitions than were their opposite numbers on the Karaite side. If they did not rain anathemas on the practitioners of superstition among the common people, they did so not because they too believed in magic but because they realized that such a campaign was bound to fail—superstition was well entrenched among both the Muslim and the non-Muslim population of the Muhammadan Empire, and the majority of the Jews resident in it could not remain untouched by it. Indeed I cannot help wondering whether the Karaite leadership was any more effective in eradicating superstition from among its own constituency—they do not mention it, but does this mean that it did not exist? I am inclined to doubt it.

CHAPTER IX

ON THE NATURE OF WITCHCRAFT AND WHETHER THERE IS ANY TRUTH IN IT OR NOT

1. The type of witchcraft which is forbidden to be practiced is the one about which the performers thereof claim that it works miracles, transforms nature (qalb al-ṭabā‘i‘), sways (human) hearts toward love or hatred, generates illnesses in, or removes them from, (human) bodies without using such means as comestibles, potions, blows, or similar things, or that it counteracts all these by means of spoken, written, or otherwise expressed (incantations).

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1 A French translation, in part condensed and in part paraphrased, of these three chapters is included in the first installment (REJ 6/106 [1946]: 87–123) of the late lamented Georges Vajda’s “Études sur Qirqisānī.” Vajda’s main interest here was in comparing al-Qirqisānī’s views with those of contemporary Rabbanite (Gaonic) and Muslim scholars, and the reader interested in this aspect should certainly consult his highly valuable exposition of it. Needless to say, Vajda’s translation, stamped by his astounding expertise in the Judaeo-Arabic language and in medieval Jewish and Muslim philosophy and theology, helped me to understand better a number of difficult passages in the text.

2 Ğarb, which puzzled also Vajda, presumably means tapping or laying on of hands. But perhaps read aw ġarb mimā ashbaha dhalika, “(potions), or similar kinds of things.”
We have already mentioned that the Rabbanites give validity (athanbatu) to all these practices, and attribute them to two causes, namely, the (use of the) Name of Cleanliness (שֵׁם טָהֳרָה) and the Name of Uncleanliness (שֵׁם טַמָּא). They assert that he who gets hold of these two names, or of one of them, is enabled to perform miracles and transform nature. Now he who holds this view, that witchcraft is valid and is capable of working miracles, such as the resurrection of the dead and its like, must of necessity recognize no (true) prophet. For the proof of the prophet’s being a genuine messenger of the Master of both worlds (the present and the next) lies in his performance of such miracles as cannot be worked except with God’s help. Therefore, if such miracles can be performed, in one way or another, by others who have not been commissioned by God, we cannot be sure but that this man who claims to be a (true) prophet may have successfully performed the particular miracle by the same means as were used by the other (false) prophet, who is neither a (genuine) prophet nor a (genuine) messenger of God. In which case religion (dīn), prophecy, and (revealed) law (sharī‘ah) are set at naught.

2. Let us now mention the arguments of those who attack prophecy on the ground that it is witchcraft and trickery (hiyal) and cite Scriptural accounts (as evidence). They say that these accounts of prophets performing miracles and transforming nature, if true, may be explained as signifying performances with the aid of certain kinds of trickery. For we know that there are in the world certain natural substances (tabā‘i‘i‘) which cause unusual effects, such as moving things without [touching them for a considerable] distance, as does the magnetic stone, which moves iron and attracts it to itself without (first) touching it. A similar (natural) phenomenon are certain plants, which when cast into water cause fish to flee out of the water and unto dry land; or echium juice,

3 That is to say, the Ineffable Name of God and the secret name of Satan.

4 The text has wal-rasūl, “and the prophet”; but the context seems to require “wal-rasūliyāh, “apostleship, prophecy.” But perhaps the word should be read wal-rasūl, as an (unusual) verbal noun.

5 Lacuna in the text.

6 Al-ukhyūn, ϰχθβ, a plant (weed) of which there are a number of varieties in the Near East (J. Thibaut, Flore Libano-Syrienne [Cairo, 1936], 1:353–54), found also in Europe and North America (viper’s bugloss). Cf. I. Loew, Flora der Juden, 1:291. Vajda emends the term to akhawayn, a dark red resin (dragon’s blood)
which colors water (red), so that he who sees it mistakes it for blood; or the stone that is placed under a woman who experiences a difficult delivery and causes her to give birth immediately; or numerous herbs and minerals which cure diseases, and others which cause death and mortal agony.

3. Now, (continue the opponents of prophecy), since these things are found in the world, and since many individuals—but not all—have witnessed their action and have become acquainted with them, it is possible that there are in the world other things even more potent in their effect than these and more difficult to find (wa-aa'azzu wujudan), which have remained unknown to those who were familiar with the aforementioned things, but were discovered by someone who searched for them more diligently and more ambitiously, particularly such a one whose ambition moved him to claim prophetic authority. It is therefore possible that those who claimed prophecy discovered these (more potent) substances by intensive search, investigation, and diligence, which their predecessors failed to exhibit, and were consequently enabled to do whatever they had in fact done.

4. They believe that their arguments are supported by what (Pharaoh's) magicians had done in confronting Moses and Aaron with the same (miraculous) performances, such as turning a staff into a serpent and water into blood, and generating frogs. Should anyone, they say, object by citing the magicians' inability to duplicate (the plagues of) gnats and itching (boils), as it is said, "Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God'" (Exod. 8:15), and "And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were upon the magicians" (Exod. 9:11), they would reply thus: People are unequal in regard to superior cleverness in the arts and sciences. It is therefore possible that Moses and Aaron had discovered some natural phenomena as well as tricks and scientific facts of which the magicians were not aware.

5. We would reply to him who holds this view as follows: Tell us about the transformation of the staff into a serpent, about the

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derived from various trees, especially from the fruit of the Malayan palm (calamus draco).

7 The text has altaf, "more gentle," which does not seem to fit the context.

8 That is to say, the magnet, the echium juice, etc.
generation of frogs, and about the transformation of water into blood—do you assert that these acts constitute (genuine) miracles which prove (Moses’) prophecy or do they not? Should they say that they are not miracles, and that he who performed them need not necessarily be acknowledged as a (true) prophet, we would reply: What was the purpose then of arming the prophet (Moses) with them and commanding him to put them into execution and to use them as evidence (of his divine mission), seeing that they do not in fact represent such evidence? Would this not have served rather as evidence that the One who had commissioned (Moses) as His messenger was indulging in idle trifling (‘abath)? Should he then admit that these performances were indeed (genuine) miracles and could serve as evidence and proof (of true prophecy)—and he cannot but admit it—we would say to him further: But was not he who had performed these acts, (that is to say, Moses), and offered them as evidence (of his divine mission) confronted with the fact that others also had performed similar acts? This being so, it follows, as we have said before, that these (similar) acts were mere tricks, and that the subsequent acts, (that is to say, plagues), which the magicians could not duplicate, were due to Moses’ greater skill in discovering what the others (that is to say, the magicians) were unable to discover.9

6. They also refer for proof to the verse, “A woman that divineth by a ghost” (1 Sam. 28:7), and claim that she (actually) brought Samuel back to life, so that Saul could speak to him and learn from him what he desired (to know). They refer further to God’s statement in the Torah that the false prophet may offer as proof of his prophetic mission an indication (dalîl), a sign (āyah), or a forecast (burhān), and that the forecast or sign may (actually)

9 Which does not imply that Moses too was a trickster (since his skill was given him by God)—an assertion that amounts to downright heresy. In other words, the argument that Moses’ miracles were not genuine and were merely the fruit of his greater erudition in the natural sciences leads inevitably to questioning the truth of the Mosaic religion. Al-Qirqisânî thus places him who does not believe in miracles in a no-win position: he must either believe in the miracles wrought by Moses or else give up his Mosaic faith. I am not sure that I understand what Vajda meant to say in his footnote, “Afin de séparer le problème du miracle de celui de la prophétie Qirqisânî fait mine d’abonder dans le sens des négateurs de celle-ci.” The gist of al-Qirqisânî’s argument is the simple idea that if man, by his own skill, can work miracles, he is in fact equal to the Deity; and if so, why should man submit to the will of the Deity or indeed assume that the Deity exists? Which of course leads to complete atheism.
come to pass, to wit, "If there arise in the midst of thee a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, [and he give thee a sign or a wonder], and the sign or the wonder come to pass" (Deut. 13:2–3)—this, (they say), is an (explicit) Scriptural text that cannot be disregarded.

