

RABBI YITZCHAK (BEN SHILOMO) YISRAELI - RABBI, DOCTOR AND NEO-PLATONIC PHILOSOPHER.

1. ***Generations of the Physicians by Ibn Juljul*** (translated in *Isaac Israeli: A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century* p. xxiv)

Ishaq ibn Sulayman the Israelite. A native of Egypt, he began his career as an occultist. He emigrated to al-Qayrawan, became a companion and disciple of Ishaq ibn Imran, and served as a physician of 'Ubayd Allah the Shi'ite. He was a physician with a ready tongue who was well acquainted with the arrangement of speech and the disposition of discourse. He lived to an age of over a hundred, never married and had no children.

He is the author of various works, the like of which had never been written by previous writers, such as his book on urine, which is the most comprehensive work on the subject ever written, and by which he gained superiority over all the earlier writers; his book on fevers; and his book on foodstuffs and drugs. He also wrote several books on philosophy, such as the book which bears the title of *Garden of Wisdom* and deals with questions of philosophy and metaphysics; his book on definitions and descriptions; his introduction to logic; the book on the elements; his book on the theriac.

When he was asked: Would you like to have a child? He answered: No, as I have a much better thing in the Book of Fevers – meaning that his memory would survive better through the Book of Fevers than through a child.

KAIROUAN - AL-QAYRAWAN

Legend tells of warrior's horse that stumbled on a golden goblet buried in the



sands. This goblet was recognized as one that had mysteriously disappeared from Mecca some years before. When the goblet was dug from the desert sand, a spring miraculously appeared and the waters of this spring were said to issue from the same source that supplies the sacred Zamzam well in Mecca. The power of these three miracles - the mysteriously lost and then found Meccan goblet, the miraculous gushing forth of the spring, and the source of

that spring - exercised a magnetic effect upon the early North African Islamic people and thereby established the site of Kairouan as a pilgrimage destination for ages to come. (<http://www.sacredsites.com/africa/tunisia/kairouan.html>)

- Great Mosque - Built by Uqba ibn Nafi 670 A.D
- Aghlabids - Fatimad Caliphate ('Abdullāh al-Mahdī Billah) – Berbers

INFLUENCE OF YITZCHAK YISRAELI

2. *Translator's introduction to Sefer HaYesodot*

אמר אברהם בר שמואל הלוי בן חסדאי... וידעתי כי מלאכת ההעתקה נשגבה ממני ורחוקה ויכול הייתי לעצור במלי ולהסיר עולם מעלי אבל מה אעשה ואבי גזר עלי הוא החכם הגדול הדר זקנים ונשוא פנים ר' דוד בן החכם ר' יוסף קמחי הוא העתיר עלי דברו... וכה אמר יצחק בן שולימן הישראלי... ורופא ואומן היה שרת בחכמות הרפואות עבדאללה מהדי מלך אפריקה והיה עם כל זה משכיל מאוד בחכמת ההגיון ובאופני יתר החכמות... ועל פיו ומצותו כתב כל ספריו ומחבר חבוריו על כן חברם בלשון הערב כי מצוה לקיים דברי הרב.

Says Avraham ben Shmuel HaLevi ben Chasdai... I know that the work of translation is too difficult and beyond me, and I could have stopped my words and removed the burden from me. But what can I do? My father decreed that I do this, and he is the great sage, beauty of the elders who finds favour, Rabbi David, son of the sage Rabbi Yosef Kimchi. He pleaded with me to do this.... This is what Rabbi Yitzchak ben Shlomo Yisraeli said... He was a skilled doctor who served Abdullah Mahdi, king of Afriki with the wisdom of medicine. In addition he was very wise in the knowledge of logic and the methods of other wisdoms... And at his [Abdullah's] command he wrote all his books and composed his treatises. For this very reason he composed them in Arabic, for it is one's duty to fulfill the command of the ruler.

3. *Commentary On Sefer Yetzirah by Dunash Ibn Tamim (p. 15)*

([http://www.otzar.org/wotzar/book.aspx?21516&\\$201204220812781](http://www.otzar.org/wotzar/book.aspx?21516&$201204220812781))

כי אגרות רבות היו באות מאתי [סעדיה] אל מקום הנקרא אלקראון אל זקנינו יצחק בן שלמה הרופא י"ה בשאלות הגיוניות ועדין היה שוכן בפיתום קודם שהלך לאשור והיה הזקן מקשה עלי בשאלות ההן והייתי אז בן כ' שנה והייתי מעמידו על מקום בחטא בהן והיה הזקן שמח בזה מצוד היותי חדש בשנים.

