

We Drink Only from the Master's Water: Maimonides and Maimonideanism in Southern France, 1200-1306

JAMES T. ROBINSON

Everything I interpret in the way of wisdom, I interpret only according to what [Maimonides'] opinion would be in these things, in accordance with what is revealed in his books. I drink from his water and make others drink [cf. Hag. 3a-b]. Everything comes from the 'fruit of the righteous' [see Prov. 11:30] and his good 'work'. It itself is 'life' and causes 'life', continuously and forever. [Samuel Ibn Tibbon, preface to his *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*]¹

IN THE HISTORY OF INTELLECTUAL TRADITIONS and schools of thought, there is no better case-study than Maimonideanism, the philosophical culture that developed around the work of the twelfth-century sage. In the two hundred years following Maimonides' death, his writings were translated into Hebrew and transmitted throughout the Jewish world, where they were studied and debated, copied and commented upon, borrowed from, plagiarised and, most important for our purposes, imitated and expanded. In fact, his writings served as the inspiration for several distinctive and diverse traditions or schools of thought, each of which claimed to be building upon and expanding the work of the master. Aristotelians and Neoplatonists, Avicennists and Averroists, Sufis and Kabbalists, rabbinic leaders and free-thinking scientists, all claimed to be the true disciples of the great sage from Cordoba.

1. See J.T. Robinson, *Samuel Ibn Tibbon's Commentary on Ecclesiastes, The Book of the Soul of Man* (Tübingen 2007), par. 35. I wish to thank Angela Jaffray for reading the present paper and offering many helpful suggestions.

Despite the rich source material available for a study of medieval Maimonideanism, however, there has been relatively little research done in this direction.² While Maimonides himself continues to be the central subject in the history of Jewish philosophy, the many translators, commentators and exegetes, the disciples and defenders of the master, the scholars who turned Mosheh b. Maimon into the True Sage and Great Eagle, Divine Philosopher and Righteous Guide, remain very much in the background. Yet these figures, many of them original philosophers and exegetes in their own right, can teach us a great deal about reception and authority, processes of canonisation and the relationship between a creative scholar and a school of thought. They can help us understand not only the history of philosophical and theological problems, but the ways in which these problems were discussed within the traditional religious community.

The purpose of the present paper is to examine the way in which one Maimonidean tradition, in thirteenth-century southern France (called Provence in Jewish sources), developed out of and in response to the work of the master. The focus will be on three developments in Provence: the development of a Maimonidean tradition of biblical commentary; the development of a Maimonidean method of exegesis; and the creation of a philosophical library in Hebrew to support the reading of the *Guide of the Perplexed*. The focus here is on Samuel Ibn Tibbon (c. 1165-1232), the founder of the tradition; but his disciples, descendants and epigones are considered as well, especially Jacob Anatoli (c. 1194-1256), Moses Ibn Tibbon (fl. 1244-1274), Levi b. Abraham b. Hayyim (c. 1215-1306), Gershon b. Solomon of Arles (fl. 1275-1300), Menahem b. Solomon ha-Me'iri (1249-1315) and Immanuel of Rome (c. 1261-before 1336), in order to illustrate the growth and development of this distinctive tradition of philosophy and exegesis.

2. There is, of course, a large literature on the influence of Maimonides and reception of his works; in fact, it is difficult to speak about any subject in later Jewish philosophy without reference to Maimonides. But there is still relatively little about the development of distinct schools of thought, with the exception of the foundational studies by Aviezer Ravitzky and Moshe Halbertal, referred to below. For reception and cultural image, see especially B. Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition: The Career and Controversies of Ramah* (Cambridge 1982); I. Twersky, 'On the Image of Maimonides: A Study of his Unique Place in Jewish History', *Asufot* 10 (1998), p. 9-35 [Hebrew].

A Maimonidean Commentary on the Bible: From Creative Exegesis to Anthology

The *Guide of the Perplexed*, although not a conventional commentary on the Bible, represents a turning point in the history of exegesis. It teaches a powerful method of interpretation, singles out key texts for philosophical explication and presents model explanations of verses, stories and biblical books, through hints, allusions and indirect pointers. While the most important texts that Maimonides focused on in the *Guide* are the 'work of the beginning' (Gen. 1-3) and the 'work of the chariot' (Is. 6, Ezek. 1 and 10), other texts are singled out and explained as well, including Genesis 28 (Jacob's Ladder), Exodus 33 (Moses' request for knowledge), the Book of Job, Genesis 22 (the Binding of Isaac), Jeremiah 9:22-23 and several key verses from Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes and the Prophets.³

Maimonides' reasons for not writing a straightforward commentary on the Bible – or rabbinic literature – are explained in the preface to the *Guide*. Although he had planned to write a treatise on 'strange subjects' in the Bible and selected rabbinic texts, he eventually abandoned these projects after recognising the following difficulties:

We had promised in the Commentary on the Mishnah that we would explain strange subjects in the Book of Prophecy and in the Book of Correspondence – the latter being a book in which we promised to explain all the difficult passages in the *midrashim* where the external sense manifestly contradicts the truth and departs from the intelligible. They are all parables. However, when, many years ago, we began these books and composed a part of them, our beginning to explain matters in this way did not commend itself to us. For we saw that if we should adhere to parables and to concealment of what ought to be concealed, we would not be deviating from the primary purpose. We would, as it were, have replaced one individual by another of the same species. If, on the other hand, we explained what ought to be explained, it would be unsuitable for the vulgar among the people.⁴

3. There is a considerable scholarship on Maimonides' exegesis. See most recently the bibliographical essay by S. Klein-Braslavy, 'Philosophical Exegesis: Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Bahya ben Joseph, Judah Halevi and Moses Ben Maimon/Maimonides / Rambam', in: M. Sæbø, M. Haran and C. Brekelmans (eds.), *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament – The History of its Interpretation*, 1/2 (Göttingen 2000), p. 302-320.

4. See S. Pines (transl.), *Moses Maimonides: The Guide of the Perplexed* (Chicago and London 1963), Preface to part 1, p. 9.

Instead of completing his initial plan, Maimonides chose to pursue a different method which culminated in his *Guide of the Perplexed*. But what Maimonides had abandoned, his followers and disciples took up and completed: they finished what the master left undone. Following Maimonides' directions in the *Guide*, applying his method and building upon his occasional remarks, they explained in detail texts that Maimonides had only cited or alluded to. They also explained texts that Maimonides had not quoted, using his method and exegetical principles.

This development of a Maimonidean commentary tradition began with Samuel Ibn Tibbon. Ibn Tibbon's *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* follows 'the method of the master', while his speculative treatise, entitled *Ma'amar Yiqqawu ha-Mayim*, includes full interpretations of the 'work of the beginning', the 'work of the chariot' and other key Maimonidean texts.⁵ Ibn Tibbon's son-in-law, Jacob Anatoli and son Moses, followed Ibn Tibbon and developed this project still further: Anatoli wrote a collection of sermons (*Malmed ha-Talmidim*), which includes Maimonidean explications of several verses from Psalms and Proverbs;⁶ while Moses wrote a proper commentary on Song of Songs – 'following the method of Maimonides and my father, may he rest in peace'.⁷ Finally, Levi b. Abraham b. Hayyim, famous for his role in the controversy of 1303-1306, included extensive Maimonidean exegetical material in his *Livyat Hen*. Notable is his interpretation of Proverbs 30, which follows,

5. For Ibn Tibbon and his writings, see J.T. Robinson, *Samuel Ibn Tibbon's Commentary on Ecclesiastes, The Book of the Soul of Man*, p. 3-17.

6. On Anatoli, see in general M.L. Gordon, *The Rationalism of Jacob Anatoli* (PhD dissertation, Yeshiva University, 1974). See also A. Melamed, 'Political Thought in Jacob Anatoli's *Malmed ha-Talmidim*', *Da'at* 20 (1988), p. 91-115 [Hebrew]; C. Sirat, 'Les traducteurs juifs à la cour des rois de Sicile et de Naples', in G. Contamine (ed.), *Traduction et traducteurs au moyen âge* (Paris 1989), p. 169-91; M. Saperstein, 'Christians and Christianity in the Sermons of Jacob Anatoli', *Jewish History* 6 (1992), p. 225-242; republished in *Your Voice Like a Ram's Horn: Themes and Texts in Traditional Jewish Preaching* (Cincinnati 1996), p. 55-74; J.T. Robinson, 'Secondary Forms of Transmission: Teaching and Preaching Philosophy in Thirteenth-Century Provence', in: H. Ben-Shamai, S. Shaked, S. Stroumsa (eds.), *Exchange and Transmission across Cultural Boundaries: Philosophy, Mysticism, and Science in the Mediterranean World* (forthcoming). His exegesis still deserves a complete study.

7. See Moses Ibn Tibbon, *Commentary on Song of Songs* (Lyck 1874), p. 6; and see most recently O. Fraisse, *Moses Ibn Tibbons Kommentar zum Hohelied und sein poetologisch-philosophisches Programm* (Berlin 2004), which includes as an appendix the editions of several additional exegetical monographs.

disputes and elaborates on the earlier interpretation of the same chapter by Jacob Anatoli in *Malmed ha-Talmidim*.⁸

By the end of the thirteenth century, the first creative phase of Maimonidean exegesis had come to a close. Philosophical exegesis gave way to exegetical compilation. Thus Menahem ha-Me'iri, legal authority and Maimonidean apologist, wrote a commentary on Proverbs, in which he reproduces over sixty of the explications found in Anatoli's *Malmed ha-Talmidim*.⁹ Immanuel of Rome, an Italian enthusiast of the Provençal tradition, carried this trend still further. His commentaries on the Bible are little more than patchwork compilations of Maimonidean sources: he identified and extracted exegetical remarks from Maimonides, Ibn Tibbon, Anatoli and others and reproduced them in his own commentaries on the appropriate verse.¹⁰ Although Immanuel's commentaries are not original, they are especially significant for what they aim to achieve: an authoritative compilation of Maimonidean explanations, organised according to the biblical verses. They represent a *glossa ordinaria* of sorts, designed to help preserve, make accessible and disseminate the best teachings of the master philosopher-exegetes.

To illustrate this development of a Maimonidean commentary tradition – from suggestive remarks by Maimonides, to creative exegesis by Samuel Ibn Tibbon and Jacob Anatoli, to anthology and compilation by

8. See H. Kreisel (ed.), *Levi b. Abraham: Livyat Hen: Book Six, Part Three, The Work of Creation* (Jerusalem 2004), ch. 9, 15; cf. L. Silbermann (ed.), *Malmed ha-Talmidim* (Lyck 1866), Sermon on Be-Reshit, p. 1-9.

9. One example is discussed below. Full discussion of the others will appear in a separate study. For Me'iri in general and his relation to Ibn Tibbon, see M. Halbertal, *Between Torah and Wisdom: Menahem ha-Me'iri and the Maimonidean Halakhists in Provence* (Jerusalem 2000) [Hebrew]; G. Stern, 'The Crisis of Philosophic Allegory in Languedocian-Jewish Culture (1304-6)', in: Jon Whitman (ed.), *Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period* (Leiden 2000), p. 187-207; idem, 'Philosophy in Southern France: Controversy over Philosophical Study and the Influence of Averroes upon Jewish Thought', in: D. Frank and O. Leaman (eds.), *Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge 2003), p. 281-303.

10. See below for examples. See also the studies of Immanuel's sources by A. Ravitzky, 'On the Sources of Immanuel of Rome's Proverbs Commentary', *Qiryat Sefer* 56 (1981), p. 726-739 [Hebrew]; D. Schechtermann, *The Philosophy of Immanuel of Rome* (PhD dissertation, Hebrew University, 1984) [Hebrew]; C. Rigo, *Judah Romano's Commentaries on the Bible: His Philosophical System as Contained in Them and His Sources in Jewish Thought and Christian Scholasticism* (PhD dissertation, Hebrew University, 1996) [Hebrew]; J.T. Robinson, 'From Digression to Compilation: Samuel Ibn Tibbon and Immanuel of Rome on Genesis 1:11, 1:14, 1:20', *Zutot: Perspectives on Jewish Culture* 4 (2006), p. 79-95.

Me'iri and Immanuel of Rome – one example is given here: Ibn Tibbon's Commentary on Ecclesiastes 3:11. Building upon two remarks by Maimonides, Ibn Tibbon produced a long and digressive explication of the verse, which was borrowed, abridged and anthologised by Immanuel in his own commentaries on Ecclesiastes and Genesis. The relevant statements by Maimonides, followed by excerpts from Ibn Tibbon and Immanuel, are cited here *in extenso*:

Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* III:25

Ecclesiastes 3:11 is cited only once by Maimonides, in *Guide of the Perplexed* III:25, where it serves as a proof-text in Maimonides' discussion of teleology. Citing the verse and alluding to the rabbinic explications, Maimonides explains as follows:

You will find this notion frequently repeated by the Sages when they interpret the verse: 'He hath made everything beautiful in its time' [Ecl. 3:11]. All this was meant to avoid that which should be avoided: namely, the thought that the agent may accomplish an act whereby he does not aim at any end at all. Such is the belief of the multitude of the men of knowledge in our Law and this was explicitly stated by our prophets: namely, that the particulars of natural acts are all well-arranged and ordered and bound up with one another, all of them being causes and effects; and that none of them is futile or frivolous or vain, being acts of perfect wisdom...¹¹

Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* III:10

This subject of teleology had already been discussed by Maimonides in *Guide* III:10, where it relates to his theory of evil. In *Guide* III:10, however, Maimonides does cite a relevant rabbinic text, drawn from *Genesis Rabbah*. His discussion reads as follows:

For this reason the book that has illumined the darkness of the world has enunciated literally the following statement: 'And God saw everything that He had made and, behold, it was very good' [Gen. 1:31]. Even the existence of this inferior matter, whose manner of being it is

11. See *Guide* III:25, transl. Pines, p. 505.

to be a concomitant of privation entailing death and all evils, all this is also good in view of the perpetuity of generation and the permanence of being through succession. For this reason Rabbi Me'ir interpreted the words: 'And, behold, it was very good' [Gen. 1:31] – and behold, death was good [see *Gen Rabbah* 9:5], according to the notion to which we have drawn your attention.¹²

Samuel Ibn Tibbon, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* 3:11¹³

It was out of these two passages that Ibn Tibbon constructed his commentary on Ecclesiastes 3:11. He alludes to both chapters, cites and elaborates upon the rabbinic statement referred to in *Guide* III:10 and further develops Maimonides' teleological concept of evil. Ibn Tibbon, however, adds additional material as well. In particular, he connects the discussion of Ecclesiastes 3:11 to Genesis 3:22-24 and introduces a long digression which separates his first and final remarks on the verse in Ecclesiastes. Only the first section of his commentary is cited here, to illustrate Ibn Tibbon's use of the relevant passages of the *Guide* and to show his transition to the digression on Genesis 3:22-24.

'He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also the world [that He has set in their heart [is beautiful]. That the man cannot [literally: cannot not] find out the work that God has done – from the beginning to the end' [Eccl. 3:11]:

[333] [Solomon] has already said that the 'times' [Eccl. 3:1-8], with respect to all the aforementioned things, are 'from the hand of God' [Eccl. 2:24], and that even the 'travail' by which the 'sons of man' are 'exercised' [see Eccl. 3:10], is 'from the hand of God' – that is, it was made part of their nature. Here he adds that all these things are 'beautiful' – that is, well-arranged – in their 'time', for the meaning of 'beautiful' here is well-arranged or seemly. Even what seems evil is 'beautiful in its time'. This resembles the Sage's dictum: 'Behold it is very good – even death in old age.' It resembles the other dictum as well: '[Behold it is very good] – behold death is good' [see *Gen Rabbah* 9:5; *Guide* III:10]. Nor is it possible that all other evils and corruptions have no utility with respect to something. Even 'the world

12. See *Guide* III:10, transl. Pines, p. 440.

13. All texts of Ibn Tibbon are cited from J.T. Robinson, *Samuel Ibn Tibbon's Commentary on Ecclesiastes, The Book of the Soul of Man*. See above, n. 1.

that He has set' in man's heart is 'beautiful in its time'. That is, the occupation with the 'world' and love of its vanities – which God has given the 'sons of man' – is 'beautiful'.

Ibn Tibbon proceeds to explain other words and grammatical structures in the verse and then refers to a philosophical difficulty: that God might intentionally prevent human beings from achieving knowledge of His works, 'from beginning to end'. Focusing on this problem, he completes the first section of his commentary on Ecclesiastes 3:11 with the following remarks, which serve to introduce his digression on Genesis 3:22-24:

[336] There is, in the Torah, something resembling this: 'Now perhaps [literally: lest, *pen*] he will put forth his hand' [Gen. 3:22]. For the purpose of this dictum [in Gen. 3:22], and of the verse – 'And He placed before the garden of Eden [the cherubs and the flaming sword]' [Gen. 3:24] – was not (God forbid!) to prevent life from whoever can receive it. With Him is the 'fountain of life' [see Ps. 36:10];¹⁴ and it is He who makes 'life' overflow to the worthy, so much so that if a small mosquito could live an everlasting life, He would not prevent it.

[337] All of this is revealed in the Noble Treatise, the *Guide of the Perplexed*.¹⁵ But even before it reached us, I had noticed this matter, and cited proof from the dictum: 'God commanded the man saying: from all the trees of the garden eat' [Gen. 2:16]. That is, He commanded him to eat from 'all the trees of the garden', in the midst of which was the tree of life. Some of them were designated for living the temporal life, and some for living forever. What He prohibited was only the tree of knowledge, which is not necessary or of any help with respect to the temporal life, and which prevents one from living forever, by making everything dark and causing perpetual death. It is prohibited because it is entirely evil. The good God does not prevent the good; on the contrary, He is abundant in loving-kindness [see Ex. 34:6]. He came to prohibit eating the tree of life [in Gen. 3:22] for no reason but to teach that it is necessary, because of the nature of existence, that it be guarded by the cherubs and the flaming sword that turns every way [see Gen. 3:24].