7. Let us now demonstrate the falsehood of their view that their aforesaid (arguments) constitute a refutation (ta'ān) of (true) prophecy; (we shall do it) on the basis of both reason and Scriptural tradition (khabar). As for their statement that there are in the world natural substances which produce uncommon effects, such as the magnetic stone and others, and that would-be prophets had discovered some such substances that were unknown to anyone else, and were thus enabled to do whatever they did do—this is impossible. For although most men are not equal in the (mastery of the) sciences and arts and in the knowledge of the secrets of nature, many of them did achieve such mastery, for example, the philosophers who discovered plants and minerals which produce numerous effects, and who composed works about them. Should we postulate that they had received this knowledge from the (Hebrew) prophets, [that would prove our point].10 But let us leave this line of argument for the present, and follow another line: Those who obtained this (superior) knowledge were not limited to only one or two individuals, but rather constituted a large group, for example, Hippocrates, Aristotle, Galen, and others, a considerable company withal. Had there been (additional) natural substances and (similar) things which produce effects other than those mentioned by them, they would have recorded them by including them in their writings, just as they had included other such substances of which they were aware or had learned about, especially considering the accounts that had reached them of the (Hebrew) prophets who had performed miracles (jarā'īh) and whom they did not regard as true prophets. Had it seemed possible to them, or had they known (for certain), that even a single thing performed by these prophets was executed by means of a trick or by a natural process, they would have revealed and exposed it. Their failure to do so indicates that (they knew that) no trick or natural process was involved. Moreover, these philosophers had also composed works on black magic,11 trickery, and feats of sleight of hand (khīfah), as well as other works on

10 The bracketed apodosis is not in the Arabic text but is understood.
11 Al-nayranjīyāt, Persian nayrang.
automata, none of which resembles anything performed by the prophets in the way of wonders and miracles, nor is it like it, nor is it of the same type. This is one of the most potent arguments in support of what we have said, to the effect that the actions of the prophets and their feats cannot be anything but the doings of the Master of the worlds. We shall explain this more clearly later on.

8. In reply to their argument that those who maintain (the authenticity of) the prophets’ miracles had not examined nor learned their full extent, nor had they acquainted themselves with the world’s natural forces (tablātī al-ʿālam) which may be utilized in such performances, one may say as follows: Do you assert that neither you nor anyone else living under the revolving sphere (of the world) has at his disposal a device that might prevent you from dying? Should they reply, “Yes,” one may go on to say: Why do you assert this? You have no full (personal) knowledge of the existence of most creatures—you did not track them down to their habitats, you did not examine their powers nor learn the potentiality and extent thereof. Neither did you search the world in order to learn its natural forces which might be employed to produce (certain) effects, just as fire is used to effect combustion. Nor did you count up all tricks, nor learned their limits.

9. Our respondent might then reply: But this is not what is claimed concerning the prophets’ miracles. There is no disagreement or doubt about (the inevitability of) death, whereas there is much disagreement about the claims regarding the prophets’ miracles. There is no disagreement or doubt about (the inevitability of) death, whereas there is much disagreement about the claims regarding the prophets’ miracles. The answer to this is as follows: Your attack on prophecies is based not on the disagreement concerning them but on your rejection of the assertion that all other persons were unable to reproduce the feats ascribed to the prophets, on the ground that this assertion is not based on (factual) knowledge of the existence of (the rest of) the totality of mankind, the potentiality of their powers, the extent of their tricks, and (in general) the facts about all the natural forces in the world which act as mediators between the actor and the reactor (al-fāʾīl

12 Literally “self-moving figures” (al-ashkāl al-mutaḥarrikah min dhātihā).
13 Literally “trick” (hilah).
14 Al-nubuwwāt; one would have expected al-anbiyāʾ, “the prophets,” or at least the singular al-nubuwwah, “prophecy.”
wal-maʃ‘ūl). Now then, tell us about those who are agreed that there is no stratagem that can prevent death—did they ascertain the truth of this by way of such (exhaustive) investigation as you have just described, or in some other way? If by way of the former, it would follow that there is no man who knows that there is no stratagem to prevent death but that he had first examined most exhaustively the forces of both trickery and nature—which is patently absurd. If in some other way, then it is possible to assume man’s inability (to prevent death) without first examining (the totality of mankind, of tricks, and of nature). This sets at nought your entire claim in this matter, for once it is granted that we may assume, without (exhaustive) examination, that mankind cannot avoid death, we may equally well assume, without (exhaustive) examination, that mankind cannot reproduce the feats of the prophets—there is no difference (between the two propositions).

10. Should the respondent object that the philosophers teach that the composition (tarkīb) of living creatures necessitates (eventual) death, the answer is as follows: Even if this is so, it does not nullify what was said before, since this conclusion (of eventual death) was reached (likewise) without (exhaustive) examination—indeed it strengthens it. Moreover, nothing differentiates you from him who asserts that the composition (of living creatures) does not necessitate (eventual) death, for how can it do so seeing that the decay of the composition removes life, even though the factor of death may not have affected life for (as long as) one hundred years? Were the reverse possible, there would be no difference between the causative factor and the noncausative one (bayn al-mūjib wa-bayn ghayr al-mūjib).

11. The respondent may then reply: I do not deny what you have said about death, and that it may be possible to prevent it by artificial or natural means. To which the answer is as follows: Even so you cannot deny that you may discover this (artificial or natural means) next day or even next hour. Should he retort that this is

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15 If I understand the argument correctly, the retort is that life and death are mutually opposite factors and cannot coexist in the same body at the same time. There is no death factor in a living creature so long as its composition is healthy; only when decay or disease disturbs the composition does the factor of death enter into the creature’s organism. Prior to that point, death is no more than an external factor, in no way connected with life, lurking outside the organism and waiting for an opportunity to invade it.
possible but highly improbable, the answer to this is: Even so you do not know but that some man may this very year go out to some mountain and obtain (there) a natural substance which, when brought near to water, would attract it, just as the magnetic stone attracts iron. Should he admit that the two (propositions) are indeed analogical, the further reply is: Even so it is possible that one might get hold of a natural substance that would pull the stars down from heaven. Should he say that this is impossible, because there is no homogeneity between the stars and terrestrial things, such as would make it possible for the one to attract the other, the answer is: How do you know that there is on earth no heavenly form forcibly held on it, as distinct from one which has the power to leave the earth after a day or two? 16 Have you examined the (whole) earth and every thing that is upon it? Have you searched (all) land and (all) sea? Can you offer anything more than the fact that you have never found nor seen such a (heavenly) form (on earth)? If it is permissible for you to make a judgment about the whole world and all that is in it without any search or examination, merely on the ground that you have never found what you yourself admit is possible, then it is equally permissible for us to make a judgment about all mankind, to the effect that no man can split the sea or perform the other feats of the prophets, on the ground that we have never found nor seen anyone else perform these feats.