When he [viz. Saadya] lived in al-Fayyūm, before he went to Baghdad, he addressed numerous letters to our city of al-Qayrawan, to our master, Isaac the son of Solomon, of blessed memory, consulting him about problems of the "external sciences" [i.e. philosophical and scientific-in contrast to theological'-subjects]. Rabbi Isaac used to show me those letters, though I was only twenty years old, and I pointed out some errors in them, which caused my master great pleasure, on account of my youth. (Translation from *Isaac Israeli: A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century* p. xxix)

4. Rambam's Letter to R' Shmuel Ibn Tibon Regarding Translating *Guide For The Perplexed* (p. 552 Shilat Edition)

וזהוהר שלא תעין בספרי ארסטו אלא בפרושיהם, פרוש אלסכנדר או פרוש שמסטיוס, או באור אבן רשד. אמנם הספרים אשר זכרת לי שהם אצלך ועמך מהם ספר "התפוז" וספר "בית הזהב" כלם הזיות ורוחות והבלים. ואלה שני הספרים הם מכלל הספרים המיחסים לארסטו ואינם לו. וספר "חכמה אלהית" שחבר אלראזי הוא לו, אבל אין בו תועלת לפי שאלראזי היה רופא בלבד. וכמו כן ספר "הגבולים" וספר "היסודות" שחבר יצחק הישראלי גם הם כלם הזיות ורוחות והבלים כי יצחק הישראלי גם הוא היה רופא בלבד.

Be careful not to look in books of Aristotle unless they have commentary [for example] the commentaries of Alexander or Themistius, or the commentary of ibn Rushd. However the books which you mentioned to me that are in your possession, including *Sefer HaTapuach* and the book *Beit HaZahav* are all worthless, pointless and useless. Those two books are amongst the books attributed to Aristotle, but which are not from him. The book *Chochmat Elokit* which was compiled by al-Razi is from him [Aristotle] but it has no value, because al-Razi was only a doctor. Similarly the books *HaGevulim* and *HaYesodot* which were compiled by Yitzchak ha-Yisraeli are also worthless, pointless and useless, because Yitzchak ha-Yisraeli was also merely a doctor.

Importance in Medicine

5. Jewish Literature and Other Essays by Gustav Karpeles (<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/27901>)

[His] works, in their Latin translation by the monk Constantine, attained great reputation, and were later plagiarized by medical writers. His treatise on fever was esteemed of high worth, a translation of it being studied as a text-book for centuries, and his dietetic writings remained authoritative for five hundred years. In general, the medical science of the Arabs is under great obligations to him.

NEO-PLATONISM

Plato/Aristotle/Plotinus/ *Theology of Aristotle*

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

6. Book of Definitions (in *Isaac Israeli: A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century* p. 27)

The description of philosophy from its effect is as follows: Philosophy is man's knowledge of himself. This also is a description of great profundity and elevated intelligence, for the following reason. Man, if he acquires a true knowledge of himself, viz. of his own spirituality and corporeality, comprises the knowledge of everything, viz. of the spiritual and corporeal substance, as in man are joined substance and accident.

ULTIMATE GOOD

7. *Book of Definitions* (in *Isaac Israeli: A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century* pp.25-26)

A case of a spiritual final cause is the union of soul and body to the end that the truths of the subject of science may become clear to man; that he may distinguish between good and evil, between what is laudable and what is not; that he may do what corresponds to truth, in justice and rectitude; that he may sanctify, praise, and exalt the Creator, and recognize His dominion; that he may avoid beastly and unclean actions in order thereby to obtain the reward of his Creator, blessed be He, which is the union with the upper soul, and the illumination by the light of intellect and by the beauty and splendour of wisdom. When attaining this rank, he becomes spiritual, and will be joined in union to the light which is created, without mediator, by the power of God, and will become one that exalts and praises the Creator for ever and in all eternity. This then will be his paradise and the goodness of his reward, and the bliss of his rest, his perfect rank and unsullied beauty. For this reason Plato said that philosophy is a zeal, a striving, an effort, and concern for death. Says Isaac: This is a description of great profundity and elevated meaning. For in saying 'concern for death' the sage meant it to be understood in the sense of the killing of beastly desires and lusts, for in their mortification and avoidance is the highest rank, the supernal splendour and the entry into the realm of truth. And by vivifying beastly desires and lusts and by strengthening them, men of intellect are drawn away from that which is due to God in the way of obedience, purity, and attention to prayer at the prescribed hours.

Reward in the World to Come

8. *Book on Spirit and Soul* (in *Isaac Israeli: A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century* p. 39)

If someone says: this reward is given in this world, we answer that this is wrong for two reasons. The first is that this world) is the opposite of the next, as this world is the place for work, the next the place for reward, I and it is fit that the righteous ones and the prophets should abide there, but not the sinners; as it is written: 'Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live for ever?' (Zech. i. 5) meaning that they have been raised to a nobler state. Similarly: 'But the wicked shall be cut off from the land' (Prov. ii. 22), meaning: from the enduring 'land', i.e. the next world. Another proof is: 'The word which he commanded to a thousand generations' (Ps. cv. 8); now a generation normally lasts for forty years, as it is written: 'And saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations' (Job xlii. 16), four times forty, a hundred and sixty years; this can occur in the case of a righteous man, but a

thousand generations is quite impossible in this world, so that it is proved that it refers to the next world.

