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Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy,
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MAIMONIDEAN CRITICISM
AND THE
MAIMONIDEAN CONTROVERSY
1180-1240

BY

DANIEL JEREMY SILVER

1965. x, 219 pp.

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Some 40 years after Maimonides' death, the "Guide To The Perplexed" and the "Sefer ha-Mada" were condemned by an Episcopal Inquisition to the bon fire. Tradition tells that these volumes had been denounced to the Church by some Jewish leaders. This study presents a systematic investigation of Maimonidean criticism, debate and controversy preceding this burning of the books.

Contemporary Jewish reaction to Maimonides' classic synthesis of faith and reason was many-sided and the debate and the criticism and the personalities are analyzed and a continuous presentation of the events is made.

The controversy is found to be full of paradox. Despite its historical title the Maimonidean controversy was not a debate over Maimonides. Both antagonist and defender praised him. It must be seen primarily as a statement of the varying cultural and political conditions under which the widely-separated Jewish communities of the early 13th century existed. What was a functional approach to law and the tradition in Egypt seemed irrelevant in France and, to some in the Provence, actually dangerous. Besides a systematic presentation of the literature and the dispute the author has drawn the cultural tone of these various communities. Not the least interesting element of this study is his conclusion that the three leaders whom history has convicted of denouncing the "Guide" were, in fact, innocent of that crime.

Some other publications in the religious field:

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MAIMONIDEAN CRITICISM
AND THE
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AND THE MAIMONIDEAN CONTROVERSY
1180-1240

BY
DANIEL JEREMY SILVER



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MAIMONIDEAN CRITICISM
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MAIMONIDEAN CONTROVERSY

1180-1140

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*To Adele, whose love
encouraged the writing and the writer*

5

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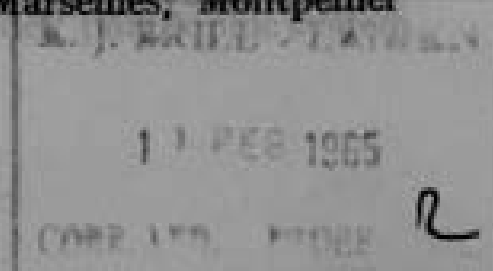
INTRODUCTION

Moses Maimonides' *Moreh Nebuchim* (English, *The Guide For The Perplexed*) was burned at Montpellier three decades after the philosopher-rabbi's death. It was bonfired by Christian authorities. It had long been the subject of a roiling controversy within Jewish life. Indeed, whether or not individual Jews denounced this work to the Church (we will attempt to show that they did not), the Jewish community generally felt a corporate responsibility for this misfortune.

This volume explores what history has chosen to call the Maimonidean Controversy, a roiling argument over Maimonides' philosophy which got sufficiently out of hand to establish in Israel a sense of guilt for the burning.

History enjoys its paradoxes. Not the least among these is the unexpected discovery that the Maimonidean Controversy was essentially not a debate over Maimonides. Neither the virtue of the man nor the verity of his specific formulations was at stake. Both attacker and defender praised him. Without exception all homaged his piety and learning, and with few exceptions neither the critics nor the protagonists had read the *Moreh* carefully. The pages of Maimonides' vast and varied literary legacy became a battlefield by virtue of their author's unique genius and unrivaled fame which established him as symbol of an entire cultural matrix. Even in his lifetime Maimonides had become seal and symbol of the many-centuried tradition which in all solemnity had married Greek categories of thought to Hebraic categories of faith. Anti-Maimonideans disapproved the marriage, not the man. Maimonideans applauded the marriage as a fitting union of two high born traditions.

Why so late in the marriage of Athens and Jerusalem should bitter controversy have developed? Quite suddenly in the last half of the 12th century the intellectual inheritance of the Arabic-Jewish world was transshipped westward and north to communities which heretofore had hardly known of its existence. Contemporaneously with Maimonides' maturity, the cultural baggage of Islamic Jewry was brought ashore at Barcelona, Marseilles, Montpellier



and Narbonne. Factors in the form of busy translators distributed this material widely.

Western Jewry was not given the leisure or the opportunity to digest in peace these imported delicacies. A crisis of survival rose up to plague these communities, a crisis which forced upon those burdened with leadership a precipitous and painful decision. Could the body politic tolerate this new thought, or was it dangerous to the social health and the wellbeing of the faithful?

As we shall show in the first chapter, the Church at this time and for the first time in nearly a millenium became involved with the existential facts of Jewish life. The Jew ceased to be viewed primarily as a necessary, if minor, pawn in the drama of the First and Second Coming. He had been the Christ-killer whose ultimate and inevitable conversion was basic to the messianic drama. He retained this role, but now took on another as heir of a vital and vigorous tradition which could occasionally convert one of the faithful and which invariably restricted the effectiveness of the missionaries of the true faith. To understand the living mind of the living Jew the Church made good use of the zeal and training of those who had been Jews. Raymond Pennaforte, the sometime director-general of the Dominicans (1238—1240), made it a matter of policy to establish schools where Hebrew was taught, with an eye to the opening up of the entire rabbinic tradition. Converts like Pablo Christiani were put to work teaching the ancient tongue and translating for Church inspection the Talmud and its sister texts. The unusual technique of public disputation was intermittently encouraged, again in order that missionary priests might be better prepared. The direct result of the Paris disputation of 1240 was a published catalogue of the errors of the Talmud. The direct result of the Barcelona disputation of 1263 was James I's order establishing the right of the Dominicans and the Franciscans to enter and preach in the synagogues of Aragon where they must be greeted with marks of friendship and respect.

Jewish life before the 13th century had been tolerant of a broad range of theological speculation. Jewish leaders in Arab lands had taken part in the revival of Greek philosophy and, like their Muslim counterparts, had developed sophisticated apologetics deeply drenched in the norms of Neo-Platonism and Aristotelianism. Many of the Jews of Castile and Aragon had been weaned intellectually by tutors at home in such philosophies.

Such Greek systematics were unknown in the more northern communities of France and Germany except through an occasional reflection which shimmered off the vast sea of Talmudic and Midrashic material. In the late 12th and early 13th centuries, along with so much else, the cultural baggage of the Arab world was carried westward and north. We shall see such communities as those of the Provence and the Languedoc come alive, through the medium of translation, to this Hebraic-Hellenic philosophic tradition. Had there been no outside pressure the process of intellectual adjustment would have followed a natural course. The deep interest in the new learning manifested by competent and pious Provençal Talmudists like Jonathan ha-Kohen of Lunel illustrate that given opportunity (i.e. time) the 13th century rabbinic mind would have accommodated this intellectualism. Jews, after all, were trained to believe that in *aggadah* broad latitude could and ought to be permitted.

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accommodated

Western Jewry was not given an opportunity to assimilate cautiously and digest slowly the attitudes of Isaac Israeli and Saad-ya Gaon and their successors. The Church, newly militant and missionary, upset the communities' equilibrium. The new learning brought into doubt popular and seemingly sacrosanct attitudes towards the reliability of Scripture, the authority of Scriptural law, the providential care by God of His people, and the ultimate promise of resurrection. Had there been time, questions would have been asked and doubts answered and a new *Weltanschauung* forged. Given conditions as they were, questions were asked and the very asking of these questions caused fear to shiver down the communal spine. Today's youthful questioner might be tomorrow's convert and the day after tomorrow's informer.

The Maimonidean Controversy was a statement of fear. Maimonides had forged the most brilliant and catholic philosophic apologetic of Judaism. A rabbi whose piety was unquestioned and a *halachist* without peer, his teachings could not be dismissed as the scribblings of a tyro without authority or competence. Those who wished the privilege of basking in the bright learning of the Arab-Jewish world claimed his sanction. Those who were fearful of the consequences of overexposure and sunburn created a Maimonidean controversy.

The issue was never Maimonides the man nor Maimonides the philosopher nor the correctness of Maimonides' philosophic system.

The issue was survival. The more realistic and confident held that the period of adjustment between cultural views could be successfully survived and that there was more danger in playing the heavy to an already restive intelligentsia than in bowing to their interests, joining their study groups, and helping them master their confusions. Judaism would only alienate those already aware of broader intellectual horizons by insisting that these horizons did not exist. Those with long historical memories or those by nature less patient with intellectual confusion argued that faith could be maintained only by keeping the catalyzing intellectual yeast far from the cultural dough. The new learning would raise doubts where before none had existed. Philosophy was a volatile explosive; its one sure result a shattering for many of their heretofore untroubled faith. Satan ought not be given an opportunity. Let only those experienced and licensed handle the dangerous cargo.

By 2 Maimonides, with his charisma of genius and his genius for the simple declarative, could not escape becoming the center of this storm. He was *the* rabbi. He was *the* philosopher. He became *the* justification for any and all speculation—much of which he would have disapproved. But the speculatives claimed him as patron. By including Maimonides in their energetic counter-attacks, the traditionalists gave to their opponents the prestige of Maimonides' authority. Having committed themselves as anti-Maimonists they had to come to grips with the vast rabbinic output of a prodigiously prolix pen and of an exceptionally fertile and magnificently competent mind. This many sided confrontation, too, is necessarily part of our story. Maimonides' fame rested on his work as a *halachist*. His great code, the *Mishneh Torah*, was in its own way as revolutionary as it was encyclopedic. Legal and literary criticism, in no way intended as part of a controversy on the tactics of survival, could be and was leveled against his restructuring of Jewish law. The controversialists often seized on purely juridical criticism which then despite itself became part of this boiling pot au feu. Again, being human and many-sided, *halachic* critics occasionally inserted controversialist material into their glosses. In the Near East Maimonides' *halachic* views became entangled in this protracted struggle. We shall follow many a narrow byway.

This debate over the valid techniques of Jewish survival was not settled within our period (1180—1240). Indeed, it was never fully settled. How could it be? But after the trauma of the burning of

1232 the controversialists came clearly to understand that they had mixed Maimonides into a controversy not of his making, without warrant, and in such a way as not only to weaken their case but to disgrace the memory of a great and pious man. As we shall show, deliberate efforts were then made to disengage Maimonides from the Maimonidean controversy. The fourth decade presents, therefore, a convenient terminus ad quem after which the language of lingering controversy took on a new idiom.

This is a study of the Maimonidean Controversy in its initial stage and while Maimonides the teacher and his teachings remained the focal issue. We shall study both criticism and controversy; those who wrote and who soberly criticized, those who wrote and who bitterly assailed, and those who wrote and who passionately defended. We shall be led down many byways, but when we have emerged, hopefully we will have gained a renewed appreciation of the breadth of mind of the greatest medieval Jewish thinker and a new appreciation of the tensions which contorted the western Diaspora at this stage of its historical pilgrimage.

CHAPTER ONE

CHANGING TIMES AND CHANGING TENSIONS

During the 13th century the attitude of the Church toward the Jews of Christian Europe hardened and the focus of its interest changed. The theology of apartheid was a thousand years old. The 13th century was unique in a determination to weave this theology into the fabric of feudal life.

Grayzel, the historian of Church-Jewish relations at this period, has documented the pronouncements and pressures which signaled and established this policy. His thesis is simply put: "One notes that the attitude of the Church remained essentially the same throughout the centuries; the difference lay in that the popes of the Thirteenth Century carried that attitude to its logical conclusions, and, moreover, bent their efforts to realize it in fact."¹

The popes of the age from Innocent III to Boniface VIII spared no energy to induce kings, nobles, and towns to abide by the long overlooked segregationist provisions of the Theodosian Code (439) including those which prohibited Jews to hold office involving authority over Christians.² Local officials were ordered to effect the stipulations of the Council of Orleans (538) mandating that Jews be behind doors during Holy Week.³ The Council of Béziers (1246) threatened excommunication to any Christian who sought medical care from Jews,⁴ thus resurrecting a prohibition at least as old as the Trulam Council (692). Effective social apartheid became the aim of the 13th century Church. Promulgations were issued that Jews might neither enjoy nor reciprocate the hospitality of their Christian neighbors⁵ nor bathe together,⁶ thus reviving sti-

¹ S. Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the Thirteenth Century*, Philadelphia, 1933, p. 9.

² Letter of Innocent III to Philip Augustus of France (1205), Grayzel, No. 14, also Nos. 23, 24, 46, 47, 69, and 71; J. Regné, "Catalogue Des Actes De Jaimie I, Pedro III, et Alphonso III Rois D'Aragon Concernant les Juifs," *REJ* LX (1910), No. 4; and G. D. Mansi (ed.), *Sacrorum Conciliorum Amplissima Collectio* (Florence and Venice, 1759-89), XXII, 1058.

³ Mansi, XXIII, 1055; Grayzel, Nos. 14, XVII.

⁴ Mansi, XXIII, 701; Grayzel, Nos. XIX, XLI.

⁵ Grayzel, No. XLI; F. Baer, *Die Juden im Christlichen Spanien* (Breslau, 1929-36), II, 133, 148, 275, 295. ⁶ Grayzel, No. XXXIII.

2 regulations of the Council of Elvira (303) and of the Trulam. Special pains were taken that no Christian live with a Jewish family as servant or nurse.¹ Intermarriage, proselyting, the ownership of slaves all were prohibited. The Council of Avignon (1209) went so far as to prohibit Jews to touch the food exposed in open market stalls.² Typical of the ecclesiastic mood and of its rationale is a pontifical missive addressed in June of 1205 by Innocent III to Philip Augustus of France.

↑ Though it does not displease God, but is even acceptable to Him, that the Jewish Dispersion should live and serve under Catholic Kings and Christian princes until such time as their remnant shall be saved, in those days when "Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell securely," nevertheless, such (Princes) are exceedingly offensive to the sight of the Divine Majesty who prefer the sons of the crucifiers, against whom to this day the blood cries to the Father's ears, to the heirs of the Crucified Christ, and who prefer the Jewish slavery to the freedom of those whom the Son freed, as though the son of a servant could and ought to be an heir along with the son of the free woman.

Know then that the news has reached us to the effect that in the French Kingdom the Jews have become so insolent that by means of their vicious usury, through which they extort not only usury but even usury on usury, they appropriate ecclesiastical goods and Christian possessions. Thus seems to be fulfilled among the Christians that which the prophet bewailed in the case of Jews, saying, "Our heritage has been turned over to strangers, our houses to outsiders." Moreover, although it was enacted in the Lateran Council that Jews are not permitted to have Christian servants in their homes either under pretext of rearing their children, nor for domestic service, nor for any other reason whatever, but that those who presume to live with them shall be excommunicate, yet they do not hesitate to have Christian servants and nurses, with whom, at times, they work such abominations as are more fitting that you should punish than proper that we should specify.

Moreover, although the same Council decided to admit Christian evidence against Jews in law-suits that arise between the two, since they use Jewish witnesses against Christians, and although it decreed that whoever preferred the Jews to the Christians in this matter should be anathematized, yet they have to this day been given the preference in the French realm to such an extent that Christian witnesses are not believed against them, while they are admitted to testimony

¹ Grayzel, No. 18, XXXIII, XXXIV, XXXVI.

² Mansi, XXII, 785.

against Christians. Thus, if the Christians to whom they have loaned money on usury, bring Christian witnesses about the facts in the case, (the Jews) are given more credence because of the document which the indiscreet debtor had left with them through the witnesses produced. Nay, more, in complaints of this nature witnesses are not received against them at all, thus, by this time, and it is with shame that we repeat it, they have become so insolent that at Sens they have built a new Synagogue near an old Church, a good deal higher than the Church. There they celebrate the Jewish rites, not in a low tone, as they used to before they were expelled from the Kingdom, but, in accordance with their custom, with great shouting; thus they do not hesitate to hinder divine services in that church.

What is even worse, blaspheming against God's name, they publicly insult Christians by saying that they (Christians) believe in a peasant who had been hung by the Jewish people. Indeed, we do not doubt that he was hung for us, since he carried our sins in his body on the cross, but we do not admit that he was a peasant either in manners or in race. Forsooth, they themselves cannot deny that physically he was descended from priestly and royal stock, and that his manner were distinguished and proper. Also on Good Friday the Jews, contrary to old custom, publicly run to and fro over the towns and streets, and everywhere laugh, as is their wont, at the Christians because they adore the Crucified One on the Cross, and through their improprieties, attempt to dissuade them from their worship. The doors of the Jews are also open to thieves half the night, and if any stolen goods be found with them, none can obtain justice from them. The Jews, likewise, abuse the royal patience, and when they remain living among the Christians, they take advantage of every wicked opportunity to kill in secret their Christian hosts. Thus it has recently been reported that a certain poor scholar had been found murdered in their latrine.

Wherefore, lest through them the name of God be blasphemed, and Christian liberty become less than Jewish servitude, we warn, and, in the name of God, exhort Your Serene Majesty, and we join thereto a remission of sins, that you restrain the Jews from their presumptions in these and similar matters, that you try to remove from the French Kingdom abuses of this sort; for you seem to have the proper zeal of God and knowledge of Him.

Moreover, since secular laws should be directed with greater severity against those who profane the name of God, you should so turn against these blasphemers that the punishment of some should be a source of fear to all, and ease of obtaining forgiveness serve not as an incentive to evil doers. You should bestir yourself, moreover, to remove heretics from the French

Kingdom, nor should your Royal Highness permit wolves to hide in sheep's clothes in order to destroy the ewes, to wander in your realm, but rather by persecuting them Your Highness should display the same zeal with which he follows the Christian faith.¹

Symbol of this reawakened interest in social apartheid was the enactment by the Fourth Lateran of the Jew Badge.² The result of this regulation was not only the gradual separating out of the Jewish element from the community but their gradual enclosure within what came, much later, to be called the ghetto.³

The details of the policy of segregation, sequestration and suborning have been fully described by others, together with the vital qualification that these pronouncements must never be construed as automatically enacted or equivalent to community practice.⁴ Princes were not easily persuaded to undertake restrictions which limited the usefulness and value of their factors and feudal property. Until the economic self interest of craft and merchant guilds entered the commercial picture, locals were not always prepared to disgrace and think theologically of long time neighbors. But the pressure of the Church was continuous and it was supported by an economic climate which increasingly cut into the political and commercial usefulness of the Jew, rendering him marginal to its production and distribution agencies. The 13th century was to see steady and deliberate progress towards the Church's set goal.

Issue, however, may be taken with Grayzel's opening premise: "One notes that the attitude of the Church remained essentially the same throughout the centuries." It did not. Specifically, during the 13th century the Church's attitude toward Jews experienced a radical reorientation of focus.

¹ Grayzel, No. 14.

² Mansi 22 : 1055. Cf. also Grayzel 31, 36, 38, 41, 42, 43, 44, 49, 62, 69, 71, 72, 78, 99, 107, 120, 122, 133. X, XIII, XVIII, XX, XXV, XXIX, XXXIII, XXXV, XXXVII, XXXIX, XLI.

³ The establishment of the ghetto is a complicated problem. Internal religious needs, practical questions of protection and defense, Feudal land restrictions as well as the familiar self segregating practice of Oriental millet communities had led in many areas to a Jewish quarter. However, the distinguishing quality of a ghetto—the prohibition of owning or renting land outside such an area and the use of its geography to regulate circulation—was a late 13th century innovation. First evidence of such procedure is to be found in the Constitution of Avignon (1243). Cf. Grayzel, p. 60, note 96.

⁴ Grayzel, *op. cit.*; J. Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, Yale, 1943; J. Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue*, London, 1934 and *The Jews in the Medieval Community*, London, 1938.

feudal

For many centuries, the Church's interest had centered on the person of the Jew. Since the days of the Church Fathers, rabbinic literature—the substance of a living faith—largely had been overlooked. In 533 Justinian forbade the study of the *Mishnah Deuterosis* and from then on for seven centuries deliberate polemics such as Agobart of Lyons' *De Insolentiae Judaeorum*,¹ Gilbert Crispin's *Disputatio Judaei cum Christiano*,² and Petrus Alphonso's *Dialogus*³ were rare exceptions. The Jew was of the family of the Christ Killers. He bore eternally, therefore, the mark of Cain and was consigned to Cain's eternal wandering. His conversion was held to be a vital precursory element of the messianic drama. Awaiting this, the Jew was to be set to one side lest his blindness prove contagious, yet at the same time he was to be wooed and won that the Kingdom of Christ might win through to its universal, inevitable, though long delayed supremacy.⁴ The liturgy, philosophies, and literature of the synagogue commanded little interest. The Church saw the Jew as bearer of a revelation given to his ancestors whose essential meaning the Synagogue subsequently had misconstrued—"They have eyes but they see not"—and as "a guardian of the Law" unfortunately deaf to the good tidings of the new gospel. The Church's theological stereotype of the Jew limited her interest in the contemporary atmosphere of rabbinic life and thought. By and large this myopia continued until the middle of the 13th century.

About then the Church came awake to the living faith. A flurry of activity ensued—activity of quite another nature than the routinely ground out social sanctions and theological formulas. The Council of Béziers (1255), at which Saint Louis himself proposed the decrees, pointed up the new direction: "Et Talmud quam alii libri, in quibus inveniuntur blasphemie, comburantur."⁵

Almost at the same time, James I of Aragon ordered a censorship of the Talmud to erase blasphemous references to the Holy Family;⁶ the preaching friar Berthold of Regensburg damned the Talmud and

¹ J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus* (Latina), (Paris, 1844), CIV, 69 ff.

² *Ibid.*, CLVI, 1033 ff.

³ *Ibid.*, CLVII, 539 ff.

⁴ Trachtenberg, *op.* 159 ff.

⁵ Grayzel, No. XLII, Art. 23.

⁶ Regné, LXI (1911), Nos. 216, 249.

its devotees;¹ and Pope Alexander IV ordered a confiscation and censorship of the Talmud in France, Burgoyne, and Anjou.²

Why this renewal of a long dormant interest in the Talmud?

It was not quite all that sudden. About ten years before, in 1247, Innocent IV had ordered his Legate to France, Odo, Bishop of Tusculum, to examine all codices of the Talmud to determine "if they brought injury to the faith of Christ." Investigation established that such was their blasphemy that these texts could not be tolerated and a year later wagonloads of books were burned in the square before Notre Dame Cathedral.³

The cindering of rabbinic works after ecclesiastic review and indictment was a relative novelty. In the previous half millenium legally decreed book burning of rabbinic texts had occurred only twice and then as recently as 1232 and again in 1240 (or 1242), incidents which we will soon relate, and which signal the emerging pattern. But from here on until the close of the Middle Ages the burning, confiscation, and censorship of rabbinic works remained part of the routine industry of the faithful—although Church officials generally kept at an official arm's length.

In 1240 another new technique for probing and revealing the lies and blasphemies of the Jew was projected by the inauguration of public disputations.⁴ The details of the first of these disputations is worth recounting.⁵ Sometime in the early 1230's a vengeful apostate who was rabbinically trained, Nicholas Donin, began agitating against his birth faith. His motivation remains hazy. A persisting tradition ascribed it to Karaite enthusiasm and spoke of his having

¹ R. Cruel, *Geschichte des Deutschen Predigt um Mittelalter*, (Dietmold, 1879), p. 62.

² I. Loeb, "Bulles inédites des Papes," *REJ*, I (1880), 116-117.

³ Grayzel, No. 119.

⁴ As it stands this statement is a bit bold. There had been earlier disputations, that of Priscus and Gregory of Tour, for example. There is some opinion that Crispin's *Disputatio* (late 11th century) was based on an historical debate. Cf. J. Jacobs, *The Jews of Angevin England* (London, 1893), p. 253 ff. A careful study of controversialist literature would surely adduce other possibilities. That these had limited significance and impact can be seen by the silence of Hebrew sources and the generally repetitious and obviously copied quality of the Christian controversialist literature. Per contra, the debates of 1240, 1263, etc., excited an extensive Jewish resistance, much literature, and profoundly affected the context of Jewish hope.

⁵ After 1240 disputations were fairly routine. In 1245 Meir b. Simon of Narbonne was summoned to confront leading ecclesiastics before the Bishop En Guillem de la Brou. Cf. H. Gross, *Gallia Judaica* (Paris, 1897). In 1263 the famous disputation of Barcelona between Pablo Christiani and Nachmanides

been attacked by the rabbis for this deviation.¹ Donin became a Dominican monk and bethought himself to denounce the Talmud to Pope Gregory IX, using the Bishop of Paris as intercessor. Donin charged that the Talmud blasphemed the Holy Family and the sanctities of the Catholic Church and that it contained heterodox ideas about God and theology. He argued that Jewish students reared on the Talmud forsook the Bible for these fanciful legends and consequently ceased to be susceptible for re-education and conversion.²

The existence and vigor of a sanctified oral law became a concern to the Church on many counts: first and foremost as a text of blasphemy, especially against the persons of Jesus and Mary; secondly as a tradition of folly and heterodoxy; thirdly as a sanction for Jewish perfidy and dishonesty; and lastly, because of its veneration as a second law and revealed authority, "assurunt Iudei legem quem talmut dicitur Dominum edidisse."³

Later in the Middle Ages, during the investiture procession of a new pope, the Jews of Rome were ordered to come forward with tokens of fealty, bearing aloft their Torah scrolls. A strange ceremony ensued. The pope received the mandated homage and in turn paid homage to the Torah with this set formula:

The Holy Law, you Hebrew men, we praise and venerate, for through Moses' hands almighty God gave it to your fathers. But your observance and unavailing interpretation of the Law we damn and reject (*Observantiam vero vestram et vanam legis interpretationem damnamus et improbamus...*).⁴

The Church had come up against the age old piety of a Sinaitically revealed Oral Law. The underlying assumptions of Hebraic jurisprudence included the conceit that ordained scholars merely developed, and revealed where necessary, a supplementary oral tradition which had been given verbally to Moses at Sinai. The rabbis avoided

took place before James I. In each of these, besides the record of Christian summation, the Jewish disputant felt it necessary to leave a personal record: Jehiel of Paris' *Sefer ha-Vikuach*, Nachmanides' *Milchemet Hova*; Meir b. Simon's *Milchemet Mitzva*.

¹ J. Parkes, *The Jews and the Medieval Community*, p. 172 f.; Grayzel, *op. cit.*, Appendix A.

² I. Loeb, "La Controverse de 1240 sur le Talmud," *REJ*, I-III (1880-1883); Grayzel, Appendix A; Jehiel of Paris, *Sefer ha-Vikuach R. Yehiel mi-Paris*, ed. S. Grinbaum (Thorn, 1873).

³ Loeb, "La Controverse . . .," *REJ*, II (1881), 253.

⁴ A. Patrizi (ed.), *Caeremoniale Romanum* I.2.21.

in this way two categories of law—one revealed and divinely mandated, the other reasoned and manufactured. The existence of a second revealed interpretation challenged the Church's own second revelation. Many churchmen did not comprehend fully this tradition and to some the existence of a revelation consequent to the Gospel covenant must have seemed subversive and heretical. This would seem to be indicated in the terms Gregory IX chose in response to Donin's charges: "Ipsi enim sicut accepimus, lege veteri, . . . ~~pre-~~mittentes eadem, affirmant legem aliam, que Talmut, id est Doctrina, dicitur, Dominum edidisse ac verbo Moysi traditam. . . ." ¹ Further, much of the conversionist energy of the preaching friars was frustrated by this second law. Where it had been believed sufficient to point out the true interpretation of a shared Scripture, now the far more difficult task of opposing a vast body of later revelation had to be faced. The Jews simply had not waited patiently over the long centuries during which the Church assumed that their faith consisted largely of reading over a Bible they were unable to comprehend. The Oral Law consecrated rabbinic exegesis. This vast body of erudition had now to be confronted and studied and, as any rabbinic student might have told the Churchmen, this in itself was no mean task.

Gregory seems to have been much exercised, we might even guess surprised, by Donin's charges—yet the Talmud had co-existed with the Church for well on to a thousand years. On June 9, 1239, he ordered William of Auvergne to seize on the first Saturday of the following Lent all books of the Jews in his district for delivery to Dominican and Franciscan control. Gregory's interest in rabbinic material was awakened. He wanted all rabbinic works sequestered and examined, not just the Talmud. He was broadly concerned, for he sent similar confiscatory orders to the Kings of Portugal, England, France, Aragon, Castile, and Navarre and to the Archbishops of England, Castile, and Leon. ²

The order was obeyed only in France. Talmud codices throughout the Capetian domain were seized. A public trial was ordered for June 25, 1240, before Queen Blanche, the court and high ecclesiastics. Rabbinic leaders were subpoenaed to defend the work and promised protection of life and limb. The Church was as eager to know more about this crucial text as to condemn it. The conclusion was, of

¹ Grayzel, No. 96.

² Grayzel, Nos. 95, 96, 97, 104, 119.

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course, foregone. The debate, however, set a precedent which was followed elsewhere and often during the next two centuries. The Talmud was consigned to the flames, but not before Eudes of Chateauroux, Chancellor of the University of Paris, had ordered an *Extrationes du Talmut* in which thirty-five specifics of error were cited and condemned.¹ Eudes' stated purpose was to enlighten clerics on Talmudic error lest they, out of ignorance, believe it a book without danger which might be freely tolerated.² The result was a careful and detailed examination of Talmudic texts touching on five major areas: the authority of the rabbis, blasphemies against Jesus, blasphemies against God, blasphemies against Christians, and miscellaneous errors, follies, superstitions, and immoralities. Although deliberately misinterpreted, post-Biblical Judaism was by way of becoming an open book.

It was not the "new" Judaism—the scholasticism of the advanced philosophers of the Judeo-Arab world—which catalyzed the Church's concern, but the "old" Judaism of Talmud and tradition. When William of Auvergne spoke of the latter he warned his fellow churchmen, "Cave autem tibi a fabulis et deliramentis Hebraeorum, quibus nel alienationes febricitantium errore et incredulitate comparabiles sunt."³ On the other hand, he made exception of the philosophers: "A tempore autem multo ad fabulas incredibiles se convertit et illis se totaliter dedic, paucis duntaxat exceptis, qui commixt: genti sarracenorum philosophati sunt."⁴ Although the Church did wage battle against Averroism and although certain Jews could easily and correctly be identified as transmitters of such dangerous errors, it was not on this account that the Church of the 13th century became exercised.⁵ If Maimonides' literary legacy posed a threat to Jewish survival, it was not because his systematics posed a threat to Christian scholasticism. To the contrary, scholastics often borrowed his ideas⁶ and such catalogues as the anonymous

¹ Loeb, *op. cit.*, published the Latin text of this document from a manuscript in the Bibliothec Nationale *REJ*, II-III (1881-1882), Vol. II, pp. 248-270; Vol. III, pp. 39-57.

² *Ibid.*, I, 249.

³ William of Auvergne, *De Universo*, 1.3.59.

⁴ William of Auvergne, 1.3.31.

⁵ In the late 80's of the 13th century the Jews of Rome had no difficulty receiving from Pope Nicholas III a statement absolving the *Moreh* of error. The Pope was particularly happy with the *Moreh's* arrangement of arguments against the Aristotelian doctrine of the eternity of matter.

⁶ Cf. J. Guttman, "Guillaume D'Auvergne et La Litterature Juive,"

Parisian *Tractatus De Erroribus Philosophorum Aristotelis, Averrois, Avicennae, Algazelus, Alkindi, et Rabbi Moysis*¹ were sufficient to deal with the dangerous spots. Indeed, Maimonidean apologetics, especially his exegesis of the Biblical commandments, were often faulted by Jews for approaching Christian positions and, inferentially, for opening the door to apostasy. Maimonides became "controversial" among Jews not because he opened Judaism to the Christian charge of heresy but because he presumably misled other Jews into heterodoxy and placed in danger the integrity of the community.

Whatever the reasons behind the Church's new found concern, it altered basically and forever the construct of relationships between Christians and Jews. In the eyes of the Church the Jew disappeared as what he had never been, an artificial theological relic, and became a living, sentient being and an intractable opponent. Many Jews recognized early on the ominous portent of this new activity. Defending the Talmud at the Paris disputation of 1240, R. Yehiel argued: "Up to the present time no one has brought any charge against it and, as it is well known, Jerome, the Church Father, knew our Scripture and our Talmud. If these contained anything heretical they would not have left them unchallenged until now.... What have you discovered in us to warrant your calling us at this time to dispute our Bible and defend our very lives because of a supposed sin forgiven these fifteen hundred years?"²

Jews sensed the novelty, but could devise no remedy. Corrective exposition is effective only where ears are open and the face is not flushed. Any remedy had to await a change of heart in another century. What is of interest here is the crucial quality of the events of 1240—and the fact that when Jews looked back at their tear-filled medieval passage they could not escape the notion, mistaken to be sure, that they were themselves somehow responsible. Had

REJ, XVIII (1889): J. Guttman, "Alexandre de Hales et Le Judaïsme," REJ, XIX (1890): J. Guttman, *Der Verhältnis des Thomas Von Aquino Zum Judentum Und Zur Jüdischen Literatur* (Göttingen, 1891); J. Guttman, *Der Einfluss Der Maimonidischen Philosophie Auf Das Christliche Abendland* (Leipzig, 1908).

¹ I. Husik, "An Anonymous Christian Critic of Maimonides," *JQR*, II (1911), 159-190.

² M. Broude, *Conscience on Trial* (New York, 1952), p. 37.

not the first burning of Jewish books been suggested to the Dominicans and Franciscans by Jews?

Many years later, perhaps as late as the 1290's, a retired Italian physician and Talmudist, Hillel b. Samuel of Verona, became exercised about the activities of one Solomon Petit who had returned to Europe from the Holy Land to seek support for a ban on the study of Maimonides' philosophic works. Professing an admiration bordering on veneration for "the second Moses," Hillel revived a long dormant acquaintance with Maestre Isaac Gajo, sometime papal physician in ordinary (~~1288-1271~~), and sought to enlist his influence to counter any and all of Solomon's activities.

(1260-1271)

The history related in Hillel's letter is suspect. Hillel was not an eyewitness to any of the events described. As we shall see, other sources correct it in dating and place, but the recapitulation he made, be it history or dramatized hearsay, has a force and interest of its own. Six decades earlier, a small number of the leaders of the Provence¹ and Catalonia had taken issue with the *Moreh Nebuchim* and the *Sefer ha-Mada* (English, *Book of Knowledge*), largely because of internal communal pressures (unspecified) which could not be focused on directly. A charge of heresy had been raised against those who championed such unorthodox studies. The accusers had taken folios of the denounced texts to France, to Paris, where they had maligned and slandered these books and those who studied them before French rabbis. Excerpts of the targeted works had been read and their errors specified. Never deigning to read for themselves, and relying entirely on a verbal precis, the French leaders had assented to a verdict of censorship by fire and a ban of excommunication to be levied against anyone who persisted in reading or retaining these texts. Ultimately, a book burning had taken place, the bonfire being lit from an altar light burning in a central monastery of Paris. God had been so incensed by this contretemps that He had taken vengeance by precipitating a Church-ordered burning of the Talmud which had flamed in Paris but forty days later. The ashes of the first burning had commingled with those of the second.²

The *Moreh* was reduced to ashes in Montpellier, not Paris. It

¹ Medieval rabbinic literature so labels the Languedoc, the Toulousain, and Roussillon together with the Provence proper. Rabbis of Montpellier, Lunel, Marseilles, Arles, Perpignan, Narbonne, etc. are the "Sages of Provence."

² Hillel of Verona Letter, *KTR*; III, 14b-15b.

was charred eight years, not forty days, before the Talmud. But Hillel's chronicle accurately reflects the medieval awareness in its insistence on a causal relationship between the two burnings and in its echo of the general belief among Jews that the *Moreh* had been denounced by one of their own. To the pious, ever careful of God's providence, the burning of the sacred Law could be justified as a merited divine punishment. God had deliberately withdrawn His support from an unworthy people.

3 awareness

Guilt and dismay seared the cindering of the *Moreh* into the consciousness of the medieval Jew. He saw it as the opening scene in a new tragedy in Jewish-Church relations. In point of fact, the burning of the *Moreh* was the opening scene of a tragedy in religious relationships, but to our age it must be explained historically and in terms of mounting Church pressures, and of changing economic and political patterns and of the response of the Jewish community to its new situation. These elements combined to form the stage setting before which our *dramatis personae* played their part, and it will be our purpose to color in the background and thus, hopefully, give meaning and dimension to their actions.

personae

W. J. LILLIE - LAMAR
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CHAPTER TWO

MAIMONIDES: THE MAN — THE TEACHINGS —
THE PRESENCE

Moses Maimonides belongs to that small band of men whose qualities of mind and person may be denounced, debated, or deplored, but never dismissed out of hand. By the age of sixteen he had compiled a creditable lexicon of the logical terms and philosophical concepts basic to Aristotelian speculation.¹ By the end of his sixty-nine years he had written the classic text of medieval Jewish philosophy, systematized the most complete and original Hebrew law code, and stamped his presence on all subsequent rabbinic learning and opinion.

Maimonides was born in the Andalusian citadel of Cordova, which was in that year of 1135 still under Muslim control. He died in the Ayyub capital city of Egypt, Fostat, in 1204. With the exception of a brief pilgrimage to Jerusalem via Acre (1165) while in transit from Morocco to Egypt, Maimonides lived out his days wholly within the Islamic world. His philosophic, medical, and astronomical works and much of his legal correspondence were written in Arabic. Any analysis of Maimonides' activities must presume the cultural and educational norms of this far flung, lineage proud, but deeply troubled Islamic-Jewish world. What was written to sustain faith within the variegated academic culture of Bagdad or Fostat often only disturbed the faith of the Talmud-oriented academics of Paris or Sens. What was edited as a handy legal reference for a Jewish citizen of Damietta or Amman, where advanced seminaries of Hebrew study were few, seemed superfluous and even dangerous to a rabbi of Narbonne or Toledo, where excellent *yeshivot* flourished and transmitted the entirety of the *halachic* heritage.

In his lifetime Maimonides' genius was legendary. Within a generation he was being called the second Moses. The communities of Yemen accepted his code as an absolute standard and mentioned

¹ *Mahdalah Fi Sind 'At Al Mantik* (Hebrew, *Millot ha-Higayon*; English, *Treatise on Logic*).

him by name in their *Kaddish* prayer.¹ In Egypt his son and his son's son unto the fifth generation were invested with the quasi-hereditary prerogatives of the *Nagide*.² Within thirty years of his death a fine Toledo *halachist* and one not unaware of the philosophic tradition was moved to ask a fine Provençal *halachist* and representative of the Maimonidean cause to search his soul whether he had not consecrated the *Moreh* as another Torah and elevated Maimonides to a rank above the Biblical prophets even into the innermost circle of celestial beings.³ At the same time another scholar, who did not wholly approve of Maimonides' speculations, pleaded with the rabbinic leadership of Northern France to rescind their ban on Maimonides' materials because some had so identified Maimonides and Judaism that to ban the former was to debase the latter.⁴ Such was the quality of his personal veneration that action against his works threatened religious schism. Nor need we wait the 1230's to establish his remarkable presence. Allowing whatever pianissimo we wish by way of acknowledging the fulsome routine of medieval panegyric—that which was lavished on Moses Maimonides exceeded all bounds. Typically, we cite this poem by Judah al Harizi, written in the first decade of the 13th century.

their^R In their day the wise of the world climbed
To heights lofty and exalted
They reached the peak of intellect, but
Moses, only, unto God ascended.⁵

Had there been no veneration of Moses Maimonides, no legendary Maimonides, there might have been some criticism of his published works, but his name and his ideas would not have become the battleground of a century-long controversy in the school-houses and synagogues of Europe—a world Maimonides had never visited and over which his teachings had no direct authority. This becomes clear as we examine the fate of the philosophic chef d'oeuvre of Maimonides' older Andalusian contemporary, Abraham ibn Daud (1110—1180). This scholar's *Al-Akibah Al Rafiyah* (1168) (Hebrew, *ha-Emunah ha-Ramah*; English, *The Exalted Faith*) was a fine, logically consistent, heavily Aristotelian apologetic which

¹ Letter of Nachmanides, *KTR*, III, 9a.

² J. Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish Literature* (Cincinnati, 1931), I, 416-463.

³ Letter of Judah Alfakhar, *KTR*, III, 2b.

⁴ Letter of Nachmanides, *KTR*, III, 9a.

⁵ Judah al Harizi, *Tahkemoni*, ed. I. Toporovsky (Tel Aviv, 1952), p. 425.

pressed home the very same challenges to familiar Jewish concepts as did the *Moreh*. Like the *Moreh*, it was founded on what Wolfson has felicitously titled the "double faith theory," i.e., the equivalence of reason and revelation as techniques of obtaining truth.¹ The *Emunah Ramah* admitted the philosophic possibility of the eternity of matter. Abraham's theory of the creation in time of each individual soul brought into serious question the continuance of personality after death. Yet this work caused hardly a stir. There is no known request in either the 12th or 13th century for a Hebrew translation, and no such translation. The devotees of "Greek science" did not rush for its proofs nor covet its support. The enemies of that cultural matrix felt no need to raise a hue and cry about a volume that was known only to a few and pondered by individuals alone in their studies.

What made for the difference? What urged on scholars of Montpellier and Lunel to commission a translation of the *Moreh* sight unseen? What made it symbol to a century of all that Greek philosophy taught and did not teach?

The answer is not to be found in any unique teaching in the *Moreh* itself, but in the reputation of the man who authored it in the fullness of maturity.

Moses was a faithful messenger [of God]
He regulated scrupulously all matters of faith
His pen took the place of [Moses'] staff
With which he did miraculous things.²

It was not Maimonides' theological ingenuity but his rabbinic omnicompetence and genius which made his philosophic work a *cause celebre*. Abraham ibn Daud was an historian. Maimonides was the rabbi.

The first half-century of Maimonidean criticism ended in the burning of his philosophy, yet in all this period no extensive gloss or challenge was penned to the *Moreh*. Surprisingly, but inevitably, an irrepressible cultural conflict became a controversy focused on the most powerful presence of the time and enlarged its concern

¹ H. A. Wolfson, "The Double Faith Theory in Clement, Saadia, Averroes, and St. Thomas, and its Origin in Aristotle and the Stoics," *JQR*, XXXIII (1942), 213 ff.

² This anonymous 13th century poem plays on the identity of names between the Biblical Moses and Moses Maimonides. As Moses' staff performed miracles so did Maimonides' pen. M. Steinschneider, "Moreh Mekom ha-Moreh," *Kobetz Al Yad*, I (1885), 17.

from a presumed threat of philosophy to faith to include strictures against the changes implicit in Maimonides' revolutionary *halachic* code. Throughout the "philosophic" controversy *halachic* specifics played a major role. Thus though the Maimonidean controversy has been traditionally and correctly identified as a skirmish in the persistent medieval cold war between the authority of revelation and the authority of reason, the battle front formed and reformed and swirled over legal as well as logical ground. Only in the last half of the 13th century did the protagonists settle on the central issue and agree in effect to separate Maimonides from the Maimonidean controversy.

Historical accident, as always, played a role in the controversy. An incursion of Berber Almohades into Andalusia, circa 1148, made life precarious for Cordova's Jews. By stages over the next ten years Maimonides moved west to east across the Mediterranean littoral, thus seemingly removing himself from influence on the Jewish centers of Europe. Moreover, the East had a millennial tradition of centralized religious control which subordinated the power and authority of individual scholars and jurists. Distance and community norms would seem to have been conspiring against any meteoric rise of the Maimonidean star.

Fortunately for Maimonides, only scattered vestiges of the once all powerful Gaonate system, i.e., of centralized religious authority, remained in being. Men continued to claim the prestige and prerogatives of that ancient title, but there were now several aspiring schools, and scholars like Maimonides' disciple Joseph ibn Aknin did not hesitate to found rival academies to those claiming hoary preeminence. No academy any longer commanded widespread support. This can be shown by the chronic financial shortages which plagued each.¹ Early on his arrival in Egypt, when the contrast between expectation and reality was still sharply defined, Maimonides observed, "Unknown people are addressed as *Rosh Yeshibah* or by some other title. All these things are but the vanities of title."² It was now possible from Fostat, especially if one had status in that powerful Ayyub capital and was at the same time an *halachic* genius, to win suasive authority through much of the Near East. Maimonides came to Egypt, too, at a time when the Mediter-

¹ J. Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and Palestine* (Oxford, 1920), I, 163 ff. Mann, *Texts* . . . , I, p. 136 ff.

² Moses Maimonides, *Commentary on the Mishnah, Bekhorot 4 : 4*.

anean was no longer a fearsome water barrier between Christian Western Europe and the Muslim Near East, but a broad and well traveled commercial, diplomatic, and military highway. Jewish sources alone make this abundantly clear. The last half of the 12th century saw a rash of world voyagings: in the 1160's Benjamin of Tudela in Aragon visited over fifty communities, some as far distant as Persia and the Soudan; Petahyah of Ratisbon and Jacob b. Nathaneel ha-Kohen followed somewhat less ambitious itineraries in the 1180's; Judah al Harizi, one of the *Moreh's* translators, visited the same area two decades later; Samuel ibn Tibbon, Lunel's chosen translator of the *Moreh*, proposed to Maimonides that he visit Egypt to work out the details of his project with the author directly¹ and later suggested to Maimonides at least one merchant voyager, Abraham ha-Kohen, who would be European courier for the precious manuscripts. The Maimonidean-Provence correspondence illustrates the degree of communication possible²—no less than eleven letters being exchanged in as many years.³ Maimonides' fame, then his words, could and did spread quickly from east to west and, indeed, throughout the subsequent century the Maimonidean literature of Egypt, Palestine, and Europe acted and reacted on each other.

Legend has established Maimonides as personal physician of Saladin.⁴ He was not, though in his later years he did become a house physician of Saladin's governor, Al Qādi al-Fādil.⁵ Maimonides' medical treatises were of a high order, and some news of his

¹ *KTR*, II, 27b.

² There was close contact between all Jewries touching the Mediterranean littoral during this period. Maimonides was in contact with a *dayyan* of Alexandria, Meir, reputed to have been a disciple of Abraham b. David of Posquières. In 1210-11 a large group (some say two hundred) French and German scholars, including Simson of Sens, pilgrimaged to the Holy Land—some stopping off at Fostat en route (cf. Chapter 4). Jonathan b. David ha-Kohen of Lunel may have been a member of this group (cf. Chapter 5). We find also the teachings of a Greek rabbi, Isaac b. Melchizedek of Siponto (12th century) quoted and argued against both in Fostat (S. Assaf, *Kiryat Sefer*, XVIII [1941], 65) and in Posquières (R. Abraham b. David of Posquières' gloss to *Mishneh Torah*, *Tu'mat ha Met* 1:2, 14:7, 15:3).

³ A. Marx, "Maimonides and the Scholars of Southern France," *Studies in Jewish History and Booklore* (New York, 1944), p. 49 ff.

⁴ Some medieval legend books promoted Maimonides to a Viziership and treated him as the guardian spirit of oriental Jewry. A. Neubauer, "Documents inédits sur Maimonide et David Alroi," *REJ*, IV (1881), 173 ff.

⁵ *KTR*, II, 28b. E. Ashtor-Strauss, "Saladin and the Jews," *HUCA*, XXVII (1956), 312.

medical prominence certainly filtered back to Europe, where the work of Hebrew and Latin translation of this material proceeded apace in the 13th century,¹ but to the Jews the force of the Maimonidean presence derived from the rabbinic jurist, not the physician-scientist.

Maimonides' far reaching fame was founded primarily upon the *Mishneh Torah*. This monumental compendium of the entire corpus of Hebrew law was completed circa 1180 and was constantly revised and corrected until his death.

Maimonides offered several explanations of this code. On the one hand he asserted that he had written it for his own private use to obviate the time consuming necessity of checking references and sources in the handling of his legal correspondence.² A few pages of shorthand references would have sufficed. The *Mishneh Torah's* Introduction probably offers a far more creditable key. Halachic terms are difficult and confused. Old patterns of study have been broken. Few any longer master the necessary material. Given the pace of life, it requires an inordinate and unavailable leisure to assimilate the sheer bulk of the material. Access, brevity, and correct determination are elementary communal necessities; therefore, this book.³ Furthermore, the citation of authority seems to encourage support of the claim by certain heterodox groups (*Minim*) that the Oral Law was based on human reasoning rather than divine revelation and reflected personal opinion rather than broad consensus.⁴

¹ G. Sarton, *Introduction to the History of Science* (Washington, 1927-1948), II, 372; III, 61.

² *KTR*, II, 30b-31a.

³ M. T., Introduction. In his letter to Jonathan ha-Kohen of Lunel, Maimonides returned to essentially this position. Twersky, noting the reference to the similar work of Judah ha-Nasi in a responsum to Pinhas, the *dayyan* of Alexandria (*KTR*, I, 25), makes the observation that Maimonides was influenced by a Midrashic tradition that the days of ~~the~~ Judah (end of 2nd century) were difficult and unsettled, much like his own, while many of his critics in the West held to another tradition that Judah's days were relatively peaceful and prosperous—and hence could not admit an historical analogy and rationale. Such differing traditions at best rationalized the issue and can not be construed as causative. (I. Twersky, *R. Abraham b. David of Posquières* [Cambridge, 1962], pp. 133-134, note 9.)

⁴ *KTR*, I, 26a.

Who were these *Minim*? An obvious conclusion is that they represent the Karaites. Marmorstein, indeed, has claimed that Maimonides wrote the *Mishneh Torah* to combat these. (A. Marmorstein, "The Place of Mai-

Wherein lies its commanding force? In part the *Mishneh Torah's* fame rests on versatility and scope. Within its fourteen volumes are enclosed the entirety of the Oral and Written tradition, laws current and those in abeyance, laws derived from the four tractates of the Talmud routinely studied in the schools and laws derived from the two concluding orders usually omitted since they related to matters of Temple worship and Palestinian agricultural practice and the like tabled for over a thousand years. Included also were such specialist areas as that of calendar regulation, usually dispensed with by the rabbis—these, too, set down with the brevity and clarity which mark the entire work.

To understand its fame, we must appreciate the difficulties attendant on its editing. This was no pedant's feat requiring only patience, scissors, and paste. Since the beginning of the 3rd century, when the Mishnah had been compiled, Hebrew law had ramified largely by scholarly excursus and specific case decision. The volume of such material was fantastic. Rules were scattered in the unindexed many-folioed Talmud, in the responsa and the excursuses and compendiums of the Geonim, and in numerous other texts and pamphlets. There existed in addition an extensive library of variant teachings, texts, and traditions. All these materials

monides' *Mishneh Torah* in the History and the Development of Halacha," *Moses Maimonides*, ed. I. Epstein [London, 1935], pp. 159-175.) Maimonides did in 1176 cosign a ban against Karaite practices concerning the ritual purity of wine (*KTR*, I, 30a). Mann has established the existence of a small Karaite community in Fostat, Cairo, and Alexandria, but under Rabbinic control. (A. Mann, *The Jews . . .*, I, 251 ff.)

Objection must be raised on the basis of a responsum where Maimonides "by virtue of what has been shown us from the Heavens" permits of his own cognizance and against tradition all social amenities towards the Karaites "as long as they do not malign the rabbinic sages of that generation and guard their tongues from mocking the opinion of our teachers." (Y. Blau (ed.), *Teshuvot ha-Rambam* [Jerusalem, 1957-1961], 371.)

A tame Karaite community firmly under rabbinic control did not catalyze the *Mishneh Torah*. Marmorstein goes too far. He accepts Maimonides at face value when, in fact, Maimonides rationalized. The possibility of so establishing a need to base the law clearly (as a refutation of Karaite charges against the Oral Law) was simply a convenient out. Maimonides programmed a code. He did so in largest part to permit a non-professional rabbinic, i.e., the leadership of citizens who needed references if they were to act as jurists. (S. Zeitlin, *Religious and Secular Leadership* [Philadelphia, 1943], p. 46 ff.). Zeitlin also argues convincingly that Maimonides had in mind the promulgation of a constitution for a recreated and independent Jewish state. (S. Zeitlin, *Maimonides, A Biography* [New York, 1935], p. 61 ff.)

had to be mined without the now usual library aids and indices. True, a step towards systematization had been taken by the teacher of Maimonides' father, Joseph ibn Migash (1077—1141) and by this scholar's more famous mentor, Isaac of Fez (Alfasi, 1013—1103), but such Talmudic condensation was limited to currently applicable laws, based on traditional principles of arrangement, and in many cases it failed to decide between conflicting traditions.¹ Maimonides brought centuries of need and tentative solution to a brilliant and logical conclusion.

To understand its fame, we must appreciate the freshness and usefulness of Maimonides' system of organization. Biblical law was divided into fourteen topical areas, and the rabbinic extensions, modifications, and additions in these areas were clearly and precisely marshalled. Prefaced by an explanation of these groupings and by a handy reference to each Biblical precept, the *Mishneh Torah* permitted the jurist to put his finger on a required ruling in a matter of minutes.

To understand its freshness and originality, we must appreciate its language, a skillfully sculpted Mishnaic Hebrew which set it off from the polyglot Aramaic-Hebrew of Talmudic and rabbinic manuscripts.² This usefulness and erudition was deeply and immediately appreciated.

¹ The need for reference aids had already been recognized by the later Geonim, who published topical essays in the form of extended responsa. Thus R. Amram compiled the outline of a complete liturgy for Spain. Sherira Gaon edited the generations of Talmudic authority for Kairuan. Lesser school scholars such as Simmon Kayyara and Aha of Shabba brought out listings of Biblical laws together with comments on their ramifications. These, however, served more to indicate need than to meet it.

Why the schools did not go further is a moot question of historical research. Suggestions include the force of tradition, the fear that legal development might be straitjacketed, the economic necessity of budgeting the schools in large part from the donations which accompanied *halachic* inquiry, a desire to maintain the authority and prerogatives of the scholar classes against the political authority and control of wealth and the majesty of law against public challenge.

² The choice of pure Hebrew was no mere stylistic refinement. The once familiar Hebrew-Aramaic legal vocabulary had long since become recondite. In the 10th century an Arabic translation of the Talmud had perforce to be prepared. (Marmorstein, p. 159.) Joseph ibn Migash testified that most Iberian jurists could not grasp a Talmudic discussion (*ibid.*). Maimonides' contemporary and correspondent, Jonathan ha-Kohen of Lunel, for similar reasons chose Hebrew for his commentary on the Mishnah. (S. Mirsky, *Commentary of Jonathan ha Kohen on Mishnah Tractates Megillah and Moed Katan* [Jerusalem, 1956], p. IX.)

To all Israel he was a light in their habitations, for he saw that the masses thirsted for the Torah. They made motions to find the word of God but they could not find it. There was no food fit for their immature palates—their souls were cloaked in hunger and thirst. He saw that these times humble all hearts. Moses arose and delivered them. He winnowed the Talmud as flour in a sieve. He took from it the choice fine flour. He prepared it specially for those who busied themselves with the needs of the time—well prepared food, full of sweetness and fatness—and the children of Israel ate the manna for which they did not have to toil. Nor need they be turned aside from its highway, for he omitted from his book the citation of authorities, all excursus and asides, *aggadic* material and novellae, all of which caused the imagination to err, until he had made over the Talmud into a well-paved way and caused a voice to be heard throughout the exile: "Come unto His gates with thanksgiving and unto His courts with praise."¹

Any novelty disturbs settled ways. Maimonides, to create this vast legal compendium, paid scant heed to many a hoary convention. He broke ground for a new topical organization of the law. He translated from Aramaic into Hebrew. In the overwhelming majority of cases he cited only one opinion, dropping entirely minority or variant decisions. He stated the law without indication of its promulgator or source. Later he prefaced the entire code and each of its parts with a novel and unique enumeration of the traditionally assumed six hundred and thirteen Biblical laws. He brought the whole scheme off magnificently and filled the manifest need for a ready reference and readable code, but guaranteed by his originality and disdain of hoary forms a hornet's nest of protest. To some, like the physician of Saragossa, Isaac bar Sheshet ha-Nasi, any opposition to this new arrangement seemed rank perversity and evidenced a selfish reaction by those whose monopoly of legal competence was now broken.² Self-interest surely affects most decisions, but there were good and valid reasons for a negative response ~~many~~ to the *Mishneh Torah*. Each law now had a finality which made equity difficult and change hard to come by. In their new language dress and context many formulas assumed new shadings of meaning.³ Each law had a finality which threatened to erase

¹ al Harizi, pp. 348-349.

² A. Marx, "Texts By and About Maimonides," *JQR*, XXV (1935), 427.

³ Asher b. Yehiel (1250-1328) later complained, "Thus do all the legists err who expound from Maimonides and who are not expert in the Talmud . . . for he did not follow the practice of other jurists who brought proof to their

many an ancient and rabbinically acceptable local custom (*min-hag*). The presentation of debate and minority argument had the effect of allowing variants in the law which could be built on at need. Law requires elbow room and must provide the basis for later change and judicial flexibility. In rabbinic *halacha* this elbow room had been provided by the inconsistent and even contradictory positions retained in the Talmud itself and by the possibility of playing off the Babylonian Talmud text against equally ancient but less accredited texts—the Baraitot, the Tosefta, the *halachic* Midrashim and the Palestinian Talmud, as well as a number of other shorter and less authoritative treatises (*Abot de R. Nathan*, *Masseket Semahot*, *Kallah*, *Kallah Rabbati*, *Mishnat R. Eliezer*, *Pirke de R. Eliezer*, *Seder Olam*, *Targum Onkelos*, *Targum Jonathan*, etc.). Source citations also provided a factor of flexibility. To be able to list an ancient citation against a modern majority was to give added force to one's argument. Immediate practical necessity motivated the compiler. Tradition and a concern for equity, judicial prerogative, and future need motivated the challengers. Maimonides structured the law. Many of his critics feared he had also straitjacketed it.

Scholarship, originality, temerity, genius, these compelled the fame of the *Mishneh Torah*. It was from its inception a social force as well as a legal tour de force. Nor has a description of its form exhausted its novelty. In Jewish life it was traditional to separate law and dogmatics. *Halacha* was a precise detailed study. *Aggada* was a deliberately non-precise study; its materials were written suggestively rather than didactically. Judaism, like the other revealed religions, had its fundamental tenets, but unlike its Christian daughter, these were more generally preached than catechized. Law commanded absolute obedience. Metaphysics and theology in the Jewish world rarely insisted on such conformity. There were also certain areas of cosmology (*Maaseh Bereshit*) and eschatology (*Maaseh Merkabah*) in which all printed or public speculation was discouraged. Along came Maimonides and in the very first volume of his code, the *Sefer ha-Mada*, he set forth black on white, briskly teaching and who cited sources But he wrote his book as one who prophesies under direct inspiration without bringing logic or proof. One who reads thinks he comprehends, but he does not for if he does not understand Talmud he can not understand the matter completely and he will trip himself in making decisions and in teachings." (*She-elot U'Teshubot* [Venice, 1607], 31.9.)

and unequivocally, the prime theological and metaphysical principles of faith. To be sure, Maimonides set down little that could not be found somewhere in the tradition, but the terse formulation and the unavoidable implication that full assent to these was as necessary as full obedience to the practical law startled many. Further close study revealed that many of Maimonides' wordings drew on philosophic rather than Talmudic formulas. This was especially true of the *Mishneh Torah's* treatment of resurrection. The promise of physical resurrection was universally believed. In his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Introduction to Chapter X of *Sanhedrin*, Maimonides had included physical resurrection as a cardinal postulate of the faith. But between assertion and elaboration yawned a vast chasm. Judaism had never developed a rabbinic consensus as to the specifics of this promise. The Bible, itself, spoke precious little about it. Talmudic Judaism had affirmed without dogmatizing on its precise terms. The wedding of Hebrew and Hellenistic thought had led to a philosophic tradition in Judaism, as in Christianity and Islam, which preferred the doctrine of the "immortality of the soul." The usual detente to this impasse was to insist that the delights of the next life are beyond the intellectual grasp of the human mind which can assimilate ideas only within familiar terms of reference. This was precisely the tack taken by Maimonides in the *Commentary on the Mishnah*. It was a familiar approach and aroused little criticism. However, in the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides' passion for orderliness and precision overcame his caution. The hidden promise of the *Olam ha-Ba* (the future world) is a life no longer attended by death. It is a blessing not connected in any way with ordinary accidents or hardship. So far so good. But Maimonides went one step farther. The next life is entirely other and distinct from our mundane existence. All human attributes fall away. The soul participates in the pure spiritual existence of the angelic spheres. In short, familiar bodily appetites and accidents no longer accrue. Talmudic statements seeming to promise familiar pleasures are figurative in force. The souls of the righteous survive. But Maimonides defined the surviving element as "the form of its (the soul's) intelligence by which it attained knowledge of the Creator Being according to its capacity and by which it attained knowledge of all non-concrete intelligences and the works of God."¹ Of the reward and punishment which traditionally attend

¹ *M. T. Teshubah* 8 : 3.

resurrection Maimonides said only that the righteous man's reward is resurrection itself and the wicked man's punishment is to be cut off from such life. There is no literal punishment, only death without hope of rejuvenation.¹ Any Dantesque view "is idle and vain and inconsequential" and only occurs to men because we cannot ~~separate out~~ separate out our desires in this world from our longings and speculation on the nature of the next life.² Finally, in the last chapters of the last book of the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides gave a humanistic picture of the Messiah. He is a political person of human dimensions and power who will reestablish the Davidic dynasty, rebuild the Temple, reestablish the sacrificial cult, and return Israel's dispersed to the Holy Land.³ All of which conformed to traditional patterns based largely on the famous text of R. Samuel, "Between this world and the Messianic Age there will be no change save the end of Israel's subjection to alien governments."⁴ However, Maimonides went on to withdraw all miraculous elements of the Messiah's power. What the Messiah will accomplish is in no way supernatural or, as Maimonides put it, the King Messiah need not perform miracles or bring anything new into being or resurrect the dead.⁵ As proof he cited the acceptance of Bar Kochba as Messiah by the renowned Akiba without any evidence of divinely inspired powers and Akiba's rejection of Bar Kochba's Messianic role when Bar Kochba's death supervened before Israel had been liberated. All this could be supported in the tradition but it was anything but traditional. There is little cause to wonder that the French ban of 1232 included in its stricture the *Sefer ha-Mada* with the *Moreh Nebuchim*.

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DISENTANGLE

The *Mishneh Torah* was elemental and could not be denied. Neither could it be accepted wholly on its own terms. The process by which the Jewish community digested and made palatable its rich food forms a significant part of our study. For this process blended itself inextricably into the Maimonidean controversy. Indeed, in the truest sense the *halachic* debate was the Maimonidean controversy.

By extension of this *halachic* preoccupation the *Kitab Al' Faraid* (Hebrew, *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*; English, *Book of Commandments*), which

¹ *Ibid.*, 8:5.

² *Ibid.*, 8:6.

³ *M. T. Melahim* 11:1-2.

⁴ *T. B. Sanhedrin* 91b.

⁵ *M. T. Melahim* 11:3.

Maimonides wrote to explain his method of selecting the Biblical laws which formed the skeleton of the *Mishneh Torah*, becomes part of our story. There had been a long standing Midrashic tradition that the Torah contained six hundred and thirteen laws, but there was no complete agreement on their exact listing. Over the generations certain selections became popular. Maimonides broke with all of these and edited the *Kitab Al'Faraid* to explain his fourteen basic guidelines of selection and the individual laws selected. Though the *Kitab Al' Faraid* was essentially little more than an exercise in legal theory, it saw at least three Hebrew translations in the 13th century.¹ From the early scattered notes of Daniel b. Saadya to the complete gloss by Nachmanides it remained an elemental part and a basic ingredient of the Maimonidean stew.

The force of the *Mishneh Torah* projected other of Maimonides' legal works into the limelight. By the age of thirty-three, Maimonides had composed an extensive gloss commentary to the Mishnah, the *Kitab Al Siraj* (Hebrew, *Sefer ha-Maor*; English, *Book of Light* or more commonly *Commentary on the Mishnah*). What he accomplished was to explain the Mishnah precepts *in situ* and develop their ramifications in later rabbinic tradition. Mishnah commentaries were not unusual. Where Maimonides moved away from familiar territory was in the writing of several extended introductions and a few topical excursuses in which he drew together in essay form history, ethics, theology, and the law.

The entire *Siraj* played only a minor role in Maimonidean criticism within the European world. The fame of the *Mishneh Torah*, however, stimulated interest and around 1200 an often interrupted translation of the *Siraj* into Hebrew was begun.² A more vigorous interest was evident in Arabic speaking lands.³

¹ Abraham b. Hisdai circa 1230 (?), Solomon b. Joseph ibn Ayyub circa 1240, Moses ibn Tibbon circa 1260.

² Judah al Harizi translated the introduction and the first five chapters of *Zeraim*. Over the decades Joseph b. Isaac al Fawwal, Jacob b. Moses of Huesca, Solomon b. Jacob of Saragossa, and Nethaneel b. Joseph of Saragossa completed the task. (M. Steinschneider, *Die Hebräischen Uebersetzungen des Mittel-Alters* [Graz, 1956], p. 923 ff.)

³ Cf. Chapter III for the *Siraj*'s central role in the "ordination" controversy.

Maimonides referred his respondents far more often to the *Siraj* than they question him on it. (Blau, 128, 131, 136, 150, 190, 211, 263.) Yet questions of its meaning or criticism of its decisions are not unknown. (Blau, 38, 217, 257.) The same pattern emerges in Abraham Maimonides' responsa. (Abraham Maimonides, *Teshubot Rabbenu Avraham b. ha-Rambam*, A. H. Frieman

Historians have assumed that two of the *Siraj's* excursuses were well known and debated by the Maimonidean controversialists. The first of these, an introduction to *Mishnah Abot*, was, indeed, early and separately translated and well ventilated.¹ The popularity of this treatise on ethics is attested by the extensive number of manuscript copies which have survived² and by its reproduction in almost all the early printed exemplars of the *Mishnah* and *Talmud*. Maimonides' psychology is basically Aristotelian. The soul consists of five faculties (nutritive, sensory, imaginative, conative, and rational). In the sensate world the human soul uniquely possesses the rational faculty which permits the acquiring of knowledge and discrimination between choices of action. The soul, like the body, can be in good or ill health. The improvement of one's moral discipline is the appropriate therapy for the soul. The key to such discipline is the Nichomachean middle way, which he equated with the ethical norms of the Torah. This treatise, popularly known as the *Shemoneh Perakim* (English, *Eight Chapters*), was treated as an appendix to the *Moreh*. Indeed, specific reference is made to it there.³ No attempt was made to include the *Shemoneh Perakim* in the debate despite its Aristotelian frame. Maimonides had limited himself largely to moralizing and had made no attempt to grade virtues as he did in Part III, Chapters 51 and 52 of the *Moreh*,⁴ an unprecedented procedure which precipitated, as we shall see, quite a storm.

and S. D. Gotein (eds.) [Jerusalem, 1937], 1, 4, 82, 106, 107.) Interestingly, only one respondent cited the *Siraj* by title. (Abraham Maimonides, 81.)

¹ Samuel ibn Tibbon circa 1200. The existence of at least one other early translation, possibly by Judah al Harizi, has been suggested. (J. I. Garfinkle, *The Eight Chapters of Maimonides on Ethics* [New York, 1912], p. 5.)

² *Ibid.*, p. 27 ff.

³ *Moreh*, i. 39; i. 71; iii. 35; iii. 48; iii. 53.

⁴ Chapter 8 of the *Shemoneh Perakim* dealt with the sensitive question of free will and, especially, with the often posited regulation of human activity by celestial motion. It is basic to any discussion of Maimonides' views on free will and astrology. But the fuller development of these themes in the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Moreh* as well as in Maimonides' letter on astrology preempted center stage. (A. Marx, "The Correspondence Between the Rabbis of Southern France and Maimonides About Astrology," *HUCA*, III [1926], p. 311 ff.) In any case, Maimonides' rigid opposition to astrology could not be met on strong *halachic* grounds. There was Biblical and Talmudic support for Maimonides' view. Cf. Ex. 22 : 17; Lev. 19 : 26; Deut. 18 : 9-14; Babylonian Talmud (hereafter *T.B.*) *Pesachim* 113b; *T.B. Sanhedrin* 68a; *T.B. Shabbat* 156a. Such an anti-philosophic sage as Judah b. Asher shared Maimonides' view. (*Zichron Jehudah*, ed. D. Cassel [Berlin, 1846], No. 91.) Whatever their private opinion, critics perforce had to state their astrologic

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It has also been assumed that the excursus which introduces Mishnah *Sanhedrin*, known in Hebrew as *Perek Helek* and famous in later sources for its discussion of immortality, retribution, and resurrection and as the *locus* of the often debated and more often venerated "Thirteen Articles of Faith," was known to the controversialists and entered their arguments. We respectfully disagree.¹

The *Kitab Dalalat Al-Hairin* (Hebrew, *Moreh Nebuchim*) was completed about 1190. It is generally subsumed under the title of philosophy, but is in reality far broader in scope. Such purely philosophic matters as ethics, politics, and logic hardly are touched, while a good bit of the work is devoted to such purely theological matters as divine providence, retribution, the messianic promise, and the perfect worship of God. But again systematic theology does not fully describe this work, for it dilates at length on Biblical exegesis and hermeneutics, comparative religion, and grammar, subjects not usually considered essential in such studies.

The *Moreh* is best taken on its own terms—as a syllabus or study guide for those who have been exposed to the tradition of Aristotelian speculation and science ~~current~~ current in the 12th century Islamic milieu and who find their faith challenged and in part undermined by its assumptions.

The object of this treatise is to enlighten a religious man who has been trained to believe in the truth of our Holy Law, who conscientiously fulfills his moral and religious duties, and

views as best they could and conclude rather lamely, as did Rabad, "All this is not important" (Gloss to *M. T. Teshubot* 5 : 6).

¹ In our study of the literature we have not found a single reference to this work outside Maimonides' own Arabic language responsa. Maimonides' views on the Messianic Age and the *Olam ha-Ba* were known from the *Moreh*, the *Mishneh Torah* (cf. *Teshubot* and *Melakhim*) and from his short essay *Ma'amar Tehiyyat ha-Metim*. Debate focused sharply on these; *Perek Helek* was not cited.

The same is true of the famous debate on the place of dogmatics in Judaism. Schechter and Loew have read a 14th-15th century debate back into the 13th. (S. Schechter, "The Dogmas in Judaism," *Studies in Judaism* [Philadelphia, 1896], I, 161 ff.; I. Loew, "Judische Dogmen," *Gesammelte Schriften* [Szegedin, 1889], I, 156 ff.) Nachmanides and others do, in fact, suggest shorter listings of principles (Nachmanides, *Torat ha-Shem Temimah*, A. Jellinek (ed.) Vienna, 1872), but there is no evidence that such positions were taken in deliberate reflection on Maimonides.

Further there is no evidence that *Perek Helek* was available in Hebrew translation until late in the century (circa 1290) when Solomon b. Jacob of Saragossa completed the translation of the entire order of *Nezikin*.

Probably the existence of these articles was known to some, but certainly they excited little if any controversy of their own.

at the same time has been successful in his philosophic studies. Human reason has attracted him to abide within its sphere: and he finds it difficult to accept as correct the teaching based on the literal interpretation of the Law... Hence he is lost in perplexity and anxiety.¹

It may be seen then, without denigration, as a justification of faith by one who believed that the original revelation, correctly interpreted, need not be a stumbling block to the philosophically sophisticated who, reading tradition's pages, question the truth and appositeness of religious teachings.² The most serious problem posed by Scripture to such readers was the anthropomorphic vocabulary it employs to describe God. It is not surprising, therefore, that the bulk of Part I (Chaps. 1-67) was devoted to a systematic examination of all Biblical terms which are, or seem to be, anthropomorphic suggesting in each case their "true" meaning. Maimonides' discussion of the psychology and the symbolism of the prophetic statements (Part II, Chaps. 40-48) and of the reasonableness of the Biblical commandments (Part III, Chaps. 30-49) were explanatory efforts at a similar exegesis; as was his metaphysical and cosmological exposition of the Biblical accounts of creation and of Ezekiel's chariot (Part III, Chaps. 1-7).

We might thus presume the *Moreh* as a search for the "correct" interpretation of Scripture and for its essential meaning. Yet this presumption would not exhaust its content. Part I, Chaps. 71-76 is a trenchant criticism of the Kalam, that heavily Neo-Platonic theology by which Mutazilite and later Asharite Muslims were wont to defend their faith. This section cleared the ground for the purely Aristotelian premises with which Maimonides began Part II (Introduction) and with the aid of which he argued to a first cause (Part II, Chap. 1).³ Maimonides felt philosophically secure within Aristotelian norms except for their assumption of the eternity of matter. Part II, Chaps. 2-30 is, therefore, an examination of the physics of the universe and of matter. Maimonides' concluded that Aristotle did not prove his case, thus it certainly is possible

¹ Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans., M. Friedlander (New York, 1956), p. 2.

² The suggestion that a mystical structure is at the root of much of Part III—especially Chaps. 51 ff.—and that a technique of mystical preparation is expounded will be made. Cf. Chapter IX.

³ Maimonides' argument runs as follows: Nature requires a cause, the series of such causes can not be infinite, Q.E.D. there must be a first cause.

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and even highly probable that the religious postulate of a creation in time and *ex nihilo* is preferable.

There is yet more. In Part III Maimonides turned to the vexing theological problems of defining human capacity and human nature (Chaps. 8-9), of explaining the existence of evil (Chaps. 10-12), of establishing both free will and divine omniscience (Chaps. 13-16), of describing the mechanics of divine providence (Chaps. 17-25), of expounding the purpose of religious law (Chaps. 30-49), the nature of worship (Chaps. 50-51), and the burden of ethics (Chap. 52).

The *Moreh* was received both with exaggerated praise and the ban. Translated circa 1200 by Samuel ibn Tibbon and again circa 1210 by Judah al Harizi, it became quickly a classic in intellectual centers east and west—Jew, Muslim, and Christian.

One of the problems of which Maimonides himself was deeply conscious was the preparation in "Greek science" which the work presumed (Introductions, Part I and Part III). Philosophy always commands two audiences—one professional who examine the subtleties, one literate but non-professional who derive only some general impressions of its contents.

In the 13th century, the *Moreh* commanded the second reader far more often than the first. The classic and searching commentaries of Crescas, Ephodi, and Narbonni were not penned until the 14th century.¹

No detailed examination of the text antedates the mid-thirteenth century, and we must rely on the controversialist literature to indicate the *Moreh's* reception. Briefly put, the *Moreh* circulated privately and was read privately or by small impromptu circles. It seems never to have interested the intellectuals of the Northern French communities. On the other hand it was seized upon avidly by a number of Aragonese, Catalan, and Castilian sophisticates who lacked the training to understand its depths but were eager to assume that Maimonides' defense of reason justified their "reasoned" rejection of certain pieties which they had discarded out of simple disinclination.

¹ Around 1250 various detailed examinations of the *Moreh's* various parts began to emerge. We shall have occasion to discuss Nachmanides' challenge to Part III, Chaps. 26-49 in his commentary on the Pentateuch. Later in the century Hillel of Verona explained twenty-five of the twenty-six Aristotelian propositions which precede Part II. Shem Tob ibn Palaquera justified the work's theology and took up criticism of ibn Tibbon's translation. Jacob Anatoli, Joseph Gikatilla, Abraham Abulafia and others, in turn, took up various aspects of the work.

Like many similar master works, the *Moreh* was read carefully by but a few, discussed by many, and banned and beatified by some who had not opened its covers.

What image did the *Moreh* project? Some dismissed it out of hand as another pernicious subtlety founded on the vanity of the Greeks.¹ To others it was literally a way of salvation. Note this anonymous 13th century inscription poem:

Happy the man who listens to me
To linger by my gates daily.
He will find wisdom—the treasures of life
He will deliver his soul with a precious deliverance.²

To some rationalists it was the proof text in their debate against religious mystery. To some mystics like Abraham Abulafia (1240—1291) and Joseph ibn Gikatilla (1245—1305) it was the key to Biblical secrets and a guide-book to the mystical union of man's intellect with the cosmic intellect.³ Were these separate reactions to disparate elements in the *Moreh*? Possibly. Men read into every important text the ideas they wish to find there. But essentially all reaction took off from one of two basic Maimonidean contentions, God's otherness and the necessity of intellectual competence for true worship. What distinguishes the *Moreh* both in specific statement and in systematics is what may be called the uncompromisable dogma of God's unity (*Yihud*). That God is one is bedrock Judaism. That God's "oneness" implies "otherness" was at least as old as Deutero-Isaiah's charge, "To whom can you liken Me?"⁴ The systematics of this "otherness," especially as regards divine attributes, had been developed centuries before by Saadya and others.⁵

What distinguished Maimonides' formulation was his hypostasizing of the principle of otherness. God is not only a necessary being

¹ "Cursed is the one who teaches his son the wisdom of the Greeks," (*T. B. Sotah* 49b.) This text was quoted by Joseph b. Todros ha-Levi Abulafia. (*Ginze Nistarot*, J. Kobak, ed. [hereafter GN], III [1872], 158.) There was also a widespread belief in Spain and the Provence that the French rabbis who had issued the ban had had to rely on hearsay evidence of its contents. (Letter of Samuel Saporta, GN, III, 43.)

² M. Steinschneider, "Moreh Mekom ha-Moreh," *Kobetz Al Yad*, I (1885), 4.

³ Abraham Abulafia, *Hayyai ha-Nefesh*—manuscript Munich 408; *idem*, *Sitrei Torah* (Ferrara, 1556), pp. 23-31; Joseph b. Abraham Gikatilla, *Shelelot Saul ha-Kohen* (Venice, 1574).

⁴ Isa. 40:25.

⁵ Saadya Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. S. Rosenblatt (New Haven, 1948), pp. 110 ff.

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whose existence follows from its essence and who is other than all contingent being, but any denial or compromise with this position puts one under the suspicion of heterodoxy.¹ More than this, God's "otherness" cannot be simply comprehended. It is not a matter of stating certain formulas but of arriving at a certain and complete understanding of the nature of life and of the universe. This is possible only after scholastic preparation for which, even if all were willing, all are obviously not fit.²

God's simplicity rather than God's significance became *faute de mieux* the touchstone of Maimonidean speculation. Everything is framed in these terms. Where earlier interpreters had been prepared to understand the anthropomorphic passages of the Bible figuratively or metaphorically, Maimonides insisted that these terms be understood as homonyms, that is, suggestive but in no way substantively significant.³ God's simplicity is not only defined by a series of negative attributes,⁴ but by a psychology of prophecy which presumed prophecy to be rather more an intellectual accomplishment than an act of divine will,⁵ and by a theory of miracles which subsumed these into natural law assuming them to be subtleties of the natural process which men do not as yet understand.⁶

A diamond shines brilliantly but the crystal is cold. Sophisticates dissatisfied with the intellectual content of the faith, as they understood it, were delighted with its clean cut brightness. Those to whom Judaism was warm and intimate noticed the coldness and one might almost say the "inhumanity" of the Maimonidean philosophic system. Reason and revelation were not the ultimate focii of this debate. The issue was one between speculative mysticism and religious mysticism, that is, between the conceit of the activation of the intellect and the conceit of the at-oneness of the heart. In both pieties men reach out for God. In the Maimonidean system the outreaching is of the mind. In more traditional systems the outreaching is of the heart and the mind. Maimonidean piety made a requirement of philosophy. Traditional piety required only Torah.

¹ *M. T. Teshubah* 3:7.

² *Moreh* iii. 55.

³ *Ibid.*, i. 1-39.

⁴ *Ibid.*, i. 50-59.

⁵ *Ibid.*, ii. 32-47.

⁶ *Ibid.*, ii. 27.

We will not concern ourselves with Maimonides' astronomical and medical works, but we must briefly turn to some of his slender essays.

1) *Iggeret ha-Shemad* (1160). (English, *Letter on Apostasy*.) (The Arabic original is lost.) This essay was written during Maimonides' stay in Morocco, where he had been part of a community facing the brutal choice between death and conversion. Maimonides used his *halachic* skill to permit the masquerades necessary for survival. The letter was broadly known in Europe, but was not subject to controversy.

2) *Risala* (1182). (Hebrew, *Iggeret Teman*; English, *Epistle to Yemen*.) This essay contains Maimonides' discussion of the problem of messianic pretensions and his airing of the whole messianic problem. Written to dissuade the Yemenite Jews from being duped by false claims, it is our one source of Maimonides' private messianic hopes. Translated by Samuel ibn Tibbon circa 1210 and quickly thereafter again by Nathan ha-Ma'arabi and Abraham ibn Hisdai, it was well known in Europe and played a role in subsequent messianic speculation, but none in the controversy.

3) *Makalah Fi Tehiyyat ha-Metim* (1190). (Hebrew, *Ma'amar Tehiyyat ha-Metim*; English, *Treatise on Resurrection*.) An extended controversialist discussion of the problems of God's unity, the messianic age, resurrection, and the *Olam ha-Ba*. Several years before, Maimonides had written a brief responsum on resurrection requested by the communities of Yemen.¹ This correspondence had been shown to the Bagdad Gaon, Samuel b. Ali, who proceeded to publish a critical brief. Maimonides' excursus was by way of response and to make clear to all that he did not share or condone any denial of bodily resurrection. On the contrary, it is a cardinal tenet of the faith. This letter was already famous when it was translated into Hebrew by Samuel ibn Tibbon circa 1202 and again shortly thereafter by Judah al Harizi.

(spacing!!) Maimonides' burden is that resurrection is not in accordance with nature—hence it cannot be proved by philosophy. It is substantiated by revelation.² What is required is a correct understanding

¹ This letter, incidentally, testifies to the spread of Maimonides' authority. One of the pupils in a *yeshibah* in Damascus had cited Maimonides to substantiate a denial of any beyond-the-grave recombination of body and soul. (*Ma'amar Tehiyyat ha-Metim*, ed. J. Finkle, *AAJR*, IX [1939], 10-11 [Heb. sect.]). In Yemen similar claims were made.

² Many modern rationalist expositors of Maimonides overlook without

(italics)

Age

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of the texts of the revelation. The traditional terms *Olam ha-Ba* and *Yemot ha-Mashiah* (Messianic Age) come under searching analysis and a rigid demarcation is made between the events of the Messianic Age which retain their ordinary physical context and the purely spiritual promise of the *Olam ha-Ba* where neither form nor matter nor appetite will intrude. The political reward of a redeemed Israel will take place in the Messianic Age. Such resurrection as God then disposes will be ancillary to that of the *Olam ha-Ba*. There will be a second "death" before the spiritual promise of the *Olam ha-Ba*. Reward and punishment is not a Dantesque phantasmagoria, but exclusion from or inclusion in the *Olam ha-Ba*.

As we shall see, no construction of Talmudic texts really permits such an analysis and no position of Maimonides' will be more roundly attacked. What remains to be asked is why Maimonides on the one hand established physical resurrection as a pivotal principle of faith (*Pinat ha-Torah*)¹ and on the other limited resurrection to a minor and temporary function of the penultimate promise. Finkle suggests that Maimonides was attempting to protect himself from precisely such denunciation of the *Moreh* as Abd-Al-Latif-Al-Baghdadi, an influential courtier, apparently raised to his orthodox and resurrection-believing caliph, Saladin.² In brief, the burden of belief both within and without the community certainly centered on such a bodily resurrection, yet in no practical issue did "Greek" concepts lead the consistent metaphysician farther away from the fold.

How did Maimonides rationalize his speaking with a forked tongue? A passage from Averroes picks up the stray justifications common to religious philosophers and develops them consistently.

Having finished this question Ghāzali begins to say that the philosophers deny bodily resurrection. This is a problem which is not found in any of the older philosophers, although resurrection has been mentioned in different religions for at least a thousand years and the philosophers whose theories have come to us are of a more recent date. The first to mention bodily resurrection were the prophets of Israel after Moses, as is evident from the Psalms and many books attributed to the

warrant Maimonides' insistence that there are three keys to truth: 1) Science; 2) The Five Senses; 3) Revelation and Tradition. (Marx, *HUCA*, III (1926, 350.)

¹ Finkle, p. 6 (Heb. sect.).

² *Ibid.*, p. 71. Finkle based his argument on Ibn Abi Usaybi'a *Tabaqat al-Atibba*.

Israelites. Bodily resurrection is also affirmed in the New Testament and attributed by tradition to Jesus. It is a theory of the Sabaeans, whose religion is according to Ibn Hazm the oldest.

But the philosophers in particular, as is only natural, regard this doctrine as most important and believe in it most, and the reason is that it is conducive to an order amongst men on which man's being, as man, depends and through which he can attain the greatest happiness proper to him, for it is a necessity for the existence of the moral and speculative virtues and of the practical sciences in men. They hold namely that man cannot live in this world without the practical sciences, nor in this and the next world without the speculative virtues, and that neither of these categories is perfected or completed without the practical virtues, and that the practical virtues can only become strong through the knowledge and adoration of God by the services prescribed by the laws of the different religions, like offerings and prayers and supplications and other such utterances by which praise is rendered to God, the angels, and the prophets. S

In short, the philosophers believe that religious laws are necessary political arts, the principles of which are taken from natural reason and inspiration, especially in what is common to all religions, although religions differ here more or less. The philosophers further hold that one must not object either through a positive or through a negative statement to any of the general religious principles, for instance whether it is obligatory to serve God or not, and still more whether God does or does not exist, and they affirm this also concerning the other religious principles, for instance bliss in the beyond and its possibility; for all religions agree in the acceptance of another existence after death, although they differ in the description of this existence, just as they agree more or less in their utterances about the essence and the acts of the Principle. All religions agree also about the acts conducive to bliss in the next world, although they differ about the determination of these acts.

In short, the religions are, according to the philosophers, obligatory, since they lead towards wisdom in a way universal to all human beings, for philosophy only leads a certain number of intelligent people to the knowledge of happiness, and they therefore have to learn wisdom, whereas religions seek the instruction of the masses generally. Notwithstanding this, we do not find any religion which is not attentive to the special needs of the learned, although it is primarily concerned with the things in which the masses participate. And since the existence of the learned class is only perfected and its full happiness attained by participation with the class of the masses, the ge- ^
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neral doctrine is also obligatory for the existence and life of this special class, both at the time of their youth and growth (and nobody doubts this), and when they pass on to attain the excellence which is their distinguishing characteristic. For it belongs to the necessary excellence of a man of learning that he should not despise the doctrines in which he has been brought up, and that he should explain them in the fairest way, and that he should understand that the sin of these doctrines lies in their universal character not in their particularity, and that, if he expresses a doubt concerning the religious principles in which he has been brought up, or explains them in a way contradictory to the prophets and turns away from their path, he merits more than anyone else that the term unbeliever should be applied to him, and he is liable to the penalty for unbelief in the religion in which he has been brought up.¹

4) *Ma'amar ha-Yihud* (date unknown). (Arabic original lost; English, *Treatise on the Unity of God*.) This short essay, which moves from physics to metaphysics to God, was unknown in Europe until the 14th century. Its teaching does not vary from the ideas on this subject exposed in the *Sefer ha-Mada* and the *Moreh* Part II, Chaps. 1-30.

Like all religious authorities of the day, Maimonides received and answered theological inquiries and appeals for appellate decision and requests for statement of guiding legal principles. These responsa, of which we control about five hundred, are a critical research area for our study of the Maimonidean criticism, as they suggest early reactions to his *halachic* works and clearly underscore the complicating factor of imperfect texts hastily copied and imperfect translations hastily drawn in establishing the precise issues under debate.

In the Hebrew Union College Museum there is on exhibit a gilded manuscript Bible of 14th century Spanish provenance. Above and below each column Samuel ibn Tibbon's translation of the *Moreh* has been patiently written in. To our knowledge, the *Moreh* was the only non-commentary ever paged with the sacred text. These silent miniscule letters speak loudly of a people's veneration and of the philosopher's overarching presence.

¹ Averroes, *Tahafut al-Tahafut*, trans. S. Van den Bergh (Oxford, 1954), I. 359-360.

CHAPTER THREE

THE AKWARD CONTROVERSY

After the death of Moses the self-willed and difficult came together. Every fool opened wide his mouth throughout Spain, France, Palestine, and Babylonia. They counselled together to raise up meaningless arguments and trivial matters against his word. They breached the walls which the upright had raised: "Little foxes despoiling the vineyard." Had they spoken out in his presence they would have been melted as wax by the fire of his anger and would perforce have fled before him as the lamb before the lion or as birds before the eagle. They would have sunk as lead into his deep waters. But every man, when he is by himself, thinks he is Moses' equal in wisdom. The weak says, "How strong I am."

The weak when at home boasts of his strength to his wife, but when he comes near the battle his confusion and his shame are nakedly revealed.¹

The Maimonidean controversy ought never to have taken place—yet it could not be avoided. An understanding of this apparent paradox is the key to any comprehension of the event.

In 1305—on July 26th, to be exact—after a century of charges and countercharges, the Barcelona Jewish community agreed with its rabbinic leader, Solomon ibn Adret, to place under the ban "any member of the community who being under the age of twenty-five years shall study the works of the Greeks on natural science or metaphysics, either in the original language or in translation." Works by Jewish philosophers were exempted. The purpose of the ban was made patently clear: "Lest these sciences entice them and draw their hearts away from the Torah of Israel which transcends the wisdom of the Greeks."²

One can make out a case that Maimonides would not have been opposed to these terms. In *Mishneh Torah, Yesode ha-Torah* we read:

I say that it is not proper to stroll in the *Pardes* until one

¹ al Harizi, pp. 348-9.

² Solomon b. Abraham ibn Adret, *She'elot u-Teshubot* (Bologna, 1539), I. 415. Some references to the ban stipulate the permitted age as thirty. (Abba Mari of Lunel, *Sefer ha-Yareah*, in *Minhat Kenaot* [Pressburg, 1838], p. 124.)

has filled his belly with bread and meat. The bread and meat referred to is a comprehensive knowledge of what is ritually permitted and what prohibited and of all similar sophistications of the Torah law....¹

Halachic knowledge must precede philosophic. Speculative theology is not a school topic. "Our ancient sages enjoined us that these matters are not to be expounded in public, but should be communicated and taught to an individual privately."² Indeed, theosophy, i.e., metaphysics, is never to be made fully explicit. "Only the chapter headings are to be given to the student."³ He must fill out the details on his own.

A correspondent of Ibn Adret's in the Provence and one equally involved in establishing the ban on premature study of "Greek wisdom," Abba Mari b. Moses of Lunel, wrote shortly before 1305 a *pièce justificative*, the *Sefer ha-Yareah*, which had as its central theme the proof of Maimonides against the Maimonids.⁴

All science was known to the early rabbis, who received it from the prophets.⁵ However, due to the dislocations of the Diaspora the books regulating these studies have been lost and such sciences now are known largely from the scraps of Jewish wisdom which had been taken over and digested by the Greeks. Greek books are both appealing and dangerous. They can be likened to a jar of honey around which a dragon is entwined.⁶ Maimonides performed the unique service of refining metal from the base ore, in the process pointing up the validity of Aristotle's substantiation of God's existence, oneness, and noncorporeality and the error of Aristotle's denial of God's knowledge of particulars, *creatio ex nihilo*, and miracles.⁷ Furthermore, Maimonides in his wisdom had insisted that even midrashic speculation should be attempted only by the properly trained and truly observant and only after thorough preparation.⁸ Abba Mari repeated approvingly the five reasons Maimonides had given in the *Moreh* Part I, Chap. 34, "why instruction should not

¹ *M. T. Yesode ha-Torah* 4 : 13. *Pardes* was the legendary garden of intellectual delight (theosophy). Cf. *T. B. Haggigah* 14b.

² *M. T. Yesode ha-Torah* 4 : 10.

³ *Ibid.*, 2 : 12, 4 : 11.

⁴ Abba Mari of Lunel, *Minhat Kenaot*, pp. 122-130. The title is a play on "moon"—"Lunel."

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-9.

begin with metaphysics" and why such research should be carried on privately, tutorially, and with a wholly competent teacher. The obvious conclusion of Abba Mari's reasoning was simply put: let those who claim Maimonides' mantle not disobey their master's rule.

Those who bring proof from the great rabbi who scrutinized and researched the Greek books and nursed at their breast, must see clearly that he filled his belly with old wine and fat meat [the reference is to Torah, cf. *M.T. Yesode ha-Torah* 4:13] and only then drank of the upper wells. He finished a commentary on the *Mishnah* at twenty-eight. Who is like unto him as a teacher who brings abundant water to the soul? A righteous man governed by the fear of God: his teachings are trustworthy, his wisdom broad and his hands faithful. Therefore, we must not disobey his rule nor demur from his fiat.¹

Of such arguments anti-Maimonid controversialists were made! A most ingenuous paradox—what?

The paradox is more superficial than substantial. Whatever approval Maimonides gave to the traditions delineating and circumscribing such study,² he not only studied philosophy and

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

² Cf. his labored justification in the *Moreh* Part III — Introduction.

"We have stated several times that it is our primary object in this treatise to expound, as far as possible, the Biblical account of the Creation (*Ma'aseh Bereshit*) and the description of the Divine Chariot (*Ma'aseh Merkabah*) in a manner adapted to the training of these for whom this work is written.

"We have also stated that these subjects belong to the mysteries of the Law. You are well aware how our Sages blame those who reveal these mysteries, and praise the merits of those who keep them secret, although they are perfectly clear to the philosopher. In this sense they explain the passage, 'Her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before the Lord, to eat sufficiently' (Isaiah 23 : 18), which concludes in the original with the words *ve-li-me-hasseh 'atik*, i.e., that these blessings are promised to him who hides things which the Eternal has revealed [to him], viz., the mysteries of the Law (*T. B. Pesachim* 119a). If you have understanding you will comprehend that which our Sages pointed out. They have clearly stated that the Divine Chariot includes matters too deep and too profound for the ordinary intellect. It has been shown that a person favoured by Providence with reason to understand these mysteries is forbidden by the Law to teach them except *vid'voce*, and on condition that the pupil possess certain qualifications, and even then only the heads of the sections may be communicated . . .

"To give a full explanation of the mystic passages of the Bible is contrary to the Law and to reason; besides, my knowledge of them is based on reasoning, not on divine inspiration [and is therefore not infallible]. I have not received my belief in this respect from any teacher, but it has been formed by what I learnt from Scripture and the utterances of our Sages, and by the philosophic principles which I have adopted. It is therefore possible that my view is wrong, and that I misunderstood the passages referred to.

taught it to individual disciples, but set these themes out in a book. That the book was written on the pretext of being a correspondence course for a single, now departed, graduate student—a pretext Maimonides liked to claim—does not mitigate the fact that the *Moreh* was written and that Hebrew translations were prepared with Maimonides' knowledge and blessing. Maimonides knew that the *Moreh* would command an audience.

In point of fact, Maimonides' cautions on mass exposure to metaphysics stem as much from Aristotelian as Talmudic reservations. Averroes wrestled with the same limitations in a strikingly parallel manner:

The problem concerning the knowledge of the Creator of Himself and of other things is one of those questions which it is forbidden to discuss in a dialectical way, let alone put them down in a book, for the understanding of the masses does not suffice to understand such subtleties, and when one embarks on such problems with them the meaning of divinity becomes void for them and therefore it is forbidden to them to occupy themselves with this knowledge, since it suffices for their blessedness to understand what is within their grasp. The Holy Law, the first intention of which is the instruction of the masses, does not confine itself to the things in the Creator by making them understood through their existence in human beings, for instance by the Divine Words: "Why dost thou worship what can neither hear nor see nor avail thee aught?" (Koran 19:43) but enforces the real understanding of these entities in the Creator by comparing them even to the human limbs, for instance in the Divine Words: "Or have they not seen that we have created for them of what our hands have made for them, cattle and they are owners thereof?" (Koran 36:71) and the Divine Words "I have created with my two hands." (Koran 38:75). This problem indeed is reserved for the men versed in profound knowledge to whom God has permitted the sight of the true realities, and therefore it must not be mentioned in any books except those that are composed according

Correct thought and divine help have suggested to me the proper method, viz., to explain the words of the prophet Ezekiel in such a manner that those who will read my interpretation will believe that I have not added anything to the contents of the text, but only, as it were, translated from one language into another, or given a short exposition of plain things. Those, however, for whom this treatise has been composed, will, on reflecting on it and thoroughly examining each chapter, obtain a perfect and clear insight into all that has been clear and intelligible to me. This is the utmost that can be done in treating this subject so as to be useful to all without fully explaining it."

to a strictly rational pattern, that is, such books as must be read in a rational order and after the acquisition of other sciences the study of which according to a demonstrative method is too difficult for most men, even for those who possess by nature a sound understanding, although such men are very scarce. But to discuss these questions with the masses is like bringing poisons to the bodies of many animals, for which they are real poisons. Poisons, however, are relative, and what is poison for one animal is nourishment for another. The same applies to ideas in relation to men; that is, there are ideas which are poison for one type of men, but which are nourishment for another type. And the man who regards all ideas as fit for all types of men is like one who gives all things as nourishment for all people; the man, however, who forbids free inquiry to the mature is like one who regards all nourishment as poison for everyone. But this is not correct, for there are things which are poison for one type of man and nourishment for another type. And the man who brings poison to him for whom it is really poison merits punishment, although it may be nourishment for another, and similarly the man who forbids poison to a man for whom it is really nourishment so that this man may die without it, he too must be punished. And it is in this way that the question must be understood. But when the wicked and ignorant transgress and bring poison to the man for whom it is really poison, as if it were nourishment, then there is need of a physician who through his science will exert himself to heal that man, and for this reason we have allowed ourselves to discuss this problem in such a book as this, and in any other case we should not regard this as permissible to us; on the contrary, it would be one of the greatest crimes, or a deed of the greatest wickedness on earth, and the punishment of the wicked is a fact well known in the Holy Law.¹

Unlike the Hebrew reservations, those of the Aristotelians were determined largely as a protection for the author from charges of heresy and mischief making rather than as religious requirements. An overriding reason could, of course, always be found to violate such restrictions and to turn away any indictment. Thus Maimonides:

If I were to abstain from writing on this subject, according to my knowledge of it, when I die, as I shall inevitably do, that knowledge would die with me, and I would thus inflict great injury on you and all those who are perplexed. I would then be guilty of withholding the truth from those to whom

¹ Averroes, I, 215-216.

it ought to be communicated, and of jealously depriving the heir of his inheritance¹.

Further, a deliberately cryptic language could be adopted—thus the Maimonidean *sodot*. Such language the author contented himself could be construed literally and without injury by the amateur yet be sufficiently opaque to suggest profounder meanings to the student.²

Maimonides, in truth, was conscious of deliberately violating the taboos which he himself had repeatedly approved. He relied on his own purity of motive, on Psalms 119:126 (the traditional proof text for any original or revolutionary literary or *halachic* change),³ and on the manifest urgency of defending the faith:

When I have a difficult subject before me, when I find the road narrow, and can see no other way of teaching a well established truth except by pleasuring one intelligent man and displeasing ten thousand fools, I prefer to address myself to the one man and to take no notice whatever of the condemnation of the multitude....⁴

The early anti-Maimonid controversialists recognized that Maimonides had both sanctified the traditional reservations and violated them. They were of various opinions in their judgment of his actions. Some agreed that the times were such that his special pleading could be admitted; these, if critical, shifted their attack to the translators who by popularizing his works presumably abused the discretions Maimonides had abided.⁵ Others found no extenuating circumstance and charged him bluntly with sin.⁶

Maimonides could be charged with revealing what ought to have been concealed, but those who defended the older ways and were seriously concerned with a philosophically attenuated fabric of faith confused the issue and weakened their case by centering their attack on him. Perhaps they could do no other, since his protective mantle was broadly claimed, but an attack in the name of faith on one who is admittedly a paragon of piety and who wears the crown of rabbinic learning blunts one's words before they can take effect. There was as much fulsome and honestly meant praise of

¹ *Moreh*, iii, Introduction.

² *Ibid.*

³ This text was understood to mean: It is time to do something for the Lord, so make void thy Torah.

⁴ *Moreh*, i, Introduction.

⁵ Letter of Joseph b. Todros ha-Levi Abulafia, *GN*, III, 155.

⁶ Letter of Judah b. Joseph Alfakhar, *KTR*, III, 2a.

Maimonides in the anti-Maimonid camp as in his own. Typically, the Toledo physician whose judgment of guilt we have just quoted preceded this verdict with a paean to Maimonides' incomparable erudition and felt constrained to recall that even such Biblical greats as Aaron and David had sinned—that after all to sin is human.¹ If the Maimonidean controversy achieved any lasting result, it managed to write Maimonides' prestige indelibly in the ledgers of Jewish literature and to underscore the universal and reverent admiration in which he was held.

The familiar term, Maimonidean controversy, is an historian's awkward way of collecting the various attacks made on Maimonides' writing and on philosophic speculation generally over the course of the 13th century.

It is awkward because not all critical notations or evaluations were edited with an eye to controversy. The early glossators of the *Mishneh Torah*, Abraham b. David of Posquières (Rabad) and Moses ha-Kohen of Lunel, were ignorant of the *Moreh*, which had not yet been translated and, however sharp their criticism, were conscious only of following a time-honored academic practice. Important works of *halacha* were read carefully in the schools and teachers often had their scholars reproduce in the margin of manuscripts their own evaluations, additions, or challenges. This practice, it was felt, added to the value of important legal works, which were thus corrected and made functional. Glossing a text implied respect rather than the reverse. Later controversialists seized on some of these notes to their own purpose and they became part of the controversy, but that is another story.

It is awkward, also, because the sheer mass and diversity of Maimonidean material forced the controversialists down many tangential byways. We will at times find ourselves well into the sophistications of jurisprudence far from the social and political pressures which roiled within the Jewish communities and forced upon them the elemental question: how can faith be firmly established among a dispersed community enjoying very different levels of education and culture and exposed daily to the threat of conversionist propaganda directed at an intelligentsia already restive and unsatisfied by traditional apologetics.

We have been alarmed by reports from your holy community as well as from other sources to the effect that dangerous here-

¹ *Ibid.*, III, 2a.

tics have arrived in the land. This is bad news, for their numbers may increase if we do not bar the door in their faces. It is obvious that these men, having completely lost faith, sin and lead others to sin. We do not know what they rely on for support. Observe how the Gentiles punish their heretics, even for a single one of such heresies as these men expressed in their books. Why, if anyone would dare say that Abraham and Sarah represent matter and form, they would wrap him up in twigs and burn him into cinders. All the nations trace their faith to them, and those say that they are nothing but symbols! Their books and sermons are but thorns in our side.¹

It is awkward, finally, as has been suggested, because the anti-Maimonids, before and after the burning of the *Morah* in 1232, often combined a condemnation of philosophy with a commendation of the philosopher. No more striking example exists than these lines taken from a didactic poem written by the Perpignan poet Joseph Ezobi (late 13th century):

thy Put not ~~they~~ faith in Grecian Sophistry:
To climb its vineyard's fence, no man is free.
Its draught will make thy footsteps vacillate
From truth; will make thy heart to curse and hate.
But askest thou in what to set thy lore,
In Grammar much, but in the Talmud more.
To know the secret of the Law's restraint,
Wherein the "holy" and wherein the "taint."
To fine the "goring ox," the "open pit,"
The cattle's lawless graze, the haystack lit.
Alfasi, glory to his memory,
Alone did bring the law to harmony.
The hungry soul from out his wisdom fed,
His touch gave life to what would else be dead.
And after, rose a man of piety,
Maimonides, the Sage of God's decree,
Whose books, that on the world their lustre shed,
In Hebrew and in Arab tongue are read.
Breathe thou the incense of his off'ring soul.
The path of rectitude his words extol.
Accept his laws of life, for he will guide
Thee near to God; in him thy trust confide.¹

Yet the anti-Maimonidean Controversy is the familiar title of the 13th century struggle between Aristotle and Akiba, and for all its awkwardness, it is this story which must be told.

¹ Letter of Solomon ibn Adret, *Minhat Kenaot*, pp. 60-61.

² Joseph Ezobi, "The Silver Bowl," J. Freedman, trans. *JQR*, III (1896).

CHAPTER FOUR

CRITICISM AND CONTROVERSY IN THE NEAR EAST

Near Eastern Jewry, in the days of Moses Maimonides, was demographically urban¹ and vocationally artisan and merchant, topped by a small but influential upper class of state officials and professionals—mostly physicians. Social intercourse and business activity outside the Jewish group was fairly routine.² A unique feature was the status and prerogatives awarded certain families and certain offices, especially state officials and court physicians, both by the Jewish and the general communities.³ Maimonides

¹ E. Ashtor, "Prolegomena to the Medieval History of Oriental Jewry," *JQR*, L (1959-60), 55-63. A careful extrapolation from the available material suggests a total Jewish population for Syria of 15,000 and for Egypt 12,000 with probably no more than 300 families living in the largest centers, Damascus, Aleppo, and Tyre—Calro, Fostat, and Alexandria. The number of small Jewish settlements is impressive—some thirty being known in Egypt alone of some significance. Certainly little, if any, rabbinic training was available. Few such communities numbered a rabbinically trained citizen, a fact of no little importance in understanding the need for and reception of the *Mishneh Torah*.

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² W. Fischel, *Jews in the Economic and Political Life of Medieval Islam* (London, 1937), p. 60 ff.

³ Heredity had long been essential in the election of an Exilarch. Heredity even played a role in the schools. When the unified authority of the Exilarch broke down, *Nessiim* foisted themselves into similar positions in the local centers on the basis of their Davidic family trees. The state generally found it convenient to confirm those whom the Jews revered as living links in the chain of their messianic hopes.

The special status of court officials and attending physicians was significant in many ways, not the least, from a status point of view, was the privilege of riding a horse instead of the donkey prescribed for the *Dhimmi*.

These rights shared by all *Dhimmi* in the higher ranks of business, medicine, or the state were in Egypt a product of the need by a Shiite dynasty (Fatamid) to rule an orthodox population. Copts, Jews, Nestorians, etc. became the agents of their rule. Islam, generally, did not educate a broad enough civil servant class and *Dhimmi* were integral to the function of the state. The Ayyubs sought to reverse this trend and create a Muslim bureaucracy. Such special rights of *Dhimmi* officials as riding on horses were rescinded. Madrasas were encouraged out of a need for their graduates. Older and stricter orthodox regulations were revised, but subordination and exclusion as a consistent policy was limited by the inability of the state to function without *Dhimmi* manpower.

Dhimmi

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enjoyed the prerogatives and certain of the prejudices of this class.¹

A comprehensive study of rabbinic education in the Near East remains to be written. Basic schooling was communally available, but rabbinic academies were few and rabbinic seminars headed by individual scholars depended on chance and circumstance. With the closing of the academy in Fostat shortly before Maimonides' arrival, Egypt seems to have lacked adequate facilities to graduate a sufficient number of native jurists.² Maimonides' own seminars were not unique, and, significantly, enrolled but two or three whom we would call graduate fellows.³

One surmises that few of the upper class attended *yeshivot*, that such advanced study as the sons of this class enjoyed was guided tutorially and weighted toward the Greeks.⁴ The broad but idealized curriculum *Tab-ul-Nufus* (English, *Cure of Souls*) by Joseph ibn Aknin, Maimonides' disciple, presumed such tutoring.⁵ Whatever the specific form of their training, those tutored could not but be aware of the philosophic traditions coursing through Islamic life. Saadya and ibn Gabirol, if not Avicenna and Al-Ghāzali, were known, if not read. Arabic was, after all, a spoken vernacular. Hebrew was a specialized attainment.⁶

¹ Maimonides was wont to pass off opposition on the grounds that these were "men of no rank as well as of no ability" (*KTR*, III, 30b). Maimonides' insistence on adding to his autograph *ha-Sephardi*, the Spaniard, was due partly to the necessity to establish his pedigree and place and partly to pride. Maimonides' views on the Exilarchate were deeply influenced by traditional Jewish emphasis on blood lines.

² A surprising number of the active Egyptian correspondents of Maimonides were of non-Egyptian birth and, interestingly, from centers outside the Oriental world; cf. Anatoli b. Joseph of Lunel, Pinhas b. Meshullam probably a Byzant, Joseph b. Judah of Ceuta, Hasdai b. Levi of Spain.

³ *KTR*, I, 25b. Maimonides read the Talmud, Alfasi, and presumably his own code with them.

⁴ A. Neuman, *A History of the Jews in Spain* (Philadelphia, 1942), II, 64 ff. The tutorial nature of advanced secular education must be insisted on, for the academies themselves were entirely rabbinic.

⁵ M. Gudemann, *Das Jüdische Unterrichtswesen* (Vienna, 1873), Appendix, pp. 1-57 (Arabic text), p. 43. The curriculum suggested began with reading and writing, Torah, Mishnah, and grammar; and progressed to Talmud and poetry, theology, philosophy (apologetics), logic, arithmetic, geometry, optics, astronomy, music, and mechanics, natural science, medicine, and, finally, metaphysics.

⁶ Cf. a letter from Maimonides to Joseph ibn 'Abd al-Jabir, *KTR*, II, 15b. "We have received the letter of the honored and esteemed sage. . . . He mentions in it that he is illiterate in Jewish things. However, it is clear to us from his letter that he is making a strong effort to study Jewish lore and that he is busying himself with our Arabic Commentary to the Mishnah, although he

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Hasdai's original letter to Maimonides has been lost and we must rely on a ghost-written answer. Possibly because of illness, Maimonides entrusted this correspondence to a pupil, dictating only a broad outline of the message.¹ Only one specific can be reconstructed having to do with two seemingly disparate exegetical explanations of the same Biblical text (Genesis 28).² However, it is clear that Hasdai touched the crucial dilemma of any interpretive system: how does one set out ground rules and fix limits. Can Jacob's dream, for instance, be a running allegory of the process by which the intellect becomes active and illumined as in prophecy and at the same time a symbol of the fundamental reality and matter of the universe?³

It is clear that Hasdai questioned Maimonides' resolution of the conflicting claims of reason and revelation and brushed over his views on free will, the motion of the planets, immortality (especially as it touched the future fate of non-Jews), miracles, cosmology, and resurrection. The dictated response reads like a capsule of the unique emphases of the *Moreh*, but it is difficult to determine Hasdai's precise feelings and whether he took issue in whole or in part or only requested elucidation.

The *Moreh* did not go unread. Most extant Arabic manuscripts contain marginalia.⁴ It was read, however, by a narrow circle of students and ~~professions~~ ^{professionals}, as Maimonides had, after all, intended. These were conditioned to accept a work of philosophy on its own terms and to deal with it with academic dispassion. We turn again to ibn Aknin for corroboration. Throughout his life this favored disciple remained a belligerent protagonist of Maimonides' authority. Yet his philosophic excursus, *A Treatise on the Meaning of Existence*.... took, in the moderate words of a modern translator, "a directly opposite position from that taken by the master"⁵ presuming in its argument a theory of atoms and the possibility of a philosophically valid argument to establish *creatio ex nihilo* (a logic denied by Maimonides). In the Oriental world ~~men~~ ^{men} could be close

¹ KTR, II, 23a.

² Maimonides had treated of Jacob's dream in the *Moreh* i. 15 and again in ii. 10.

³ KTR, II, 24a.

⁴ British Museum MSS 1423; Berlin Museum MSS OR Oct. 258. 2, 8, 10. A fragment survives of a full commentary by Yahya ibn Suleiman. Berlin Museum MSS OR QU 554. 2.