12. Should the opponent say that such a (prophetic) feat is possible (by other means) because it is analogous to the magnetic stone’s attraction of iron, even though we have never seen it (actually performed by nonprophets), we would answer as follows: The attraction of the magnetic stone also resembles the (aforementioned prophetic) feats about which we have asked you—admit then that they too are possible, even though you have not seen them (performed) with your own eyes, because you have seen similar feats. If you thereupon admit this also, you will have to admit further that there may be one or two natural substances which, when intermixed and combined in a certain way and held on to, will enable one to climb up above the heaven or even to the highest celestial sphere, or will enable him to pull people out of their places (of residence). Moreover, this argument can be pur-

16 Presumably meaning atmospheric precipitation, which evaporates and returns to the atmosphere after a while.
sued further as far as the creation of elements (\(a\,\text{yān}\)) and formation of bodies. Should the opponent retort that the latter is known naturally (\(tībā\,\text{an}\)) to be impossible, the answer is: So is what the prophets had done, in the way of the splitting of the sea, the movement of the two pillars of fire and cloud, the transformation of rivers, pools, and other waters found in that land (of Egypt) into blood—all this is known to be naturally impossible for anyone other than the first Creator, who had originated the natural properties of substances and creatures. There is thus no difference (between the two propositions).

13. Should anyone of our opponents go back to questioning (us) and say: Is there not in the world a stone which attracts iron? Upon our replying, “Certainly,” should he go on by saying, “Then you cannot deny that there may be something in the world which can make water stand still without drying it up and prevent it from flowing.” we would reply as follows: It is incumbent upon one to know that this is not so, just as it is incumbent upon one to know that there is nothing in the world that can prevent death, restore melted pupils (of the eyes) or severed legs, cure congenital paralysis, pull the sun and the moon out of their places, cause a stone to hang still in the air, or prevent normal eyesight from noticing a compact person in a lighted environment. Just as a (negative) judgment is unavoidable concerning all the aforementioned things, without any preliminary research and examination—and all minds are agreed on this point—so too is a (negative) judgment unavoidable concerning that which we have denied, namely, that there is a thing in the world which can split the sea and hold water still, without (preliminary) research and examination.

14. Should our opponents go back to the magicians’ imitation of Moses and Aaron, we shall now discuss this point, with God’s help. Let us begin with their first argument concerning Scripture’s explicit statement that the magicians’ rods turned likewise into serpents. No one can deny that Pharaoh was a puissant king and an absolute monarch, whereas Moses and Aaron were despised, lowly, and humble individuals, members of a nation enslaved under Pharaoh’s hand. When they came to Pharaoh bearing the message of the Master of the worlds, Pharaoh began by denying Him who had sent them, as it is said, “(And Pharaoh said...)'I know not the Lord’” (Exod. 5:2). Now the Creator had commanded them beforehand that “should Pharaoh demand that you show proof (of your mission), let Aaron cast down his rod, and it
will turn into a serpent,” as it is said, “When Pharaoh shall speak unto you, saying, ‘Show a wonder for you,’ ” etc. (Exod. 7:9); and so it came to pass, as it is said, “And Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent” (Exod. 7:10). Scripture then goes on to tell that Pharaoh summoned the magicians, who proceeded to perform a similar feat. Now none of our opponents claims that the feat of the magicians was of the same kind as the feat of Moses and Aaron—that is to say, that it was effected by the Master of the worlds—nor did Pharaoh make such a claim in behalf of his associates and magicians. What our opponents do claim is (the opposite, that is to say), that the feat of Moses and Aaron was of the same kind as the feat of the magicians, namely, a trick. Likewise, Pharaoh ordered his associates and magicians to imitate Moses and Aaron only after he had first denied the Creator, so as to show Moses and Aaron that “what you allege has come from the Creator has in fact not (come from Him), as you assert, since I have at my service and with me such men as can perform similar feats.” This is one of the preliminary considerations that must be put forward.

15. Then we would say further that since Pharaoh was a mighty, puissant, and absolute king, it is unlikely that when Moses and Aaron displayed to him this wonderful sign, they should have employed a trick or a delusion (tamwīh), since Pharaoh could have easily uncovered it and convicted them of it, considering his might and their weakness. Had they indeed employed trickery, Pharaoh could have demonstrated and uncovered it, and would have had no need to remonstrate with them, since the exposure would have covered them with shame. Moses and Aaron, on the other hand, had no power to uncover the trickery of Pharaoh's associates or to demonstrate and investigate it, because of their aforementioned lowly status and their being no more than two ordinary individuals (wa-waḥdatihimā). It was God Himself who exposed and uncovered it, by way of Aaron's rod swallowing the magicians' rods. This fact is the strongest confirmation of the difference between the feat of Moses and Aaron and the feat of the magicians.

16. Our opponents might object by arguing as follows: But Scripture does not differentiate between the performance of Moses and Aaron and that of the magicians, nor does it indicate that the latter worked by trickery or delusion; on the contrary, Scripture
says (of the magicians’ rods), “And they became serpents” (Exod. 7:12), just as it says of Aaron(’s rod), “And it became a serpent” (Exod. 7:10). Now this is the most potent objection that can be offered in this matter, and the answer thereto is as follows: The statement that Scripture does not indicate that the magicians worked by trickery or delusion is false, for Scripture does indeed expressly indicate that trickery was employed, since it says about everything that the magicians succeeded in doing, as well as about everything that they did not succeed in doing, “with their secret arts (be-latehem)” (Exod. 7:22), meaning their arts of delusion, although some interpret the expression as “with their subtlety.”

Whichever way the (Hebrew) expression is interpreted, it refers to something hidden, as in “Speak with David secretly (ba-lat)” (1 Sam. 18:22), “And the king covered (la'at) his face” (2 Sam. 19:5), “The face of the covering (ha-loť) that is cast over all peoples” (Isa. 25:7), and “It is here wrapped (lutah) in a cloth” (1 Sam. 21:10). “With their secret arts” must therefore indicate something hidden and covered up, (obviously) meaning (in this case) trickery and delusion.

17. As for the Scriptural statement that “the magicians did in like manner (with their secret arts)” (Exod. 8:3), it refers only to (their) visible anxious efforts in seeking (to duplicate Moses’ and Aaron’s) performance, since Scripture uses the same term in reference to occasions when they were unsuccessful, for example, “And the magicians did so with their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not” (Exod. 8:14). The statement “they could not” indicates that the immediately preceding expression “did so” refers only to their busy efforts to effect a similar and parallel performance, and not to their actual success (in duplicating Moses’ and Aaron’s feat).

18. What is left (to explain), then, is the statement (about the magicians’ rods) that “they became serpents” (Exod. 7:12), which is the strongest part of the objection. The answer to this is that the preposition le- (in the word le-tanninim, “to serpents”) refers sometimes not to the thing itself but rather to something resembling it or (seemingly) like it, for example, “And the hearts of the

17 From the root laut, “to wrap or cover tightly.”

18 Reading, rather ungrammatically, bi-le-atahem, derived from at, “gentleness, softness.”
people melted, and became as water (le-mayim)” (Josh. 7:5)—the hearts did not actually turn into water, Scripture likening them to water merely on account of their having become as soft\(^{19}\) as water. A similar instance is “And he became as a stone (le-eben)” (1 Sam. 25:37)—Nabal did not actually become a stone, rather he became so stricken and upset by exceeding grief that he looked like a stone. So also the expression “they became serpents” must mean “they looked like serpents.” So much for the argument that the (magicians’) rods turned into serpents.