14. See *Guide* II:12 for this use of Ps. 36:10.

15. Cf. *Guide* I:1-2, II:30 and see 'Eight Chapters', ch. 8 and *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah* 5:1.

Immanuel of Rome, Commentaries on Ecclesiastes 3:11 and
Genesis 3:22-24

How did Immanuel of Rome, Maimonidean epigone, make use of Ibn Tibbon's Maimonidean explication of Ecclesiastes 3:11? In his own *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, Immanuel reproduced, with only minor changes, Ibn Tibbon's beginning and final remarks on Ecclesiastes 3:11, eliminating the long digression on Genesis 3:22-24. But rather than discard the digression entirely, he moved it to his own commentary on Genesis. In fact, Immanuel's commentary on Genesis 3:22-24, with the exception of some initial grammatical remarks and final conclusions (which are also taken from secondary sources) is pieced together entirely from Ibn Tibbon's *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*.

The complete text of Immanuel's commentary on Ecclesiastes 3:11 and commentary on Genesis 3:22-24, side-by-side with Ibn Tibbon, will appear in a separate study; a few examples suffice here to show Immanuel's method of compilation:

| | |
|--|---|
| Samuel Ibn Tibbon, Commentary on Eccl. 3:11 | Immanuel of Rome, Commentary on Eccl. 3:11, Hebrew Union College, MS 167, 28a |
| 'He has made everything beautiful in its time, also the world [that] He has set in their heart [is beautiful], that the man cannot [literally: cannot not] find out the work that God has done, from the beginning to the end' [Eccl. 3:11] | Then he said: 'He has made everything beautiful in its time', etc. [Eccl. 3:11] |
| [333] [Solomon] has already said that the 'times' [Eccl. 3:1-8], with respect to all the aforementioned things, are 'from the hand of God' [Eccl. 2:24], and that even the 'travail' by which the 'sons of man' are 'exercised' [see Eccl. 3:10], is 'from the hand of God' – that is, it was made part of their nature. Here he adds that all these things are 'beautiful' – that is, well- | [333] [Solomon] has already said that the 'times' [Eccl. 3:1-8], with respect to all the aforementioned things, are 'from the hand of God' [Eccl. 2:24], and that even the 'travail' by which the 'sons of man' are 'exercised' [see Eccl. 3:10], is 'from the hand of God' – that is, it was made part of their nature. Here he adds that all these things are 'beautiful' |

arranged – in their ‘time’, for the meaning of ‘beautiful’ here is well-arranged or seemly. Even what seems evil is ‘beautiful in its time’. This resembles the Sage’s dictum: ‘Behold it is very good – even death in old age.’ It resembles the other dictum as well: ‘[Behold it is very good] – behold death is good’ [see *Gen Rabbah* 9:5; *Guide* III:10]. Nor is it possible that all other evils and corruptions have no utility with respect to something. Even ‘the world that He has set’ in man’s heart is ‘beautiful in its time.’ That is, the occupation with the ‘world’ and love of its vanities – which God has given the ‘sons of man’ – is ‘beautiful’.

in their ‘time’, for the meaning of ‘beautiful’ here is well-arranged or seemly. Even what seems evil is ‘beautiful in its time’. This resembles the Sage’s dictum: ‘Behold it is very good – even death in old age.’ It resembles the other dictum as well: ‘Behold it is very good – behold death is good’. Nor is it possible that all other evils and corruptions have no utility with respect to something. Even ‘the world that He has set’ in man’s heart is ‘beautiful in its time.’ That is, the occupation with the ‘world’ and love of its vanities – which God has given the ‘sons of man’ – is ‘beautiful’.

Immanuel borrows Ibn Tibbon’s subsequent discussion as well, with minor changes. The end of the first section of the commentary on Ecclesiastes 3:11, with transition to Genesis 3:22-24, then reads as follows. Note especially how Immanuel eliminates the reference to Maimonides and the *Guide*.

| | |
|--|--|
| Ibn Tibbon, Commentary on Eccl. 3:11 | Immanuel of Rome, Commentary on Eccl. 3:11, Hebrew Union College MS 167, 28a-28b |
| <p>[336] There is, in the Torah, something resembling this: ‘Now perhaps [literally: lest, <i>pen</i>] he will put forth his hand’ [Gen. 3:22].</p> <p>For the purpose of this dictum [in Gen. 3:22], and of the verse – ‘And He placed before the garden of Eden [the cherubs and the flaming sword]’ [Gen. 3:24] – was not (God forbid!) to prevent life from whoever can receive it. With Him is the ‘fountain of life’ [see Ps. 36:10]; and it is He</p> | <p>There is, in the Torah, something resembling this: ‘Now perhaps he will put forth his hand and take from the tree of life and eat and live forever’ [Gen. 3:22].</p> <p>For the purpose of this dictum [in Gen. 3:22], and of the verse – ‘And He placed before the garden of Eden the cherubs and the flaming sword’ [Gen. 3:24] – was not (God forbid!) to prevent life from whoever can receive it. With Him is the ‘fountain of life’ [see Ps. 36:10]; and it is He</p> |

who makes 'life' overflow to the worthy, so much so that if a small mosquito could live an everlasting life, He would not prevent it.

who makes 'life' overflow to the worthy, so much so that if a small mosquito could live an everlasting life, He would not prevent it.

[337] All of this is revealed in the Noble Treatise, the *Guide of the Perplexed*. But even before it reached us, I had noticed this matter, and cited proof from the dictum: 'God commanded the man saying: from all the trees of the garden eat' [Gen. 2:16]. That is, He commanded him to eat from 'all the trees of the garden', in the midst of which was the tree of life. Some of them were designated for living the temporal life, and some for living forever. What He prohibited was only the tree of knowledge, which is not necessary or of any help with respect to the temporal life, and which prevents one from living forever, by making everything dark and causing perpetual death. It is prohibited because it is entirely evil. The good God does not prevent the good; on the contrary, He is abundant in loving-kindness [see Ex. 34:6]. He came to prohibit eating the tree of life [in Gen. 3:22] for no reason but to teach that it is necessary, because of the nature of existence, that it be guarded by the cherubs and the flaming sword that turns every way [see Gen. 3:24].

The proof of this is his statement that 'God commanded the man saying: from all the trees of the garden eat' [Gen. 2:16].

That is, He commanded him to eat from 'all the trees of the garden', in the midst of which was the tree of life. Some of them were designated for living the temporal life, and some for living forever. What He prohibited was only the tree of knowledge, which is not necessary or of any help with respect to the temporal life, and which prevents one from living forever, by making everything dark and causing perpetual death. It is prohibited because it is entirely evil. The good God does not prevent the good; on the contrary, He is abundant in loving-kindness [see Ex. 34:6]. He came to prohibit eating the tree of life [in Gen. 3:22] for no reason but to teach that it is necessary, because of the nature of existence, that it be guarded by the cherubs and the flaming sword that turns every way [see Gen. 3:24].

Here, finally, is the beginning of Immanuel's commentary on Genesis 3:22-24. Note again the way Immanuel interposes occasional remarks in order to create fluid transitions in his composite text. Note also that this is one of the rare cases in which Immanuel does cite his source. In fact his discussion does not come from 'Samuel Ibn Tibbon and other sages'; it is entirely from Ibn Tibbon.

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Samuel Ibn Tibbon, Commentary on Eccl. 3:11, digression on Gen. 3:22-24</p> | <p>Immanuel of Rome, Commentary on Gen. 3:22-24, ed. David Goldstein, <i>The Commentary of Immanuel ben Solomon of Rome on Chapters I-X of Genesis: Introduction, Hebrew Text, Notes</i> (PhD dissertation, University of London, 1966), p. 93-94.</p> |
| <p>[336] There is, in the Torah, something resembling this: 'Now perhaps [literally: lest, <i>pen</i>] he will put forth his hand' [Gen. 3:22].</p> <p>For the purpose of this dictum [in Gen. 3:22], and of the verse – 'And He placed before the garden of Eden [the cherubs and the flaming sword]' [Gen. 3:24] – was not (God forbid!) to prevent life from whoever can receive it. With Him is the 'fountain of life' [see Ps. 36:10]; and it is He who makes 'life' overflow to the worthy, so much so that if a small mosquito could live an everlasting life, He would not prevent it.</p> <p>[337] All of this is revealed in the Noble Treatise, the <i>Guide of the Perplexed</i>. But even before it reached us, I had noticed this matter, and cited proof from the dictum: 'God commanded the man saying: from all the trees of the garden eat' [Gen. 2:16]. That is, He commanded him to eat from <u>all</u> the trees of the garden', in the midst of which was the tree of</p> | <p>Because the meaning of this verse is very strange and requires more explanation to make it agree with existence, we shall explain it at length and mention what the sage Rabbi Samuel Ibn Tibbon and other sages have said as explanation. For by way of truth, one needs to know that when it is said: 'Now perhaps he send out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever' [Gen. 3:22],</p> <p>the purpose of this dictum [in Gen. 3:22], and of the verse – 'And He placed before the garden of Eden the cherubs and the flaming sword' [Gen. 3:24] – was not (God forbid!) to prevent life from whoever can receive it. With Him is the 'fountain of life' [see Ps. 36:10]; and it is He who makes 'life' overflow to the worthy, so much so that if a small mosquito could live an everlasting life, He would not prevent it.</p> <p>The proof of this is the dictum: 'God commanded the man saying: from all the trees of the garden eat' [Gen. 2:16]. That is, He commanded him to eat from <u>all</u> the trees of the garden', in the midst of which was the tree of</p> |

life. Some of them were designated for living the temporal life, and some for living forever. What He prohibited was only the tree of knowledge, which is not necessary or of any help with respect to the temporal life, and which prevents one from living forever, by making everything dark and causing perpetual death. It is prohibited because it is entirely evil. The good God does not prevent the good; on the contrary, He is abundant in loving-kindness [see Ex. 34:6].

He came to prohibit eating the tree of life [in Gen. 3:22] for no reason but to teach that it is necessary, because of the nature of existence, that it be guarded by the cherubs and the flaming sword that turns every way [see Gen. 3:24].

[344] 'For whoso finds me finds life, and shall obtain the will of the Lord' [Prov. 8:35].

Wisdom says that whoever finds it finds 'life'. It does not say that whoever finds it finds 'life', implying that whoever finds it finds, because of it, something else which is 'life'. It says that whoever finds it finds 'life' because it itself is the 'life' he alludes to, which is the everlasting life of the soul. As he said about [wisdom] elsewhere: 'She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her' [Prov. 3:18] – with no missing particle of similitude, as was suggested by someone

life. Some of them were designated for living the temporal life, and some for living forever. What He prohibited was only the tree of knowledge, which is not necessary or of any help with respect to the temporal life, and which prevents one from living forever, by making everything dark and causing perpetual death. It is prohibited because it is entirely evil. The good God does not prevent the good; on the contrary,

He came to prohibit eating the tree of life [in Gen. 3:22] for no reason but to teach that it is necessary, because of the nature of existence, that it be guarded by the cherubs and the flaming sword that turns every way [see Gen. 3:24].

For He, may He be blessed, would not prevent the good from someone who possesses [that which merits the good] and anyone who 'finds' this 'life' obtains His will, as in: 'For whoso finds me finds life and shall obtain the will of the Lord' [Prov. 8:35].

who did not understand his purpose (as we explained in our preface). 'And shall obtain the will of the Lord'. This shows that, by finding wisdom (which is 'life') one attains the 'will of the Lord'. For what He willed with respect to the man/Adam is that he eat from the tree of life and live forever [see Gen. 3:22], that is, that he become wise and live forever.

This shows that, by finding wisdom (which is 'life') one attains the 'will of the Lord'. For what He willed with respect to the man/Adam is that he eat from the tree of life and live forever [see Gen. 3:22], that is, that he become wise and live forever.

This literal borrowing from Ibn Tibbon continues for another nine pages in Goldstein's edition.¹⁶

To sum up: Maimonides' citation of Ecclesiastes 3:11 in *Guide* III:25, understood by Ibn Tibbon in relation to *Guide* III:10, was used by Ibn Tibbon to write his own commentary on Ecclesiastes 3:11, in which he introduced a long digression on Genesis 3:22-24. Immanuel the compiler rewrote Ibn Tibbon's commentary on Ecclesiastes 3:11, eliminating references to the *Guide* and reorganising Ibn Tibbon's remarks according to the verses in the Bible: Ibn Tibbon's explanations of Ecclesiastes 3:11 proper he included in his commentary on Ecclesiastes 3:11 and Ibn Tibbon's explanations of Genesis 3:22-24 he moved to his commentary on Genesis. It is in this way that the creative, often controversial, ideas of both Maimonides and Ibn Tibbon became codified and classified according to the verses of the Bible.

A Maimonidean Method of Exegesis: Homonyms

Among the most distinctive characteristics of the *Guide of the Perplexed* are the 'lexicographic chapters'. In the first part of the *Guide*, Maimonides explains more than fifty terms and expressions that appear in the books of prophecy, including *tselem*, *demut*, *elohim*, *ish*, *ishshah*, *yalod*, *ben*, *adam*, *akhol*, *panim*, *abor*, *lev*, *ruah*, *nefesh*, *hayyim* and *mavet*. In

16. D. Goldstein (ed.), *Immanuel of Rome, Commentary on Genesis: The Commentary of Immanuel ben Solomon of Rome on Chapters I-X of Genesis: Introduction, Hebrew Text, Notes* (PhD dissertation, University of London, 1966), p. 94-102.

parts two and three of the *Guide*, Maimonides explains several additional terms as well, such as *malakh*, *erets* and *shamayim*, *raqi'a* and *hokhmah*.

That Maimonides begins his treatise with the explanation of key terms is in itself not surprising. It was the custom of Aristotle and the Aristotelians to do exactly the same thing at the beginning of any philosophical discussion. Aristotle, for example, begins his *Metaphysics* with an examination of key terminology; Themistius begins his commentary on Aristotle's *De caelo* with a survey of the possible meanings of the term 'heavens'; and al-Farabi, the most important philosophical influence on Maimonides, discusses, in his 'Treatise on Intellect', the different meanings of the Arabic term '*aql*'. What is surprising, however, is the way in which Maimonides uses his discussion of language. For, while Aristotle, Themistius and al-Farabi aimed to eliminate homonymy and ambiguity, to remove metaphors and figures of speech from their philosophical discussion, Maimonides aimed to do exactly the opposite: to bring out the figurative in biblical language, to emphasise the ambiguity and homonymy, so that biblical texts could be read figuratively rather than literally. In this way the secrets of the Torah could be uncovered; the biblical text, which seems to contradict reason, could be shown to teach philosophical principles and doctrines.

Maimonides borrowed philosophical method to help explain the Bible philosophically. By creating this philosophical method of allegorical exegesis, moreover, he established the foundation for a Maimonidean method of exegesis. Samuel Ibn Tibbon, Jacob Anatoli, Moses Ibn Tibbon and other Maimonideran disciples and enthusiasts used the terms singled out by Maimonides to help explain texts that Maimonides had not explained. Following the example of the master, moreover, they identified new homonyms that Maimonides had not identified, which they used in their own original works of philosophy and exegesis. In other words, Maimonides created an allegorical lexicon of sorts, which his followers expanded, modified and applied in new ways.

In order to illustrate how Maimonides' 'lexicographic chapters' in the *Guide* became a Maimonidean allegorical lexicon, three examples are considered here: the term *adam*, which is defined in *Guide* I:14; the terms *ish* and *ishshah*, which are defined in *Guide* I:6; and the term *akhol*, which is defined in *Guide* I:30. Maimonides' explanation of each term is followed by a discussion of its use by Ibn Tibbon, Anatoli and their followers.

Example 1: *Adam*

Chapter I:14 of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, the shortest of the book, is also one of the most important. In it Maimonides defines the meanings of the equivocal term *adam*. The entire chapter, from beginning to end, reads as follows:

The equivocality of the word *adam*: It is the name of Adam the first man and is a derivative word; for, as the biblical text states, it is derived from the word *adamah*. It is also the term designating the species. Thus: 'My spirit shall not abide in man' [*ba-adam*] [Gen. 6:3]; 'Who knoweth the spirit of the sons of man' [*bene ha-adam*] [Eccl. 3:21]; 'So that man [*ha-adam*] hath no pre-eminence above the beast' [Eccl. 3:19]. It is also a term designating the multitude, I mean the generality as distinguished from the elite. Thus: 'Both the sons of man [*bene adam*] and the sons of an [outstanding] individual' [*bene ish*] [Ps. 49:3]. This third meaning is to be found in the following verses: 'The sons of Elohim saw the daughters of man' [*benot ha-adam*] [Gen. 6:2]; 'Nevertheless ye shall die as man' [*ke-adam*] [Ps. 82:7].¹⁷

For Maimonides, the equivocal term *adam* is especially important for understanding the story of the Garden of Eden: Adam, the first man, represents the human species and Adam's fall is a fall from reason into a life of appetite and imagination, a life devoted to matter rather than spirit, which differs in no way from the life of the beast. For Ibn Tibbon, on the other hand, the prooftexts cited by Maimonides were as important as the term itself. Following the direction of the master, Ibn Tibbon explained Ecclesiastes 3:19, 3:21 and the book as a whole in light of the three meanings of *adam* defined by Maimonides.

For example: understanding the term *adam* as either the human species or the man of the multitude, Ibn Tibbon suggests three possible readings of Ecclesiastes 3:21. 'Who knows the spirit of the sons of man [*bene ha-adam*], whether it rises above,' he explains, can have any of the following meanings:¹⁸ everyone knows, with certainty, that no human soul can rise above and achieve conjunction with the active intellect; no

17. See *Guide* I:14, transl. Pines, p. 40.

18. See especially Ibn Tibbon's commentary on Eccl. 3:21-22, par. 474-478.

one knows, with certainty, that no human soul can rise above and conjoin with the active intellect – although conjunction seems unlikely, Ibn Tibbon explains, there is no scientific demonstration; or everyone knows, with certainty, that the man of the multitude cannot rise above and conjoin with the active intellect. It is this man – who does not actualise his intellect – that has no profit in all his labour wherein he labours under the sun.

Understanding *adam* as species or man of the multitude became a hermeneutical key in explaining Ecclesiastes. Any mention of *adam* or sons of *adam* could take on either of these meanings as defined in *Guide* I:14. Moreover, understanding *adam* as Adam, the first man, allowed Ibn Tibbon to relate the discussions in Ecclesiastes to the stories in Genesis. This and more: Solomon, in Ibn Tibbon's opinion, intentionally wrote about the 'man' in Ecclesiastes and the evils he suffers in order to provide further explanation of the secrets of the Torah. Thus the Book of Ecclesiastes itself, Ibn Tibbon explains, ought to be entitled the 'Book of the Man' or the 'Book of the Soul of Man', since it was written about the Man/Adam who eats from the Tree of Knowledge through the agency of the Woman.¹⁹ It is this Adam – who was expelled from the Garden of Eden and punished with thorns and thistles – who has no profit in all his labour. Everything he does is vanity and vain aspiration. He returns to the earth from which he came, while only the spirit of the elite few can possibly return to God or the active intellect.

Example 2: *Ish, Ishshah*

The second example is related to the first: the Maimonidean use of the terms *ish*, 'man' and *ishshah*, 'woman'. These terms are defined in *Guide* I:6, which is the second shortest chapter in the *Guide*. They are further explained in *Guide* I:17. The text of *Guide* I:6 and the relevant section from *Guide* I:17, read as follows:

19. See *Samuel Ibn Tibbon's Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, par. 41, 46-51.

Guide of the Perplexed I:6:²⁰

Man [*ish*] and woman [*ishshah*] are terms that at first were given the meaning of a human male and a human female. Afterwards they were used figuratively to designate any male or female among the other species of living beings. Thus it says: ‘Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee seven and seven, the man and his woman’ [Gen. 7:2]. It is as if it said male and female. Thereupon the term woman was used figuratively to designate any object apt for and fashioned with a view to being in, conjunction with some other object. Thus it says: ‘The five curtains should be coupled together, a woman to her sister’ [Ex. 26:3]. Hereby it has been made clear to you that the terms sister [*ahot*] and brother [*ah*] are likewise used equivocally with figurative meaning just as with man and woman.

The beginning of *Guide* I:17:²¹

Do not think that only the divine science should be withheld from the multitude. This holds good also for the greater part of natural science. In fact we have repeatedly set down for you our dictum: The Account of the Beginning ought not to be taught in the presence of two men. This is not only the case with regard to people adhering to law, but also with regard to the philosophers and learned men of the various communities in ancient times. For they concealed what they said about the first principles and presented it as riddles. Thus Plato and his predecessors designated matter as the female and form as the male.

Like the equivocal term *adam*, *ish* and *ishshah* – ‘man’ and ‘woman’ or ‘male’ and ‘female’ – were important for Maimonides in his explication of the Garden of Eden. Adam, the first man, could be understood as a figurative representation of form and Eve, the woman, as a figurative representation of matter. The identification of female with matter was useful for Maimonides in explaining Proverbs as well: he saw the ‘harlot’ with the smooth tongue as a metaphor for bad matter and the ‘woman of valour’ as an image representing good matter. The former, he explained, is

20. See *Guide* I:6, transl. Pines, p. 31.

21. See *Guide* I:17, transl. Pines, p. 42-43. For background on this chapter and its Arabic sources, see J.T. Robinson, ‘Some Remarks on the Source of Maimonides’ Plato in *Guide of the Perplexed* I.17’, *Zutot: Perspectives on Jewish Culture* 3 (2004), p. 41-49.

susceptible to desires and appetites, which prevent the human being from achieving true perfection, whereas the latter is disposed toward virtue rather than vice. She is satisfied with what is necessary and does not desire luxury or excess. In contrast to the 'harlot', the 'woman of valour' helps rather than hinders: she helps human form to achieve its ultimate perfection.

Although the image of matter and form was useful for Maimonides in the *Guide*, he used it with restraint. The same cannot be said of his followers. On the contrary, the image of matter and form as female and male became a favourite topos in later tradition. Following Maimonides, it was used to explain the stories of Adam/Man and Eve/Woman in Genesis and the 'harlot' and 'woman of valour' in the Book of Proverbs. It was applied to other texts as well, including the 'lover' and 'beloved' in Song of Songs and the 'one man in a thousand' and 'woman more bitter than death' in Ecclesiastes. Following Maimonides' explanation of 'woman' as anything 'apt for and fashioned with a view to being in conjunction with some other object', the image was extended into other areas as well. Thus the human soul, the human intellect and the intellect *in actu* were considered female, while the intellect, the intellect *in actu* and the active intellect were considered male. In fact, the image of male and female was so popular that it became the motto of the opponents of philosophy. Thus, during the controversy of 1303-1306, one example was cited time and again to illustrate the dangerous effect of philosophy on Judaism: the philosophical preachers, Rashba complained, make Abraham a figure of form and Sarah a figure of matter.²²

Two examples illustrate the use of *ish* and *ishshah*, 'male' and 'female', in the later tradition. The first is from Samuel Ibn Tibbon's *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, in which he explains the meaning of Song of Songs. The second is from the *Commentary on Song of Songs* by Samuel's son Moses, in which he follows and expands his father's discussion:

22. See *Minhat Qena'ot*, in: H. Dimitrovsky (ed.), *Teshuvot ha-Rashba* (Jerusalem 1990), p. 412 ff and elsewhere. See also Yedayah ha-Penini, 'Letter of Apology', in *She'elot u-Teshuvot ha-Rashba* (Bene Brak 1958), vol. 1, n. 418, p. 158-159, for a response to Rashba's accusation.

Samuel Ibn Tibbon, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (par. 80):

As for the woman of that story [viz. Song of Songs] – the woman that loves – she was used in place of the man who finds a ‘woman of valour’ of the most complete perfection [see Prov. 31:10], a woman whose every longing is for her husband, or a woman whose husband rules over her [see Gen. 3:16]. This man, after he has moved his intellect from potentiality to actuality – or say, he himself is intellect in actu – is called the ‘most beautiful among women’ [see Song 1:8]. The ‘beloved’ is the separate intellect, with which this man, described here, can conjoin.

Moses Ibn Tibbon, *Commentary on Song of Songs* (p. 9):

I need to make known to you that it is an ancient custom for the sages, as well as the prophets, to represent matter as a woman or the female and the soul as a man or the male; or the soul as a woman and the intellect of man [*adam*] as a man [*ish*]; or the intellect of man as a woman and the separate intellect as a male. It is also the way of sages to represent that which receives form as a female and that which gives form as a male. Finally, religion is represented as a female and reason as a male; religion is called ‘the law of the mother’ and reason ‘the instruction of the father’.

Example 3: Torah as Food and Water

The third example is more complex. It shows, better than the previous two, the ways in which Maimonidean observations became codified in later commentaries on the Bible. The example begins with *Guide* I:30, in which Maimonides defines the meanings of *akhol*, to eat. It continues with Jacob Anatoli’s sermon on Be-Shalah and concludes with Me’iri’s borrowings from Anatoli in his commentary on Proverbs 25:25 and 5:15-19. Each stage in this process – from lexicon, to exegesis, to anthology – is discussed here in succession.

Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* I:30

In *Guide* I:30, Maimonides presents the various meanings of the biblical word *akhol*. It possesses the simple meaning of ‘eat’ – to eat or consume food – as well as the extended meaning of ‘destroy’ and the figurative meaning of ‘consume wisdom’. In the course of his discussion,

Maimonides relates the same figurative meanings to drinking and water as well. Thus learning Torah or wisdom, he explains, is often represented as eating food or drinking water. His discussion of water, which is important for our purposes, reads as follows:

Similarly, they often designate knowledge as water. Thus: 'Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye for water' [Is. 55:1]. Inasmuch as this use has become so frequent and widespread in the Hebrew language that it has become, as it were, the first meaning, the words meaning hunger and thirst are likewise employed to designate lack of knowledge and of apprehension. Thus: 'I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord' [Amos 8:11]; 'My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God' [Ps. 42:3]. This use is frequent. Jonathan b. Uziel, peace be on him, translates the verse: 'With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation' [Is. 12:3] by the words: With joy shall you receive a new teaching from the chosen of the righteous. Consider accordingly that he interprets the word water as being the knowledge that will be received in those days. And he takes the Hebrew word for wells – *ma'yene* – to be the equivalent of *me'eyne ha-'edah*; I mean thereby the notables who are the men of knowledge. And he says: From the chosen of the righteous, as righteousness is true salvation. See how he interprets every word in this verse with a view to the notion of knowledge and learning. Understand this!²³

Jacob Anatoli, Sermon on Be-Shalah [Exodus 13:17-17:16]

Maimonides' discussion of drink, thirst and water in *Guide* I:30 served as the starting point in Anatoli's sermon on Be-Shelah, in which he focuses his attention on Exodus 15:22-26: the waters of Marah. As he often does, however, Anatoli frames his discussion of the *parashah* with verses from Proverbs and it is here where the influence of Maimonides is most directly evident. Anatoli's frame discussion of relevant texts from Proverbs, moreover, passes directly into Me'iri's commentary on the same verses.

Because of the importance of this discussion, Anatoli's sermon is cited here at length, followed by the relevant texts from the Me'iri. In the first section, notice especially Anatoli's explanation of the same verses

23. See *Guide* I:30, transl. Pines, p. 64.

cited by Maimonides in *Guide* I:30 – Isaiah 55:1 and Amos 8:11 – and his identification of the relevant rabbinic text.

Malmad ha-Talmidim, Sermon on Be-Shalah (p. 56b-57b):

‘As cold waters to a thirsty soul [*nefesh ayyefah*], so is good news [*shemua tovah*] from a far country’ [Prov. 25:25]

This verse, like all other verses in Proverbs, has two meanings: external and internal. The external meaning is clear. It comes to quiet the heart of the passionate lover who madly desires his beloved during the entire time he is far away. For when something ‘good’ is heard about him, it is appropriate that [his passions] quiet and relax. [Solomon] likened this to ‘cold waters’ and to a ‘thirsty soul’, since it is known that the nature of the ‘thirsty [soul]’ bubbles and boils, as a result of which his thirst is great; and of all customary drinks, there is none that can satisfy his thirst like water. As it is said: ‘[Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread,] nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord’ [Amos 8:11]; and ‘he asked for water’ [Judges 5:25]. It is the same in many other places of scripture as well and even reality shows this to be true. Just as cold water satisfies the ‘thirsty [soul]’, causes the boiling to subside, cools his heat and makes his heart good, so too ‘good news’ about the beloved will quiet the mad heart of the lover, even though he will continue to possess the same passionate desire [for the beloved’s presence].

This is the external meaning of the verse. But the verse also points to the purpose of the Torah, which comes to satisfy the thirst of anyone who hears the words of the Lord; it satisfies the ‘thirsty [soul]’ that seeks [the word of the Lord] but does not find it. The sage [Solomon] called the Torah ‘news [*shemua*]’ here and elsewhere, as in the following: ‘[The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart;] and a good report [*shemua tovah*] maketh the bones fat’ [Prov. 15:30]. This is because [Torah] comes according to [the call of tradition]: ‘hear and accept’, rather than the way of demonstrative learning...

According to this notion, [the Sages] said in several places that the Torah is likened, by way of riddle and allegory, to water. And according to this meaning it is fitting to investigate all the secrets of the Torah, which are hidden and concealed [*reshumot* and *hatumot*]. This relates to the meaning of what had been mentioned in rabbinic texts when they said the following regarding the verse: ‘And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water’ [Ex. 15:22]. Dorshe Reshumot said: ‘There is no water except Torah, as it is said: ‘Ho, every one

that thirsteth, come ye to the waters' [Is. 55:1; see *Baba Qamma* 85a]. That they cite proof from this verse is like many of the proofs cited in the Talmud, in which [the Sages] mention only part of the matter as proof, while the proof is found in what is attached to it, in the same context. Thus it is said there, as explanation of [the initial] statement: 'Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me and eat ye that which is good and let your soul delight itself in fatness' [Is. 55:2]. He taught that hearkening to Him, which is the principle of the Torah, is good eating and delight for the soul. Furthermore, he said there: 'Incline your ear and come unto me: hear and your soul shall live' [Is. 55:3]. He taught that this hearkening is true life for the soul. All of this served to explain his previous statement, when he called out: 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters' [Is. 55:1]. This then shows that 'water' is a metaphor [*kinnuui*] for Torah.

We also find the explicit statement: 'Not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord' [Amos 8:11]; and 'word of the Lord' is certainly Torah. Thus, since the thirst for [Torah] and the [physical] human thirst are both related to water, it is appropriate that [Torah itself] be called 'water'. And this likeness of Torah to water is appropriate for several reasons: Water is the suitable and necessary drink for every man, whether healthy or sick; it is found in every inhabited place for free and with little effort; it is more necessary than any other drink; it satisfies and makes good the heart of the 'thirsty [soul]'. In contrast, all other drinks are inappropriate for some human beings, do not exist in many places of the inhabited region and their existence is not without cost. Nor are they, like water, necessary. For, although wine is better than any other drink, it is, in most cases, not needed to sustain the life of any man. What is necessary is bread, for which he hungers and water, for which he thirsts, as has been mentioned. But wine, on the other hand and meat, are not suitable for the sick; and even for the healthy, they are not necessary.

Anatoli then proceeds to make some general remarks, then returns to the subject of Torah and related verses in Proverbs. Here he alludes to another rabbinic *midrash* as well: *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:19.

The Torah is the necessary study for every man, whether his soul is healthy or sick. It is found with every man and in every place, as it is said: 'But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it' [Deut. 30:14]. The Torah satisfies all those who are thirsty and revives their soul. Thus it is fitting that it be called 'water'. What is water? Someone who is great is not

embarrassed to say to someone small: give me water to drink. So it is with the words of Torah. Someone great is not embarrassed to say to someone small: teach me one chapter or one verse or one *halakhah* or even one letter of the alphabet. Moreover, just as water purifies the body and cleanses it of any filth, so the Torah purifies the soul and cleanses it of any sin. Moreover, just as someone who knows how to swim in water can find whatever he needs with respect to it, whether he seeks to wash in it or cross to another place or bring out pearls from it and if he does not [know how to swim], he will drown and be washed away; so it is also with those who study the words of Torah. If one does not know how to swim in them and read them properly, in the end he will be engulfed by them. But if he does know how to swim, he can explain secrets that are even more precious than pearls, which was the purpose.

Finally, it is appropriate to liken the overflow [*shafa*] of Torah to living waters because it flows from every side without any deficiency and many drink from it. According to this figure [*mashal*] it was said: 'Drink waters out of thine own cistern [and running waters out of thine own well]' [Prov. 5:15] and 'Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, [and rivers of waters in the streets]' [Prov. 5:16]. For this is the nature of every sage and perfect man: he ought to benefit others – whether orally or in writing – with as much wisdom as he himself has grasped. He said: 'Let them be only thine own and not strangers' with thee' [Prov. 5:17]. That is, it is not appropriate for anyone for whom the Lord has graced with a good intellect to use it for anything but things that are useful for this [world] and the next and to give a portion to 'strangers with him' with respect to his nature. But he also needs to make sure he rules over his natural powers and protects himself, so that the 'stranger with him' will not lead him to stumble and make his source of water a 'troubled fountain' and 'corrupt spring'. As he said: 'A righteous man falling down before the wicked is as a troubled fountain and a corrupt spring' [Prov. 25:26].

Me'iri, Commentary on Proverbs

How does this Maimonidean discussion pass into the Me'iri? As he usually does, the Me'iri combs *Malmed ha-Talmidim* for explanations of Proverbs and then reproduces them in his commentary on the relevant verse. This is true in both his commentary on Proverbs 25:25 – which was the opening verse of Anatoli's sermon – and his commentary on Proverbs 5:15-19. The Me'iri's commentaries, which reproduce Anatoli's Maimonidean explications, read as follows:

Me'iri, Commentary on Proverbs 25:25:²⁴

'As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country' [Prov. 25:25]:

The external meaning [of this verse] is an ethical pointer, encouraging the lover to love the beloved even when he is not present and to remember his love always. He should not despair of it or forget it. Rather, whenever [the beloved] is far away, he ought to increase his search for him and investigate his whereabouts, until 'good news' is reported, which for him will be like 'cold waters' for a 'thirsty soul'. For the 'thirsty [soul]', on account of the boiling of its nature, thirsts and hopes and desires 'cold waters' that can slake its thirst; so too the passionate lover hopes for 'news' of his beloved from a 'distant land' in order to quiet the madness of his heart.

According to the internal meaning, [Solomon] called the Torah and its speculative cornerstones 'good news'. For all its laws [*inyanim*] are given over to the heart by way of tradition [*qabbalah*] – even the speculative notions contained within it. He called it 'good', that is, perfect, as in: 'the Torah of the Lord is perfect' [see Ps. 19:8], meaning that there is nothing necessary with respect to belief that is lacking from it: it lacks nothing related to the perfecting of virtue and the avoiding of vice; and it lacks nothing related to the perfecting of intellect, both speculative and traditional. He says 'from a distant land' because grasping the speculative matters contained within it is achieved only after many preliminaries, preparatory training and the study of many sciences. He said that one who passionately desires to know the 'good news' from a 'far land', that is, to know the things in it that are cognised intellectually by investigation and speculation, when he grasps it he will, like the 'thirsty soul' that finds 'cold waters', find rest and quietness and contentment regarding the truth. Finally, he likened the passionate desire for wisdom to a 'thirsty soul' and the slaking of [this desire] to 'cold waters', because of the sweetness it gives to the 'thirsty [soul]', together with the fact that Torah is likened to water for several other reasons, some of which have already been explained.

The Me'iri refers back to his explanation of Proverbs 5:15-19, where he had reproduced Anatoli's justification of the Torah-water connection. The relevant text of Me'iri's commentary on Proverbs 5:15-19 will bring

24. See the edition of Menahem Mendel Meshi-Zahav (Jerusalem 1969), p. 243.

this section of the paper to a close. Here we see clearly how the Maimonidean waters flowed easily from one text to another!