⁵ Joseph ibn Aknin, *A Treatise on the Meaning of Existence*, ed. J. L. Magnes (Berlin, 1911), p. 6.

personally yet philosophically in disagreement. A presumption of the appropriateness of speculation, rather than agreement on any one system of speculation, was the psychological bond of the scholar class.¹

The *Mishneh Torah*, not the *Moreh*, was the focus of Maimonidean interest among Near Eastern Jews.²

Many received the *Mishneh Torah* gratefully. Mann has published from the Genizah a letter addressed by a merchant currently in Kalne to a one-time Egyptian neighbor praising Maimonides and requesting a copy of certain correspondence in which Maimonides had answered *halachic* criticism of some of his decisions. This anonymous merchant fancied himself something of a master of poetics and he grudged being separated from "civilization;" his rather intelligent interest and obvious approval were probably largely typical of his class.³

Maimonides' Arabic responsa are replete with critical and confirmatory citations taken from the *Mishneh Torah* testifying to its widespread use in both court proceeding and school teaching.⁴ There is evidence that at least one seminar met regularly in Alexandria to discuss the *Mishneh Torah*.⁵ The nature of the questions submitted permit the assumption that the text was studied serial-
tim.⁶ There were other such small study groups in Egypt, Syria, and Yemen.⁷ Besides a search for the exact meaning of the *Mishneh Torah* text⁸ some took pains to check the consistency of the *Mish-*

¹ I have assumed the identity of Joseph ibn Aknin (Joseph b. Judah b. Joseph b. Jacob ha-dayyan al Barcaloni) with Joseph b. Judah b. Joseph al-Sabti the writer of the *Treatise* following M. Steinschneider, *Die Arabische Literatur der Juden* (Frankfort, 1902), p. 228, note 170, and Magnes against S. Munk, *Notice sur Joseph b. Jehouda* (Paris, 1842), p. 9 ff., and D. H. Baneth (ed.), *Iggerot ha-Rambam* (Jerusalem, 1946), I, 6 ff. Were the separate identity of these two scholars established our point would be no less valid. The cryptic exchange of letters published by Munk, *Notice sur . . .*, makes an intellectual break, though not its timing, abundantly clear.

² Interestingly, a legendary biography of Maimonides, probably of Islamic Jewish origin, actually labeled the *Mishneh Torah*, rather than the *Moreh*, as the *causus belli*. (A. Neubauer, "Documents Inédits," *REJ*, IV [1881], 123 ff.)

³ Mann, *The Jews in Egypt*, II, 321-322.

⁴ Blau 66, 158, 160, 161, 162, 184, 219, 252, 253, 257, 264.

⁵ Blau 160.

⁶ Blau 184 raises specific questions to serialtim points in *M. T. Tefillah* 6 : 3, *M. T. Berachot* 1 : 11, 3 : 13, 4 : 4, 4 : 5, 5 : 7, 6 : 5, 6 : 8, 8 : 1, 10 : 7.

⁷ There is even a responsum citing *M. T. Teshubah* 11 : 17 addressed from Magreb. Blau 271.

⁸ Blau 264.

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nesh Torah with Maimonides' other legal works—especially the *Siraj*.¹ Most questions centered, however, on Maimonides' authority for particular statements *in situ*. Students would cite contradictory traditions, and since the text gave no indication of Maimonides' sources, the seminar often could not establish it, thus necessitating an appeal to Fostat.²

Other evidence of the *Mishneh Torah*'s pervasive popularity can be seen in a responsum sent by Maimonides to Alexandria (probably to be dated in the early 1190's). In it Maimonides told of a scholar, for whom he evidenced a measure of respect, who had raised during a personal audience a query as to the source and authority for a particular *Mishneh Torah* decision.³ The incident had stuck in Maimonides' memory not because it signalled a careful research of his book—this he expected—but because he could not locate the source and was put in mind to compose a catalogue of source citations.⁴

Not all comment on the *Mishneh Torah* was deferential. In a letter written to ibn Aknin some time after 1185, Maimonides referred to a highly emotional outburst in Fostat itself. Some "persons

"Pray teach us what your honor intended in *M. T. Talmud Torah* 5 : 6 . . . What is the force of this teaching? Further concerning what your honor wrote in *M. T. Talmud Torah* 7 : 11 . . . what is the force of this teaching? Further concerning what you have said in *M. T. Abodah Zarah* 2 : 5 . . . Yet your honor said in *M. T. Teshubah* 3 : 14 . . . Teach us, O holy teacher, may God enlighten our eyes in the meaning of his law. Amen."

¹ Blau 38 questions a discrepancy between *M. T. Shabbat* 17 : 6 and *Siraj Erubin* 1 : 1. Similarly Blau 217 questioned Maimonides' discussion of *Probul* in *M. T. Shemittah u'Yovel* 9 : 22 and *Siraj Shemittah* 10 : 5. Such questions were not picaresque nor intended necessarily to board the author. Scribal error was common. Indeed, a scribe was at fault in the last cited case. Correspondents noting contradictions usually assumed such error and checked with the author for confirmation. Abraham Maimonides continued to receive questions to his father's *halachic* work. (Abraham Maimonides, pp. 125-129.)

² Typically, Blau 65.

³ "May our master teach us concerning what he wrote in *M. T. Lyshon* 2 : 12 . . . A challenger came and said . . . basing himself on R. Samuel b. Hofni's *Sefer ha-Boggeret* and citing further proofs from the teaching of T. B. Yebamot 80b, where in a debate between R. Huna and R. Johanan, the ruling follows Johanan (who agrees with the challenge). We hesitated to answer. Teach us, O honored master, the proper law and your blessing will be doubled from God."

⁴ *KTR*, I, 256-260.

⁵ Abraham Maimonides also mentioned his father's notion to compile a *Sefer ha-Bur*, (*Birkat Abraham*, ed. Goldberg [Lyck, 1839], p. 8.)

of no account" would not even open his work lest it be said of them that they had derived benefit from it.¹ Maimonides implied that intellectual vanity rather than any basic criticism of the *Mishneh Torah* had motivated their conduct.² The context of his response, however, belies this explanation, for his response was in fact an apologia answering a variety of charges raised against him for authoring such a book, and making much of his rationale that he did not write the book for personal glory, but out of a personal need for a ready legal reference and because of a manifest social need for such a work. He had not written the *Mishneh Torah* to supersede the Torah. Indeed, his only thought had been to settle on the correct interpretation of Torah law lest attacks based on false exegesis be levied against it.³ Maimonides was fully alive to the unsettling effect of the *Mishneh Torah* on familiar habits and prejudices.⁴ However, precisely whose toes he had stepped on and whose settled prejudices he had outraged we are not sure.

A few leagues to the north we hear not only of seminar study but of stout criticism—this by one Pinhas b. Meshulam, an elderly Byzant *dayyan*⁵ settled now and officially busy in Alexandria. Pinhas was in routine communication with Maimonides.

Of this correspondence we retain 1) certain appellate cases sent to Maimonides from Alexandria by respondents challenging Pinhas' decisions and/or by Pinhas himself seeking corroboration;⁶ 2) three theoretical questions from Pinhas questioning specific rulings of the *Mishneh Torah*;⁷ 3) an extended response by Maimonides (to a query no longer extant which touched the method of the *Mishneh Torah*) in which he defended his omission of sources and of authority citations and the book's code structure.⁸

Pinhas was a rabbinic scholar of quality. The legal specifics he raised pointed up issues which were to become classics of *Mishneh Torah* criticism, especially Maimonides' treatment of the re-

¹ KTR, II, 30b.

² Ibid.

³ KTR, II, 30b-31b.

⁴ KTR, II, 31a. Maimonides argued that human vanity and status seeking would compel many to seek to sweep his work under the carpet. Those who want office and authority will put the book to one side to make it appear that they have no need of it.

⁵ Blau 367, cf. Mann, *The Jews in Egypt*, II, 309, note 2.

⁶ Blau 21, 82, 173, 235, 246, 258, 269, 361, 367, 393, 402, 412, 420.

⁷ Blau 355, 445, 453.

⁸ KTR, I, 25a-27a.

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quirement of a ritual bath for prayer leaders who had experienced nocturnal emission (Maimonides was lenient) ¹ and his stipulation that marriage by *kinyan* (money exchange) was a rabbinic rather than a Biblical stipulation. ²

Most issues between these men were thrown up by actual circumstance, but Pinhas had both practical and personal reasons to be disturbed by the *Mishneh Torah*. On the mundane level it is apparent that many began to check Pinhas' decisions by *Mishneh Torah* formulas. There is, further, some evidence that another Alexandrian *dayyan*, Daniel, may have tried to undermine Pinhas' position as senior *halachist* by repeated appeals from his decisions to the *Mishneh Torah* text and to Maimonides himself. ³

Pinhas' structural criticisms must be reconstituted from Maimonides' answer. 1) The *Mishneh Torah* is a useful tool only to the rabbinic scholar who can read between and behind its lines, and even such an authority may end by overlooking sources and hence subtleties and niceties of the law. If an amateur used the code he would have no knowledge of original authorities and would not understand the variants and the intricacies of the law. ⁴ 2) The *Mishneh Torah* was intended to supplant the Talmud and the corpus of traditional literature. Were it really to become a *Mishnah Torah*, the second Torah, the whole nature of the Hebraic legal system would be transformed. ⁵

Pinhas certainly, and probably the anonymous Fostat critics, sensed the radical challenge of the *Mishneh Torah* to familiar *halachic* norms. Law had been the preserve of the legally competent; now amateur jurists could act on their own, aided and abetted by this encyclopedic code. Rabbinic competence would

¹ *KTR*, I, 25a.

² Blau 355. The prevailing view held that all forms of marriage were Biblical in authority.

³ *KTR*, I, 25a reveals Pinhas' fear that gossip and slander may have been spread about him before Maimonides.

⁴ *KTR*, II, 25a.

⁵ *KTR*, I, 25b.

"I [Maimonides] never dreamt of suggesting that one should no longer busy himself with the Talmud or Alfasi or other compendiums. You fail to understand the separate perspective and purpose of a Talmudic style case book and of a *Mishnah* style code. The former interprets, the latter regulates."

One can read behind this argument to what must have been Pinhas' response. It is precisely the encyclopedic and constitutional structure of your work which is of concern. How can law remain flexible and fluid, etc?

h — be at a discount. Case law's presumed flexibility would be replaced by the rigidity of a crystal clear and crystal cold code. Finally, in the *Mishneh Torah* Maimonides repeatedly had selected from among coexisting but conflicting traditions. Could his selections be accepted? Often Maimonides' authority had rested on the Palestinian Talmud, Tannaitic *halacha*, or even stray midrashim. Were these adequate? Maimonides' sources were not always familiar, available, or acceptable. Something of a bibliophile, Maimonides had enjoyed collating textual variants, often deliberately selecting one at odds with the familiar and accepted.

There are versions of the Talmud in which it is written: "If a man said to his fellows..." This is a scribe's error which misled those who have taught in accordance with these books... I have investigated the old versions and found therein the reading... There has come into my hands in Egypt part of an old Talmud written on parchments, and I have found two formulas in both of which it is written...¹

Given these variables and unstandardised, handwritten texts to boot, concern with the acceptability of the *Mishneh Torah* becomes understandable. Nor could the interpretive problem be overridden even on the plea of social necessity. Hebrew law was not simply regulatory. It was revealed. "All the commandments were given to Moses at Sinai and their interpretation."² Correct interpretation was both a juridic and a religious obligation. "Ye shall not add to the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it."³ The precise formula was a matter of religious moment.

The Near East had a Maimonidean controversy all its own. It swirled about the legitimacy of current institutions of religious and secular authority.

Some time before 1189 one Zekaryah b. Berakhel composed a paper criticizing positions taken by Maimonides in the *Siraj* and published it in Aleppo. This document unfortunately is lost.⁴ It is known that Maimonides' one-time pupil and ardent disciple, Joseph b. Judah ibn Aknin, then resident in Aleppo, reacted bitterly

¹ *M. T. Malveh We-Loveh* 15 : 2.

² *M.T. Introduction*.

³ Deut. 4 : 2.

⁴ It would seem to have been a closely reasoned gloss of specifics. Many of the *halachic* points raised Maimonides perforce admitted to be valid. (*KTR*, II, 31a.)

and emotionally to its contents both verbally and in a report to his mentor.¹ In understanding why a list of errata and corrigenda to a Mishnah commentary long since published should have generated high voltage debate, students can clearly see the dimensions of this controversy within a controversy.

Zekaryah was not just another *halachic* technician. He was the *Ab-bet-din*, associate head, of the venerable *Yeshibah* Gaon Yaakob in Bagdad. He was on an official commission to Aleppo as representative of the *Yeshibah* head (Gaon) Samuel b. Ali (in office 1164—1198).² Indeed, he had been "ordained" for this particular visit³, a fund raising swing through Aleppo, Tyre, and Damascus. What had a *Commentary to the Mishnah* to do with a foundation fund campaign for a venerable seminary? Simply this, in the *Siraj* Maimonides had ruled:

It remains incumbent on us to make clear who it is that gives permission to judge over us. I say that he who certifies is the Exilarch who is appointed in Babylonia and he does not need to be a sage.⁴

In brief, Samuel envisaged his capital funds drive not as a voluntary effort but as the collection of legal dues. He asserted ancient prerogatives both financial and judicial, most surprisingly the long dormant right of ordination. He ran up against local opposition, motivated by principle or parsimony we cannot be sure, which challenged these pretensions and cited in substantiation the authority of Maimonides.

Jewish life never sanctified any single norm of secular authority. In the course of the first millenium of the Common Era (consequent on Parthian, Sassanid, and later Arab hegemony) effective power tended to concentrate in that area the Jews called *Babel* (Babylonia). Here two institutions (one "secular," the other "religious") were established and competed for authority, allegiance, and taxes.

¹ *KTR*, II, 31a-b.

² The letter of authorization under which Zekaryah traveled has been published. (S. Assaf, "A Collection of R. Samuel b. Ali and his Contemporaries" [Heb.], *Tarbiz*, I, No. 2 [1930], 58-70.) Zekaryah's function was fund raising, but he was empowered in all other matters by the most venerated authority of the area.

³ *Ibid.*, I, 61-62.

⁴ *C. M. Sanhedrin* 1 : 3. cf. *M. T. Sanhedrin* 4 : 13, "The Exilarchs of Babylon stand in the place of the King. They exercise authority over Israel everywhere and sit in judgment over the people, with or without the consent of the latter, as it is said: 'The sceptre shall not depart from Judah' (Gen. 49 : 10). This refers to the exilarch of Babylon."

As early as 140 C.E. a certain Nahum established the Exilarchate. The office was empowered by the state, hence "secular," and was made responsible for the peace and tax farming of the Jewish community.¹ The office was hereditary in families claiming lineal descent from King David and was popularly associated with the *dramatis personae* of the Messianic expectation. Feudal lands, poll taxes, licensing fees, and the like were among its perquisites. Its authority tended to wax and wane with the effective authority of the empowering government.

From the very beginning of Diaspora settlement, spiritual authority had been vested in the religious leaders and (with the shift of power to Babylonia) especially in the Babylonian academies (Sura and Pumpedita). These Babylonian academies won suasive religious authority over world Jewry, received their appellate cases, rendered law, empowered jurists, and from the first were in an uncertain relationship to the Exilarch over regulatory autonomy and fiscal prerogatives. The Gaonate, providing as it did indispensable *halachic* and religious service, was able to maintain a central position for an extended period after the Exilarchate's authority weakened (consequent on the break up of Caliphal dominance), and so become for a time the *de facto* though not the *de jure* "secular" and "religious" authority in Arab Jewish life. This was achieved largely by arrogating to the Gaonate two prerogatives which traditionally had belonged to the Exilarch: assent in the nomination of the Gaon and control of all appointments in the judicial system.

The Samuel b. Ali-Maimonides debate broke out during the twilight of this ancient power struggle. Old battle slogans and long contested theories and sanctities were aired *de novo*, but the issue was already moot. The realities of a widely scattered Diaspora (especially the emergence of the Christian-European Diaspora) owing a wide variety of political allegiances and featuring independent legal centers had drained the debate of broad effect although not the individual participants of their emotional involvement.² In fact, though Maimonides sided with the political arguments of the Exilarch, he synthesized the views of this farflung Diaspora where individual scholars and schools, often two thousand miles

¹ A. A. Goode, "The Exilarchate in the Eastern Caliphate," *JQR*, XXXI (1941), 149 ff.

² On the emerging patterns of leadership cf. S. Zeitlin, *Religious and Secular Leadership* (Philadelphia, 1943).

distant from Babylonian academies, had assumed perforce plenary rabbinic authority. Communal reality and messianic hopes now led to a veneration of a political authority which could not establish any substantial exercise of effective power and at the same time these prompted opposition to a rabbinic authority which could and did insist on such power.¹ Specifically, Maimonides' rationale rested on the premise that academic control of the judicial system had ceased with the voidance of the system of ordination, traditionally the function of the Palestinian Academy. Ordination might in time be reinstated² under certain conditions,³ but in the meantime the Exilarch was the proper agent to continue the authorization of judges.

Per contra, on the testimony of the German traveler, Petahyah b. Jacob of Ratisbon, who visited the Near East during the eighth decade of the 12th century, Samuel b. Ali not only claimed but attempted to exercise rights which traditionally had been "secular."

In all the lands of Syria and Palestine, in the cities of Persia and Media, as well as in the land of Babel, they have no judges unless appointed by R. Samuel, the head of the Academy. It is he who gives permission in every case to judge and fine.⁴

Assaf has published a responsum in which Samuel b. Ali asserted not only control of all judicial appointments, but claimed the traditional powers of ordination in almost ancient panoply, "only excepting the power of levying fines."⁵ Samuel's historical rationale is known to us. The Babylonian Gaonate had exercised broad authority since its establishment a millenium before. Its authority had been respected *de facto*. The ancient powers of the Exilarch, as representative of the Hebrews and as an arm of the royal house, had ceased in the days of the Exilarch David b. Judah (820—840)

¹ *M.T. Sanhedrin* 4 : 13, in turn based on *T.B. Sanhedrin* 5a.

² *C.M. Sanhedrin* 1 : 3.

³ *M.T. Sanhedrin* 4 : 11.

⁴ Petahyah of Ratisbon, *Sibbub ha-Olam*, ed. A. Baruch, (Jerusalem, 1872), p. 19.

⁵ Assaf, p. 82 ff. Traditionally ordination was vested only with the Palestinian academies. (*T.B. Sanhedrin* 13b.) The powerful Gaons of the 8th-10th centuries had arrogated most of these implicit powers though they could not change the ancient texts to permit them actually to ordain. Ordination was in time practiced in the Sarfatic and Ashkenazic communities which were deeply influenced by the Palestinian tradition, but not in Babylon. Samuel's "ordination" of Zekaryah was a unique, bold, and unsuccessful attempt to introduce this power into the Babylonian tradition. cf. S. Zeitlin, "Rashi and the Rabbinate," *JQR*, XXXI (1941), 56-58.

when the incumbent had accepted membership in and subservience to the authority of the Academies.¹ This act had established Gaonic authority *de jure*. Further, what respect can Israel have for an Exilarch "who can not control Bible or Talmud nor make practical decisions but is powerful through money and closeness to the throne".² "In the Exile Israel is not bound by any power associated with royalty and they have no need except for such as will guide them and teach them the religious law and judge their cases."³ Religious integrity is the elemental survival mechanism. It can exist only when religious authority (the Academy) is free of the controlling heavy hand of court appointed officials. Moreover, now that the Caliphal hegemony has broken down, Jewries in areas not owing allegiance to Bagdad run a risk by pledging loyalty to a Jewish official accredited to Bagdad—the 13th century version of the dual loyalties charge. Finally, monarchy was from its inception a rebellion against God's law (I Samuel 8). Q.E.D. only legitimate rabbinic authority can be accepted by God's priest people.⁴

Emboldened by the rise of an Egyptian-Syrian bloc under Saladin which weakened even further the Bagdadi power on which the Exilarch depended, (in 1174-5) Samuel had attempted to end the office of the Exilarch once and for all when the incumbent, Daniel b. Hisdai (1150—1174), died without issue. He could and did argue that Israel required only its scholars.

Samuel b. Ali had ambition and a cogent argument, but he did not carry the day. Samuel of Mosul, scion of a collateral blood line, was appointed Exilarch (1174—1195). Further exacerbation was inevitable—brought on ultimately, as is so often the case, by economic necessity. In the late 1180's the *Yeshibah's* debt became unmanageable—even non-Jews held its paper. Zekaryah's visit to Aleppo was a bold move to bail out the academy. If control could be gotten over the judicial system dues and tithes of many kinds would flow in, but this plan, too, failed as it ran up against the increasingly vigorous autonomy of the Syrian, Palestinian, and Egyptian communities, the Diaspora's continuing practice of and affection for localism, and widespread and lingering Messianic dreams associated with the house of David.

¹ Assaf, p. 65 ff. ² *Ibid.*, p. 126. ³ *Ibid.*

⁴ On monarchy and its presumptions in ancient and medieval Israel, see my "Monarchy," *In the Time of Harvest*, ed. D. J. Silver (New York, 1963), pp. 421-432.

Maimonides' own role is beyond reconstruction. On the basis of his counsel to ibn Aknin, he seems to have regretted the open clash between Zekaryah and ibn Aknin. Yet we find no protest from his pen to ibn Aknin's use of his name in public and private debate with Zekaryah. Nor did Maimonides moderate his opinion that the days were long since over when Israel must depend for law on an academy. Further, he approved of ibn Aknin's plan to set up a graduate academy in Bagdad to teach the *Mishneh Torah* and Alfasi's *Code*, a move which can not be seen but as a challenge to Samuel's authority in the lion's own lair.¹ Matters came to a head in 1195 when the Exilarch, Samuel of Mosul, died and Samuel b. Ali again tried to block the naming of a successor and was again unsuccessful. As symbol of his approval of the election of David b. Samuel (1195—1240), Maimonides summoned to his home the communal leaders of Fostat and all stood in silent confirmation while the letter of investiture was read.²

Samuel had to fight the most difficult windmill of all—prestige. Maimonides sought neither his office nor title. Samuel could not meet him face to face in the political arena. Little latitude was left but to challenge the rabbinic omniscience on which Maimonides' prestige rested. A protracted trench warfare ensued.

We control a responsum by Maimonides to one Joseph ha-Ma'arabi from which it is clear that Samuel had glossed the Sabbath laws of the *Mishneh Torah* and had broadcast his criticisms.³ This

¹ *KTR*, II, 31b. Maimonides' interest in ibn Aknin's new school was at least partially pedagogic. He was something of an educational reformer and was unhappy with the irrelevant burdens of the traditional curriculum. He hoped the new seminar would waste little time "in the interpretation and in the intricacies of the Talmud." Let the modern functional codes like Alfasi's be the class texts.

² *Birkat Abraham*, p. 8.

³ Blau 464. We control only Maimonides' response written in the hope that Joseph will disseminate the answer. Issue was joined on *M.T. Shabbat* 1 : 6-7, 20 : 7, 8 : 2. The original document was evidently a searching legal gloss sometimes discursive, sometimes simply imputing error. Typically in a discussion whether one is culpable for certain work on the Sabbath which is not self-evidentially vital and hence permissible, Samuel returned the issue to its base *M. Shabbat* 20 : 5 and *T.B. Shabbat* 31b and argued that the burden of this discussion has been misunderstood. Samuel here followed Hai Gaon, Nissim, and Hananeel (cf. Blau, III, 144, note 13). Maimonides depended on a source he could not remember. Not all "errors" were laid by Samuel to Maimonides. Thus the discussion of *M.T. Shabbat* 20 : 7 led Samuel to hold that his text was a scribal error, an explanation to which Maimonides gratefully agreed. Samuel, to his credit, maintained the traditional scholarly respect for truth and judgment.

gloss was in its turn probably an outgrowth of a lingering dispute over a decision originally set down by Maimonides touching the permissibility of travel on broad riverways on the Sabbath.¹ Maimonides had equated such travel with ocean travel and permitted it.² Samuel b. Ali, shown a copy of the decision, entered a dissenting brief, gentlemanly in language, but with the unmistakable imprint of his feeling that the "much praised" can be shown to be overly praised.³ Maimonides in response maintained a scholarly, dispassionate tone, "This is the way men of rank and knowledge should address each other," but backed down not one whit.⁴ *juridically* ~~Historically~~, little was resolved. In all such legal discussions, decision rested ultimately with the community's assent, but the correspondence is interesting historically as an example of how battles of prestige were fought out at the once removed. *knowl-*

On what issues did the Academies and Samuel seek to make capital? A response by Maimonides to a Bagdadi defender, Joseph ibn Gabir, makes clear the central charges: 1) that Maimonides denied the Abrahamitic origin of circumcision;⁵ 2) that Maimonides erroneously permitted river travel on the Sabbath;⁶ 3) that Maimonides negligently lifted the requirement that women remain at home during the full seven days established as menstrual;⁷

¹ Blau 308. The question was submitted by one Abraham ha-Kohen of Damascus.

² Blau 309. This permission was based not only on a visible similarity between a river so broad that the opposite bank could not be seen and the open seas, but on the narrower point that the law was rabbinic rather than Biblical in origin and thus permitted other than the strictest construction.

³ *Ibid.* Samuel's argument was from authority. He challenged on the basis of *T.B. Erubin* 51a that the original prohibition was Biblical and hence to be narrowly construed.

⁴ Blau 310. He referred Samuel to the *C.M.*, *Shabbat* 27 : 1, and the *S.M.*, *N.C.* 321 and reminded Samuel that these texts were available in Bagdadi schools and that there was no need for him to act the pedagogue. He too was aware that most Sabbath limits are Biblical. He spoke only of the specific case of "broad rivers."

⁵ *KTR*, II, 15b. In the *C.M.* Maimonides had stated that though Abraham was enjoined to circumcise his children (*Gen.* 17 : 10-14), the operative law was based on *Lev.* 12 : 3. Maimonides' attempt to ground the law Mosaicly may have been taken against Muslim interpreters who based their similar requirement on Abraham in line with their general denial of the force of Sinaitic regulation. In *M. T. Milah* 1 : 1 Maimonides reverted to the more traditional authority of *Gen.* 17 : 14.

⁶ *KTR*, II, 16a.

⁷ *Ibid.* Maimonides did not so teach. This charge's only possible source is a responsum, Blau 114, in which Maimonides permitted certain housewifely activities during this period. He did not insist that those who practice

4) that Maimonides did not require the ritual immersion of a prayer leader who had suffered a nocturnal emission;² and 5) most sorely pressed of all, that Maimonides denied the physical resurrection of the body.

The attack on Maimonides' concept of resurrection was the most deliberate, potentially dangerous, and demanding of answer. Maimonides, as we have developed in Chapter II, had dealt with resurrection in the *Siraj* and in the *Mishneh Torah* in *Teshubah* and *Melahim*. His various dogmatic formulas were inconsistent. On the basis of the *Mishneh Torah* a scholar in Damascus publicly denied resurrection, and a protracted and apparently acrimonious debate ensued.³ Similar positions on similar authority were taken by individual scholars in Yemen.⁴ Yemenite correspondents requested of Maimonides an elucidation of his position. He answered at some length, restating his understanding of the tenet but insisting that resurrection is a basic creed not to be rationalized away nor to be taken entirely in a figurative sense.⁵ Certain members of the Yemenite community then requested Samuel b. Ali to comment on this paper. His response was, in part, an attack on Maimonides focused on two charges: that Maimonides in fact denied the substantive truth of resurrection by his interpretive exegesis of Talmudic and Biblical passages and that Maimonides, in effect, postulated a purely spiritual bliss in the *Olam ha-Ba*.⁶

stricter rules change them. According to A. Mazahéry, *La Vie Quotidienne des Musulmans au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1952), p. 67, the 11th and 12th centuries saw some relaxation of the norms of sexual apartheid and sequestration, and this broader Jewish construction may have been a concomitant. In Blau 320 Maimonides labeled the stricter practice "Karaite" and hence identified it with the lower classes. In any case it is easy to understand how such a broad charge could excite debate.

² *KTR*, II, 16c. Maimonides did not, in fact, remove the requirement of water purification. He had labeled it a *minhag* (custom) rather than a law. He personally abided by the ruling. The source is a responsum from Maimonides to Pinhas, the *dayyan* of Alexandria (Blau 140). This European scholar had tried to remove the requirement on the grounds that it had no Talmudic support. Maimonides admitted that it was unknown outside Muslim countries. As Wieder has shown, the practice was reinforced in late Gaonic times to counter Muslim charges that not to require such bathing was shameful. (N. Wieder, *Hashpaot Islamiyot al Pulhan ha-Yehudi* [Oxford, 1947], pp. 23-25.)

³ Finkle, p. 11 (Heb. sect.).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12 (Heb. sect.). Unfortunately, our only knowledge of Samuel b. Ali's position comes from Maimonides' response. Maimonides accused

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Maimonides was moved to complain to Joseph ibn Gabir about those who deliberately misinterpreted his teaching² and to write a further exposition of his views, the *Ma'amar Tehiyyat ha-Metim*.³

The question is, why this extensive defense? The answer lies in the nettles which surrounded this issue, popularly venerated, believed Scriptural in both Islam and Judaism, yet essentially un-philosophic and un-Greek. It is interesting to note that each of the issues charged against Maimonides, except the Sabbath ruling, touched life at a point where the Islamic world impinged on the Hebraic and where Samuel's followers might well believe that the whole weight of both cultures would descend on Maimonides. A non-Abrahamitic origin of circumcision would seem to deny Muslim traditions—as would, of course, a purely spiritual resurrection.⁴ Greater freedom to women during the week of menstrual seclusion might seem to violate Muslim sexual taboos. The ritual bathing of the reader was a Muslim norm. Surely, implicit here was an attempt to discredit Maimonides as much in Muslim as in Jewish eyes.

Samuel died in 1199, Maimonides in 1204, but the passions roused by their correspondence and the infighting of their disciples did not die with them. Sometime after 1204 a venerable scholar of the Gaonate party, Daniel b. Saadya of Damascus,⁵ compiled

Samuel of deliberately misrepresenting his position, of spinning out old wives' tales, and of teaching philosophic material without understanding it. "If the Gaon had limited himself to a collection of sermons and parables and to straightforward exegesis of Biblical passages which illustrate that resurrection has a Torah source it would have been far more seemly." (*Ibid.*, p. 13.) He faulted Samuel for an analysis which postulated the soul as an accident and failed to differentiate between soul and intellect. (*Ibid.*, p. 14.) This is precisely the systematic error for which Maimonides faulted the Kalam. cf. *Moreh*, i. 73, Proposition 5. Samuel's position was not philosophically naive; at worst he did not share Maimonides' rigorously Aristotelian systematics.

¹ *KTR*, II, 15b.

² Cf. Chapter II.

³ The crucial nature of this charge can be seen not only in the energy Maimonides expended in establishing his orthodoxy in the *Ma'amar Tehiyyat ha-Metim*, but equally in the fact that a disciple, one Daniel of Damascus, found it necessary to underscore this defense.

⁴ The poet Eliezer ha-Babli called him "the father of all moral instruction and reproof." (*Divan of Eliezer b. Jacob ha-Babli*, ed. H. Brody [Jerusalem, 1935], No. 10.) Abraham Maimonides in his *Milhamot Adonai* also spoke of him as moralist and preacher. (Abraham Maimonides, *Milhamot Adonai*, R. Margaliyot (ed.) [Jerusalem, 1952-3], p. 55.)

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glosses to both the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Kitab al Faraid*,¹ each

¹ 47 questions in Hebrew to the *Mishneh Torah* text were published with Abraham Maimonides' justifications as the *Birkat Abraham*. In their day they enjoyed broad circulation. Four responsa of Abraham Maimonides answered the questions of certain men of Aden which reproduced seriatim Questions 16, 20, 31, and 34 of *Birkat Abraham*. (Abraham Maimonides, pp. 111-114.) Questions 40 and 41 of the *Birkat Abraham* show Daniel to have been familiar with the twenty-four questions submitted by Jonathan ha-Kohen to Maimonides. The Arabic gloss to the *Sefer ha-Mitsvot* is dated in 1213, as is Abraham Maimonides' rejoinder. Both gloss and defense were published together as *Maaseh Nissim*, ed. Y. Brill [Paris, 1866]. The method as in *Birkat Abraham*, is scholastic—there is no personal attack or denigration of Maimonides' scholarship. There are thirteen Questions in all. The first five deal with the premises underlying Maimonides' unique 14 principles of selection, the remaining deal with specific laws (P.C. 56 [No. 6], 57 [No. 7], 111 [No. 8], 135 [No. 9], 31 and N.C. 77 [No. 11], N.C. 321 [No. 12], N.C. 199 [No. 13]).

Daniel's method was to recast Maimonides' meaning and then comment. First off, he disagreed that only those laws which tradition specifically labeled Mosaic were, indeed, so. He preferred the inclusion of laws logically adduced from the Torah text—a traditional position. He had already adumbrated this position when he questioned in *Birkat Abraham* the exclusion of marriage by *Kinyan* (monetary exchange) from the category of Torah law.

"It seems to me despite my limited capacity that this conclusion is not required by the teaching of the sages for they spoke of 613 laws 'spoken' to Moses at Sinai and not of 613 'written down' by Moses in the Torah. The tradition includes all those matters generally referred to as *Torah le-Moshe mi Sinai*. It excepts only the Takkanot and Gezerot (fiat rulings)" (*Birkat Abraham*, p. 44).

Daniel pointed out inconsistencies in Maimonides' own practice of his guide rules. How might he justify N.C. 76 (the exclusion of a defiled priest from performing Temple service despite ritual immersion)? It was derived by logic from Lev. 2:6 and there was no tradition of Mosaic authorship. (Question 1.)

There were other problems anent Maimonides' rules. Maimonides' Rule 3 excluded laws not binding for all times. How, then, justify P.C. 34, 187, 188 (which required the mandatory extermination of Amalek and stipulated certain requirements imposed on priests who bear the Ark on their shoulders), obligations which historically, either, had been completed or superseded (Question 2)? Maimonides ruled that a similar legal proposition couched in a variant formula should not be listed with its brother. How, then, include N.C. 176 or 179 (both prescribe similar categories of edibles) (Question 4)? Maimonides established that the details of a law ought not be listed separately, only the general rule. Daniel would add this qualification: except in those cases where the violation of each stipulation required a differing punishment (Question 4). Maimonides established as a guide line for the grouping of laws the concept of identity of interest; Daniel rejected this test. He argued, convincingly, that a whole flock of widely disparate laws have the identical rationale "that we may remember the Sabbath" (Question 5). Again even in his own terms, Daniel found Maimonides inconsistent. P.C. 12 and 13 were listed separately (the wearing of phylacteries on the

in the language of the original text, and sent them to Maimonides' son Abraham. Abraham, despite some complaint about the unnecessary multiplication of questions, answered them and spoke respectfully of the author's scholarship. Daniel had indicated in his gloss that he had certain reservations about the *Moreh* which although as brilliant as crystal contained items about the Godhead and explanations of Biblical commandments which were foreign to Jewish teaching.¹ He apparently included those criticisms, or some of them, in a commentary on the Biblical Book of Ecclesiastes, a work which is, unfortunately, lost to us. All that we know of the criticism contained is the one issue on which Abraham Maimonides chose to comment—Daniel had opposed Maimonides' denial of the existence of daemonic spirits.² To Abraham's later discomfiture, the Exilarch David of Mosul (a not disinterested party, certainly) used the publication of this commentary as a pretext to excommunicate Daniel—a rash, highhanded action for which Abraham three decades later still had to protect and defend his innocence.³

Godhead

head and on the arm) though both had a single purpose "as a public proclamation of God's unity."

(INNOCENCE)

Much like Nachmanides' larger and later gloss of the same work, the *Maaseh Nissim* drove home the point that Maimonides had not replaced the inconsistencies of Simmon Kayyara and the *Halachot Gedolot* with an altogether rational order.

Daniel's work was unknown to the West during the 13th century.

¹ *Maaseh Nissim*—Postscript.

² This can not be taken as evidence that Daniel defended a crude God concept. Abraham Maimonides was concerned almost solely in *Milhamot Adonai* with the problem of *Yihud*, God's spiritual unity, and did not fault Daniel in these terms, cf. Note 1, p. 100, below. Daniel was probably wrestling with theodicy and the tortured problem of the existence of evil. A commentary on Ecclesiastes was a classic *locus* of such discussion both because of its general tenor and specifically because of 12 : 4-5.

³ Abraham Maimonides, *Milhamot Adonai*, pp. 54-55.

"It happened that a student of Samuel, may his memory be for blessing, the head of the school in Bagdad, Daniel of Bagdad by name, came from Bagdad to Damascus and wrote questions and raised doubts on the decision set down in the work (*Mishneh Torah*) of my father and teacher, may his memory be for blessing, and in the *Book of Commandments*, and he sent them to me. I replied with many added proofs and after I had sent him these chapters—some years afterwards—a letter came to me from a very wise and respected pupil of my father and teacher, R. Joseph b. Judah b. Simon, by name Joseph ibn Aknin, whose school was in Aleppo after he had left father and it was for him that father wrote the *Moreh*. . . . With this message came a work of the aforementioned Daniel, a commentary on Ecclesiastes, wherein it appeared that he raised his voice against father and against the early Gaonim—the work was published anonymously.

The emphases of controversy were markedly different in the Near East and Western Europe. Still many of the elements of *halachic* criticism were similar. The Exilarchate was never at issue in the Provence. This Near Eastern controversy died without heirs. We will now trace those who inherited Pinhas' and Daniel's concern with the nature and context of *halacha* and with Maimonides' unique code.

"R. Joseph mentioned above and others asked that I excommunicate him for the sake of the honor of my father. Nevertheless I refrained from so doing and I answered them that though he will be an enemy of ours I will be like his defender and I will not sentence him for my honor or for the sake of my father's lest there be any profanation of God's name in the issue because our fathers taught (*T.B. Ketubot* 105b) 'not to excommunicate a man in the case of one he loves or in the cases of one he hates.' Further his faith in God's pristine unity and in the rest of the first principles of the Torah was well ordered and he did not argue except in the matter of evil spirits and the like. Further I heard of him that he sermonized publicly and induced many to revere and serve God and that he brought many sinners to repentance. . . . When our answer reached them they turned it over to the honorable David the Exilarch, may his memory be for blessing, and he excommunicated him and he remained under the ban until he repented. He adjured himself before them and they freed him. Afterwards he went and finished out his days in Damascus. And that is what happened."

CHAPTER FIVE

HALACHIC CRITICISM

European ports of entry for the Maimonidean cargo were the small urban and newly vigorous Jewries of the Bas Languedoc and the Provence.¹ Time of arrival was the last two decades of the 12th century.² The first freight handled were the fourteen volumes of the *Mishneh Torah*.

The *Mishneh Torah's* fame spread quickly. It quickly became a staple of *yeshivot* libraries, often referenced in the rabbinic seminaries if not already the subject of graduate research.³ Moses Maimonides' fame was thereby given visible substance.

¹ Evidence of the speedy westward passage of Maimonides' work can be cited for the North African communities as well. A commentary on the Song of Songs, written in Fez some time before Maimonides' death, contained reference to all Maimonides' major works. (A. S. Halkin, "Ibn Aknin's Commentary on the Song of Songs," *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume*, English Volume [New York, 1950], p. 404.) It is probable, nay, certain, as the Jonathan ha-Kohen-Maimonides and Samuel ibn Tibbon-Maimonides correspondences show, that the texts known to the Provence came directly by sea from Egypt rather than circuitously through North Africa and Spain.

² The *Mishneh Torah* was completed November 28, 1180. (A. Marx, "Moses Maimonides," *Studies in Jewish History and Booklore* [New York, 1944], p. 39.) Maimonides' first answer to the *halachic* questions the *Mishneh Torah* put to him by Jonathan ha-Kohen of Lunel was dated May 1198, and came after a considerable delay. (M. Steinschneider, *Catalogus Librorum Hebraeorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana* [Berlin, 1931], I, No. 2400.) Abraham b. David of Posquières, the author of classic glosses to the *Mishneh Torah*, died the same year (1198). His glosses evidence internal revision and were surely written somewhat earlier. In at least one gloss there is a reference to an earlier well known argument raised to the text. (*Rabad to M.T. Zivit* 2 : 8.)

³ When and how was the *Mishneh Torah* studied? It was researched independently and according to personal interest. Lecturing in the *yeshivot* was based solely on the Talmud text. (Neuman, II, 76 ff.) The glosses of Moses ha-Kohen and Rabad were certainly used by graduate students in their special studies. There is early evidence of the copying of the text and its discussion by small informal groups. (Marx, *JQR*, XXV, 427.) The non-curricular use of the *Mishneh Torah* is uniquely highlighted by a responsum by Meir of Rothenburg (1215-1293) where this consummate *halachist* spoke of having been a respected jurist long before he had read the *Mishneh Torah*, yet of so respecting Maimonides' authority that he was psychologically prepared to concede an opinion if Maimonides differed. (I. Agus, *Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg* [Philadelphia, 1930], I, 218-220, No. 134.)

Despite its revolutionary structure, the *Mishneh Torah* ignited no "controversy"; much criticism and discussion, but no passion-ridden conflict. There was some disposition, largely it would appear in Castile and Aragon where the quotient of rabbinic literacy was lower than elsewhere in western Europe, to use the *Mishneh Torah* not only as reference to the law but as the final statement of the law. But this attitude seems largely to have been limited to a few among the courtiers and the wealthy who, though well educated, had not graduated from *yeshivot* and who wished for some basis to validate a challenge to rabbinic authority.¹ Such use had explosive potential, but perhaps because Hebrew was not a universal tongue² (especially among these groups) the *Mishneh Torah* did not become the judicial passkey some had hoped it might become. Early training in Bible and liturgy and the continuing ritual repetition of both must have kept a minimal Hebraic fluency alive, but this for the average merchant or physician was something far less than the facility required to control the *Mishneh Torah*. Only those close to scholarship and to circles where Biblical exegesis, Hebrew grammar, Mishnaic law, and Midrashic literature were rehearsed achieved and maintained the necessary competence. In the west, therefore, there was never any serious move to supplant the Talmud tradition with Maimonides' code and hence no "controversy" over the *Mishneh Torah*.

The *Mishneh Torah's* importance in the "controversy" was threefold. It established Maimonides' credentials. No work of his could be dismissed as the scribbling of a tyro. It quickened the thirst of the Provençal scholars for his entire output. Where Judah ha-Levi's *Kitab al-Hujjah Wal-Dalil Fi Nuer al Din al Dhalil* (Hebrew, *Sefer ha-Kuzari*; English, *Kuzari*) had waited half a century for a Hebrew translator,³ the *Morah's* translation was

¹ The letter of the Saragossan physician Sheshet ha-Nasi bar Isaac, written circa 1200 (Marx, *JQR*, XXV, 427 ff.), will be discussed in Chapter VII.

² Writing late in the 13th century Mordecai b. Isaac ibn Kimhi answered a suggestion concerning the education of women by wondering aloud what language skills could be expected of the weaker sex in an age when the men themselves can not speak or understand Hebrew. (A. Neubauer, "Documents Inédits," *REJ*, XXII [1886], 82, No. 59.) Similarly Abraham Abulafia (1240-1290) wrote in his *Otsar Eden Ganuz*, "The Jews have forgotten the holy language, if not totally, at the least in overwhelming measure." (A. Neubauer, "Bibliographie," *REJ*, IX, [1884], 148-149.)

³ Judah ibn Tibbon.

commissioned even before all its parts were completed. It suggested at least one major area, eschatology, where Maimonides' views were abrasive to the fabric of traditional faith, and one concern, the concept of the oneness of the Godhead (*Yihud*), where philosophic requirements and religious affirmations, though seemingly in agreement, were in reality of quite disparate purpose. To some like Meir b. Todros Abulafia of Toledo and Simson of Sens, Maimonides' apologetics in the *Moreh* were suspect (because of what they had read in the *Mishneh Torah*) even before opening the *Moreh's* covers. Meir b. Todros, during a long life which lasted into the fourth decade of the 13th century, claimed to have abided by a self-imposed regimen never to read the *Moreh*.¹ For weal or woe, the *Mishneh Torah* predisposed many as to their reception of the *Moreh*.

When Europeans leafed the *Mishneh Torah* they were both awed and troubled by its catholicity. Its pages regulated narrowly every aspect of life and presumed a uniformity which did not in fact exist. All Jewry was by its own confession under Biblical and Talmudic authority. In theory practice was uniform. In fact it was not. The legal system adjusted to local variations by admitting the force of customary law and by permitting ritual and civil requirements to be bent before the weight of such practices. Much use was made of the Talmudic principle, "Custom causes the law to be suspended."²

Maimonides was well aware of the existence and force of customary law. On one occasion Pinhas b. Meshullam, the *dayyan* of Alexandria, had appealed for support to Maimonides when a decision of his to permit the leader of prayer to carry on without a ritual immersion (if he had experienced nocturnal emissions) had precipitated popular outcry and a challenge to his authority.³ Maimonides' answer was equivocal. Finally, he permitted the continuance of this customary practice despite the absence of any Talmudic requirement for it and despite its nonfaisance in Byzantium, France, and the Provence. Customary law must not be cavalierly set aside.⁴ However, in the code itself he made few allowances for such customary variations.⁵

¹ *KTR*, III, 6b. ² *P.T. Baba Metzia* 7:1.

³ *KTR*, I, 25a.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ The only non-authoritative section of the *Mishneh Torah* was the *Seder ha-Tefillah*, a liturgy, which Maimonides appended to *M.T. Ahabah* and

Northern European Jewry had matured independently of the Islamic-Jewish way of life, and was feeling at this time a need to validate long established customs against criticism by Sephardic immigrants and travelers.

Rhenish — European Jewry was one in faith, but distinguished by geography, custom, and political conditions, as well as historical tradition, into four separate and self conscious communities: Sephardic (i.e., Spanish), Sarfatic (i.e., French), Ashkenazic (i.e., German, especially ~~Rhenish~~), and Provençal (i.e., Languedoc, Rousillon, the Toulousain, and the Provence). The Reconquest had brought and was bringing ancient Sephardic communities, shaped by Islamic pressures, into the ambit of Christian Europe. Travel and trade assured penetration and many a merchant's raised eyebrow must have loosed a spirited defense of local practice. An element of superiority feeling was probably also present among these merchants and wanderers. What they found about them lacked the breadth of culture and the pride of history to which they believed themselves accustomed. Not surprisingly, early in the 13th century we find Abraham b. Nathan ha-Yarhi compiling a full blown customary, the *Sefer ha-Minhag*, and Asher b. Saul editing a *Sefer ha-Minhagot*.¹ Both men were Provençals. Familiar habits were not given up diffidently or silently.

The *Mishneh Torah* seemed to ride roughshod over the familiar ways of European life and to insist on the ways Maimonides knew—ways which were molded by Islamic influence. The earliest gloss of the *Mishneh Torah* appears to have had as its central theme an exposition and defense of the European *minhagim*.

This gloss by the Provençal scholar Moses ha-Kohen of Lunel lacks either introduction or statement of purpose. It may have had some preface, but none is reproduced in the unique manuscript.² It is clear, however, that the commentator was concerned throughout to validate local practice against the all embracing and precise regulations of the *Mishneh Torah*.

In matters of liturgy the Sephardim were insistent on prescribed forms and formulas. The Spanish schools were heirs to a tradition which he introduced with "*Nahagu ha-Am*"—"It is the custom of the people."

¹ Sarfati scholars produced no similar collections. Travel north was less frequent, but the principle of customary authority was no less guarded. R. Tam, *Sefer ha-Yashar* (Venice, 1811).

² Bodleian MSS No. 613.

△
• Travel
cf.

which had opposed, rather consistently, any flexibility in the formulas of the liturgy. Maimonides mirrored this attitude when he legislated:

All these blessings (*Berachot*) as well as all the other blessings with which Israel is familiar were instituted by Ezra and his court. One is not permitted to add or subtract from their wording....

The general principle is that if the form of the blessings which the sages gave is altered this is an error and the blessings must be repeated and recited according to the prescribed formula.¹

Moses ha-Kohen, whose tradition was permissive as to liturgical wording, did not let this pass unchallenged.

This is not clear from the case of the shepherd who said "Blessed be the Merciful One, the owner of this bread"² nor from the case of the one who said "Blessed be the All-Merciful who has given you back to us and has not given you to the dead."³ In this case the Talmudic authorities freed him from any further obligation in the matter of blessing for deliverance, further, they recorded this change in the blessing over food yet held that in that case too he has fulfilled his obligation.

R. Zecharyah has ruled that one who changes the formula of a blessing has fulfilled his obligation.⁴

A variant to the same basic purpose illustrates Moses ha-Kohen's concern and general method: the breaking open of Maimonidean formulas by the illustration of exceptions, the citation of conflicting prevailing customs, and of previous authorities who validated the customary practice. Maimonides had ruled: "In the first three and last three benedictions of the *Amidah* there must be no additions, subtractions, or changes."⁵ Moses ha-Kohen glossed: "This is to be

¹ *M.T. Keri'at Shema* 1 : 7.

² *T.B. Berachot* 40b. "Benjamin the shepherd made a sandwich and said: 'Blessed be the master of this bread' and Rab said that he had performed his obligation." This statement was much qualified by subsequent Talmudic discussion but Moses ha-Kohen used this example to question Maimonides' contention that anyone who varied the formula of the blessing (here substituting an Aramaic single blessing for the correct three-fold Hebrew one) was deemed not to have fulfilled his obligation.

³ *T.B. Berachot* 54b. Another example in which the Talmud permitted the substitution of a different Aramaic blessing for the prescribed Hebrew one.

⁴ R. Zecharyah ha-Levi. The precise citation is unknown to this author.

⁵ *M.T. Tefillah* 1 : 11. Maimonides based himself on the authority of *T.B. Berachot* 34a. He also had strong personal feelings against "those foolish people who are extravagant in praise, and fluent and prolix in the prayers they compose and in the hymns they sing in their desire to approach the

explained as referring to private petitions, but petitions which involve the public weal are permitted, for example we say *Zachrenu*¹ in the first blessing. R. Isaac ibn Giat ruled similarly."²

This glossator had his eye throughout on *minhag*, not only the *minhag* of his own native Provençal culture but Sarfatic and Sephardic practice as well. Thus when Maimonides ruled flatly that "When a new moon falls on the Sabbath the reader of the Prophetic section from the Bible must include mention of the fact in his blessings. . . ." Moses ha-Kohen demurred, "This is the opinion of Alfasi but it does not follow from the Mishnah (*Shabbat* 4:1). In all the lands of France mention of the new moon is not inserted in this blessing."³ Similarly when Maimonides listed the restrictions imposed on one under the ban, Moses ha-Kohen wondered why he had not included the restriction requiring the drawing off of shoes, which not only has some Talmudic basis but "is the custom in the whole land of Spain."⁴

Moses ha-Kohen's eye was peeled sharply for texts from which Provençal customs varied.⁵ His typical note cited what traditional support he could find for a particular practice and the place where that custom was familiar. His legal rationale was always the same: "When the law is in doubt, one follows the custom."⁶ To cite a few examples, Maimonides had stipulated that at a wedding feast only the last of the seven marriage blessings might be repeated. Moses ha-Kohen glossed, "Our custom is to repeat the seven blessings during the meal even though all were at the marriage and had heard them."⁷ Maimonides had made the flat statement, "It is forbidden to recite the Shema before a naked child or a non-Jew." Moses ha-Creator." (*Moreh*, i. 59.)

¹ A petition for life inserted in the first blessing during the ten days of Repentance. There were other accepted insertions of public petition in the opening and concluding prayers, indeed, Maimonides knew of these, cf. *M.T. Amidah* 2:19: "There are places where they add the prayer *Zachrenu* during the ten days of Repentance and the prayer *Mi Kamoha* in the second blessing. . . ."

² *MK to M.T. Tefillah* 1:11. Isaac ibn Giat was a Spanish Biblical commentator, philosopher, and poet (1038-1089). He was either a teacher or fellow pupil of Alfasi and was especially famous for his liturgical poetry.

³ *MK to M.T. Amidah* 12:15.

⁴ *MK to M.T. Talmud Torah* 7:4. The Talmudic text referred to is *T.B. Baba Metzia* 58a.

⁵ *MK to M.T. Berachot* 1:11, 2:1, 11:9, 11:10, 11:16; *Keriat Shema* 3:16; *Amidah* 3:5, 3:11; *Zizit* 3:8, etc.

⁶ *MK to M.T. Zizit* 3:8.

⁷ *MK to M.T. Berachot* 2:10.

Kohen stipulated, "It is our custom that the circumciser may recite the Shema without covering the child."¹ Similarly to Maimonides' declaration, "If he faced the obligation of reciting the *Amidah* twice (the time for the *Minhah Amidah* having arrived without the *Musaf Amidah* having been said), he prays first the one for *Minhah* and afterward the one for *Musaf*," Moses ha-Kohen insisted on a refinement: "It is our custom on Yom Kippur that after the time of the *Minhah* has arrived he no longer recites the *Musaf* service before the *Minhah*."² Again, to the stipulation, "One who prays the *Musaf* service after the seventh hour even though he transgresses fulfills his obligation," Moses ha-Kohen qualified, "I do not know why he calls one who prays after the seventh hour a transgressor. It is our custom on Yom Kippur to pray *Musaf* after the seventh hour. In any case our practice is not to be overly scrupulous in this direction."³

Moses ha-Kohen cited not only custom but local case decisions which validated legal variations. Two decisions of Abraham b. Isaac (Rabi) were cited against Maimonides wherein this jurist permitted a *Kohen* to defile himself in order to mourn for a deceased father even if only a limb of the torso remained,⁴ and in a similar case to defile himself even after the father's grave had been topped.⁵ Moses ha-Kohen also cited "the sages of this city" who had ruled that in the case of a man executed by the civil authorities mourning need not be delayed until the body had been recovered,⁶ against Maimonides' stipulation that "the observance of mourning rites and the counting of seven and thirty days begins from the time that the relatives have ceased petitioning the government for permission to bury the executed."⁷ In similar manner Moses ha-Kohen advanced the unusual ruling of the sages of Béziers and Montpellier permitting an *erub* inclusive of both the inner city and the faubourg without a purchasing of the intervening public thoroughfare⁸ against Maimonides' strict construction of the Sabbath limit rules.

¹ MK to M.T. *Keriat Shema* 3 : 16.

² MK to M.T. *Amidah* 3 : 11.

³ MK to M.T. *Amidah* 3 : 5.

⁴ MK to M.T. *Ovel* 2 : 14.

⁵ MK to M.T. *Ovel* 2 : 8.

⁶ MK to M.T. *Ovel* 1 : 3.

⁷ M.T. *Ovel* 1 : 3.

⁸ MK to M.T. *Shabbat* 17 : 10.

Moses ha-Kohen's *hagahot* were known to later rabbinic scholars largely through numerous citations in Joseph Karo's 16th century commentary to the *Mishneh Torah*, the *Kesef Mishneh*.¹ Moses' manuscript contained notes only to sections of currently applicable law.²

Traditionally, Moses ha-Kohen is known as *Baal Hagahot*.³ The usual explanation of *hagaha* refers it to a gloss lacking the acerbity and caustic burden of *hassagot* marginalia. A distinction was thus established between Moses ha-Kohen's *hagahot* and the more famous and more damning *hassagot* of Abraham b. David of Posquières (Rabad). The distinction is artificial. The late 13th century Perpignan scholar Menahem ha-Meiri twice referred to Rabad as among the *Gedole ha-Magihim*.⁴ The Bodleian manuscript of Moses' glosses bears a subtitle labeling what follows *hassagot*.⁵ The scribe of columns 35 ff. of this manuscript used the term *hagaha* throughout.⁶ No judgment of Moses ha-Kohen's purpose can be extrapolated from a comparison of these two terms of reference.

Unfortunately, we know little of Moses ha-Kohen's biography. Sambary (17 c.) spoke of him as a descendant of the 11th century Aragonese scholar Isaac b. Reuben of Barcelona.⁷ In his text Moses referred to a *Kunteros* and to some *Hiddushim* from his pen, but we might expect these familiar pedagogic fruits from any Talmudic scholar.⁸ Sambary also spoke of an excursus on the regulations concerning vows (*Hilchot Nedarim*).⁹

¹ The present study is based on a unique manuscript, Bodleian Library, MSS No. 613, partially published by S. Atlas, "The Glosses of R. Moses ha-Kohen of Lunel to the *Mishneh Torah*" (Heb.), *HUCA*, XXVII (1956), 1-94; XXXIV (1963), 1-40, and secured in extenso in photostat by the author.

² *M.T. Yesode ha-Torah, Talmud Torah, Abadah Zarah*, all portions of *Ahabah: Shabbat, Erubin, Sheviat, Issur, Shemitat Yom Tov, Hametz u Matzah, Ishiyot, Gerushim, Yibbum v'Halitzah*, all of *Kidushin, Sanhedrin, Mumri*, and *Ovel*.

³ Sambary, "Liklutim Mi'dibre Yosel," *Medieval Jewish Chronicles and Chronological Notes*, ed. A. Neubauer (Oxford, 1887), I, 132-133.

⁴ Menahem ha-Meiri, *Bet ha-Behirah—Baba Metzia*, ed. K. Schlessinger (Jerusalem, 1959), pp. 246 and 266.

⁵ Bodleian MSS No. 613, Column 1.

⁶ Cf. the text beginning *M.T. Shabbat* 6 : 12. Interestingly, this same scribe apparently went back and inserted *hagaha* as a reader's direction above some earlier texts (*vide M.T. Shabbat* 3 : 11, 3 : 12, etc.).

⁷ Neubauer, I, 126-127.

⁸ The *Kunteros* is referenced in glosses to *M.T. Sanhedrin* 22 : 4, *Edut* 8 : 1-4, etc.; the *Hiddushim* in *MK to M.T. Sheviat Yom Tov* 4 : 6.

⁹ Neubauer, I, 133.

Tradition, as reflected in the title of the Bodleian manuscript, associated Moses with Lunel. There are two indications that these R (There) glosses at least were written in Narbonne. Moses cited a decision recorded in Narbonne concerning a *Kohen* who defiled himself to attend the funeral of his father's dismembered corpse as "an opinion of R. Abraham *Ab Bet Din* and all the scholars of this city."¹ Again we find reference to a certain case adjudged "here in the days of the *Rishonim*, i.e. by R. Abraham *Ab Bet Din* and his disciples."²

Moses ha-Kohen belonged to that self-conscious Provençal school which was flourishing not only in Narbonne and Lunel but at Montpellier, Béziers, Marseilles, Nîmes, Carcassonne, etc. There is internal evidence aplenty for this fact. He cited Sephardic texts as variants to his own.³ Concerning the propriety of women who put on fringes and spoke the appropriate blessing, he wrote, "In any case, the custom of our locals is that women may speak the blessing and I have heard that this also is the custom in Spain."⁴ Concerning the length of periods of mourning which are interrupted by holidays, he set out his opinion and added, "This also is the opinion of the Rabbis of France (*Sarfat*) and they have expatiated at length in their books and responsa and one ought not deviate in this matter from their opinion...."⁵

The dating of these glosses is an even more complicated problem than their geography. There has been a general assumption that Moses ha-Kohen's notes postdate Rabad's. This opinion was based on a misreading of the initials *רמב"ם*—a misreading which is as old as one of the scribes of the manuscript itself.⁶ One of the intriguing problems of these glosses is that Moses ha-Kohen never quoted Rabad nor Rabad, Moses, even though at times their views coin-

¹ *MK to M.T. Ovel 2 : 14.*

² *MK to M.T. Ovel 2 : 8.*

³ *MK to M.T. Ovel 2 : 1.*

⁴ *MK to M.T. Ziv 3 : 8.*

⁵ *M.T. Ovel 10 : 4.*

⁶ Twice a subsequent reader of the Bodleian MSS indicated the correct reading in the MSS margin, *M.T. Eduf 12 : 1* and *M.T. Ovel 3 : 8*. The *רמב"ם* referred to throughout—often fully and correctly—is R. Abraham (*Ab Bet Din*) of Narbonne, the author of *ha-Eshkol* (1110-1179), Rabad's father-in-law. Twersky, p. 53 *passim*, repeats this error of identification.

cided¹ and at other times differed markedly.² Interestingly, as we have seen, Moses cited Rabad's father-in-law, Rabi of Narbonne.

The 18th century scribe Hayyim Joseph b. David Azulai placed Moses ha-Kohen's *hagahot* slightly before Rabad's:

First Moses ha-Kohen wrote *hassagot* (sic) on the book and they were sent to Maimonides out of respect for there were raised many public and open questions; Moses answered them as *Migdal Oz* and Karo show in their quotations of *Responsa* from Maimonides to the Sages of Lunel. Afterward Rabad made *hassagot* and then Moses ha-Kohen again made answer, and afterward Karo quoted many.³

Azulai's evidence is unreliable. We will show that the questions sent to Maimonides by Jonathan ha-Kohen on behalf of his school were drawn at times from Rabad, but never from Moses ha-Kohen. This whole construct would seem to have been derived from simple uncertainty. How was one to understand Karo's cryptic reference "to answer the *hassagot* of Rabad and the *hagahot* of Moses ha-Kohen."?⁴

Gross established Moses ha-Kohen as a contemporary of Joseph

¹ Cf. Rabad and MK to M.T. *Keriat Shema* 3 : 2, 3 : 6, 4 : 1, etc. In one place the Bodleian MSS scribe copied in the margin a comment of Rabad's as if completing Moses ha-Kohen's thought. (M.T. *Edut* 8 : 3-4.) In the whole manuscript there is just one text where Moses ha-Kohen may be reproducing, albeit freely, a comment of Rabad *ad loc.* (MK to M.T. *Sanhedrin* 25 : 3), but in all probability the reference is rather to a familiar Tosaphistic debate.

² Cf. Rabad and MK to M.T. *Berachot* 1 : 11, *Melachim* 12 : 1, *Maachelot Assurot* 11 : 18, etc. The suggestion forces itself that Moses ha-Kohen was a partisan of Zechariah ha-Levi, whose *Sefer ha-Maor* Rabad had handled peremptorily, and that the silence of one or the other of these men was premeditated. This suggestion stems from Moses' treatment of Alfasi. Moses ha-Kohen is hard on Alfasi. The *hagahot* often read as much as a critique of him as they do of Maimonides. (MK to M.T. *Abodah Zarah* 8 : 11, 9 : 6, 10 : 3; *Keriat Shema* 3 : 12; *Tefillah* 12 : 15; *Berachot* 1 : 12, 8 : 7, 8 : 10, 12 : 9; *Milah* 1 : 14; *Shabbat* 1 : 7, 1 : 17, 2 : 13, 2 : 14, 3 : 2, 3 : 4, etc.) "This is the opinion of R. Alfasi, but it does not appear so from the passages in T.B. *Shabbat* . . ." (MK to M.T. *Tefillah* 12 : 12). "Alfasi taught according to the anonymous Mishnah, but it appears to us as this rabbi (Maimonides) has taught." (MK to M.T. *Berachot* 8 : 10). "Even though Alfasi so teaches, it did not appear so to R. Hai and to all my teachers . . . Alfasi needs greatly to be set in order here." (MK to M.T. *Shabbat* 2 : 13). Couple this with his familiarity with ha-Levi's *Sefer ha-Maor* and it would appear that Moses ha-Kohen belonged to the small Provençal school of Alfasi critics born of R. Ephraim and the *Sefer ha-Tashlum* and continued by Zechariah ha-Levi in his *Sefer ha-Maor*.

³ Hayyim Joseph David Azulai, *Shem ha-Gedolim* (Leghorn, 1786), lxiii. 137.

⁴ Joseph Karo, *Kesef Mishnah*, Introduction.

ibn Plat (last half 12th century). The *Jüdische National Biographie* followed suit, but its authority is unknown. There is a doubtful tradition that Moses ha-Kohen lived till 1225. Perhaps Gross had this in mind.¹

Internal evidence suggests a somewhat later date than Gross'—that Moses ha-Kohen was a contemporary of ibn Plat's students, including Rabad. Zecharyah ha-Levi's *Sefer ha-Maor*, completed circa 1185, is cited,² as is Eliezer b. Samuel of Metz's *Sefer Yereim*.³ This work was completed towards the end of the octogenarian's life. R. Abraham b. Isaac, the contemporary of ibn Plat, and Rabad's father-in-law, is cited as among the *Hahamim Rishonim*.⁴ For a *terminus ad quem* we can only argue from silence; no 13th century work is cited.⁵ From the bracketing of Rabad and Moses ha-Kohen in the minds of later commentators and historians, it would seem probable that the two writers were contemporaries.

Moses ha-Kohen was a *halachist*. Whatever his interest in theology or science it was well hidden. His comments on *aggadic* matters were few. To Maimonides' requirement that members of a Sanhedrin must "possess some knowledge of the general sciences such as medicine, mathematics, (the calculation of) cycles and constellations" in addition to other qualifications, Moses ha-Kohen remarked, "I do not know his source for this and it is cause of some amazement for what necessity is there that judges know medicine, mathematics, and astronomy. It requires investigation."⁶ Because of Rabad's silence *ad loc* some have taken this text to evidence Moses ha-Kohen's disinterest in philosophic matters. Lacking other manifestation, this is an unwarranted extrapolation. The issue would seem to revolve much more narrowly about the judicial relevance of Deuteronomy 1:13, "Get you from each one of your tribes, wise men, and understanding, and I will make them heads over you."

¹ H. Gross, *Gallia Judaica* (Paris, 1897), p. 285. "Moses ha-Kohen," *Jüdische National Biographie*, ed. S. Wininger (Czernowitz, 1927-1936), IV, 442.

² MK to M.T. *Berachot* 1:8 and 3:1, *Maachalet Assurot* 2:1 f. and 3:1 f.

³ MK to M.T. *Maachalet Assurot* 4:4.

⁴ MK to M.T. *Ovel* 2:10.

⁵ Moses ha-Kohen's sources included both Talmuds, the Tosefta, Targum Onkelos, Gaonic responsa, Alfasi, Isaac ibn Giat, Rashi, R. Tam, R. Asher, R. Isaac the Elder of Rameru, R. Samuel, R. Ephraim, R. Eliezer b. Samuel of Metz, R. Isaac b. Merwan ha-Levi, R. Abraham b. Isaac, *Ab Bet Din* of Narbonne, R. Zecharyah ha-Levi, and R. Aaron ha-Kohen of Lunel.

⁶ MK to M.T. *Sanhedrin* 2:1.

Moses ha-Kohen was neither obscurantist nor literalist. The crucial text is a comment on a prohibition against the writing of the names of angels or holy names in a mezuzah. Maimonides had explained that the mezuzah's purpose was to express God's unity, and had insisted that it was not intended to be a safeguard or good luck charm for the home.¹ Moses ha-Kohen's gloss involved three points: 1) a Talmudic story about Onkelos² where the principle seems to be established that the mezuzah safeguards Israel; 2) the agreement of "R. Samuel and all my teachers" to the interpretation that the "mezuzah safeguards from all dangers;" 3) the prevailing practice of scribes to include in mezuzah parchments such protective names. Moses ha-Kohen's points are culturally typical: a search of the Talmud for variant opinion; an expression of previous authorities; a detailing of local custom; but these points in no way reveal his championing of religious credulity against Maimonidean rationalism. In the first place, though he tolerated the custom and would not proscribe it, Moses ha-Kohen appended the admonition, "Note that this is according to the teachings of Onkelos." Onkelos, by tradition a famed proselyte, had a legendary rather than scholarly fame and the annotator thus cautioned against any positive legal norm being derived from such authority—a caution reinforced by his concluding remark, "All this (custom) is not according to the true way."³

Moses ha-Kohen was not a theologic primitive, though on the basis of these *hagahot* no reconstruction can be made of the specifics of his faith. His interests were simply, here at least, *halachic*. Even when such problems as providence and free will were raised in the *Mishneh Torah* in a manner which Rabad could not let pass, Moses ha-Kohen remained silent. Only once did he indicate even tangential concern. In *Mishneh Torah, Milah* 1:2 Maimonides had discussed the punishment of one who grows up uncircumcised and delays having that operation performed: he is in violation of a positive commandment—the usual punishment for which is

¹ *M.T. Mezuzah* 5:4.

² *T.B. Abodah Zarah* 11a. Onkelos was the reputed first century translator of an Aramaic Targum to the Five Books of Moses.

³ *MK to M.T. Mezuzah* 5:4. It ought also be noted that Maimonides is not here the complete rationalist he seems to be. His concurrence in the permission to write *Shaddai* on the outside of the mezuzah legitimized a practice generally believed to be especially powerful against demons.

*Karet*¹—but Maimonides had prescribed "he is not liable to *Karet* until he shall have died and become a deliberate violator of the law." Moses ha-Kohen could not understand this formulation of punishment.

It requires investigation. How can *Karet* be imposed after death? Does not *Karet* involve the taking of half a life and the foreshortening of a life span. [It is possible to say] when he dies [uncircumcised] he will be judged in Gehenna, if he had not repented and accepted [the obligation], for if he desires he can at any time circumcise himself....²

It is unwise to establish on the basis of this single text any wide disparity between Maimonides' views on retribution and Moses ha-Kohen's. There may have been one and in all probability there was, but it is not here defined. The problem here is logical, not theological.

The same reservation must be made in interpreting Moses ha-Kohen's gloss to *Mishneh Torah*, *Abodah Zarah* 1:3. Maimonides, explaining the historical origin of monotheism, had described an intellectual program which led Abraham at the age of forty to the knowledge of God's unity. Moses ha-Kohen margined, "This is a cause of surprise since in *T. B. Nedarim* 32a it states that Abraham was three when he recognized his creator. עקב according to its *gematria* [numerical equivalent] is 172."³ Much has been made of this note, especially in studies on the Rabad, who repeated it.⁴ It has been seen as a veiled attack by the philosophically naive against

¹ Literally "cut off." cf. Num. 15 : 30 f. *Karet* is a God-imposed penalty not enforced by human agency. *Karet* was generally presumed to result in an untimely death. However, Maimonides in *M.T. Teshubah* 8 : 1 had implied that *Karet* had a double edge, i.e. that it was a punishment both in this world and in the world to come. Because of this view Maimonides could presume that punishment might be delayed until after death. Maimonides' reason for so doing was purely logical—the obligation of circumcision has no fixed time limit. Circumcision might be performed at any time until one's death, hence one is not in unredeemable violation until his death.

² *MK* to *M.T. Milah* 1 : 2. Rabad raised the same question and to solve it posited an *Issus Karet*, a kind of intermediate obligation-cum-punishment under which the one who delayed his circumcision stood as long as he delayed.

³ עקב entered the picture because of the language of Gen. 26 : 5. "Because (עקב) that Abraham hearkened to my voice." Abraham lived one hundred and seventy-five years, deduct one hundred and seventy-two and you find Abraham recognizing God while only a lad of three. cf. *Midrash Rabbah-Genesis ad loc.*

Rabad's gloss *ad loc* was identical in thought but not in language.

⁴ Twersky, p. 268.

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Maimonides' insistence on metaphysical study as a prerequisite for the knowledge of God. However, there is no reason to assume that the glossator espoused the legend he cited. Moses ha-Kohen cited the Talmudic source, to be sure, but he omitted any indication of agreement or disagreement. Nor is there reason to assume that Abraham's "knowledge" was any more philosophic and self achieved at forty than at three.¹ Karo *ad loc* cited a continuation of Moses ha-Kohen's note, not in the Bodleian manuscript, which if genuine discourages any such theory spinning:

It is possible to sustain both interpretations. Abraham was three when he began to think and to puzzle out in his mind how to recognize his creator. Finally when he was forty he attained a complete recognition of God.

On the basis of this single text, Moses ha-Kohen's theology can not be reconstructed. Nor need it be. Moses' purpose throughout was *halachic*. As teacher and scholar he had before him a *halachic* magnum opus which he set out to gloss where it seemed to contradict or limit or run counter to local practice. The *Moreh* had not yet been translated and Maimonides appeared to him but another, albeit brilliant, contemporary rabbi-jurist.² Moses ha-Kohen was as willing to contradict Maimonides as any other master, his teachers³ or Alfasi⁴, and he did so in each case in the time honored vocabulary of such exercises without disturbing his equanimity and without sarcasm. He researched this text as he might have any other.⁵

¹ The addition is questionable, as Moses ha-Kohen rarely attempted to reconcile opposing views, preferring rather to choose one side of the argument or the other.

² Key formula of the *MK* text is the ubiquitous abbreviation, (p⁷⁸ 3) "It requires investigation." The glossators' technique was to strip away the pristine simplicity of a text and return with specific reference to the complexity of the Talmudic tradition. "All this requires investigation because of the debate in the Talmud." (*MK* to *M.T. Shabbat* 8 : 7.) There is no set purpose apparent to discredit Maimonides. Silence can be construed as approval, but more significantly the text is sprinkled with approval of specific rulings. "He has explained well, even though my teachers did not argue in this vein." (*MK* to *M.T. Abodah Zarah* 3 : 10.) cf. also *ibid.* 2 : 11, 7 : 26, etc.

³ *MK* to *M.T. Kerial Shema* 3 : 12.

⁴ Cf. p. 78, note 2, above.

⁵ Though Moses ha-Kohen listed glosses only to operative law, he had read carefully the entire text. *Vide* his gloss to *M.T. Erubin* 1 : 12. He also had an eye peeled for inner contradictions. (*MK* to *M.T. Abodah Zarah* 3 : 6, 7 : 13, etc.).

Joseph Karo listed Moses ha-Kohen among the critics who believed the *Mishneh Torah* ought never to have been written.¹ There is no internal evidence for this assertion. But by his citation of sources, local customs, variant textual proof texts, and conflicting authorities Moses, in effect, began that academic conflation of the *Mishneh Torah* which destroyed its briskness and its quality of ultimate authority and reduced it to the rank of more familiarly organized compendiums of law. Moses ha-Kohen's glosses reflect the need of Diaspora communities for elbow room to maintain their separate refinements of ritual and law.

↑
communities

Moses ha-Kohen shot an arrow of practicality at the *Mishneh Torah*. His more illustrious contemporary, Abraham b. David of Posquières (1125—1198), shot at the same target, but his quiver held more than a single bolt. Rabad was far more aware of the *Mishneh Torah's* broader implications, and his glosses punctured the text from many angles.

Where Moses ha-Kohen's concern was largely existential, Rabad's was essential as well. Unlike Moses, Rabad wrote glosses to almost every section of the *Mishneh Torah*. He was as concerned with regulation and formula long in abeyance as with operative law. Rabad did not slacken his glossator's pace when he reached the volumes dealing with discontinued practice. Material concerning Temple sacrifice was carefully annotated. A theoretical text such as *Bi'at ha-Mikdash* received thirteen logical and quite sophisticated and technical notes. However, Rabad was not interested equally in all the *Mishneh Torah's* parts. The intricate calendar regulations of *Kiddush ha-Hodesh* sport only one gloss, the heavily theological sections of *Yesode ha-Torah* and *De'ot* only one and two respectively. *Halacha* was Rabad's prime interest. Rabad took the *Mishneh Torah* on its own terms—as a code of Hebrew law in its entirety. He refashioned it to the same end, discounting in so doing that other announced purpose of Maimonides: that the *Mishneh Torah* serve as a ready handbook for the working jurist. Moses ha-Kohen was a competent legal technician. Rabad was a competent legal theoretician.

Among the second generation of the invigorated Provençal scholarship no name shone more brightly than that of Abraham b. David of Posquières. Blessed by a first rate mind and an excellent education, he was blessed also by a fortunate birth. His Provence

¹ *Kesef Mishnah*, Introduction.

could provide teachers of exceptional competence and range: Moses b. Joseph of Narbonne (Rambi), Abraham b. Isaac of Narbonne (Rabi), and Meshullam b. Jacob of Lunel. His family could and did give him a leg up financially.¹

By and large, the Jewries of the Provence remained till the mid-12th century as insulated rabbinically as most other communities north of the Pyrenees. When the Spaniard Abraham bar Hiyya visited Southern France circa 1130, he spoke of it as Sarfat. "I would not have had to treat of this matter, if I had found in Sarfat any Hebrew books on this subject."² At the end of the century Judah ibn Tibbon reminisced in his ethical will of a time when "there were among them [in Provence] scholars proficient in the knowledge of Torah and Talmud, but they did not occupy themselves with other sciences because Torah study was their sole profession and because books in other disciplines were not available."³ ↑
rabbinically

This earlier world was bounded by the sophisticated but circumscribed seas of the Talmud and the Midrashim. The Eastern Crusades, the Spanish Reconquest, and the pre-Murat trans-Pyrenean political ambitions of Aragon brought in their train a newly vigorous and international economic life, newly burgeoning communes, troopers, travelers, teachers, refugees, and professional poets who crossed boundaries and cross-fertilized cultures.

In the 12th century first the Pyrenees, then the Mediterranean ceased to be a cultural wall. Abraham bar Hiyya came north circa 1130 and, finding no astronomical works in Hebrew, indited his *Sefer ha-Ibbur*. He was followed circa 1150 by the exegete-poet Abraham ibn Ezra, who while resting at Béziers dedicated his *Sefer ha-Shem* to two local scholars. Joseph b. Isaac Kimhi (1110—1195) came to Narbonne from Spain, introduced Sephardic gram-

¹ Unlike Moses ha-Kohen, whose life remains a blank, Rabad's has been often studied and carefully reconstructed. (J. Reifmann, "A Biography of Rabad the Author of the Hassagot" (Heb.), *Ha-Maggid*, VI [1862], 382-390; H. Gross, "R. Abraham b. David Aus Posquières," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, XXII [1873], 337-344, 398-407, 446-459, 536-546, XXIII [1874], 19-23, 76-85, 164-182, 275-276; A. Marx, "R. Abraham b. David et R. Zerahya Ha-Levi," *REJ*, LIX [1910], 200-224; B. Bergmann (ed.), *Katuv Sham* [Jerusalem, 1957], vide Introduction: "Rabad," *Encyclopædia Hebraica*, I, 294-295; Twersky.)

² Abraham bar Hiyya, *Sefer ha-Ibbur*, ed. Filipowski (London, 1851), p. 4.

³ Judah ibn Tibbon, *Musar Ab*, I. Abrahams (ed.), *Hebrew Ethical Wills* (Philadelphia, 1926), I, 57.

(ed.),^d

mathematical norms, and began a family tradition of translation by rendering from Arabic to Hebrew works by Bahya ibn Paquda and Solomon ibn Gabirol. (One of his sons, David, became the most active Maimonist in the controversy of 1230—1235.) Contemporaneously Joseph ibn Plat, a transplanted Castilian, instructed scholars of Narbonne and Lunel in the Spanish Talmudic tradition. We know only the scholars. They were the most historically visible of the merchants and emigrés who, fleeing Almohade terror and Reconquest dislocation, made their way into the more settled Provence.¹

Where Provençal Jewish history remains dim and uncertain during the early Middle Ages, it emerged with startling vigor in the 12th century. Shortly after mid-century the Castilian traveler-journalist, Benjamin b. Jonah of Tudela, pictured the area in flourishing terms. There were aljamins in all the major centers bordering the Mediterranean, north from Barcelona to Marseille and spreading inland to Aquitaine and the Auvergne. These communities were often fairly large for the time—one hundred to two hundred souls or more—and seemingly prosperous. Trade was apparently the major contributory cause.² Academies and scholarship flourished.

The southern sun graced a land basking in new wealth, busily growing, eager to savor new tastes and new texts and a bit more conscious than the rest of Western Europe of the limitations of Christian culture. The same sun graced the Jewish settlements and made them aware of and hungry for rabbinic delights beyond those of the European *yeshivot*. The Talmudically advantaged Rabad was not unaware of the baggage of apologetics and speculation, both mystical and philosophical, which was being passed through custom by the translators at Lunel and elsewhere.³ Careful records have

¹ Later teachers were conscious of the importance and chronology of this cultural transmission. Towards the end of the 13th century Yedaya Penini of Béziers wrote to Solomon ibn Adret, "Our ancestors told that the pious and honorable and wise of the region received Abraham ibn Ezra with great favor. It was he who opened our eyes to the light of science." (Solomon ibn Adret, *She'elot u-Teshubot* [Bologna, 1539], I, No. 418.)

² This economic factor was recognized at the time. cf. Benjamin of Tudela on Marseilles (*Massa'ot* [Lemberg, 1859], i. 4.)

³ R. Abraham *Ab Bet Din* of Narbonne, his teacher and father-in-law, had crossed the Pyrenees to study with Judah b. Barzillai in Barcelona. Meshullam b. Jacob, besides being an excellent scholar, was the Maecenas of the early translations of the ibn Tibbons. A polemic compendium of the Maimonidean dispute of 1305 contains an interesting confirmation of Meshul-

(italics)
 ↓
 Kultur -
 kampf

established that Rabad cited in his works some paragraphs ^{from} Honein ibn Ishak, Saadya, Abraham bar Hiyya, Solomon ibn Gabirol, and Judah ha-Levi and that he was among those who urged ibn Tibbon to complete his translation of Bahya ibn Paquda's *Kitab Al-Hidaya 'Ila Fara'id Al-Aulub* (Hebrew, *Hovot ha-Lebobot*; English, *Duties of the Heart*).¹

Whatever Rabad intended the *hassagot* to accomplish, he did not author them as the opening gun of an anti-philosophic Kultur - kampf. What reason would he have to do so? He had before him a *halachic* text. He found in it many errors. It may have seemed pretentious, but its purpose was honorable and its subject time honored. Maimonides had spoken eloquently of the substantive truth of the Torah Law. The *Mishneh Torah* stated the law and left aside all discussion of possible rational explanations of these laws.² Rabad had not experienced the Albigensian crusade nor the new hard line of the Church. He could not foresee that one day philosophy might corrode the close-knit unity of Jewish life. Philosophy was still, in his day, a brand new and eagerly sought after delicacy. In all probability he did not even think of Maimonides principally as a philosopher. In 1198 when Rabad died Samuel ibn Tibbon was just beginning the *Moreh's* translation.

A case can be made that in Rabad and Maimonides we find opposed two concepts of Jewish piety. Both were pious men, but each defined piety in different terms. We speak now not of the piety of worship but of the piety of study (Torah), which enjoys in the Jewish world a religious virtue. To Maimonides "Torah" ultimately involved the activation of the intellect. It was essentially philosophic in its importance as patron of such interest. Joseph b. Makir, the Narbonne philosopher, cited the sainted and venerable Meshullam as patriarch and validator of his intellectual interest. (Abba Mari b. Moses ha-Yarhi, *Sefer Minhag Kenaot* [Pressburg, 1838], p. 85.)

¹ Louis Ginzberg has shown that the *hassagah* to *M.T. Teshubah* 5 : 5 was a literal translation of Honein ibn Ishak's *Musre ha-Philosophim*. ("Abraham b. David," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, I, 103.) Marx has detailed Rabad's knowledge of Judah ha-Levi's *Kuzari* (*REJ*, LIX [1910], 207) and Twersky his knowledge of Abraham ibn Ezra's *Yesod Mora*, Solomon ibn Gabirol's *Tikkun Midot ha-Nefesh* and Abraham bar Hiyya (p. 274 ff.). However, Rabad knew no Arabic. He called Arabic "a strange dark language." (*REJ*, LIX [1910], 208.) Living in the generation before Samuel ibn Tibbon, Judah al Harizi, Abraham b. Hasdai and others occupied themselves with the Aristotelian *Organon*, Galen, Euclid, Avicenna, and Averroes; Rabad knew philosophy largely as dialectics and as Neo-Platonic theosophy and apologetics.

² *M.T. Melakhim* 11 : 3.

ic. It presumed *halacha* but in its upper reaches moved far beyond it, into metaphysics. To Rabad "Torah" involved an immersion in tradition—a mastery of the four ells of *halacha*; philosophy was but a pleasant if dilettantish sidelight.¹

One of the features of the Maimonidean controversy of 1230–35 was the deference, even reverence, paid throughout to Maimonides himself. Solomon b. Abraham of Montpellier, the self-acknowledged leader of the anti-Maimonid camp, affirmed his constant respect and admiration.² Compare this with the offhandedness of Rabad's curt citations, "this man" or "this author," and his more than occasional outbursts of vitriol, "If they (certain righteous men) had been present when he said this, they would have applied burning torches to his face."³ "This author brought up water from deep wells but the water he brought up was turgid."⁴ Rabad saw no reason to hang on Maimonides' every word. Until scholarly respect became in the next generation awed reverence there could be no Maimonidean controversy.

Rabad's role in the Maimonidean controversy was circumstantial and paradoxical. As the critic of the *Mishneh Torah* he pointed up areas where *halachic* issue might be taken and challenge raised. As the critic of the *Mishneh Torah*, he encouraged a later generation to criticism. As the critic of the *Mishneh Torah*, he gave it added stature and usefulness; indeed, his criticisms and comments would be cited by moderates and Maimonidean protagonists in their cause. Thus Nachmanides cited these *hassagot* to the French rabbis as proof of the work's worth and to substantiate his claim that impeccable scholars of first rank had never considered banning it.

¹ This can be seen in the whole burden of Rabad's work. I am indebted to Twersky for one striking confirmation. In *M.T. De'ot* 3 : 3 Maimonides stated the Hebraic distrust of ascetic excess, the barring of excessive fasting or of any weakening or physically debilitating regime because "he will not be able then to understand or research the sciences." Rabad, per contra, explained this attitude, "because he will cease from study [Torah] and prayer." (Twersky, p. 272 and note 47.) cf. also Rabad to *M.T. Lulav* 8 : 5 and to *M.T. Melame Mishkan U'moshav*, where Rabad spoke of being enlightened as to certain esoteric meanings and simple rulings by a presence, "the holy spirit." Rabad's Kabbalah is still moot; but his Torah centered theosophy certainly gave his son, R. Isaac the Blind, a theologic springboard. Between the *Weltanschauungs* of Rabad and of the Geronese school of mystics there are certain elemental ties. In Chapter IX we will develop and contrast these pieties at some length.

² GN, IV, 12. cf. Chapter IX.

³ Rabad to *M.T. Abodah Zarah* 11 : 4.

⁴ Rabad to *M.T. Tumat ha-Met* 12 : 6.

Already all the sons of Lunel and their great rabbi Abraham b. David, peace be unto him, have seen this book. They did not label it unfit...but all of them studied and read it continuously. Abraham b. David discussed some of its concepts acidly, but he made no claim that it was either heretical or misleading. God forbid!¹

Reviewing Rabad's criticism from their awareness of the subsequent controversy, modern scholars have put Rabad in arms against Maimonides' Aristotelianism. Such a case is more easily stated than proved. Rabad's attitude to philosophy is hard to characterize. Certainly he did not believe philosophy to be an end in itself.

This writer did not follow the practice of the sages. For a writer does not begin a discussion unless he is able to complete it. Maimonides here raised difficult issues and he left these issues hanging in mid-air, dependent entirely on being accepted on faith.

It were better for him to have left this matter in its undisturbed simplicity. He should not have bothered men's minds with doubts—even if man's heart is thereby troubled only for the space of an hour.²

Rabad was keenly aware of some divergences between rabbinic learning and philosophic logic. "We ought not to depend for our learning on one who is not proficient in rabbinics."³ However intrigued he may have been with the new learning, this was not his world and he was suspicious of its validity.⁴

Rabad's view of God was as non-anthropomorphic as Maimonides'. He passed up Maimonides' discussions of God's essence and existence in *Sefer ha-Mada* without comment, but Maimonides had developed the matter further. He had declared that one who assumed any human qualities of the Godhead was perforce a *Min*. Certain practical consequences followed, and Rabad rose angrily to the issue.

Why should the one who conceived God anthropomorphically be called a *Min*? How many better and greater than he have held such opinions following what they understood of the Bible

¹ KTR, III, 9b.

² Rabad to M.T. Teshubah 5:5.

³ Katuv Sham (Hassagot ha-Rabad 'al Ba'al ha-Me'or) to Rosh Hashonah, ed. B. Bergmann (Jerusalem, 1957), p. 23.

⁴ Rabad to M.T. Kiddush ha-Hodesh 7:7.

and from what they read in the Midrashim which is capable of such interpretation.¹

The *halachist* in Rabad was outraged. This was unorthodox law. But one can not label Rabad a disciple of the *Shiur Komah* or of any anthropomorphic theosophy on the basis of this gloss. It said no more than that Judaism had never read the simple minded or the literalist out of the fold. It reveals nothing of Rabad's personal profession.

To Maimonides' analysis of the ticklish problem of reconciling God's foreknowledge and man's freedom of will (which Maimonides resolved semantically by arguing the absolute otherness of divine knowledge) Rabad suggested his own solution, i.e. that the attributes of Knowledge and Will are separate in the Godhead.² Rabad was not above speculating with the familiar theological coin of the Midrashic literature.

Rabad was not unwilling to speculate on his own. Thus to Maimonides' declaration of God as Creator and Foundation (*Yesod*), Rabad egregiously and pointedly added the nicety that God must be considered Creator *ex nihilo* and not as a sculptor who fashioned with preexistent elements.³

Rabad did not face either Maimonides' need to be "advanced" or "systematically consistent"; the Provençal world was not yet as "intellectual" as the Sephardic. As yet philosophy had no broad approval among the enlightened of the Midi. Maimonides would not permit any assumption of potency in omens. Rabad equivocated, dredging up a text from *T. B. Hullin* 95b that if an omen has proven out three times it possessed a presumption of reliability.⁴ Maimonides explained Exodus 33:15 (Moses' plea, "Show me, I beseech Thee, Thy glory") as a request for true and full metaphysical knowledge. Rabad objected that Moses had already "seen" God at Sinai and that this passage should therefore be construed as evidencing Moses' concern for God's special presence among and protection of Israel.⁵

Rabad neither knew of the pressures which later precipitated the Maimonidean controversy nor did he deny himself the pleasures of Midrashic, non-authoritative speculation. He may even have

¹ Rabad to *M.T. Teshubah* 3 : 7.

² Rabad to *M.T. Teshubah* 5 : 5.

³ Rabad to *M.T. Teshubah* 3 : 7.

⁴ Rabad to *M.T. Abodah Zarah* 11 : 5.

⁵ Rabad to *M.T. Yesode ha-Torah* 1 : 10.

felt himself a philosopher, though he had not mastered its "Greek" systematics. His opposition was not to speculation *per se* but to Maimonides' specifics. Like the Damascus school before him, Rabad sensed the novelty of Maimonides' eschatology and reacted unfavorably.

To Maimonides' description of the Messianic Age as one of independence for Israel in which the familiar laws of nature continue routinely, Rabad wondered what of the miraculous promises of Isaiah 11:1-7.¹ To Maimonides' insistence that the Messianic King will perform no miracles or wonders and that he will not bring into being anything new, Rabad suggested, but did not insist, that this limitation was not religiously elemental. Maimonides had cited Akiba's acceptance of Bar Kochba as Messiah as proof that scholars did not require any magical or supernatural powers of the Messiah—only his political success in the reestablishment of an independent Israel. Rabad countered with the tradition of *T.B. Sanhedrin* 93b that the sages did in fact examine Bar Kochba and order his execution when he failed.² Rabad's strictures on Maimonides' views on the *Olam ha-Ba* were astringent:

"The words of this man appear to me to be close to the position of one who says there is no resurrection for the body only for the soul and, by my life, this was not the prevailing opinion of the sages." cf. *T.B. Ketubot* 111b "In the future the righteous will stand up in their garments—a deduction *a minori ad majus*... and from what is stated in *T.B. Shabbat* 114a "So they commanded their sons do not bury us in white garments and not in black shrouds, white lest I do not merit... black lest I have merit..." and from *T.B. Sanhedrin* 92a "The righteous will not revert to dust... but remain in their accustomed form" and from *T.B. Sanhedrin* 90b-91a "They will rise in their deformities and be healed." All of which is proof that the dead will be resurrected in their bodies.³

Two points must be added: 1) Rabad subsequently qualified his position by saying, "It is possible that the Creator may make their bodies strong and healthy like the bodies of the angels and Elijah";⁴ 2) Rabad's complaint about Maimonides' treatment of resurrection and theosophy was to its substance, not to its appearance in the text. "This one did not follow the custom of scholars;

¹ Rabad to *M.T. Melaki* 12:1. m

² Rabad to *M.T. Melaki* 11:3. m

³ Rabad to *M.T. Teshubah* 8:4.

⁴ *Ibid.*

for no man begins a thing he does not know how to finish, whereas he commenced with inquiries and questions and left the issues open and only twisted it around incidentally to the faith. It would have been better had he left the innocent in their innocence."¹ It follows that competent speculation, though difficult, would not be unwelcome.

Rabad's *hassagot* to the *Mishneh Torah* were written when he was at the apogee of an illustrious career,² and their fame was as much due to Rabad's own fame as to the brilliance of his trenchant analysis of the text.³ Medieval writers deemed him the dean of Provençal *halachists* in his generation.⁴ A man of many virtues but not always of discretion, Rabad was by his own admission "the revered jurist to whom neighboring communities and scholars submitted their appeals and inquiries."⁵

To evaluate these *hassagot* we must bear in mind that they were academic in origin and purpose, i.e. Rabad's lecture notes to advanced students, and that they were not the first questions raised by readers to the *Mishneh Torah* text.

Rabad's choice of a gloss as his technique of criticism can be

¹ *Ibid.*

² Rabad's work can be listed briefly: *Issure Mashehu*, a short critique of his teacher's (Meshullam b. Jacob) study on the fitness of mixtures in various foods; *Hibbur ha-Mizvot ha-Nogahot Atah ba-arets*, a brief codex for travelers and pilgrims of laws applicable in the Holy Land but not required in the Diaspora; *Hibbur Harsha'ot*, an excursus of the implications of contractual powers transferred to agents; a *Commentary on the Talmud* of which we control segments of many sections, (parts on *Shevuot* and *Abodah Zarah* and all of *Baba Kama*), *Hilhot Lulav*, a code of *Sukkot* ritually important as emphasizing Provençal traditions against Spanish customs; *Ba'ale ha-Nefesh*, a code of the laws of uncleanness and purification; a *Commentary to Sifra*; *Commentaries to Mishnah Edyot*, *Kinnim*—there may have been others; some holiday lectures and sermons; *Temim Deim*, a compendium of Responsa; and *hassagot* to Zecharyah ha-Levi's *Sefer ha-Maor*, to Isaac of Fez' *Halahot* and Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*.

³ It is possible that Rabad controlled a manuscript of the *Mishneh Torah* more akin to the Oxford manuscript published by M. Hyamson, *The Mishneh Torah*, 2 vols. (New York, 1937, 1949) than to the more familiar text through which rabbinic students have known these glosses. This would explain the often noted *halachic* discrepancies in the familiar text. cf. *M.T. Yesode ha-Torah* 3 : 5, *Talmud Torah* 5 : 5, *Abodah Zarah* 7 : 7, 7 : 11, etc. For the technical references to the various texts cf. A. Neubauer, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, I (Oxford, 1886), 114.

⁴ Anon., *Sefer ha-Kabbalah*; Neubauer, *Medieval Jewish Chronicles*, I, 84; Isaac b. Abba Mari, *Sefer ha-Ittur* (Lemberg, 1860), II, 21; Solomon ibn Verga, *Shebet Yehudah*, A. Shohet (ed.) (Jerusalem, 1947), pp. 146, 171.

⁵ Rabad, *Temim Deim* (Lemberg, 1811), No. 113.

(no italics)

explained both personally and academically. It was a form in which he delighted. He had previously completed two such marginalia, one to Zecharyah ha-Levi's *Sefer ha-Maor*, the other to Alfasi's *Halakot*. This form was a useful academic device in that it permitted a critical discussion with students of the points raised, ~~but~~ gave them on completion a corrected text. Rabad's choice of a gloss criticism offers us insight into his purpose. By its nature a gloss establishes a text. At the very least it admits the text's popularity, for the gloss can not survive the demise of its literary parent. The intent of a glossator is both to correct the author and to correct the author's text. His purpose can be spoken of as existential. His program is to correct, establish warning signals, suggest lacunae or gross errors in brief, to make it possible for a reader to use the work as a dependable reference in his studies and juridic work. It is not surprising that Rabad did not think to submit his text to Maimonides. There would have been no benefit. His concern was not to change Maimonides' mind, but to regulate the teaching and practice of his students.¹ and office.

Rabad referred to Maimonides as an erudite, yes, and younger, contemporary whose teachings must be fenced within necessary limits and to whose writings necessary danger signs and warning signals must be affixed. Acerbity was to Rabad a natural inclination, and the harshness of some of his language must not tempt us to see in his writings more than was intended.² Many notes simply elaborate, expressing neither approval nor disapproval. Others express approval.³ Rabad was concerned in the *Hassagot*

¹ There is an old tradition that Maimonides saw the *hassagot* of Rabad. (Simeon b. Zemah Duran, *Sefer ha-Tashbez* [Amsterdam, 1738], p. 72.) There is also a pious anecdote that having seen the book Maimonides commented, "Never have I been bested but by this one author." (*ibid.*) Twersky tries to authenticate the tradition, rather unsuccessfully in the author's opinion. (Twersky, p. 195 f.) There is no evidence that even Abraham Maimonides ever saw the whole corpus of Rabad's *hassagot*. Twersky dismissed the omission of this legendary tradition by Joseph ha-Zaddik too lightly. (*Sefer Zaddik*, A. Neubauer (ed.), *Medieval Jewish Chronicles*, I, 94.)

² Rabad often suggested that an error was not Maimonides' but a careless scribe's (*Rabad to M.T. Tumeat ha-Met* 7 : 3; *Melahim* 9 : 11; *Genebah* 5 : 2) or that Maimonides controlled a faulty text and erred through no fault of his own. (*Rabad to M.T. Teshubah* 4 : 4.)

³ "He has spoken well." "He has interpreted accurately." "He has developed the point well." (*Rabad to M.T. Zizit* 3 : 1, *Genebah* 13 : 15, *Milah* 7 : 2, *Shabbat* 5 : 28, 4 : 17, 29 : 14, *Nezikim* 1 : 18, *Shekanim* 9 : 9, *Maachelot Assurot* 10 : 20, *Yom Tov* 1 : 14, *Terumot* 10 : 16, *Parah Adumah* 5 : 5,

with the integrity of his *halachic* world. His concern was for the structure of law, not for the stability of communal life. This latter was not as yet threatened in Posquières.

How, then, shall we assess these *hassagot*? Unfortunately, they lack introduction or preface. We begin *in media res*: the first note simply corrected Maimonides' dating of a certain Ahijah the Shilonite, the second arguing against Maimonides' "who's who" among the disciples of Judah ha-Nasi.¹

Rabad's one general statement on the *Mishneh Torah* is well known:

I say² he wanted to bring order but he did not succeed because he departed from the method of all students of the Law who came before him, in that they brought proof of their teachings, and in that they set out the Law in the name of its propounder.

This method offers great advantage in its procedures, since when a judge decided to permit or prohibit finding the decision in one place, if he had known that there was a decision by one greater than he, he would have changed his opinion to conform.

Now I have no way of knowing whether I should reverse my legal traditions and opinions because of the nature of the work of this writer. If the one who disagrees with me is greater than I, then all is well; if not, why should I withdraw my opinion for him?

Further, there are matters in which the Geonim disagree. This author arbitrarily chose one opinion and set it down. Why should I depend upon his choice if it does not find favor with me, especially if I do not know whether the dissenter has the right to differ? This is nothing but a presumptuous project.³

Justice, in Rabad's mind, rested not in the law library but in the living law—in a jurist, not in a book. Such a code as the *Mishneh Torah* threatened the balance between case presentation, due process, and equity which a trained jurist class, following ancient norms, had established. A code would upset this balance and make the Law more rigid than it need be.

Kilayim 3 : 3.) At times Rabad approved a point even though this reversed familiar traditions. "He spoke well, even though R—does not agree." (*Rabad to M.T. Yom Tov* 1 : 14.) At times he merely defined Maimonides' position further. (*Rabad to M.T. Abodah Zarah* 10 : 14, *Tefillah* 9 : 11, *Keriat Shema* 14 : 8, *Beth ha-Behirah* 15 : 16, *Korbanot* 10 : 11.)

¹ *Rabad to M.T. Introduction.*

² The abbreviation, aleph-aleph, might be translated with equal correctness, "Abraham states."

³ *Rabad to M.T. Introduction.*

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To illustrate the unreliability of this code (and presumably of any code) Rabad reintroduced the sources. "This writer brings those matters according to their simplistic explanation. When I looked in the Talmud at the pertinent references I found that the explanation was not so."¹ "I researched this rule but I could not find it either in the Mishnah or the Tosefta or in the Babylonian Talmud. Perhaps it follows by what was said by..."² Again and again we come upon, "By my life the Mishnah is not so"³ or the like.

It should not be thought that Maimonides proposed to stifle equity and legal change while Rabad by affirming the older case method sought greater change. Rabad was anything but an innovator. When Maimonides stipulated that a court might recast the decrees of an earlier body "if it is greater than that body in numbers and wisdom," Abraham took pains to circumscribe this power, however doubtful it certainly was that such a court would ever again be convened.⁴ When Maimonides spoke of the "provisional power of a court to permit what the Bible prohibits and to prohibit what it permits", Abraham shied away from any language which made it appear that such decisions contravened Scripture.⁵

Rabad, like Moses ha-Kohen, set great store by local custom. Maimonides had stipulated that at a circumcision the Moel should recite the blessing, "who has commanded us concerning circumcision." Rabad added, "Our custom is that the Sandek recites it."⁶ Maimonides had permitted the reading of the last eight verses of Deuteronomy without a *minyan*, arguing that these verses had been altered since Moses' day. Rabad argued that the relevant Talmudic formula, "that an individual reads them," implied only that the Hazan did not read these verses with him.⁷ Maimonides had accepted the general indifference to women's rights prevalent in the Moslem world when he prescribed marital intercourse when the sex act was medically or physically necessary for the man.

¹ Rabad to M.T. Shabbat 1:10.

² Rabad to M.T. Shabbat V'Yovel 4:6.

³ Rabad to M.T. Tumeat ha-Met 7:7.

⁴ Rabad to M.T. Mumrim 2:2.

⁵ Rabad to M.T. Mumrim 2:9.

⁶ Rabad to M.T. Milah 3:1.

⁷ Rabad to M.T. Tefillah 13:6. cf. also Rabad to M.T. Berachot 9:16, Erubin 1:16, Sukkah 6:12, Iyshut 3:23, etc.

Rabad, as a man of the West, supplemented, "similarly when she insists".¹ Maimonides had declared that one who converted in time of persecution was a *mumar* (one who had alienated himself).² Rabad labeled him a *min* (heretic). To Rabad in a trinitarian environment such a man perforce denied God's unity, while to Maimonides in the unitarian Islamic world no such denial of monotheism was implicit.³ Some notes say no more than "Not so." "He erred."⁴ Others develop Rabad's conflicting views at length. Typical in form and method is his gloss to *Talmud Torah* 7:7. Maimonides had stated that three citizens or one qualified and authorized sage are required to release the *niddui* or *herem*. Rabad appended:

This is not so. According to the number and rank of those who pronounced the ban is the number required to lift it. Perhaps this refers to the case where release is effected during the period of sentence, but when the sentence is served any three or one scholar may release him. Perhaps this refers to the case where one not a scholar pronounced the ban for a transgression, then after the serving of the sentence any three or one scholar may release him. However, if many made the ban, an equal number is required to release from the ban.⁵

Rabad assumes the rabbinic competence of his reader. His technique is to raise subtle but significant qualifications, that will suggest to such a reader a whole sackful of reservations.

Other glosses developed questions to Maimonides' regulations without restating the law or without insisting finally that a formula be changed. Maimonides ruled that a sage who imposed *niddui* on himself may release himself. Rabad wondered:

This is not clear. If so then why did Judah not release himself... [Ed: from the vow to bring Benjamin home safely].⁶

¹ Rabad to M.T. *De'ot* 3:2.

² *Mumar* is usually translated "Apostate," but see J. J. Petuchowski, "The Mumar—A Study in Rabbinic Psychology," *HUCA*, XXX (1959), 179-190.

³ Rabad to M.T. *Teshubot* 3:9. Subsequent Church censorship makes the relevant Talmudic text uncertain. The original text may have read *meshumad*, which would underscore the meliorative character of Maimonides' ruling.

⁴ Rabad to M.T. *Genebah V'abedah* 13:15.

⁵ Cf. also Rabad to M.T. *Abodah Zarah* 2:5, 3:9, 5:13, 6:10, 8:3, 8:11, 9:4, 9:13, 10:4, 12:10, *Teshubot* 5:2, *Shevi'ut* 3:6.

⁶ Rabad to M.T. *Talmud Torah* 7:11. cf. Rabad to M.T. *Abodah Zarah* 11:1, *Teshubah* 10:6.

Teshubah

Teshubah

Another typical form challenged the authority of a statement, i.e. its base in tradition. Maimonides had stated that the refuge cities in Palestine could never become apostate cities¹. Rabad began his note, "I do not know where he found this. It is not ~~stated~~ stated in the Talmud except in the one case of Jerusalem..." Not so gentle, but as typical was Rabad's reaction to *Abodah Zarah* 10:6, where Maimonides set the rule that were Israel to be reestablished as a Jewish state no gentile might settle there or even trade there unless he bound himself to the basic terms of moral law (the seven Noahite commandments). Rabad commented:

We do not know the source. We never heard this tradition. The Biblical verses which he adduces (Exodus 22:33 etc.) refer only to the seven Canaanite nations. Further even on his own terms it is a restriction on settlement only, never on trade or transit.

Rabad also suggested that Maimonides' translations from the familiar legal language of the Talmud into Mishnaic Hebrew often distorted the meaning of an ancient formula.² Let it be emphasized that Rabad did not complain of Maimonides' choice of pure Hebrew but of the effect of translation on the nuances of precise texts. Still another form resurrected a Talmudic debate to suggest that Maimonides had misinterpreted a legal discussion and had followed the minority rather than the majority opinion.³ A variant disapprovingly indicated a rabbinic debate which earlier authorities had left unresolved for which Maimonides had furnished a single final decision.⁴

- (indent for paragraph) 4) Rabad never read the *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*. It was translated from the Arabic only after his death. However, Maimonides had prefaced the *Mishneh Torah* with a listing of the Torah commandments and a brief statement of his method of selection; Rabad passed over the fourteen general principles of selection without comment. However, he objected to the inclusion among the positive commandments of those laws which he felt involved double affirmations, and which, therefore, logically ought to be listed as negative commandments (P.C. 7 [Deut. 10:20], 60 [Lev. 22:27], 146 [Deut.

¹ Rabad to M.T. *Abodah Zarah* 4 : 4.

² Rabad to M. T. *Shabbat* 6 : 9.

³ Rabad to M.T. *Abodah Zarah* 7 : 10, 8 : 1, 8 : 2, *Teshubah* 3 : 6.

⁴ Rabad to M.T. *Korban Pesach* 7 : 3, *Abodah Zarah* 17 : 4, *Shabbat* 8 : 6, *Abot ha-Tumeh* 5 : 7.

Teshubah

12:12], 149 [Lev. 11:2]). He felt that Positive Commandment 6 (Deut. 10:20, "and to Him shalt thou cleave") was not a separate command but a warning not to swear by other gods, and that Positive Commandment 108 (Num. 19:9 and 21) should have been divided into two separate laws, one concerning the rules of sprinkling as applied to the clean and one as applied to the unclean. It is a pity that Rabad could not have seen the fuller text. His comments would have been worth the reading. Some, too, would have been retracted. Thus his reasoning that the law requiring that the Temple altar be built only of stone should have been listed among the positive commandments had been reviewed and cogently dismissed by Maimonides in his excurses on Positive Commandment 20 (Ex. 25:8). On similar grounds Rabad's objection to Positive Commandment 239 (Ex. 21:37) would have been unnecessary.¹

With Rabad we have the confrontation of genius by excellence. The *hassagot* have ever defied categorization, for they touch almost every area of the rabbinic geography and range widely and seemingly erratically. Surely Rabad could have written far more than the four hundred-odd marginalia he set down. Yet need he have done so? He was writing for a technically skilled reading public. His interest was only in the refinement of law. Not the *Mishneh Torah* but the Torah preoccupied him. Never did it enter his mind that Maimonides' code would actually become the basic legal text of Jewish life. It was but another of a long line of important volumes of juridic scholarship to be valued for its contributions and faulted for its confusions. Rabad is the first first-rate critic of the *Mishneh Torah*, but he did not fire the opening gun in that *Kulturkampf* which historians label the Maimonidean controversy.

¹ Nachmanides, in his later and much more extensive gloss of the *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, showed that he had read these *hassagot*. This can be seen from the commentary prepared by Nachmanides to a small work of the Rabad's on the laws of the Lulav, reported by Meiri in his *Magen Abot*. Similarly we find the language of Negative Commandment 58 duplicated in the notes of Rabad and of Nachmanides. Both scholars argued that the command that a soldier should not entertain fear in battle is an expectation or a hope, not a command. Both Rabad and Nachmanides argued that Positive Command 198 (that in granting a loan to an idolator interest is to be demanded) was not a Positive Commandment at all. Rabad took out the sting of Deut. 23 : 21 and from the *Sifre ad loc* by arguing that this text did not establish a Positive Commandment but rather a possibility which devolved from the Negative Commandment that interest may not be asked of an Israelite.

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CHAPTER SIX

JONATHAN HA-KOHEN OF LUNEL AND THE BROADENING OF CRITICAL HORIZONS

Research much in outside books and you will find
that which will give status to its doer in the gates,
that t that which will lengthen your speech among the
mighty and exalt your name among your fellow
academics.¹

In the 12th century the various centers of Jewish life, heretofore largely hermetic, began to draw on each other. By mid-century cultural apartheid was giving way rather rapidly to cultural cross-fertilization.

Rashi (Solomon b. Isaac, 1040—1105), the rabbinic giant of his age, lived intellectually as well as physically entirely within the Franco-Jewish world. He knew nothing of the philosophic output of an Isaac Israeli (c. 855—955) or of a Saadya Gaon (882—942). He did not control the legal works of Alfasi (Isaac b. Jacob ha-Kohen, 1013—1103), his Sephardic and equally illustrious rabbinic contemporary. Similarly, Alfasi had not read Rashi's monumental contributions.

had taken firm root Cross-fertilization took place in many ways and at many levels. The Tosaphist tradition of Talmudic study moved north to south. By the mid-12th century it had penetrated the Provençal schools. By the end of the century it had root taken firm even in Spanish soil. Conversely, the Alfasi-Joseph ibn Migash system of codification moved south to north. At mid-century Jonathan ha-Kohen of Lunel was studying *halacha* with Joseph's son in Toledo and a great debate was breaking out in the schools of Narbonne and Lunel among Rabad, Zecharyah ha-Levi and others over the relative weight to be credited to Alfasi or the Tosaphists. Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* capped the influence of the Sephardic school on the European Jewish communities but did not carry the day.

We have already noted a growing awareness of differences in *minhag* manifested by the burgeoning literature of customaries.²

¹ Neubauer, I, 67. Samuel ha-Nagid, quoted by Judah ibn Tibbon.

² Cf. Chapter V.

Parallel to this commingling of variant *halachic* traditions there occurred an exchange of philosophic materials. The systole of this exchange was east to west as the sophisticated Arab-Hebrew philosophic tradition was translated and penetrated western Europe. The diastole was west to east and later when, perhaps a century later, the new European compound of philosophy and piety, Kabbalah, penetrated the Holy Land and the Near East.

The *Moreh Nebuchim* would have remained to us but a pebble in a stone heap and a rose among nettles (since the work was given to those who could not read it)—if God had not brought to us a wise man, learned in all sciences, taught by his father the literature and language of the Arabs, the son of the wondrous sage, the skilled physician R. Judah ibn Tibbon the Spaniard who made available to us and enlightened and taught us from books of the various intellectual disciplines by translating for us [Saadya's] *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*; [Bahya ibn Paquda's] *Book of the Duties of the Heart*; [Solomon ibn Gabirol's] *Book of the Qualities of the Soul and Chain of Pearls*; [Judah ha-Levi's] *Book of the Khazars*, the *Book of Grammar*, and the *Book of Roots* of [Jonah] ibn Ganah and his *Book of Grammar* (*Sefer ha-Rikmah*).¹

In the 1160's Meshullam b. Jacob of Lunel underwrote a busy translation factory centered on the scholar-physician-translator Judah b. Saul ibn Tibbon (1120-1190). The letter to Maimonides just quoted indicates the breadth of Judah's accomplishment. At the same time, in nearby Narbonne, Joseph b. Isaac Kimhi (1105-1170) established another scholar-translator dynasty and brought out duplicate but valuable translations of Bahya and ibn Gabirol.

At the turn of the century not only these Jewish works but their Greek and Arab counterparts and sources began to be transhipped. Judah ibn Tibbon's son Samuel (1150-1230) translated Maimonides' *Moreh Nebuchim*, *Ma'amar Tehiyyat ha-Metim*, and *Commentary to Mishnah Pirke Abot*, Ali ibn Ridwan's commentary on the *Ars Parva* of Galen, three small treatises of Averroes known in Hebrew as the *Shelochah Ma'amarim*, and Yahyah Ali Batrik's Arabic paraphrase of Aristotle's *Meteora*. As the years pressed on more and more literary baggage passed over through the linguistic midwifery of Judah al Harizi (c. 1160—

(Spanish)
(Italics)

¹ Letter of Jonathan ha-Kohen, *Ginze Yerushalayim*, S. Wertheimer (ed.), I (1896), 33.

thoughts of
al Ghazali
Averroes ↑

the

1220), Abraham ibn Hisdai (c. 1190—c. 1250), David Kimhi (1160—1235), Berechiah ha-Nakdan (c. 1180—1260), and others. Interests broadened. Judah al Harizi, for instance, translated not only Maimonides' *Moreh*, the first part of his *Commentary to the Mishnah*, and Honein ibn Ishak's *Musre ha-Philosophim*, but an anonymous Arabic paraphrase of Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*. The thoughts of (through Abraham ibn Hisdai),¹ Avicenna, Averroes, and Aristotle² (largely through Averroes' paraphrases) were, by the 1220's, in good part available to a qualified European Jewish audience. These translators did more than translate. In his letter requesting ~~the~~ last volume of the *Moreh*, Jonathan ha-Kohen praised Samuel ibn Tibbon as one who "gave us background, made us to understand, and taught us from philosophic texts"³

If Torah be taken generically as word-symbol of the entire rabbinic tradition, Rabad's faith agreed with the Mishnaic proposition, "Turn it (the Torah) over, turn it over again, for everything is in it."⁴ Tradition delimited truth even if tradition's depths were not easily mined. There were those, however, among Rabad's Provençal contemporaries who though professionally competent in rabbinics and personally scrupulous in observance (and certainly convinced that the Torah was the ultimate repository of truth) nevertheless looked for reflections of truth both within "the" book and in the new "outside" books. The Torah was truth, but there was truth also in medicine, poetry, astronomy, calligraphy, mathematics, etc., yes, even in certain philosophies.

Rabad's classmate and contemporary, Jonathan b. David ha-Kohen (c. 1135—1215), was of this inquisitive breed.⁵ Truth is one. The new truths would help mine and refine the full virtue of the old. In a letter to Maimonides Jonathan praised those well versed in secular learning as indispensable "in opening the rooms of the Torah so that the eye can perceive".⁶

¹ Abraham ibn Hisdai, *Mozene Zedek*, ed. Goldenthal (Leipzig, 1839).

² M. Steinschneider, *Die Hebräischen Uebersetzungen Des Mittel-Alters* (Berlin, 1893); N. Golb, "The Hebrew Translation of Averroes' *Fasl Al-Moqal*," *PAAJL*, XXV (1956), 91-95; A. Hyman, "The Composition and Translation of Averroes' 'Ma'amar be-'Esom ha-Galgol'," *Studies and Essays in Honor of A. A. Neuman* (Philadelphia, 1962), pp. 299-307.

³ *Ginze Yerushalayim*, p. 33. ⁴ *Mishnah, Pirke Aboi* 5 : 22.

⁵ Jonathan's biography remains to be adequately written. cf. S. K. Mirsky, "R. Jonathan of Lunel" (Heb.), *Sura*, II (1956), 242 ff.; S. Assaf, "R. Jonathan ha-Kohen of Lunel" (Heb.), *Tarbiz*, III (1932), 27 ff.

⁶ Marx, *HUCA*, III (1936), 243, line 9.

Whatever his range of intellectual interests, Jonathan b. David ha-Kohen was primarily a competent and respected jurist. There were then no systematic philosophers native to the Provence nor did the Provence ever develop such men. Jonathan's primary occupation and interest was the law. He had been a contemporary and fellow student of Rabad and Zecharyah ha-Levi at the Narbonne *yeshibah*. His major life work was a well regarded commentary to portions of Alfasi's *Halachot* in the form of longish essays explaining the underlying Mishnah text.¹

Whatever his intellectual angle of vision, Jonathan was primarily a pious, even ascetic believer, deeply stirred by the messianic hope of redemption. In an encomium Jonah b. Solomon ibn Behaleel described him not only as "one who vigorously propagated the Torah" but equally as one who "rejected the pleasures of the day."² Circa 1210 Jonathan pilgrimaged to the Holy Land in the expectation of an early coming of the Messiah.³

In Maimonides Jonathan found a teacher after his own heart, a rabbi who could call the Talmud his "father" and reason his "sister"⁴, an acknowledged *halachist* (Jonathan set Judah al Harizi to work translating the *Siraj*⁵), a scholar revered for his piety (Jonathan praised Maimonides for "cleaving with his soul to the reverence of his Creator"⁶), yet one alert to and master of all the various intellectual disciplines current. It is our position that Maimonides' reputation for catholicity of knowledge attracted Jonathan to initiate and sustain their correspondence.

¹ *Commentary on Berachot and Erubin* in the El ha-Mekorot edition of Talmud (Jerusalem, 1959); *Commentary on Megillah and Mo'ed Katan*, S. Mirsky (ed.) (Jerusalem, 1956); *Commentary on Hullin*, S. Bamberger (ed.) (Frankfort & Main, 1871); *Commentary on Sukkah*, S. Kaminka (ed.); *Ha-Meassef*, IV (1899), 13b ff., 155a ff.

² N. Wieder, "The Burnt Book of Judah ibn Shabbatai" (Heb.), *Me'udah*, II (1944), 124.

³ It was believed that there was a possibility of the Messiah's arrival in the year 1216. This calculation was based on the prophecy of Num. 23 : 23. (A. H. Silver, *Messianic Speculation in Israel* [New York, 1927], p. 75 f.) That Jonathan was adept at such calculation is evidenced by a eulogy to him found in the Cairo Genizah which begins, "O Torah bewail the one who read your books and interpreted your secrets." (S. Assaf, "Elegies on the Death of the Great in Israel" (Heb.), *Minah le-Yehudah*, I [1950], 164.)

⁴ *Teshubot ha-Rambam*, A. Friemann (ed.) (Jerusalem, 1934) (hereafter TR), p. LIV.

⁵ al Harizi, p. 406. Judah did not prosecute the work beyond the first order *Zeraim*.

⁶ TR, p. LIII.

(indent for new paragraph)

¶ "Our hearts are disturbed. We row about seeking to return to the dry land but are unable."¹ Jonathan thus movingly described to Maimonides the impact of the Eastern philosophic tradition on the West. Here was a new world enticing but confusing. Jonathan sensed its promise and that his generation required competent instruction to avoid its pitfalls. He sensed that traditional apologetics were inadequate, and that neither he nor his fellow European rabbis were sufficiently knowledgeable to be able to answer the many questions which forced themselves to attention.

¶ Not unexpectedly, Jonathan's first concern touched a practical consequence of the new thought rather than some recondite systematic ramification. Philosophy becomes rarified only when its social implications have been exhausted. The issue raised concerned the validity of the science of astrology.² In a letter to be dated circa 1193³ Jonathan requested of Maimonides an authoritative statement on the powers, if any, of the stars and planets over human destiny. There are men about who insist upon man's dependence on the stars.⁴ They quote such texts as the *T. B. Mo'ed Katan* 28a: "Raba said: Life, children, and sustenance depend not on merit but on the planets." Various Talmudic texts cited by defenders of astrology were minutely analyzed. It is clear that Jonathan had trouble in squaring a theory of man's dependence on the power of the stars with his understanding of the religious tenets of divine omnipotence, free will, and retribution.⁵ Although this letter was a query rather than a flat denial submitted for confirmation, it is clear that Jonathan was predisposed against ascribing any efficacy to astrologic calculations.⁶ That Jonathan and/or the Montpellier school, with which Jonathan was then associated, had won their way to a denial of astrologic influence is a remarkable fact not sufficiently underscored. Post-Biblical Judaism had been steeped in astrologic speculation. Long since forgotten were the Biblical invectives against Egyptian and Babylonian necromancers and astrologers and Jeremiah's plea, "Learn not the way of the nations;

¹ *TR*, p. LVII.

² Marx, *HUCA*, III (1936), 311-358.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 348, No. 27.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 345, Nos. 4, 5, 6.

⁶ There is nothing in the text to justify Marx' assertion, "One feels that they believed in its (astrology's) truth in their hearts." (*Ibid.*, p. 315).

be not dismayed by the signs of the heavens."¹ From Mishnaic days to the 13th century one is hard put to find rabbi or philosopher who denied planetary influence. Some qualified or denied the planets' power over Israel.² Others concluded that God could at will release a man from dependence on his star.³ But few, if any, were prepared to deny entirely the power of the stars. A sophisticated astrologic rationale had been brought into the Provence by two early 12th century Spanish transplants, Abraham ibn Ezra⁴ and Abraham bar Hiyya.⁵ Gifted astronomers and mathematicians, these men had developed a subtle and beguiling rationale for popular belief. In short, there was no tradition which categorically denied astral power. No one had yet insisted in the West, as Maimonides was insisting in the East (where, incidentally, he was the first among medieval philosophers so to do) that astrology was not only false but tantamount to idolatry.⁶

In his answer Maimonides presumed that his correspondents had not yet seen the *Mishneh Torah*. The *Mishneh Torah* contained a straightforward, unequivocal prohibition against astrologic practice and belief, even prescribing punishment for anyone who acted on horoscopic advice.

Who is an "observer of times"? The term applies to those who cast horoscopes claiming that astrologically a certain day is auspicious and another unfavorable or that it is well to do a specific task on a certain day or that a certain month or year is inauspicious for a specific task. It is forbidden to be an "observer of times" even if he performed no overt act but only spoke such lies as the foolish believe to be true and pregnant with wisdom. Anyone who acts on such advice... is stripped....⁷

¹ Jer. 10 : 2. cf. Isa. 65 : 4. Lev. 20 : 6 and 27. Deut. 18 : 9-15.

² T. B. *Shabbat* 156a, etc.

³ *Ibid.*, 142a-b, etc.

⁴ "Sefer ha-Mibharim," J. Fleisher, *Semitic Studies in Memory of Immanuel Loew* (Budapest, 1939); *Sefer ha-Te'amim*, J. Fleisher (ed.) (Jerusalem, 1951); *Sefer Reshit Hokhmah*, R. Levy and F. Cantera (eds.) (Baltimore, 1939); *Sefer ha-Meorot*, L. Fleisher (ed.); *Sinai*, V (1937).

⁵ *Hegyon ha-Nefesh*, I. Friemann (ed.) (Leipzig, 1860); *Hibbur ha-Meshihah weha-Tishborot*, J. Guttmann (ed.) (Berlin, 1913); *Megillat ha-Megalleh*, A. Poznanski and J. Guttmann (eds.) (Berlin, 1924); *Zurat ha-Aretz* (Offenbach, 1720).

⁶ Marx, *HUCA*, III (1926), 350, lines 21-27. Note bene that the rules on astrology were subsumed in the *Mishneh Torah* into the category of prohibitions implicit in the Biblical term "idolatry."

⁷ M. T. *Abodah Zarah* 11 : 8-9.

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One wonders, however, if Maimonides did not misinterpret the motivation of Jonathan's letter. Having found this text and having read the other scattered references to free will, retribution and omniscience in the *Mishneh Torah*, Jonathan may simply have wanted Maimonides to draw out and systematize his logic. Possibly he wished to circulate such a document to counter the sophistications of bar Hiyya's *Megillat ha-Megalleh* and ibn Ezra's *Sefer Reshit Hokhmah*. If, as seems to be indicated, Jonathan denied planetary influence he stood almost alone. Rabad qualified Maimonides' prohibition against practicing divination or acting on advice thus secured by insisting that although one may not act on the advice of magician or astrologer, one may act on the basis of premonition or experience.¹ Moses b. Jacob of Coucy (circa 1180—1250) insisted that the common practice of foretelling by random selection of a Biblical verse was "prophecy" rather than "divination" and therefore permissible.² Nachmanides insisted that the planets and intelligences do control human destiny with a single exception—Israel had been uniquely exempted from their invisible chains.³

The issue of astrology was not raised controversially in the Maimonidean debate. The rationalists (i.e. the Maimonideans) were the devotees of this pseudo-science. Here they took their lead from ibn Ezra rather than Maimonides.⁴ Not until the next century do we find a philosophically oriented scholar, Isaac Pulgar, fully subscribing to Maimonides' thesis that divination is not only false and misleading but a form of idolatry.⁵ On their side the traditionalists were rigidly limited in their attitudes by the Bible's condemnation of "the ways of the Amorite" and furthermore many had little interest in the sophistications of the "science" of the stars, preferring to make their predictions from the permutations of the Torah text rather than the intersects of planetary trajectories.

The subsequent item in the Jonathan-Maimonides correspondence was a set of twenty-four *halachic* questions to the *Mishneh Torah*.⁶ It was dispatched East circa 1194 and answered in 1199 after

¹ *Ibid.*, 11 : 4-5.

² Cf. Joseph Karo, *Kesef Mishneh* to *M. T. Abodah Zarah* 11 : 5.

³ Nachmanides, *Perush ha-Torah* to *Num.* 23 : 23.

⁴ L. Baeck, "Characteristen den Levi ben Abraham," *MGWJ*, XLIV (1900), 24-41.

⁵ Isaac Pulgar, *Eser ha-Dat*, G. S. Belasco (ed.) (London, 1806).

⁶ *TR*, p. LII ff. and *TR* 1, 2, 7, 49, 50, 59, 61, 65, 80, 90, 93, 106, 123, 129, 131, 143, 150, 152, 165, 260, 339, 340.

several intervening petitions and pleas.¹ It became a classic and much circulated document. The protagonists of the *Kitab al Rasail*² obviously had this document before them as had Daniel b. Saadya.

These questions present many difficulties. Why were these precise issues chosen from the vast *Mishneh Torah* text for Maimonides' personal comment? There is no readily discernible plan. Were more than these questions sent? What is the relationship, if any, between these questions and the *hassagot* of Rabad and the *hagahot* of Moses ha-Kohen? On this latter question there were already in the Middle Ages several traditions. One tradition insisted on Jonathan's impartiality. Shem Tob ibn Palaquera (13c) observed, "It appears to me that the sages of Lunel edited anonymously the essence of the *hassagot* (Rabad) to learn how Maimonides would answer."³ Isaac b. Jacob Lattes (14c), however, made Jonathan a Maimonidean protagonist. Jonathan "answered the glosses of Rabad in order to establish the teaching of Maimonides—a great many beyond numbering."⁴

Lattes' view commends itself. The implied purpose of these questions was to win support for Maimonides against one or another of the glossators, but the details are not certain. None of the documents is dated save the final response, September 30, 1199.⁵ Though there is a high degree of similarity between the content and language of these twenty-four questions and Rabad's corresponding *hassagot* there is no identity. The questions to *M. T. Tefillin* 1:8 (TR 7), *Berachot* 8:11 (TR 51), *Shabbat* 14:6 (TR 59), *Shehitah* 8:23 (TR 89) and 8:11 (TR 90), and *Nedarim* 13:1 (TR 106) are unique. Only one of these, *M. T. Shehitah* 8:23 (TR 89) was not raised by Rabad and was discussed by Moses ha-Kohen, and the issue submitted by Jonathan was not similarly joined. On this point at least we can be certain; these glosses were not derived from Moses ha-Kohen. Moses ha-Kohen glossed only five of the same passages, *M. T. Berachot* 1:11 (TR 49), *Shabbat* 2:21 (TR 61),

¹ On the datings of these various documents cf. Marx, *HUCA*, III (1926), 325-335; Z. Diesendruck, "On the Date of the Completion of the Moreh Nebukim," *HUCA*, XII-XIII (1937-38), 463 ff.; I. Sonne, "The Letter of Maimonides" (Heb.), *Tarbiz*, I (1938-39), 135-154, 309-332.

² Cf. Chapter VII.

³ Shem Tob ibn Palaquera, *Migdal Oz* to *M. T. Zizit* 2:6.

⁴ Isaac b. Jacob Lattes, *Kiryat Sefer*; Neubauer, *Medieval Jewish Chronicles*, II, 238. David of Castile made an identical comment. (*Kiryat Sefer*, *ibid.*, II, 232).

⁵ *KTR*, II, 29a.

Shehitah 8:23 (TR 89), *Maachelot Assurot* 11:18 (TR 93), and *Issure Bi'ah* 15:2 (TR 152), and there is in these passages little similarity in language or approach.

(please straighten) → It may be that Jonathan had a text of Rabad before him, but given the facts as they are the reverse construction is equally possible—though not probable; Rabad may have had before him some original notes of Jonathan ha-Kohen's school. Neither text, to be sure, mentions the other, but notice Rabad, "I saw one who disputed Maimonides on this..."¹ where the issue being glossed is precisely one on which Jonathan raised comment. There is no Moses ha-Kohen *ad loc.* The more probable construction, however, is that Jonathan selected from all the glosses raised by anyone and chose either the most difficult or the most typical.

Neither
text,

Is there any explanation possible for his choice of texts? They range over nine of the fourteen books of the *Mishneh Torah*. It was the practice in many schools to study only the four Talmud tractates which cover currently applicable law. Perhaps they reflect interest only in current practice? Not so. TR 143 raised a technical point concerning the manumission of slaves sanctified to the Temple in Jerusalem. TR 150 concerned the problem of cleansing certain vessels used for the burnt offering in the Temple.

A surprising number deal with the personalia of the faith. TR 1 involves the making of the fringes of a prayer shawl. TR 2 treats the same theme. TR 7 involves a classic rabbinic debate about the placement of Scriptural passages in the parchment insert for phylacteries and the preparation of that parchment. TR 129 concerns the preparation of parchment for Torah scrolls, phylacteries, or mezuzot. TR 131 concerns the definition of "house" with a view towards deciding when a doorway required a mezuzah. It is known that these practices were then in a state of uncertainty but the immediacy of many of these rulings dissipates on closer examination. TR 1 concerns a blue dye which had been unavailable for half a millenium, all fringes of a tallis long since having been made white. TR 2 deals with the possibility of these same, no longer available, blue threads being twined. TR 131 turns out to be not so much a search for a proper "definition" of a house as for the proper wording of a decision in a debate in *T. B. Menahot* 32a. In short, the issues are rather more technical than topical.

The as yet uncited responses range farther afield and often

¹ Rabad to *M. T. Ziv* 2:8.

indicate no more than a continuing imprecision concerning old and never settled Talmudic debate. *TR* 50 involves the wording of two related but irreconcilable Talmudic texts, *T. B. Berachot* 20b and 48a. *TR* 260 questions the required height of a fence in a subdivided lot to assure privacy—at issue is the text of *T. B. Baba Batra* rather than any practical consequence. *TR* 339 involves the degree of liability for cattle which wander through a breached fence and is at base not so much a search for law as for the consensus between *T. B. Baba Kama* 56b and other relevant passages.

Five questions cited possible textual errors on the part of the *Mishneh Torah's* scribe: *Zizit* 2:7 (*TR* 2), *Shabbat* 14:6 (*TR* 59), *Shehitah* 8:11 (*TR* 90), *Kiddushin* 4:44 (*TR* 165), and *Nizke Mamon* 4:4 (*TR* 340). In all cases but *Shehitah* 8:11 Rabad had noted the error. In one case, *Berachot* 8:11 (*TR* 51), Jonathan suggested a correction which Maimonides admitted—somewhat testily, to be sure—though it was not a scribal error but an oversight. The issue was minor. There is an appropriate blessing for strong drink, "by whose word all things exist," and a special blessing for wine, "who createst the fruit of the grapes." If the special blessing for wine is recited over hard liquor Maimonides ruled the obligation had been fulfilled. Jonathan wondered how this can be, seeing many liquors are made from cereals rather than from grapes. All one need add is that Maimonides lived among those who eschewed strong drink, at least openly, and the vines of Southern France were famous. That Rabad was a teetotaler is not indicated by his lack of comment.

No generalization explains all these questions. The construction which appeals is that they represent some culling of questions raised in the Provençal schools and that they were sent to Maimonides by a group eager to defend his rabbinic competence and, thereby, further validate his philosophic and/or messianic approach. The introductory panegyric of Jonathan's letter often seems preoccupied with theological issues rather than with the submitted *halachic* points. "Most graciously you did give to the people of God knowledge, understanding, and reasoned analysis."¹ Maimonides is Israel's best guide to the citadel of wisdom. The *Moreh's* text rather than the *Mishneh Torah's* context was being solicited.

Indeed, Jonathan's requests for Maimonides' long delayed answers to these questions gave way to interest in the *Moreh*, re-

¹ *TR*, p. LV.

quests for its text,¹ requests for its third part,² and Samuel ibn Tibbon's questions as translator.³ Let Maimonides' own evaluation of Jonathan and his circle stand.

[Their letter] testifies to the purity of their souls, and that they pursue the sciences and investigate the discipline of knowledge and that they desire to go up the rungs of true understanding to find fit teachings and proper traditions, to understand the issue and the interpretation, to open up all that is closed and to straighten all that is bent.⁴

The fact that Maimonides answered these *halachic* queries established for them an historic centrality they basically did not deserve. Both Rabad and Moses ha-Kohen edited more sophisticated marginalia, but Maimonides, himself, had responded and scholastic makers of tempests in *halachic* teapots made the most of it.

For students of the Maimonidean controversy this correspondence establishes the presence and quality of at least one circle of Provençal rabbinic admirers who were excited by the full ambit of Maimonidean ideas. Shortly, as we shall see, attack was pressed against Maimonides for his analysis of the tenet of resurrection. The challenger could not throw down the gauntlet to Maimonides directly, so he directed his arguments to this circle of admirers in Lunel. A champion was not tardy, but that is the substance of the next chapter of our history.

¹ *TR*, pp. LII-LVI.

² *KTR*, II, 44b.

³ *KTR*, II, 26b-27a. The second letter was published in Z. Diesendruck, "Samuel and Moses ibn Tibbon on Maimonides' Theory of Providence," *HUCA*, XI (1936), 13-22; for Maimonides' answer cf. *KTR*, 27a-29a.

⁴ *KTR*, II, 24b.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE RESURRECTION DEBATE

In 1232 when tension was at its highest, Nachmanides (1194—1270) from Barcelona requested the religious leaders of Castile and Aragon, among others Meir b. Todros Abulafia of Toledo, to join hands in supporting the cause of Solomon b. Abraham of Montpellier. Nachmanides had reason to assume Meir's sympathetic cooperation. Four decades before, this well known Castilian Talmudist had been among the first to challenge Maimonides' works. Nachmanides, however, received more sympathy than cooperation. Meir was battle-scarred and utterly disillusioned. In begging off Meir rationalized his disinvolvement with an *apologia pro sua vita*.¹ Long ago, he had confronted similar communal pressures to those Nachmanides now was experiencing. He had had to go it alone against those who were rebellious against God. He had tried to reach and preach, but to no avail; indeed, not even the wasting of war attendant to an Almohade incursion had traumatized a return. The misguided had failed to see those travails as the corrective punishment of a displeased God.

Meir recalled that even before the *Moreh* had reached Spain, he had recognized the latent danger (latent because it fed the fires of disbelief long since burning in certain quarters) implicit in Maimonides' doctrine of resurrection as formulated in the *Mishneh Torah*. To counter any advantage the enemies of true faith might make of Maimonides' teachings, Meir had written a careful but forthright criticism, a *Sefer Kena'ot*, but unfortunately few had shared his concern.

Note the candid admission that his criticism had been motivated more by the social consequences of Maimonides' words than by any intrinsic or substantive position taken in the *Mishneh Torah*.

I became exercised to protect Israel and its sanctities, to establish the right and its fundamentals when I saw that belief in bodily resurrection was being lost in this land among many of its dispersed peoples. . . .²

¹ KTR, III, 6a-7a—especially 6b.

² KTR, III, 7a.

(type
too heavy)

Yesteryear and before, even before the book which perplexes the guides (the *Guide for the Perplexed*) had reached here, part of the nation had rebellious ideas about faith in the Creator.¹

Thirty years before, upon reading the *Mishneh Torah*, Meir had precipitated a flurry of correspondence which he subsequently collated under the title *Kitab al Rasail* (English, *Writings of Controversy*). Knowing this early text and the brouhaha it momentarily touched off, historians have described Meir's attacks as "characterized by great persistence as well as intolerance" and have painted Meir as the archetype of a fanatic pietist, single purposed and single minded in his attitudes.²

Scant attention has been paid to an elegy Meir wrote shortly after Maimonides' death in 1204 which must be seen 1) as a plea that an end might be made to the controversy he had started, 2) as evidence of Meir's thorough acquaintance with the *Moreh* and his not unfriendly attitude towards philosophy, and 3) as indication of a not unkindly estimate by Meir of Maimonides the man, and even of the *Moreh*.

Tears have ceased falling into the [tear] vase for the burning coals within have been kindled.

Why do you ask for yourselves waters from the bottom of my heart when its thoughts have been consumed as with the fires of Hell.

There is just enough [water] for my heart—just enough to extinguish the flames within them. How can they pour [additional] water upon the fires that extinguish my tears.

What happened to the hearts that they despaired of finding a remedy and why has their spirit been broken.

Please ask, if the evil accidents of the times have accosted them and if they groan from the afflictions of the hour.

Or does the raging fire burn because Moses has died—to whom now can they turn (lit., cry out)?

Who will extinguish the fires of sorrow? Who will free the prisoners whose chains have been tightened?

Who will lead us on dry land through seas of knowledge deeper than the depths of the sea?

¹ KTR, III, 6b.

² J. Sarachek, *Faith and Reason* (Williamsport, 1935), p. 47; cf. H. Graetz, *A History of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1894), III, 524, "His hostile attitude toward science and his tendency towards an ossified Judaism, isolated him even in his own circle."

Who will summon streams of wisdom of the rock? Who will sweeten the bitter waters?

Cease, you who are hungry for instruction—for those about (lit., the people of the day) have broken down her vines.

Weep for the prince of moral instruction who has been taken away. Can you now suckle the poison of asps [as he did]?

He was like a hero in battle. He rejoiced for the day when the chariots of instruction jostled one another in the street.

He was the fruit of life in his group. With his sword he struck through the hearts of his enemies.

He was as the life giving principle and we were as the body. Who of them could live if these would be separated?

Write this upon the walls of the heart and inscribe the wondrous secret on the foreheads of the times.

How the luminaries go down to the grave and how the rocks of instruction were uprooted from their places.

Concerning the much praised one who was buried, it is as if the light left the rocks and preferred to descend to the grave in his place.

Arise, O mighty one, who despised the sweetness of the earth, since today the earth is sweet to his throat (Ed. he has been buried).

Arise, see the people gathered around your grave who kiss its stone and its dust.

Arise, see the scholars of the day—as one—knock on the doors of your understanding as petitioners.

They will ponder your *Mishneh Torah*, daily they will harvest valuable knowledge fashioned as if of pure gold.

They will see in the *Moreh* intellectual steel which flashes as lightning in the darkness.

There they will see the swords of confusion polished clean and honed smooth with the oil of reason.

Words, much desired, as if fashioned like apples of the gold of wisdom in baskets of fit understanding.

Through them the confused came to know truly and through them the weak were strengthened in the fear of their Creator.

Arise [Maimonides], see the sheep who had strayed from secure pens, now following you.

They built with you a sanctuary of instruction; yet today perforce they throw ashes upon their heads (i.e. they mourn).

To whom will they now run for help and, since you are gone, upon whom can they depend?

They will never remove from themselves the yoke of your mourning until the cursed day will remove the yoke of your death (i.e. never).

Alas, the princes tell good news to the counselors of Pharaoh and the seers of that land will smack their lips.

Let not such be heard in the city of Sihon and let not such a piercing groan [be heard] in Heshbon.

It is not a day of good tidings. Be silent lest strangers hear and clap their hands over you.

Would that I might be like a bird, I would fly to his grave. My eyes would summon tears.

I would wet with my tears his dust just as the springs of his knowledge nourished my soul.

I will erode with them (i.e. the tears) the rocks of the time (i.e. the mighty) just as the waters of his suffering wear down great men.

What else can the cursed days say? What more can they complain about? How can they justify themselves?

Is there still any answer in their mouthing to the complaints? Will they fault us that they may be justified?

Are the sins of the waters of Meribah (i.e. of controversy) still remembered today? Do they still pursue us?

Or is the hand of evil days waxing strong—days that spread hurt in their anger.

Tearing prey until its lair is filled with corpses. One crowds out another in his grave.

Children will be buried in the very grave of their fathers; for if not how will there be sufficient space for his victims.

This is the ancient law (i.e. destruction). These have learnt from them—he consecrated these disciples.

Where are the dead of yesteryear? Only a short time has passed. Where have they disappeared?

Did the host of night kidnap them? Were they not exiled from the populous city? How did we not cry?

Rather they [these days] despised us—therefore they forced us from pleasant dwellings unto parched wilderness.

If on a day their children are vexed they are not troubled: if they (the children) become weak it is passed off.

If they will call them no one answers. When they speak bitterly it is as the braying of an ass.

Will you call in their ears when no one listens? Will you groan or be silent?

Today they groan for their wandering...¹

You are like them (the former evil times) except that they hastened and you are slow to pass over.

Search out the world, ask even of the gates of Hell—for there her great ones are shackled.

See the grave of Moses. It is a sign to all created beings that death is unavoidable.

He (Maimonides) has disappeared but not his greatness. Though he is gone his deeds are here.

Peace to you, O faithful messenger, peace. As with the groaning over the slain they groan for you.

Peace, you whose righteousness was like a river, the living feel bitterly deprived by your death.

Peace, they cling to you today with a love like my love or the love of the angels of righteousness.

In measure as your soul desired righteousness, so the angels of righteousness desired you.

May peace hover over you just as justice and peace were joined always in you.²

Meir can not be figured as unreservedly anti-philosophic. He had disapproved of certain arguments, but not of the whole. One senses that youthful brashness had carried him farther than he had wished, and that he now sensed that it was not Maimonides he had been arguing against, but a widespread contagion of religious indifference and skepticism for which the lion of the Law, the pious Maimonides could hardly be blamed. In any case external threat, "cursed days," required that those who would wield the rod of correction now moderate their efforts.³

Israel stumbled into a Maimonidean controversy. It was not

¹ The author can not adequately render this verse.

² H. Brody, "Poems and Letters of Meir ha-Levi Abulafia" (Heb.), *Yedeot ha-Mahon Le-Heher ha-Shira ha-Ivrit*, II (Berlin, 1936), 32-35, No. 12. The author's translation.

³ These "cursed days" probably referred to the early 13th century Almohade incursion in Andalusia which threatened Meir's home in Toledo, but they might also refer to the brewing Albigensian Crusade which as early as 1209 had decimated the Jewish community of Béziers.

Abulafia

fear of philosophy nor ignorance of philosophy which precipitated it but a breakdown of faith among certain elements within the western communities, among anonymous persons who when pressed claimed the *Moreh* and the *Mada* as support of their fancies.¹ Doubters and sophisticates seized on certain quotations—often out of context—in Maimonides or from philosophic material generally and arrogated these as proof texts of their denials. To blame the *Moreh Zedek*, Maimonides, for this sputtering of the candle of disbelief was on the face of it implausible. Nor was philosophy to blame. There is no indication that individual anti-Maimonids studied the *Moreh*, or Bahya, or Saadya, or ha-Levi any less assiduously or appreciatively than the Maimonids. Judah Alfakhar, to cite a classic anti-Maimonid example, was knowledgeable and competent in philosophic disciplines.²

In this first stage of the controversy, before the *Moreh* was known, the less than pious believed that they found some support in the *Mishneh Torah* for their denial of the traditional assumption of resurrection. To defend against this challenge, those who vigorously opposed such aberrations perforce attacked the delineation Maimonides had given to this doctrine.

Resurrection had been affirmed rather than defined by the rabbinic tradition. Typically, the early 13th century scholar Zerahyah ha-Yevani:

It is well known that one ought to believe that when man dies full of good deeds and having lived a pious life God will love him and in the nature of this love is the reward beggaring description. . . . We ought not to search out how this reward actually will take place.³

When Maimonides in his *Commentary to the Mishnah, Sanhedrin X* argued man's inability "to comprehend the delight of the soul" in the future life on the basis that such delights were outside the limits of sense experience and hence beyond the capacity of human reason, he was simply handling methodically doctrinal reservations many had long observed. Touching the doctrine of physical resurrection many had observed poetic license as long as the tenet itself was supported.

¹ I. Baer, *A History of the Jews of Spain* (Philadelphia, 1961), I, 96.

² *KTR*, III, 7a.

³ Zerahyah ha-Yevani, *Sefer ha-Yashar* (Vienna, 1811), V. This work was for a time erroneously ascribed to Jacob b. Meir, Rabbenu Tam.

In brief, rabbinic doctrine insisted on some future reward but was open-ended on the specifics of that reward. The 15th century philosopher Joseph Albo explained this deliberately uncertain certainty.

But it [Resurrection] is not itself either a fundamental or a derivative principle of divine law in general or of the Law of Moses in particular, for they can be conceived without it. As long as one believes in reward and punishment generally, whether corporeal, in this world, or spiritual, in the world to come, he does not deny a principle of the Law of Moses if he disbelieves in resurrection. Nevertheless it is a dogma accepted by our nation, and everyone professing the Law of Moses is obliged to believe it... Belief in the Messiah and in the resurrection of the dead are principles peculiar to Christianity which cannot be conceived without them. But resurrection and the Messiah [in Judaism] are like branches issuing from the principles of Reward and Punishment and are not root principles in themselves.¹

Resurrection was the most "unenlightened" rabbinic dogma; that is, it was the religious dogma which most violated the *tendenz* of Greek philosophy which throughout assumed the dualism of body and soul. An ancient veneration and a long lingering issue, it had been hotly debated as early as the first century.² Circumscribed by the authority of traditional belief but convinced of the accuracy of Platonic psychology, medieval ~~speculative~~ thinkers resorted to equivocation. Resurrection seemed to these a crude, even superstitious doctrine—quite out of step with any proper understanding of the soul and its faculties and the body and its foibles. If both pious and philosophic, these men could cite precedent for their seeming heterodoxy. The traditional treatment of resurrection was anything but consistent. Raba had insisted that Job 7:9 ("As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away, so he that goeth down to the pit shall come up no more") indicated a Biblical denial of the entire doctrine.³ Ecclesiastes presented a skeptical view of the whole

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century
thinkers

¹ Joseph Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikharim*, I. Husik (ed., trans.) (Philadelphia, 1929), I. 15.134-5.

² H. A. Wolfson, *Philo* (Cambridge, 1947), I, 396 ff. Compare the Talmudic treatment of Deut. 32 : 39, "I kill and I make alive," as a proof text of resurrection (*T. B. Sanhedrin* 91b) and Philo's use of Gen. 15 : 15, "But thou shalt go to thy fathers nourished with peace, in a goodly old age" as a proof text of the immortality of the soul. (Philo, *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesim* 3 : 11, quoted in Wolfson, I, 398.)

³ *T.B. Baba Batra* 16a.

issue, as did *Ben Sira*.¹ If the liturgy praised a God "who raises the dead," Biblical literature raised no such definite promise.²

Resurrection did not remain the controversial theme for many reasons: 1) Maimonides affirmed even as he squirmed. Men recalled that Maimonides had established in his introductory commentary to *Mishnah Sanhedrin* the belief in physical resurrection as a cardinal tenet of the faith and few had the interest or the patience to square subsequent discursive elaboration with this simple declaration. 2) With the Hebrew translation of the *Moreh* a veritable Pandora's box of theologic topics was provided. 3) Physical resurrection was the weak point of rabbinic apologetics. Even the most traditional disciples often had quite esoteric views and whatever their public professions entertained personal reservations. One does not attack another for struggling with one's private doubts.

Meir, however, was horror-stricken at Maimonides' seeming denial of bodily resurrection in the *Mishneh Torah*.³ This promise was part of God's covenant with Israel.⁴ He could not support Maimonides in deducing that there will be neither form nor body in the *Olam ha-Ba* from the single text "that in the *Olam ha-Ba* there is neither eating nor drinking."⁵ The reprise in Meir's apoplexy was his argument that Maimonides' view destroyed the substance of God's promise, so essential to faith. "If bodies will not be resurrected how can the promise of a redeemed Israel be fulfilled."⁶ "If God does not resurrect where is the hope for those who at great personal sacrifice obey His law."⁷ As for the metaphysical problem involved, is such an act too much for God?

Reduced to simple terms—and Meir's first missive has the virtue of simplicity and is, therefore, revealing—Meir argued that faith is not a selfless commitment. Israel's faith is based on a covenant, a two-way relationship, man obeys and God abides. The obligations of this covenant for the party of the second part (God) require the arrival of the Messiah and a proper occasion for the resurrection of the faithful. One can sympathize, for without hope the spirit

¹ Eccl. 3 : 19 ff.; *Ben Sira* 41 : 3 ff.

² Dan. 12 : 1-4 was often cited as Scriptural authority for this tenet. Cf. Isa. 26 : 19, Job. 14 : 13-15. But the promise was nowhere insisted upon in the Torah law.

³ *M. T. Teshubah* 8 : 2.

⁴ Meir Abulafia, *Kitab al Rasail*, Y. Brill (ed.) (Paris, 1871), p. 14.

⁵ *T. B. Berachot* 17a.

⁶ Meir Abulafia, p. 14.

⁷ *Ibid.*

shrivels, and what hope had Israel, what justification for continuing its intransigent confrontation of Diaspora and despair, except this promise?

Meir's outpouring was submitted to Jonathan ha-Kohen, for what specific purpose it is hard to tell. Jonathan was a respected senior, a man of known *halachic* competence, piety, and prestige. Perhaps Jonathan's correspondence with Maimonides and his sponsorship of the translation of the *Moreh* made him the logical addressee. Meir certainly felt that Lunel had shown an exaggerated admiration for their intellectual mentor, but he made no request explicit or implicit that the work be banned.¹

Meir appended to the resurrection missive a longish set of *halachic* glosses to the *Mishneh Torah*. Perhaps he hoped by this display of erudition to establish his credentials. Their provenance is difficult to assess. Six of the points touched were to issues raised by Jonathan in his correspondence with Maimonides;² three of the others touched points raised by Rabad³ (Moses ha-Kohen had notes also on these); one was entirely original—the first,⁴ as were elements of the notes to *M. T. Abodah Zarah* 2:7 and 4:2. Meir's method throughout was juridic. The points at issue were largely theoretical: whether a month may be intercalated during a Sabbatical year or a year of famine under certain extenuating circumstances (in Meir's day the calendar was already fixed); whether children are to suffer the death penalty if they live in a condemned apostate city (such a city could exist only in an independent Israel); whether an elder who renders a verdict in spirit contrary to a decision of the Sanhedrin is liable to the death penalty if the matter involved a violation not specifically described by a Biblical negative commandment, i.e. in ritual matters of Phylacteries, Lulav, Sabbath (there was, of course, no longer a Sanhedrin). The only issues having contemporary relevance were cited from the circulating Jonathan-Maimonides correspondence: whether a mezuzah required a specifically prepared parchment; whether one may carry a found object on the Sabbath, etc.

Meir's approach was not heavily negative. He conceded the

¹ Meir Abulafia, p. 15.

² *M. T. Berachot* 1:11, *Shabbat* 20:7 and 2:11, *Milah* 3:6, *Tefillah* 1:11, and *Issure Bi'ah* 15:2.

³ *M. T. Abodah Zarah* 2:7, 4:2-4, *Mumar* 4:3.

⁴ *M. T. Kiddush ha-Hodesh* 4:16.

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Mishneh Torah's worth.¹ Interestingly, he made no challenge to Maimonides' code method except such as was implicit by the opening up of seemingly settled issues. He contented himself with suggesting that "there is no wheat without chaff" and that this represents but a small anthology of the "leaves which he [Meir] had plucked."²

Meir's answer, for some unrecoverable reason, came not from Jonathan ha-Kohen but from Aaron b. Meshullam (d. 1210), son of the venerable founder patron of the Lunel school. In tone Aaron's epistle was a "dressing down", as if Meir had been called on the carpet by a college dean. "Know, my brother, that humility is the adornment of wisdom and its sweetness, while arrogance is her flux and disease."³ "Your legal issues having nothing new in them and reading between the lines of your letter it is apparent that you did not want to set a matter straight in your own thought but to preen your intellect."⁴ Meir was accused of rashness, arrogance, brashness, ignorance, and subjected to condescension. "I know you did not consult your wise and venerable father."⁵ To Aaron, Meir was the prodigal who brashly challenged the experience, understanding, and knowledge of a master without having mastered even fundamentals. "Take to heart, my son, the rabbinic admonition 'that one who argues with his teacher is as one who argues with the *Shekinah*.'"⁶

Presumptuousness was Meir's cardinal sin. He ought to have inquired, not pontificated.⁷ He has asked Lunel how they could praise Maimonides. "Know that such praise does not begin to exhaust Maimonides' accomplishments."⁸ His teachings are "clean, healthy, and worthy."⁹ His knowledge is catholic of all sources and traditions.¹⁰ Indeed, God sent Moses to the people at an opportune time when "the hand of the judges had grown lax" and the control of Israel had become progressively more difficult.¹¹ In this time of confusion Maimonides "stretched out the staff of his strength over the sea of the Talmud until it was possible for his children to enter the sea in safety."¹² "Behold it is written before me and I will not deny it that from the days of Rabbina and R. Ashi none

¹ Meir Abulafia, p. 16.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 30.

arose in Israel equal to Maimonides to multiply counsel and increase redemption." ¹ Not only is Maimonides' genius and knowledge unparalleled but there is none in Israel whose family tree is so redolent of rabbis and learned ancestors. ²

Aaron's defense of Maimonides' views on resurrection was made simply. How can Meir have been so naive as to presume that the single statement of *M. T. Teshubah* 8:2 exhausted Maimonides' treatment of the subject. Had Meir noticed the many places in the *Mishneh Torah* where anyone who denied the belief in resurrection was labeled a *Kofer* or an *Epicoros* or *Min*? ³ "Now we will set you straight as to that which you said concerning the servant of God that he denies the Covenant and destroys the hope of those who dwell in this life." ⁴

Basic to Aaron's view was the argument that one ought not accept the exoteric meaning of the *aggadah*. Aaron transformed Maimonides into a disciple of Saadya who got around conflicting *aggadic* texts by positing two resurrections, one during the Messianic Age followed by a second death and a second period of resurrection in the *Olam ha-Ba*, a totally new world where the properties of space and time and bodies—all the worldly categories—no longer apply. ⁵ Maimonides' statement denying bodily attributes referred only to the *Olam ha-Ba*. Meir was accused of not being conversant with such Saadyanic subtleties, ⁶ indeed, "you ought not to have approached this whole area steeped in mystery until you had spent much time exploring the whole matter with some learned master, for in your epistle you show that you do not have the faintest acquaintance with such mysteries." ⁷

This attempt to impose a Saadyanic superstructure on Maimonides is interesting a) in showing that only a limited knowledge of Maimonides' views was then available to his protagonists (the *Ma'amar Tehiyyat ha-Metim* was not translated by Judah al Harizi until 1198 and the text of Part III of the *Moreh* did not reach the Languedoc until 1200), b) as illustrating the quick pro-

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37. cf. Saadya Gaon, *The Book of Belief and Opinions*, trans. S. Rosenblatt (New Haven, 1948), pp. 264-289, and the variant text pp. 409-435.

⁶ Meir Abulafia, p. 37.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

liferation of ideas through translation. Judah ibn Tibbon had completed his Hebrew translation, the first, of the *Emunot ve De'ot* as late as 1186. It obviously had helped to organize many loosely held verbal traditions popular in the Jewish schools.

Aaron returned two letters. The second was a point by point rebuttal of Meir's *halachic* glosses in which Aaron set each point out fully in all its tradition, logic, judgment, ramification, etc.¹ Aaron extended himself most on the challenge raised to *M. T. Issure Bi'ah* 15:3 where Maimonides had ruled that an Israelite who had relations with a *mamzer* (a child of an illegally constituted marriage) without a proper marriage was not to be stripped since the Talmud prescribed such punishment (in the area of illicit marriages) only in the single case of a High Priest who married a widow or divorcee. Maimonides here had ruled against a traditional consensus. Indeed, he had admitted to Jonathan that he once had thought otherwise.² Any ruling depended on the interpretation of an involved Talmudic debate.³ The uniformity of dissent by Rabad, Moses ha-Kohen, the sages of Lunel, and Meir underscored its novelty and Aaron was forced to some lengths to establish Maimonides' view. His method here, as in all his responsa, was to review the Talmud discussions and to show how Maimonides' opinion was plausible.

Aaron argued not the absolute correctness of Maimonides' decisions, but their plausibility.⁴ "This is the opinion of Maimonides as I understand it, but if you wish to have another opinion, go ahead—the Torah has seventy faces; what is unacceptable is your presumption of Maimonides' light handed treatment of the material and your claim that he was unaware of conflicting traditions."⁵ This last paragraph is crucial for any understanding of the *Mishneh Torah's* reception in the west. In the east, in Yemen for instance, it became a constitution—the law—while among even its greatest ad-

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 45 ff.

² *TR.* 52.

³ *T. B. Ketubot* 29a.

⁴ In cases where Maimonides decided between two well defended decisions, as in the case of *M. T. Abodah Zarah* 2:7 (concerning the special name of God which if uttered constituted blasphemy) Aaron simply took the offensive: "How can you think that he erred, behold our master recognized both opinions, since he specifically quoted the variant . . . It is evident that he went to the heart of the matter and chose the one which he found fit and proper. He weighed the issue in his understanding and in the scale of his knowledge." (Meir Abulafia, p. 47).

⁵ Meir Abulafia, p. 67.

mirers in France and Spain it remained but another, albeit brilliant, contribution to *halachic* literature. Not one of the better scholar defenders swore unquestioning fealty. Nor can any glossator *ipso facto* be presumed to have disparaged the entire work.

Meir did not let matters ride. "Oh staff of Aaron, is not your nature to freshen the waters—why do you now roil them?"¹ Meir took understandable umbrage at Aaron's high-handed questioning of his competence. "Keep your own view and I'll keep mine."² His anger extended to a petty grammatical criticism of certain forms and meters Aaron had employed in his opening poetry.³ Meir had turned to Lunel knowing their scholarly reputation and believing they accepted "the rule among the wise in such matters that when a proper argument is developed all acknowledge it."⁴ Apparently this was not to be. "Now you listen... and if you are really open minded, I know that you will find that I am right."⁵

For Meir the proofs of resurrection were clear. They appeared in the Torah (Gen. 13:16, 26:3, 28:13; Deut. 1:8, 11:9, 11:21, 32:27), in the Prophets (I Sam. 2:6; Isa. 26:11, 42:11; Ezek. 27:10; Hos. 6:2), in the Writings (Ps. 72:16, 104:30, 50:4-5; Dan. 12:2, 12:13; Job 7:9; Eccl. 9:4-6), in the Talmud (*T. B. Sanhedrin* 90b-91a; *T. B. Berachot* 17a, etc.). Especially clear to Meir were the texts dealing with bodily reward and punishment in the *Olam ha-Ba* (*M. Abot* 4:5; *T. B. Sanhedrin* 90b-92a, 99a; *T. B. Abodah Zarah* 26a, etc.).

These texts were not to be handled casually or interpreted cavalierly. True, they contained allegorical depths but in no case was their establishment of bodily resurrection in the *Olam ha-Ba* to be reasoned away.⁶ Meir quoted Saadya to his own purpose; had not the Gaon held that in only four types of Biblical texts could there be any question of a wholly metaphorical intent—none of these cases being applicable here.⁷

Meir showed insight into the burden of Aaron's position. His

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

² *Ibid.*, p. 58.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁷ Saadya, pp. 414-417. Saadya had ruled that the literal version of a Biblical text may be questioned only when 1) it obviously conflicts with common sense experience, 2) it posits anthropomorphic attributes of God, 3) on the face of it there is an obvious error, or 4) authoritative interpretation had modified the apparent meaning.

was an attempt to establish the philosophically popular concept of the immortality of the soul, while retaining the traditional emphasis on resurrection largely because being hoary it could not be discarded.¹ *T. B. Berachot* 17a must be the controlling text. In this text where R. Gamaliel had stated that there is no eating and drinking in the world to come he establishes not the concept of the immortality of the soul but that of physical resurrection;² for why should he preclude the existence of specific bodily attributes if there was no possibility that bodies might exist in the *Olam ha-Ba* to which one might be tempted to make such an attribution.³

Meir could not imagine how reward and punishment can operate in the *Olam ha-Ba* if bodies were not there to receive their due "according to their corruption or quality" ⁴ "for have not our sages said that the souls do not receive their reward or punishment in the *Olam ha-Ba* except conjoined to their bodies."⁵

The argument had shifted imperceptibly but inevitably to an issue which would be aired throughout the 13th century—the permissible limits of the allegorical interpretation of Scripture. We shall hear of some philosophers who denied the reality of all Biblical stories, considering them to be mere allusions to philosophic doctrines. Some Kabbalists will come close to this view and will insist that had the Bible simply told the stories of Esau and Hagar, Laban and Jacob, Balaam's ass, and the like, and not impregnated these stories with esoteric meaning, far greater books could have been written.⁶ Meir possessed an acute sense of religious preservation and sought to limit such exegesis. Otherwise, he averred, the law must follow the narrative out the window and the entire foundation of the commandments which establish Jewish life would be undermined.⁷

Meir's architecture of the future bliss is clear. There are some who are wholly righteous who will live on from this life to the Messianic Age.⁸ In the Messianic Age many of the saintly of Israel will be

¹ Meir Abulafia, p. 52.

² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁶ *Zohar*, iii. 152a, "The jar is not the wine, so stories do not make up the Torah."

⁷ Meir Abulafia, p. 56.

⁸ *Ibid.*

(SEPARATION)

will live

resurrected¹ and they will live on until the more inclusive resurrection scheduled for the *Olam ha-Ba* takes place. "The Talmud is full on every side of clear proof concerning the *Olam ha-Ba* that it is the end of the rewards for the righteous and of the punishments of the wicked and involves both body and substance. God forbid, that any who fear God should deny this."²

Meir wrote his first and second letters to Lunel some time before Maimonides' death. As might be anticipated, he was not satisfied with Aaron's reply and either in 1204 or shortly before he addressed himself to certain rabbis of Sarfat, seven by name: Solomon of Meroz, Isaac b. Abraham of Dampierre, Simson b. Abraham of Sens, Simson of Corbeil, David of Chateaux Thierry, Abraham of Toul, and Eliezer b. Aaron of Bourgogne. Meir asked these worthies to judge the merits of his correspondence and to submit to Aaron a position paper on resurrection and on the other Talmudic issues which he had raised.

All you who dwell on earth, all you who inhabit the land,
You men, our kinsmen, who are sturdy of faith; be zealous
for the Rod (God) who created in His might all creation which
swarms over the land and the seas.

Judge! Take no account of rank! Let rich and poor come as
one to justice.

That those who permit judgment may see and know clearly
That there are in the land judges who judge honestly.³

In this letter Meir touched rhetorically his motivation in entering the fray and answered quite simply that he wished all doctrine to be carefully regulated. Meir was concerned with the promise of the faith. If resurrection is but a mirage which dissipates itself upon scrutiny, what is the hope for "all the oppressed lost in the lands of their captivity."⁴ The certainty which encourages Israel is the belief in "a day when God will repay all according to his righteousness or innocence." "How can wound be repaid for wound and sorrow for sorrow, if God does not cause all creatures to be reestablished in form and body?"⁵ "What profit is there that men should obey His commandments and go about sadly because of the Lord God. If bodies are not resurrected where then is their hope and who will regulate this hope?"⁶

A historian must add that religionists become concerned with

¹ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

² *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*

the promise of faith when this promise is not self evident. Meir's energy reflected a dissipation of that loyalty and a fear of the social consequences of this loss of confidence.

To his now familiar arguments Meir appended his equally familiar glosses in a clear, precise form obviously reworked for the occasion.¹

Of or for the French rabbi Simson b. Abraham of Sens (c. 1155—1225) replied. His letter is to be dated shortly after Maimonides' death.²

Simson was and remained a Talmudist working in a Talmudically oriented community. The issue of resurrection did not excite him. The whole issue was, after all, cut and dried. The famous text *T. B. Berachot* 17a indicated only that there would be no eating or drinking or sex in a worldly sense. The resurrected will draw their nourishment and drink from the divine radiance. As proof he offered *T. B. Sanhedrin* 90a, 92b, 108a.³ Body and soul will be resurrected together as they will be saved and judged together.⁴ The holoistic rabbinic view of man is confidently reasserted. Simson's understanding of the textual problems insisted that what difficulties arise occur because interpreters did not differentiate the Messianic Age from the *Olam ha-Ba* (not unlike Maimonides' own reconciliation in his *Ma'amar Tehiyyat ha-Metim*). There are truly righteous who do not die.⁵ Some souls are given to bodies eternally. For others there is death and rebirth in the *Olam ha-Ba*. The Messianic Age is a period of resurrection for a favored few, but principally the time when God releases Israel from captivity. The *Olam*

¹ The list was abbreviated. *M. T. Kiddush ha-Hodesh* 4 : 16 and *Abodah Zarah* 2 : 4, among other issues of the Aaron correspondence, were missing.

² "I do not care to argue with the great master after his death." (Meir Abulafia, p. 131.)

Gross developed what is known of Simson's life. His dates are uncertain. He was a younger contemporary of R. Isaac b. Samuel and R. Tam. He wrote commentaries to the Mishnah and the Sifre and was quoted in many responsa and in the Tosaphistic literature. He knew no Arabic. Of his pilgrimage to Palestine, more later. (H. Gross, "Étude sur Simson b. Abraham de Sens," *REJ*, VI [1883], 167-186; VII [1884], 40-47.)

³ Meir Abulafia, p. 107.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁵ Simson based this on Num. 18 : 28, "Ye shall give the *Terumah* of God to Aaron the priest." The *Terumah* was given only in the Holy Land. The Bible can only mean that Aaron lives on, since he never entered Palestine. (Meir Abulafia, pp. 108-109.) cf. *T. B. Sanhedrin* 90b. cf. also Isa. 4 : 13, "And it shall come to pass that he that is left in Zion shall be called holy even any one that is written unto life in Jerusalem." Holy things never die.

Étude

ha-Ba is a newly created world without the properties of this worldly existence. But unlike Maimonides' view, the body's identity is not wholly lost. God grafts the wings of an eagle to these resurrected bodies and they hover, not unlike the angelic beings, over the face of the deep.¹

In a second letter to Meir, Simson confronted the problem of allegoric interpretation. He quoted *T. B. Hullin* 90b, that in only three cases was the *aggadah* to be taken in other than its literal meaning. Of philosophic flights of fancy based on the *aggadah*, a mistake for which he fingered Aaron, Simson also had serious reservations. Such sophistries are not unlike "passing the proverbial elephant through the eye of a needle."² Presumably in all other cases an exoteric interpretation was required. In a postscript to this second letter he quoted in further confirmation Saadya's four categories of permissible allegorical interpretation. The *Emunot ve De'ot* had just arrived in *sens* and had been read out to him by one who possessed the necessary linguistic skills.