19. As for their objection concerning the magicians turning water into blood, this matter too is perfectly clear and evident: Scripture has (previously) stated that every kind of water available in Egypt had already been turned into blood after Aaron struck it (with his rod), as it is said, “Over their rivers, over their streams, and over their pools, and over all their ponds of water, that they may become blood” (Exod. 7:19), thus embracing all streams, all canals, all pools, all reservoirs of water, down to water in vessels, as it is said, “both in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone” (ibid.). This being so, it follows that there was no water whatsoever, held in any container in Egypt, which the magicians might have transformed (into blood). Hence they must have exercised their trickery and delusion over newly drawn water, namely, from wells newly dug by the Egyptians to drink from, as it is said, “And all the Egyptians digged roundabout the river for water to drink” (Exod. 7:24). This must have involved (water in) a shallow excavation\(^{20}\) or in a vessel (filled therefrom), hence it would have been easy for the magicians to throw something into it to dye it, and it is this that is conveyed by the Scriptural statement that they did it “with their secret arts” (Exod. 7:22). Not so did the two saintly men, (Moses and Aaron)—it is exceedingly unlikely that they would have employed any sort of trick or delusion that can be conceived by human minds and senses in concert.

20. The first proof of (the genuineness of Moses’ and Aaron’s) miracle is the fact that the blood was, as stated above, everywhere, even in (all domestic) vessels—it is impossible that Moses and Aaron could have managed to enter the domiciles of all the

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\(^{19}\) Literally “weak” (da’fihî).

\(^{20}\) The water level of the Egyptian soil being high, owing to the proximity of the river Nile.
population of Egypt and to dye the water found therein by exercising their trickery. Secondly, had Moses and Aaron wished to dye (all) the waters in rivers, canals, and ponds by casting into them some substance that would dissolve in them and change their color, they would have needed an amount of that substance that could not be transported by all the beasts of burden on earth, since it would have exceeded the (total) number (of grains) of sand (in the world). Thirdly, even were this possible and feasible for standing waters, it would still have been impossible for flowing waters which are constantly changing, so that dyed water would be replaced each instant by water yet undyed, particularly considering that this condition was going on for some time, since Scripture informs us that the Egyptians had dug wells for drinking water. 21 Could such an idea appeal to (dumb) beasts, much less to those who possess (human) intellects? Is it possible then that such a (protracted and universal) wonder could have been performed except by the action of the Omnipotent Master who had created (all) creation and originated (all) nature, and is able to reverse and change it according to His wish?

21. As for the (plague of) frogs, there are some herbs which, when cast into water, cause fish and other living creatures to flee onto (dry) land, either because of the herb’s odor or because of some other characteristic of it, just as many creatures, such as vermin and other (noxious) animals, flee when the places infested by them are fumigated (with some particular substance), as for example snakes, which flee from a place that has been fumigated with a (burning) stag’s horn. There are many other such substances, some of which we have mentioned in (our) Commentary on Genesis. Of the same nature was also the act of the magicians (in bringing forth frogs), since Scripture uses for it the same expression “with their secret arts” (Exod. 8:3). But the same cannot be assumed of Moses’ feat, for the same reason as explained above about the (immense) multitude (of frogs all over the land of Egypt), so that the (generation of even a) lesser multitude by trickery would have been impossible, as it is said, “And the river shall swarm with frogs, which shall go up and come unto thy

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21 Hence any sort of trick would have had to retain its effectiveness for an extensive period of time.
house . . . and upon thy people, and upon all thy servants” (Exod. 7:28–29).

22. An even stronger argument than all these, or (at least) as strong, is the fact that Moses not only inflicted the plague but also provided relief from it, whereas the magicians were able to do only the lesser part, (namely, inflict the plague), and were unable to remove the (consequent) affliction which overtook them. Indeed, they and their king implored and demanded of Moses that he relieve them of it, the king saying to him, “Once you relieve us, I will do this (that you demand of me).” Once Pharaoh set a time (for the relief), 22 Moses did what Pharaoh demanded of him. This, too, is one of the miraculously marks and splendid proofs which show the distinction between the work of the Creator and the work of the magicians, God having thus safeguarded His cause 23 against attack by an unbeliever (mukhālīf). Much praise and gratitude be to Him!

23. As for what our opponents rely on in the matter of “a woman that divineth by a ghost” (1 Sam. 28:7) and her actually resurrecting Samuel, Scripture does not say that she did so, nor does it say that she said that she had resurrected him. The most that they can rely on in this case is the Scriptural statement, “And Samuel said to Saul, ‘Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?’” (1 Sam. 28:15). Those who hold our view have two answers to this argument. First, the woman had recognized both Saul and Samuel. As for Saul, he was king, and it is the way of a king to be known (by sight to his subjects); moreover, he was noticeable by a mark present in no other person, namely, his exceptionally tall figure. As for her recognizing Samuel, he used, while living, to make a circuit every year through the entire Land of Israel, dispensing judgment to the people, as it is said, “And he went from year to year in circuit of Beth-El, (and Gilgal, and Mizpah, and he judged Israel)” (1 Sam. 7:16). As for Saul, everything that she said to him which indicates that she had not recognized him was obviously a ruse on her part in order to obtain (his) leave to use her tricks of make-believe. Hence the expression “and Samuel said to Saul” represents her own words, spoken by her but attributed (by her) to Samuel, with no factual basis for it.

22 Cf. Exod. 8:5–6.

23 Literally “arguments” (hujajahu).
24. It is possible, however, that Scripture meant by “and Samuel said (to Saul)” (1 Sam. 28:15) that Saul had thought and believed that it was Samuel who was speaking to him. A similar case is the Scriptural statement, “And the men pursued after them the way to the Jordan” (Josh. 2:7)—the men (of Jericho) did not actually pursue after them, since these (Israelite spies) had not yet left the house (of Rahab), as it is said, “But she had brought them up to the roof” (Josh. 2:6); rather the men of Jericho thought and believed that they were pursuing the spies. So, too, Saul thought and believed (that Samuel was speaking to him). As for the statement, “And tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me” (1 Sam. 28:19), that was a matter of conjecture and surmise (on her part), aware as she was of Saul’s weakened and faint-hearted condition, his inability to devise a (strategic) ruse (against the Philistines), and his liability for his transgression, as well as of the approach of the armies of the Philistines and their might. All these things having now come together, it was evident (to her) that Saul and his army were doomed to be slain and perish. Possibly Saul’s servants,24 too, had realized all this.25

25. The second answer is as follows: Saul was in sore straits, with the (Philistine) enemy approaching against him. He had inquired of God in every (possible) way, but God would not answer him at all. Thus dire necessity and exceeding danger drove him to seek what he needed from the “woman that divineth by a ghost.” When he reached her, it so happened that at that same time it pleased the Creator to inform Saul of what was to happen to him and of what the consequences of his transgression were to be. Thus it was He who had resurrected Samuel at that very time, so that he

24 Who had recommended the witch of En-Dor to Saul (1 Sam. 28:7).

25 The Arabic reads wa-hadhā mā laʿalla al-ṣibyān qad kānū yaqīfitā nā alayhi. Vajda translates it “c'est une chose que peut être les enfants n'ont pas ignorée.” To the best of my judgment this translation is logically and grammatically impossible: if the matter is so elementary, why the “peut être”? And the pluperfect sense of kānū yaqīfitā is hardly the right one to express “should know.” To be sure, ṣibyān is used in the sense of “children, teenagers,” but it is also often used for full-grown young men (like the English “lads”) acting as servants or attendants to a master or a military leader. The general logic of the sentence seems to be evident: Saul’s “lads” were aware of his desperate situation and were intelligent enough to realize that he was doomed, but could not very well tell him so. So they referred him to the witch, confident that she knew the situation just as well and would find a way to say so to Saul without exposing herself to his wrath.
might inform Saul of whatever he informed him of. Scripture does not say that it was the woman who had resurrected Samuel, nor did she say so, nor is there any evidence whatsoever of it in the whole story. Indeed Scripture goes on to say, “And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice” (1 Sam. 28:12)—she must have screamed and cried out for no other reason than that she saw something frightening, which she had not foreseen and had not expected that it would come to pass. She was aware of Saul’s (desperate) situation, of his having inquired of God through the prophets and through others, and of God’s refusal to answer him. She also realized that God would not have resurrected Samuel at that time except for the sake of a person like Saul; hence she recognized Saul26 and said to him, “Why hast thou deceived me?” (1 Sam. 28:12), since she feared for her own life, lest he should slay her, seeing that he had previously put away witches and sorcerers.27 That is why he said to her, “Be not afraid; for what seest thou?” (1 Sam. 28:13), to which she replied, “I see a godlike being, coming up out of the earth” (ibid.). She thus stated only that she had seen something that had just happened—she did not say that it was of her own doing. So much in answer to this inquiry.

26 As for our opponents’ reference to the verse, “And the sign or wonder come to pass” (Deut. 13:3), this implies not a true sign, wonder, or proof but rather something that the false prophet claims is a sign and proof in his favor and confirms the truth of what he says. A similar instance is the fact that a false prophet is (sometimes) called (simply) “prophet” without further specification, meaning that he is a prophet only in his own mind and claim, as for example in the verse, “And all the (false) prophets prophesied before them” (1 Kings 22:10). Similarly idols are sometimes called “gods” without any further specification, even though they are not true deities but are merely taken for deities by some people.

27 The Arabic reads fa-‘alimat annahu huwa huwa, immediately preceded by li-mithli Shā‘īl. Hence huwa huwa must, I think, refer to Saul. Vajda refers the pronoun to Samuel and translates “et elle sut que (le personnage apparut là) était bien Samuel,” which seems illogical to me: this entire answer assumes that the witch did not right off recognize Saul by his height and royal demeanor—both were probably much reduced by that time by his misfortunes. The immediately following “for she said to him, ‘Why hast thou deceived me?’” must of necessity refer to Saul, which is why Vajda was forced to insert a bracketed “(à Saul)” after “she said.”
The same applies to this chapter (of Deuteronomy) which begins with “If there arise in the midst of thee a prophet, or a dreamer (of dreams)—that is to say, a would-be prophet—‘and he give thee a sign’ (Deut. 13:2)—that is to say, present a sign or proof by saying, “Tomorrow there will come down a violent rain,” or “an earthquake,” or “hail,” or “a snowfall,” or “violent thunder and lightning.” Now it is the nature of such phenomena to occur at times in the world, so that his statement to this effect is either a matter of conjecture and surmise, or is based on some (natural) sign, or is (pure) guessing. If this (forecast) actually comes to pass, he considers himself entitled to (prophetic) authority; if it does not come to pass, he will proffer some kind of reason or excuse. The worst that could happen to him is to be accused of lying, and he is not (particularly) concerned about it.

Now when the would-be prophet makes such a prediction, it is in God’s power to prevent it from coming to pass. If God does not prevent it, if what the would-be prophet has predicted does come to pass, and if its coming to pass is a matter of the (natural) course of things and the world’s wont, (it is evident that) God did not prevent it because He wished to test Israel, as it is said, “For the Lord your God putteth you to proof,” etc. (Deut. 13:4). A similar instance is the young Levite’s statement, “And the priest said unto them, ‘Go in peace; before the Lord is your way wherein ye go’” (Judg. 18:6), thus forecasting their (going in) safety; and so it came to pass, and they were successful. Yet this young Levite was not a prophet—it was merely a matter of safety favoring (indiscriminately) both the righteous and the wicked. Possibly the reason for safety favoring them in this instance was the aforecited “For the Lord your God putteth you to proof.”

27. Our opponents might object by saying that the would-be prophet might say to the people, seeing that what he had predicted has come to pass, “I had told you about what was hidden, and what I had told you has come to pass—why then do you brand me a liar?” The answer is that the would-be prophet is not justified in asking such a question, for the people may reply, “What you told us was not a miraculous thing nor one that does not (ordinarily) happen—(on the contrary), it is its nature to happen. We often see a conjecturer and surmiser predicting things that come naturally to pass in the world, and they subsequently do come to pass, which does not make him a prophet. Such kind (of prediction) is not the
mark of a (genuine) prophet. Moreover, God has already told us that He would not prevent such things as you, (the false prophet), have foretold, in order to put us to proof and test us. Therefore we need not pay any attention to what you say."

28. Should one object by saying: If the false prophet claims that a miraculous thing is to occur, and it does occur, notwithstanding his calling (the people) to acts of disobedience (to God), should then his call be accepted (and acted upon)?—the answer is as follows: Your objection is null and void, for none but a true prophet can have a miracle take place in his behalf, and a true prophet will not call to an act of disobedience. Should the objector refer to the verse, "When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken" (Deut. 18:22), we would reply: That is a perfectly true statement, namely, that anyone who predicts something, and it does not come to pass, is indubitably a liar; Scripture, however, does not imply at the same time that if he predicts something, and it does come to pass, he is (necessarily) a true prophet, since such a case may occur when "(the Lord your God) putteth you to proof" (Deut. 13:4). (To sum up), He who predicts something, and it does not come to pass, must be judged to be a liar absolutely; he who predicts something, and it does come to pass, may be either truthful or lying in his claim (to true prophecy), but the truth of his claim has to be ascertained in other ways.

29. One may object further by saying: Does not Jeremiah say, "The prophet that prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord hath truly sent him" (Jer. 28:9), thus stating that the mark of the true prophet is that what he predicts does come to pass? Surely peace customarily does come to pass in the world. The answer to this is that the verse just cited is part of Jeremiah's conversation with Hananiah, who falsely claimed prophecy, and who called Jeremiah a liar for predicting that Nebuchadnezzar will come and demolish the Temple and will seize the remainder of the (holy) vessels. At the same time Hananiah announced the good tidings that the vessels seized at the time of the abduction of Jehoiachin will be returned within two years. Thereupon Jeremiah, wishing to demonstrate Hananiah's lying, refuted his claim by referring to what was to occur soon, saying, "The prophet that
prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass,” that is to say, “The prediction that you have just made, and the good tidings of peace that you have just announced—if you are right in this, the truth of it will be proven by the coming to pass of this peace, whereupon it will be known that you had spoken at the Lord’s bidding, and that so also did the others who had made the same claim at this time.” It was not Jeremiah’s intention to imply thereby that anyone who prophesies peace, and whose prediction comes to pass, is to be regarded as a true prophet—he meant only Hananiah and his associates who were at that particular time.

30. Another reply to “And the sign . . . come to pass” (Deut. 13:3) is as follows: Suppose a person hears a true prophet predict that on a certain day of a certain month something out of the ordinary will occur. Suppose that this person then goes to another place and claims to be a prophet, citing as proof that which he had heard from the same true prophet, the which subsequently comes to pass, thus (seemingly) confirming his claim. Suppose further that he next calls for a show of disobedience to God and for actions contrary to what God has commanded—all of which is what is meant by “And the sign . . . come to pass.” Of just such a person Scripture goes on to say (in effect), “Do not spare him, but put him to death, for the sign which he claimed (to be his own) is not (really) his own but rather has been stolen from someone else,” and this is what is referred to in “(The prophets) . . . that steal My words every one from his neighbor” (Jer. 23:30).

31. Should someone ask, “But what is to be done about one who claims to be a prophet but does not call to disobedience, although he has (in fact) stolen this (aforementioned) sign and has made it his own proof?”, our answer is as follows: If that sign does come to pass, we should not slay him immediately, as we would him who calls to disobedience, but should let his claim to prophecy stand while we investigate the matter and scrutinize his statement. If it is ascertained that his prediction was his own, and that he had not stolen it from someone else, we should acknowledge him as a (true) prophet. If not, and if it is ascertained that the prediction was first made by someone else, and that he merely appropriated it, he should be slain, for he has falsely, misleadingly, and unfoundedly claimed to be a prophet of God, even though he did not urge the people to disobey and defy God, for he has (in fact) claimed that God had spoken to him and had made him His
messenger, as it is said, "(The prophets) . . . that steal My word" (Jer. 23:30).

32. To sum up, all these doubts and questions in regard to Scriptural statements deal with matters of detail (furūʾ). The basic principles (al-uṣūl) are clear, are supported by decisive logical proofs which are as irrefutable as the proofs of the incipiency (of all creation), of the existence of the Creator, of the genuine mission of (true) prophets, and of the authenticity of the Torah and of the other prophetic books as originating from God. If then we are unable to interpret (correctly) some small portions of Scripture and to elicit their (true) meaning, we must realize, given the truth of the original text (al-aṣl), that our ignorance of some details of law is of our own making, due to our insufficient effort to seek and search, and is not due to the imperfection of the detail itself—it is we who have fallen short.

33. So much for witchcraft and everything else of the same kind, as employed by the Rabbanites, in the way of amulets and other such. Scripture prescribes that sorcerers be put to death, as it is said, "Thou shalt not suffer a sorcerer to live" (Exod. 22:17). So also does Scripture require the slaying of anyone who patronizes those who practice witchcraft, sorcery, divination, or anything else of this kind, as it is said, "And the soul that turneth unto the ghosts, and unto the familiar spirits, to go astray after them, I will even set My face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people" (Lev. 20:6). This includes all those mentioned in the verse (beginning with) "One that useth divination" (Deut. 18:10), which lists several such crafts, e.g., stargazing, (etc.), all of which comes under the term of divination. Other such kinds are augury, as it is said, "a soothsayer" (ibid.), and (distinction of) unlucky and lucky days, as it is said, "an enchanter" (ibid.), as well as spells and charms, as it is said, "or a sorcerer" (ibid.)—explained by "which hearkeneth not to the voice of charmers or of the most cunning binder of spells" (Ps. 58:6)—and (the works of)

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28 Al-iqmīʕin (variant al-iqmīʕāt, p. 574, 4), arabicized form of the Hebrew qāmēy-a, Aramaic qemēy-ā.
29 Meʾēnēn, presumably connected by al-Qirqisāni with ʾānān, "cloud," one who prognosticates by observing the shape of clouds.
30 Menahēsh, presumably connected by al-Qirqisāni with the Arabic nahīsa, "to be inauspicious."
witches and sorcerers, as it is said, "One that consulteth a ghost or a familiar spirit" (Deut. 18:11). The proof that this latter practice comes under the heading of divination lies in Saul's words to the woman (of En-Dor), "Divine unto me, I pray thee, by a ghost" (1 Sam. 28:8). The same applies to seeking (fulfillment of) one's needs from the dead, as mentioned above, which is the practice today of the commonalty (of sectarians) and of the Rabbanites. Let us now discuss each type (of these practices) in such detail as may be necessary.

CHAPTER X

ON AUGURY AND ITS VARIETIES

1. We have already mentioned that the Scriptural term "soothsayer" (Deut. 18:10) implies the interdiction of augury. Some Jews, however, deny this and do not regard augury as forbidden. They maintain that (the term) "soothsayer" refers to him who determines the propitious time, meaning the practice of the astrologers (al-munajjin) who choose (the right time for action). They refer for proof of the permissibility of augury to the story of Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, who said, "So let it come to pass that the damsel to whom I shall say . . . let the same (be she that Thou hast appointed for Thy servant, even for Isaac)" (Gen. 24:14), which, they think, implies an act (of augury) performed by a (person who was the) messenger of a saint(ly patriarch) and a prophet, and indeed this augury of his did come to realization. A similar instance, they say, is the story of Jonathan, who said to his bearer, "If they say thus unto us, 'Tarry until we come to you,' then we will stand still in our place. But if they say thus, 'Come up unto us,' then we will go up, for the Lord hath delivered them into our hand" (1 Sam. 14:9–10). This, too, they say, is an act of augury whereby Jonathan was guided, and the matter was resolved according to it. Had augury been displeasing to God and forbidden, He would not have had it fulfilled for these two individuals.

2. In reply to this we say that the aforesaid view is mistaken, the doctrine underlying it is false, and he who practices augury is

31 See above, note 27.
32 Al-mutawaqqit, literally "the timer."
disobedient to God and to His Scripture. There are many kinds of augury. One used by the commonalty is when a person in leaving his house finds his cloak caught in the door-hinge, or hears an unpleasant sound, or is confronted by a deformed cripple or an empty vessel, or some similar thing, and is so repelled by this that he considers it an unlucky omen; he might then turn back from his errand and conclude that it will not be successful; on the other hand, if he is confronted by some opposite thing, he might conclude that his errand will be successful. There are here also other things practiced by the elite and the wise men of particular nations. Thus the Sabaeans (practice augury) by examining (an animal's) liver; the Turks (do the same) by examining a sheep's shoulder for marks which they look for in it; the Arabs (do it) by observing the flight of birds and arrows; the Hindus (do it) in many ways—by (observing) the strike of the gecko lizard, or (observing) the way mice have gnawed on clothing, and drawing their conclusions therefrom, or doing as the Arabs do by (observing) the behavior of snakes and (the flight of) some birds. Some people cast lots, which is similar to (shooting) arrows. All of this is prohibited, and God holds in disfavor him who engages in such practices, which come under the heading of sorcery and are of the same order as idol worship.

3. Proof of what we have said is offered by what Scripture tells of Nebuchadnezzar, “For the king of Babylon standeth at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination” (Ezek. 21:26), which is explained by the following “he shaketh the arrows to and fro” (ibid.)—these are the well known (divinatory) arrows which we have mentioned above—“he inquireth of the teraphim” (ibid.)—some identify the latter term with the astrolabe, but Scripture does not explain the true nature of the teraphim—“he looketh at the liver” (ibid.)—meaning the examination of the

33 Ḍarb al-wazagh; Vajda translates literally “frapper le lezard (?)”, making the gecko the object of the striking. I suppose the reference is to the lightning fast strike of the lizard's elongated tongue to seize its prey.

34 Istiqbāl al-hayyāt, literally “the coming forward (or “the encountering”) of snakes.” Vajda translates “des serpents qu'ils rencontrent,” making human beings the subject of the verb. It seems to me, however, that the phrase refers rather to the behavior of snakes when confronted by humans, i.e., their rearing up in readiness to strike, sounding their warning rattle, etc. For copious references to literature on all these practices see Vajda’s footnotes to this section (p. 101).
liver, as practiced by the Sabaeans. The other types (of augury), which we have mentioned above and which are not referred to in Scripture, are similar to these and of the same kind, since Scripture has prohibited (any kind of) sorcery, and all these (other) types come under this (general) term; otherwise how could we say that while examining the liver is forbidden, examining the shoulder, as practiced by the Turks, is permitted? Or how could one maintain that using arrows is forbidden and comes under the term of sorcery, while sortilege, (the use of) which is similar to (the use of) arrows, does not come under the term of sorcery and its practice is not forbidden? Is there any difference between the Hindu practice of watching the strike of the gecko lizard and observing the gnawing of mice and the movement of snakes, and the aforementioned practices condemned by Scripture as sorcery, such as examining the liver and other such? How can anyone doubt that all such practices come under the term of augury and constitute sorcery? He who maintains that some of them are permitted must concede that all of them are licit, or if any of them are forbidden, all of them are illicit.

4. Someone may perhaps object to our treatment of sortilege by saying that Scripture itself commands the casting of lots, as it is said, “The lot causeth strife to cease” (Prov. 18:18), and “The lot is cast into the lap” (Prov. 16:33). The basis of this, (says the objector), is God’s command to the Children of Israel that they apportion the land (of Canaan) among themselves by casting lots. Yet you, (continues the objector), maintain that such sortilege is a kind of sorcery forbidden by God. To this we would reply thus: The kind of sortilege which we have mentioned as illicit is not the same as that ordained by God, nor is it the same as the one spoken of by Solomon. Both kinds are designated by the same term but vary in meaning, just as the arrows used in augury are not of the same type as the ones used in warfare, the latter being of a different sort, even though both sorts are designated by the same term. As for the lots commanded by God to be used in apportioning

35 Which is absurd, since both are parts of an animal’s carcass.
36 Literally “root” (asf).
37 Num. 26:52–56. That is to say, such casting of lots, authorized by divine command, is obviously licit.
38 In the aforecited verses from the Book of Proverbs.
the land (of Canaan), they are licit by God's command, by His authorization (wabi-tashibih), and by His approval (wa-
apparihi); this is similar to "And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats" (Lev. 16:8), which is authorized and approved by God. As for the lots mentioned by Solomon, they are the kind employed by men among themselves for the sake of mutual agreement and avoidance of contention. That is why Solomon said, "The lot causeth strife to cease," thus indicating that such lot-casting was adopted in order to prevent quarrels and disputes, and is not claimed to be a means for finding out things that are hidden or foretelling what is yet to happen. Such latter sortilege is illicit, as we have said, and is a type of augury, for its practitioners claim to derive by means of it the knowledge of the unknown, and they give judgments to the people as to success and prosperity in their affairs and the fulfillment or nonfulfillment of their needs. This is (clearly) augury and a kind of forbidden sorcery practiced by sorcerers who claim to tell what is hidden. Anything partaking of this latter nature clearly comes under this term (of sorcery) and is unquestionably part of it, as well as any other practice cited by this opponent that involves miraculous power, as mentioned above.

5. As for the story of Eliezer, their claim about it is void and their interpretation of it is mistaken—it does not involve sortilege. Eliezer was the messenger of a saint and a prophet of God. His master who had sent him on his mission told him that God will send His angel with him to prosper his way, as it is said, "The Lord, before whom I walk, will send His angel with thee, and prosper thy way" (Gen. 24:40). When Eliezer reached his destination, he prayed to God, asking Him to (help him) complete his task and to prosper the business of his master, and to do it in such and such a manner, as explained in that passage (in the Book of Genesis). The proof that this is indeed what Eliezer did, and that he did it in the way of request and entreaty addressed to God and not in the way of augury, is his saying, "(She that) Thou hast appointed for Thy servant, even for Isaac . . . let the same be the woman whom the Lord hath appointed for my master's son" (Gen. 24:14, 44). Moreover, the statement at the beginning of the story, "If now Thou do prosper my way" (Gen. 24:42), clearly shows that Eliezer asked God to give him a sign and an indication of His prospering and authorizing in the precise manner sought and
desired by him. And God did just so in accordance with his request, as we have explained in our Commentary on Genesis, namely, at the end of our discussion of the adherents of (the doctrine of) compulsion;\(^{39}\) there we have set forth the passages in Scripture\(^{40}\) to which they refer for support of their belief in compulsion, together with the refutation of what they think.

6. The same applies to the story of Jonathan. What he did was not an act of augury but rather a prayer and a request to God for a guideline and a sign, as it is said, “For the Lord hath delivered them into our hand, and this shall be the sign unto us” (1 Sam. 14:10), that is to say, a sign and mark from God pointing to this conclusion. This is thus not a matter of augury, for augury proves to be sometimes wrong and sometimes right, whereas what proceeds from God is never wrong and always runs true, as long as men’s deeds do not change from obedience to disobedience, or vice versa, as we have explained in more than one place, for example, (in our comment on) “a soothsayer”\(^{41}\) (Deut. 18:10), which signifies (a practitioner of) augury.

7. Scripture lists next “an enchanter” (Deut. 18:10), which includes several kinds, one of them “birding,” which is the opposite of (ordinary) augury. For in the Arabic language “birding” denotes ill luck (augury) only, as for example in Laban’s saying, “I have enchanted, and the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake” (Gen. 30:27), that is to say, “I have ‘birded’ concerning thee, but the matter concerning thee has turned out to be the opposite, (that is to say, the favorable), way.”\(^{42}\) All kinds of inquiry into inauspiciousness come under this heading.

\(^{39}\) Al-Mujbirah (al-Mujabbirah, al-Jabriyah), i.e., those Muslim thinkers who were accused by their opponents of holding that God alone acts, and that mankind are in a way His puppets dancing to His tune. This reminds us of belief in fatalism, although here fate is the divine will and not pure chance, so that these thinkers were not really true fatalists. The Commentary on Genesis was apparently al-Qirqisânî’s first major work.

\(^{40}\) Al-Kitâb usually in Judeo-Arabic literature means the Hebrew Bible. It is not clear whether al-Qirqisânî refers to Muslim “fatalists” or to Jewish ones. If the former, the reference is to the Koran.

\(^{41}\) See above, note 29.

\(^{42}\) Meaning that Laban used ill luck augury (“birding”) to find out whether Jacob might bring misfortune upon him, but found instead that Jacob has brought him prosperity.
Having treated of augury, let us now deal with the stars.

CHAPTER XI

ON THE STARS

1. Know that knowledge and science of the stars is of two kinds. One is the basic knowledge—called introductory (madkhal)—covering the number of spheres, stars, and signs of the Zodiac, their natures, and their colors, the positions of the stars in relation to the signs of the Zodiac, and the place of each star in each sign of the Zodiac, as well as the knowledge of what is auspicious and inauspicious or moist and dry, of limits (hudūd), phases (wujūh), equinoctial points (nawbaharāt), and similar matters mentioned in the books (of astrologers). Another part of this science is the knowledge of the calculations which define the movements of the stars, their orbits outward and inward, in advance and in retreat, as well as the times of (special) phenomena, such as eclipses—meaning eclipses of the sun and of the moon—the junction of stars one with the other, and suchlike. The other kind (of the science of the stars) is the knowledge of judgments, that is to say, of what it is claimed that they cause and foretell as about to happen to the earth and to plants and animals, whether favorable or unfavorable. This is called the knowledge of (astral) judgments.

2. As for the first part—the basic introductory knowledge, and the knowledge of calculation connected with it—it is not forbidden, since it is pure science involving no practical application and action, and all pure science is not prohibited. Indeed, should we say that even he who applies this science by using calculation in order to find out when the new moon will appear, or when the sun will enter the sign of Aries, or suchlike matters concerning the position of stars or the times of eclipses, his action too is not prohibited, since there is nothing in it that might corrupt religious faith or lead to impiety.

3. As for the other part, whose practitioners claim that it is the knowledge of (astral) judgments and the science of hidden things—that one is forbidden to practice or (even) to incline towards it and claim that it is true. That part comes under the heading of sorcery, as it is said, “Balaam also, the son of Peor, the soothsayer, (did the

43 Literally “their books.”
Children of Israel slay)” (Josh. 13:22). All agree that Balaam was an astrologer, and he is known among the other nations as a famous astrologer. It is said that his astrological writings are still extant, and the (Muslim) scholastic theologians (al-mutakallimūn) list him in their works on the various theological movements (kutub al-maqālāt) as the founder of one such movement (madhhab). Now Scripture condemns him who inclines towards anyone who claims to have mastered the art of astral judgments, and states that such a one will end by being burned in the fire, as Isaiah says, “Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels; let now the dividers of the heavens stand up and save thee”—“dividers” signifying those who select the propitious times for actions—“the stargazers . . . Behold, they shall be as stubble, the fire shall burn them” (Isa. 47:13–14).

4. Someone might retort that if astral judgments are something that one is forbidden to follow or (even) to incline towards it, is there any substance to it? [If there is], and if God Himself had set it up and made it a guide to this, how is it possible that He should have set up something and made it a guide to something else, and yet forbidden man to look into it? If that is so, God’s creation of this quality is a meaningless absurdity. If, on the other hand, (you say that) there is no substance to it, you contradict reality, for we observe practitioners of this craft informing us of something unknown or something yet to happen, and it does indeed happen, proving that they were right. To this our reply is as follows: It is not incumbent upon us to investigate whether this craft has or has not any substance—we have no need for it. Our duty is to follow (God’s) command and to eschew what He had forbidden us to do.

5. As for the argument that the practitioners of this craft have sometimes proven right in their predictions and judgments, this does not necessarily constitute proof of the craft’s substance. They are more often proven wrong than right, and no intelligent person doubts this. Indeed, even if they were right in ninety cases out of a hundred and wrong (only) in ten cases, this would still constitute no proof (of this craft’s validity). Valid proof should have no room for any error whatsoever. We observe that even one who deals in guesswork and conjecture often proves right in much of his conjecturing, (simply) because he is a man of sound judgment.

44 That is to say, to what is auspicious or not on earth.
(qawī al-ra'y)—should we conclude therefrom that every guesser and conjecturer is (always) right, and that all guesswork and conjecture is (always) true? The same applies to the stars—just because some practitioners of the craft happen to prove right in some of their predictions we are not bound to conclude that a craft obviously subject to so many errors has substance.

6. Further support for what we have said above is provided by the disagreement of the practitioners of, and believers in, the craft of (astral) judgments. Some of them deem it applicable to all matters, while others disagree and assert that the science of (astral) judgments applies only to (horoscopes based on) birthdays (al-mawālīd) and to the transformation of yearly seasons, but not to (other) problems (masā'il). As for al-Thābit ibn Qurrah, who was outstanding in his time as a philosopher, he regarded the entire science of (astral) judgments as completely vain and devoid of substance. Some of those who believe in this craft interpret this declaration of al-Thābit’s as meaning merely that in his opinion the figures used by the people in making these judgments are false, but that there are other (true) figures and premises (muqaddamāt) in it unknown to these people. To this we reply as follows: Even if this were as you say, did not disagreement therein take place? Did not al-Thābit deny the validity of those (astral) judgments which are (actually) in use? Any craft subject to disagreement among its practitioners should not be practiced.

7. As for the argument that if this craft has some substance, it is God who has set it up and created it, and this being so, God could not have forbidden it, for in that case His creation of it would have been meaningless—we would reply thus: God has created all kinds of (unclean) creatures, terrestrial and aquatic, and has implanted in them certain useful properties, yet He then forbade the use of all of them. If what the objectors say is cogent, it would follow that His creation of many of these creatures—certain kinds of birds and fishes—whose flesh and fluids (marā'iruha) are used in many medicaments, and His subsequent interdict of them (for use as food) represents an absurdity. The same applies to snakes and

45 Such as recovery of lost or stolen property, the outcome of an undertaking, etc. (so Vajda).
46 Eminent Muslim philosopher, mathematician, and physician (d. 901).
47 Awqā'd, so translated by Vajda.
vipers whose flesh is used in the most effective theriacks; to the saqanqūr, which is the baby-crocodile,\(^{48}\) whose flesh is useful for some things; to the jundbādustar, which are the male organs of the seadog,\(^{49}\) and have their uses; to the inner organs of the scarab beetle, used as a substitute for the jundbādustar; or to innumerable other similar substances. If, however, this objection is invalid, and if God’s creation of all these things is a mark of His wisdom and uprightness, devoid of any futility of superfluity, then the same applies to what they say about the stars, namely, that having created them and endowed them with indications of certain (unknown) things, God could not have prohibited inquiring into them. On the contrary, He could have prohibited inquiring into them, for Balaam says of God, “For there is no enchantment with Jacob, neither is there any divination with Israel. Now is it said of Jacob and of Israel, ‘What hath God wrought?’” (Num. 23:23), thus implying that it is God who disposes of their affairs, whether successful or unsuccessful, not the stars, and making it dependent upon (God’s) law, that is to say, upon obedience or disobedience to it.

8. So also says Moses of God, “For these nations, that thou art to dispossess, hearken unto soothsayers, and unto diviners; but as for thee, the Lord thy God hath not suffered thee so to do” (Deut. 18:14). It is (thus) possible that these stars have influence over the other nations and cause them to advance or retreat, but not over (the nation of) Israel, just as fire is enabled by nature to consume, and water to drown, some human beings, but not the righteous and the God-fearing, as it is said, “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee” (Isa. 43:2). Some say that the verse “(The sun and the moon)... which the Lord thy God hath allotted unto all the peoples” (Deut. 4:9) goes back to the same idea that these luminaries influence these nations but not Israel. Hence, say they, Scripture says elsewhere, “Thus saith the Lord: Learn not the way of the nations, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the nations are dismayed at

\(^{48}\) The usual meaning of the term is “skink,” a small lizard.

\(^{49}\) Castoreum, a substance derived from the perineal glands (or the testicles) of the beaver, used in medicaments and perfumes.
them” (Jer. 10:2), meaning that it is the way of the nations to scrutinize the happenings affecting the celestial sphere and the stars, but that you, (the nation of Israel), should not learn their ways nor be dismayed by such happenings. The same idea is implied in the aforesaid verse “But as for thee, the Lord thy God hath not suffered thee so to do.” As for him who desires (merely) to acquire knowledge of this craft and become proficient in it without intending to practice it and to be inclined towards it, this is not forbidden, for God does not enjoin man from learning any field of knowledge and becoming proficient in it, just so he makes use of what is permitted and eschews what is forbidden.

9. Should one then retort: Even so, should one be permitted to learn enchantment, sundry kinds of augury, and such similar things as incantations and spells, whose use is forbidden, just so he does not make use of them but merely wishes to acquire the knowledge of them?—we would reply: We do not deny this as far as (mere) knowledge is concerned. However, his occupation with learning this craft diverts him from learning what would be (far more) useful to him, such as studying the Lord’s Scripture and its ordinances. But if he is so well equipped that studying these (occult) matters would not so divert him, he may study them, so long as there is (in him) no inclination (towards them) and he wishes merely to learn how they are performed, and their falsity, inasmuch as we have already stated that enchantment has no substance and cannot justify the claim of its practitioners that it can perform miraculous things. On the contrary, it is all a matter of tricks, ruses, and misrepresentations. Therefore he who desires to learn this craft in order to expose it and brand its practitioners as liars, is not forbidden to do so.

APPENDIX

Some Arabic terms used by al-Qīrqīsānī

ארפא (pl. ārāfān)—diviner, one who predicts future events
اذمحت—spell
فل (good luck) augury by observation of the flight of birds
نيحوس—inauspiciousness
قرحة—lot used in sortilege
ruqyah—incantation
sāhir—sorcerer
sihr—enchantment, witchcraft (usually for an evil or wicked purpose)
su'ūd—auspiciousness
tābi'ah (pl. tawābi')—("female follower"); a female jinni who follows a man continually; also called qarīnah ("sidekick") (Dozy)
tīrah—("birding"); (ill luck) augury by observation of the flight of birds
zajr—augury by shooing birds into the air and observing how they turn in their flight: if they turn their right side toward the observer, the augury is good; if their left side, the augury is evil.