

‘NO ACHIEVEMENT BUT THROUGH ARABIC’:  
THE IBERO-ALMOHAD EDUCATION OF SAMUEL IBN TIBBON

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The present study is an intellectual biography of Samuel ibn Tibbon (c.1150-1232), the scion of an important family of Andalusí translators exiled to Provence in the wake of the ascent to power of the Berber Almohad dynasty in Iberia in the late twelfth century. It comprises three areas of investigation: examinations of Samuel’s education as a translator at the hands of his father and of the philosopher and theologian Moses Maimonides; of his own writings that describe his thoughts about his profession; and of the ways in which he was memorialized by later writers after his death. By examining a variety of Hebrew and Arabic sources related to each of these three aspects of the record of Samuel’s intellectual and professional life, it is possible to observe many ways in which Samuel’s work transformed the status of the Hebrew and Arabic languages among Andalusí and Andalusí-exiled readers whose lives were shaped by the changing intellectual and political scene wrought by the Almohads.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sarah Jean Pearce earned her B.A. at Yale College in 2005 and her M.A. at Cornell University in 2009. She is currently employed in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at New York University, where she researches and teaches in the area of medieval Iberian literary and intellectual history.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Biographical Sketch	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	ix
Introduction	1
Chapter One	17
Chapter Two	69
Chapter Three	96
Conclusion	139
Bibliography	148

## Introduction

The existence of translation as a full-scale intellectual movement can be traced back to the Arabic translations, mediated through Syriac by Christian translators, of the classics of the Greek scientific and philosophic canon that were made in the Islamic Near East beginning in the ninth century. But that was not the only time that translation would be a widespread cultural force; a direct outgrowth of the Greek-into-Arabic translation movement was the translation movement of the Mediterranean west that saw Arabic texts (both original compositions and translations of Hellenic works) translated in Hebrew, Latin and even the nascent Ibero-romance.<sup>1</sup>

Members of the Ibn Tibbon dynasty were critically important to the latter-day Iberian translation movement that saw the adaptation of dozens of important philosophical, scientific, religious and even some literary texts from Arabic (and in the last generations, from Latin as well<sup>2</sup>) into Hebrew. The Tibbonid translators were responsible for making those texts accessible to Jewry resident in northern Europe for whom vernacular or even literary Arabic

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<sup>1</sup> Much has been written about both of these translation movements. To start, see Franz Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam*. New York: Routledge, 1975; and Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> The last scion of the dynasty was Joseph ben Machir ibn Tibbon, whose work included the Latin translations of almanacs that Dante Alighieri consulted as he composed the *Divine Comedy*.

was inaccessible; additionally, their ideas and lexicographical talents led to the development of a scientific and philosophical vocabulary in Hebrew comparable to the rich specialized vocabularies that already existed in Arabic. In spite of their importance, there is a paucity of both primary sources and secondary analyses dealing with their lives. Yet to be produced since the inception of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* at the end of the nineteenth century are truly comprehensive and analytic biographies of any of the major members of the family, particularly the patriarch, Judah, and his son Samuel, whose Hebrew translation of Moses Maimonides' philosophically-informed work of religious esoterica, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, is traditionally held to be the authoritative one. His translations included seven stand-alone texts — the commentary on *Mishnah Avot*,<sup>3</sup> the treatise on resurrection,<sup>4</sup> the *Guide*,<sup>5</sup> the epistle on translation and the *Epistle to Yemen*<sup>6</sup> all by Maimonides; Aristotle's

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<sup>3</sup> *Commentary on Mishnah Avot*, ed. M. Rabinowitz. Jerusalem: Mosad Rav Kook, 1961; preface translated in Menahem Kellner, "Maimonides and Samuel ibn Tibbon on Human Perfection," *Studies in Halakhah and Jewish Thought Presented to Rabbi Professor Menachem Emanuel Rackman*, ed. M Beer. Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan UP, 49-57.

<sup>4</sup> *Treatise on Resurrection: The Original Arabic and Samuel Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew Translation and Glossary*, ed. Joshua Finkel. New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1939.

<sup>5</sup> *Moreh ha-Nevukhim*, ed. Y. Even-Shemuel. Jerusalem: Mosad Rav Kook, 1987.

<sup>6</sup> *Moses Maimonides' Epistle to Yemen: The Arabic Original and Three Hebrew Versions*, A. Halkin, ed. New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1952.

*Meteorologies*;<sup>7</sup> and the three treatises on conjunction by Averroes and his son;<sup>8</sup> — as well as excerpts from a variety of other Arabic texts incorporated in Hebrew translation in his own compositions such as the *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*<sup>9</sup> and the *Ma'amar Yikavvu ha-Mayim*.<sup>10</sup> Some of his translations contain excurses on the process of translation, some allude to it, and others ignore it.

The implications of the Ibn Tibbons' writings about their own lives and work have also not yet been fully explored, nor have the processes by which their labor came to form the canons of both texts and Hebrew philosophical and scientific vocabulary. The present study seeks to remedy this lacuna and to set Samuel ibn Tibbon's work as a translator into the context of Arabic-into-Hebrew translation against the proximate backdrop of the Andalusí diaspora

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<sup>7</sup> *Otot ha-Shamayim: Samuel ibn Tibbon's Hebrew Version of Aristotle's Meteorology*. Ed and trans., R. Fontaine. Leiden: Brill, 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Averroes, "Three Treatises on Conjunction," ed. J. Herez, in *Drei Abhandlungen über die Übersetzung von Samuel Ibn Tibbon*. Berlin: H.G. Hermann, 1869. And 'Abdallah ibn Rushd, "On Whether the Active Intellect Unites with the Material Intellect Whilst it is Clothed with the Body," eds. Charles Burnett and Mauro Zonta in *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen age* 67 (2000): 295-335.

<sup>9</sup> Preface to the *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, ed. Ruth Ben-Meir, "Samuel Ibn Tibbon's Preface to the Commentary on Ecclesiastes," *Maimonidean Studies*, 4 (2000): 13-44. And *Samuel ibn Tibbon's Commentary on Ecclesiastes: The Book of the Soul of Man*, trans. James Robinson. Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> *Ma'amar Yiqqawu ha-Mayim*, ed. M. Bisliches. Pressburg: Anton Edler von Schmid, 1837. This is a text that allowed Samuel ibn Tibbon to use Maimonides' philosophical and exegetical techniques to explore the interest in cosmology and particularly in the creation of the universe that he first articulated in his preface to his translation of Aristotle's *Meteorologies*.

and advent of Almohad rule in North Africa and then al-Andalus at the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries, as well as into the broader context of the evolving medieval relationship between Arabic and Hebrew literature, philosophy and science.

The Almohad movement that saw the ibn Tibbon family driven north from Granada to Lunel, an inland city in Provence, was founded towards the early twelfth century based upon the unitary teachings of Ibn Tūmart, a Maṣmūda Berber from the anti-Atlas who, in spite of his Sunnī roots proclaimed himself to be both the Maḥdī, the Messiah-like embodiment of the last of the Shi‘ī imāms; who, in spite of his Berber roots, claimed descent from the Quraysh, the Arab tribe to which the prophet Muḥammad belonged; and who, finally, in spite of never having been in the same city at the same time, claimed to be a student of the famed religious-philosophical thinker Abū Ḥamīd al-Ghazālī, a Persian-born rationalist who made a dramatic shift toward mystical thinking in the later part of his life. Ibn Tūmart founded the Almohad movement as a way to espouse his unconventional religious views. The movement was both messianic and reactionary in that it sought to establish a direct connection with the leadership of Muḥammad and to derive both its authority and practices from that invented connection. In spite of the centrality of the Arabian peninsula to Almohad ideology, and in spite of its doctrine

being highly attuned to the linguistic and cultural needs of the Berber populations, there was also a high degree of encroachment by the Almohads onto the Iberian peninsula for largely geopolitical purposes. This encroachment culminated with their formal rule there in the mid-twelfth century. Their sovereignty there was most complete and best recognized and recognizable during the period between the battles of Alarcos (1195) and Las Navas de Tolosa (1212), bookending them with what is typically and rightly described as conquest and Crusade in the purest forms manifest in Iberia, but which nevertheless manifests porous boundaries between interests and allies than such an appellation would suggest possible.<sup>11</sup>

It is natural that in the years running up to a much-anticipated military showdown between the corporeal manifestations of Andalusí values and of Almohad ones, the articulation and refinement of those values should play themselves out in the intellectual production of people living under the cloud of an imminent “clash of civilizations” (to completely bastardize the sense of Huntington and Lewis’ phrase). It was in response to that major political shift

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<sup>11</sup> Maya Shatzmiller, “Al-Muwahhīdūn,” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 7, p. 801b. Both this version of the article as well as the one revised and updated by Allen Fromherz in *EI3* are problematic in the ways in which they cling to the “fundamentalist” designation that has come to dominate the characterization of Almohad Islam. For alternative approaches see Mercedes García Arenal, *Messianism and Puritanical Reform: Mahdis of the Muslim West*. Leiden: Brill, 2006; and Maribel Fierro, “Conversion, Ancestry and Universal Religion: The Case of the Almohads in the Islamic West,” *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 2:2 (2010), 1-20.

that the Ibn Tibbons relocated northward to Lunel, the Provençal town that would become their center of operation and whose Jewish elders would goad Samuel into translating Maimonides' *Guide*. Yet it is the end of the Almohads' rule that, improbably and through the tropes of nostalgia and diaspora, consolidates a definitive Andalusí identity for the Ibn Tibbons against that of a collective North African counterpart.

Maribel Fierro establishes a set of points that she argues define Almohadism and which can be extrapolated to the Ibn Tibbons' circumstances.<sup>12</sup> Her Almohadist principles include the prioritization of encyclopaedic knowledge; the furthering of scientific, philosophical and mystical thinking; the promulgation of doctrine in the vernacular (Berber, in the case of the Almohads); the creation of new political and religious elites; and the establishment of a theocratic government with a caliph who operates in the mode of *khalīfat Allāh* rather than in the mode of *khalīfat rasūl Allāh*.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Maribel Fierro, "Alfonso X the Wise: The Last Almohad Caliph?," *Medieval Encounters* 15 (2009), 177-8. Note that there are several other precepts (like the standardization of weights and measures) that have been omitted because they are not relevant to translation or broader literary activity.

<sup>13</sup> This definition of caliphal role is, in particular, one of the ways in which the Almohad movement sought to return to early Islamic roots not as fundamentalists, necessarily, but certainly as revisionists. What they evoke by emphasizing the one mode of caliphal authority over the other is the late Damascene Umayyad- and early 'Abbasid-period conflict between political rulers and religious scholars over the extent of that authority. In their *God's Caliph*, Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds challenge the conventional distinction between these two terms and their development — a history furthered originally by Ignaz Goldziher in his *Muslim Studies* and by D.S. Margoliouth — by arguing that *khalīfat Allāh*

Even though each of these principles requires further investigation to be completely fleshed out in their own right, they will suffice as basic guidance for the purposes of understanding the Almohadist environment in which Samuel grew up. The recognition that Almohad intellectual and literary development, artistic tastes and even doctrinal principles and their application are not fully understood has gained traction in recent years and the attempt to remedy it has begun.<sup>14</sup> So, while this will be a necessarily incomplete panorama, it is necessary to lay out, at a minimum, what is already known in order to begin to place Samuel's religious, philosophical and linguistic opinions in their correct historical-intellectual context.

The ways in which the Almohads deployed the various languages at their disposal is the most important point with respect to a Jewish translator of

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was always the sense of the title and that *khalīfat rasūl Allāh* was always a later backformation (God's Caliph, pp. 12 and ff.). There is also some particularly Maghrebi provenance to this question. The Spanish caliphs always called themselves *khalīfat Allāh* and have no backformation of the *khalīfat rasūl Allāh* title, perhaps suggesting a greater ease between political power and knowledge in the Muslim West (17); on the other hand, North African leadership always seemed more at home with the concept of *khalīfat rasūl Allāh*, with that notion seeming to lie in the background of many caliphal depictions (19).

<sup>14</sup> Recent compendious forays into the breach include a dedicated section of the journal *Al-Qantara* 18:2 (1997) and two-volume collection of essays edited by Maribel Fierro, entitled *Los Almohades: Problemas y perspectivas*. The most recent monograph on the topic, Fromherz's *The Almohads: The Rise of an Islamic Empire* is deeply flawed. Older studies include Ambrosio Huici Miranda's two-volume *Historia política del imperio almohade*, and even — in spite of the fact that the most prolific of his students would all go on to ignore virtually completely the advent of Almohadism in the Maghreb — Francisco Codera y Zaidín's *Decadencia y desparición de los almoravides en España*, which touches upon the tension between the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties.



Maimonides (who has, himself, been described as conforming to the Almohadist mode of thinking)<sup>15</sup> into Hebrew. While Berber became the language of prayer for the simple believer living under Almohad rule, literary Arabic was still very much the language that was used to articulate power and elite status. While Berberization of liturgy and statements of faith is indeed one of the most innovative aspects of the Almohad program, it is unsurprising that a dynasty invested in working power and authority forward from the earliest days of Islam should cling to the Arabic language and its literary conventions in order to call attention to those aspects of their caliphate.<sup>16</sup>

Naturally, the paradigm is significantly more complicated when we consider the role of a Jewish translator living during Almohad rule yet outside its borders and translating from Arabic into Hebrew, which is in this case at once the sacred language of Scripture and the language of convenience, dissemination and intelligibility. Therefore, Arabic is both relegated and elevated to an increasingly rarefied position within the literary universe. And yet, translation as a force of literary and social history among the Jewish neo-

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<sup>15</sup> Sarah Stroumsa. *Maimonides in His World: A Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker*. Princeton: UP, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed discussion of the use of Arabic panegyric to assert elite status and power among the Almohad leadership and their bureaucrats and poets, see Teresa Garulo, "Los panegíricos de la época almohade," *Los Almohades: Problemas y perspectivas*, ed. Maribel Fierro, et al. Madrid: CSIC, 975-94.

Aristotelian *mutakallimūn* (practitioners of dialectical theology who frequently applied rationalist modes of inquiry to religious texts) of twelfth and thirteenth century Andalus and the Andalusī diaspora rather than simply as a vehicle for transmission, is, like its Almohad context, drastically under-understood. For all the importance of the Tibbonids, their collective working life and its underpinnings remain something of an enigma. It would be especially valuable to gain further insights into the biobibliography of Samuel, son of the dynastic patriarch Judah, for a variety of reasons. These include their role in transforming the Hebrew language during the middle ages through the coinage of new philosophical and scientific terminology and their role in consolidating what would become the standard for the rabbanite interpretation of Judaism. The importance of Samuel in particular was evident even immediately after his death through the wide range of eulogists who commemorated a variety of aspects of his professional life; even if the primacy of his translation of the *Guide* was not totally universal, the eulogies written by David Qimḥi and Jacob Anatoli suggest that its canonical status was well on its way of being achieved and consolidated.<sup>17</sup> By setting out the theoretical and practical values of the members of the ibn Tibbon family, it is possible to learn more about the

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<sup>17</sup> F. Talmadge. *David Kimḥi: The Man and the Commentaries*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 30 and ff.

intellectual transactions of the period and, of course, about the individuals who were lynchpins in them.

But that tension between Hebrew and Arabic in their new roles is evident in Samuel's education and in what he chose to adopt and reject from it. Although he was responsible for what would become the authoritative Hebrew version of the *Guide*, his literal style of translation went against everything that Maimonides had advised; Samuel very clearly picked and chose from among the influences upon his training rather than adhering to one prescribed professional program. A study of his education is, then, both informative and necessary in and of itself and also as a way to illuminate the process of Tibbonid translation and the ways it was remembered, historically and literarily, after the fact. The footprint of Samuel's instruction and formation as a translator as well as his own writings (both those that are truly self-aware and those that are less so) offer a wealth of insight into how he, his contemporaries and his audience valued his work and placed it within the context of the changing linguistic landscape of the Andalusí diaspora in northern Iberia and southern France; these — namely the records of his teachers and his own documentation of his process — will be the subject of chapters one and two, respectively.

As a Jewish translator of Arabic texts into Hebrew and, arguably, as a victim of the Almohad model, there are two distinct strains of thought in Samuel's education and then in the way that he implemented that education in his professional life, and finally in the ways that it was implemented after his death to uphold his legacy and to give a Hebrew philosophical-literary program the force to continue. First is the Andalusí strain, that privileges classical Arabic as the literary and scientific language. Second is the Almohad one that forces a finer and more complicated relationship between sacred and vernacular languages. Samuel was a translator from one sacred language into another, from one language whose prestige and value was shifting palpably during his lifetime into another. But unlike his Iberian, Catholic counterparts who were just beginning to discover the value of the scientific study of Arabic and Hebrew both as languages and for their theological implications, Samuel found himself precisely at the crux of these cultural forces that competed fiercely in the years leading up to the last great showdown, if not between Islam and Christianity, then between Almohad forces and the Andalusí ones by then consolidated under the Castilian flag and standard of Alfonso VIII. The tremendous nostalgia for Sefarad that is evident in all corners of Samuel's translated oeuvre is very much a function of that corpus of texts being, at their heart, products of the run-up to the battle of al-'Iqāb (as it is known in Arabic)

at Tolosa, in a world where the status of every language and the religious significance of every language was in dramatic flux.

Thus far, the most important work on the Tibbonids has been carried out by James Robinson, Warren Harvey, Steven Harvey, Yair Shiffman and Carlos Fraenkel. Robinson has both edited a variety of texts and written what most closely resembles individual and collective intellectual biographies of members of the family.<sup>18</sup> Fraenkel's work has focused on the correspondences between the Arabic and Hebrew versions of the *Guide of the Perplexed* and how the intellectual formation of each of the creators contributed to the texts and to the similarities and differences between them.<sup>19</sup> Steven Harvey, too, focused specifically on the development, reception and canonization of Hebrew versions of the *Guide*.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, Gad Freudenthal has done work on the philosophical and history-of-science aspects of Samuel's work.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> James T. Robinson. "The Medieval Translator as Cultural Type: The Ibn Tibbon Family of Southern France," forthcoming; "Samuel ibn Tibbon," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/tibbon/>, accessed 7/8/11; *Samuel ibn Tibbon's Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007; inter al.

<sup>19</sup> Carlos Fraenkel. *From Maimonides to Samuel ibn Tibbon: The Transformation of the Dalālat al-Ḥā'irīn to the Moreh ha-Nevukhim*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2004; and "Beyond the Faithful Disciple," *Maimonides after 800 Years*, ed. Jay Michael Harris. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 33-63.

<sup>20</sup> "Did Maimonides' Letter to Samuel ibn Tibbon Determine Which Philosophers Would be Studied by Later Jewish Thinkers?" *JQR* 83:1-2 (1992): 51-70.

<sup>21</sup> Eg., "Maimonides Guide of the Perplexed and the Transmission of the Mathematical Tract 'On Asymptotic Lines' in Arabic, Latin and Medieval Hebrew," *Vivarium* 26:2 (1998) 113-40.

The most intriguing studies of Samuel ibn Tibbon's work, however, were not studies as such at all but additions to the canon of texts that bears his name written by people who were not him. For example, although we know, on the authority of Isaac Abarbanel, that Ibn Tibbon did translate Maimonides' introduction to the tenth chapter of *Mishnah Sanhedrin*, the Hebrew translation that survives and is attributed to him is not the translation that he himself created; that one is lost and the extant one was added to the canon later to fill a gap.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the Hebrew translation of 'Alī ibn Riḍwān's commentary on Galen's *Ars parvae*, the colophon of which claims it to have been a product of Ibn Tibbon's pen in 1199, contains vocabulary that would not be coined yet for several decades; Robinson concludes on this basis that the entire text is a forgery (rather than misdated).<sup>23</sup>

A particularly interesting manifestation of this phenomenon is the subject of chapter three: The next generations of historians — those living and working, mostly but not entirely anonymously approximately a century after Samuel's death— had their own theories and bio-bibliographical insights. One is of particular interest. His was not an analysis in any way that we would recognize it today, but rather a sort of historical-argument-by-codicology. In

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<sup>22</sup> Robinson 2007, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Robinson 2010, section 3.9.

taking on Samuel, defending him in a colophon that he forged and appended to a Hebrew translation of the *Historia Proeliis* he asserted a variety of positions on religion and translation that were of critical importance to him; and to us, they serve as the traces of what we can no longer see: the Arabic intermediary text, of course, but also the relationships between authorship, text and faith as they were construed both on the cusp of the thirteenth century and then later. From his tone and from the element of the sheer unexpected that suffuses his brief contribution to the record, it is clear that our anonymous historian/colophonist was arguing against something, and what was remains at the bottom of the last page of the London/New Haven<sup>24</sup> codex is what left this void in the pattern, the sort of chalk outline of some great debate that we can no longer see in positive, but only in the shapes of negative. By asserting Samuel's primacy in a manner that is at once virulently forceful and completely idiosyncratic, the colophonist perhaps inadvertently draws our attention to the idea that in spite of receiving authority and blessing from Maimonides, that his translation of the *Guide* into Hebrew was perhaps not automatically the authoritative one; and his combination of a debate over how best to translate Maimonides with a life of Alexander the Great first remembers

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<sup>24</sup> Beinecke Additional Hebrew MS 113, so designated here because it originally formed part of the collection at Jews' College London and is referred to by either and both of the designations in the literature.

early thirteenth century Toledo as a place where Samuel's Franco-Hebrew translation was not yet universally accepted, second argues in favor of Samuel's translation, and third manages to create a framework for defining the record of the local Iberian response to the arrival of the Almohads in Iberia.

There was something about Samuel that appealed to the generations that followed him. We see it in the adoption of his *Guide* as the authoritative one and also in the way that the elements of the Pseudo-Samuel canon are constructed — and even in the mere fact of that canon's existence. A certain universalizing quality made Samuel appeal to later historians of a sort — the anonymous readers, editors, translators, canonizers, consumers and even pseudepigraphers whose collective judgment form the canon. And that something, which is made evident through a careful examination of the didactic epistolary of Samuel's teachers gained traction in parallel Christian communities, a factor which will be explored in a future expansion of this project. The fourteenth century saw a connection drawn between translation and faith, and Samuel's life in the early thirteenth made him a perfect subject to be incorporated into that vision of Andalusí history. Samuel is an interesting object of study in his own right as an important translator and as a student who left behind the record of an extraordinary education that we may use to parse his professional output; but he is also compelling because of the interest he



held for a group of slightly later historians — our own predecessors — who left behind their own puzzling and fascinating output.

Altogether, the writings to, by and about Samuel created during his lifetime and inserted falsely into the canon lifetimes later paint the complex portrait of a man who deployed every tool at his disposal as a translator, everything from detailed knowledge of many languages to the sheer and present stubbornness that gave his work its distinctive, grounded and utilitarian character; and in doing so was able to preserve (and have preserved in his name) a very particular moment of Jewish self-identity with and against both Andalusis and North Africans, from which he himself was already separated by a degree and a generation of loss.

## Chapter One

### ‘O, Pen, I Recount Your Kindness, Etc.’: The Education of Samuel Ibn Tibbon as Scribe and Translator

Much of Samuel’s education as a translator was recorded in letters, chiefly an epistolary ethical will in which his father describes Samuel’s education and the values that guided it, and a pair of letters between Samuel and Moses Maimonides, in which the former seeks advice from the latter on translation. They provide an excellent record of Samuel’s professional formation. The exemplars from what I shall term Samuel’s “didactic epistolary” describe and prescribe not only the best practices of translation but how to live life in order that those practices would ultimately flow naturally and become second nature. They provide stark, surprising and invaluable insight into the resources and the textual grounding with which he was educated and how, precisely this led to the creation of a literary canon of Hebrew-language scientific and philosophical texts. That canon of texts was as much a sign for distant and future communities as an organic part of the environment in which they — and their creator — emerged.

## 1.1 ELEMENTS OF SAMUEL'S EDUCATION

It goes without saying that even today we know that the direct and literal style of translation employed in the Tibbonid *oeuvre* (which will be described in greater detail below) went a long way to making Samuel's the authoritative translation of the *Guide* over other translations undertaken by his competitors who applied a more fluid literary style to the Hebrew of their versions.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, questions remain about the rise to prominence of Samuel's Hebrew *Guide* to when, as we shall see, his technique seems to contradict not only his father's instruction to him but even more significantly and clearly, Maimonides' own ideas about what constituted good translation. There is, perhaps, less reason to believe that Samuel's authority as the translator of Maimonides was a foregone conclusion, leaving room for the jockeying and uncertainty among translators, patrons and readers with particular preferences (such as we shall see reflected in the text that is the basis for Chapter Three). A pair of incredibly detailed letters between Samuel and his biological and intellectual fathers allows us a considerable degree of insight into the nature and quality of Samuel's education, and even into his own qualities as a student.

The elements of Samuel's education that cohere around major intellectual

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<sup>25</sup> Different styles of translation into Hebrew is a theme that will recur throughout this study. For now, suffice it to say that Samuel employed a very direct and literal style of translation, while his chief near-contemporary rival, Judah al-Ḥarīzī translated the *Guide* in a much looser and more literary fashion.

lights and that imbue particular values of readership, canonicity and translation are the ones that are of particular interest here. They suggest that a very a well-established curriculum which provided access to the most current thinking of the day was followed consistently by the sons of prominent and well-educated Jewish Andalusí exiles in the south of modern-day France; and so the discussion of Samuel's education will be limited to the corpus of the didactic epistolary.

We will consider here the letters written to Samuel by both his father Judah and by Moses Maimonides. In each case, the letter-writer imparts advice on translation explicitly, but also more covertly begins to suggest his ideas with respect to canonicity, textual integrity and authority through the sources to which he chooses to refer in the course of the writing. The two letters dovetail nicely with each other as they form an intertextual conversation about translatorial values and philosophy that quite self-consciously riffs on the principles of *kalām* (speculative theology), making a foundation from which Samuel can and does depart, deviate and actively resist even as he is immersed in that universe and adopting pieces of it that suit him. Additionally, the mention of some of the most contemporaneously-compelling philosophers and theologians situates Samuel in a much broader context and exposes his points of contact with the world about him. Through the sages in whose image he was

educated, we can define very precisely the modes of thought which reflect both contemporaneous and historical values about texts that inform Samuel's work and shape his historiographic persona.

#### 1.1.1 'THIS WILL BE GOOD ... SHOULD YOU WISH TO TRANSLATE': SAMUEL AS SON, STUDENT, AND TRANSLATOR

One of the aforementioned letters, written by Judah to Samuel and circulated upon the death of the former in 1190, takes the form of an ethical will, a sort of moral and professional guidance from father to son. We can extrapolate from several references to his contemporaries' sons that the guidance and tutelage that Samuel received was not unique for young men from families of similar station, all of whom were generally supporters of the philosophy of Moses Maimonides and, furthermore, strove to preserve Arabic learning in their Provençal exile. This letter confirms both the commonplaceness of this type of education and Samuel's merely common efforts within it. Throughout, Judah exhorts his son to try to live up to the academic achievements of his (sometimes much younger) contemporaries. Among other complaints, Judah writes: "Have you not noticed the son of Rav Sheshet, aged [only] twelve, whose handwriting looks so like the handwriting

of his teacher, Rav Patur, that it could be the same hand?”<sup>26</sup> He further advises him to consult with the sons of Meshullam of Lunel, both of whom he describes as wise.<sup>27</sup>

By contrast, Judah makes this criticism, along with others, of his own son:

You have failed to progress as expected with your Hebrew writing. Have you forgotten that I pay your teacher, the learned Rav Ya‘akov son of the generous Rav ‘Ovadia, thirty gold dinars each year? And when I prevailed upon him to teach you how to write the alphabet, he answered me: “Shouldn’t it be enough for him to learn one letter each year?” If you had even paid attention to that remark as it came out of his mouth, you might have endeavored to become a better scribe than his own sons.<sup>28</sup>

Judah not only expresses considerable disappointment in his son’s lack of achievement,<sup>29</sup> but also situates that failure within the coterie of other sons —

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<sup>26</sup> Judah ibn Tibbon, “A Father’s Admonition,” in *Hebrew Ethical Wills*, ed. Israel Abrahams. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 60.

<sup>27</sup> Abrahams, 65. Meshullam was a Talmudist and philosopher who predeceased Judah ibn Tibbon by two decades; Sheshet was likewise a rationalist, praised by the Tibbonid translators and Judah al-Ḥarīzī alike.

<sup>28</sup> Abrahams, 59.

<sup>29</sup> This negative assessment does not seem to be a rhetorical flourish limited to this letter but rather a reflection of Judah’s genuine opinion of his son. (Whether it was accurate or not is another matter.) In his own letter to Samuel (which will be discussed below), Moses Maimonides expresses his own surprise even to be writing such a letter since he had, up to then, been unaware that Judah had had a son at all. The elder Ibn Tibbon clearly had not gone out of his way to publicize his son’s work or even his existence, instead leaving him to develop his own professional connections. Although the coherence of the Tibbonid canon is evident, particularly through the development of technical vocabularies and programmatic priorities, it does raise questions about the extent to which the “school” or “workshop” model of translation has value for the Tibbonids.

Sheshet's, Meshullam's and Ya'akov ben 'Ovadia's — who have access to similar educational resources, both material and experiential.

Nevertheless, the kinds of advice found within Judah's letter to Samuel are diverse, ranging from the father's aspirations for the son's intellectual growth to instructions on how to care for his body and family. Much of the intellectual guidance comes with respect to writing, instructing Samuel in everything from the intricacies of poetic composition to the practicalities of cataloguing a library. A significant portion of the text, however, consists of specific guidance that is particularly pertinent to a translator who is the son of a translator.

Perhaps the most interesting translatorial advice would have set Samuel, had he followed it, on a collision course with the heart of kalāmist thought on the relationship between knowledge and religion. Judah exhorts Samuel to:

take it upon yourself to write at least one page each day and to peruse *Ben Mishle* for another hour. On each Saturday you should read the Torah portion in Arabic, since this will be good for your literary Arabic<sup>30</sup> and your translation skills, should you wish to translate.<sup>31</sup>

That Judah tells Samuel to read from the Hebrew Bible in Arabic is quite striking. It is unclear from this instruction whether he meant that his son should

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<sup>30</sup> Lit.: "... it will help you with the words in Arabic books."

<sup>31</sup> Abrahams, 66.

read the Arabic translation instead of or in addition to the Hebrew original. However, by making a point of assigning this activity to Saturdays he emphasizes the religious character of the exercise, regardless of whether Samuel read the Hebrew during his personal devotions and the Arabic later, or only the Arabic translation. And in reducing a pietistic act to one with everyday professional benefits, Judah upends the position of the *mutakallimūn*, who hold that knowledge works in the service of religion.<sup>32</sup> Rather than deploying knowledge in the service of devotion, Judah puts a religious act to work for the sake of pure or “secular” learning.

In that same section of the letter, he writes something to Samuel that makes the most sense when we consider in the context of his emergence from and continued contact with the newly-Almohadizing influences of the Peninsula. Following his admonition to use his religious devotion to improve his skill as a translator, Judah adds:

You know that the elite of our nation (*‘am*) only attained their stature and lofty heights through their ability to write in Arabic. You have also already seen what the Nagid, of blessed memory, said with respect to the approbation that adhered to him — and to his son after him — because of that, specifically [what he said in] this dictum: “O, pen! I recount your kindness, etc.” You have also seen that in this country, the *nasī* R. Sheshet, of blessed memory,

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<sup>32</sup> This sentence encapsulates the point of the section; I hope to expand upon the idea of Judah’s inversion of the whole of *kalām* at some later date.



received the same wealth and honor that he received in the land of the Ishmaelites.<sup>33</sup>

This one paragraph encodes quite a lot of ideology and information.<sup>34</sup> It self-defines a rising “nationhood” and stakes out territory for other nations as well.<sup>35</sup> But most important for the present argument is the assertion that excellence in Arabic is, even then, still the only way to attain status. In spite of the shifting political tides and borders, Judah takes pains to convince his son that Arabic literacy can be as rewarded in the Christian north of Iberia and in Provence as it is in places where Arabic and Islam remain currencies of power. This is not inconsistent with the ways in which the Almohads themselves tended to use Arabic literature to articulate and defend their position of power even as they allowed the Berber language a certain status within popular religious spheres.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Abrahams, 59. (See the above note on Meshullam and Sheshet.)

<sup>34</sup> Some of this, particularly the varied concept of “nation” expressed throughout the passage as well as the relative value placed on translation in those different places, will be addressed later in the discussion.

<sup>35</sup> The terms used to describe Arabs and Arabic — *Ishmaelites* and *the Ishmaelite tongue* here and in most places, *Arabs* and *Arabic* somewhat less frequently, and *Hagarites* and *the Hagarite tongue* in the cases of anachronism and separate authorship — will be discussed in detail in chapter three.

<sup>36</sup> Teresa Garulo makes a compelling argument in her contribution to the two-volume *Los Almohades: Problemas y perspectivas* that the use of the most conventional of Arabic panegyrics was one of the most important ways that the Almohad leadership articulated its claim to power and its place within a longer leadership tradition. The fact of it being poetry rather than prose that was used to articulate power will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter, when we examine Samuel’s attitudes about Arabic and Hebrew which he ties closely to questions about the superiority of biblical Hebrew poetry.

All of this advice seems to reflect two trends: First, the inversion of a kalāmist hierarchy of religious devotion and knowledge; and second, the continued use of literary Arabic to articulate status and power, even in the face of, on the one (Maghrebi) hand, the increasing centralized vernacularization of doctrine and on the other (Provençal) hand the increasing uselessness of the Arabic language as a complement of power and as a means of communication and of understanding philosophical argumentation and religious devotion. There was a change afoot that would affect the relative attitudes towards both Hebrew and Arabic; no longer was even the pretense viable of a clear-cut hierarchy differentiating the two. In this topsy-turvy scheme, Hebrew is made the accessible language and Arabic the rarefied one; in doing so, Judah inverts centuries of *faḍā'il al-luġha* (the merits of the language) written on behalf of Hebrew and implied in the rise of secular Hebrew poetry.<sup>37</sup> Arabic began to lose its role as the lingua franca of intellectual activity and commerce, but so too did the theological and artistic threat it posed to Hebrew lessen.<sup>38</sup> And so as Hebrew became the language of utility as well as the sacred language, Arabic could return to its very early place as the unrivaled language of prestige. The

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<sup>37</sup> Samuel's own consideration of the merits of Hebrew and Arabic, along with how ranking corresponds to the attitudes of his rival in translation, Judah al-Ḥarīzī, is the subject of the second section of chapter two.

<sup>38</sup> The question of the status of Hebrew will be discussed in more detail in chapter two, and in even greater depth in a future version of this project.

covert triumph of Arabic in the wars of *fadā'il al-lugha* is Judah's unappreciated "Maghrebi" legacy to his son and his successors.<sup>39</sup>

Additionally, this commentary on the status of Arabic at once reflects the historical relationship of Jewish readers to the Arabic language and foreshadows one of the debates (or, at least, unresolved judgment calls) among different translators during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries: namely whether to translate literally or literarily. For now, it is sufficient to raise the question of which Judaeo-Arabic translation Samuel would have read. The idea that the Arabic translators of the Hebrew Bible did their work doubly, that is, rendering both a literal and a literary translation, is well documented; the best-known example is, of course, Sa'adya Gaon's lost literary translation.<sup>40</sup> And so, to stand Judah's advice to Samuel against the literal style of translation that he would adopt in the future necessarily raises the question of which kind of translation Samuel would have cut his teeth on as a young reader and believer.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Again, in a future version of the project, it will be worth it to unpack further the Andalusí and Almohad elements of this legacy insofar as they are not the same thing and this occurs at a moment, the first decades of the thirteenth century, where the difference would become both more critical and more vociferously insisted upon by all sides.

<sup>40</sup> Joshua Blau, "The Linguistic Character of Saadia Gaon's Translation of the Pentateuch," *Oriens* 36 (2001), 1-9.

<sup>41</sup> Although it is beyond the scope of the present study, it would be beneficial to attempt to reverse-engineer or otherwise ascertain details of the text of the Arabic Hebrew Bible Samuel must have read.

### 1.1.2 ‘I DID NOT KNOW HE HAD A SON’: MAIMONIDES’ INSTRUCTIONS TO

SAMUEL B. JUDAH

Samuel also had direct instruction in how to translate from Moses Maimonides, in the form of an Arabic-language epistolary correspondence that took place while Samuel was translating the *Guide* and would seek advice on the details from the author. One letter from each man survives in Hebrew translation. Maimonides’ letter to Samuel opens an intertextual conversation with Judah’s letter, seeming to confirm that the elder Ibn Tibbon’s disappointment in his son was, if not warranted according to more objective and time-tested standards, then at least not imaginary or unexpressed. Maimonides indicates that he is responding to a letter from Samuel, the arrival of which came to him as a complete shock, since he “did not know he [viz., Judah] had a son.” Samuel was making professional contacts and inquiries on his own; Judah did not pave the way for him. Even if his family name helped, his father did not. The texts speak past each other on another level as well: while Judah offered instruction in how to live life to become a particular kind of writer, Maimonides was more focused in his advice to Samuel, offering both a theory of translation and specific advice on words and passages that troubled

Samuel's labor.<sup>42</sup> But if Judah's ethical will casts Samuel as a rebellious son whose failure to take full advantage of the opportunities and material possessions afforded him was seen as a direct measure of disrespect towards his father, then the documentary record of Samuel's fraught intellectual relationship with Moses Maimonides, in which the student sought and then utterly disregarded guidance from the teacher, does nothing to alter the portrait of Samuel as a headstrong pupil. Samuel's direct access to Maimonides accounts for at least part of what ultimately what makes him the authoritative translator from among all the Hebrew-language translators of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, yet the translation itself seems purposely — if “spontaneously,” to Shlomo Pines' mind<sup>43</sup> — to disregard that advice. Carlos Fraenkel has argued in a variety of articles and in his book that Samuel's “image as a faithful disciple... is to a considerable degree misleading.”<sup>44</sup> I will argue here that it is not only in his capacity as a philosopher and exegete that Samuel never

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<sup>42</sup> That is not to say that Maimonides' letter is devoid of the kind of detail that paints a fuller and more humane picture. In fact, this letter is famous for two passages: one is the study guide to the Greco-Arabic philosophers and the other is a despairing description of the demands on Maimonides' time in Cairo and Fustat.

<sup>43</sup> Joel Kraemer and Josef Stern, “Shlomo Pines on the Translation of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 8 (1998), 21.

<sup>44</sup> Carlos Fraenkel, “Beyond the Faithful Disciple: Samuel ibn Tibbon's Criticism of Maimonides,” *Maimonides After 800 Years*, ed. J. Harris. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 35-6.

achieves (either intentionally or not) his self-promoted ideal<sup>45</sup> of being that faithful disciple but also as a translator. The ways in which Samuel pushed back against his father's curricular advice have been documented above, and now, adding an enumeration of the ways in which he also resisted Maimonides' professional advice provides a very nuanced setting for placing Samuel into three distinct yet overlapping cults of the written word that epitomize the early years of the thirteenth century and that would be recalled and memorialized later.

Maimonides first provides Samuel with both general advice on translation as well as specific advice on how to translate particular terms. He begins by suggesting that his translator/might-have-been-disciple adopt an exegetical style of translation that, simply put, prefers holistic meaning over strict adherence to language. He writes:

I am passing along to you everything I can think of, lest anyone who wants to adapt<sup>46</sup> [texts] from one language to another translate word-for-word,<sup>47</sup> preserve the organization of the text

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<sup>45</sup> See especially the translator's prologue to Ibn Tibbon's *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, ed. J. Robinson Whether Samuel's self-invented image as the faithful disciple was always a rhetorical flourish or whether he tried and fell short is another matter.

<sup>46</sup> Here Maimonides uses 'T-Q, a verb which causes quite a number of translation headaches into English, as we shall see towards the end of chapter three; later in this sentence he uses T-R-G-M, which I render more plainly as *translate*. Even though maintaining this distinction between the two verbs in the English translation requires a bracketed addition to the English text in order to maintain the sense of it, I have decided to do so because the distinction is important to the present discussion.

<sup>47</sup> Isaiah Soneh adds [*gam ken*] here in his omnibus edition; it seems unnecessary.

and the syntax, and strive but only make his translation dubious and most insufficient; it is unadvisable to operate this way. Rather, in order to adapt [texts] from language to language one must first understand the material and then later recount<sup>48</sup> his own understanding of it. [...] He may substitute many words for one word, omit certain expressions so that [his translation] might be in good order and add expressions for the same effect until it will be understood clearly in the language into which it is being adapted. This is what Ḥunayn ibn Iṣḥāq<sup>49</sup> did for Galen's books and what Iṣḥāq did for Aristotle's and as such, their explanations<sup>50</sup> came to be even more enlightening.<sup>51</sup>

Although he never uses either term, Maimonides is essentially delineating translation as part of the classical distinction made by Arabic literature between *lafẓ* (wording) and *ma'na* (meaning), preferring that his own translator<sup>52</sup> come down on the side of meaning rather than preserving his style and even his thoughtfully crafted terminology.

This is not to say that Maimonides (nor Judah al-Ḥarīzī, who ultimately does translate the *Guide* according to the principles set out in this letter and to

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<sup>48</sup> The text reads S-P-R, while Soneh explains the remark further, adding [P-R-Š] to the text as an additional possible reading.

<sup>49</sup> The mention here of Ḥunayn ibn Iṣḥāq — the ninth-century Nestorian translator of the works of Galen, the Septuagint and a variety of other works — not only evokes the inception of a translation movement but more specifically Ḥunayn's contention that he was a more successful translator than those who came before him because he translated units of meaning (sentences, that is) as a whole, rather than word-by-word (Lufti M. Sadi 419-20, *inter al.*).

<sup>50</sup> Literally, Maimonides casts these translations as *perush Galenus* and *perush Aristu*.

<sup>51</sup> Ed., Isaac Shailat. *Iggerot ha-Rambam*. Ma'aluyot: Jerusalem. All translations are my own except where indicated.

<sup>52</sup> Cfr. D.Z. Banet, "Maimonides as the Translator of His Own Work," *Tarbiz* 23 (1952), 170-91. [you've been using (1952), 170-91].

much less acclaim in the Jewish world) wholly or necessarily privileges meaning over style. The style of translation that he advocates serves to strip the possibly meaningful ambiguities from the original text, clarifying phrases that would sound merely ambivalent in the original language but, when translated literally, sound downright awkward in the target language. Maimonides is quite clear on this point: Translation is not simply a question of adapting from one language to another but of reading a text, understanding it and then explaining it in a different language. The literary/exegetical style of translation preferred by Maimonides makes for a clearer and more intelligible — more enlightening, in his own words — result, but it is one that is necessarily understood through the interpretive filter that will contain fewer, or at the very least, totally different shades of nuance. This is an observation that has been made before.

While working on his English version of the *Guide*, Pines wrote to his correspondent, Leo Strauss:

As I see it, there are two legitimate ways of translating the *Moreh*.<sup>53</sup> One of them (which is the way spontaneously adopted by Ibn Tibbon) is to endeavour to provide a translation as ambiguous and as esoteric as is the original text. In other words, the uninitiated reader should have as great a difficulty in penetrating the sense of the translated work, as he would have in reading the original text. On the other hand, such a translation, inasfar [sic] as it succeeds in being an entirely exact reflection of the original,

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<sup>53</sup> It is interesting that Pines referred to the text by its Hebrew title even as he was translating from the Arabic original.



would give the reader the possibility of appreciating Maimonides's method of exposition and all that is involved therein.<sup>54</sup>

So while a literal translation like Samuel's may seem unclear by virtue of its more stilted and faithful reproduction of the original, it leaves room for interpretation in some of the same ways that the original does, preserving the possibility of seeing Maimonides' shades of meaning. The preservation of those shades of meaning is the very esotericism to which Pines refers in his letter. And so even though the audience for his translation of the *Guide* is generally surmised to be people who are less capable of understanding nuance, in reality there is much to be derived even for a very well-educated and thoughtful Jewish reader whose only deficiency in approaching the text is that he would have come from northern Europe rather than the Arabic-speaking world.

## 1.2 QUOTATION AND THE FORMATION OF A TRANSLATED CANON<sup>55</sup>

All the pieces of Samuel's education work either directly or indirectly towards creating the canon that would ultimately take hold, first because those elements comprise curriculum that well-educated men would have read, and

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<sup>54</sup> Kraemer and Stern, 21.

<sup>55</sup> I would like to acknowledge a pair of particularly helpful conversations with Frank Griffel about some of the ideas presented in this section.

second because they form the people who will continue to shape the canon itself. Canon formation is, then, at once the preservation of the past and the capturing and curating of the spirit of the age; as such, the very process by which texts are incorporated into the canon can shed some light onto where the emphasis is being placed. One of these processes is not the drawing in of old texts but rather the quotation of and reliance upon existing materials within new ones that are candidates for the canon. In the cases of both Judah ibn Tibbon and Moses Maimonides, they both rely on borrowed words to achieve their textual goals; but the two take different approaches to their deployment and to advising their use to give weight to newer ideas and texts. An examination of the quotations in their texts sheds light on what, to each man, constitutes textual authority.

Two passages in Maimonides' letter to Samuel are the most frequently cited and are the letter's best claim to fame: in one, Maimonides complains about the busy pace of his life between Cairo and Fustāṭ and the limits this places on his ability to study and to minister to the Jewish community there. In the second, he delineates for Samuel which Arabo-Muslim philosophers' work the younger man should read and which ones he should avoid owing to their inherent worthlessness; in doing so, he delineates a canon, the texts that would have liked to see form the intellectual and stylistic basis for future

philosophical and other writing that can be broadly classified as scientific.<sup>56</sup>

Maimonides imparts his opinions and values about the idea of canon and canonicity by means of a list of texts to be incorporated, studied and imitated; in doing so, he establishes this incorporation, very naturally, as a process by which new texts could be brought into the canon.<sup>57</sup>

Each of the letters to Samuel is the product of the cultural admixture from which it emerged. The two reflect their milieu both in the broad questions they address and the philosophical and theological outlook that undergirds them; and this occurs most directly and evidently through the sources that they employ in a concrete way through direct quotation, reinterpretation and allusion. These rhetorical techniques all make time, place and history inextricable elements of the letters. It is the treatment of those sources that makes a tangential point— in the most literal and geometric sense of the word — to the advice on translation that Samuel received. Through an overview of both the general quoting practices as well as through one particularly salient case-study comparison we may gain a better sense of how these particular

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<sup>56</sup> In his article “Did Maimonides’ Letter to Samuel Ibn Tibbon Determine Which Philosophers Would Be Studied By Later Jewish Thinkers?” Steven Harvey addresses the question of the extent to which this canon was accepted and concludes that it was “dramatic” (52). While I am not in complete agreement with Harvey’s analysis, I do agree that it represents an articulation of canonicity and canonical values.

<sup>57</sup> It is possible that a causal relationship is overstated here.

*mutakallimūn* (and, by extension, those travelers in their intellectual circles) approached and conceptualized authorship and its stakes.

Each of the two letters to Samuel takes a distinct approach to the question of textual authority. Maimonides' letter specifically and directly addresses the ways in which a translator may preserve the authority and meaning of the original text, while Judah's letter treats the topic more broadly, examining the role of books in the life of the intellectual. Each author's particular prescription for textual authority is cemented by the ways in which he both uses and advocates the use of preexisting texts and defines them through their reuse. By regulating the naming of the sources and sages upon whose work their own rests in combination with alternatively taking on their words wholesale and paraphrasing them, each author both puts into practice and implicitly advocates for his own view of the source of a text's authority to readers and communities. The treatment of the Arabic-language sources within Hebrew-language texts provides the raw material to move us from simple advice on translation to the beginnings of a comprehensive theory of transposed authorship through a small-scale practical demonstration of principles.

On the one hand Maimonides, through both the specific aspects of Samuel's skill and intellect that he praises and through the nature of his directions to him, asserts a philosophy of textual authority that establishes text

as the basis for inquiry and understanding. In other words, he argues indirectly that a sound and interpretable text is the base of knowledge and that the element of the worthwhile in each text comes from both its interpretability and its interpretation. In this letter, which was originally written in Hebrew but only survives in Samuel ibn Tibbon's Hebrew translation, he writes:

At the end of this epistle, I explain everything in Arabic, and give you all the information you desire, and mention the works you should study or neglect. You are thoroughly fitted for the task of translation because the Creator has given you an intelligent mind to understand the parables and their interpretation, the words of the wise and their difficult sayings. I recognize through your words that you have entered thoroughly into the depth of the subject, and that its hidden meaning has become clear to you. I shall explain to you in Hebrew how you shall manage with the entire translation.<sup>58</sup>

In this passage, Maimonides argues, in effect, that authority comes from the meaning derived from the text (that is, the understanding of the meaning hidden within specifics and examples) rather than from any sort of slavish adherence to the written word. His assertions here — that Samuel's special depth of understanding is precisely what is needed to translate his work — are congruent with the specific translation techniques that he goes on to recommend (detailed in the previous section). Even the elegant symmetry of the passage, beginning with an Arabic text and ending with a Hebrew

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<sup>58</sup> Trans., D.H. Adler. *Miscellany of Hebrew Literature*, A. Loewy, ed. Westport: Greenwood Publishers, 221.

translation or explanation, which mirrors the process Samuel will undertake, serves to reinforce Maimonides' message about the text as the basis and foundation for its metamorphosis into higher thought and commentary. Explanation both within a language and into other languages is proof of the authority of a text.

But on the other hand, as alluded to earlier, for Judah ibn Tibbon it is the book itself that is the source of wisdom and so his instructions to and aspirations for Samuel are accordingly different from Maimonides'. After extolling the virtues of wisdom and learning, Judah alludes to the verses written by Dūnash ben Labrāṭ that speak of "the Arabs' books [as] your paradise grove;" but he alters Dūnash's words to eliminate the reference to "scripture [as] your Eden."<sup>59</sup> Whether we call it alteration or selective quotation, both the process and the end result are the same: words taken in a way in which they were not originally written to serve a particular intellectual bent. In doing so, he eliminates an abstract reference to a sort of platonic ideal of a text — Scripture in the abstract rather than any *muṣḥaf* (volume)—leaving in place only the concrete reference to books. And although Judah is practically pedantic with respect to matters of literary style, he is equally eager for Samuel to appreciate and practice the value of good penmanship, that is, the physical

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<sup>59</sup> Trans. Peter Cole, *The Dream of the Poem*. Princeton: UP, 24.

manifestation of his words. And finally, Judah leaves his son with detailed instructions for the care and maintenance of his library, all focused on the preservation of the codices rather than the contents or coherence of the library:

Check your Hebrew books at the beginning of every month and the Arabic ones once every two months,<sup>60</sup> and the bound anthologies once every three months. Arrange everything in a sensible order so that you won't have to search for any book when you need it; you should know its place on the shelves in the bookcases. It would be a nice idea if you were to write down in list form the specific place of each book on the shelves; that way if you were looking for a book you could see its place on the list before shuffling through all of the books.<sup>61</sup> Pay attention to any loose leaves in your codices, take care of them and do not lose them because they contain some of my most important disclosures and selections from my own writing. All told, you should frequently cast a watchful eye over your books so you are sure of what books you have.<sup>62</sup>

As Judah articulates it, his own source of authority stems from the conservation of the leaves upon which he himself has written and from their wholeness and integrity; and in a complementary fashion, he extrapolates to tell his son, essentially, that the source of knowledge is a well-organized bookshelf.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> This particular proviso seems to reflect the differences in binding techniques used for Arabic and Hebrew books.

<sup>61</sup> In his notes, Abrahams remarks upon the frequency of this practice in medieval university libraries in particular.

<sup>62</sup> Abrahams, 81.

<sup>63</sup> He makes similar claims elsewhere. In his commentary on the biblical book of Genesis, Judah similarly argues for the value of an integral book: "Whoever wishes to copy this book is not allowed to copy one subject and leave out the rest. He should copy the book as it stands, from beginning to end, letter by letter, word by word. He should also mention the

And therefore, the role of the exact words of authoritative texts within interpretations, commentaries and later dependent works is naturally different in each letter and in each man's work. Looking at the two letters, it is possible to appreciate several key differences in the treatment of source material. It is important to emphasize that for the present purposes I am only describing and drawing conclusions about the didactic epistolary and not, for example, the treatment of source material in the Tibbonid scientific translations or in Maimonides' *Guide*. In short, Maimonides glosses over the sources of his quoted material, incorporating them all into his own text seamlessly, while Judah takes steps to differentiate the material he appropriated wholesale and that which he adapted to make his own.

Whereas Maimonides' practice appears both straightforward and consistent, as delineated above, Judah ibn Tibbon's practice is more nuanced and varied. When the latter quotes from the Hebrew Bible or the Talmud,<sup>64</sup> the reader can observe that their insertion into his text goes unremarked. When he quotes his contemporaries, though, it is likewise observable that he makes certain distinctions based on whether he has imported their text word-for-word or whether he has adapted and reworked it. In the case of the former kind of

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names of the authorities as he finds them written in the book. Thus he is commanded to do on oath from Mount Sinai" (Gutwirth, 398).

<sup>64</sup> He references the Bavli exclusively.



text, he introduces quotations with the name of the work from which he is quoting (especially *Ben Mishle* and *Mivḥar ha-Peninim*<sup>65</sup> in particular) and then repeats the quotation. In other cases, although he is clearly drawing upon the work of his contemporaries, he adapts and changes their writing, as in the aforementioned example taken from the poetic *dīwān* of Dūnash ben Labrāt; once he has made it his own he no longer attributes it to the “original” author.

One major exception to the consistency of the Maimonides-Ibn Tibbon quotation matrix described above is a mistaken attribution of a text written by Judah Halevi. Immediately following the altered version of Dūnash’s verse within Judah ibn Tibbon’s letter, the author exhorts his son to recall some lines from *Ben Mishle*, the oft-cited moral compendium of Samuel the Nagid.<sup>66</sup> Abrahams notes that the manuscript reads *Ben Mishle* but alters his text to read *in the poet’s poetry, ha-meshorer be-shirav*, because the verses that follow in fact come from the *dīwān* Judah Halevi. That this misattribution was made with respect to Judah Halevi may well be coincidence but at the very least it is evocative of other covert uses of Ghazālī’s work; that is because just like

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<sup>65</sup> Part of my continuing study of Judah’s sources for this letter will include a comparison of these quotations with the final version of *Mivḥar ha-Peninim* to ascertain where in the process of working on that text Judah found himself at the time he composed this letter, or at least this section of the letter; this should help to date the composition — rather than just the circulation — of the letter, and should also yield additional insight into Judah’s process as a translator, which is interesting both in and of itself and also with respect to the translatorial values that he was attempting to impart to his son.

<sup>66</sup> *Divan Shemuel ha-Nagid*, vol. 2, ed. Dov Yarden. Jerusalem: HUC Press, 1966.

Halevi does in the *Kuzari*, Judah ibn Tibbon makes use of al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* in his letter to Samuel. In an article dedicated to reconsidering and diminishing the previous link between Halevi's work and Ghazālī's, D.Z. Baneth identifies instances in which Halevi, even in this new light, seems to have incorporated ideas from Ghazālī's masterwork into his own *Kuzari*.<sup>67</sup> In particular, he connects Halevi's ideas about skepticism and religious dogma with those expressed by Ghazālī in the *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*.<sup>68</sup> However, Baneth also argues that while the two thinkers were preoccupied by the same specific questions (especially that of religious exceptionalism), they approached them in similar but discernibly distinct ways. In light of this similarity, it is worth noting that Halevi does not seem to quote directly from the *Iḥyā'* but rather treats the same topics with a relatively similar approach; accordingly Baneth is of the opinion that "when [Halevi] wrote his work, [he] no longer had Ghazālī's treatise[s] actually before him, but merely recalled the general outline."<sup>69</sup> Like Maimonides, Halevi's thinking was influenced by Ghazālī even though he never incorporated Ghazālī's words into his own writing; but

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<sup>67</sup> The article, entitled "Judah ha-Levi and al-Ghazālī," was originally written in German and also exists in both Hebrew and English translation. Each subsequent version was updated, although the English version appears in an anthology for students and does not include any of the footnotes of the original. Bibliographic information for all three versions may be found in the bibliography.

<sup>68</sup> "Judah ha-Levi and al-Ghazālī," Hebrew version, 316.

<sup>69</sup> "Judah Halevi and al-Ghazālī," English version, 184.

he parallels Judah ibn Tibbon in that it is possible to trace the influence directly to the treatises of the *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (*The Revival of the Religious Sciences*).<sup>70</sup>

It is undisputed that Ghazālī's thought was influential among Jewish thinkers during and after Maimonides' lifetime. Yet the use of the *Iḥyā'* by these two writers raises the question of its significance for Jewish thinkers as a text on Muslim practice. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh describes the *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* as a book in which the author "frequently mentioned Jews and Judaism" in and among his descriptions of and prescriptions for "every aspect of a Muslim's life."<sup>71</sup> She proceeds to write that

the relevant remarks are scattered here and there, and are all couched in dry legal language... In the 'Dhimmī' he saw not man and the divine spark, but a mere legal object, similar to animals and inanimate things. It seems that this legalistic approach is more than just a method of treating them; it may point to a basic attitude of Al-Ghazzālī which largely explains his abstention from all polemics with Jews and Judaism or Christians and Christianity.<sup>72</sup>

This seems like sufficient reason for a man like Judah ibn Tibbon, confronted as he was with the advent of the Almohad empire and its necessitation of his flight to the north, to cling to it above other writings or even in the face of some kind of social or intellectual taboo (see below); so too would it increase

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<sup>70</sup> Abū Ḥamīd al-Ghazālī. *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*. Cairo, 1968.

<sup>71</sup> Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzali*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 441.

<sup>72</sup> Lazarus-Yafeh, 446.

the work's appeal for a man like Judah Halevi over that of a Jewish counterpart to al-Ghazālī in that his late works are unrecognizable as the works of the young man he had once been. But all told, if plausible, this quality of the text — that while condescending sets up Ghazālī's prerogative to let Jews and Christians alone in accordance with Islamic law — seems at once to be an answer both too facile and not wholly satisfying to the question of why the *Iḥyā'* in particular would have appealed to Jewish writers.<sup>73</sup> Further investigation into this question is required.<sup>74</sup>

Judah ibn Tibbon goes considerably further than Judah Halevi — and, indeed, considerably further than any of his contemporaries — by directly calquing the Arabic language from the text of the *Iḥyā'* *'ulūm al-dīn* into the Hebrew of his letter.<sup>75</sup> Although we know that Ghazālī was read by the Jewish

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<sup>73</sup> I am not wholly convinced by Lazarus-Yafeh's analysis, in spite of the relevance of her emphasis on Ghazālī's focus of the second-class status of citizenship of the *dhimma*. In fact, there needs to be much more here on the applicability of the *Iḥyā'* to Jewish thought and why it was the *Mizān al-'amal* that was the most appealing text to the Jewish neoaristotelians.

<sup>74</sup> One question that will need to be addressed is how the Lunel community would have been particularly served by the transmission of al-Ghazālī and whether his religious writings might make philosophical study more palatable. Strictly speaking it is beyond the scope of the present study, but will be pursued in further work.

<sup>75</sup> Shem Tov ibn Falaquera seems to be the one major exception to the rule that Ghazālī was read and translated in whole. Upon closer inspection of both his methods and goals, however, we find that his treatment of Ghazālī within his own work is wholly distinct from Ibn Tibbon's and that he is in fact completely in line with the translate-or-ignore ethic of the Jewish neo-Aristotelians with respect to Ghazālī. Falaquera's motivation was to achieve something rather more like what Ibn Ḥasdai was able to — that is, making the texts accessible to a Hebrew readership — than to what Ibn Tibbon did, which was to educate his

neo-aristotelians like Jacob Anatoli who worked in the wake of Moses Maimonides seem to have read, as Maimonides himself did, Ghazālī's works but were reluctant to quote him within their own treatises. There were, of course, full translations of some of his writings into Hebrew, including a rendering of the *Mizān al-'amal* as *M'oznei Šedek* by Ibn Ḥasdai, a translator contemporary with Samuel ibn Tibbon

The direct, quoted, presence of Ghazālī within Judah ibn Tibbon's letter to his son is therefore unusual and surprising, but really should not surprise anyone because it was asserted in a footnote that formed part of Israel Abrahams' critical apparatus to the text. However, Abrahams underplayed the presence and significance of this quotation, because his observation did not seem to find its way into any of the subsequent scholarly discourse on the extent to which Jewish thinkers were influenced by Ghazali. In addition to adding another element of intellectual formation for Samuel, in particular and for the Jewish rationalists, more generally, the presence of Ghazālī in Judah's letter to Samuel forces us to revisit the stylistic and material questions about how these writers conceived of their earlier influences and incorporated them

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son according to the best precepts available to him regardless of source. Although Falaquera quotes Ghazālī and many others in his treatises, by incorporating large tracts into his own work rather than simply pithy phrases, that places him in the category of translator of Ghazālī rather than quoter.

into their own work; this matter will be considered later in the present chapter.<sup>76</sup>

In a single-word throwaway footnote in the critical apparatus, Abrahams presents the idea that the gulf between Ghazālī and the Jewish neo-Aristotelians is rather more like a strait than has been perceived; and when the individual we will identify in the following chapter as the colophonist of the London/New Haven Hebrew Alexander manuscript conjoins the life of Alexander with his preferences for Samuel’s translation of Maimonides’ *Guide*, it will become all the more clear that his juxtaposition is not nearly as strange as it would seem within the community of Jewish neo-Aristotelians. Indeed it conforms to a broader northern Iberian and Provençal pattern of relating Ghazalian theology and philosophy to Alexander romances. Footnoting a scholarly apparatus for his edition and translation of Judah Ibn Tibbon’s ethical will, Abrahams’ only comment on a proverb Judah that quotes for Samuel’s benefit — “The Arab sage said: ‘The types of wisdom are two: Knowledge of bodies and knowledge of laws.’” — is that the Arab sage is al-Ghazālī.

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<sup>76</sup> See also the discussion in Esperanza Alfonso, *Islamic Culture Through Jewish Eyes*. New York: Routledge, 41-51.

That is all. The note leaves a tremendous amount unsaid and unaddressed. How, exactly, does this “Arab sage”<sup>77</sup> stand in for Ghazālī: through a direct quotation, or simply as a literary incarnate of his principles? Where does this fit in with the well-attested tendency of Maimonides’ successors alternately to translate Ghazālī’s works *in toto* (of particular note for its wide circulation is Ibn Ḥasdai’s translation of the *Mizān al-‘amal*) and then seemingly to ignore them when it comes time to compose synthetic and analytic works? This raises a variety of questions about anonymity and anonymous borrowing, quotation and identifiable authorship as practical and artistic choices that will continue to reappear in the analysis and historical reconstruction of all of the texts that comprise the present project. A single-word footnote discredits the absolutes with which we tend to discuss the Jewish neo-Aristotelians’ approach to Ghazālī and raises a potentially very fruitful set of questions.

Although the thinkers under the most immediate discussion here are both called Ibn Tibbon, the line of argument that borrowing in the course of composition is indicative of authors’ intellectual formation necessarily begins with Moses Maimonides, who stands as the intellectual grounding for the

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<sup>77</sup> Both components of this epithet deserve further comment: First, that Ghazālī is referred to as *ha-‘aravi* but also that he is called *ha-ḥaḥam*, foreshadowing the epithet that will eventually be assigned to him by his fourteenth-century Jewish followers and detractors (especially Moshe Narboni, who was a bit of each).

Tibbonids and as one among their sources of legitimacy, but whose legacy, alternatively, allows Judah ibn Tibbon to act as a foil in the details of composition. We can already talk about Maimonides as an Almohadist thinker according to the parameters set out by Maribel Fierro and Sarah Stroumsa described in the introduction; and even his unheralded debts to the thought of al-Ghazālī are well documented. The relationship between Maimonides and the Almohad power structure and its intellectual and religious framework is both conflictive and not fully understood and is perhaps best epitomized by his flight from Almohad Córdoba into the heart of their empire in Fez. But even before all of that, Shlomo Pines' now-canonical translator's introduction (cited above) to the *Guide of the Perplexed* reviews the influence of various Muslim philosophers and offers a comprehensive argument in favor of such an uncredited influence, arguing that simply by virtue of being who he was, it was unthinkable that Maimonides would not have kept current with the philosophical thinking of the day. He further argues that the approaches of al-Ghazālī and Maimonides to the mediation of philosophy in the face of religion are congruent and that a man such as Maimonides would not have been "all unaware, floundering in [the] welter of inconsistencies"<sup>78</sup> that he would have to

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<sup>78</sup> Shlomo Pines, ed. and trans. *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 78-9.



have been in order to come up with such a system independently. In short, the two philosophers' work is remarkably similar and Maimonides was not so unaware of the intellectual world around him to have been able not to draw on Ghazālī as a source. Of course, he did not quote much of anybody directly, as Pines noted:

We do not know what *kalām* treatises he used in his exposition of these 'premises.' It is a pretty safe assumption that generally he drew upon the same sources as Averroes... [but] it might be a difficult task to prove that he had made use of them, as the composition and the style of the exposition concerning *kalām* bear the unmistakable stamp of his literary personality.<sup>79</sup>

It was a stylistic consideration, then, rather than anything else that leaves this particular textual puzzle for posterity.

Nevertheless, there is a vast difference between the *rarely* of many of the *mutakallimūn* and the *never* of Ghazālī. The broader concept that this illustrates, namely that of later philosophers and translators paying attention to the works of the earlier philosophers deemed to be "*hashuvim*" (Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Ibn Bājja and Ibn Rushd, and sometimes Ibn Sīnā but sometimes not) is well- and widely-attested; and Ghazālī is uniformly excluded from that group. Ernest Renan contended that the Tibbonids were not immune to the particulars of this line of thinking and sourcing,<sup>80</sup> and Samuel

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<sup>79</sup> Pines, 75.

<sup>80</sup> Ernst Renan. *Averroes et l'avveroisme*. Toronto: University Libraries Press (reprint).

received advice from Maimonides himself to pay attention to philosophers he believed to be important and not to bother with the unimportant ones, or even with poorly-executed commentaries on the important ones and pseudo-canonical versions thereof.<sup>81</sup> As for what follows here, perhaps this is some of what Israel Abrahams already knew about how al-Ghazālī fit into this scheme.

Through Judah's letter to his son, we can also see that not only did Almohadist thought — that is, the incorporation of the intellectual and cultural concerns of the Almohads themselves (again, as delineated in the introduction) in contexts designed to be used by a wider, non-Almohad and non-Muslim audience — explicitly form a part of the education that was offered to the sons of the most prominent Jewish neo-Aristotelians, but also that the writings of Ghazālī, which they adopted as one of their spiritual standards, were not as marginalized as we heretofore believed. And so, not only does the colophonist discussed in Chapter Three connect this version of the Alexander romance with an individual whose thought was and would have been known and appreciated to have been influenced by the Almohad movement that claimed Ghazālī as one of its spiritual sources, but he also framed his brief discussion of Maimonides in terms of the superiority of the man whose education included both Almohadist and Ghazalian elements. Although there is no way of

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<sup>81</sup> Maimonides' letter to Samuel.

knowing for certain that the Alexander colophonist would have known about the ethical will (and it is quite unlikely that he would have), he nevertheless reflects an awareness of an intellectual milieu in which Ghazālī was not alien to this community. On the one hand, one could argue that this is merely a question about Maimonides and that Samuel's inclusion is simply a matter of him being one of the individuals who translated the *Guide*; but when we consider what we now know about Samuel's education, it becomes clear that there is more at stake and that those same greater stakes are illuminated in the fact of this colophon and other scribal decisions like it.

In Judah's letter to Samuel, we find a section of text in which the elder Ibn Tibbon counsels the younger to adopt good habits of the mind in order to develop his capacity for memory while young and stave off the forgetfulness that is an insult of old age. He points his son to prooftexts from Ecclesiastes, Proverbs and from the Samuel the Nagid's *Ben Mishle*. After quoting from Ibn Gabirol's *Muḥtar al-Jawāhir* (the full Hebrew translation of which, entitled *Mivḥar ha-Penanim*, was a product of Judah's own translatorial hand), a text which he mentions neither by title nor author, he advises his son as follows: "The Arab sage said: 'There are two types of wisdom: *ḥoḥmat ha-torōt ve-*

*ḥoḥmat ha-gūfōt*.’’<sup>82</sup> The similarity to an observation made by Ghazālī in the third subsection (*baḥat*) of the fourth chapter (*faṣl*) of his masterwork of theosophy, *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, cannot go unremarked: “Concerning the science of law and within Islam, there are two types of wisdom: *uḥrawī* and *dunyawī*.’’<sup>83</sup> At first blush, it seems that the mere parallelism of syntactical construction of the two sentences is what contributes most to a close resemblance, but further examination of the lexicographical materials that Judah and his contemporaries would have known suggests that there is, in fact, a very direct correspondence between *ḥoḥmat ha-torōt* (the knowledge of laws) and *uḥrawī* (otherworldly knowledge) and between *ḥoḥmat ha-gūfōt* (the knowledge of bodies) and the *dunyawī* (worldly knowledge). The Hebrew lexicographers, both those working within the Iberian Peninsula and those from without whose works were read there, very much understood bodies to be both worldly and earthly, and systems of laws as both divinely bestowed and eternally binding. This both fits into a consistent theological schema and shows how each term came to be a calque of its counterpart.

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<sup>82</sup> For the moment, I will leave aside the question of what constitutes the best English rendering of the terms that refer to these two types of wisdom, whose answer will become clearer after considering the commentaries as well as the Arabic source for the quotation.

<sup>83</sup> *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* II:4.3

In his *Kitāb Jāmi‘ al-Alfāz*,<sup>84</sup> the tenth-century North African Karaite lexicographer Abraham ibn Daūd al-Fāsī (c. 950-1005) defines the semantic range of the root *G-W-F* in a way that both argues for and sheds some light on the calquing of the Arabic adjective *dunyawī*. Al-Fāsī employs two biblical citations in support of this definition of the word *gūf*. The first comes from a section of text in First Chronicles that concerns the corpses of King Saul and his sons and compatriots: “Once every soldier arose they ferried the body of Saul (*gūfat Shaul*) and the bodies of his sons (*gufot benav*), bringing them towards Yavesh and burying them under a tree.”<sup>85</sup> The second, Exod. 21:3a, concerns the rights of the freed slave to agency over his body: “If he arrives possessed of sound body then he should leave possessed of sound body (*‘im be-gufo yavo’ be-gufo yetze’*).” If there were any doubt as to whether this definition were current in the Tibbonid circle, it can be dispelled by noting that the quotation from I Chron. is also the one that appears in *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, Judah Ibn Tibbon’s Hebrew translation of *Kitāb al-Usūl* by Jonah ibn Janāh. Both of these examples assert the materiality, the “objectness” and the worldliness of the body, making plain the correspondence between the two terms. Those quotations show that the medieval lexicographers saw the body as

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<sup>84</sup> David ben Abraham al-Fāsī. *Kitāb Jāmi‘ al-alfāz*, ed. Solomon Skoss. New Haven: Yale UP, 1963.

<sup>85</sup> I Chron. 10:12.

a possession, as something to be lugged about, and as something to be returned, ultimately and unceremoniously to the very earth itself.

The contemporaneous commentaries on these verses qua verses (rather than purely as sources of lexemes) further bear out a perception of the body as a worldly, even an earthy, entity. In his commentary on Exodus, Abraham ibn ‘Ezra’ (b. 1093) unsurprisingly employs the verse about Saul’s body as a proof-text in remarks on the verse about slaves’ bodies. But he also sets Exodus 21:3 against the backdrop of Psalm 129, in which the enemies of a national Israel are described in metaphorical terms as vicious agriculturists who will themselves ultimately be mowed down. Excerpts from that psalm read: “They have oppressed me much since my youth but could not overcome me; ploughmen plowed across my back, digging their furrows... Let them be like rooftop grass that dries out before it has grown.”<sup>86</sup> That psalm and the image that it paints of the use of farm equipment as a way to tame unruly bodies appears as a means of explicating a verse on the possession and disposition of the human body points to the commentators’ appreciation of the materiality of the body by drawing a one-to-one correspondence between parts of the human body and the earth itself. It seems only natural then that a Hebrew translator conversant in these particular lexical and exegetical texts should render the

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<sup>86</sup> Psalm 129:2-3, 6.

Arabic term *dunyawī* (of this world) as relating to this most earthly of objects, the *gūf* (body).

The correlation between the notion of *torōt* and *uḥrawī* is complicated somewhat by the fact that the earliest medieval Hebrew lexicographers had not yet fully standardized the manner of alphabetizing words built from the kind of root which we now describe as having a first weak radical; in other words their tendency toward privileging homonymy over polysemy makes the ordering of a lexicon just a bit disordered, particularly where weak consonants are concerned. Nevertheless, in spite of the weaker philological and exegetical evidence, the strength of the first half of the correspondence and the similar structures of the two sentences would seem to suffice in proving the correspondence. It seems clear, then, that the aforementioned quotation that Abrahams identified as originating in Ghazālī's work does belong to Ghazālī's *oeuvre*. And furthermore, the correspondence between the excerpt from *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* and Judah's letter to Samuel is evocative of the manner in which the Tibbonids began to develop a Hebrew philosophical vocabulary as a central part of their translation activities.

To return to the text of Judah's letter, the second quotation from a so-called "Arab sage" is as follows: After instructing Samuel on what foods he ought to eat in order to be and feel healthy, Judah rounds out the personal-

advice section of the letter with an admonition that Samuel should place critical importance on treating his wife well. It is in that context that the letter offers a second quotation of advice from a source that the letter describes in relatively the same way as the first one: “The Arabs’ sage said, on the subject of women: ‘No man respects them unless he is respectable, and no man discards them unless he himself is worthless.’”<sup>87</sup>

Unlike the first quotation, I have, as yet, been unable to identify the source of this one, either within Ghazālī’s corpus of texts or elsewhere, which leaves us to wonder if Judah meant to signal the same source both times. As noted above, both quotations are attributed roughly to an Arab sage, though it should be noted that the construction of the epithet is not exactly the same in both cases. The first pearl of wisdom is attributed literally to “the Arab sage,” and the second to “a sage of the Arabs.” Until positively identifying the second quotation, it will be impossible to say whether “the Arab sage”<sup>88</sup> is an honorific that Judah ibn Tibbon gave specifically to Ghazālī or whether it is instead a generic way to refer to Muslim thinkers. The noun for sage, *ḥaḥam* (cognate,

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<sup>87</sup> Abrahams, 79.

<sup>88</sup> The chosen national/linguistic/ethnic element of the term itself raises a variety of issues. While they are beyond the narrow scope of the present study, the eventual reader will be advised to consult R. Brann, “Muslim Counterparts, Rivals, Mentors and Foes — A Trope of Andalusī Jewish Identity?” *Power in the Portrayal*. Princeton: UP, 119-39; and R. Drory, “Words Beautifully Put,” *Models and Contacts*. Leiden: Brill, 158-76.



obviously, with the Arabic *ḥakīm*), is identical in both cases and so it is hard to know whether this relatively small grammatical difference between the two epithets is merely a stylistic one (perhaps a copyist's or author's slip, even) regardless of whether Ghazālī is the only sage in question or if it is both he and another who are quoted, or, alternatively, whether the slight alteration was deliberate and intended to signify to the reader that the words of two different sages were in play. In short: is it difference or distinction?<sup>89</sup>

With those issues of attribution and style aside, even the presence of just one direct quotation forces us to rethink what we previously believed we understood about the utilization of Ghazālī within Iberian Jewish neo-Aristotelian texts. The presence of the quotations raises a variety of questions, which I will present here just briefly and by way of addressing the broader implications of and further directions for this research: First, we must inquire as to the relevance of the inclusion of not just any text by Ghazālī (and not the *Mizna al-'amal*, which was in widest circulation among Jewish readers) but specifically the *Iḥyā'*, a work very explicitly directed to a Muslim audience; one of the approaches to this question will be to study Judah's letter alongside a treatise of another, slightly older, Judah (that is, Judah Halevi, d. 1141) in

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<sup>89</sup> This panorama of quotations is further complicated by a third quotation in the letter that seems to be a simple aphorism — “As the Arab said: He who sits on the edge will fall in.” — which is attributed simply to an Arab as opposed to an Arab *sage*.

whose *Kuzari* we may, according to Baneth, also see the specific influence of the *Iḥyā*, diffusely transmitted rather than quoted, of course. Next, the problem of the terminology that is used to refer to Ghazālī and which I touched upon briefly may offer an additional window into how this population conceived of its neighbors on the eve of major political and cultural upheaval in the region in which particularly Andalusī variations of the notions of ‘*arabiyya* (Arabness) and *shu‘ūbiyya* (foreignness) would come to the fore and strongly into play.<sup>90</sup> In other words, what are the implications of describing Ghazālī as an Arab as opposed to anything else he might reasonably have been called from among the epithets that were in common use at the time? And then finally, the whole conceit raises questions — which will be the subject of further study — of the management of source material within translated texts and how this contributes to the formation of a canon, or at the least of a coherent corpus of texts.

Samuel ibn Tibbon, then, learned his trade and his religion through a curriculum infused with Ghazālī, a fact exploited by the Hebrew colophonist and a pairing mirrored in the education and work of Judah’s counterparts.

Nevertheless, it is only Judah ibn Tibbon who goes as far as to quote him

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<sup>90</sup> For the prime instance in which these ideas are discussed under the headings of ