

Shimon IAKERSON, “Unknown Sephardi [*sic*; the misspelling, throughout the book, is apparently an editorial emendation] Incunabula” (pp. 297-312, including bibliography), in addition to some curiously bad translations of Hebrew, is a mere rehash of two of his earlier articles (see his bibliography), “Early Hebrew Printing” and, especially, “An Unknown List of Hebrew Books”. One might be grateful for thus making the material more widely available, except that both articles are readily accessible on the internet.

More valuable with respect to printing is Adri OFFENBERG, “What Do We Know about Hebrew Printing in Guadalajara, Híjar, and Zamora?” (pp. 313-37, including bibliography). Both Iakerson and OffenberG (Iakerson particularly), however, include incorrect and outdated information about the “mystical” or “mysterious” printer Juan de Lucena. Neither a mystic nor mysterious, he was a famous *converso* author and printer, and correct information about him may be found in my *Conversos*⁵.

Norman Roth

Ryan SZPIECH, ed. *Medieval exegesis and religious difference: commentary, conflict, and community in the premodern Mediterranean*. New York Fordham University Press, 2015. xiii, 329 pages.

Sarah STROUMSA, “The Father of Many Nations: Abraham in al-Andalus”, after the usual denunciation of the possibility of convivencia, worrying that even the (rather absurd, if now widely accepted) term “Abrahamic religions” is a distortion which might create an “exaggeratedly harmonious” picture of the actual situation, precedes to consider the supposed centrality of Abraham in philosophy in al-Andalus; in fact, only two figures are considered: the Muslim philosopher Ibn Massara (d. 931 C.E.), whose work has only been recently discovered (although his ideas were of course long known).

It should be noted that the concept of ascending the ladder, which the author claims to be explicitly in Ibn Massara and in the famous letters of the *Ikhwān al-ṣāfi* and subsequently “frequently” in mystical texts is in fact not explicitly in either source, as correctly noted in the article which she cites [n.º 8; incidentally, that article was published already in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 41 (2014) 261-312]. On the actual motif of ascending the ladder, and specifically through acquisition of secular knowledge, see my “Ladder of Knowledge” note in the previous issue of *Iberia Judaica*. With breathless audacity (and no evidence) we are informed that Ibn Massara derived his knowledge of Abraham from his “contacts with Jews and their reflections on *Sefer Yešira*” (p. 33); even more fantastic speculation follows. But it is Maimonides who is the paragon of “Abrahamic” emphasis; including the fact that he named his son Abraham (a not uncommon name, one should mention, in al-Andalus or in Christian Spain). Particularly in his account of the Sabians can be seen his emphasis on Abraham contrasted with idolatry. Also correct, and the best part of the article, is her explanation of Maimonides’ attitude to proselytes and their relation to Abraham as “father of nations” who taught them religion.

Antoni BIOSCA I BAS has written a very important analysis of “The Anti-Muslim Discourse of Alfonso Buenhombre”. While this does not therefore deal with a Jewish top-

⁵ *Conversos, Inquisition, and the Expulsion* (Madison, 1995; revised and with new material, paper ed., 2002), pp. 180-81 (it is mostly on the internet). I did not there note S. Mitrani-Samaritan, “Un typographe juif en Espagne avant 1482”, *R.E.J.* 54 (1907) 246-52; also Pilar León Tello, *Judíos de Toledo* (Madrid, 1979) 2: 579, n.º 1623; and Manuel Serrano y Sanz, “Noticias biográficas de Fernando de Rojas... y del impresor Juan de Lucena”, *R.A.B.M.* 5 (1902) 245-99.

ic as such, there are nevertheless interesting references to the anti-Jewish polemic of this curious fourteenth-century Dominican, in his famous (forged) “Letters” of non-existent rabbis.

Ursula RAGACS, “Reconstructing Medieval Jewish-Christian Disputations”, offers important new insights especially on the Barcelona Disputation between the convert Paul Christiani and Naḥmanides. Particularly important is the demonstration of the influence of the text(s) of that on the lesser-known polemical work of Ramon Martí, *Capistrum Iudaeorum* (ed. and tr. [Sp.] Adolfo Roblés Sierra [Wurzburg, 1990 = Corpus Islamo-Christianum (CISC), Series Latina; 3:1]).

Harvey J. HAMES also deals with the Barcelona, as well as the earlier Paris, Disputation. Intriguing as is his theory that the Hebrew “text” of the Barcelona Disputation influenced that of the Paris Disputation, this is unproven. The similarity that both Jewish participants faced challenge by apostate Jews is a simple historical fact. Admittedly, there are some coincidental similarities, but direct influence is unproven and probably unprovable. The notes, incidentally, are perhaps the most important part of this article.

