Secondary Forms of Philosophy: On the Teaching and Transmission of Philosophy in Non-Philosophical Literary Genres

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In the thirteenth century, the traditional Jewish communities of southern France (called 'Provence' in Hebrew sources), where Talmud and Midrash had reigned supreme, were transformed into the leading centres of Jewish philosophy. There in Rousillon, Languedoc, Comtat Venaissin, and Provence proper, in the communities of Perpignan, Béziers, Carcassonne, Narbonne, Lunel, Montpellier, Arles, and Marseilles, Jews devoted themselves — with religious zeal — to the teaching of philosophical ideas.

This cultural transformation in southern France, a transformation from traditional Jew to philosopher, from yeshiva student to enthusiast of Aristotle, is really quite remarkable. Especially remarkable is the speed with which philosophical texts, ideas, principles, ideals, and aspirations spread throughout the region. By 1306, when the Jews were expelled from France, Greek and Arabic philosophical ideas were discussed freely and openly, in Hebrew and Romance, in every area of Jewish life and letters.

How did this transformation take place? There were certainly many factors — sociological, political, economic, religious, and even geographical. The purpose of the present paper is to focus on the literary: the way that different literary genres and forms — different media, if you will — were used to teach and disseminate philosophy to the general public. In other words, the paper will focus on the popularization of philosophy in Provence, the creating of a literary foundation for philosophy within the traditional community, the creation of a philosophical culture.

The paper will survey the main literary-pedagogical developments in thirteenth-century Provence: translation; reference works and study aids; popular literature,

including poetry and rhymed prose (*maqāmah*); commentary on the Bible; and the philosophical sermon. The order of presentation corresponds (more or less) with the order of historical development, as 'foreign science' was gradually transformed into Talmud Torah (traditional learning).

Translation

In Christian Europe, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were — as Charles Homer Haskins famously said — a time of renaissance. This applies not only to the Christians but also to the Jews, who devoted themselves to the translation of classical works into Hebrew. Although there were centres of Hebrew translation in Spain and Italy (often corresponding with the main centres of Latin translation), the most productive Hebrew translators were based in Provence. Indeed, already in the twelfth century a fairly coherent translation project began to develop in Provence, with the renderings of several Judaeo-Arabic works into Hebrew. It continued into the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, with increasing attention directed towards Arabic, Graeco-Arabic, and even Latin works of philosophy and science.[1]

In Provence, moreover, the main translators were members of a single family, a fact which contributed to the coherency of the movement. Judah Ibn Tibbon (*c.* 1120–90), a refugee from Islamic Spain, resettled in Lunel, where he rendered Judaeo-Arabic classics of grammar, lexicography, ethics, philosophy, and theology into Hebrew. His son Samuel (*c.* 1165–1232) translated Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, along with Aristotle's *Meteorology* and Averroes's 'Treatises on Conjunction with the Active Intellect'. The increased interest in non-Jewish philosophy is evident especially in the work of Samuel's son and son-in-law. For example, Jacob Anatoli (*c.* 1194–1256) and Moses Ibn Tibbon (fl. 1244–83)

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[1] For the translation movement, see the classic study of Moritz Steinschneider, *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher* (Berlin: Kommissionsverlag des Bibliographischen Bureaus, 1893; repr. Graz: **[DAO1]**, 1956); and especially the more recent work of Isadore Twersky, 'Aspects of the Social and Cultural History of Provençal Jewry', *Journal of World History*, 11 (1968), 185–207 (repr. in *Jewish Society through the Ages*, ed. by H. H. Ben-Sasson and Samuel Ettinger (New York: Schocken, 1971)); Gad Freudenthal, 'Les Sciences dans les communautés juives médiévales de Provence: leur appropriation, leur rôle', *Revue des études juives*, 152 (1993), 29–136; Gad Freudenthal, 'Science in the Medieval Jewish Culture of Southern France', *History of Science*, 33 (1995), 23–58; Mauro Zonta, *La filosofia antica nel Medioevo ebraico: Le traduzioni ebraiche medievali dei testi filosofici antichi* (Brescia: Paideia, 1996).

produced Hebrew versions of at least thirty-five works by Euclid, Ptolemy, Geminus, Theodosius, Themistius, Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq, Abu Bakr al-Rāzī, Ibn al-Haytham, al-Hassar, Ibn al-Jazzār, al-Fārābī, Avicenna, al-Farghānī, Ibn al-Sīd al-Batalyawsī, Averroes, Jābir ibn Aflaḥ, al-Biṭrūjī, and others.[2] The last know member of the Ibn Tibbon dynasty is Jacob b. Makhir (*c.* 1236–1306), who translated additional works from Arabic and Graeco-Arabic and revised existing translations. He also seems to have rendered a work from the Latin: a medical text by his contemporary Arnold of Villanova.