Me'iri, Commentary on Proverbs 5:15-19, p. 53-54:

'Drink waters out of thine own cistern and running waters out of thine own well' [Prov. 5:15]... According to the internal sense, you already know that the Torah and wisdom are likened to water: 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters' [Is. 55:1]. The many reasons for this have already been explained in the *midrashim* and rabbinic dicta: The first is that it is the drink suitable for every man, healthy or sick; it is found at every time without effort; it is necessary for every required activity [*tashmish*] of man. Moreover, someone great is not embarrassed to say to someone small: give me some water to drink, so someone great is not embarrassed to say to someone small: teach me one chapter. Moreover, water cleanses the body of every sickness, so the Torah cleanses the soul of every sin. Moreover, if one knows how to swim in water, one can bring out fine stones and pearls, but if one does not know how to swim, in the end he will be engulfed; so it is also with the study of Torah...

Creating a Philosophical Library

In *Guide of the Perplexed* II:2, Maimonides, following a series of logical proofs for the existence, unity and incorporeality of God, introduces the following preface:

Know that my purpose in this Treatise of mine was not to compose something on natural science, or to make an epitome of notions pertaining to the divine science according to some doctrines, or to demonstrate what has been demonstrated in them. Nor was my purpose in this Treatise to give a summary and epitomised description of the disposition of the spheres, or to make known their number. For the books composed concerning these matters are adequate. If, however, they should turn out not to be adequate with regard to some subject, that which I shall say concerning that subject will not be superior to everything else that has been said about it. My purpose in this Treatise, as I have informed you in its introduction, is only to elucidate the difficult points of the Law and to make manifest the true realities of its hidden meanings, which the multitude cannot be made to understand because of these matters being too high for it.²⁵

25. See *Guide* II:2, transl. Pines, p. 253-254.

Writing in Arabic, in twelfth-century Egypt, this preliminary statement by Maimonides is not surprising. For at the time he was writing, the basic works of Greek philosophy and science had already been translated into Arabic and an original and complex Arabic tradition of philosophy had developed. Because Maimonides – and his readers – had ready access to Aristotle and the Aristotelians, Hippocrates and Galen, Euclid and Ptolemy and the Arabic commentaries and original treatises by al-Farabi, Avicenna and many others, what need was there to introduce yet another summary of philosophical ideas and principles? In contrast, the Hebrew reader in Southern France, who did not know Arabic, would find this preliminary statement troubling. How could he understand the *Guide of the Perplexed* if he were unable to read the books that Maimonides considered fundamental? How could he understand arguments that referred to philosophical discussions by Aristotle, Alexander, al-Farabi and others, when these books were unavailable in Hebrew?

This need for a basic library of works in Hebrew to support the reading of the *Guide* was one important influence on the translation movement in southern France. Beginning with Ibn Tibbon, Jewish translators devoted themselves to rendering into Hebrew works that Maimonides had referred to in the *Guide*, or works that could help understand a problem that Maimonides had dealt with in the *Guide*.²⁶ Thus Ibn Tibbon himself seems to have translated Aristotle's *Meteorology* in response to the suggestion in *Guide* II:30 that the *Meteorology* is the key to understanding the 'work of the beginning'.²⁷ Similarly, an anonymous translator seems to have translated Apollonius' Conic Sections because it was mentioned by Maimonides in *Guide* I:73.²⁸ A whole

26. For the translations, see in general G. Freudenthal, 'Les sciences dans les communautés juives médiévales de Provence: Leur appropriation, leur rôle', *Revue des études juives* 152 (1993), p. 29-136; M. Zonta, *La filosofia antica nel Medioevo ebraico: La traduzioni ebraiche medievali dei testi filosofici antichi* (Brescia 1996). See also S. Harvey, 'Did Maimonides' Letter to Samuel Ibn Tibbon Determine which Philosophers would be Studied by Later Jewish Thinkers?', *Jewish Quarterly Review* 83 (1992), p. 51-70, for a discussion of the translations in relation not to the *Guide* itself but to Maimonides' Letter to his Translator.

27. See A. Ravitzky, 'Aristotle's *Meteorology* and Maimonidean Exegesis of the Account of Creation', *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 9 (1990), p. 225-250 [Hebrew].

28. See G. Freudenthal, 'Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and the Transmission of the Mathematical Tract 'On Two Asymptotic Lines' in the Arabic, Latin and Hebrew Medieval Traditions', *Vivarium* 26 (1988), p. 113-140.

secondary literature emerged as well, which consisted of encyclopaedias, glossaries and, later, commentaries on the *Guide* itself, which often aimed to identify and explain possible sources of and influences on the master. So important was this literature for understanding the *Guide* that, during the controversy of 1303–1306, Me'iri criticised the ban on the study of Greek philosophy because, as he says, without Aristotle and Averroes, no one would understand the *Guide*.²⁹

In this final section we shall consider two examples which illustrate the close connection between translation and the reading of the *Guide*: the translation of Aristotle's *Meteorology* and the translation of al-Bitruji's *On the Principles of Astronomy*. The translating of these works are considered together with their reception, in encyclopaedias, literary works and exegesis.

Aristotle's *Meteorology*

The first example, the translation of Aristotle's *Meteorology*, begins with a cryptic remark by Maimonides in *Guide* II:30. Maimonides' allusion to the *Meteorology*, characteristically linked with a rabbinic text, reads as follows:

With regard to the fact that that which is above the firmament is called water in name only and that it is not the specific water known to us, a statement setting this forth has also been made by the sages, may their memory be blessed. They made it in the following passage: Four entered paradise and so on. Rabbi Aqiba said to them: When you come to the stones of pure marble, do not say, Water, Water, for it is written: He that speaketh falsehood shall not be established before mine eyes. Reflect if you are one of those who reflect, to what extent he has made clear and revealed the whole matter in this statement, provided that you consider it well, understand all that has been

29. See D. Kaufmann, 'Simeon b. Josefs Sendschreiben an Menachem b. Salomo', in *Jubelschrift zum neunzigsten Geburtstag des Dr. L. Zunz* (Berlin 1884), p. 166: 'How can we know the twenty-five premises in the *Guide*, upon which the principles of the Torah depend, without the books on nature [physics] and what is after nature [metaphysics]; all of [the premises] are taken from them. How will we know any of the wondrous secrets mentioned in that book [the *Guide*] in chapter 17 of Part I without having any knowledge of the principles [of existence] and how can we know the principles without the books on nature?'

demonstrated in the *Meteorology* and examine everything that people have said about every point mentioned in that work.³⁰

How did Ibn Tibbon respond to this glowing praise of Aristotle's scientific treatise? As is now well known, he rendered Aristotle's *Meteorology* into Hebrew, completing the translation in 1210, after having consulted manuscripts in Barcelona and Toledo.³¹ He then used it in his own exegetical works in order to explain, as Maimonides had suggested, the 'work of the beginning'. Thus, the first chapter of Genesis, Ibn Tibbon explains in both the *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* and *Ma'amar Yiqqavu ha-Mayim*, says nothing about the creation of the world as a whole. It refers instead to meteorological processes within the world itself: The 'heavens' and 'earth' mentioned in Genesis 1:1 refer to the same 'heavens' and 'earth' mentioned on day two. The 'light' created on day one refers to the light emanating from the luminaries and this natural light contributes to meteorological phenomena in the atmosphere and the generation of sublunar beings. The 'firmament' is the atmosphere and the water above and below the firmament refers to rain and snow, rivers and seas. The waters are gathered and dry land appears as a result of evaporation, caused by the heat of the sun. Then plants, animals and human beings come into existence, through natural processes of mixture and congealing, together with the giving of form by an incorporeal agent intellect.

Having mastered Aristotle's *Meteorology*, Ibn Tibbon could apply it to other texts as well. One example is especially interesting. In his *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* 7:6 – 'For as the sound of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool and this also is vanity' – Ibn Tibbon digresses to explain the nature of thunder. Even though this is not directly related to the verse, he apologises, it is nevertheless introduced to satisfy the reader's curiosity. His apology, followed by the digression itself, runs as follows:

[573] I have spoken at length about something unrelated to this book's meaning. And I have condemned others for doing precisely the same

30. See *Guide* II:30, transl. Pines, p. 353.

31. See Ravitzky, 'Aristotle's *Meteorology*' *op. cit.* and R. Fontaine, *Orot ha-Shamayim: Samuel Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew Version of Aristotle's Meteorology* (Leiden 1995).

thing. But this is something that occurs in nature the cause of which many men of understanding yearn to know. Since it resembles the cause of the ‘sound of thorns’ referred to here, I decided to speak at length about both [processes] in order to slake the thirst of those who yearn to know. Let us return now to explaining the verse.

The digression is based on his own translation of the *Meteorology*, with modifications in language and structure;³² it is a freer description of thunder, representing his own understanding of the translated text:

‘For as the sound [*qol*] of thorns [*sirim*] under a pot [*sir*], so is the laughter of the fool and this also is vanity’ [Eccl. 7:6]:

[572] The word *sirim* refers to thorns or thistles. He chose to use the expression *sirim* [thorns] together with *sir* [pot] for literary effect. He says that the ‘laughter of the fool’, that is, his foolish song, resembles the ‘sound’ of burning ‘thorns’. They produce a ‘sound’ as a result of the release of their smoky vapour, which comes to exist in them when their quality of wetness is brought to boil. This vapour cannot escape from inside the thorn until its surrounding shell is broken, namely, when cracks are made in it. When it escapes through these cracks, it does so with extraordinary force, making a sudden sound when it strikes the surrounding air.