Yosi YISRAELI, “A Christianized Sephardic [*sic*] Critique of Rashi’s *Peshaṭ* in Pablo de Santa María’s *Additiones ad Postillam Nicolai de Lyra*” focuses on the *converso* polemicist’s “additions” (actually, as the author shows, counter arguments) to Nicolas de Lyra’s famous biblical commentaries (important is the author’s observation that these must have been written over a period of time, from the mid-1390’s and up to 1431. It is correctly pointed out that, contrary to Lyra, Pablo did not consider “Rashi” the most important Jewish exegete. Indeed, he remarked (again, correctly) that while Jews adhered to Rashi’s commentary on the Talmud, they had less regard for his biblical commentary, preferring instead Maimonides, Naḥmanides and Ibn ‘Ezra. However, while the discussion of Ibn ‘Ezra is generally correct, it should be mentioned that he was not entirely dismissive of “Rashi”, whose interpretation he sometimes borrowed, and he noted that the majority of his fellow scholars “prided themselves” in their knowledge of Rashi’s commentaries. Particularly interesting is the author’s careful demonstration of the dependence of Pablo on interpretations of Naḥmanides. This may demonstrate, he concludes (p. 141) “that the converted bishop’s profound Jewish training and education never ceased to play a major role in his theological thought, even after his baptism”. This disturbing realization confronts us as indeed a contradiction to his vicious hostility towards his former “faith”, which found expression in the harshest anti-Jewish polemic.

The late lamented Ángel SÁENZ- BADILLOS left as a small part of his vast legacy observations on “Jewish and Christian Interpretations in Arragel’s Biblical Glosses”. In general, he asserts, when dealing with passages that were of no particular polemical importance Arragel included the explanation of only one or two Jewish exegetes, but on more debatable verses he utilized several. In some cases he cited both Jewish and Christian interpretations of a particular verse, without showing any preference. While he cites some Christian glosses which refer in a polemical way to Jewish beliefs, he generally refrains from his own polemicizing. A major point of contention between Christians and Jews, about which much has already been written, is the interpretation of Gen. 49.10. Noting that the Christians interpret this as referring to Jesus and the Jews have other explanations, he diplomatically (some might say cowardly) leaves it for each to decide according to their faith. Another important suggestion is that anonymous Christian revisers added to or changed the text of some of the glosses to conform more closely to Christian teaching.

Alexandra CUFFEL, “Between Epic Entertainment and Polemical Exegesis”, presents fascinating new details on the evolution of the notorious anti-Christian polemic “Toldot Yeshu” (not Toledot, of course). Virtually ignored for many years, this work (rather, various

versions) has received considerable recent attention⁶. Through a careful analysis of the various versions (including Aramaic and Judeo-Arabic) of these fables, the author demonstrates not only the obvious fact of its importance as polemic but that part of it was directly a result of and a counter-argument to the popular Christian narrative of Empress Helena and the finding of the “true cross”. Cuffel emphasizes what may be a heretofore unrecognized, or at least little recognized, aspect of the tales: that this was primarily oral literature, “designed to entertain as well as polemicize”. A major indication of this, it is argued, is the inclusion of aspects of it in the polemical work of Ramón Martí’s *Pugio fidei*. Martí usually cited the Hebrew texts of various Jewish sources he used and translated them into Latin, but the fact that he gave neither Hebrew nor Latin citations of the *Toledot Yeshu* material may be due, the author argues convincingly, to the oral nature of the texts, which he heard rather than read. This is a well-written and carefully constructed article, with thorough bibliography in the notes.

Nina CAPUTO, “Sons of God, Daughters of Man, and the Formation of Human Society in Nahmanides’s Exegesis” deals with his interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4, the union between “*beni Elohim*” and “*benot ha-adam*”. “Sons of God” is interpreted to refer to the sons of Adam, who are perfect like their father. Furthermore, following the traditional interpretation of “*elohim*” as judges, they are thus portrayed as judges upon men, but when idolatry was introduced they became feeble like other men. This idolatry brought about divine punishment. The author persuasively suggests that his allusion to the interpretation of “fallen angels” in *Pirke de R’ Eli’ezer* and the talmudic tractate *Yoma* enforces his view of the sexual union which resulted in “leading men astray”.

Esperanza ALFONSO, “Late Medieval Readings of the Strange Woman in Proverbs”, introduced by a summary of some modern scholarship on the possible meaning but without the most obvious historical context of its setting in the Hellenistic period, considers the interpretations of Joseph b. Joseph Ibn Naḥmias, a student of Asher b. Yehiel and author of unfortunately few but interesting commentaries⁷. Following earlier commentators, he takes the passages about the “foreign woman” literally rather than figuratively; nevertheless, he seems to have equated the woman with heresy at one point. The allegorical interpretation of Gersonides [Levy b. Gershon (1288-1344)] is of less interest since he wrote in Provence in the 14th century, no longer part of Spain. More of interest is the virtually unknown commentary, described by Alonso as “linear qabalistic”, in MS Sassoon 559, apparently 15th century., in which the evil woman is associated with menstruation and demonic legend. Her seduction of men leads them to *miynut* (deviation, heresy, probably correctly identified by Alonso with Christianity). Isaac ‘Arama (1420-94), best-known of those discussed, comes closest to understanding perhaps the true implications of the metaphor in describing it as a clash between philosophy and the Torah (so also is the meaning of his “third woman”, actually the same: philosophy in ch. 7, which ties together the opening