Why were these translations produced and who read them? Some of the texts translated were requested by patrons, although it is not clear whether the patron or the translator himself was the initiator of the project. Others were translated as textbooks. This is especially the case with medical books and astronomical or astrological primers.[3] Many of the translations were rendered for other reasons as well: to promote an ideological perspective, to defend a philosophical position, or simply to provide source material to help understand another book, for example, Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*. The latter motivation seems to be operative in Samuel Ibn Tibbon's translation of Aristotle's *Meteorology*, a text which Maimonides singled out as the key to understanding the biblical account of creation.[4] It might also be the reason for the early translation of al-Biṭrūjī's *On the Principles of Astronomy*, for this work attempted to resolve the inconsistency between

[2] For the translations by the Ibn Tibbon family, see most recently James T. Robinson, 'The Ibn Tibbon Family: A Dynasty of Translators in Medieval Provence', in *Be'erot Yitzhak: Studies in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, ed. by Jay M. Harris (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 193–224.

[3] For motivations in general, see J.-P. Rothschild, 'Motivations et méthodes des traductions en hébreu du milieu du XIIᵉ à la fin du XVᵉ siècle', in *Traduction et traducteurs au moyen âge*, ed. by Geneviève Contamine (Paris: CNRS, 1989), pp. 279–302; and with respect to the Hebrew medical library in particular, see Joseph Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine, and Medieval Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

[4] See especially Aviezer Ravitzky, 'Aristotle's *Meteorology* and Maimonidean Exegesis of the Account of Creation' [in Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 9 (1990), 225–50. For the translation itself, see Resianne Fontaine, *Otot ha-Shamayim: Samuel Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew Version of Aristotle's Meteorology* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); Resianne Fontaine, 'Samuel Ibn Tibbon's Translation of the Arabic Version of Aristotle's *Meteorology*', in *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism: Studies on the Transmission of Greek Philosophy and Sciences dedicated to H.J. Drossaart Lulofs on his Ninetieth Birthday*, ed. by Gerhard Endress and Remke Kruk (Leiden: CNWS, 1997), pp. 85–100.

Aristotle's celestial physics and Ptolemy's astronomy, an inconsistency identified in *Guide* 2. 24 as the 'true perplexity'.[5]

Reference Works and Study Aids

In general, the Hebrew translations were literal. They followed the order of the Arabic syntax and borrowed terms, or coined new terms, which would have been unfamiliar to the average Hebrew reader. In fact, the translators created a new language, what modern linguists call 'Arabized Hebrew'.[6]

It was not enough, therefore, simply to create a library of philosophical works in Hebrew and do nothing more. The works had to be taught as well. Thus in some early cases, it seems that the literal translations were produced for study with a teacher, who could initiate the reader into the mysteries of the 'foreign sciences'. A qualified teacher, however, was not always easy to acquire, thus other tools were needed in order to help make this new literature intelligible.

Together with the translations, therefore, there emerged a cognate literature, consisting of reference works and study aids. These were produced in Hebrew, often in simplified or abridged form, and were designed specifically to make the new philosophical texts and ideas more understandable, accessible, and manageable. The two main examples of secondary literature of this type produced during the thirteenth century were glossaries and encyclopaedias. I'll provide a few remarks about each.

The Philosophical Lexicon and Glossary

[5] See Y. T. Langermann, 'The "True Perplexity": *The Guide of the Perplexed* Part II, Chapter 24', in *Perspectives on Maimonides*, ed. by Joel Kraemer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 159–74, along with the roundtable discussion of this chapter of the *Guide* in *Aleph*, 8 (2008). For the Arabic text of [**DAO2**]Biṭrūjī, together with Hebrew and English translations and brief discussion of its reception, see Bernard Goldstein, *Nūr al-Dīn al-Biṭrūjī: On the Principles of Astronomy: Arabic Original with Hebrew trans. by Moses Ibn Tibbon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971). For the general interest in [**DAO2**]Biṭrūjī in Hebrew sources, see James T. Robinson, 'The First References in Hebrew to al-Biṭrūjī's *On the Principles of Astronomy*', *Aleph*, 3 (2003), 145–63.

[6] For Arabized Hebrew, see the pioneering work of M. Goshen-Gottstein, *Syntax and Vocabulary of Mediaeval Hebrew, as Influenced by Arabic* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2006).

As is well known, defining philosophical terms is as old as philosophy itself. Socratic dialectic was driven by definition and division, as were the scientific investigations of Aristotle, who was always fearful of using imprecise language. In *Metaphysics*, book delta, moreover, we have the beginnings of a philosophical dictionary proper.

Defining philosophical terms became a formal exercise in late antiquity, especially in the Neoplatonic academy in Alexandria. Following the example of Porphyry's *Isagoge*, which introduced Aristotle's *Organon* by defining the five predicables, students of philosophy would begin study by explaining key terms in philosophy, including the various meanings of philosophy itself. Out of this school tradition emerged at least one full dictionary, the *Book of Definitions* by Michael the Interpreter.

This Neoplatonic school tradition continued, in various forms and shapes, in the Middle Ages. The discussions of logical terms by al-Fārābī and Maimonides are noteworthy, as are the fuller philosophical dictionaries by al-Kindī, Isaac Israeli, and Avicenna.[7] Unlike these works — which were organized conceptually rather than alphabetically — there also developed alphabetical lexicons, such as the Arabic and Syriac lexicon of Ibn Bahlūl.[8]

In contrast to the Greek and Arabic traditions, the definition literature developed in Hebrew — at least generically — along narrower lines. Despite the example of Israeli's *Book of Definitions* and Maimonides' *Treatise on Logic* — both of which were translated into Hebrew — the Hebrew lexicons were generally arranged alphabetically and usually designed to help read particular works. There was, however, a tendency to use the alphabetical reference framework as an opportunity to introduce philosophy more generally.

The best example of this hybrid form — that is, an alphabetical glossary used also as philosophical primer — is Samuel Ibn Tibbon's *Perush ha-Millot ha-Zarot*,

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[7] See T. Z. Frank, 'Al-Kindī's Book of Definitions: Its Place in Arabic Definition Literature' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Yale University, 1975); Alexander Altmann and Samuel M. Stern, *Isaac Israeli, a Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century: His Works Translated with Comments and an Outline of his Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958); and Kiki Kennedy-Day, *Books of Definition in Islamic Philosophy: The Limits of Words* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

[8] About which see Gerhard Endress, 'Bilingual Lexical Materials in the Arabic Tradition of the Hellenistic Sciences', in *Lexiques bilingues dans les domaines philosophique et scientifique (Moyen Âge–Renaissance)*, ed. by Jacqueline Hamesse and Danielle Jacquart (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), **[DAO3]**.

the most influential and widely read of the Hebrew philosophical glossaries.[9] This work, which was likely completed by 1213, was written as a reference tool for readers of his translation of the *Guide*. However, it does much more as well. It includes a long introduction, in which the author explains his methods of lexicography and attacks the work of a rival translator, then proceeds to explain more than 190 terms. Although the definitions are generally organized alphabetically, there are significant divergences. For example, the first term *eikhut* (the Aristotelian category quality) leads Ibn Tibbon to present a lengthy discussion of all ten categories together with the five predicables, definition, and description.[10] Other entries also include introductory essays, such as the brief description of the quadrivium at 'mathematical sciences', the eight books of physics at 'natural science', and the five types of syllogism at 'rhetorical statement'. In a sense, Ibn Tibbon's alphabetical glossary works as an *Isagoge* to the *Guide of the Perplexed*, providing the beginning student with remedial training in Aristotelian philosophy.

The Encyclopaedia

The glossaries, especially Ibn Tibbon's, served as philosophical primers, as remedial training in the sciences. A more direct way of achieving this goal was through the encyclopaedia.

As we know from the excellent collection of essays edited by Steven Harvey, the thirteenth century was the golden age of the medieval encyclopaedia.[11] This is true

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[9] For background on Ibn Tibbon's *Perush ha-Millot ha-Zarot*, see M. Goshen-Gottstein, 'On the Methods of Translation in the Middle Ages: D. Samuel Ibn Tibbon's *Perush ha-Millot ha-Zarot*' [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz*, 30 (1961), 385–95; Carlos Fraenkel, *From Maimonides to Samuel Ibn Tibbon: The Transformation of the Dalālat al-Ḥāʾirīn into the Moreh ha-Nevukim* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2007), pp. 108–24. See also Shalom Rosenberg, 'The Theory of Nouns in Medieval Jewish Philosophy' [in Hebrew], *Iyyun*, 27 (1977), 105–44; Robinson, 'First References in Hebrew', pp. 145–63; Robinson, 'Samuel Ibn Tibbon's *Perush ha-Millot ha-Zarot* and al-Fārābī's *Eisagoge* and *Categories*', *Aleph*, 9 (2009), 41–76. For many other examples of Hebrew glossaries, with special reference to the medical tradition, see J.-P. Rothschild, 'Remarques sur la tradition manuscrite du glossaire hébreu-italien du commentaire de Moïse de Salerne au *Guide des égarés* (en appendice, note sur les glossaires médicaux hébreux; liste de manuscrits hébreux contenant des glossaires)', in *Lexiques bilingues*, ed. by Hamesse and Jacquart, pp. 49–88.

[10] For detailed discussion of this entry, in relation to Ibn Tibbon's direct source, see Robinson, 'Samuel Ibn Tibbon'.

[11] See all the essays in *The Medieval Hebrew Encyclopedias of Science and Philosophy*, ed. by Steven Harvey (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000).

among the Jews as well, who produced several Hebrew encyclopaedias organized according to different patterns. The encyclopaedias drew from a variety of sources, some translated fresh by the encyclopaedist himself and some borrowed from existing translations — cut and pasted, abridged and rearranged, producing an original compendium, greater than the sum of its parts. The encyclopaedias were ordered often (but not always) according to the Aristotelian curriculum — mathematics, physics, and metaphysics. An alternative organizing principle was the story of creation, moving from the elements and vapours to minerals, plants, and animals, and ending with human beings, the last and most complex of created beings.

Regardless of form and content, however, the main virtue in all these works was accessibility. This is especially the case in the most popular Provençal encyclopaedia, Gershom b. Solomon's *Gate of Heaven* (*c.* 1275–1300). Gershom presents the student with a readable three-hundred-page summary of all scientific subjects, ascending wisdom's ladder from physics to mineralogy, botany, biology, human anatomy, psychology, and astronomy. To illustrate its eclectic use of sources, the psychology section is composed primarily of excerpts from Maimonides' 'Eight Chapters' (which themselves derive from al-Fārābī's *Select Aphorisms*), Dominicus Gundissalinus's *De anima* (which is itself based on the *De anima* section of Avicenna's *Shifāʾ*), and Averroes's two treatises on conjunction with the active intellect.[12]

Popular Literature

There were other ways of transmitting philosophical ideas, less technical and more popular. Indeed, in the thirteenth century, the development of popular Hebrew literature is closely linked with the spread of philosophy.[13]

[12] See James T. Robinson, 'Gershom ben Solomon's *Shaʿar ha-Shamayim*: Its Sources and Use of Sources', in *Medieval Hebrew Encyclopedias*, ed. by Harvey, 248–74. For Gundissalinus, see also the recent discussion of Dag Nikolaus Hasse, *Avicenna's De anima in the Latin West* (London: Warburg Institute, 2000), pp. 13–17; Alexander Fidora, *Die Wissenschaftstheorie des Dominicus Gundissalinus: Voraussetzungen und Konsequenzen des zweiten Anfangs der aristotelischen Philosophie im 12. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003); and for Averroes's treatises, see J. Hercz, *Drei Abhandlungen über die Conjunction des seperaten Intellects mit dem Menschen von Averroes (Vater und Sohn), aus dem Arabischen übersetzt von Samuel Ibn Tibbon* (Berlin: [**DAO1**], 1869); Carlos Steel and Marc Geoffroy, *Averroès, La béatitude de l'âme* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2001).

[13] For general background, see Jefim Schirmann and Ezra Fleischer, *The History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain and Southern France* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1997).

What literary types and genres were developed? The two most popular forms were poetry and rhymed prose (*maqāmah*). There were of course other forms as well, such as the animal fable, the ethical testament, and collections of wisdom sayings. I will focus here on poetry and the *maqāmah*.

Poetry

In the Islamic world, poetry was the only genre Jews consistently wrote in Hebrew. Already in the eleventh century, moreover, it was used as a medium for spreading and popularizing philosophical ideas. In Islamic Spain, in particular, Hebrew poems were saturated with philosophical motifs and principles. As shown in a recent book by Adena Tanenbaum, the three greatest masters of Hebrew verse — Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021/22–54/58/71[**DAO4**]), Moses ibn Ezra (fl. 1055–1135), and Judah Halevi (*c.*1075–1141) — all wrote Neoplatonic soul poems.[14] They also introduced cosmological themes into their poetry. The most famous poem of this type is Ibn Gabirol's 'Kingly Crown', which presents a complete Neoplatonic universe: from the One, down to the material world, and — with penitential pleas for assistance in purifying the soul of impurities — ascending back towards God, the One beyond being.[15] Of special note is the fact that many of these poems, especially the soul poems, were written for the synagogue, to be presented as part of the liturgy. Thus already in eleventh- and twelfth-century Andalusia philosophy had found a place in the very centre of the Jewish cult.

Unlike Arabic, Graeco-Arabic, and Judaeo-Arabic works of philosophy and science, these philosophical poems were immediately accessible to the scholars of southern France: there was no need for translation. In fact, one might speculate that these poems helped lay the groundwork for the philosophical activity that followed: they piqued the interest of local scholars in the philosophical culture of the Islamic world. However, the sages of southern France were not content to admire the work of their predecessors. Instead they adopted, imitated, and developed the traditions of Andalusia in new ways and forms.

[14] For this development, see especially Adena Tanenbaum, *The Contemplative Soul: Hebrew Poetry and Philosophical Theory in Medieval Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

[15] For translation and discussion, see Raphael Loewe, *Ibn Gabirol* (London: Halban, 1989); Bernard Lewis and Andrew Gluck, *The Kingly Crown* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003).

One good example of this creative borrowing is the didactic poem by Levi b. Abraham b. Hayyim (*c.* 1235–after 1305), in which he presented in verse a summary of the contents of his prose encyclopaedia of philosophy, entitled *Liwyat Hen*.[16] The verse summary includes the following sections: ethics, logic, the account of creation, psychology, prophecy, the account of the chariot, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, astrology, physics, and metaphysics. Levi himself attached a commentary to his poem, and in the following generation, the poem — along with his commentary thereon — became the object of several independent commentaries.[17] In this way, Levi's poem became a textbook of sorts, and writing a commentary on it a school exercise.

Maqāmah

The other popular literary genre cultivated in the thirteenth century was the *maqāmah*, the medieval forerunner of the picaresque novel. The standard form of the *maqāmah* was rhymed prose interspersed with poetry, and the content consisted of first-person fictional reports by a narrator about his adventures, which usually involved repeated encounters with the same rogue figure.[18]

The literary form of the *maqāmah* was developed in the Islamic East. Its function, it seems, was partly didactic, and partly for the purpose of entertainment. Thus the main characteristics of the Arabic *maqāmah* itself seem to be literary virtuosity, on the one hand, and bawdy humour, on the other. In Jewish literature, in contrast, the *maqāmah* was developed in a different way and for more sober purposes: to teach not literary style but philosophy and science.

This can be illustrated by two Hebrew *maqāmah*s. Neither was written in southern France, but both were produced in the surrounding regions, and at least one was read widely in Provence proper.

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[16] Only parts of the poem have been published. See most recently Howard Kreisel, *Levi b. Abraham b. Hayyim, Liwyat Hen 6:3* (Jerusalem: **[DAO1]**, 2004), pp. 423–34.

[17] Kreisel, *Levi b. Abraham b. Hayyim*, pp. 435–52. For the school of commentators, see Dov Schwartz, 'Kuzari Commentators in Fifteenth-Century Provence' [in Hebrew], in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, vol. III, ed. by Isadore Twersky and Jay M. Harris (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000) **[DAO3]**.

[18] For the *maqāmah*, see most recently Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqāma: History of a Genre* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002). This includes one chapter on the Hebrew *maqāmah* written by Arie Schippers.

The first was by a certain Joseph ibn Zabara, a resident of nearby Catalonia who travelled widely throughout southern Europe.[19] His *Book of Delight*, written in Hebrew rhymed prose and consisting of a series of adventures, includes several 'gates' devoted to the sciences.[20] In one episode, for example, the narrator and his accomplice visit the latter's city and house, but instead of duping unsuspecting victims — as in the traditional Arabic model — they while away the night discussing medicine, based on the best of Graeco-Arabic texts.[21]

A more effective literary piece is Shem Tov Falaquera's *Book of the Seeker*. This too is a work of Spain rather than Provence, but the author, and his general programme of propagating the sciences, closely parallels similar activity in Provence.[22] In this work the Seeker, the traditional narrator of the *maqāmah*, recounts his travels in search of wisdom. He successively visits a merchant, warrior, artisan, physician, master of ethics, grammarian, and poet, learning their trades, asking them a series of questions, but always falling short of satisfying his desire for complete wisdom. When he finally recognizes that philosophy is the true source of wisdom, he stops writing poetry and switches to prose. The second part of the work is then focused exclusively on introducing the sciences: arithmetic, geometry, optics, astronomy, music, logic, physics, and metaphysics.

Commentary on the Bible

Popular literature could be read casually by any interested reader. The Bible, on the other hand, was read seriously by everyone. The philosophers recognized very early the possibilities of teaching philosophy through scripture.

Teaching philosophy and science through scripture was in fact an old approach. Already in the tenth century, in the Islamic East, Saadia Gaon (882–942) used his

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[19] See *Sefer Shaashuim by Joseph ben Meir Zabara*, ed. by Israel Davidson (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1914); *Joseph ben Meir Zabara, The Book of Delight*, trans. by Moses Hadas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932).

[20] For brief discussion of the scientific background, see *Sefer Shaashuim*, ed. by Davidson, pp. lxvii–lxxxvi.

[21] See *Joseph ben Meir Zabara*, trans. by Hadas, pp. 111–42.

[22] See Herschel Levine, *Book of the Seeker* (New York: Yeshiva University, 1976). For the author's work in general, see Raphael Jospe, *Torah and Sophia: The Life and Thought of Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1988); and Steven Harvey, 'Shem-Tov Falaquera's *De'ot ha-Filosofim*: Its Sources and Use of Sources', in *Medieval Hebrew Encyclopedias*, ed. by Harvey, pp. 211–47.

biblical commentaries to defend his views, to polemicize against others, and to introduce any number of topics in contemporary science, philosophy, and theology.[23]

This tradition continued in the Islamic West as well, and was transmitted into Christian Europe with the commentaries of Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1164). Indeed, although Ibn Ezra criticizes Saadia for precisely this, his own biblical commentaries are full of frequent and sometimes lengthy digressions on problems in mathematics, astronomy, and astrology.[24]

It was only with the work of Maimonides (1138–1204), however, that occasional digressions developed into a clearly defined philosophical-exegetical programme. Although Maimonides himself did not write a proper commentary on the Bible, in his *Guide* he set forth a method for philosophical exegesis. He singled out key texts worthy of discussion and provided model samples of how to explain these texts philosophically.[25]

Working within the framework provided by Maimonides, his disciples in southern France carried on and furthered what they considered to be the Master's plan. Thus Samuel Ibn Tibbon wrote a full philosophical commentary on the book of Ecclesiastes and a philosophical-exegetical monograph entitled *Ma'amar Yiqqawu ha-Mayim*;[26] Jacob Anatoli wrote philosophical sermons, which include extensive philosophical discussions of Psalms and Proverbs;[27] and Moses Ibn Tibbon wrote a philosophical commentary on Song of Songs along with several philosophical-exegetical monographs.[28] Other figures participated in this tradition

[23] For background on Saadia and full bibliography, see R. Brody, 'The Geonim of Babylonia as Biblical Exegetes', in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of 'ts Interpretation*, vol. I. 2: *The Middle Ages*, ed. by Magne Sæbø (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), pp. 74–88.

[24] See especially Shlomo Sela, *Astrology and Exegesis in the Thought of Abraham Ibn Ezra* [in Hebrew] (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1999); Shlomo Sela, *Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

[25] For Maimonides as exegete, see most recently Sarah Klein-Braslavy, 'The Philosophical Exegesis', in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*, ed. by Sæbø, pp. 302–20, with extensive bibliography.

[26] See James T. Robinson, *Samuel Ibn Tibbon's Commentary on Ecclesiastes: The Book of the Soul of Man* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

[27] See James T. Robinson, 'Secondary Forms of Transmission: Teaching and Preaching Philosophy in Thirteenth-Century Provence', in *Exchange and Transmission Across Cultural Boundaries: Philosophy, Mysticism, and Science in the Mediterranean World*, ed. by H. Ben-Shammai, S. Shaked, and S. Stroumsa (forthcoming).

[28] See O. Fraisse, *Moses Ibn Tibbons Kommentar zum Hoheleid und sein poetologisch-philosophisches Programm: Synoptische Edition, Übersetzung und Analyse* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004).

as well, including Menahem ha-Me'iri (1249–1315), the leading legal authority in late thirteenth-century Provence.[29]

Teaching philosophy through Bible meant several things. It served to justify the philosophical enterprise itself. It helped to pass on key information by way of philosophical digressions and scientific excurses. In a more subtle way, it established a real solid foundation for philosophical reflection itself. For, following Maimonides, there developed a set corpus of texts, a canon of sorts, which were associated with specific philosophical ideas or problems. This created a space within the classical tradition itself for philosophical speculation where ideas could be argued and debated freely in relation to a fixed authoritative text. I will give two examples to illustrate this process.

In *Guide of the Perplexed* 2. 30, Maimonides presents a very allusive explanation of the first chapter in Genesis, and indicates that Aristotle's *Meteorology* is the key to understanding it. This he says and nothing more. But with this enigmatic remark, he stimulated his followers to explore every aspect of creation in relation to *Meteorology* — along with every other physical work written by Aristotle. The first chapter of Genesis became the focal point for the study of the sciences, and the study of the sciences led to a variety of increasingly complex readings of Genesis chapter 1.[30]

A second example is the 'account of the chariot'. According to Maimonides, the enigmatic visions of God in Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1 and 10 are not mystical visions but visions of the cosmos. Thus he presents in *Guide* 3. 1–7, again using indirect pointers and suggestive comments, a full cosmological reading of these biblical texts in light of Aristotle and the Aristotelian tradition. Following his lead, his followers then devoted themselves to teaching cosmology through precisely these same designated biblical texts. But what is interesting is that, while the texts remained the same, the explanations did not. Thus Isaiah and Ezekiel were shown, by different commentators, to hold to very different cosmological schemes, depending on the preference of the exegete. Some found eight spheres, some nine, and some even ten, with the tenth sphere, the 'sphere of intellect', perhaps corresponding with the Latin *empyrium*.[31]

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[29] For fuller discussion of philosophical exegesis in medieval Judaism with bibliography, see James T. Robinson, 'Philosophy and Science in Medieval Jewish Commentaries on the Bible', in *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, ed. by Gad Freudenthal (forthcoming).

[30] See Aviezer Ravitzky, 'Aristotle's *Meteorology* and Maimonidean Exegesis of the Account of Creation' [in Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 9 (1990), 225–50.

[31] See for example Samuel Ibn Tibbon, *Ma'amar Yiqqawu ha-Mayim* (Pressburg: [**DAO1**],

In both of these examples, Maimonides established set texts for the study of philosophy; he created a very unusual philosophical curriculum, consisting of biblical verses and stories. His followers in Jewish Provence, primarily Samuel Ibn Tibbon and Ibn Tibbon's disciples and descendants, used this as the starting point in their own philosophy and teaching of philosophy. It served as a very effective pedagogical device. This peculiar scriptural classroom also stimulated a surprisingly open and undogmatic engagement with philosophy.

Sermons

The most effective genre for teaching and disseminating philosophy was the sermon. What was the character of the sermon and how was it used to teach philosophy? To give a sense of how effective this genre could be, I will give a brief description of the classical form.

The main form of the rabbinic sermon — the *petihta* — was already established in late antiquity. It was a short homiletic discourse presented in the synagogue before the public reading of the Torah. Although the short texts we have from late antiquity vary in many ways, they tend to conform to a distinct pattern. The sermon begins with a remote verse, often drawn from Psalms, Proverbs, or the Haftarah, and explains this verse in great detail before returning to the first verse of the assigned reading from the Torah.[32]

There seem to have been very good reasons — both literary and theological — why the sermon developed in this form. Beginning with a remote verse created tension — how would the rabbi connect it with the assigned reading? — and thus allowed the preacher to display his mastery of scripture and rhetorical skill. It also reinforced an important lesson: that all of scripture is holy; and that every verse, no matter how remote it might seem, is related to every other verse: 'all is from one shepherd'.

1837/38), chaps 7–11; Joseph Ibn Kaspi, '"Menorat Kesef"', in *Zehn Schriften des R. Josef Ibn Kaspi*, ed. by I. Last (Pressburg: [**DAO1**], 1903), pt. 2, pp. 74–142; Hanokh al-Qonstantini, '"Marot Elohim"', ed. and with French trans. by Colette Sirat as '"Hanokh b. Salomon al-Qostantini"', in *Les Visions divines*, ed. by Colette Sirat (Jerusalem: [n.pub.], 1976) [**DAO3**].

[32] For discussion of the character of the *petihta*, together with samples, see Joseph Heinemann, 'The Proem in the Aggadic Midrashim: A Form-Critical Study', *Scripta Hierosolymita*, 20 (1971), 100–22; Joseph Heinemann, *Public Sermons in the Talmudic Period* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik 1982).

In the medieval context, this form, with its rhetorical power and theological lesson, was especially useful in teaching and spreading philosophical ideas.[33] Not only did it exploit a public forum for the teaching of philosophical ideas — in the synagogue on Holy Days and Shabbat — but it gave extra authority to the ideas taught, for now the theological lesson was extended: all of scripture — *and* philosophy — is given by one shepherd.

I will give one example to illustrate the possibilities for public philosophy, drawing on a text from the most popular collection of philosophical sermons, Jacob Anatoli's *Malmad ha-Talmidim*. In Anatoli's model sermon for a wedding, he presents a philosophical reading of the *sheva berakhot* — the seven blessings said at a wedding.[34] These blessings, he explains, were designed to remind the new couple of the proper hierarchy of values. Although marriage supports the second aim or intention in human life — to propagate the species — it should strive to support the first intention as well: to achieve intellectual perfection and knowledge of God. This, he says, is what one ought to preach to the newlyweds at their wedding!

Conclusion

During the Middle Ages, philosophy never succeeded in entering into the standard curriculum of the Jews. In yeshiva education, Bible, Mishnah, Talmud, and Jewish law remained the main subjects of higher learning. But during the thirteenth century, especially in southern France, a devoted group of philosophers and translators used creative means to spread philosophy far and wide. They translated works into Hebrew and taught them through the novel use of literary media. They used new forms, which were borrowed from the Greeks and Arabs, and they revived classical Jewish forms, which they modified and updated for the purpose of teaching philosophy. Through their creative literary activity, their innovative use of powerful 'vehicles for transmission', they found a place in traditional Judaism where philosophy could survive and even flourish.

[33] For the medieval sermon, see especially Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching 1200–1800: An Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); and for philosophy in the sermons, see Marc Saperstein, 'Sermons as Evidence for the Popularization of Philosophy in Fifteenth-Century Spain', in *Your Voice Like a Ram's Horn: Themes and Texts in Traditional Jewish Preaching*, ed. by Saperstein (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1996), pp. 75–88.

[34] See Anatoli, *Malmad ha-Talmidim*, ed. by L. Silbermann (Lyck: [**DAO1**], 1866), sermon on *parashat terumah*, [**DAO5**]72b–75a.