This corresponds with one explanation of thunder. A portion of the dry vapour, which is not fit to become water, is led to rise together with the vapour that becomes cloud, for neither of them [the two types of vapour] can rise without the other. The wet vapour is raised by the smoky vapour, because it is light, and when it reaches a cold place in the atmosphere – where the [wet] vapour becomes cloud – the smoky vapour enters this [newly formed] cloud. It attempts to ‘run away’ from the cloud’s surface, which is the first [part of the cloud] that returns to water; for water is the contrary of this [smoky] vapour. Water is moist and cold, and this smoky vapour is warm and dry, and contraries destroy each other. Therefore, the one ‘runs away’ from the other, like a man who flees someone that hates him, in order to avoid being killed.

When the cloud becomes condensed and cold and re-approaches its first nature as water – this occurs at a place close to where the [smoky] vapour entered [the cloud] – the [smoky] vapour will need to escape and ‘run away’. But this is possible only after it has made some sort of crack in the cloud – whether on top or bottom or in one of the sides.

32. Cf. the following to *Otot ha-Shamayim*, II: 520-529, p. 141-142.

For [by this time the smoky vapour] has already been surrounded on every side by [the cloud], the cloud's surface having first returned to water, as we explained. All of this is explained in the appropriate place in [Aristotle's] *Meteorology*. When the [smoky] vapour escapes through this crack, it strikes the surrounding air with a sudden force and makes a great sound, which is called 'thunder'.

Following Maimonides, the *Meteorology*, as translated by Ibn Tibbon and applied to the exegesis of Genesis, became a central text in the Maimonidean tradition. Moses Ibn Tibbon translated Averroes' Epitome of the *Meteorology* into Hebrew and used Aristotle and Averroes extensively in his own commentary on the work of creation and in his other exegetical monographs.³³ Levi b. Abraham accepted and applied the meteorological explanation of Genesis in his own discussion of creation in *Livyat Hen*.³⁴ Following Ibn Tibbon, the *Meteorology* entered into additional fields of discourse as well. Gershom b. Solomon of Arles, in his encyclopaedia of science *Gate of Heaven*, organised the first section according to Ibn Tibbon's theory of creation and reproduced extensive passages from Ibn Tibbon's translation of the *Meteorology*.³⁵ Then Gershom's abridged version of the *Meteorology*, rearranged according to the 'work of creation', was borrowed and reproduced in a later version of Joseph Ibn Zabarah's *Book of Delight*.³⁶ This last move is especially interesting. For, as the result of the free mixing of sources by a medieval scribe, Maimonides' esoteric allusion to a secret of creation became a topos of popular literature!

Al-Bitruji, *On the Principles of Astronomy*

The second example, al-Bitruji's *On the Principles of Astronomy*, is a text that Maimonides does not refer to in the *Guide*; indeed, he could not

33. See Moses Ibn Tibbon, appendix to O. Fraisse, *Moses Ibn Tibbons Kommentar zum Hohenleid und sein poetologisch-philosophisches Programm* (Berlin 2004).

34. See Kreisel, *Livyat Hen op. cit.*, ch. 12 and throughout.

35. See J.T. Robinson, 'Gershom b. Solomon's *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*: Its Sources and Use of Sources', in: S. Harvey (ed.), *The Medieval Hebrew Encyclopedias of Science and Philosophy* (Dordrecht 2000), p. 248-274. For meteorology in the encyclopaedias, see R. Fontaine, 'The Reception of Aristotle's *Meteorology* in Hebrew Scientific Writings of the Thirteenth Century', *Aleph: Historical Studies in Science & Judaism* 1 (2001), p. 101-140.

36. See I. Davidson (ed.), *Ibn Zabarah* (New York 1914), p. 109-112 and Davidson's discussion, p. lxxii-lxxx. My thanks to Resianne Fontaine for this reference.

have cited it or even alluded to it, for it was written after the *Guide* was already complete. But an interest in al-Bitruji's Astronomy, which attempted to resolve the inconsistency between Ptolemy's astronomy and Aristotle's celestial physics, was nevertheless stimulated by Maimonides' own concern with precisely the same problem. Maimonides' statement of the problem, which he calls the 'true perplexity', is expressed most clearly in *Guide* II:24:

Consider now how great these difficulties are. If what Aristotle has stated with regard to natural science is true, there are no epicycles or eccentric circles and everything revolves round the centre of the earth. But in that case, how can the various motions of the stars come about? Is it in any way possible that motion should be on the one hand circular, uniform and perfect and that on the other hand the things that are observable should be observed in consequence of it, unless this be accounted for by making use of one of the two principles or of both of them?...

Furthermore, how can one conceive the retrogradation of a star, together with its other motions, without assuming the existence of an epicycle? On the other hand, how can one imagine a rolling motion in the heavens or a motion around a centre that is not immobile? This is the true perplexity.³⁷

Maimonides, as is now well-known, was part of a general Andalusian 'revolt' against Ptolemy.³⁸ The astronomy of Ptolemy, which worked well in describing and also predicting astronomical phenomena, was inconsistent with Aristotelian physics. Aristotle's physics, on the other hand, which requires the uniform movement of celestial bodies around a fixed centre, could not explain the celestial phenomena, especially the apparent retrogradation of the planets. This problem was discussed by other members of the Andalusian school of Aristotelianism. Ibn Bâjjah had already identified doubts and difficulties; Ibn Tufayl had suggested constructing a workable Aristotelian astronomy; and Ibn Rushd addressed

37. See *Guide* II:24, transl. Pines, p. 325-326.

38. See A.I. Sabra, 'The Andalusian Revolt against Ptolemaic Astronomy: Averroes and al-Bitruji', in: E. Mendelsohn (ed.), *Transformation and Tradition in the Sciences: Essays in Honor of I. Bernard Cohen* (Cambridge, Mass. 1984), p. 133-153; Y.T. Langermann, 'The "True Perplexity": *The Guide of the Perplexed* Part II, Chapter 24', in: J. Kraemer (ed.), *Perspectives on Maimonides* (Oxford 1991), p. 159-174.

several problems of Ptolemaic astronomy in his commentary on *Metaphysics*. Only al-Bitruji, however, attempted to rehabilitate Aristotle completely and produce an astronomical theory that could both preserve Aristotle's physical principles and explain the phenomena.

Maimonides did not know al-Bitruji's treatise, but Ibn Tibbon, clearly aware of the problem, was quick to recognise its importance. Not long after the work itself was written, he summarised it in all three of his major works: *Perush ha-Millot ha-Zarot*, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* and *Ma'amar Yiqqavu ha-Mayim*.³⁹ In the latter treatise, he also associates it with the chariot vision in Ezekiel, suggesting that the new astronomical theory might help explain the prophetic vision. Following Ibn Tibbon, al-Bitruji's *On the Principles of Astronomy* then became an important treatise in Provence. Moses Ibn Tibbon translated the entire text into Hebrew; Levi b. Abraham discussed it in the astronomical section of his *Livyat Hen*; and, in the following generation, Gersonides used it in the formulation of his own original astronomical investigations.

Thus, to sum up: Maimonides' discussion of a problem in the *Guide* stimulated among his readers an interest in the same problem, which created an awareness of contemporary attempts to resolve the problem. This final example is especially important. For it shows how an authoritative text could stimulate the development of an open tradition among its followers. The *Guide* did not present the final word on the subject, but established the framework for further investigation.

Conclusion

Maimonides, in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, established the foundations of a tradition of biblical commentary, with well-defined hermeneutical principles and methods of exegesis. He introduced or inspired other developments as well: he singled out key rabbinic texts and showed how they ought to be interpreted; he introduced a method of explaining the reasons for the commandments; and influenced the development of a distinctive rhetoric and literary style. As discussed here Maimonides also

39. See J.T. Robinson, 'The First References in Hebrew to al-Bitrūjī's *On the Principles of Astronomy*', *Aleph: Historical Studies in Science and Judaism* 3 (2003), p. 145-163.

stimulated, through his philosophical-theological discussions and occasional references to philosophical works, the translation of Arabic writings into Hebrew.

In all these areas, Maimonides laid the foundations. But he left it to his followers, disciples and epigones to develop his occasional remarks into a clearly defined philosophical-literary movement: 'He left room for his students.' The first development of such a movement, really a philosophical-literary culture, was in thirteenth-century Provence. But many other Maimonideanisms developed as well: in Italy, Yemen, Egypt and Spain; in the later Middle Ages, Renaissance and early modern period. The study of each of these traditions, in comparison with the others, can contribute significantly to our understanding of schools of thought and intellectual traditions and of the relation of a creative figure to the traditions that he inspires. Each tradition is, in its own right, an important chapter in the history of Maimonideanism, the writing of which has only just begun.