

READING OTHER PEOPLE READING OTHER PEOPLE'S SCRIPTURE: THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS POLEMIC ON JEWISH BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

JAMES T. ROBINSON¹

This is what Onqelos meant when translating Deut 5:19, *qol gadol ve-lo yasaf*, into Aramaic as: "a great voice that never ceases." For that great voice sounds forth without interruption; it calls with that eternal duration that is its nature; and whatever the prophets and sages of all generations have taught, innovated, and decreed, they have received precisely out of that voice that never ceases, in which all regulations, decrees, and decisions are implicitly contained, as well as everything new that may arise in the future. In all generations these men stand in the same relationship to that voice as the trumpet or shofar to the mouth of a man who blows into it and then it brings forth a sound. There is nothing new in this deriving from their own understanding or cognition. Instead, they bring out from potentiality to actuality that which they had received from that voice when they stood at Sinai.

– Meir Ibn Gabbai, Sefer 'Avodat ha-Qodesh²

This statement by Meir Ibn Gabbai—well-known sixteenth-century Kabbalist and refugee from Spain—is really a remarkable theory of progress. He does not deny the existence of innovation. He simply projects it back into history, to its original source. He develops, one might say, a thoroughly *traditional* theory of change, an inverted idea of intellectual development. All innovation—past and future—was already at Sinai, all interpretations were already revealed there *in potentia*. The exegete or legal scholar is simply a passive conduit, an intermediate or agent cause at best, allowing the unceasing spirit of divine revelation to manifest itself.

This is, I emphasize again, a strongly *traditional* theory of progress, or to say it in a different way, a strangely Platonizing conception of Jewish thought. Ibn Gabbai posits a collective anamnesis of sorts; every idea is nothing but recollection of what was already known at Sinai.³ Moreover, his brief statement implies an idea about Scripture that has had, and continues to have, considerable influence on the modern study of Jewish exegesis, in which the exegetical process has been conceived in strongly linear fashion: the reader facing the text in light of his own interpretive tradition. Exegesis means identifying a problem already there, uncovering a preexisting gap, responding to an incoherence. The problems are really there. The exegete discovers them and explains them in whatever way suits his agenda.⁴

What I would like to do in this essay is help to construct a slightly different conception of the history of exegesis that poses a question that Ibn Gabbai did not. If all truths or problems or innovative readings are already in the text *in potentia*, what causes any individual reading or innovative explication to emerge at one time and not another? Why now and not before? Why here and not somewhere else? And why this particular exegete and not another? In other words, what I want to do is help reorient the history of exegesis locally, horizontally, with focus on the readers as much as the text, and with a very specific goal in mind: to identify the causes—internal to the religion or tradition, but also and more emphatically external to it—that contribute to the emergence of new readings, new traditions of interpretation, new schools of thought. Or to say it in a slightly different way: a history of exegesis as dialogue, not between reader and text but between different readers situated in well-defined historical settings.

The best way to build this history, I think, is through examples, case studies, collecting and analyzing data inductively, piece by piece. In this paper I introduce three examples, which are presented consecutively from simpler to more complex. The first focuses on Jewish vs. Christian readings of one verse: Genesis 1:26. The second briefly surveys the polemical use of rabbinic literature—especially rabbinic anthropomorphisms—by Muslims, Christians, Karaites, and the Rabbanite response.⁵ The last example has more general significance. It shows that the internal debate about studying philosophy in medieval Judaism begins much earlier than is usually thought, how it develops within an exegetical context, but in response to a general anxiety about other people reading Jewish Scripture critically and rationally. The goal, in all three examples, is to point to and isolate some of the polemical motivations, horizontal causes, historical factors, and marginal contributors to the emergence of exegetical traditions.

Jews vs. Christians on Genesis 1:26

The first example, as mentioned, is Genesis 1:26, a text that both Jews and Christians claimed their own. Focusing on the plural subject in the verse—“Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness”—it became a standard proof-text of the Christian Trinity already in antiquity, and for this reason was a subject of debate continuing into the Middle Ages. I will start here with a relatively late interpretation—found in the Hebrew commentary on Genesis by David Kimhi—and then work backwards.

David Kimhi (c. 1160–1235)—influential grammarian and biblical exegete—produced his commentary on Genesis in thirteenth-century Narbonne (in Languedoc), where his father Joseph Kimhi had fled during the Almohad persecutions in Islamic Spain.⁶ His explication of this verse, as of others, consists of a survey of different possible readings, beginning with one introduced in the name of his father. It reads as follows:⁷

“And God said, Let us make man” (Gen. 1:26):

With respect to all other created beings in the sublunar world, He said: “Let the earth bring forth grass” (Gen. 1:1); “Let the waters bring forth” (Gen. 1:20); “Let

the earth bring forth" (Gen. 1:24). In contrast, when He came to create man, who is the final composite existent, He said: "Let us make man" (Gen. 1:26). On account of the superiority of man and his nobility, He created him last to make known that all other created beings in the sublunar world were created for his sake, and that he would be placed in the position of master over all of them. As for saying "Let us make" in the plural, *my master and father*, may his memory be for a blessing, explained as follows: This was said with reference to the elements, insofar as from their power (with the will of God) creatures came to be. As He said: "Let the earth bring forth grass" (Gen. 1:11); "Let the waters bring forth" (Gen. 1:20); "Let the earth bring forth" (Gen. 1:24). It is as if He said to the elements: "Let us make—you and I together, in cooperation;" for the body is composed of the elements, whereas the spirit is supernal, like the angels. We find something similar in the dicta of our Sages: "He took counsel with the works of heaven and earth" (cf. *Genesis Rabbah* 8:3).

This reading of the verse is a straightforward, simple, even elegant dualistic Platonizing solution to the problematic plural in Genesis 1:26. God, together with the elements, created man: man's soul comes from God, from the simple spiritual world of essences and ideas; his composite body is from the four elements, the realm of matter, the world of generation and decay. Yet the question I want to ask relates not to the content of this interpretation but its source: Where did David Kimhi find it? It is not in any of his father Joseph's extant works of grammar or commentaries on the Bible. Could it be a witness to some text no longer available? An oral tradition? Possibly. But it is also to be found in a work that does survive, not a biblical grammar or straightforward commentary but Joseph's polemic against Christianity titled the "Book of the Covenant," possibly the very first full systematic polemic against Christianity written in Hebrew.⁸ This dialogue between a believer (*ma'amin*) and a heretic (*min*) includes one exchange on Genesis 1:26 in which exactly the same interpretation cited by Joseph's son David is set forth. It reads as follows:⁹

The Heretic said: I shall now reprove you and expound my teachings based on the prophecies, some of which are written in the Torah of Moses, some in the Prophets, and some in the Writings, most of which originated with David, the man of God. I shall test you and ask you of these verses which are all prophecies of Jesus and you shall not be able to contradict or deny any of them. The first is written in the Book of Genesis: "Let us make man in our image after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). Then: "And God made man in His image, in the image of God created He him" (Gen. 1:27). The plural form of the verb proves [the existence] of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, as do the plural possessives: "In our image, after our likeness." In addition, the "image" and "likeness" referred to are a human image and likeness which the Divinity adopted in Jesus. You cannot contradict this.

The Believer responded: You have neither teachings nor prophecies which I cannot explain according to their plain sense and context. With reference to the plural form of "Let us make," some explain that at the beginning of creation, He created the four elements—the higher, fire and air, and the lower,

earth and water. Then He gave them the faculty to produce all creatures by virtue of their natural qualities. It is thus written: "The earth brought forth vegetation" (Gen. 1:12); "Let the earth sprout vegetation" (Gen. 1:11), "Let the earth bring forth swarms" (Gen. 1:20). This was so until the sixth day when He—along with the four elements—created man, saying: "Let us make man" (Gen. 1:26). It is in their nature to produce the body, which is material in character, while He breathed into it (see Gen. 2:7) the supernal soul possessing intellect and rational wisdom.