PLATO VS. ARISTOTLE

9. *Book of Definitions* (in *Isaac Israeli: A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century* p. 39)

The philosopher said: The soul is a substance which perfects the physical body that possesses life potentially. Plato said: The soul is a substance which is united with the heavenly body, and through this union it is joined to the bodies and acts in them. Isaac says: Someone may think that there is a difference between these two statements, but we shall make it clear that this would be an error. Plato, in his description of the soul, had in mind the soul at the beginning of its movement and action. He says that the soul at the beginning of its movement is united with the body of the sphere, joins the bodies, and acts in them. This is so because the rank of the sphere is intermediate between the rank of the soul and that of the bodies; through this intermediate position the junction of the soul with the bodies is achieved, because through the movement of the sphere the four kinds of matter, which are the elements of the bodies, come into being. The philosopher, on the other hand, had in mind the soul at the completion of its movements and perfection of its acts. He said: 'The soul is a substance which perfects the physical body that possesses life potentially', informing us that the bodies before the soul's junction with them possessed life potentially, while, when the soul was joined with them, it completed and perfected them and made them alive actually. Isaac says: When we say 'the bodies were at the beginning alive potentially, and afterwards they passed into actuality', we imply no temporal difference, separation, or distance, as things remain in the state in which the Creator had ordered them to be; it is only that corporeal expression cannot reproduce spiritual concepts except by separation and conjunction, so that the mind, which is in the corporeal bodies, should be willing to receive them.

BOOKS BY YITZCHAK YISRAELI

ON MEDICINE:

"Kitab al-Hummayat," in Hebrew, "Sefer ha-Kadaḥot," a complete treatise, in five books, on the kinds of fever, according to the ancient physicians, especially Hippocrates.

"Kitab al-Adwiyah al-Mufradah wa'l-Aghdhiyah," a work in four sections on remedies and aliments. The first section, consisting of twenty chapters, was translated into Latin by Constantine under the title "Diætæ Universales," and into Hebrew by an anonymous translator under the title "Ṭib'e ha-Mezonot." The other three parts of the work are entitled in the Latin translation "Diætæ Particulares"; and it seems that a Hebrew translation, entitled "Sefer ha-Mis'adim" or "Sefer ha-Ma'akalim," was made from the Latin.

"Kitab al-Baul," or in Hebrew, "Sefer ha-Shetan," a treatise on urine, of which the author himself made an abridgment.

"Kitab al-Istīḳat," in Hebrew, "Sefer ha-Yesodot," a medical and philosophical work on the elements, which the author treats according to the ideas of Aristotle, Hippocrates, and Galen. The Hebrew translation was made by Abraham b. Ḥasdai at the request of the grammarian David Ḳimḥi.

"Manhig ha-Rofe'im," or "Musar ha-Rofe'im," a treatise, in fifty paragraphs, for physicians, translated into Hebrew (the Arabic original is not extant), and into German by David Kaufmann under the title "Propädeutik für Aerzte" (Berliner's "Magazin," xi. 97-112).

"Kitab fi al-Tiryāḳ," a work on antidotes. Some writers attribute to Isaac Israeli two other works which figure among Constantine's translations, namely, the "Liber Pantegni" and the "Viaticum," of which there are three Hebrew translations. But the former belongs to Mohammed al-Razi and the latter to 'Alī ibn 'Abbas or, according to other authorities, to Israeli's pupil Abu Ja'far ibn al-Jazzar.

PHILOSOPHICAL WORKS.

"Kitab al-Ḥudud wal-Rusum," translated into Hebrew by Nissim b. Solomon (14th cent.) under the title "Sefer ha-Gebulim weha-Reshumim," a philosophical work of which a Latin translation is quoted in the beginning of the "Opera Omnia."

"Kitab Bustan al-Ḥikimah," on metaphysics.

"Kitab al-Ḥikmah," a treatise on philosophy.

"Kitab al-Madkhal fi al-Mantiq," on logic. The last three works are mentioned by Ibn Abi Uṣaibi'a, but no Hebrew translations of them are known.

"Sefer ha-Ruah weha-Nefesh," a philosophical treatise, in a Hebrew translation, on the difference between the spirit and the soul, published by Steinschneider in "Ha-Karmel" (1871, pp. 400-405). The editor is of opinion that this little work is a fragment of a larger one.

A philosophical commentary on Genesis, in two books, one of which deals with Gen. i. 20.