(italics)
aggadah

Halacha concerned Simson primarily. It is doubtful that he knew or sensed the social ramifications of the resurrection debate. Abraham b. Nathan of Lunel, who was with Simson at this time and subsequently traveled to Castile, chronicled on his arrival in Toledo that only now (in Toledo) had he met any who said that Maimonides had denied resurrection and had taught only the doctrine of the immortality of the soul.³ In France such comment as had been expressed had been entirely *halachic*.

As *halachist* Simson dealt not only with Meir's questions, but with Lunel's twenty-four, and showed his thorough acquaintance with the *Mishneh Torah* and Maimonides' correspondence. He first discussed the six questions revived by Meir which had been covered also in the Jonathan-Maimonides correspondence.⁴ He handled these in the familiar form of legal debate, citation, source, argument. His purpose "is not to establish law but to let the erudite hear and then let anyone who wishes to answer him do so."⁵ Even when he agreed with Maimonides' ruling, as in the case of the special requirements for parchment in a mezuzah scroll,

¹ Meir Abulafia, p. 135.

² *Ibid.*, p. 131.

³ M. Higger, "Abraham ben Nathan Ha-Yarhi," *JQR*, XXXIV (1943), 342.

⁴ Cf. p. 117, note 2, above.

⁵ Meir Abulafia, p. 132.

Simson was eager to make clear certain sophisticated differences in their reasoning.¹

Simson acknowledged the extraordinary needs of the time which had prompted Maimonides to write the *Mishneh Torah*, but faulted him severely for his lack of citations. This is not the way of *halacha*. Let those who want to know study the original texts which permit various lines of reasoning and development.² Finally in a second letter he added an extensive gloss of his own to *M. T. Parah Adumah* 11:2 in which he challenged Maimonides' view that one who has been contaminated by corpse uncleanness and has undertaken the first cleansing may, if a delay is unavoidable, undergo the second required sprinkling at any time. The argument was based on a correlation of two variant texts, *T. B. Hagigah* 22b and *T. B. Kiddushin* 62a.

Simson's further role as a Maimonidean critic is uncertain. He wrote one more brief response to a second letter from Meir, pleading with Meir that he had no time to prolong such a point by point *halachic* correspondence.³ Meir's questions were purposeless—matters ought not to be raised unless they have been brought into serious question. Enough had been said.

Simson throughout respected Maimonides as *halachist* although he questioned his methods. It is, therefore, difficult to know what to make of Abraham Maimonides' report that later in Simson's life he became active in opposing Maimonides. The facts are these. Simson was among some three hundred French and English sages who pilgrimaged to the Holy Land circa 1211 or 1212, probably motivated by messianic expectation. Abraham Maimonides, in his *Milhamot Adonai*, reported and made much of the fact that Simson did not stop in Alexandria to pay his respects; the implication is that the oversight was deliberate, and that once settled in Acre and still later in Jerusalem Simson continued to argue against various teachings of his father. Saracheck⁴ among others makes much of this, but Abraham's own words make us feel that the issues raised were purely *halachic*.

And, I heard concerning R. Simson the master of Tosaphot who was in Acre, whom we did not meet because he did not pass by here—we heard about him after his death and about

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 131-132.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁴ Saracheck, p. 60.

one of his pupils that they disputed the teaching of my Father and Teacher in some few matters. The particular issues were not set right by us because we did not examine them. We said to ourselves, if these words contain truth let them eat the fruit of their labor and if not they will be publicly denied.¹

The only reason to believe that "resurrection" continued to be an issue is the succeeding sentence in Abraham Maimonides' text which mentions without specification certain men who propagated "the profession of a faith false in basic principle" in the various communities of the Near East. The precise relation, if any, of this charge to Simson is uncertain. To all this only two other historical rumors can be added: according to Abraham Zacuto (15 c.), a R. Caleb, a disciple of Maimonides, otherwise unknown, disputed these issues with Simson,² and a rumor reported by Abraham Maimonides himself which averred that he had excommunicated Simson—a rumor which he flatly denied.³

Simson leads us to the interesting figure of the wandering Provençal scholar Abraham b. Nathan ha-Yarhi (c. 1155—1215), one of the leading anthologists of the variant religious customs of the day. The only published version of *Kitab al Rasail* includes a cryptic heading after Meir's first letter to Simson, "Afterward there came from France a response to my letter from R. Abraham b. Nathan of Lunel and this is its text"⁴—but no text follows. Higger overlooked this heading, but he succeeded in establishing on other grounds that a known commentary to *Kallah Rabbati* was the work of this Abraham and he has published that portion of the commentary which dealt with the exchange of letters between Simson and Meir and is in point of fact a continuation of the resurrection debate.⁵ We know from other sources that this Provençal scholar studied with the Tosaphist Isaac b. Samuel before he settled in Toledo, Meir's home, in 1204. He was bilingual (Arabic-Hebrew),⁶ and it is not impossible that it was he who translated the Saadya passages in Simson's hearing.

Professing great admiration for Maimonides, whom he called Gaon, Abraham quoted the sources in the *Mishneh Torah* where

¹ Abraham Maimonides, *Milhamot Adonai*, pp. 53-54.

² Abraham Zacuto, *Sefer Yuhasin*, H. Filipowski (ed.) (London, 1857), p. 218.

³ Abraham Maimonides, *Milhamot Adonai*, p. 54.

⁴ Meir Abulafia, p. 106.

⁵ Higger, p. 330 ff.

⁶ Abraham b. Nathan ha-Yarhi, *Sefer ha-Minhag* (Berlin, 1855), p. 95.

Maimonides had stated that those who deny resurrection have no place in the world to come. Like Simson, Abraham could not see why Meir had raised all this fuss. Maimonides' theories may have been in error, but he cannot be faulted for any denial of the fundament of resurrection. But certainly Meir had thought so and Abraham paraphrased Meir's arguments, cited Aaron's high handed reply, and quoted Simson at length.¹ He omitted all reference to the accompanying *halachic* debate. Abraham concluded by adducing other proof of Simson's views.

Abraham was troubled by a seeming contradiction between Ps. 72:16 and *T. B. Berachot* 17a. The Psalm speaks of redemption in glowing terms, concluding "may he be as a rich cornfield in the land upon the tops of the mountains," which Abraham understood as an allusion to certain future gastronomic rewards. How then establish both this promise and the oft cited "There is no eating or drinking..."? Obviously, the one refers to eating in the Messianic Age and the other to non-eating in the *Olam ha-Ba*. "Bodily resurrection is not an attribute of the Messianic Age."² The Messianic Age will mark the end of Israel's captivity and dispersion. The *Olam ha-Ba* will mark the salvation of the righteous. Some may live on into the Messianic Age, but resurrection *per se* is of the *Olam ha-Ba*, where "God will give life to the body and soul together...and judge them according to the measure of justice."³ Abraham's views and Simson's were, then, essentially one—as was their attitude toward Meir's tempest in a teapot.⁴

Crucial to an understanding of the world view of those who at this stage enthusiastically supported the Maimonidean position is the activity of the wealthy physician-literati-sometime scholar Sheshet ha-Nasi b. Isaac of Saragossa (1131—1210), also known as Sheshet b. Isaac Benveniste.⁵ Sheshet was *Alfaquim* (physician)

¹ Higger, pp. 342-346.

² *Ibid.*, p. 348.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

⁴ Interestingly, despite his critical position Abraham became in some way dependent on Meir. Brody has published a letter from Meir to certain citizens of Narbonne pleading that that commune release Abraham from taxes. (Brody, II [1936], 23, No. 9.)

⁵ Graetz was the first to insist on the identity of these two names. (H. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden von den Altesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart*, 3rd ed. [Leipzig, 1894], III, 328.) Marx denied the identity but without offering proof. (Marx, *JQR*, XXV [1934], 408.) Baer showed that Sheshet b. Isaac lived in both Saragossa and Barcelona and concluded that the two names referred to one and the same man. "Er (Sheshet b. Benveniste of

and bailiff to Alfonso II and Pedro II of Aragon and possibly the wealthiest and most powerful Jew of his time. That a Jew of this rank became enmeshed in the *Kitab al Rasail* debate offers effective testimony to its notoriety. Sheshet ha-Nasi b. Isaac of Saragossa entered the fray with a letter sent to Lunel in rebuttal to the first polemic addressed by Meir to Jonathan and before Meir had received Aaron's original answer. In this letter Sheshet dismissed out of hand the *halachic* arguments of the Meir-Aaron correspondence. He probably lacked the necessary tools for legal debate. Only one *halachic* issue was even alluded to—the question of the mezuzah, and then only to give an opportunity for Sheshet to inveigh *ad hominem* against a writer who, despite his inconsequence, showed such unbecoming disrespect for excellence. Meir was ticked off as a presumptuous pup.¹ Sheshet was but little interested in the involvements of rabbinic tradition. His letter does include a few remarks of a Midrashic nature,² but it is clear that Sheshet thought in and depended upon a philosophic rather than a Talmudic frame of reference. It is the philosophic plausibility of resurrection which alone concerned him.³

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Barcelona) ist also wohl identisch mit "ששת בר יצחק בן יוסף בן בושט סרקסטי" (Baer, *Die Juden* I, 35, note.) Brody questioned this identification on the basis of the close ties evidenced in a letter and poem of condolence sent by Meir to Sheshet b. Isaac on the death of his son Samuel. (Brody, II, 61 and II, 88.) However, family ties sometimes onlyacerbate a particular issue. The manuscript identification remains. Notice also the curious phrasing of the opening of Brody No. 39 where Meir seems to be alluding gently to Sheshet's dependence on reason and on knowledge (*Mada*) as a source of strength which ought not now desert him. (*Ibid.*, II, 88.)

¹ Marx, *JQR*, XXV (1934), 416-417, v. 75.

² *Ibid.*, p. 417, vv. 97 ff.

³ At the close of his letter Sheshet reported the anger of a Castilian judge towards the *Mishneh Torah*. (*Ibid.*, p. 365 ff.). Ostensibly this worthy's criticism was to Maimonides' method, his lack of citations, etc.—but Sheshet saw this critique not as a matter of judicial judgment but as an expression of pique. Until the *Mishneh Torah* trained *halachists* had had things pretty much their way. Only a very few controlled even a limited competence in Talmudic jurisprudence. No one could dispute or challenge a judge's edict. Now such powers could be circumscribed. Everyone and anyone could check a decision by simply referencing it in the *Mishneh Torah*. There was an element of anti-rabbinic feeling in this. The *halachist* commanded authority by virtue of what was to the average Jew esoteric knowledge. Now that Maimonides had made the law an open book this preferential treatment was threatened. (*Ibid.*, p. 427.) Had this hofjuden found his sway over Aragonese Jewry circumscribed by popular reverence for rabbinic authority and by rabbinic insistence on traditional norms?

Compare also the basis of Sheshet's structural attack on the office of the

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Sheshet began by arguing the immutability of natural law.¹ Biblically, "there is nothing new under the sun" (Eccl. 1:9). Philosophically, God at creation gave to each created thing its natural form and these, consequently, obey God by abiding their essential nature.² Bodies, by definition, have appetites. To argue that God resurrects bodies without appetites is a contradiction in terms.³

What of the argument that the Creator of all, being omnipotent, can change at will the nature of His order and resurrect in bodily form without appetite? God could—but He has not. "We ought not say God can until we see that He has".⁴ Furthermore, a change in the basic order of things would imply an imperfection in the original creation and in the Creator.

Does Sheshet deny all possibility of miracles? Here Sheshet's hardiness deserted him. He equivocated. He argued that God had interfered in the natural order but only occasionally to help out His people and His prophets.⁵ For all practical purposes God has never touched the basic framework of the world.

To change the seasons, to refashion the circuit of the planets, or to remake the nature of fire so that smoke would descend rather than rise or to reverse the order of water so that it would rise instead of settling or in the case of any other created thing which exists changeless by virtue of God's will—of such things we have no knowledge nor have our ancestors reported any occasions since Day One when God injected into such things a wholly new nature which became established permanently (rather than temporarily). So Solomon: "That which has been is that which shall be and that which has been done is that which shall be done and there is nothing new under the sun." (Eccl. 1:9.)⁶

To Sheshet resurrection presupposed such a basic change in Rabbi-Judge to Meir's deep concern with judicial probity and competence.

"Today, the faithful are forced down into Sheol while they (the times) hasten to exult the traitorous.

When I ask, what and why is this that the ends of the earth should tremble from the rod of their wickedness

They answer me, with whom do you quarrel. Ask the judges who pervert judgment.

They rig the scales of justice and cast off truth."

(Brody, II, 22, No. 5.)

¹ Marx, *JQR*, XXV (1934), 420, vv. 164-165.

² *Ibid.*, p. 422, v. 234.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 419, vv. 144 ff.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 421, v. 198.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 420, v. 175.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 420-421, vv. 191-197.

the natural order.¹ What then is resurrection? "The pleasure of the intellect which cleaves to its Creator."² The philosophic immortality of the activated intellect freed of its prison body,³ freed of all mortal attributes, and rejoicing in the effulgence of God.⁴ Resurrection will not take place at any one time in the future but occurs daily.⁵ It does not rupture the material order of things, but is the happy result of that potential which God placed within certain men at their birth.⁶ The intellect, once activated, can live forever. If sages or tradition spoke otherwise, i.e. of an actual return of soul to body, it was only to "reassure the simple" who could not accept a more refined promise,⁷ and, incidentally, could not achieve such salvation. Why does the Bible seem to allude to Heaven and physical resurrection? The Bible speaks allegorically⁸ to strengthen the faith of the simple, to encourage by the promise of reward and to frighten into obedience by the threat of punishment.⁹

Comparing Meir's approach to Sheshet's, we note the widely disparate authority in which each grounded his case. Sheshet argued from sense experience, Meir from Scripture. Meir quoted the Talmud. His problem was exegetic—what did a text really mean. Sheshet brushed off these interpretive problems. His authorities were Epicurus, Plato, and Aristotle.¹⁰ His problem was to interpret science accurately. Sheshet set little store with those who claimed unique authority for revelation. Man's innate reason had enabled many not aware of the truths of Sinaitic revelation to acknowledge God's unity.¹¹ Revelation had established the truths of theology, but Sheshet believed that these truths were not recondite but accessible to human reason. Meir was concerned with the possible undermining of Scriptural authority by the practice of unbridled allegorical interpretation. Sheshet blithely stated, "All the words of the prophets are meant as allegories and have hidden

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 426, vv. 356-358.

² *Ibid.*, p. 424, v. 292.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 418, v. 108.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 425, vv. 312 ff.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 426, v. 362.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 427, vv. 360 ff.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 425, vv. 325 ff.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 422, vv. 231 ff.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 425, vv. 331 ff.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 414, vv. 2-3, p. 423, 312, 323.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 422, vv. 236 ff.

This attack is peculiarly strange, in that a) in the *Kitab al-Ra'ay* Meir does not define his god concept and b) the religious practice brushes

meanings."¹ Sheshet's epistle was not so much a defense of Maimonides or of the *Mishneh Torah* (both praised but never cited) as a defense of the first principles of philosophic speculation. Sheshet remained as indifferent to the various resurrection formulas of *M. T. Teshuvah* as he did to Meir's Midrashic exegesis. What Sheshet praised in Maimonides was not his *halachic* competence nor even his philosophy, but his interest in philosophy. Maimonides was "the man of God, the holy one, the Gaon, the philosopher who excelled all others, possessed of a full knowledge of his creator who served God with his mind and understanding."² Immediately he continued: "Thus did the ancient wise men say that one can serve his Creator only if he knows His true nature and only if God has permitted His spirit to him or if he be a philosopher who by virtue of his ability approaches God."³ At issue between Meir and Sheshet was the basis of faith. Was faith a preserve of the brilliant, its truths accessible to reason, its salvation limited to the mentally alert and philosophically disciplined, or was it "the inheritance of all Israel," its truths accessible in Scripture, its salvation universal and not limited to the erudite?

One reviews Sheshet's passion for philosophic norms in two acerbic poems he indited against Meir.

I will break, I will prick, the words of Meir and I will not leave
any remnant to him.

He closed the doors of understanding with his two hands,
Lying lips are his portion.

He contemns knowledge, he gathered his strength from the
riffraff.

The lightness of his head spoiled his judgment. He increased
his lies, He enlarged his sin.

He discharged his arrows against the *Moreh*; He is the son of a
rebellious son; Have no regard for him.

He enlarged with evil intent, like the son of Edom. He nests
his trust on gossamer.

Even against his master he became arrogant. He gnashed his
teeth because of his great folly.

If God is a form, and he believes according to the literal mean-
ing, he denied his God.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 426, v. 341. He based himself, however, on a proof text, "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." (Ps. 119 : 18.)

² *Ibid.*, p. 414, vv. 10 ff.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 414, vv. 12 ff.

For if God is corporeal, having a hand or eye, any form, God would be mortal and have no permanent existence.

Therefore, he lied for he did not march out between the light of dawn and the pitch darkness of night.

His song is an anthology of nothing. As a magician he gets involved in a quarrel which is not his.¹

And again:

My friends asked me, how can one be named Meir (i.e. one who gives light) when he is one who walks in darkness.

I answered them: The sages have already called the night, light. His name is among those similarly transposed.²

Again, besides any private bad blood between these two of which we are historically unaware, what is at issue is not the *Mishneh Torah* nor even resurrection, but Sheshet's passion for a God who is not only nonanthropomorphic but pure being. Sheshet dismissed Meir's theology as systematically crude and simplistic:

If God is form, and he believes according to the literal meaning, he denies God.

For if God is corporeal, having a head or eyes, any form, God would be mortal and have no permanent existence.

This attack is passing strange, a) (in that) in the *Kitab al Rasail* Meir does not define his God concept, b) ~~in that~~ Meir's own religious poetry breathes the pure air of monotheism unadulterated by any of the fanciful speculations associated with the *Shiur Komah* or the *Alef Bet de R. Akiba*. Compare these lines selected from one of Meir's hymns lauding God's power.

How will you ascribe form to that which has no body? How can He be like the bodies? Who can circumscribe and gather in His essence?

He is the beginning without end. How can there be end or boundary to the Creator and Fashioner of all?

He is strong and the source of strength and power, He is merciful and the source of His mercy and righteousness.

He lives, From him alone is the fountain of life for all living things, He is beyond the source of his holiness.

¹ H. Graetz, *Lehet Shoshanim* (Breslau, 1862), p. 149; M. Steinschneider, "Moreh Mekom ha-Moreh," No. 11. Note, however, I. Davidson, *Thesaurus of Medieval Hebrew Poetry* (New York, 1924), I, 354, No. 7811. "It is difficult to decide who is the author."

² H. Graetz, *Lehet Shoshanim*, p. 149; M. Steinschneider, "Moreh Mekom ha-Moreh," No. 64.

This attack is passing strange, in that a) in the *Kitab al Rasail* Meir does not define his God concept, and b) Meir's own religious poetry breathes

He exists but without place. How can place circumscribe him,
He created its [earth's] dust and dimension?

He was before the dimension of time, how can time relate to
Him since He created it, seconds and minutes?...¹

Wherein lay the parting of the ways?

Men like Sheshet began with the necessity of a pristine and philosophically acceptable God concept: that is, one free of all attributes and relations. Men like Meir presumed God's oneness and otherness and began with the necessity of a God who could reveal and resurrect. Both insisted on *Yihud*, God's oneness. Each believed he insisted on God's otherness. But by *Yihud* men like Meir meant God's uniqueness and spirituality and men like Sheshet God's uniqueness and the logic of God's pure existence. *Yihud* to the Talmudically oriented rabbis meant a God of whom one ought not posit human attributes, yet a God who had the power of creation and of judgment and of resurrection. *Yihud* to the speculative meant the *ding an sich*—the unmoved mover—of whom it could only be said that He is. The world was created by God but ran according to natural law. Such a view allowed precious little leeway for such fundamentals of faith as prayer, revelation, and resurrection. To argue as Meir had argued the possibility of divine interference with natural law was to the speculative *prima facie* evidence of an imperfect God idea. Presumably such a belief could be sustained only by assuming positive attributes of God.

One can describe the prevailing rationalism as a backwash of the high tide of the Arabian cultural sea, but how account for those who held to it? One suspects that at base it was a matter of education and environment. Those educated in the *yeshivot* clung to the sanctities or transmuted their speculative energies into mystical and conforming channels. Those privately tutored were grounded in the Biblical aspects of faith but not its *halachic* reaches and probably knew as much of Greek science and logic as they did of Talmud—if not more. Furthermore, these men generally moved in the cosmopolitan circles of early 13th century Spain and Provence and rubbed shoulders with Christians, Mozarabs, and other Jews still deeply conditioned by the attitudes of the Islamic world. These, therefore, had every practical reason to set a high value on that culture which provided a common coin and a convertible currency.

¹ Brody, II, 80, No. 34, vv. 13-15.

Personal idiosyncrasy touches every controversy. Unfortunately, the tendency within Jewish life has been to avoid biography and to argue the logical rather than the emotional issue. The young, zealous Meir chose resurrection, but was it really Maimonides' views which troubled him? Given the traditional freedom of Jewish dogmatics, this must be considered doubtful. What was at stake was Meir's whole context of religious values. No one likes to hear that what he holds most sacred is only the inferior part of a greater whole. Conversely, what excited Sheshet's ire? Certainly not a few *halachic* criticisms of the *Mishneh Torah* by a young whippersnapper. There is no indication that Sheshet idolized Maimonides. But one can imagine this cultivated physician and gentleman, who fancied himself as something of a scholar, rubbing shoulders with his equals at Pedro II's court happily agreeing that God's unity was Judaism's cardinal truth and, yes, that this belief was quite like the metaphysical ideas expressed by the best minds of the Islamic and Christian world. Sheshet could dismiss the uniqueness of Judaism as irrelevant. Jewish thought insisted on the existence of the one God, the universally acknowledged philosopher's God. To doubt that Judaism's identity was to doubt the rationalization which established Sheshet as an equal in his own eyes.

To doubt that Judaism's God was identical with the universally acknowledged philosopher's God was to doubt the rationalization which established Sheshet as an equal in his own eyes.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE COMPASS POINTS OF JEWISH CULTURE

As for those whose minds are confused and tainted with unsound ideas and fallacious methods of thought which they believe to be sound knowledge, considering themselves thinkers though they know nothing whatsoever that deserves the name of knowledge, those people will be shocked by many parts of this book. Our arguments will be all the more difficult for them to stomach, not only because they will not see any sense in them, but also because they demonstrate the falsehood of the trash they call their own, which is their stored-up knowledge for the hour of need.¹

shocked

Within early 13th century European Jewry there were two co-existing and commingling but not always communicating cultures. As illustration we oppose two documents representing polar attitudes.

Shortly after March of 1199 Samuel ibn Tibbon sent a query to Maimonides touching the doctrine of providence as Maimonides had developed it in Chapter 51 of Part III of the *Moreh*.² It will serve to illustrate criticism within an acknowledged and mutually understood frame of discourse.

In Chapter 51 Maimonides had argued that those who advance to a true knowledge of God in effect lift themselves out of the circumstances of earthly life and are protected from accident as long as an immediacy with God is sustained.

When man has achieved purity of thought, clear perception of God by the proper method, and beatitude through that which he perceives, it will never be possible for evil of any kind to befall this man, because he is with God and God is with him. However, when he averts himself from God, in which state he is hidden from God and God is hidden from him, he is a target for every evil thing that happens to come his way. The thing which induces Providence and saves man from the raging sea of chance happenings is just that intellectual emanation....³

¹ Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, C. Rabin, trans. (London, 1952), p. 45.

² Diesendruck, *HUCA*, XI (1936), 341-366.

³ Maimonides, *The Guide* . . . p. 154. Guttman has pointed to a

The conceit of an achievable, albeit temporary, immortality was as bold as it was religiously revolutionary and as imaginative as it was philosophically radical. Samuel agreed with Maimonides that the activation of the intellect was the ultimate achievement of human ambition. He believed such intimacy engendered great benefit, but such benefit was of a spiritual rather than a physical nature.¹ Samuel preferred to believe that the activation of the intellect resulted in a new psychological perspective which permitted men to disengage themselves from the silken chains of desire and to adopt a stoic attitude towards unpredictable fortune. So it had been with Job "after he knew God with a true knowledge, he was no longer preoccupied with the affects of worldly fortune, i.e. health, wealth, and children."² The activated intellect enables men to rise above the pain of unhappy circumstance but not above the circumstance itself.

Of significance is the *point d'appui* of Samuel's argument. He was not disturbed by the radical break with traditional consensus implicit in Maimonides' concept but by an absence of consistency within the *Moreh* itself, and by the general disagreement of the Greek-Arab philosophic tradition. Samuel insisted that Maimonides (in the *Moreh* Part III Chapters 19-22) had developed, correctly, the philosophic truth implicit in Job's experience, for Job's physical and worldly situation had not altered after he attained intellectual perfection.³ Q.E.D. his benefit must have been psychological. That intellectual perfection "protects man from all types of evil, even the accidents of disease and of injury resulting from social dislocation,"⁴ appears implausible to me and close to a rejection of philosophy."⁵ How so? Samuel argued that any assumption of the physical insulation of the enlightened necessitated a break in the operation of natural law, an interference which could be accounted for only

relationship between Maimonides' assertion and Avicenna's teaching "that the miracles of the prophets are due to their minds being so closely connected with the Active Intelligence that the powers of the latter communicate themselves to them: hence they are able to change the objects of the world about them in such a manner as exceeds the natural powers of man." (*Ibid.*, p. 224.)

¹ Diesendruck, *HUCA*, XI (1936). 353 : 76b.

² *Ibid.*, p. 355.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Samuel here referred to the first two of three categories of evil Maimonides had specified in the *Moreh*, iii. 12.

⁵ Diesendruck, *HUCA*, XI, 359.

(omit parenthesis)

by presuming a pre-creation cosmic stipulation to abandon natural law during each such occasion of intellectual perfection.¹ "This is a religious assumption not a philosophic one,"² and an implausible one at that, considering the mathematics of the situation. To account for a few Biblical incidents in this way was excusable, but the possibility of an infinite number of "enlightenments" by an infinite number of individuals in effect made a mockery of the orderliness of natural law.

Samuel's entire argument was closely reasoned. He was careful to elucidate every possibility. He had researched previous philosophic authority³ and was careful to insist on Maimonides' acknowledged skill as philosopher—even to the point of assuming that the whole contradiction may have been deliberately introduced. Had not Maimonides prefaced the *Moreh* with a list of apparent but deliberate inconsistencies?⁴ In brief, though strong exception was taken, the premises of Samuel's criticism were entirely in sympathy with Maimonides'. This Provençal scholar had a technical difference of opinion but he and Maimonides spoke the same language.

The second text with which we would illustrate the antipodes of early 13th century European Jewish culture is the *Kitab Tamim* (English, *The Book of Completeness*) of Moses b. Hisdai.⁵

Although probably written in the late third or early fourth decade of the 13th century, the *Kitab Tamim* shows no awareness of the *Moreh*.⁶ Briefly described, it is a broadside directed against

¹ Such a cosmic stipulation was the traditional explanation of miracles by philosophers who insisted on the elemental quality of natural law yet were constrained to account for Biblical miracles.

² Diesendruck, *HUCA*, XI, 358.

³ Samuel quoted Aristotle directly. (*De Anima*, ii. 412.25 f. cf. Diesendruck, 359.)

⁴ The seventh of these suggests itself: "The Seventh Cause is the difficulty experienced in discerning very profound matters, some details of which must be kept hidden while others can be revealed. . . ." (Maimonides, *The Guide* . . . , p. 48.)

⁵ On the various problems of chronology this document presents and the presumed identity of Moses b. Hisdai with Moses Taku, cf. J. N. Epstein, "Moise Taku b. Hisdai et Son Ketab Tamim," *REJ*, LXI (1911), 60-70; E. E. Urbach, "The *Arugat ha-Boshen* of R. Abraham b. Azriel" (Heb.), *Tarbiz*, X (Jerusalem, 1938), 47 ff. We have followed Urbach's conclusive argument which dates the *Kitab Tamim* before 1234 on the basis of a long quotation from it to be found in the text of the *Arugat ha-Boshen*.

⁶ Moses b. Hisdai, *Kitab Tamim*, R. Kirchheim (ed.), *Ozar Nechmad*, III (1860), 54-99.

any and all public exposition of cosmology. Saadya's *Emunot ve-De'ot* was the chief culprit. Saadya had opened the door to all who took up the burden of speculation, i.e. Abraham ibn Ezra in his Biblical commentaries and his *Sefer ha-Hayyim* (English, *Book of Life*) and Maimonides in the *Mishneh Torah*, especially in the *Mada*.¹ Saadya "separated many from the fear of God, because men no longer knew the fundamentals of their faith. He strengthened the hands of the rebels who have deceit in their hearts against the Talmud which is an all inclusive encyclopedia (*Torah Shel^emah*)."² C.E.

Moses b. Hisdai's world was bounded by the Talmud text and its "legitimate" interpretation. Until the Amoraim (circa 500 A.D.) edited their notes into the Talmud there had been a distinct Hebrew metaphysical tradition, but "after the Amoraim the formulas of *Maaseh Bereshit* were hidden."³ Cosmology and eschatology had been "deliberately hidden". Such Biblical interpretation as revealed the profound metaphysics buried in Biblical vocabulary and letters had been secreted. It is unseemly and unwise to dilate on these matters. Moses repeated again and again the formula, "It is to the glory of God that such matters be hidden".⁴

Moses found Saadya's attempt to limit the attributes of God to be pernicious. He felt that Saadya's theory of attributes necessitated the assumption of a powerless God, prisoner of His own perfection, and inevitably suggested unfortunate conclusions concerning the sacred doctrines of prophecy, providence, and prayer.⁵ Moses knew God not as pure being but as the quintessence of light and power whose radiance was refracted in varying degrees through the universe. God created through emanation, especially through an angelic *Kavod* or glory. His system is reminiscent of gnostic speculation, various agencies of creation creating intermediary beings and, by a process of concretization, finally precipitating the images of prophetic vision. A whole bevy of angelic emanations people his pages and are presumed to perform certain specific tasks.⁶

¹ The references to Abraham ibn Ezra are *ibid.*, pp. 67, 84, 96, 97; to Maimonides *ibid.*, pp. 66, 68, 75, 77.

² *Ibid.*, p. 64. cf. *ibid.*, p. 68, "Until Saadya no one invented such matters concerning Torah, the Prophets, the Holy Writings, and the eternal truths of the sages."

³ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-60, etc.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 65 ff.

God remains hidden from man—too brilliant to be seen. The world is sheltered from God's brilliance by a protecting curtain.¹ We will find that David b. Saul's theosophy of a cosmic "veil" bore many similarities.² Though hidden and unviewed, attributes may be posited of God. In some miraculous way He judges men, cries over their peccadilloes and smiles on their heroics.³ Moses b. Hisdai was no simple anthropomorphist. He attacked the fantasies of the *Alef Bet de R. Akiba* and the *Shiur Komah* which posited actual dimensions of God.⁴ God is one, universal, eternal, spiritual yet somehow substantial and present. If philosophy denies these elements, the error is philosophy's.

Moses b. Hisdai's cosmological and theological views, including his insistence on a literal interpretation of Talmudic Midrash, were not authoritative. By his attack on Judah Hasid's *Sefer ha-Hasidim* for various de-anthropomorphising speculations, Moses revealed that his was an extreme position even among German Hasidim; but his manuscript illumined ideas which had currency and, as we shall see, ideas which were more or less refracted in many of the anti-Maimonids.⁵

What separated these men?

Interestingly, Samuel ibn Tibbon would not have argued against Moses b. Hisdai's theory of a hidden Jewish metaphysical tradition. In his cosmological commentary to Gen. 1:9, the *Ma'amar Yikkavu ha-Mayim* (English, *Text on "Let the Waters be Gathered Together"*), Samuel wrote of "'the truth which our prophets and sages long since secreted.'" ⁶ Where Samuel would and did take issue was on the need to maintain these ancient caveats. He himself had deliberately revealed much that had been heretofore locked away. Why had he chosen to publish what had for long lain concealed? "For I saw that these truths...are today public among the nations."⁷ In brief, the Hebraic gnosis was now common knowledge. Christians and Muslims possessing intricate metaphysics mock us for our simplicities "saying we have no prophecy only superficialities."⁸

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

² Cf. Chapter IX.

³ Moses b. Hisdai, III, 59.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 65, 67, 74, 95.

⁶ Samuel ibn Tibbon, *Ma'amar Yikkavu ha-Mayim*, Bisselheim (ed.) (Pressburg, 1837), p. 173.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

We should not be a shame to our neighbors nor an object of derision to those about. "When it is necessary to work for God, put aside tradition."¹

Though both Samuel and Moses agreed on the myth of a hidden metaphysical tradition their assumptions as to its contents differed radically. To Moses metaphysics was a distillate of Talmudically enshrined Persian angelology,² the Midrashic doctrine of *Maaseh Bereshit*,³ and that uniquely Hebraic mystique which insisted on the exotic power of the letters of God's name and of the letters and lines of the Biblical text.⁴ God is creator, concealed and active. God operates through angelic intermediaries. God's will, not natural law, sustains life. The angels have personalities and wills of their own and are something altogether other from the philosophic constructs labeled "angels" by which metaphysicians explained the motion of the spheres and thereby the relations between an immovable God and a world in motion. The many Talmudic legends about angelic and demonic phenomena have a literal force. Samuel's "hidden" metaphysics can be deduced from Maimonides' and from Samuel's insistence that the basic framework of the universe was common knowledge. God is Creator and wholly other. He established motion which passed down the planetary spheres to man. On earth natural law is the order of the day. God's omnipotence is self limited.

It would be facile but not accurate to say that Samuel's metaphysics rested upon 13th century science and Moses' on 13th century superstition. Fundamentally, Samuel rested his case on reason, and Moses on revelation; but, elementally, their differences represent two traditional responses to the nature of God. The one required God only to be, the other required that God exhibit personality. Both attitudes had their superstitions and their rationales and their virtues. In the 13th century Samuel's drew on a broadly outlined tradition, but in its own way Moses' was neither unsophisticated nor unenlightened.

What separated these men? Samuel ibn Tibbon was bi-lingual. He came of an emigré family of translators. As a youth Samuel had been tutored by a "master of secular sciences."⁵ His father

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

² Moses b. Hisdai, III, 58-9.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁵ Neubauer, I, 58.

had presented him with an extensive secular and Judaic library many of whose philosophic texts Judah ibn Tibbon personally had copied for his son "so that he did not have to borrow a book from any man."¹ Samuel was early set "to learn Arabic writing" as well as Hebrew.² From swaddling Samuel was exposed to two cultures. "Wake up, my son, busy yourself with science and ethics. Habituate yourself to good moral habits... As the Arabic philosopher (al-Ghāzālī) has said, 'there are two branches of knowledge, religious and secular.' Be diligent (in both), my son."³

We have no similar *curriculum vita* for Moses b. Hisdai, but it is certain that his education was of a piece with that shared by most Tosaphists. His was the world of the *yeshibah*, a world illiterate in Arabic, a world in which no text of medieval Arabic-Jewish philosophy ever played a major role.⁴

L. Rabinowitz, in his exhaustive study of the culture of medieval French Jewry, concludes:

To the Jew of Northern France and Germany the Talmud was his world, the sum total of all knowledge and education and doctrine and theology in the universe.... For the Jews of Northern France, there was no independent study of any subject outside the Talmud; secular knowledge was regarded only in so far as it might be an aid to the elucidation of the Talmud, and—what is even more striking—what general knowledge they had was more often than not derived from the Talmud and often led to strange results.⁵

This generalization can not be accepted without qualification. We have seen Simson of Sens becoming aware of a text of Saadya's, *Emunot ve De'ot*; and let it not be held that Talmudic competence was a mean or unsophisticated accomplishment. Rashi, Rabbenu Tam, Simson of Sens, the Tosaphists generally were respected and revered by all Jewry. The Talmud was a profound book full of philosophic insight. The world view it refracted was unsystematic but out of it fine religious philosophies could be and were constructed, and a view of life equal to the vicissitudes of the human situation could be and was forged. What it was not equal to was an appreciation of the rigid logical abstractions of "the way of the Greeks."

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁴ The necessary qualifications to this generalization will shortly be made.

⁵ L. Rabinowitz, *The Social Life of the Jews of Northern France in the XII-XIV Centuries* (London, 1938), pp. 220 f.

Greek systematics were associated with the Talmudic legend of four Tannaitic scholars who had entered Pardes, the mythical garden of intellectual splendor, only to be permanently deranged or turned from the living wisdom of the faith. Greece and Israel had approached life from different directions.

A. Neuman, in his treatment of the life of Spanish Jewry, has reconstructed the Spanish *yeshibah* from late 13th century rabbinic sources. His conclusion is simply stated: "The exposition of the *Halakah*, in its broadest sense, was the aim and sole content of the studies pursued in the *Yeshivot*."¹

Certification implied no more than competence in the intricacies of Jewish law, the traditional texts and the teachings of the faith. However, this purely traditional curriculum did not exhaust the educational goals of many nor were all solely trained in this ~~curriculum~~ manner. Beyond the *yeshibah* was the private tutor. In Iberia, especially, his curriculum was "Greek," not Gemarrah. Judah b. Samuel ibn Abbas shortly after mid-century set down the broader educational theory. It included beyond the texts: grammar, ethics, medicine, arithmetic, music, logic, natural science, and culminated in metaphysics.² Israel Abraham summed up the tutorial instruction available to Spanish Jews of the time in this way:

Bible, Hebrew, Poetry (satirical, eulogy and love poems), Talmud, the relation of Philosophy and Revelation, the Logic of Aristotle, the elements of Euclid, Arithmetic, the mathematical works of Nichomachus, Theodosius, Menelaus, Archimedes and others; Optics, Astronomy, Music, Mechanics, Medicine, Natural Science, and, finally, metaphysics.³

This was essentially the full breadth of the knowledge available within the Islamic-Jewish world.⁴ The ideal persisted, but it

¹ Neuman, II, 78. The autobiographic reminiscences of Yedaya of Beziers (late 13th century), published by Neubauer, makes clear that Provençal *yeshivot* were Talmud centered and engaged in extraneous subject matter only at the occasional whim of a master. (A. Neubauer, "Yedaya de Beziers," *REJ* XXI [1890], 244 ff.).

² Judah b. Samuel ibn Abbas, *Yi'rei Netiv*, quoted in M. Guedemann, *Das Jüdische Unterrichtswesen* (Vienna, 1873), p. 147 ff.

³ I. Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1958), p. 365.

⁴ The one hundred and three titles sold in 1170 by a Cairo physician represent the broadest library known to have been owned by an Oriental Jew. The titles sold range from Aristotle and Galen to late and comparatively little known Neo-Platonists and Stoics. (D. Baneth, "A Doctor's Library in Egypt at the Time of Maimonides," *Tarbis*, XXX, No. 2 [1961], 171-185.)

depended now on private opportunity, and competent tutors were not always available; and on the availability of texts, and these, too, were increasingly rare; and on the financial resource to pay for this privileged training; and on the private interest of the student who could qualify for religious office without the whole and even with part or little of this complex training.

As a result there was no uniformity of background or interest which might develop a broad sense of community, identity of purpose and at least an understanding of basic premise. Here was a situation much like that in our own day which C. P. Snow has described as two co-existing but unrelating cultures. It was not possible for all Jews to get a common core A. B. degree before they graduated to seminary study. Some seminarians were poor or came from areas where the texts or tutors were unavailable. Other young men had no interest in the seminary world. The nascent Spanish, French, and Italian universities, except in the most unusual circumstance, were closed to Jewish matriculation.¹ It is always dangerous for a people when an alienated intelligentsia develops alongside an equally intelligent authoritative leadership with whom it can hardly communicate. The subtleties of the Talmud are as finely honed as the subtleties of Aristotle, but they begin with different premises, employ differing procedures, and result in widely separate *Weltanschauungs*.

The worlds of Samuel ibn Tibbon and Moses b. Hisdai went separate ways. Samuel prepared a glossary of philosophic terms employed in the *Moreh*, the *Bi'ur Meha Milot Zarot* (English, *An Interpretation of Strange Words*) and a philosophic commentary on the Bible of which only parts are known.² We have already detailed his output as translator.³

This world and its interest were unknown to Moses b. Hisdai. He lived out his life expounding the law⁴ —preserving the integ-

¹ Hillel of Verona (1120-1195) studied medicine at the University of Montpellier. Joseph b. Makir ibn Tibbon may have been a professor on its medical faculty, but these are the exceptions that save the rule.

² Besides the *Ma'amar Yikkavu ha-Mayim* already referenced, Samuel wrote philosophic commentaries to Eccl. and Cant., and the *Ner ha-Hefes*—a listing of those parts of the Five Books of Moses which are to be taken allegorically. Samuel's insistence that many passages are *Hanhagot*, i.e. guides to a better personal or social life rather than history, will, as we shall see (especially in the poetry of Meshullam b. Solomon), become a major irritant to the anti-Maimonids. Cf. Chapter VI.

⁴ Cf. *Teshubot R. Meir ha-Aruchot*, M. Bloch (ed.) (Budapest, 1895), No.

city of the revealed faith as he knew it and insisting that men like ibn Ezra, who attacked this truth, met their deserved punishment. To prove the force of God's malediction, Moses repeated the legend that God saw to it that ibn Ezra, attacked by a pack of wild dogs, contracted rabies, and died a painful death.¹

had been

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The *Moreh* was received by a world betwixt and between.

Samuel and Moses were at one at least in this—faith was to each a matter of importance. There were others who had no great passion for the faith. Nachmanides wrote of those so mired in the mud of Greek thought that they denied to God the attribute of power and any providential concern for mortal beings.² Joseph b. Todros told of sophisticates who insisted that all the texts of the Torah were allegories, that Biblical miracles were implausible fancies, and who dismissed sarcastically the "primitive" teachings of the scholars.³ Not unexpectedly, we hear of a pervasive ritual indifference among the spiritually uprooted: "They absent themselves from public worship and from private prayer."⁴

This group remains anonymous. Indifference seldom sits down to work out its skepticism in reasoned form. They were certainly mainly of Spanish and Provençal origin. Baer has suggested an identity between these and the courtier class; and he goes on to suggest that the Maimonides controversy may be viewed as a minor scene from the age old clash of haves and have-nots.⁵ Men like Joseph b. Todros did criticize those who have more wealth than Torah and who find presumed support in the *Moreh* for their reli-

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Baer

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601; *Teshubot R. Meir*, N. Rabinowitz (ed.) (Lemberg, 1860), Nos 110-111 and 114.

¹ Moses b. Hisdai, III, 97.

² GN, IV 19.

³ GN, III, 151.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁵ Baer, *A History* . . . , I, 102 ff.

⁶ GN, III, 172-173. The classic example of this identity of wealth and wordliness would be Sheshet b. Isaac Benveniste. Rich, high handed, and, as we have seen, passionately committed to philosophy, Sheshet once became so angered over synagogue regulations that he spoke irreverently of Rashi and the tradition. However, Baer's larger thesis is hard to establish; Alfakhar, Nachmanides, Jonah Gerundi, and many of the Provençal anti-Maimonids were well born. Meir b. Todros was well born and well connected but not rich. On his important and close family connections to the ibn Shushans and Alconstantinis, cf. Brody, II (1936), 4-8. On Meir's being a poor relation or at least having suffered major reversals, note this verse:

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gious indifference.¹ Certainly only the well-to-do could provide tutors for their sons. Furthermore, it was only among the courtier and merchant class that there was any degree of social and professional mingling, and therefore any reason to believe that the coin of Greek philosophy could be exchanged on the open market. "Men in the royal service have been permitted to study Greek science, to learn the art of healing and the science of measurement, and all the other sciences and their application, so that they may earn their livelihood in the courts and palace."² The indifferent first heard of the *Moreh* from pious scholars who were excited by its intellectual horizons. Probably few among them bothered to read it. We suspect that the *Moreh's* role at this time was not unlike Einstein's general theory of relativity in our own, much discussed by the average man but known only through popularization and at the once removed. They heard that Maimonides had allegorized many Scriptural passages and jumped happily to the conclusion that he would have shared their sweeping claim that "the whole Torah from Creation to Sinai is an allegory."³ They heard that Maimonides had offered a catalogue of rational explanations for the Biblical Law, and assumed that he would have agreed that if a law did not satisfy their categories of reason it might be discarded.⁴ They heard that Maimonides had given a novel interpretation to the tenet of resurrection, and assumed that he did not mean what he said when he insisted that resurrection remained a doctrine of the faith.

These restless and rootless anonymous men, however few they

"Behold, I am adrift in the sea of this hard time—
a net has been spread for me
Command to pacify her according to your generosity
that I may come safely to dry land."

(Brody, II, 36, No. 13.)

Nor is there any indication that Sheshet's wealthy and powerful Castilian counterpart, Joseph ibn Shushan, shared his attitudes. A panegyric and a eulogy by Meir b. Todros in honor of ibn Shushan has been published. (*Ibid.*, 11-12; 25-31, Nos. 1 and 10.) Ibn Shushan was *almoxarife* of Alfonso VIII of Castile, and counterpart in power in Castile to Sheshet in Aragon. (Baer, *Die Juden* . . . , II, 39, Nos. 19-21.) Did Meir counterpose political powers? Do we have here a reflex of some ancient Aragonese-Castilian feud? What, at least, is true is that it was a cultivated and sophisticated and religiously indifferent group among the wealthier class who took up the *Moreh* as justification for their disinterest.

¹ KTR, III, 8b.

² KTR, II, 1b.

³ GN, III, 165.

Shushan

may have been, precipitated the Maimonidean controversy. They presented a serious threat to the security and safety of the Jewish community.

"Alas the sword of apostasy is active among us."¹ In the new confrontation of European Jewry by the Church militant and missionary the apostate was a jugular threat.² How to head off his defection and defamation was the issue between the men of faith who fought the Maimonidean controversy.

¹ KTR, III, 8b-9a.

Early in the 13th century Judah al Harizi produced a copy of his Hebrew paraphrase of the *Wahy* with an introduction which concluded with the passage:

If you desire to rejoice in the garden of wisdom
There is a garden full of bloom
If you would offer your heart to God as a sacrifice
Here is the fire and the kindling.³

Early in the fourth decade of the 13th century, possibly in December of 1242, probably at Montpellier, the *Wahy* literally became

² Steinwaller, *Wahy*, p. 121. The poem is generally ascribed to:

Abraham ben Meir.

³ *ibid.*, p. 401.

⁴ The date of the burning is a matter of conjecture. We know that Abraham ben Meir was expelled from Montpellier in 1242. The event in January of 1242 by a Dominican friar then in Avignon and presumed to have been three years after the burning. (Abraham ben Meir, *ibid.*, p. 401.) The only other clearly dated document is the *Sefer ha-Seder* of David Kimhi (1260-1326) which is dated before the burning and which provides a number of clues (KTR, III, 90). The entire burning and the *Wahy* were placed in a book which was placed at a distance and with several witnesses after the burning of the *Sefer ha-Seder* (KTR, III, 90). The correspondence concludes with Kimhi's third and final letter regarding the full extent of Solomon ben Abraham's period— which means that the burning can be placed no earlier than 1242. December of 1242 or early 1243 since the beginning of the correspondence took place at about the time of the burning.

⁵ The correspondence, but not last-hand account of David Kimhi placed the denunciation of the *Wahy* in Montpellier (KTR, III, 90) and there is no reason to doubt this date. Kimhi's *Sefer ha-Seder* is dated early years after the fact, placed in Montpellier and burning in Paris, but this is to be doubted. The matter resulted, probably, from a confusion of the burning of 1242 at Paris and the *Wahy* which took place or so years before (KTR, III, 142).

CHAPTER NINE

THE ACTUAL CONTROVERSY

What have the burners burned? They have cinder-
red a book of most pleasant things, more precious
than gold.

Fire has consumed them. Yet how can fire consume
them?

Remember this, you who burn and are vainglorious,
All is not as it appears, they went up like Elijah to
God, and as an angel in the flame.¹

Early in the 13th century Judah al Harizi prefaced a copy of his Hebrew paraphrase of the *Moreh* with an encomium which concluded with the quatrain:

If you desire to rejoice in the garden of wisdom
Here is a garden bed full of bloom
If you would offer your heart to God as a sacrifice
Here is the fire and the kindling.²

Early in the fourth decade of the 13th century, possibly in December of 1232,³ probably at Montpellier,⁴ the *Moreh*, literally, became

¹ Steinschneider, *Kobets al-Yad*, I, 15. The poem is generally ascribed to Abraham Maimonides.

² al Harizi, p. 402.

³ The date of the burning is a matter of conjecture. We know that Abraham Maimonides was supplied with information on the event in January of 1235 by a Montpellier traveler then in Acre, and presumed it then to be three years after the burning. (Abraham Maimonides, *Milhamot Adonai*, p. 54.) The only other clearly dated document is the Saragossa counterban of July-August 1232, which by internal evidence must be dated before the burning and hence provides us a *terminus quo*. (KTR, III, 5b.) The entire David Kimhi-Judah b. Joseph Alfakhar correspondence took place at a distance and with several hiatuses after the promulgation of the Saragossa ban. (KTR, III, 1a.) This correspondence concludes with Kimhi's third and jubilant letter recording the full extent of Solomon b. Abraham's perfidy—which means that the burning can be placed no earlier than, say, December of 1232 or early 1233, since the beginning of this correspondence took place at about the time of the Saragossa ban.

⁴ The contemporary but not first-hand account of David Kimhi placed the denunciation of the *Moreh* in Montpellier (KTR, III, 4b), and there is no reason to doubt this detail. Hillel of Verona, whose testimony is dated sixty years after the fact, placed a denunciation and burning in Paris, but this is to be doubted; this mistake resulted, probably, from a confusion of the Talmud burning of 1240 at Paris and the *Moreh* affair eight or so years before. (KTR, III, 14a).

fire and kindling. The details of this cindering will now occupy us.

The usual historical account of the Montpellier incident lists three chief anti-Maimonidean actors¹ and paints them in black

it was ¹ The quarrel was one of individuals. Even when communities pronounced the ban, ~~the~~ the action of its religious and/or political leadership, not of the people. Much of the Jewish community undoubtedly was unaware and unaffected by these disputes except for their consequences. Literacy was far more broadly spread among Jews than among their neighbors, but not universal. When around 1290 the council of the Toledo Aljaman was empowered by Alfonso X to appoint "elders" in the surrounding communities "there wasn't anyone in these places able to read a single letter." (Baer, *A History* . . . , I, 214.) The goldsmiths and craftsmen and ~~and~~ brokers probably had little but a gossip type of interest in the quarrel—if they heard of it at all. Samuel b. Abraham is the only respondent to mention consulting his community. (GN, IV, 14.)

There was no mass polity. Baer suggests that in all of Castile in 1290 there were no more than 3600 tax paying families. (Baer, *A History* . . . , I, 190.) The largest Aljaman, the princely and much praised Toledo, had no more than 350 families. Other representative estimates suggested by Baer: for Seville 200 families, for Jarez de la Frontera perhaps 100, for Burgos 120 to 150. There were certainly no more six decades earlier. He intimated a similar number "for all of the lands under the Aragonese crown by the end of James the Conqueror's reign." (*Ibid.*, I, 195.) Saragossa, the largest Jewry, had perhaps 200 families. Huesca and Catalayud were somewhat smaller. Barcelona, the largest in Catalonia, 200; Lerida, 100. Emery, in his excellent study of Perpignan's Jewry, estimates, on the basis of rather complete notarial records, that at the end of the 13th century Perpignan had a Jewish population of around 100 families, in all, 300 to 400 souls. (R. Emery, *The Jews of Perpignan in the Thirteenth Century* [New York, 1959], p. 11.) Perpignan circa 1300 was at the zenith of a century-long growth from relative obscurity and it would seem fair to equate this end-of-century statistic with those of the flourishing centers of Lunel, Béziers, Narbonne, Montpellier a hundred years earlier. The one fairly accurate statistic places 140 adult males in Narbonne in 1305. (A. Blanc, "Les Livres de Compte de Jaume Olivier" [Narbonne, 1885-1902], pp. 545-546, quoted by J. Régné, "Étude sur la Condition des Juifs de Narbonne," *REJ*, LXII [1911], 257.) Of the French Jewries at the time, Rabinowitz states on the basis of a study of Tosaphist sources: "We may assume with some certainty that a community of one hundred householders was regarded as a really large community, and probably Paris alone could number so many. The larger cities had from fifty to one hundred Jews, the smaller ones from ten to fifty, while in many places there were but individuals." (Rabinowitz, p. 32.) The figures are for early in the century; but difficult times and the *herem ha-yishub* quota restrictions certainly kept numbers within such limits.

The techniques of 20th century political analysis tend statistically to discount individual idiosyncrasy, knowing that mass numbers will compensate. 13th century Jewish life prohibits us this luxury. Class consciousness and cultural norms are convenient and helpful historical explanations, but in the 13th century personal vanities, family ties, and personality quirks can not be discounted and are, unfortunately, largely unknown to us. Nachmanides' role in the quarrel was heavily influenced by his blood ties

consequences.

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colors: as senior, Solomon b. Abraham of Montpellier together with two disciples, David b. Saul and Jonah b. Abraham Gerundi; and holds them directly responsible for the burning.¹ It is our contention that none of these three was the actual informer. *Malshinut*, informing, was a capital crime. Anathema would have greeted any such act.² No further support could have been given such a criminal. No authority would have cited the opinions of such a person in *halachic* matters. Yet each "conspirator" subsequently was defended and cited and, at least in the case of Jonah Gerundi, was given high communal position.

Before we elaborate on this, the facts need briefly to be reconstructed. Solomon b. Abraham of Montpellier and his disciples some time before 1232, possibly as early as two decades before, became concerned that some speculative minded Jews minimized

with Jonah Gerundi—especially when the latter's legitimacy was questioned. The *Assent* of the Aljamins of Aragon to the counterban against those who banned study of the *Moreh* reflected as much the power of Bahya and Moses Alconstantini, physicians attendant and diplomatic interpreters to James I of Aragon, and Bahya's personal interest in the matter and the sway of these court Jews, as they reveal the inner feelings of these communities. Similarly, one can not separate Nachmanides' position from his decade long opposition to the authority of the Alconstantinians over the Aljamins of Aragon and Valencia. (Y. Baer, "Books and New Research in the History of the Jews of Spain" (Heb.), *Devir*, II [Berlin, 1924], 316 ff.)

¹ Typically, "These three propounded the ban . . ." (Graetz, *A History* . . . , III, 529.) Graetz pictured both Solomon and his disciples as "bigoted," as sustaining a theology "both gross and anthropomorphic," and as borrowing from the Church militant the idea of enforced conformity: "The effective instrument of excommunication to destroy ideas apparently pernicious." (*Ibid.*) cf. Neuman, II, 119 ff.: "A redoubtable opponent in the person of the revered Talmudist, Solomon b. Abraham of Montpellier, arose to engage the adherents of philosophy in vigorous combat, and he was blindly followed by two fanatical disciples, David b. Saul and Rabbi Jonah Gerundi. . . . Standing almost alone, except for the support of two of his disciples, Solomon anathematized the philosophic writings of Maimonides, interdicted the sciences, and pronounced the sentence of excommunication against those who engaged in the study of profane literature or who treated and dealt too freely with the *aggada* portion of the Talmud. . . . Solomon finally resorted to the execrable measure of denouncing the philosophic works of Maimonides to the Inquisition as heretical and dangerous." cf. Sarachek, p. 77 ff.: "Thus occurred the shameful public burning of the *Guide* and the *Book of Knowledge*. It was done at the instigation of the strict traditionalists, with the approval of the Cardinal Romanus, the Judge of the heresy court." Cf. I. Zinberg, *Toldot Sifrut Yisrael*, I (Tel Aviv, 1959), 277 f.

² For specific citations of anathemas pronounced and of the execution of such culprits, see D. Kaufmann, "Jewish Informers in the Middle Ages," *JQR*, VIII (1898), 217-238.

traditional teaching, openly violated certain religious requirements, interpreted Biblical and Talmudic statements allegorically to their own purpose, and justified all such activity on the authority of Maimonides. Samuel b. Abraham defined his social concern this way:

It grew out of our zeal for the Torah of our Creator, for we heard of a minority of both young and old, publicly insisting on non-traditional teachings, following a path which was not good after their thoughts, to tear down the tradition, and to spin allegories out of the narrative of the Written and Oral Law which reduced to pedagogic example and flight of literary fancy the description of Creation and the chronicle of Cain and Abel and other similar narratives.¹

Apparently, Solomon *et al* came to the conclusion that these "un-orthodox" groups could be silenced if they were denied the cover of "official" sanction, i.e. if Maimonides' philosophic material, the *Moreh* and the *Mada*, were banned to public instruction. Solomon did not accuse Maimonides or his works of being heretic. Translators had abused the text. The very act of translation was an abuse. Maimonides had intended the *Moreh* to be a "reserved" doctrine taught individually to thoroughly qualified graduate students.² The translators had popularized and publicized and many who were intellectually and spiritually unprepared had sampled its ideas to their confusion and to the weakening of their faith.

Apparently Solomon *et al* debated these people often and publicly and circulated pamphlets against them through the Provence. For their pains they were met with denunciation and contumely. Wanting to buttress their position, Jonah b. Abraham Gerundi was sent north to gain support for a proposed ban against the public study of philosophic works generally and of Maimonides' works particularly. The Sarfatim did in fact publish such a ban whose only immediate effect was to bring forth a Provençal counterban against any who interfered in such study.³

Those who opposed Solomon then sent the aged and respected translator-grammarian-Talmudist David Kimhi south into Aragon and Castile to state their case, while the anti-Maimonists wrote to Nachmanides of Gerona and others whom they had reason to believe sympathetic. In Aragon most of the leading Aljamans (Saragossa,

¹ GN, IV, 11.

² GN, IV, 12.

³ KTR, III, 2b. We are in the dark as to the individual and/or communal signatories though it is clear that it included leaders of the communities of Lunel, Béziers, and Narbonne.

Huesca, Monzon, Catalayud, and Lerida) joined in the counterban under the influence of the powerful Alconstantini family and especially its leader, the physician-politician Bahya b. Moses. In Castile, however, the counterban met with little approval, the unsympathetic position taken by the well born and influential physician Judah ibn Alfakhar being largely responsible.

This literature and politics will be examined in detail. The entire brouhaha was aborted within a matter of months by the unexpected burning of the *Moreh* in Montpellier.¹ The issue became moot and Israel fell to the elemental business of healing the breach.

¹ No satisfactory explanation has been offered which would explain Montpellier's central role in the controversy, indeed, none to our knowledge has been attempted. Montpellier "was a center of orthodoxy in Albigensian country." (R. G. Little, *Medieval France* [Cambridge, 1922], p. 244.) The preaching fathers had early in the century established a house there and the Dominicans had a *Studium Generale*. A council there in 1215 reaffirmed the mandate of the Episcopal inquisition established already in 1184. It was to Montpellier that Raymond VII came in 1224 to make his submission. Montpellier was a steadfast Catholic island in a seething Catharist sea. Perhaps this militant orthodoxy put the Jewish community under some duress to control its own speculatives. There is no proof either of such conversation or coercion. The ban was not a decision of the *Kahal*. Abraham Maimonides insisted on this. (Abraham Maimonides, *Milhamot Adonai*, p. 55.) In further corroboration the names of the rabbinic authorities of Montpellier are known from their signatures on a legal brief in an entirely unrelated matter and excepting Solomon none figure in this connection. (Gross, *Gallia Judaica*, p. 329.) Solomon acted on his own. The possibility is not ruled out that he felt that the Church would not disapprove, but as far as is known no bargain was struck. It is far more plausible that living in a Provençal commune which from the first felt Catholic power and sensed the direction and success of Church energies, Solomon had a better idea than contemporaries who still lived within religiously freer walls that the Church militant was challenging on an entirely new basis the integrity of Jewish life. Technically under the crown of Aragon, lieged to the Count of Toulouse who controlled the citadel, seat of the Bishop of Maguelone who shared the market with the commune—the Jewish community's relations with each of these various authorities is beyond reconstruction. The lords of Montpellier "owned" the Jews and licensed the Jewish physicians. The Bishop wielded ecclesiastic control of the university, which then included faculties in law and medicine and perhaps already one in the arts.

Any attempt to explain the issue in terms of a town-gown controversy is unpromising. The gown in this case was rigidly orthodox. Jews were rarely admitted. Indeed, of all the protagonists only Jonah Gerundi was associated as a student of the medical faculty and he was, of course, on the side of the traditionalists. All in all, Montpellier was not an easy city in which to keep one's balance and it most certainly was a city in which Jews were constantly subject to sophisticated church arguments and bald church attacks. This can be substantiated by the contemporaneous but anonymous Pentateuchal commentary, *Lehet Katsir*, which contrived into the familiar exegesis numer-

Of the burning itself there is little that is certain except that it occurred. David Kimhi, who was sick in Avila at the time, accused Solomon b. Abraham of being the informer and claimed that Solomon had peddled his baggage of lies first to the Franciscans, then to the Dominicans (who, surprisingly, did nothing about it), finally to "The Cardinal" who ordered an investigation and subsequently confiscation.¹ The Cardinal referred to was probably the Papal legate Romanus, whom we know to have been in Montpellier circa 1233 directing an inquisitional attack on Catharist heresiarchs.² Kimhi's information has served as the basis for most reconstructions.³

The Toledoans, Judah Alfakhar⁴ and Joseph b. Todros ha-Levi,⁵ presumed Solomon's guilt (even as they argued in mitigation on the basis of extreme provocation) but they had only Kimhi's information to go on.

On the other hand, the brothers Judah and Abraham ibn Hisdai of Barcelona (in a circular letter to the Spanish Aljamans) failed to nominate the guilty and spoke only of "people wayward and perverse who had banded together...." They added a detail—the tongues of the informers had been cut out⁶—a fate we are certain did not befall Jonah Gerundi, who lived out his days as a public preacher, and one which probably did not befall the others.

The Hisdai post eventum account is probably the more exact. There is no doubt that Solomon, David, and Jonah were active in opposing speculative energies within the community and were identified publicly as leaders of this cause. There is, however, every reason to doubt their being the actual agents of denunciation.

Despite Jonah Gerundi's active partisanship, the Montpellier physician Isaac b. Shem Tob, who in 1235 reported the incident to Abraham Maimonides, made no mention of Jonah in his review—

ous apologetic passages seeking to answer various Christian attacks. (*Ibid.*, p. 327, No. 8.)

Montpellier's Hebrew name, *Har Ga'ash*, the mountain of trembling, was consciously appropriate to Jewish life there. Solomon's controversy was his program for stability.

¹ *KTR*, III, 4b.

² Lea, *A History of the Inquisition*, I (New York, 1955), 316.

³ *KTR*, III, 4a ff.

⁴ *KTR*, III, 4b.

⁵ *GN*, III, 172 f.: "They sinned and rebelled, but he (Solomon) also is not forgiven."

⁶ *GN*, III, 176 ff.

none at least Abraham Maimonides thought worthy of repetition.¹ Shortly after the affair, circa 1240, Jonah became preacher and moral revivalist to the large and proud Toledo community where he lived out his days with honor (d. 1263).² No Jewish community would have tolerated the sermonic strictures of a known informer.³

¹ Abraham Maimonides' account can be reduced to these terms. There were in the Provence two parties on questions of religion: one a party of intelligentsia who had a true concept of faith, the other, Talmudists who followed a confused doctrine which they had received of their fathers. (Abraham Maimonides, *Milhamot Adonai*, p. 54.) Two men, Solomon b. Abraham of Montpellier and David b. Saul, made themselves the zealous heads of this second party. Since the men of "true faith" were self proclaimed disciples of Moses Maimonides, these two aforementioned began to attack Maimonides' teaching and to speak slander about his authority and orthodoxy and, incidentally, about Abraham Maimonides' authority. Solomon prepared a brief listing errors in the first two parts of the *Moreh* touching, especially, the question of resurrection and Maimonides' rational explanation of the commandments. (*Ibid.*, p. 58 and p. 68), Solomon passed out the word that Abraham Maimonides had high-handedly excommunicated two scholars who had differed with his father: i.e., David b. Saadya and Simson of Sens. (*Ibid.*, p. 53.) The news, especially that dealing with the fate of the venerated Tosaphist leader Simson of Sens, excited the French and they, sharing Solomon's mistrust of "Greek studies," issued a ban against reading the *Moreh* or the *Mada*. Abraham Maimonides was also in receipt of a counter-ban, which he attributed to his father's old friends in Lunel "against the little foxes who despoil the vineyard" and of the saddening information that the *Moreh* had been burnt by the authorities after it had been denounced to them by Solomon b. Abraham and David b. Saul "through the agency of the nobility who helped them because they (the Jews) quarreled with their own faith and revealed its shame." (*Ibid.*, p. 55.)

It is apparent that no specifics of the denunciation of the *Moreh* to Christian authorities were known to Abraham Maimonides. Solomon and David are implicated but the when and why are not explained. None of our sources, as we shall see, was clear on this point. The only explanation really attempted was Joseph b. Todros ha-Levi's view that such pressure was put on Solomon because of his zealous concern for the orthodoxy of the faith that he had no alternative (*GN*, III, 172.) Neither in this account nor in any other is it clear to whom the book was denounced. Abraham Maimonides speaks of the "princes" *נְסִיכִים*; others of the royal court; still others of the Franciscans and Dominicans either separately or conjointly.

² Gerundi left two fine ethical statements as monument of this stay: *Sefer Sha'arei Teshubah* (English, *The Book of the Gates of Repentance*) and *Sefer ha-Yirah* (English, *The Book of Piety*).

³ Shrock, Jonah's most recent biographer, follows A. Loewenthal, *R. Jona Gerundi und Seiner Ethischen Kommentar zu den Proverbian* (Berlin, 1910), pp. 6-10; in insisting on a minor role for Jonah in this controversy. (A. T. Shrock, *Rabbi Jonah ben Abraham of Gerona* [London, 1948], p. 54 f.) In proof Shrock cites the references to Maimonides in Jonah's works. (*Ibid.*, p. 57 f.) However, the references are minor and the argument carefully designed to put Jonah in a favorable light. Jonah was a busy controversialist,

(Resh) 7

Of no "informer" would the poets have sung, as did Meshullam b. Solomon of Jonah:

O perfect one in moral quality, put the honey comb in your mouth and let incense sweeten your heart.

Let your expansive spirit spread out lest your censors cease to give off scent...

O Jonah, respected rabbi, may his footstool be a sanctuary and his seat a place of offering.

Honor will sing of you, churlishness will be silent—pay no attention to it

May the *Shekinah* rest on your house and may God's spirit protect your holiness and testify of you....¹

A similar case can be made for David b. Saul. Israel Levi has published a legal brief edited by David against the views of an anonymous *halachist* who had legislated rather permissively in certain matters touching the fitness of wine which had passed in transit through non-Jewish hands.² The document postdates the 1230's, since it cited Moses of Coucy's *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol*, which was not compiled until the 1250's.³ No scholar who had been smeared with the taint of having denounced a Hebrew work to the Church would have dared write a responsum with the fervor and condemnatory abandon David showed here. Any such writing would not only not have been tolerated, it certainly would not have been cited by subsequent authorities as effective precedent.⁴

Even the master "conspirator," Solomon b. Abraham, continued to be revered as scholar and rabbi. At the close of the century we find Menahem Meiri, the revered scholar of Perpignan, citing

but by no stretch of the imagination an informer. On Gerundi in Toledo see the excellent account in Baer, *A History* . . . , I, 250-257.

¹ H. Brody, "Poems of Meshullam b. Solomon Da Pierra" (Heb.), *Yedeot ha-Mahon le-Heher ha-Shira ha-Iurit*, IV (1938), 45-46, No. 8, vv. 52-54.

² I. Levi, "Un Recueil de Consultations Inédites de Rabbins de La France Merideonale," *REJ*, XXXIX (1899), 231-241. David wrote of having wondered as a boy at certain practices of Spanish wine merchants who put a bit of honey into their kegs to free these from any charge of unfitness for Jewish consumption if they were handled by non-Jews. His teacher, who had taught him this legal nicety, followed consciously the *Mishneh Torah*, although no other Provençal or Narbonne sage agreed. (*Ibid.*, p. 237.) Interestingly, Maimonides is treated throughout as an authority necessarily to be considered, though in this case Maimonides' view was dismissed. The quotations are all from *M. T. Maachelot Assurot* 11:11, 9:10. (*Ibid.*, p. 236.)

³ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

⁴ Cf. the affirmatory references to this brief in a later responsum by Samuel Sulami written circa 1300. (*Ibid.*, p. 231 ff.)

him in his responsa.¹ We also possess some legal correspondence between Solomon and Nachmanides, though this is undated.²

Someone, possibly some converted Jew aware of the roiling controversy, denounced the *Moreh* and *Mada* to a papal mission investigating heresy, or perhaps a mission minded clergy simply heard of the boiling argument and thought to make the most of it. That the informer was any of the three scholar protagonists of the anti-Maimonidean ban is doubtful. Solomon and his disciples inadvertently prepared a witch's brew; to the crime itself they were but tragic bystanders.

What manner of men were these?

Nachmanides,³ Judah Alfakhar,⁴ Meshullam b. Solomon,⁵ and Joseph b. Todros ha-Levi⁶ spoke warmly of Solomon, considered him a fine scholar, and acted on the presumption of his Talmudic soundness. Abraham Maimonides referred to Solomon and David as masters of *halacha*—as familiars of the intricate byways of Talmudic logic.⁷ It is clear from his *Milhamot Adonai* that neither Solomon nor David were considered simple men or queer duck fanatics. Abraham faulted them only for being philosophically naive.⁸ He meant by this that they were unaware of the presuppositions of his own and his father's heavily Aristotelian cosmology. From Abraham's account we can reconstruct tentatively some of Solomon's premises. Reason must be subservient to revelation as the law (Torah) predated Creation,⁹ hence study of the Torah rather than the activation of the intellect (i.e. philosophy) is the prime concern of religious devotion. Solomon took to heart the Talmudic injunction against drinking from the wells of the Greeks, believing, probably from actual observation, that philosophic study

¹ Menahem b. Solomon Meiri, *Magen Abot*, Isaac Last (ed.) (London, 1909), Chapter 6.

² Baer's conclusion is inescapable, "the memory of R. Solomon of Montpellier and his scholarship were held in reverence during the next generation." (Baer, *A History* . . . , I, 402, note 60.)

³ *KTR*, III, 5a.

⁴ *KTR*, III, 2a, "The brilliant rabbi . . ."

⁵ Brody, *Yedeot* . . . , IV, 104, No. 44, vv. 79-81, "Had it not been for Solomon, the exceptional man, who insisted on the covenant . . ."

⁶ *KTR*, III, 6b, "A faithful branch, a fountain of wisdom and understanding, mighty in his efforts to restore the beaten paths and to repair the breach."

⁷ Abraham Maimonides, *Milhamot Adonai*, p. 69.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

often led to a denial of faith or to a sense of superiority towards its regulations.¹

We control only one relevant document from Solomon's pen, an undated letter, seeking support, sent to a Castilian friend of his school days, Samuel b. Isaac.²

O
Castilian

There is a determined group who are publicizing ideas of faith which are unique and novel. They destroy the force of tradition by opposing to it the conclusions of their reason.³ Their *modus operandi* is to spin allegories out of the text of the Torah—contradictory, unrelated, and vague.⁴ For their purpose they use the epic of creation, the history of Cain and Abel and all manner of other stories found in the Torah.⁵ They validate this allegorical dispensation by quoting the assertion of the *Moreh's* translators that Maimonides had taught that all the stories of the Torah are allegories and all the *Mitzvot* (commandments) are only customary practice.⁶ The traditional fabric of faith had, in Solomon's mind, been ruptured. Solomon had heard scoffing against the teaching of the rabbis.⁷

Solomon saw this new attitude towards the Biblical text as posing a threat to the viability of faith. When he heard such scoffing he flushed and became fearful.⁸ His concern was not of recent origin. Solomon recognized that he had made himself broadly

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

² GN, IV, 10 ff. By internal evidence this letter can be dated after the French ban, i.e. circa 1231-32. It is in essence an appeal for support from an embittered and beleaguered man to a friend of his youth in his hour of need. The support requested is to limit the effectiveness of an emissary from the opposition, David Kimhi, who had been dispatched to Aragon, Castile, and Navarre, to line up signatures for the counterban. Of Samuel b. Isaac ha-Sardi few biographical details are known. He came to the Provence and studied with Nathan b. Meir of Trinquetaille and returned to Spain. As *the* *halachist* he was the author of *Sefer ha-Terumot* (on the Civil Laws of *The* Talmud) and *Sefer ha-Zikronot* (on the arrangement of chapters of the Mishnah).

³ GN, IV, 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12. The "superiority complex" of those possessed of the new learning must not be discounted as a precipitating factor. Solomon tells that "He was in their eyes as a fool." (*Ibid.*) One thinks of the unspoken contempt and counterbalancing angry if silent frustration which exists between today's high-churchmen and country revivalists. Solomon, for all his erudition, must have seemed old hat, even incongruous to those who ~~valued high scholarship~~ knew Aristotle. They in turn must have seemed dangerous and immoral to him.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

disliked, but the quarrel had become exacerbated only when some men of the Béziers community interferred. These few went so far as to accuse Solomon of failing to abide communal restrictions and of shaming publicly the memory of Maimonides.¹

Solomon's attack on the translators and his generally respectful treatment of Maimonides are interesting in themselves. Maimonides' piety and *halachic* competence generally precluded any frontal *ad hominem* attack. Hence the convenient subterfuge of blaming the translators—a charge which, by the by, had some basis in the abandon of Judah al Harizi's free wheeling paraphrase.

To defend himself and to win support, Solomon had turned to the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12. Béziers played a crucial role in the denouement of l'affaire Solomon, but precise details cannot be documented. Solomon's narrative presumed this chronology:

- 1) Solomon's concern for the prevalent intellectual novelties,
- 2) his being informed that a translator of the *Morsh* insisted that Maimonides had held all Biblical stories allegorical and all Biblical commandments supportable by human reason,
- 3) a protracted debate between Solomon and spinners of novelties which seems to have followed a fairly familiar course until . . .
- 4) the men of Béziers entered the picture. They are accused of bringing personalities and vindictiveness into the debate and of charging Solomon with slandering Maimonides. The men of Béziers pursued this policy for some time, finally precipitating the denouement.
- 5) the appeal by Solomon to the rabbis of France for support.

Béziers' involvement thus must be placed fairly early. It was this same Béziers community which later charged Jonah Gerundi with being of impure descent. (N. Brüll, "Die Polemik Für un Gegen Maimuni in Dreizehnten Jahrhundert," *Jahrbücher Für Jüdische Geschichte und Literatur*, IV [1879], 23; *GN*, IV 9-10.) It was this charge which precipitated Jonah's cousin Nachmanides from his role as peacemaker into the fray (*GN*, IV, 15-36) and which moved Meshullam b. Solomon to this evocation of God's wrath: "On Béziers pour out Thine anger. Yet grant safety to a few." (Brody, *Yedeot* . . . IV, 34, No. 12, v. 25.)

Who were these irascible men of Béziers? We do not know. That no official *Kahal* program was involved is clear from the text cited above and from the friendly letter from Nachmanides to the venerable jurist and scholar Meshullam b. Moses of Béziers seeking his help in silencing those of that city who had libeled Jonah's legitimacy.

The original Jewish settlement had been wiped out in the massacre of 1209 when Béziers fell to the forces of Simon de Montfort. Of those who resettled we biographically unaware except for the name of Meshullam b. Moses and of another Talmudist, Solomon b. Asher. (Gross, *Gallica Judaica*, p. 101.) We do know that circa 1240 Solomon b. Joseph ibn Ayyub, a Granada scholar emigré, settled here and found a welcome and eager support for his translation of Maimonides' *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* and Averroes' paraphrase of *De Caelo*. Surely, those who rated Solomon b. Abraham and Jonah Gerundi were of the circle that patronized Solomon b. Joseph ibn Ayyub, but of their biographies and motivations we are ignorant.

Béziers

are are

rabbis of France. These worthies responded with the assurances he requested, nay with more: a representation to gather information on the specific nature of the quarrel and an immediate reproof to those who busy themselves with vain speculation. Solomon apparently had forwarded a translation of the *Moreh* and on the basis of this text and of the report of their observer a final ban was pronounced "because the teaching was in their eyes a blasphemy of tradition and of God."¹ The text of this ban is not known.

David Kimhi's mission was characterized by Solomon as deliberately provocative. It was certainly designed to enlist the Spanish Aljamans against Solomon and the French ban. Solomon accused Kimhi of distorting facts and of displaying doctored copies of Solomon's letters to France in which it was inferred that Solomon, on his own, had excommunicated anyone who followed Maimonides' philosophic regimen.²

For his pains Samuel received from his friend a mildly encouraging reply full of admonitions to avoid bitterness and to patch up the quarrel.³ Samuel b. Isaac touched a theme almost universal in the literature, "The Torah must not become split."⁴ There must be one tradition, not two. Bitter memories of the centuries-old Karaite schism still rankled.⁵ Nor could the Aljamans survive if communal authority was challenged. The playing off before Christian authorities of one side's grievances against the other was a frightening prospect. (Nachmanides' subsequent peacemaker's letter to the French was based entirely on this same urgency).⁶ The Jewish community could permit theological argument only to the

¹ GN, IV, 12. One of the impenetrable sidelights of this history is that neither the text ban nor the personalities of the French rabbis emerges. That the text itself was lost is understandable. Nachmanides tells us that it was peremptory and made no mention of specifics. (KTR, III, 8a.) That none of the discussants stipulated any name or signature is hard to explain. There were famous Tosaphist leaders aplenty at the time/Yehiel of Paris, Moses of Coucy, Judah b. David, Samuel b. Solomon, etc. If Solomon's chronicle is to be taken at face value it calls into question the fact and authority of Jonah Gerundi's trip north.

² GN, III, 13. ³ GN, IV, 14-15. ⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

⁵ The Karaite schism was not entirely a distant historical memory. Joseph b. Alfakhar, the controversialist Judah b. Alfakhar's father, had been instrumental as late as 1200 in assuring the denial of an appeal to Alfonso VIII by the small Karaite community of Castile. (I. Loeb, "Polémistes Chrétiens et Juifs," REJ, XVIII [1889], 60-63; I. Loeb, "Notes sur l'Histoire des Juifs," REJ, XIX [1889], 206-207.) There is a possibility Joseph Abulafia's father, Todros, was involved in a similar affair. (GN, III, 169.)

⁶ KTR, III, 8a ff.

f Alfonso

point where it did not crystallize into factionalism. Life, not logic, insisted that quarreling could go no farther.

The figure of Solomon which begins to emerge is that of a competent *halachist* and sturdy moralist who was rendered heartsick by the novelties and speculation of those who preferred to argue faith than to abide it. Had he provocation? Undoubtedly, although we can name no names. Was there reason for his urgency? Undoubtedly, his was not a quiet age in a quiet province. His was the Provence of the Albigensian Crusade. His Jewish community was under the Church militant. Such a community needed a sturdy faith if it was to survive. Basically we have here the opposition of two *Weltanschauungs* rather than a dialectic between obscurantism and enlightenment. Even Abraham Maimonides sensed as much:

But the fundamentals of our faith which are the unity of God and His holiness and the holiness of His great and awesome name, most of the dispersed do not concern themselves with, since the mass do not burden themselves except under the pressure of routine circumstance and routine vanities. They depend on obedience to the Law following the teaching of the sages of the Torah. The schools do not bestir themselves except in the sophistications of Abaye and Raba and of Talmudic debate, elucidation, and sophistry. Those who concern themselves in the fundamentals of the Torah and her establishment to know the truth, and to understand it, and to teach it to intellectuals who wish to know the faith of their Creator, these are great sages and they are but few.¹

Compare also the charge implicit in an unsigned letter to the rabbis of France and Spain:

If the books have not reached you how did the vagrant thought occur to you to speak angrily and to shame a sage whose universal reverence you must recognize... Behold your control is great in matters of permission and prohibition (*halacha*—Talmud)—that is your priority. It is consecrated work—but how can you prohibit in an area with which you are not familiar...²

Abraham Maimonides permits us to glimpse David b. Saul's God idea. David denied all anthropomorphic attributes.³ What he had

¹ Abraham Maimonides, *Milhamot Adonai*, p. 48.

² *GN*, IV, 42.

³ Abraham Maimonides, *Milhamot Adonai*, p. 69. David b. Saul appears to have been Provençal, probably of Narbonne. (Levi, *REJ*, XXXIX [1899], 241.) This responsum reveals him to have been mightily concerned with the "fences" which must surround the law and protect its integrity.

not known was the "full light".¹ God can not be conceived even as a radiance or effulgence without positing of Him some quality of form. David apparently based his theosophy on the mystical doctrine *Aharei ha-Pargud*² currently popular among German Hasidim. Briefly put, this doctrine held that God exists as a divine effulgence behind a veil of darkness which masks God's brilliance from men. Into this curtain are woven the archetypes or ideal forms of worldly existence. The curtain conceit was an ancient doctrine already alluded to in the Talmud and in 3 Enoch.³ It was designed to solve the problem of God's otherness—His perfection—and still admit certain ties between heaven and man. The veil on which the ideal forms are written reveals the fate of the universe and permits those, i.e. the prophets, who can penetrate to it to see (that is, foresee) the terms of the divine promise. The world runs according to divinely predetermined law. That law is woven into the veil. The Messianic hope also was woven into this veil as part of the pre-ordained order of things.⁴ Abraham Maimonides made great fun of this belief. Since the earth is round, the veil must be round and God formed like a doughnut with a hole through the middle. More seriously, he argued that for God to be even a radiance was to posit form; to ascribe form was to ascribe place. Form and place are qualities of matter, hence David was a corporealist and hence a *min* according to his father's formula in *Mishneh Torah*, *Teshubah* 5:7.

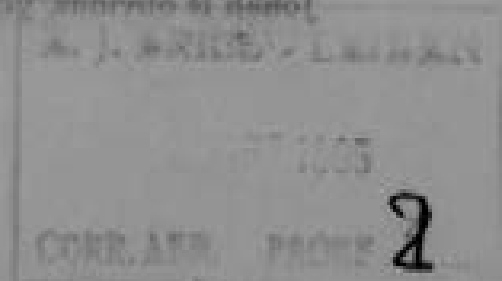
It may not be inappropriate to ask why Abraham Maimonides and the Maimonids generally made so much of God's otherness and pure essence. In part the answer, of course, is systematic. The goal of piety is the fully activated intellect. Man's intellect comes alive in measure as it knows truth. Unclear ideas prevent its activation. Hence quite pragmatically the God idea must be pristine. Biblical anthropomorphisms are misleading hence the uncompromising insistence that they be understood allegorically. We suggest that another part of the answer lies in the field of interreligious relations. In his *Milhamot Adonai*, Abraham Maimonides developed this interesting argument:

¹ Abraham Maimonides, *Milhamot Adonai*, p. 69.

² *Ibid.*, p. 70.

³ *T.B. Hagigah* 15a; 3 Enoch 45.

⁴ G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem, 1941), pp.



On all this (the discussion of *Yihud*) no one has doubts from the farthest east to west in all Arab lands for the Ishmaelites got their faith from the Jew and they based the fundamentals of their faith on it (*Yihud*), and turned from the folly of their fathers and idolatry and began conceiving of the unity of His name and greatness and because their worship is to a Unity (*Yihud*). Scripture likens them to the ritual of sacrifice which is in His name.¹

Elementally, i.e. systematically, Islam and Judaism become one devotion. Those "across the sea who make the mistake of following the simplicities of Bible, Midrash, and *Aggadah*" are fortunately across the sea. Such mistaken beliefs, had they been held in Islam, would have posed a threat to the *dhimmi* status of the Jew for these, the misguided, worship not God but God's *baboh*, His reflected image, and are not true unitarians.

David's views were anything but simplistic. They represent not the absence of philosophy but another philosophic tradition largely Neo-Platonic received through Talmudic allusions. Certainly he felt himself anything but a corporealist. Indeed, David might well have rejoined: the Bible presumes God's otherness, not the negation of all attributes implicit in the philosophic category of Pure Existence. Furthermore, God is beyond the categories of logic. That philosophers insist on God's unrelatedness has not precluded His being intimate to man.

A picture of Jonah b. Abraham Gerundi, of whom much more is known, reveals the same breadth and subtlety of mind. Rummaging in his writings we can find "obscurantist" statements. "Let one beware lest he busy himself with far fetched and misleading metaphysics. Let him not join himself to the teachers of these lest they cause him to stumble."² On the other hand, Shrock's comprehensive analysis of Jonah's works found in them reference to Saadya Gaon's *Emunot veDe'ot*, Bahaya ibn Paquda's *Hobot ha-Lebabot*, Solomon ibn Gabirol's *Mibhar ha-Penanim* and *Tikkun Middot ha-Nefesh*, Judah ha-Levi's *Divan*, Maimonides' *Commentary on Mishnah Abot*, and Judah Hasid's *Sefer Hassidim*.³ Jonah's theology had definite ties to the burgeoning Kabbalist

¹ Abraham Maimonides, *Milhamot Adonai*, pp. 71-72. The Scriptural reference is probably Jer. 16 : 19-21.

² Jonah Gerundi, *Perush al Mishle* (Berlin, 1910), Prov. 1 : 7.

³ Shrock, pp. 115-119. Let it be insisted upon that such philosophical references were limited and sketchy. That such material did not intrigue Jonah is obvious, yet equally he was not unaware of it.

thinking centered in his natal city of Gerona. Meshullam b. Solomon mentions him along with Ezra, Azriel, and Nachmanides as belonging to this group.¹ What was early Kabbalah but a sophisticated philosophic mysticism in Hebraic dress? In a responsum on concubinage Nachmanides addressed Jonah as "the man of God, the Holy One, the *Hasid*."² Nachmanides, in an elegy written on the occasion of Jonah's death, dwelt at length on his learning and ascetic piety:

... Rabbi Jonah, paragon of character, Without peer in purity
Woe to saintliness, Woe to humility, Woe to ~~asceticism~~ and
continence,
Woe to Talmud and Tosafot, Woe to Legal Refinements and
Legal Opinions.³

asceticism

Finally, on Jonah's tombstone there is an inscription which includes these lines:

In this grave is buried the Father of moral example beloved
of Israel and Judah
The rabbi who spoke the secret parts of wisdom and published
its regulations, and enlightened every aspect of its organiza-
tion
The source of wisdom and understanding
The burning light from which both the rays of wisdom and
understanding went out
The great saintly Rabbi Jonah, may his memory be for bless-
ing.⁴

The famed preacher of the intellectually alert Aljaman of Toledo was certainly far more than a fundamentalist pietist.

So much for the three central anti-Maimonidean protagonists. What emerges is an impression of piety and traditional learning: metaphysical involvement in some forms of either German Hasidism (Solomon-David) or the nascent Spanish Kabbalism (Jonah), passion for communal religious integrity, some awareness of philosophic vocabularies but blindness to philosophy's possible benefit. Maimonides was respected even while his philosophy was attacked—not directly but because of what translators and traducers had imputed to the *Moreh* and claimed to derive from it. Solomon

¹ Brody, *Yedeot* . . . , IV, 22-24, No. 8.

² Nachmanides, *Torat ha-Adam* (Warsaw, 1841), Responsa II, 284.

³ Nachmanides, "Haylelu," *Leket Z'vi*, S. Baer (ed.) (Rodelheim, 1861), p. 68, vv. 5-8.

⁴ Anon., "Epitaph," *Rapport sur les Inscriptions Hebraiques de l'Espagne*, M. Schwab (Paris, 1907), p. 73, vv. 7-13.

and his disciples sought to return Israel to the traditional content of *yeshibah* training (i.e. the four ells of the Talmudic ~~sa~~ world), and to abort the "study groups" in philosophy which were about and busy raising all manner of embarrassing questions and successfully seducing the uncertain. That they actually denounced the *Moreh* to the secular authorities or the Church is doubtful. That they wished to evict its influence and persuasiveness is beyond question.

The controversy developed in terms of spiritual rather than systematic norms. Both the Talmudic and the Hellenic outlook encouraged a form of speculative mysticism. The philosophically oriented refined and translated into Jewish vocabularies various Greek formulas concerning the activation of the intellect. Traditional mysticism, on the other hand, centered on the piety of Torah. Both were validated by illumination and by certain assurances of salvation, but each spoke within a self contained frame. The forms of the psychological organization of mystical experience are elemental to human nature and independent of culture, but there is a world of difference in interpretation and priority between immersing one's intellect in metaphysics—the higher knowledge of truth and being—and immersing one's intellect in the profundities of Scripture. Philosophic mysticism reduced the Torah, its study and practice, and especially its hidden truths, to second rank. It was not the ultimate commitment but a means of preparation. Torah mysticism centered entirely on the virtues of practice. Study was directed toward uncovering the implicit profundities of the text. There was no higher gnosis. "Every letter of the Torah has a soul." ¹ "Every letter of the Torah contains the entire *Sephirot*" ² (i.e. all supernal creation).

Later in the century the philosophic moralist and Maimonidean defender, Shem Tob b. Joseph Palaquera, epitomized in verse the level beyond Torah which preoccupied philosophic mysticism.

Night and day work to be wise according to your capacity, be not a fool

For there is no blemish worse than that of a man deficient in understanding who might have been complete. ³

¹ Isaac the Blind, *Perush Sefer ha-Yezirah*, iii. 48. Quoted in I. Tishbi, "The Kabbalists R. Ezra and R. Azriel" (Heb.), *Zion*, IX, No. 4 (1944), 181. Isaac the Blind was the senior and seminal figure of the Geronese school.

² Isaac the Blind, iii. 42; *ibid.*, p. 182.

³ Shem Tob b. Joseph Palaquera, *Iggeret ha-Musar*, A. Habermann (ed.).

And again:

Perfection lies in studying the power of God through His deeds and in investigating the wonders of His actions, in comprehending them through true demonstration and in distilling them with the fire and furnace of the intellect.¹

Compare this to the thumbnail biography by Benjamin of Tudela of an early Provençal ascetic and Kabbalist, the son of Meshullam b. Kolonymos of Lunel, "He is a *perush* who has separated himself from worldly interests and stands before the book day and night and fasts and is vegetarian and a fine scholar in Talmud."² Kabbalists aside, compare this to the traditional norms of the *yeshibah* where men were tempted to fish for truth in the broad sea of the tradition, and taught the traditional rubrics that "perfection is not of man" and that "not study but practice is primary."

In August of 1232 the leading Aljaman of Aragon, Saragossa, promulgated a ban against Solomon and his disciples, an action quickly supported by the lesser Aragonese Aljamans of Huesca, Monzon, Catalayud, and Lerida.³ Each ban was signed by several names, but it is clear from the communications of the smaller communities that Saragossa took the lead and that Bahya Alconstantini of that city called the tune.⁴ This in itself is not surprising. Bahya, at the moment, was the single most powerful Jew in Aragon. He was a large landowner and a prominent courtier as physician attendant to James I and his diplomatic interpreter during the conquest of Majorca of 1229.⁵ His king subsequently appointed him chief *rab* (court appointed representative) of the Jewries of Aragon and Valencia. Bahya's word may be considered powerful if not definitive. The only indication we have of Bahya's motives comes from a covering letter he added to the Saragossa ban when it was circulated for concurrence. Bahya obviously venerated Maimonides.⁶ Could it have been that the *Mishneh Torah* made it possible for him to establish his authority above that of *halachic*

Kobets al-Yad, I (Jerusalem, 1936), 57.

¹ Shem Tob b. Joseph Palaquera, *Sefer ha-Mebakhesh* (Joselow, 1881), p. 15.

² Benjamin of Tudela, p. 65.

³ *KTR*, III, 5a-6a. It is well to remember that Saragossa had been the home bailiwick of Isaac b. Sheshet Benveniste.

⁴ Cf. especially the Lerida letter *KTR*, III, 6a.

⁵ Baer, *A History*, I, 404, note 2.

⁶ *KTR*, III, 6a.

bailiwick

scholars in the various communities? Recall that these Aljamans knew the tension of a struggle between religious and secular leadership.¹ Moreover, Bahya held secular studies in high regard. Those who opposed Maimonides and such studies he described as "influences of destruction."² As a member of James' entourage Bahya might be expected to set great store by the terms of philosophic exchange then popular and to see any attempt to withdraw Jews from such interests as adding to their separateness and contributing to their inability to get along in a world difficult enough when one had mastered all studies and skills.

The Saragossa ban was couched in rather specifically religious terms, but to the same point. Maimonides brought enlightenment, and strengthened many in their faith. God has no desire to be worshiped without wisdom or understanding; indeed, philosophy helps to confirm the truth of God's unity and armors the faithful against the barbs of the skeptic. For having washed their dirty linen in public and for having sinned and caused others to sin, Solomon and his two disciples, David and Jonah, were banned until they repented.³

Catalonia was another matter. Neither Barcelona nor Gerona confirmed Saragossa's action. In large measure this must have been due to the personality of Nachmanides, the high born scholar, brilliant Talmudist, and pious Kabbalist who already in his youth had crossed swords with Bahya Alconstantini.⁴ What was needed now was patience, not rash involvement. Nachmanides broadcast throughout Spain a letter evidencing his deep reverence for French opinion, "from their learning we drink,"⁵ and asking the various communities to suspend decision until both sides shall have submitted their case to judgment—an eventuality he fondly hoped might come speedily. In this letter Nachmanides rejected the assertion that Solomon could summarily be found guilty of creating division within Israel. Solomon was serving in the cause of God and had submitted his case to the French for decision. Indeed, Nachmanides suggests that if he were to make the decision,

¹ Baer, *A History* . . . pp. 186 ff.

² *KTR*, III, 6a.

³ *KTR*, III, 5a-5b.

⁴ Baer, *Devir*, II (1924), 316 f. The incident cannot be dated. The issue touched the claims of the Alconstantini to secular-religious authority, i.e. the title of *Nasi*.

⁵ *KTR*, III, 5a.

Solomon would be awarded the verdict, for Nachmanides sensed^d that though the Maimonideans profess piety this virtue was at least in part a calculated pose.¹

Nachmanides was of an entirely other breed than Bahya. Though well born, his world was the *halacha* and rabbinics. Though broadly educated, his terms of reference were traditional. He was master of all that Maimonides had written and of the sources on which he had drawn. Tradition weighed heavily with him. As *halachist* he penned, somewhat later, an extensive gloss to the *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*.² He also debated many of the *Moreh's* arguments in his *Perush*

¹ *Ibid.*

² Nachmanides, *Hassagot ha-Ramban le-Sefer ha-Mitzvot*. References are to the Zuckerman, Jerusalem, 1926, edition of Maimonides' text. This excursus in marginalia dealt largely with legal theory. The work is a self-styled defense of the older *Halachot Gedolot* tradition. The *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* is praised "as filled with many fine things, a sweet smelling work as if perfumed with incense"; but it is a novelty. (*Ibid.*, Introduction.)

Nachmanides began by questioning the legal necessity and justification of the arbitrary enumeration of 613 laws. The Talmudic basis of the tradition *T. B. Makkot* 23b is an individual opinion of R. Simla, not a fixed immutable tradition (Root I, p. 7b-8a). Nachmanides followed but tempered the earlier opinion of Abraham ibn Ezra in the *Yesod Mora* "that there is no end to the number of commandments. . . and that the root principles are not enumerated." (Abraham ibn Ezra, *Yesod Mora*, [Prague, 1833], Gate 2.) Many of the views taken are similar to those we have seen in Daniel b. Saadya ha-Babli though Nachmanides is more complete and his excursus on ten of the thirteen theoretical principles of selection is far more extensive.

Nachmanides, however, was not an at-all-costs defender of the past. In the discussion of the first Positive Command "to believe that there is a Supreme Cause," Nachmanides sided with Maimonides against the *Halachot Gedolot*. Maimonides had based his decision on Ex. 20 : 2 even though this verse was an affirmation rather than a commandment. Nachmanides quoted the *Halachot* at length and sympathetically, but in his note to Negative Commandment 5 finally announced his acceptance of Maimonides' argument that this root belief is *sui generis*.

Of Maimonides' fourteen root principles Nachmanides glossed ten (Roots I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VIII, IX, XII, XIV). The similarity between his reasoning and Daniel b. Saadya's is striking—though dependence can not be shown. Thus Deut. 1 : 18 is a principle of excision: that seven specific ritual laws which the Talmud had stated to have been established by the sages are not to be included. The basis for Maimonides' decision was *T. B. Makkot* 23b: "The 613 commands *spoken* to Moses on Sinai." Here, then, is definite information as to their later promulgation. David's argument had been that the text reads *spoken* to Moses, not *written* (that is, made public) by Moses. These seven were part of the Oral tradition descending from Moses and, therefore, to be considered Pentateuchal. (Daniel b. Saadya, *Maaseh Nissim*, p. 2.) Nachmanides' logic was almost identical, although Nachmanides went on at length to point up the inner contradictions in the *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* and between it and the *Mishneh Torah*. (Nachmanides, *Hassagot* . . .

One is certain that he, unlike others of the controversialists, had read

~~that~~ *ha-Torah* (English, *Commentary on the Torah*). ~~Unlike others of the controversialists, One is certain that he had read~~ and understood the *Moreh*.¹ As a rabbi, well trained in all facets of Spanish Jewish culture, he sought to claim philosophy and allegory for the tradition through the intricate sophistries of mystical theology and Kabbalah.²

Root I, pp. 16a-18b.)

(space)
also touched

Root II that no law derived by ~~the employing~~ ^{the 13} Tannaitic (13) hermeneutic rules was to be considered Pentateuchal also ^{by} touched the piety of the revealed Oral tradition and became a well known cause against Maimonides. It had little practical import though it had led Maimonides to stipulate in the *Mishneh Torah* that though marriage by intercourse (*usus capio*) or contract was of Pentateuchal origin, marriage by the exchange of money (*Késef*) was only rabbinic. Pinhas the Payyan had already raised the specific issue. (TR, 165.) Maimonides had responded with the generalization that no logically derived law is so classed unless the sages specifically accord it Biblical rank (*ibid.*), but Abraham Maimonides revealed that his father later corrected a *Mishneh Torah* manuscript to establish all three forms of marriage equally. (Abraham Maimonides, *Birkat Abraham*, p. 42.) Nachmanides' critique was a defense of the integrity of the hermeneutic system, "if a hermeneutic interpretation is correct all is known by tradition from God." (Nachmanides, *Hassagot* . . . , Root I, p. 22b.) "Any ruling which is hermeneutically expounded in the Talmud by one of the 13 *Middot* is considered Pentateuchal unless it is specifically stated that the Biblical text is only a mnemotechnical aide." (*Ibid.*, Root II, p. 23b.)

Of historical interest is the discussion of Positive Commandment 198 where on the basis of Deut. 28 : 21 Maimonides established the law that "in granting a loan to an idolator, one is to demand interest." Nachmanides followed the Western tradition, already signalled by Rabad, that the Deuteronomy text is but the premise of the Negative Commandment "not to take interest of a co-religionist." It is difficult to know Maimonides' basis for his ruling. The Oriental tradition would seem to agree with the Western. Daniel b. Saadya "found it difficult to accept that the taking of interest is mandatory." (Daniel b. Saadya, p. 91.) On a theoretical level we have here one of the most vexing problems of *halachic* treatment: is a positive statement in the Bible a direct command or a broad generalization of common practice given to establish the permissive rather than the legal quality of such statements?

Sufficient evidence has been cited to indicate the quality of this gloss. The *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* with Nachmanides' glosses became a staple of the schools and a favorite debating ground of *halachic* theoreticians. The responsa of Aaron ha-Levi, Menahem Meiri, Jacob b. Asher, and Solomon ibn Adret reveal their intimate control of the work and its prevailing influences. Maimonides' enumeration even was used in the *Asharot* of the Shabuot service. ¹ Nachmanides' commentary on the Torah included *inter alia* a summary critique of the *Moreh*, especially of Part III. Cf. L. Kravitz, *The Commentary of Nachmanides to the Torah*, Doctoral dissertation, Hebrew Union College, 1958.

² Nachmanides was irritated by the presumption of certain philosophers that they were the "enlightened" and all others necessarily benighted. *Vide* his attack on those "who argue teachings dependent on interminable soph-

The Torah was the repository of all truth. "All that we know and understand is traceable directly or indirectly to the Torah... where it was written either explicitly or by intimation."¹ The numerical equivalence of letters, the juxtaposition of words, case endings, even diacritical and scribal marks afford interpretive keys to the ingrained truth. In essence Nachmanides' position, and it was the position of all the early Kabbalists, mythologized the implicit assumption of all *yeshibah* training. "Turn it [the Torah] over, Turn it over again for everything is in it."²

Philosophy was not the precipitate of clear categories of speculative thought, but what emerged from a careful and inspired research of the Scriptural text.

We have a true tradition that the whole Torah consists of the names of God... everything dealing with *Maaseh Merkabah* (metaphysics) and *Maaseh Bereshit* (cosmology) and that which is deduced from these by the sages; the future history of the people, the four powers of the sublunar world (i.e. mineral, vegetative, animal, and rational)... all of these were spoken to Moses including their creation, their potencies, their essences, their deeds and their passing out of being. Everything is written in the Torah either explicitly or by hint.³

man's In such a scheme Biblical narrative may be symbolic but never purely allegoric. Biblical law may have an apparent identity with ~~some~~ organized law but it is essentially mythologic and concerned with cosmic rather than mundane purpose. In such a system God is Creator but no category of logic can be permitted to retire God or prevent His becoming manifest through miracles and revelation. God's will is a continuing and manifest power.

Nachmanides' concern was to validate the will of God and His power against any philosophy which restricted that power. Why was it not sufficient to limit the first commandment to the simple declarative "I am the Lord your God"? The conclusion ("who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage") established God's presence in time and history.⁴ Israel's God is no *Deus Absconditus*. Nachmanides' argument against the Aristote-

istries and fanciful phrasings accompanied by the loud denunciation of all who differ as fools and dense." (Nachmanides, *Torah ha-Shem Temimah*, p. 24.)

¹ Nachmanides, *Perush* . . . , Introduction.

² *Mishnah, Pirke Abot* 5 : 20.

³ Nachmanides, *Perush* . . . , Introduction.

⁴ *Ibid.*, to Ex. 20 : 2.

lians was quite explicit: "To him who believes in the eternity of matter God is powerless even if He should want to shorten the wing of a fly, or to extend the foot of an ant." ¹ No person has a share in the Law of Moses until he firmly believes that all the events which happen to us are determined by the foreseeing care and guardianship of God. A blind and mechanical universe is foreign to the Torah concept of a living God working His way on the sons of men. ² Nachmanides' theory of emanations—the separating out of elements within God and the attenuation of these elements through successive levels of *Sephirot* or spheres—is too well known to require repetition.

Revelation is actual and direct ³ and prophecy is fact, albeit that its message is not of uniform quality ⁴; both evidence God's determination to give man a rule to redeem his earthly life. Miracles are of various qualities. There is no reason to presume God cannot or does not "interfere." ⁵ The very continuation of life, what we call cause and effect, is an ongoing and continuous miracle, not a requirement of natural law. The promise of Retribution and the World to Come is certain. All is treated with sophistication, within a frame of Neo-Platonic terms, and highly qualified; but the unmistakable impression left is that true Biblical interpretation and obedience to Biblical law gives man miraculous assurances and almost miraculous powers.

At about the same time that he addressed himself to Spain, where he had no authority save that of a revered rabbi of good family, Nachmanides wrote a longish letter to the sages of France asking that they reconsider their ban. ⁶ His concern was for the unity of Israel. He could not escape unhappiness over the rising tide of choler. The French cannot be aware of Spanish conditions. There is no current of doubt and philosophic sophistication in France as here. ⁷ Maimonides has brought back many "who had filled their pockets with the vanities of Greece" and has been rightly praised for it. ⁸ Moreover, his *Mishneh Torah* is universally respect-

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¹ Nachmanides, *Torah ha-Shem Temimah*, p. 7.

² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³ Nachmanides, *Perush* . . . to Ex. 3 : 13.

⁴ *Ibid.* to Num. 24 : 1; Deut. 34 : 11.

⁵ *Ibid.* to Gen. 27 : 1; Ex. 6 : 21; Deut. 8 : 18, 9 : 41, 12 : 13, 13 : 2.

⁶ *KTR*, IV, 8a-10b.

⁷ *KTR*, III, 8a.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8b.

ed. Any ban on this work, any mark on Maimonides' piety, only confuses and angers and drives many away. Let the French, therefore, remember the Talmudic admonition that one does not impose burdens on the congregation they will not bear.¹ Further, by what authority have you extended the ban to us? There are boundaries to your authority as there are to ours. Still further, why did you not particularize your charges² that one might know the specific points being challenged?

Nachmanides spoke of his respect for Solomon and sadly of the bitterness this debate had evoked. He does not know the particulars of the Montpellier quarrel, but suggests peace and a withdrawing of the ban as the sole remedy; if not the withdrawal of the whole ban, at least of that part which subjects the *Mishneh Torah*. Let us reduce the voltage of this debate from its present dangerous pitch to a scholars' quarrel such as occupied the schools of Hillel and Shammai and has long been familiar in Israel.³

In passing Nachmanides noted his own views on certain items of the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Moreh* which may be the cause of concern and suggested (following Hai Gaon) that metaphysics and tradition can be helpful to each other when philosophy is pursued by one already a master of *halacha*.⁴ The subjects which Nachmanides desired to dilate on are classics of Maimonidean debate: resurrection,⁵ the nature of God's incorporeality (i.e. that He has neither shape nor form), and the public study of the *Moreh* and inferentially of all philosophy.

There must have been another shaft in his critical bow though Nachmanides does not reveal it in the correspondence immediately relevant to the controversy. Two of Nachmanides' later works contain *inter alia* rigorous criticism of Maimonides' historical and pedagogic rationalizations of the Biblical commandments.⁶ Nach-

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9a.

² *Ibid.*, p. 8a.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 10a.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9b.

⁵ Of interest in connection with his discussion of resurrection is the longish quote Nachmanides included from the German Hasid Eliezer b. Judah's *ha-Rokeach*. (*Ibid.*, pp. 9a-9b.) Nachmanides had chosen it deliberately because he felt the French might not be aware of philosophy based on late Gaonic sources, but would be familiar with this.

⁶ The *Perush ha-Torah* and his *Hassagot* to *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*. Maimonides never denied the necessity of obedience to a law whose exoteric purpose was not evident. "A law which a man cannot explain and to which one can not

manides' position was basically this: "All the words of God are pure", therefore no Torah law is whimsical or arbitrary.¹ All the laws have purpose and reason. God simply did not choose to reveal each and every reason lest people assume that obedience to the law is not automatic but a function of reason and a matter for private decision.² Nachmanides fulminated against those "who make themselves wise in natural science and who follow the views of the Greek (Aristotle), who denied everything which could not be understood through reason and who developed the principle... that whatever could not be understood through reason is not true."³ The *Mishpatim* (judgmental) laws are of obvious social benefit. The *Hukkim* (apodictic) laws have a secret cosmic benefit not revealed to all. The sacrificial cult was not, as Maimonides had argued, a psychologically necessary stop gap between primitive means of worship and advanced forms. "Such explanations make the altar vile. [The function of the altar] is not limited to the destruction of evil impulses;"⁴ rather the sacrificial law permitted atonement for the sin of the nation.⁵ It was theurgic and operative. Equally all the other *Hukkim*. They are each and every one part of the cosmic mechanics which permits God to draw close to man and makes Israel's role central and cosmically crucial.

Another letter to the French rabbis urging the revocation of the ban on the grounds of its tendency to factionalism came from the pen of Samuel b. Abraham Saporta.⁶ This material was of two parts, a brief, euphuistic introduction and a hard-headed legal brief defending seriatim arguments raised against the *Mishneh Torah* and

impute a proper cause should not therefore appear to be of little concern." (*M. T. Neilah* 8 : 8.) Nachmanides faulted Maimonides on his method of explanation, not on any tendency to ritual eclecticism, though such eclecticism was not unknown among the Maimonids. Cf. Jonah b. Abraham Gerundi, *Sha'arai Teshubah* 1 : 18 (Jerusalem, 1959), p. 16.

¹ Nachmanides, *Perush* . . . to Lev. 19 : 19.

² Nachmanides to *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* Negative Commandment 365 near end. Here Nachmanides' divergence from Maimonides becomes clear. Compare *Moreh*, iii. 26, "If it appears unexplainable to you, it is owing to the deficiency in your own comprehension." Maimonides presumed that such explanations became clear as the intellect became perfected, Nachmanides that such explanations had been revealed to initiates who passed the esoteric knowledge down the generations.

³ Nachmanides, *Perush* . . . to Lev. 16 : 9.

⁴ *Ibid.* to Lev. 1 : 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *GN*, IV, 37-67.

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the *Moreh*. One sees here a Maimonides reinterpreted almost into conformity with tradition: Maimonides' view of resurrection became¹ a defense of an after death divine judgment; ^A he is made to tolerate shades and spirits; ² and the various historical interpretations of the sacrificial commandments are made to imply traditional truths. ³

Samuel's main worry, like most other respondents, is "lest the Torah be split in two."⁴ He seeks adjudication and wonders why the French exacerbated an issue which was really not in their province ⁵ and whose social and philosophical implication they could not have known because of geographic distance and their policy of keeping philosophy and philosophic works from their boundaries. ⁶

^é Nachmanides was not quit of the whole issue. The aggressive Béziers Jewry resurrected an old charge bearing on Jonah's legitimacy.⁷ Jonah was descended of a concubine married by a great-grandfather, who had divorced his first wife for childlessness. Béziers challenged the legitimacy of the second marriage. Nachmanides was Jonah's cousin. The charge, therefore, affected him personally. The charge was apparently an old one. Nachmanides had long since convened a judicial proceeding to prove his legitimacy.⁸ This resort to slander angered Nachmanides. He wrote the Provençal communities a bitter letter ⁹ declaring war against those who sling mud and against the quarrelsome who do not have God always before them, who praise Maimonides without seeing his mistakes, broadcast slander, and deny that God knows particulars or affects the lives of individuals.¹⁰ He is bitter at those who attack Jonah like a pack of wild dogs and he insists that they be tried before a rabbinic court. Nachmanides, who began as peacemaker, ended an enraged partisan, though at no time did he speak other than highly of Maimonides nor did he show towards Maimonides any of his controversialist's emotion.¹¹ Maimonides was the context of the quarrel, not its content. ⁹

Nachmanides was a son of Spain, fully aware of Arabic-Jewish philosophic traditions and a thoughtful critic of its heritage, yet temperamentally disposed to the anti-Maimonidean cause even:

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-55.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-43.

⁷ *GN*, IV, 15-17. On the details of the charge and the entire genealogical question, cf. Shrock, p. 19 ff., especially note 34.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-24.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹¹ *KTR*, III, 8b.

if in the first stages of the quarrel "his own horses neither neighed nor stamped."¹

Nachmanides did not, however, speak the united will even of Catalonia. Two brothers, Abraham and Judah b. Hisdai, apparently of rank in Barcelona, spoke up after the burning² to silence all trace of lingering animus.³ In a letter addressed to the Aljamans of Aragon and Castile they defended the Provençal position against the French ban. This letter provides us incidentally the information that the ban had been rescinded.⁴ This epistle must be dated after Nachmanides' similar letter to the Spanish communities and to the French rabbis and can not be cited as evidence of some communal split. It seems to be essentially an attempt to write *finis* to the whole dirty business. The scoundrels have been discredited by their actions. It is time for those who have been quiet to speak out and defend the faith. Unity must be reestablished.⁵ Again there is the theme that Israel must not be divided into two camps. Finally, and as symbol of the end of all argument, they ordered that a chapter or two of the *Moreh* be read in the synagogue each Sabbath.⁶

The chronicle of events as the Hisdai brothers knew it was as follows. After the original ban, the Provençal centers rallied to the *Moreh* and the *Mada's* defense and finally persuaded the French to withdraw their restrictions.⁷ When the "sinner rebels" saw that their support had vanished they revealed their real character by appealing for aid to the Episcopal authority and to the Friars, Franciscan, Episcopal, and Dominican. Their approach to the Church was on the basis of mutual interest, "You propose to drive out your heretics and to pursue those who deny your rule, thus burning out evil from your midst. We too have such books, woven of heterodoxy and heresy."⁸ An inquisition apparently met over the

¹ Brody, *Yedeot* . . . , IV, 104, No. 44, v. 85.

² *GN*, III, 178-179.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 176 ff.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 182. The Hisdai brothers cannot be numbered summarily among the eager Maimonids (cf. Sarachek, pp. 89-90.) Meshullam b. Solomon addressed a long, laudatory poem to Abraham Hisdai in which we learn incidentally that two of Abraham's family belonged to the Gerona circle of Kabbalists (Judah [*sic*] and Solomon) (vv. 51-58), and that Meshullam considered Abraham quite another type from the unclean and foolish of the generation (vv. 50-51). (Brody, *Yedeot* . . . , (IV) 105-108, No. 45.)

⁶ *GN*, III, 183.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 179. ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

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books, which were duly condemned and handed over to the civil magistrates for the *auto da fé*.¹

The Hisdais more than any other protagonists sensed the long term dangers implicit in the burning:

In the eyes of the enemy we were self effacing vessels and till now we were not publicly shunned. Now that we have begun to fall and to be profaned before them who will be able to live with them or bear the burden of their judgments and decisions.²

Finally, they closed with a most interesting bit of fact. The informers had had their tongues cut out, and then the evil ones (unspecified) repented of their ways, but after a hiatus (apparently due to the trauma of the burning) they returned to their evil and voided many communal regulations. Even after the burning there were a few who lent them support. The Hisdais have spoken now to silence once and for all these few unconscionable men who continue to disturb the faith.³

We turn to David Kimhi's visit to Aragon, which, as we have noted, was not without success. In Catalonia he could not win over Nachmanides; but, after the book burning some sympathy, if not support, developed in Barcelona. In Castile matters were different and very little support was forthcoming.

During his trip Kimhi, already advanced in years, fell sick in Avila and had to content himself to seek further agreement by letter. Toledo was preeminent in Castile. Its support was obviously Kimhi's ambition. He chose as correspondent the physician Judah b. Joseph Alfakhar, one of the leaders of that community and scion of an old and respected family. The correspondence can be dated as beginning after the rescinding of the French ban mentioned in Kimhi's first letter⁴ and as closing with the burning mentioned in his third.⁵

Kimhi shows himself a bitter man/perhaps this, however, is only a sign of growing age and feebleness, a theme to which he reverted continually. In any case, he adds little to our knowledge of the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

² *Ibid.*, p. 180.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁴ *KTR*, III, 1a.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4b.

case. He linked Narbonne (his home) with Béziers as Provençal centers zealous for God and Maimonides and as organizers of the ban against Solomon, David, and Jonah.¹ Kimhi wrote of his earlier successes in Catalonia and Aragon. What he asks of Judah is the assent of Toledo to a ban similar to the Provençal ban.

Why Judah? The question is a difficult one. The Alfakhar family was among the great lineages which from Toledo set much of the policy of Castile. A letter of Abraham b. Hisdai to Alfakhar gives us a clue. It is written after Alfakhar's refusal to Kimhi became known. Yet Abraham speaks of Judah "as one who took delight in all his (Maimonides') books." "I have heard you speak approvingly of them."² Was it Abraham b. Hisdai who suggested Judah to Kimhi as his most hopeful contact?

Judah's answer reveals that Kimhi, or Hisdai, had misjudged the disposition of the man but not his capacity. Kimhi was to be censured for fanning the flames of quarrel and the *Moreh* was to be censured, even banned, for revealing matters which ought not to have been made public,³ and for offering some justification to almost every kind of deviation.⁴ We know from correspondence that Judah was a trained philosopher (Meshullam b. Kalonymos,⁵ Abraham b. Hisdai,⁶ and David Kimhi,⁷ himself, all testify to this) as well as *halachist*, so Judah must have been disturbed by the confusion such books cause among the unprepared and untrained. Of all the discussants Judah spoke the frankest criticism of Maimonides: "Out of Zion shall come forth the Law"—not out of Greece. Maimonides had great and deserved fame as a *halachist*, but in setting down the *Moreh* he made a bad mistake. Even the best sometimes lose their balance and good sense.⁸

Judah proceeded to state trenchantly the intellectual case of the anti-Maimonids. Allegory is a subtle tool whose use leads itself to abuse. If it is handled carelessly traditional limits are easily exceeded, especially in respect to such themes as miracles and creation. Miracles can be defended without denying belief in natural law

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1a.

² *Ibid.*, p. 7a.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 2b.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2a.

⁵ *GN*, IV, 3.

⁶ *KTR*, III, 7a.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4a.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2b.

or resorting to allegory by the conceit of their being preordained at the dawn of time. The reality of Creation is Judah's main concern. Reading Aristotle into the Creation epic one necessarily allegorizes the Creation myth. To do so is not just to make an interpretive blunder but to sap the foundation of faith. Such a law as the cardinal obligation of the Sabbath rests on the fact of Creation. "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, for in six days the Lord created heaven and earth and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath and sanctified it." (Ex. 20:8 and 11.) If the Sabbath is denied the authority of divine will, how can the harsh punishments which surround its restrictions be justified? If the Creation is an allegory, how can the law which stipulates the sentence of stoning merely for the picking up of sticks on the Sabbath seem reasonable to anyone? ¹

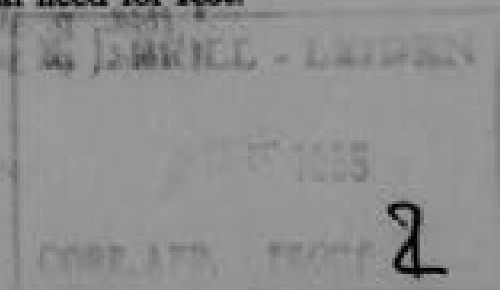
The issue was not creation; all agreed on creation and on *creatio ex nihilo*. Judah's argument was to the validity of a Godly creation and a divinely established seventh day of rest. The *Moreh's* interpretive method established the Sabbath: 1) to confirm the true theory of a Creation; 2) to encourage the wellbeing of the body. The Sabbath to Maimonides had both a pedagogic and a philosophic purpose. ² Judah insisted that such Maimonidean rationalizations and explanations led to a humanism in which man is the measure and arbiter of truth. Further such explanations lead to a questioning of practice without contributing to any firming of faith. If Genesis I is myth, what imperatives does the law command? If Genesis I has only an allegorical truth, why should the Sabbath law impose obedience on those to whom it does not seem reasonable?

The Kimhi-Alfakhar correspondence sputtered on with two more missives on both sides—these crossed each other en route and tell us little. In both hands the pen was not particularly controlled. Judah did not ask to get involved in the first place. He had no intention of speaking for a ban against the "innocent man" Solomon. Indeed, in his eyes the burden rests with Kimhi to patch up the quarrel, to leave off discounting the practice of Talmudic study, and to abjure cosmology and theosophy. ³ Judah saw the *Moreh* as a ladder by which Kimhi was trying to climb to an under-

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1b.

² *Moreh*, ii. 31. Deut. 5:15 connected the Sabbath to the Exodus and Maimonides connected the Exodus with the psychological need for rest.

³ *KTR*, III, 4a.



standing of that which is beyond full understanding, the mysteries of God (the *Merkabah*).¹ One is reminded of Nachmanides' caution:

Seek not that which is beyond you, investigate not that which is too powerful for you, research not that which is too mysterious for you, intrude not in that which is deliberately hidden from you. Concern yourself only in that which you have received in the tradition for you have no concern with the secret things.²

Judah's final summation of the *Moreh* was that it contained some rich, ripe fruit but also much that was spoilt. All in all it would have been better had it not been written.

In passing we learn that Kimhi, in addition to this correspondence, had sent Judah a detailed brief of his position³ and that at the base of his argument lay the familiar issues of a spiritualized Resurrection and the nature of God's incorporeality.⁴ Kimhi's second letter affords us an insight into the self-justification of a rabbinically competent Maimonidean. *Ad hominem*: "We are the religious loyalists."⁵ Philosophy has only helped to confirm my faith. Philosophy has never led me to leave off my *halachic* interests. We number in our party scholars, pious men, and philanthropists. Shall such as we be called sinners? Not at all, no rabbi is more scrupulous with the tradition than I. Where we differ is in our recognition of the need to wed faith and philosophy following the old adage, "It is good that you should seize hold of this and at the same time not loosen your hold elsewhere."⁶ In short, it is not *we* but *they* who pay little heed to the integrity of Israel.

Furthermore, for any in Israel to continue affirming a God of shape and form (one thinks of the "radiance" behind a curtain of brilliance presumed by David b. Saul) is to violate the cardinal principle of our faith (*Yihud*). "That which the heavens cannot contain they have shut up in an inner room." Is this the true teaching of our Torah? In this regard "we are the real traditionalists."⁷

Judah closed off this exchange by insisting in a way now familiar

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4b.

² Nachmanides, *Perush* Introduction.

³ *KTR*, III, 3a.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3b.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3a.

to us that the dispute must be patched up "lest Israel be divided into two camps. Israel's Torah may not be divided, such division is shameful."¹

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Kimhi's last letter rejoiced to tell Judah of the real nature of the "innocent man" he had been defending. Kimhi specifically accused Solomon of being the informer², but we must remember that whatever information Kimhi had was second-hand. The letter tells us that he had at the time moved from his sick bed in Avila to Burgos. The denunciation story was repeated—first to the Franciscans, then to the Dominicans. Priests reveled at its condemnation. The Jews of Montpellier and the surrounding towns were ~~gravely~~ ^{gravely} endangered.³

Alfakhar's attack was probably all the more bitter to Kimhi because it was unexpected. After receiving the first astringent reply, Kimhi apparently requested his fellow townsman Meshullam b. Kolonymos b. Todros to come to his defense. This *Nasi* of Narbonne and bearer of a famous name might be expected to carry some weight. Meshullam's first letter, written with the gravity of an elder statesman, was a moderate letter of recommendation for Kimhi⁴ and a moderate defense of the *Moreh*. It surely does not deserve broadcast damning. There are many who incline toward the *Moreh* yet still fear God and stand fast to His law.⁵

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4a. Judah did not limit his anger to ~~the~~ Kimhi. Steinschneider has published a bitter poetic attack by Judah against Maimonides:

"Forgive, O son of Amram (the Biblical Moses), pardon
That the name of a sinner (Moses Maimonides) is identical to your own
[Forgive] on the basis that in the Torah the prophet of God and the
prophet of Baal are both called prophets."

(Steinschneider, *Kobetz al Yad*, I [1885],
12, No. 36.)

Geiger has published an anonymous rejoinder:

"Since every man is called after his parents
He is called *Nasi* and leader
I name my donkey (*Pardi Nasi*, for *Hamor* (donkey) his father
was the *Nasi* of the land."

(A. Geiger, *Zizim u-Perachin* [Leipzig,
1856], p. 24.)

The play is to Gen. 34 : 2. Judah must have borne the title "*Nasi*." The erudition cloaked the simple statement, "You, sir, are an ass."

² *KTR*, III, 4b.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *GN*, IV, 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*

From Judah's answer it is clear he did not believe that Meshullam was actively involved in the controversy. Judah showed deference. There is in his letter an element of self justification. I entered the fray only because I was challenged to. I tried earnestly to give balanced views and give each man his credit.¹ One is tempted to suppose that Kimhi's report of the burning, linking Solomon to the act, had reached Judah and shocked and dismayed him.

We have seen Kimhi travel from Avila to Burgos in search of support and there receive news of the burning of the *Moreh*. It would seem that Kimhi received there a mixed reception. He apparently succeeded in getting from someone a letter or letters of approval, but Joseph b. Todros ha-Levi Abulafia, the brother of Meir, challenged the authority of these letters. "They have not been approved by the *Kahal* nor written or signed with the knowledge of the rabbis."² He also tells us that with the aid of his father-in-law, R. Nathan, the *Kahal*'s "illegal" action had been reversed. It is not improbable that some rich and influential Jew, possibly one holding a royal appointment, impressed with the Alconstantini name, wrote such a letter without thought of consulting rabbinic authority. This was often the case, for the *Kahal*'s power structure was but loosely defined in areas other than taxation and defense. In any case, it appears that Joseph was able to win out in the end, with politics and pressures at which we can only guess, for he was able to expel Kimhi from that city.³

Joseph's letter was addressed to the scholars of Provence. Coming after the burning, it is in its strong condemnation of philosophic preoccupation, strong testimony that the burning settled nothing—except to slacken the zeal for publicity with which the issue was joined. Further, his defense of Solomon, or rather his plea in mitigation,⁴ points to Solomon's innocence of the act of "informing."

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

² *GN*, III, 173.

³ Baer raised the possibility that Joseph's activities lay in Toledo, not Burgos. (Baer, *A History* . . . , p. 400, note 39.) Joseph's euphemistic style, indeed, makes the identification difficult (*GN*, III, 168) but the silence of Judah Alfakhar and Meir b. Todros on any such visit and subsequent expulsion militates against this interpretation. If Judah and Joseph were partners in a similar cause how shall we explain the rather bitter letter Judah addressed to Joseph? (*GN*, IV, 6-10.) It would seem that Baer strained matters here to fit his thesis of class unrest in Toledo at the end of the century.

⁴ *GN*, III, 167.

Note the bracketing of "The quarrel flared up, until matters reached the point where the book was burnt by the priests" with "They sinned and rebelled but he (Solomon) is also not to be forgiven."¹ The Maimonideans see only Solomon's guilt and not the necessary relationship between Solomon's zeal and their own oppressive tactics.

Joseph's eye was on the social implications of philosophic study. He admitted that he had read philosophy though he gave primacy always to tradition.² But like Meir he mistrusted speculation, recalling the personal misfortunes of the rabbis who had entered the *Pardes*.³ Philosophic speculation tends to downgrade the received tradition (*Kabbalah*). The danger here lay in the technique of untrammelled allegory "which makes dark, light and light dark"⁴ and saps *aggadic* texts of their meaning. Joseph came close to accusing the Maimonids of Biblicism even though they acknowledged, verbally, the tradition.

Have you not heard. Do you not know that their heresy is worse than that of the Karaites; they to uproot all have come. These know and still deny, the others deny without knowing.⁵ The faith rests on *Kabbalah* (tradition), not *Savarah* (logical deduction). Until these allegorists "went out against Eden, the Garden of God, for which all Israel longs, it was a beautiful sight to behold ...after them it was a desolation."⁶ Joseph praised Maimonides rather fulsomely, even to the point of blaming the translators for the more apparent errors, but he cited the *Moreh's* baleful social effect.

Most of those who seize on these books...offer a strange fruit in their platters...Among these are the hypocrites who falsify the law and secretly transgress it...who bow their heads like a reed and put on righteousness, but it does not clothe. Another group is the rich, entangled in the pursuit of

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*, p. 169.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 170. Like Nachmanides, Joseph attacked Maimonides' justification of the commandments, not on the grounds that Maimonides' attempt to explain the commandments was novel, but on the grounds that Maimonides gave "blemished reasons." The *Hukkim* contain "locked secrets," i.e. they reveal cosmic forces to which man must accommodate—forces only those who know the secrets are aware of. (*Ibid.*, p. 165.)

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

pleasure... They are sinners and seducers, who chatter and prattle, who grow fat and arrogant, who force the poor off the highway and forsake the paths of righteousness and in their wealth deny the Torah.¹

Here we have delineated the two groups who preoccupied the thoughts of the anti-Maimonideans. On the one hand a group who espouse the new philosophy and, though they abide the Law, are suspect because of their non-conformist ideology. On the other a group ritually lax and indifferent, sophisticated and worldly, who feel themselves superior and who latch on to the *Moreh* as a justification for their indifference.

Finally, Joseph also the need to bury the hatchet. What has been, has been. In a storm-tossed age, we need a strong, unified faith. You are wise men, certainly you in the Provence can break the rod of controversy."²

Our knowledge of the Spanish anti-Maimonidean position can now be filled out by an analysis of the polemic poetry of Meshullam b. Solomon.³ His *Divan*, transcribed from manuscript by H. Brody, reveals a passionate emotional involvement on the part of this Geronese mystic. His poetry, though contributing not at all to

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 174-175.

³ Meshullam's biography has been variously reconstructed. Carmoly placed his birth at Fère in Burgoyne, presumed a Tosaphist education under the tutelage of R. Isaac b. Samuel of Dampierre, and a peripatetic adult life a la minnesinger-troubadour, with the seat of his operations at Béziers. (R. Carmoly, *Litteraturblatt*, VII, 471.) The Béziers ascription depends on a manuscript superscription which adds *En Béziers* to his title. Neubauer, *per contra*, posited a Catalan birth at Piera, a Spanish-Provençal education, and the life of a wandering poet. (A. Neubauer and E. Renan, *Histoire Littéraire de la France*, XXVII [1877], 715.) Patai made no definite statement on Meshullam's place of birth but definitely credited Isaac b. Zacharyah ha-Levi of Lunel with a major role in his education and brought creditable evidence of his protracted stay at Gerona in Aragon. (J. Patai, "From the Oxford Manuscripts," (Heb.), *Ha-Zofeh*, V [1921], 56-57.) Brody denies entirely the vocation of wandering poet and established Meshullam as a permanent citizen of Gerona who was even at one time elected a leading *Kahal* official. (Brody, *Yedeot* . . . , IV, 4.) This position seems to the author largely creditable. It explains a) the manuscript references to *En Meshullam* reflected happily at being elected to office, c) his unmistakable involvement in the local Kabbalist school. Whether he was a permanent citizen of Gerona or not, Meshullam was certainly Spanish; all manuscript references to Provence or France are as to a foreign area.

an historical reconstruction, affords us our broadest window into the heart and mind of certain of the anti-Maimonideans.¹

Meshullam's poetry suffers from preciousity and that suffocating rabbinic pedantry all too familiar in medieval Jewish verse. It proceeds by allusion rather than logical progression. It reflects an unresolved tension within the poet between his instinctive attraction towards philosophy and his recognition of its religious consequences. Nonetheless, it must be studied as a prime source in any reconstruction.

We know that the Spanish communities were early brought into the Solomon b. Abraham-Béziers quarrel. The poet Meshullam, in one of his verses, pleaded with the French to stand up and take a position. "Wake up my people, my disturbed people, Wake up France, put on armor."² We do not know when his interest began. We do know that most of this material postdates the French ban and was precipitated by the attempt by Maimonist and anti-Maimonist to enlist support south of the Pyrenees. Meshullam b. Solomon reflected accurately the values and faith of at least one section of Spanish Jewry, those who had been touched by the nascent Kabbalah and who centered on Gerona in a circle which included Ezra, Azriel, Isaac b. Y'verechya, Isaac b. Samuel, Meshullam b. Solomon, and, for a time, both Nachmanides and Jonah b. Abraham Gerundi.³

Béziers

To Resnais

This school grew in the shadow of the pious mystic, R. Isaac the Blind. According to Scholem, Tishbi, and others who have begun researching this school, it was characterized by a Bible centered mysticism which mined secrets from the Biblical text and language and which was not unmindful or unaware of philosophic traditions

¹ We do not know who was the audience for these polemic verses. They were not kept private. This is made certain by a mimicking rejoinder to Brody, *Yedeot* . . . , IV, 39, No. 15:

"Moreh Nebuchim bear with the upright of the people
Make whole all those who are knowledgeable in faith
Silence the mouth of stupidity
If one recognizes in his lines an enemy, beat him with
the text
Rebellious one, go out and don't come near."

(Steinschneider, *Kobetz al Yad*, I
[1885], 17.)

² Brody, *Yedeot* . . . , IV, 34, No. 12, v. 24.

³ *Ibid.*, 35, No. 13, v. 21; 43, No. 17, vv. 19-21; 69, No. 29, v. 62; 91-92, No. 40, vv. 32 and 37; 104, No. 44, vv. 85-86; 106, No. 45, v. 18; on the Gerona circle see I. Tishbi, *Zion*, IX, No. 4 (1944), 175 ff., especially 183-184.

(ITALIC)

THIS PATTERN

coming from the Greco-Arab world, Meshullam, as we shall see, fits this pattern. He was both attracted and repelled by metaphysical speculation. In his more controlled moments he was prepared to praise Maimonides' piety and legal competence as well as some of his philosophic ideas and to place the blame on exaggerated and inaccurate translators and on the willfulness and lack of preparation of many among Maimonides' readers. "He did bring light to the eye, first and foremost on God's preeminence. He spoke sweetly to enlighten the blind eye."¹ "Those who misrepresent the *Moreh* did not get to its real meaning. They were estopped from its inner sense. With their mental capacity they were able to understand only a little, and with difficulty. The subtleties of his thought they could not approach. Hammer and sword went out from their mouths, crippled thoughts not at all complete."² But what is clearest in Meshullam's teaching is the refrain that speculative philosophy ultimately misleads because it drains faith of its miraculous power and intimate quality.

"About me, Meshullam b. Solomon, they will say: 'Questionable doctrine exists in you.'"³ Meshullam was no obscurantist. He had been attracted by and had wrestled with the subtleties of metaphysics. "Hasten to my help, O ye few of certain faith, while such spirits seek to pervert my thoughts."⁴ "My thoughts race on endlessly, for I would search out mysteries beyond solution."⁵ Meshullam's verse reveals his participation in speculative mysticism.

(NO ITALICS)

"I know the chain [of *the Sephirot*] which establish the world's structure according to the quality of each and [I know] the foundation of God's rule and the secret of seals. It is written in the core structure of the universe and in the Torah, as if with diamonds. The secret of the *Sephirot* is found in all precious books. Traces can be discerned in available proof."⁶ "Ezra and Azriel and the rest of my friends have given me opinion and not lied, They are my priests. They will bring fire upon my altar. They are the inextinguishable light and that never is darkened. They knew *סוד, סוד, סוד* therefore they were attracted to the precious tradition.

¹ Brody, *Yedeot* . . . , IV, 56, No. 24, vv. 63-64.

² *Ibid.*, p. 117, No. 49, vv. 31-33.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 17, No. 3, v. 32.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 113, No. 48, v. 11.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99, No. 44, v. 1. ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56, No. 24, vv. 55-57.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 104, No. 44, vv. 86-88. The quote is the first line of the *Sefer Yezirah*.

Central to this Kabbalist tradition was what Scholem has called "an ideology of *halacha*," i.e. a conceit that the religious commandments were not allegories of more or less profound idea or pedagogic measures, but rather commands to perform secret rites or mysteries of cosmic significance.¹ As we shall see, it was especially on the count of reducing the Torah law to natural law that Meshullam faulted Maimonides. Central also was a doctrine of angelic intermediaries, and again we shall see that Meshullam faulted Maimonides for denying angelic and divine beings. Azriel as well as R. Isaac wrote significant commentaries to the *Sefer Yetzirah*. We have seen Meshullam refer to the *Sephirot* and their seals and the various powers by which these in turn affect mundane life.

In the course of the controversy Meshullam sided with Solomon b. Abraham and his disciples. "Had it not been for Solomon, the fine man who insisted on the Covenant, the forgetful would have completely broken the Covenant... A beloved remained faithful to our God and his disciples were crowned through him with the crown of faith."² He chafed under the restraint and lack of passion of his intimates. "The men of our circle boast themselves against the *Moreh* and sneer privately. Let me not be enticed by the men of controversy, let them not take hold of me nor press me."³ Despite his reverence for Nachmanides he wished "his warhorses might have neighed and stamped,"⁴ for Meshullam could not bridle his passion: "*Moreh Nebuchim*, be silent, shut up! We have never heard such things until now. Let him who says that the text is an allegory and the prophet merely a man of dreams, bear his own sin."⁵ "I will stretch out a strong right hand, I am eager to rip apart the self wise intellectual and the seers of Egypt. Let every writing be blotted out which attacks faith and seems to jest about the teachings of the wise. I will not leave a single survivor to a people which separates itself from God by studying logic and sealed

¹ Scholem, p. 30.

² Brody, *Yediot* . . . IV, 104. No. 44, vv. 79 and 81.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 104, No. 44, vv. 82-83.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 104, No. 44, v. 85.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33, No. 15. With the quixotic nature of a poet, Meshullam was capable of a *volte face*. "I will cry greatly. It is my intention to cry. My feet speed to seek pardon. Who will give me of the dust of his grave that my face may roll in it and be covered . . . In abject apology I humble myself with a humility which both confesses and acknowledges." (*Ibid.*, p. 116, No. 49, vv. 5-6, 9.)

books."¹ "I will rend the *Moreh*, my mind is made up. To what purpose do those who know (my circle) seek to patch up my cuts. Would that I were not inclined to be a defender and to forgive, but they are not forgiven."² Meshullam went so far as to say, "He [Maimonides] became hypocrite and heretic and violated the Covenant. May his sins be inscribed upon a book."³

Meshullam was passionate and when committed, committed. He could not escape a need to go beyond the passive negativeness of his circle. Yet after his most damning polemic, he felt compelled to add this postscript:

Concerning our rabbi (Maimonides) rise in proof of his reverence. His saintliness and his testimony to God's unity and his witness is well known. God forbid that I should libel with my parable since his fear is upon me and his respect is on my heart. He did bring light to the eye, first and foremost on God's firstness. He spoke sweetly to enlighten the blind eye. But weak minds found in him a stumbling block—though he only innovated to awaken the sleepers.⁴

Like so many before him, Meshullam often exonerated Maimonides by prosecuting the translators of the *Moreh*. "This was not the intention of the teacher, God forbid, but the translators turned aside from his ways. It was written in Arabic. They confused the text of our master. They did not explain. Search out his manuscript and see if prophecy actually was rationalized into a dream."⁵ "I will spew out my venom on Harizi, let him be mocked and scorned. He, the translator, translated badly, he wrote his book with evil intent."⁶ But one can not escape the conviction that Meshullam basically faulted the original equally with the translator. "The *Moreh* dilates on every folly. It is a plant which gives no shade. The rebellious draw on the *Moreh*. Cease from metaphysics."⁷ Meshullam blinded himself to his own passion even as he pleaded balanced judgment. "Listen to the words of one who wishes well of

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 101, No. 44, vv. 31-33.

² *Ibid.*, p. 103, No. 44, vv. 70-71.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 54, No. 24, v. 22. Contrast, however, his alter ego, "Our generation was silent. Many bridled their tongues until our master [Maimonides] came and the times became fragrant and scented with the spice of his incense. He wrote like the writings of God. They are alike even to the letter. Truth and righteousness are met there." (*Ibid.*, p. 116, No. 49, vv. 12-14.)

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 56, No. 24, vv. 62-63.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 100, No. 44, vv. 14-16.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33, No. 12, vv. 11-12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 33, No. 12, vv. 11-16.

Tien "1"

Too DARK)

^

Moreh, even

the *Moreh*, ² Even if in his eyes there are many deficiencies. Who wishes for the cords which are strong in it, even though in certain places the cords are torn." ¹

What did Meshullam find fault with in the *Moreh*?

A) Maimonides' historical and empirical treatment of the Biblical Commandments. "He erred in other things by weighing the commandments and reducing them to light and welcome burdens. The man who desires the absence of restraint takes such [teachings] to heart. Now there is a book which speaks to him in welcome trivial terms." ² Meshullam scoffs at Maimonides' claim that each law has a reasonable base. "I ask you, O Rabbi, I draw near to hear [your answer], explain the proper reason for the *Yibum*. Do not forsake your kind spirit and reveal the secret of the hyssop and the secret of the woman who has a flux, and [of the regulation concerning] the sight of stain. Let the light of your knowledge praise (explain) the uncleanness of the Tent. Let your spirit not be alarmed because of the need of a valid opinion and explanation. Let thought dwell on the prohibitions of the hyssop, and the spreading of a leprous spot, and the quarantine for leprosy. Here is your pay, give the reason concerning the requirement of incense and the measurement of spices. I will give you a portion and all kinds of rewards and trinkets for [an explanation] of the burnt offerings. I will give you all manner of treasure, even the coffers of Egypt, for [an explanation] of *Kilayim*." ³

What is Meshullam's position? "Their secret was never revealed. God, the Creator of man and the Foundation of the world, established them for his own glory." ⁴ Why this concern? There must have been a current of ritual eclecticism about. "The one who denies a single command falls under a curse. They are men of destructive purpose even though they appear respectable." ⁵

The laws have a "secret," a mythological purpose, known only to the initiate. "You dwell on the incense. Know that the true reason escaped you: How can you believe that they offered incense because of the fat and the blood and to remove the stench. Let your heart concern itself with the secret of *Kilayim*. Have you been

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 90, No. 40, vv. 12-13.

² *Ibid.*, p. 54, No. 24, vv. 17-18.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 55, No. 24, vv. 35-41.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55, No. 24, v. 42.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 55, No. 24, v. 43.

told why these were prohibited? . . . The commandments are truth. A king promulgated them. They are meaningful to those who understand." ¹ Meshullam's chart of these secrets is unknown, but it is doubtful that they differed unduly from Nachmanides'. To cite only one example, Maimonides argued that the rule of *Kilayim* was conceived to eliminate certain pagan ritual. ² Nachmanides, on the other hand, argued that it was a warning that man was not to contradict the will and wisdom of God. ³ To do so was to doubt God's wisdom and to disturb the harmony of creation with unpredictable, but surely dire, consequences. To Meshullam, then, Maimonides' explanation of the commandments not only led to an attenuation of practice, but denied the esoteric value of the revealed tradition ~~that knowledge~~ which ~~gave~~ the initiate ^{from} cosmic power. ⁴ drew his

B) Maimonides brought into question the reality of future reward and the fact of a divine judgment and punishment.

"What of those who keep the law, who have forgotten the attractions of the world, who have been exiled from the house of pleasures and who await the deferred hope; Can the heart live if it is deprived of hope?" ⁵

M. T. Teshubah 8:5 troubled and disturbed Meshullam. "Is there no punishment for the sinner except that they die and are not remembered. If there is no judgment nor punishment in the world to come, how then did they tell me that burning fires will be kindled." ⁶ Meshullam's concern was at once practical—the absence of restraining fear would induce many to break the bonds— and theological; the faith promises retribution. "If there is no retribution or punishment for human beings and the guilty simply no longer exist after death, then the light of the Torah is extinguished, falling away is multiplied, and hatred increased even to

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 102, No. 44, vv. 49-51, 54.

² *Moreh*, iii, 36.

³ Nachmanides, *Perush* . . . to Lev. 19:19.

⁴ In these early Kabbalistic days the Shabuot ritual (*Tikkun L'eyl Shabu'oth*) was a developing practice. On Shabuot the Torah had been given. On its eve the mystics panted for the renewal of this gift. The mystics not only assumed the supernatural authority of the commandments but considered carefully the correct posture and attitude in which each should be observed. In the face of such practice and attitude Maimonides' "scientific" analysis was an impossible pill to swallow.

⁵ Brody, *Yedeot* . . . , IV, 113, No. 48, vv. 5-6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 101, No. 44, vv. 25-26.

the point of bloodshed..."¹ It is not as Maimonides thought, "that the human soul is identical with the animal and has no attribute of immortality."² The technique of reducing allegory to fancy was at fault. "Perhaps these are only parables—without basis. Perhaps their purpose is only to build fences around men's actions. Perhaps they are only parables to strengthen those who are struggling against their desires. Father, cease entirely your speech..."³ "Those who shame by allegorizing the truth, though they make their tongues sweet to us; the end of those who forget [God] will be fire and brimstone, and their bones will be ground in Hell."⁴ Meshullam rejected entirely the argument that retribution is simply a worldly corrective to frighten men into obedience.

To Meshullam the promise of faith was certain and cosmic. "I believe in resurrection when the body and soul will arise and the bones will come to life again. That day awaits only God who will blow the Shophar at which time the earth that was clod will begin to stir."⁵ Meshullam reversed the argument of natural law by assuming an immutable cosmic law—at one stroke validating causation and retribution. "Are you bedazzled because of the house of bitterness [this world] where some have perverted their way and not been punished. Or perhaps your heart wonders at the wounds of those who seek God early and who are concerned with His holy name. Know that there is a retribution in time, but that its operation at every instant is not revealed. The wheel of life revolves. Such are its revolutions and they are never diverted. They follow the lines of His decision. No unexpected circumstances arise or bring change. The world has its own routine. Good awaits those who are patient—even if these wonders are delayed. This is the inheritance of the servants of our God. Over the sinners the bars of Hell will roar."⁶ Meshullam validated his position simply by assuming the authority of Talmudic Midrash. "How can they say of the geese of Rabba that it is a parable when according to my opinion they [the geese] were specially created for that purpose."⁷

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 54, No. 24, vv. 9-10.

² *Ibid.*, p. 54, No. 24, v. 8. This was, of course, not Maimonides' position.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 101, No. 44, vv. 28-30.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 91, No. 40, vv. 26-27.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 56, No. 24, vv. 58-59.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 114, No. 48, vv. 23-29.

⁷ *T. B. Baba Batra* 73b, i.e. to establish the principle of reward and punishment.

Father, are you not astonished at the cakes¹ (the reference is to an *aggada* establishing the Messianic promise)."² If the validation was simple, the Kabbalistic description of these events was not. Meshullam did not illustrate his view of it all. His motivation here was not to elaborate but to establish. "[About the one] who persisted in speculating; is there deliverance from Sheol? Is there a redeemer to save one full of sins? In the day when judgment is rendered will there be time to laugh?"³

C) Maimonides denied God relevance by denying His attributes.

"Those who deny the proper attributes of God speak out until faith has been drained of man."⁴ Meshullam believed, of course, in God's unity but not in God's absolute otherness. "I am determined to know the God of my fathers and my thoughts are continuously of Him. I would know the awesome God, omnipotent, who created all glory outside the category of time. He is exalted as God in this perishable world. He hung and founded the world upon the seas. He smote the primal matter and cut the sea and brought harm to the Egyptians with powerful wonders. He chose the fathers and their descendants from among all peoples and from that time He has supported them in His mercy against other nations. My eyes saw Him at Sinai when He revealed Himself to my host with noise and thunder."⁵ Meshullam's God must be not only Creator but in history.

Meshullam blamed Greek modes of speculation for this attenuation of the Hebrew God concept. "Oh, men, cease from drawing waters from a well the fathers neither bore nor dug. What have you to do with Plato or with the philosophers who gave birth to evil and wickedness?"⁶ There was a point beyond which logical categories resulted only in error. "Who will write sophistications which are too refined for understanding? Such a one will be trapped in arguments and fall because of their weight."⁷

Meshullam's concern was part theologic, part practical. He rebelled against our old friend the text of *Mishneh Torah*, *Teshubah* 3:9.

¹ T. B. *Shabbat* 30b.

² Brody, *Yedeot* . . . , IV, 102, No. 44, vv. 40-41.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 54, No. 24, vv. 16-17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 113, No. 48, v. 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56, No. 24, vv. 49-54.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 102, No. 44, vv. 37-39.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54, No. 24, vv. 11-12.

Teshubah

which presumed anyone who posited attributes of God to be a *min*. "Do not be angry at those who posit corporeality or if they liken God to the form of a man, those who speak of 'glory' and who think of 'shape.' These are variant opinions but not heresy. How many sages spoke of *Komah* [divine dimension] yet they worshipped their Creator and did not rebel against His law."¹ Nor was he so unsophisticated that he did not recognize that the ideas of his circle of Kabbalists approached a similar position. "They (Ezra and Azriel) know *Shiur*, but they keep private the teaching out of fear of causing heresy."²

worshipped

What particularly exercised Meshullam was the inevitable negation of miracles resulting from a God who is Pure Existence and can be defined only in terms of negative attributes. "Father, are you not astonished at the cakes?³ Do you not remember the things of the past? Has there been a miracle greater than the crossing of the Red Sea when the depths were cut in twain? Pay heed to the stop at Sinai when the mountains quaked and shook. Remember the holiest of miracles, the manna, which our fathers ate without ever lacking. God's strength is not foreshortened nor are God's plans beyond fulfillment."⁴

"There is a quarrel between the naturalists and miracles. Who will judge these contradictions and reconcile them?"⁵ What was Meshullam's side of the quarrel? That there is historical evidence for the miracles: "For every miracle our lips can establish clear proof without error."⁶ One is reminded that to a man like Nachmanides miracles were the ultimate proof texts of the existence and power of God. Meshullam, for instance, insists, "To us the ass [of Balaam] is a factual text, though the book labels it a vision."⁷ Nachmanides' *Commentary to the Torah* fills out the "us." The miracle occurred "to show Balaam who it is that establishes speech and silence. It is God who invests man with the power of speech." All this "to convince Balaam that he should not practice sorcery or curse Israel."⁸ According to Nachmanides, and certainly Me-

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 102, No. 44, vv. 46-48.

² *Ibid.*, p. 104, No. 44, v. 79.

³ *T.B. Shabbat* 30b.

⁴ Brody, *Yedeot* . . . , IV, 102, No. 44, vv. 41-45.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 103, No. 44, v. 69.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90, No. 40, v. 17.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 102, No. 44, v. 39.

⁸ Nachmanides, *Perush* . . . to Num. 22 : 23.

shullam would have agreed, "There is nothing in the world which is causally controlled or operates only according to natural law, rather everything is under the power of hidden miracles."¹

In his discussion of miracles Meshullam revealed clearly his own earlier attraction to Greek norms. "These are counsels to me about the subject of miracles because these seemed alien to me. For my mind rejected the concept of miracles and insisted on some material explanation. I would not accept any proof until it became unmistakably clear to me. My heart would not believe until my answers were convincing and strong: Now I come with impeccable witnesses concerning miracles. Written documents support me."² What were these texts? Probably the *Sefer Yazirah* as expounded by his circle.

D) Maimonides reduced prophecy to a vision seen but dimly and a mere psychological potentiality.

"O Moreh Nebuchim there is contention about the issue of prophecy in you."³ What is the contention? The contention was that Maimonides denied both the charismatic powers of the prophet and the fact of prophecy as an act of divine will. "Concerning the dead whom the prophets revived, they said it was only a temporary stoppage of the pulse, that they were not actually dead."⁴ "Heretics say censorially that the Torah is only a vision, that the text does not denote what it says, that the copy contains allegories."⁵ Meshullam's argument was that prophecy was not only denotatively accurate but revealed truths of cosmic significance. "The heart of the seer saw in the vision of prophecy a fearful wonder and deep secrets. Every visionary saw delineated in his vision the form of our God who is above all that are exalted."⁶ Prophecy established God far more than logic. Moreover, it was not only Moses but many who saw truly and it is their visions that the tradition unfolds. "Some obtained vision as might a man entranced; Some prophets saw while in complete possession of their critical faculties. Of these came the received [tradition] and to these were the revelations concerning God who dwells in praise and precedes all. How prodigious the curse which will overtake those who offered a purely

¹ *Ibid.*, to Ex. 13 : 15.

² Brody, *Yedeot* . . . , IV, 100, No. 44, vv. 3-7.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 100, No. 44, v. 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 104, No. 44, v. 75.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33, No. 12, vv. 1-2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 53, No. 24, vv. 1-2.

natural explanation to a people upright and pure who cling to the Torah and those who taught that faith and law were received of a distant nature, and who laugh at the commandments and [insist] that the commandments are dreams."¹

To claim prophecy was the truth darkly seen was to undermine the foundation of faith. One thinks immediately of Nachmanides' insistence that prophecy depends not on human capacity—all heard the revelation at Sinai—but on divine will, and his further insistence that the clear and open quality of prophecy establishes its validity and precludes anyone casting doubt on the truth of the content of the revelation.²

E) Maimonides denied the plenary power of angelic beings and spirits.

"Shamelessly, he spoke deprecatingly of the angel of conception."³ Meshullam believed in both angels and spirits. "Busy yourself to find substance in the matter of angels and you will be remembered kindly even by the guilty. The angel of birth [belongs] to God the most High and the messenger angels fulfill His will. We have witnesses in the matter of evil spirits. The class of destroying angels actually brought into being certain laws.⁴ Torah and Tradition confirm me in the matter of demons. The teachings of the *aggadah* restore my conviction."⁵

Meshullam did not fault Maimonides for denying angels. In the face of the *Moreh* text: "As for the existence of angels, there is no necessity to cite any proof from Scriptures, where the fact is frequently mentioned,"⁶ he had no need to. He complained rather that Maimonides circumscribed the angels to the spheres. They did not walk about in the world of men. Biblical episodes involving angels were simply verbal descriptions of the images from prophetic

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54, No. 24, vv. 3-6.

² Nachmanides, *Perush* . . . to Deut. 4:9.

³ Brody, *Yedeot* . . . , IV, 33, No. 12, v. 9.

⁴ Cf. *Mishnah Gittin* 7:1; *T. B. Gittin* 67a. Maimonides had explained these texts in purely rational terms. (Maimonides, *Commentary on the Mishnah*) *Gittin* 7:1; cf. H. Zimmels, *Magicians, Theologians, and Doctors* (London, 1952), p. 111.) Aristotelian astronomy had no place for negative intelligences. How far Meshullam actually went in a belief in evil spirits is uncertain. One recalls Nachmanides' stricture, "I am greatly astonished at the habit of [pious] people in Germany who occupy themselves with demons, conjuring them and using them for various purposes." Solomon ibn Adret, *Teshubot ha-Rashba ha-Hayohasot le-ha-Ramban* [Zolkiev, 1795], I, 283.)

⁵ Brody, *Yedeot* . . . , IV, 54, No. 24, vv. 44-47.

⁶ *Moreh* II, 6.

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dreams.¹ To Maimonides angels were forms without substance, the active intelligences of the spheres.² Hence any verse about angels must be taken allegorically.³ "Father, does your heart not know that angels move about in the world."⁴ "Slow up, O great one of the generation, for the lines of your book are not clear."⁵ To Meshullam angels were a fact of life and he sensed, correctly, that to Maimonides angels were largely a fact of astronomy, and that man's apperception of angels was intuitive, in dreams, rather than immediate. Compare Meshullam, "Even while awake men are conjoined to them and attach themselves."⁶

Meshullam attempted Biblical proof. "See in *Va-ye-rah* (Gen. 18) concerning the angels who appeared to Abraham."⁷ According to the Kabbalists the three who appeared to Abraham to announce Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction were angelic beings, divine emanations, and hence divine forms of creation, "God-like"—even Godly. Angels solved all problems of Biblical "messengers" and in sophisticated analysis explained divine-mortal communication. But the proof lay not so much in the Bible as in the traditional angelology of the Talmud and in the rarified Neo-Platonic angelology of early Kabbalism—his world. Recall Nachmanides' insistence that every nature has its star of destiny and every star its controlling angel.⁸ There was, of course, an angelic equivalent to each of the *Sephirot* of which the Ezra-Ariel school made so much. Philosophically we might say these were the personalities of each sphere, and of a far more active personality than Maimonides permitted. Meshullam longed for the Resurrection, "When Michael will serve as priest offering sacrifice before God in the sanctuary of God's mount."⁹

Let us put Meshullam's world together, for it is typical in many ways of the mind that was at the very least sorely troubled by Maimonides' approach.

"Faith is the root and principle of every philosophy. The tra-

¹ Cf. *Moreh*, ii. 12; *M.T. Yesode ha-Torah* 2:4.

² *Moreh*, ii. 3.

³ *Ibid.*, ii. 4.

⁴ Brody, *Yedeot* . . . , IV, 101, No. 44, v. 19.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 101, No. 44, v. 24.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 101, No. 44, v. 23.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 100, No. 44, v. 18.

⁸ Nachmanides, *Perush* . . . to Lev. 18:25.

⁹ Brody, *Yedeot* . . . , IV, 56, No. 24, v. 60.

dition is to be followed in all essentials." ¹ Faith need not conform to logic. Logic is in error when its conclusions vary from the familiar principles of faith. "Draw near, my brother, to that which is experienced [of God]. See the company of the ones who take delight. What can you grasp of intellectual things? Stretch out your understanding to the heavens." ² The revelation of Sinai and of the prophets precedes reason in order of truth. "What did those of confused faith see in wicked thoughts and unclear logic to lead them astray." ³ "If you rely only on what is possible [according to sense experience] what, if anything, is possible. The people will be caught in error and come to trust in monstrous things." ⁴

There was a deliberate attempt on Meshullam's part at an innocence of faith. "According to his *Innocence*, Meshullam b. Solomon will explain reasons for commandments and laws." ⁵ "Be still, O wise one lest you be pierced with the sword wielded by the recesses of your mind. Discipline your spirit and let your understanding withstand the ideas that enter your head. Frustrate the counsel of your heart and return before the day turns and the pillar of your cloud evaporates (death). Put aside speculation. How many [before you] have drawn out the fundamental mysteries [to no avail]. The knowing ones have erred in their speculations. Knowledge entangled them and they blundered." ⁶ Meshullam's simplicity of faith was a deliberate posture. His own thoughts about faith were anything but untroubled and had to be disciplined systematically. "And I, Meshullam b. Solomon, I also will keep the teachings private. My hand will be restrained from writing. Still I will research the matter (faith). My deeds will speak for me though my ideas are not exhausted." ⁷

God is one, omnipotent, creator. Each of these concepts was refined for Meshullam by the cosmology and metaphysics of early Kabbalism. He knew the *Sephirot* and their seals—i.e. a theory of creation through successive emanation. He knew the speculation in this regard of the *Sefer Yezirah*. "I stood in the secret of the *Sefer Yezirah* and I learnt the fundamentals of the seven divisible

(no italics)

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 91, No. 40, v. 20.

² *Ibid.*, p. 91, No. 40, vv. 21-22.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 54, No. 24, v. 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 54, No. 24, vv. 13-14.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91, No. 40, v. 24.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 116, No. 48, vv. 15-20.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 104, No. 44, vv. 90-91.

parts." ¹ He was also privy to some secret teaching concerning God's nature. "They (Ezra and Azriel) knew concerning God's *Shiur*, but they kept private the teaching out of fear of causing heresy." ² Of the nature of this gnosis one can only guess, but one recalls Nachmanides' intricate letter play on the text "I will be that which I will be" (Ex. 3:14) which established Omnipotence and Omnipresence. One does not need to speculate on the specifics of Meshullam's cosmology. It presumed a constant process of emanation—God revealing Himself to man—that very revelation, in effect, returning as a messenger to God. Its touchstone was that God keeps in touch with life. Miracle, revelation, prophecy were the significant elements in that "keeping in touch" as far as man was concerned.

The theory of *Sephirot*, besides establishing a bond between God and man, established a cosmic order which could easily subsume miracles as orderly phenomena. Apply the order of the universe to the terrestrial world and one can be certain not only of the fact of Sinai and the accuracy of prophecy, but of the fact of Judgment and the act of Retribution. "It is certain to me that those of the dust will arise and the scattered bones will blossom." ³ "The day awaits only God who will sound the Shophar at which time the earth that was clod will begin to stir." ⁴

A general feeling that Maimonides, for all his brilliance, had withdrawn God and divine intimacy from human life rather than any careful analysis of the *Morch* motivated Meshullam's opposition. "My voice is to you who are in pain. . . A place is prepared for the dead who sanctified themselves by serving God. . . Speak to those sunk in tears of the peace of death." ⁵

5 — "Shall there be no penalty for the overly speculative?" ⁶ Meshullam blamed the "intelligentsia" of his day for sowing confusion by their sophistications and for causing the fabric of faith and goodness to unravel. "Many without knowledge grasped the *Mada* and glorified and preened themselves in her name." ⁷ "Since of old, that land (Provence) was susceptible to skepticism and there here-

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43, No. 17, v. 37.

² *Ibid.*, p. 104, No. 44, v. 89.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 31, No. 10, v. 50.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 56, No. 24, v. 59.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115, No. 48, vv. 36-39.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 54, No. 24, v. 30.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 103, No. 44, v. 55.

tics gathered. They, though few in numbers, with a cruel heart bedeviled the wise of the day... They found cause against prayer. They did not pray or supplicate God." ¹ "He placed a snare for a trapped generation against which even innocency could not triumph." ² "In their land (Provence) there are groups whose faith is lacking—like the faith of the fallen angels. Their faith is certain only of what can be seen. They acknowledge miracles only under duress... Take, my brother, my greetings to my mother's house, though they be among the leaders of the opposition. Though the fathers are still set in their hearts and a minority are steadfast in their vanities. May the impression of the merit of Meshullam return the children and the babes to the truth. Announce to every roof and dwelling that mine is the obligation to bring good tidings to the groaning." ³

acknowledge

Meshullam's vacillation between interest in philosophy and anger at its religious consequences brings us full cycle. Maimonides, in building a logical superstructure for Jewish theology, had not violated any dogmatic prohibition. He had had notable and pious predecessors. He would have notable and pious successors. The Maimonidean controversy did not erupt because of the definitions the *Morh* and the *Mada*. These were, as we have seen, new but not novelties.

in — in

Had western European Jewish life been culturally of one piece, there would have been no controversy. But in Aragon, Castile, and the Provence there were men who were better trained in Greek logic than in Talmudic lore and whose hearts were committed to the Academy rather than to the *yeshibah*. Maimonides wrote the *Moreh* to encourage the faith of pupils troubled by the incongruity of their religious and secular training. Some, at least, in western Europe read the *Moreh* not as an apologetic for Judaism but as an apologetic for secular preoccupations and as an apologetic for their spiritual indifference and their religious disinterest.

Again there would have been no controversy had the faith of these few un-rooted ones not been of moment to the larger community. Traditionally Judaism was tolerant of doubt and sophistication. But at this moment in time the missionary and militant Church

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 104, No. 44, vv. 73-74, 78.

² *Ibid.*, p. 33, No. 12, v. 13.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92, No. 40, vv. 35-36, 40-43.

was casting its net with new found skill for the faith-loose Jew. Once converted, he could be pressured into the service of the missionary societies and censorship boards who were preparing various lists of Talmudic blasphemies and errors. He could be made to say almost anything.

One can appreciate the concern of the anti-Maimonists. But censorship worked no better in the 13th century than it does today. The ban multiplied bitterness, increased differences, and resulted in a scandal which rocked all Jewry.

After the burning the aims of the pious became more sophisticated. Maimonides might be read, but secular philosophy was not to be studied except by the adult and the pious. This program of survival, too, was doomed to failure. But its promulgation occurred a half century later and with another set of principals and under pressures somewhat different from those we have described.

The best of anti-Maimonists were good, decent, able, and pious men. The best of the Maimonists were good, decent, able, and pious men. That pressures of survival should separate these men is the tragedy of this history.

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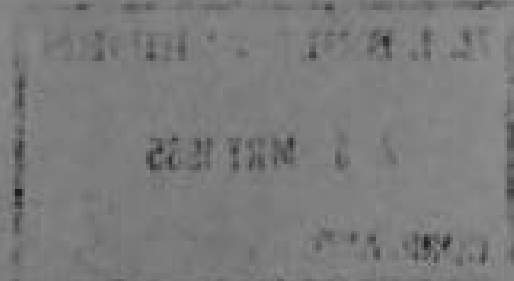
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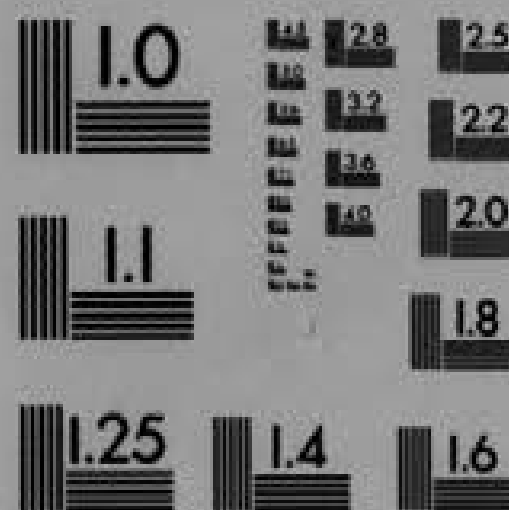
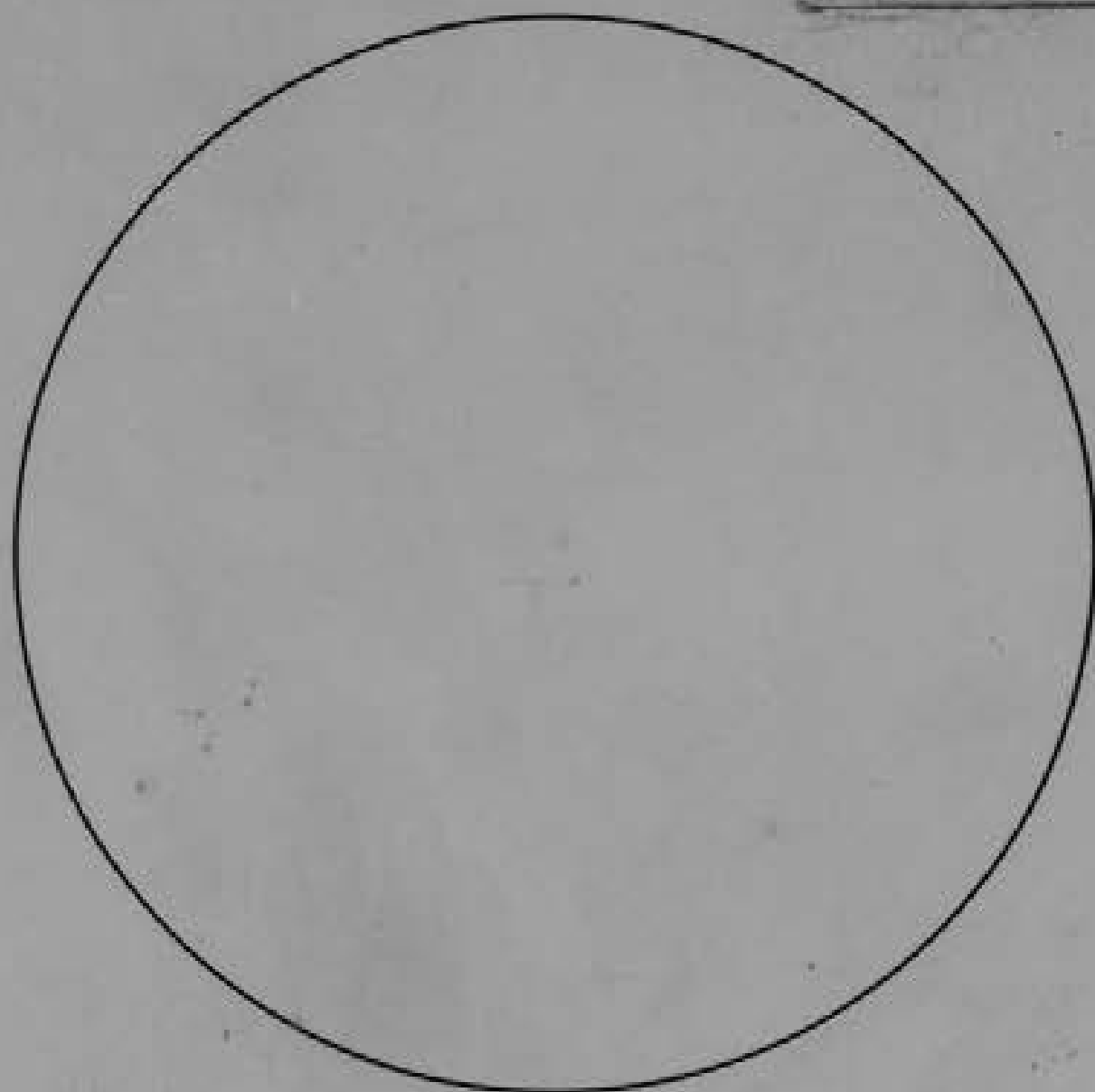
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