The implication of this first example is as follows. A very creative reading of Genesis 1:26 emerges in a straightforward polemical context. It is an alternative reading of a verse, a reading against the Christian reading. When reproduced by Joseph's son David, however, this polemical motive recedes into the background; there is no hint of it, no indication of it. Nor is this original context sensed by later borrowings from and readings of David's commentary, which by the fifteenth century becomes a standard source of legitimate authentic Jewish rabbinic interpretations of the Book of Genesis.¹⁰

Rabbinic Anthropomorphism

In medieval religious polemic, divine anthropomorphism was a subject of increasing import. Under the influence of Islam, along with strongly spiritualizing trends in philosophy, Judaism and Christianity were accused of anthropomorphism and even polytheism. This we find already in the ninth-century biblical questions of Hiwi al-Balkhi—I will speak about him in the third example below. Hiwi, the arch-heretic in early medieval Judaism, singles out and gives detailed criticism of anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms in the Hebrew Bible. In the tenth century we find the emergence of a robust polemical literature focusing on rabbinic anthropomorphisms. This seems to begin in Karaite polemics against Rabbanite Judaism, but is found also in Islamic-Arabic critiques of rabbinic Judaism in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and in Christian-Latin critiques of rabbinic Judaism from the twelfth century forward.

To single out a few well-known examples: The Karaite Ya'qūb al-Qirqisānī in the first part of his legal code "The Book of Lights and Watchtowers" presents a detailed heresiography of Judaism in which he identifies examples of and exposes the foolishness of rabbinic representations of God.¹¹ His younger Karaite contemporary Salmon b. Yeroham in his polemical "Wars of the Lord" devotes the final four chapters to anthropomorphism in the Talmud and non-canonical rabbinic sources, especially *Shi'ur Qomah* ("Measure of [the Divine] Stature").¹² The same focus on corporeal representations of God repeats itself in al-Mas'ūdi's universal history, in Ibn Hazm's many polemical works, and in the early twelfth-century "Dialogue" by Petrus Alfonsi, the father of Christian polemic against rabbinic literature in Latin Europe.¹³

These texts and figures are well known. What I want to focus on here are two things that are not well known, or at least they have not been emphasized sufficiently. First, there is extraordinary similarity between all of these polemical writings, not only in the ideas sin-

gled out for discussion, but in the sources. The same cluster of rabbinic texts is singled out again and again for reproach, often in exactly the same order; that is to say, there is a repeating pattern in polemic against the same sources, which suggests a borrowing of polemical traditions. Whether this is the result of direct borrowing—Christians borrowing from Muslim and Karaite sources, Muslims from Karaite—or all derive from some sort of early polemical ur-anthology, as it were, is not clear. What is clear is that there seems to emerge, already by the twelfth century, a fairly consistent tradition of polemic across religious boundaries, a sharing between traditions for polemical purposes. Karaites, Muslims, and Christians are reading each other's readings of rabbinic Judaism.

This is the first thing I want to emphasize: a pattern of sharing found in polemics against rabbinic anthropomorphism, a polemical sharing across religious boundaries, from Karaite to Muslim to Christian. The second thing I want to focus on relates to the Rabbanite response and the secondary effects of this response. And so now I move from general discussion to a few particular examples.

Two sources are singled out at the beginning of the polemical texts introduced above. The first is the reference to God wearing *tefillin* in the Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 7a. When Moses saw God's back at Exod. 33, the Rabbis say he saw the knot of His *tefillin*:

"And I will take away My hand and thou shalt see My back" (Exod 33:23)—R. Hama b. Bizana said in the name of R. Simon the Pious: This teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, showed Moses the knot of the Tefillin.¹⁴

And the second: the non-canonical rabbinic source *Shi'ur Qomah*, really a cycle of texts giving detailed descriptions of the measurements of the divine body. Here is a sample passage from this corpus of texts:

Rabbi Aqiva said: . . . from the place of the seat of His glory and up is a distance of 1,180,000,000 parasangs [approx. 3.5 miles]. From the place of the seat of His glory and down is a distance of 1,180,000,000 parasangs. His height is 2,300,000,000 parasangs. From the right arm across to the left is 770,000,000 parasangs. And from the right eyeball until the left eyeball is a distance of 300,000,000 parasangs. The skull of His head is 3,000,003 and one third parasangs. The crown of His head is 600,000 parasangs, corresponding to the 600,000 Israelite minions. Thus is He called great, mighty, awesome God, Kaliote, Tzaziote, Haqtas, Baavur, Masos. Blessed be the name of the glory of His kingdom forever.¹⁵

These two texts are ridiculed in the sources mentioned above: in book one of al-Qirqisānī's "Book of Lights and Watchtowers," in chapter 14 of Salmon's "Wars of the Lord," in Ibn Hazm's heresiography, and also in Petrus Alfonsi's "Dialogue."¹⁶

How did rabbinic Judaism respond? From contemporary Rabbanite sources we have evidence of a defensive, apologetic tradition which: 1) emphasized the non-authoritarian nature of non-legal rabbinic sources, as in the famous formulation: "one does not rely on *aggadah*"; or 2) challenged the authenticity of some of the rabbinic texts in question.¹⁷

Maimonides took the latter route in a legal *responsum* on *Shi'ur Qomah*.¹⁸ But at the same time there started to develop a more positive, constructive response, what we might call allegorical. The first move in this direction that I know of is found in the long commentary on Exodus 33 by Abraham ibn Ezra (1089–1164)—a near contemporary of Petrus Alfonsi and Joseph Kimhi and fellow refugee from Islamic Spain.¹⁹ Building on the rabbinic association of Moses's vision of God's back with the knot of His *tefillin*, and connecting this vision with *Shi'ur Qomah*, Ibn Ezra presents a long and detailed description of the entire cosmos. This is how he explains the “Back” of God that Moses saw; it is a vision that includes the four elements and composite beings, the atmosphere and atmospheric phenomena, the celestial world including spheres, planets, and constellations with their various movements and conjunctions, continuing up to but not including the First Cause, the “Face” that no man can see and live.

Like Joseph Kimhi's interpretation of Genesis 1:26, Ibn Ezra's reading of Exodus 33 is an elegant and original philosophical-cosmological-astrological exegesis of the text. It is one of the longest interpretations found in Ibn Ezra's rather large exegetical corpus, including commentaries which aim—so says Ibn Ezra in his introduction to Genesis—to uncover the plain sense (*peshat*) of the biblical text in light of grammar and reason, and to avoid as much as possible rabbinic midrash and aggadah; Christian-style allegorical interpretation; and the digressive method of interpretation developed by the medieval Rabbinic Jews.²⁰ Although it is difficult to prove decisively, the anomalies in this excursus—an extended philosophical-allegorical digression drawing on rabbinic midrash—together with the association of Berakhot 7a with *Shi'ur Qomah*, suggest that Ibn Ezra's philosophical reading is not only *peshat*, nor is it simply an attempt to teach philosophy to his co-religionists in Christian Europe. It represents a positive response to the polemical traditions found in Karaite, Muslim, and Christian sources.

And what of the secondary developments? From Ibn Ezra on, his interpretation of Exodus 33 takes on new life; later exegetes built in various ways upon the framework he had constructed, modifying and extending it in light of different intellectual traditions. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, for instance, supercommentaries on his commentary elaborate on his description of the cosmos, adding more layers of speculation, drawing from philosophical and astrological sources and even Kabbalah, but never identifying or returning to the original challenge of Karaism, Islam, or Christianity.²¹

Thus to sum up the significance of this second example: A shared tradition of polemic—shared by Karaites, Muslims, and Christians—gives rise to an internal Jewish rabbinic exegetical tradition considered authentic and independent of polemical challenge, shared by and developed in different ways by grammarians, philosophers, and Kabbalists. This is really a remarkable development.

Biblical Questions

The third example, as mentioned in the introduction, is more complex, and points not to specific polemical readings of a verse influencing a Jewish response, but to a general anxiety about “foreigners” reading Scripture in general, especially when reading critically and rationally. I will begin with the ninth-century collection of biblical questions by Hiwi al-Balkhi and then move toward the readings of a verse he might never have mentioned.

Hiwi al-Balkhi is a rather shadowy figure in early medieval history.²² He is said to have written “200 questions” against the Bible, but his text survives only in citations by his opponents.²³ Nor is it known even what his religious inclinations were, if any. Some medievals considered him a Zoroastrian, some a Christian, some a renegade Jew. His name suggests he hailed from Balkh (Bactria) in central Asia, which was generally regarded a center of sectarianism in early Islam, where Zoroastrianism, perhaps even Buddhism and Manicheanism, continued to flourish.²⁴

Nor do the questions themselves help much in this identification. As far as they can be reconstructed they are entirely Bible-focused; they do not relate to rabbinic midrash or aggadah. In other words, there are no Karaite or pro-Karaite leanings; the critique applies equally to the two major sects of medieval Judaism: Karaite and Rabbanite alike. In general they seem to fit into a fairly well-established genre of writing. As scholars have shown, the questions resemble and overlap with similar questions in a contemporary Zoroastrian critique of Judaism and Christianity, and they share affinities with earlier Byzantine texts from the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries.²⁵ Whether the purpose of these questions was as a catechism of sorts—teaching how to respond to critics of the Bible—or a real living polemic is a moot issue. The medieval Jews who responded to Hiwi, at least—a genre in its own right—seem to have taken the challenge seriously.

The largest datum we possess relating to Hiwi’s questions is the Hebrew response written by Saadia Gaon (884–942),²⁶ generally considered the founder of medieval rabbinic Judaism. The responses to Hiwi are consistent with Saadia’s projects in general; in fact he excelled at the polemical treatise. He penned responses to Karaites, to Christians, to competing rabbinic authorities in Palestine or even in Iraq, where he was Head of the Rabbinic academy of Sura during his later years. The responses to Hiwi are relatively simple and straightforward. Following the order of the biblical text, he cites a question of Hiwi, exposes its mistake, and provides his own alternative and correct (in his opinion) reading.

This is the background. Now I start to move in a different direction. Saadia’s responses to Hiwi are often taken over and developed further by Saadia himself in his later philosophical and exegetical works with little or no reference to the original polemical context, and from Saadia they enter into general Jewish rabbinic exegetical tradition going forward. For example, Saadia’s response to Hiwi on the theological problem of the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22—that God seems not to have known the outcome, and seems to have changed his mind—is developed, it seems, in his commentary on Genesis 22, and then discussed

and rejected by Ibn Ezra in the latter's commentary on the same chapter.²⁷ In other words, we find exactly the same process that has already been described above: challenge, response, and the consequent emergence of original traditions independent of the original polemic.

But with Hiwi we find something more as well: a general discomfort with any non-Jewish reading of Scripture as illustrated in general by Hiwi's questions. In fact, we find, paradoxically, exegetical traditions of reading developed precisely to prove this point. One example—medieval interpretations of Ecclesiastes 7:16—is especially illuminating.

From the eleventh century forward, Jewish exegesis of Ecclesiastes 7:16—"Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldst thou destroy thyself?"—had a remarkably stable exegetical history, with most commentators—philosophical and anti-philosophical alike—reading it as a warning against excessive asceticism and a proscription of the over-engagement with non-Jewish wisdom. Even in the Neoplatonic commentary of Isaac Ibn Ghiyath (1038-1089)—according to which Ecclesiastes in general is Solomon's "Book of Asceticism," aimed at inculcating ascetic practices and encouraging the study of the sciences—the verse is read this way.²⁸ Yet in none of these readings is it clear that this understanding of the verse has its origins in the Karaite polemic against Hiwi and other like-minded rebels and infidels.

The first interpretation of this sort I know of presented against Hiwi—found in the tenth-century commentary by Salmon b. Yeroham—is worth citing *in extenso*.²⁹ Here is its second half:

"Neither make thyself over wise" (Eccles. 7:16)—that is, just as he commanded you not to add upon yourself to what He commanded and prohibited, so he commands that you not be over wise, that is, saying: "I will study the sciences of this world," as a result of which he abandons the wisdom of Torah. He explained this at the end of the book, saying: "And further, by these, my son, beware of making many books without end" (Eccles. 12:12). All the more so someone who has no worry or toil but rather wanders around in the cities and markets seeking foreign books such as the books of the philosophers and the books of Ibn al-Rāwandī and the books of Ibn Suwayd which lead to unbelief with respect to Allah and His prophets and His Book.³⁰ Allah takes vengeance against them who have deeds and ways like these; it is what leads people such as these to eternal existence in Jahannam,³¹ especially someone who takes money from the poor and orphans and widows and spends it on books such as these and fears not nor submits piously to the Merciful. When it is said to them that such action is prohibited, they consider him who reproaches them a fool and ridicule him. . . .

He says "Neither make thyself over wise" after having said: "Be not overmuch righteous." He means: do not question the meanings of Allah's book, saying: "Why did He command this and why not this or that?"—as did Hiwi al-Balkhi, may Allah curse him. He said: "Why did He command sacrifices if He requires

no nourishment?" "Why did He command the shewbread if He does not eat it?" "Why did He command lamps if He requires no illumination?" Already the sages, may their memory be for a blessing, responded to him and rebuked him. They said to him: O fool, how can He be nourished from the sacrifices? Doesn't the fire consume part of them whereas the other part is eaten by the priests? How can He eat the shewbread when the priests eat it, as it is said: "And it shall be Aaron's and his sons'; and they shall eat it in the holy place" (Lev. 24:9)? How could He need illumination? Is He not the creator of fire and light, as it is said: "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Gen. 1:3), and the prophet Isaiah, peace be with him, said: "I form the light, and create darkness" (Isa. 45:7). He—great and exalted—is above these attributes and has been cleansed of them, as it is said: "Will I eat the flesh of bulls" (Ps. 50:13). He teaches moreover that He—great and exalted—did not command this; rather it is for the utility of man and his success, as it is said: "Offer unto God thanksgiving" (Ps. 50:14), "And call upon me in the day of trouble" (Ps. 50:15). This is why he says here: "Neither make thyself over wise"—that is, do not question Allah, thinking that your knowledge is stronger and deeper; rather ought you to trust in Allah and receive all that He commands you, as it is said: "Trust in the LORD, and do good" (Ps. 37:3); "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart" (Prov. 3:5).

Thus, to sum up this third and final example: a reading of Ecclesiastes 7:16 in response to one ninth-century arch-heretic—Hiwi al-Balkhi—stands at the beginning of a five-hundred-year tradition of Jewish exegesis completely independent of that same ninth-century arch-heretic.

Conclusions

Meir Ibn Gabbai may be right that the Bible creates its own exegetical history. It is, after all, the immediate literary context of any commentary. Yet this does not help understand the diversity of interpretations that emerge in particular historical places and times, why they take the positions they do, why they appear at one time and not another. I think it is only through examining the historical causes and cultural contexts—case by case, verse by verse, rabbinic dictum by rabbinic dictum—that one can see how lively a dialogue the history of exegesis is, not only between reader and text but competing readers of the same text, representatives of rival traditions and ideologies, religions and schools of thought, whose motivations are often far from exegetical. It is in reading other people's readings of Scripture that causes and contributing factors come to light. And what one will see is that often, if not always, exegesis begins not only with the text: it enters interpretive history from the margins.

James T. Robinson
University of Chicago

NOTES

¹This paper developed out of a seminar taught with Lucy Pick at the University of Chicago, Fall Quarter, 2009: "Reading Other People's Scriptures." A first version was presented at the conference "Deconstructing Dialogue—New Perspectives on Religious Encounters: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern," held at the University of Chicago in January of 2010. I thank my fellow co-organizers, Lucy Pick and Malika Zeghal, for a stimulating event. Special thanks also to Angela Jaffray for ideas, suggestions, and editorial acumen.

² Meir Ibn Gabbai, *Sefer 'Avodat ha-Qodesh* (Jerusalem: Shevile orhot hayim, 1991), Part III, Ch. 23, 301–2; translation from Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 299, with modifications.

³ I borrow this reading of Ibn Gabbai from my friend Abe Socher of Oberlin College; I thank him for discussion, over the years, of this and many related sources.

⁴ This idea has dominated scholarship on Midrash over the last several decades. See, e.g., the work of James Kugel, "Two Introductions to Midrash," *Prooftexts* 3 (1983): 131–55; Idem, In *Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Michael Fishbane, *The Exegetical Imagination: On Jewish Thought and Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998). See also Susan Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982).

⁵ By "Rabbanites" I refer to the medieval followers of Rabbinic Judaism. The "Karaites," on the other hand, were (and continue to be) Biblicist, non-Rabbinic, often anti-Rabbinic Jews. During the Middle Ages, especially from the ninth through twelfth centuries, the Karaites provided a major challenge to Rabbinic hegemony in Judaism. For background on the multiple forms of Judaism during the Middle Ages in the Islamic world, see Steven Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); David Sklare, *Samuel ben Hofni Gaon & His Cultural World: Texts and Studies* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 99–140. For an introduction to all things Karaism, see Meira Polliack, ed., *Karaite Judaism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003). The best recent discussion of the complex relation between Rabbanism and Karaism is Marina Rustow, *Heresy and the Politics of Community: The Jews of the Fatimid Caliphate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

⁶ For background on David Kimhi and his family, see the pioneering work of Frank Talmage, *David Kimhi: The Man and the Commentaries* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); Idem, "Provençal Exegetes in the Twelfth and Beginning of the Thirteenth Centuries," in *Jewish Biblical Exegesis*, ed. M. Greenberg (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1982), 86–91 [Hebrew]; Idem, "Joseph Kimhi: From the 'Exile of Jerusalem in Sefarad' to the 'Canaanites' in Zarefat," in *Culture and Society in Medieval Jewish History: A Collection of Articles in Memory of H. H. Ben-Sasson*, eds. R. Bonfil, M. Ben-Sasson, and J. Hacker (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1989), 315–32 [Hebrew]; along with Mordechai Cohen, "The Qimhi Family," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*. Volume 1, From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (Until 1300), Part 2: The Middle Ages, ed. Magne Saebø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2000), 388–415; Idem, *Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor: From Abraham Ibn Ezra and Maimonides to David Kimhi* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003); and the forthcoming book by Naomi Grunhaus, *The Challenge of Received Tradition: Dilemmas of Interpretation in Radak's Biblical Commentaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁷ Translated from *Miqra'ot Gedolot ha-Keter, Bereshit I* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1997), 26–27.

⁸ For Joseph Kimhi's place within the history of Jewish-Christian polemic, see Robert Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity in Medieval Western Christendom* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁹ *Sefer ha-Berit*, ed. Ephraim (Frank) Talmage (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1974), 31–32, trans. Frank Talmage, *The Book of the Covenant* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute), 39–40 (cited with some modifications).

¹⁰ See, e.g., Isaac Abarbanel's *Perush ha-Torah* (Jerusalem: Horev), at Gen. 1:26.

¹¹ See Bruno Chiesa and Wilfrid Lockwood, *Ya'qūb al-Qirqisānī on Jewish Sects and Christianity* (Frankfurt, Bern, New York: Peter Lang, 1984), 105, 124–25.

¹² See Israel Davidson, *The Book of the Wars of the Lord* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1934), 103–32.

¹³ For the Islamic sources, see especially Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996); and for Petrus, see Irvn Resnick, *Petrus Alfonsi: Dialogue against the Jews* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006). Note that Alfonsi's dialogue is more properly a dialogue not against the Jews but against himself, a dialogue between the author and himself; that is, it takes the form of an extended conversation between Moses (the author's former Jewish self) and Peter (Moses's new name as a converted Christian).

¹⁴ This is the Soncino translation.

¹⁵ See Martin Cohen, introduction to *The Shi'ur Qomah: Texts and Recensions* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1985).

¹⁶ It is worth adding an additional source as well: an anecdote in al-Mas'udi, cited by Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 78–79, about a Copt in Egypt lambasting a Jew for his religion's anthropomorphic extravagances; he cites another common rabbinic locus found also in the other polemical sources, i.e., Berakhot 3a: God bemoans His destruction of the Temple. Thus al-Mas'udi gives witness to the debate on anthropomorphism as being central in oral discussion as well.

¹⁷ See the general discussion in Marc Saperstein, *Decoding the Jews* (Cambridge: Harvard Center for Jewish Studies, 1980), 1–20.

¹⁸ See the full bibliography collected by Martin Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Texts and Recensions* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1985), 230.

¹⁹ For background on Ibn Ezra see the collection of essays in *Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra: Studies in the Writings of a Twelfth-Century Jewish Polymath*, eds. Isadore Twersky and Jay M. Harris (Cambridge: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 1994). For detailed discussion of the long excursus on Exodus 33, see especially Shlomo Sela, *Astrology and Exegesis in the Thought of Abraham Ibn Ezra* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1999) [Hebrew].

²⁰ See Ibn Ezra's preface to his Torah commentary, as translated and discussed by Irene Lancaster, *Deconstructing the Bible: Abraham Ibn Ezra's Introduction to the Torah* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002). What Christian tradition of interpretation Ibn Ezra may have had direct contact with requires further research. The medieval Rabbinic Jews or Rabbanites he was critical of include, especially, Isaac Israeli and Saadia Gaon. About the former, see Alexander Altmann and Samuel Miklos Stern, *Isaac Israeli: A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958); about the latter, see below.

²¹ See especially Alexander Altmann, "Moses Narboni's Epistle on *Shi'ur Qoma*," in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 225–64.

²² For background on Hiwi, who became the paradigmatic freethinker or heretic in Jewish writings, see: Judah Rosenthal, "Hiwi al-Balkhi: A Comparative Study," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 38 (1948): 317–42, 419–30; Idem, "Hiwi al-Balkhi, A Comparative Study: The Christian Heretics," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 39 (1948): 79–94; Moshe Gil, *Hiwi al-Balkhi, the Heretic from Khurasan* (Merhavia: Sifriyyat Po'alim 1965) [Hebrew]; Sarah Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), 218–21.

²³ Especially in the polemic of Saadia Gaon, about which see below.

²⁴ See the recent discussion of the continuation of Manichaeism in the Islamic world by John Reeves, *Prolegomena to a History of Islamicate Manichaeism* (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2011); and, for the encounter between Islam and Buddhism, *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Routes*, eds. Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett, Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010).

²⁵ Judah Rosenthal, "Hiwi al-Balkhi: A Comparative Study," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 38 (1948): 317–42, 419–30, discusses the Pahlavi work of Hiwi's contemporary Mardan Farukh, *Shkand Gumānīg Wizār*, along with "a collection of 154 Questions" attributed to Anastasius Sinaita, patriarch of Antioch, and 354 questions collected by Photius of Constantinople. For Mardan Farukh, see now the newly-completed dissertation by Samuel Thrope, *Contradictions and Vile Utterances: The Zoroastrian Critique of Judaism in the Shkand Gumānīg Wizār* (UC Berkeley, 2012). For the existence of a Hebrew and Judaeo-Arabic tradition of questions, see David Sklare, "Scriptural Questions: Early Texts in Judaeo-Arabic," in *A Word Fitly Spoken: Studies in Mediaeval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'ān Presented to Haggai Ben-Shammai*, eds. Meir Bar-Asher, Simon Hopkins, Sarah Stroumsa, Bruno Chiesa (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2007), 205–31 [Hebrew].

²⁶ Israel Davidson, Saadia's *Polemic against Hiwi al-Balkhi* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1915), with the additional fragments in: Hayim Schirmann, *New Hebrew Poems from the Genizah* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1965), 31–41 [Hebrew]; Ezra Fleischer, "A Fragment from Hiwi al-Balkhi's Criticism of the Bible," *Tarbiz* 51 (1982): 49–57 [Hebrew]. For general discussion of Saadia and his work, see Henry Malter, *Saadia Gaon: Life and Works* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1921).

²⁷ See the discussion of this by Andrew Rippin, "Sa'adya Gaon and Genesis 22: Aspects of Jewish-Muslim Interaction and Polemic," in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*, eds. William Brinner and Stephen Ricks (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 33–46; and E. Schlossberg, "The Binding of Isaac in R. Sa'adia Gaon's Polemic Against Islam," in *The Faith of Abraham in the Light of Interpretation throughout the Ages*, eds. Moshe Hallamish, Hannah Kasher and Yohanan Silman (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2002), 115–29 [Hebrew].

²⁸ See Isaac ibn Ghiyath's commentary on Ecclesiastes 7:16, in *Hamesh Megillot*, ed. and trans. Yosef Kafih (Jerusalem: ha-Agudah le-hatsalat ginze Teman, 1961/2), 243–46. For discussion of Ibn Ghiyath's commentary in general, see Hagit Mittelman, "Asceticism in the Commentary on Ecclesiastes attributed to Ibn Ghiyath, with Comparison to Islamic Mysticism," *Da'at* 48 (2002): 57–80 [Hebrew].

²⁹ The translation is from my book: James Robinson, *Asceticism, Eschatology, Opposition to Philosophy: The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Salmon ben Yeroham on Qohelet (Ecclesiastes)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2012), 424–31.

³⁰ For background on Ibn al-Rāwandī and other notorious "freethinkers" in Salmon's milieu, see Sarah Stroumsa, *Freethinkers in Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999). I have not been able to identify the other figure singled out here. For general discussion of anxiety about philosophy during Salmon's time, see, again, David Sklare, *Samuel ben Hofni Gaon & His Cultural World: Texts and Studies* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 110–42.

³¹ Or in Hebrew: "Gehinnom."