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Kabbalah and Sufism in AL-Andalus

By Mike Steele

This paper focuses on the growth and evolution of Kabbalah and Sufism, two mystical sects of Judaism and Islam that both enjoyed philosophical and cultural booms in Al-Andalus, which was the name given to Spain when it was ruled culturally and politically by the Muslims from 711 to 1492 CE. The argument that I have proposed in my thesis is that even though Kabbalah and Sufism both originate from different religious traditions the two mystical sects became almost intertwined during their periods of growth in Al-Andalus. Furthermore I argue that even though Jews and Muslims have a history of tense and antagonistic relations that can be seen clearly in current events they have a close and connected history that is displayed nicely in Al-Andalus that seems to have been forgotten, the significance being that common ground is a solid first step to establishing peace. The means by which I argue my point is comparing the writings and doctrines of some of the big names in Kabbalah like Moses de Leon and Nahmanides with the writings and doctrines of the big names in Sufism like Ibn Arabi and Ibn Masarra to show how they had similar approaches to approaching the divine such as cleansing oneself of desire, similar praying and meditation styles and focusing on communing with God through the power of the mind.