⁶ Just published: Ursula Ragacs, “MS Maria Saal: Ein originelles Fragment aus der Toledot [sic] Yeshu Tradition”, in and Gerhard Josef Langer (eds.), “*Let the wise listen and add to their learning*” (Prov. 1:5): *Festschrift for Günter Stemberger on the occasion of his 75th birthday* (Berlin, 2016), pp. 593-604. Earlier but important articles are Michael Rand, “An Anti-Christian Polemical Piyyut by Yosef Ibn Avitur [sic] Employing Elements from Toledot Yeshu”, in *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 7 (2013): 1-16; Hillel J. Newman, “The death of Jesus in the Toledot Yeshu literature”, in *The Journal of Theological Studies* N.S. 50 (1999) 59-79; Eduard Feliu, “Un antievangelio jueu de l’Edat Mitjana: el Séfer Toledot Iesu”, *Estudi General. Revista de la Facultat de Lletres de la Universitat de Girona* 9 (1989) 237-262; Carlos Sáinz de la Maza, “El Toledot Yeshu castellano en el maestro Alfonso de Valladolid”, in *Actas del II Congreso Internacional de la Asociación Hispánica de Literatura Medieval* (Alcalá de Henares, 1993), pp. 797-814.

⁷ It is unfortunate that only the original, hard to obtain edition is cited rather than the more accessible photo reprint of all his works, *Peyrushey Yosef ben Naḥmias* (Jerusalem, 1982).

speeches of ch. 8 and 9. One can see this as “literal” and “morally superficial” if one chooses, but it is quite in line with the best of modern scholarship.)

Norman Roth

Alfred I. IVRY. *Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed. A Philosophical Guide* (Chicago, London. The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 307 pages.

Recent years have seen a number of books on Maimonides, some of a scholarly and others of a more popular nature. The present work falls somewhere in between. Written by an acknowledged scholar of medieval philosophy (Jewish and Muslim) from whom one would expect a thorough and detailed analysis, this book fails to deliver. It is instead similar to what is known in the U.S. as “Cliffs Notes”, or perhaps a Wikipedia article, with very short summaries (sometimes several chapters to a page), followed by a somewhat more scholarly “Analysis” of each of the three sections of the “Guide”. The whole is preceded by three short introductory chapters (one an abridged biography) of interest only to the most uninformed general reader (here we are told, p. 45, that Maimonides did not intend to write an original treatise but was “content” merely to copy the views of others, usually without acknowledgement). Not to worry, however, we soon discover that the main purpose of the Guide is to “transform the Bible into a philosophical text” (p. 52). That certainly would have aroused much greater controversy than in fact was the case.

Ivry has real problems with Maimonides’ understanding of God: nothing but intellect (p. 57) who (that?) does not relate directly to the world (p. 73), or is solely a “thing” or principle of physics (p. 77), an unknown (unknowable?) impersonal deity (p. 120). The obvious question which needs to be dealt with in this case, but is not, is whether everything Maimonides wrote about God elsewhere, particularly in the *Mishneh Torah*, is therefore a lie. Perhaps the “hidden” answer to this lies in the observation (correct, no matter how contradictory to all that has gone before) that Maimonides instructs his philosophical reader that “the path to intellectual perfection entails appreciation and observance of the Law” (p. 204). Ah, but the commandment requires a Commander.

Probably the most important observations in the book are the discussions of the various kinds of “intellect” and of Maimonides’ views on prophecy (“Analysis”, p. 133 ff.). From time to time, important individual points are made in almost an off-hand manner, such as that Maimonides’ view of providence is that God’s knowledge is of universals, of the species, and not of individuals (p. 216); he might have said, though he does not, that this also was the view of Ibn ‘Ezra, however somewhat concealed.

While dismissing the crucial ch. 15 of Part II, dealing with the question of eternity of the universe (and see ch. 19), in another short paragraph (p.99) he does devote more discussion to it in his “Analysis” (p. 115). However, missing again are important articles, some of which help elucidate the sources used or referred to. Maimonides is accused of “polemicizing” and of offering rhetorical arguments. Because he has (allegedly) denied a personal God, “placing the [Jewish] people’s destiny in an unknown and impersonal deity” he is as guilty as Aristotle of threatening belief in the law (presumably the Torah) (p. 120).

Following a generally correct summary of Maimonides’ views on good and evil in Part III, ch. 9-11, we find the surprising statement (p. 157) that he does not add that in order to bring an end to the harm that individuals do to each other, knowledge of science and true knowledge of God’s world is required. But of course that is precisely what Maimonides says, and he concludes ch. 11 with the saying of Isaiah (11:9) “for the earth shall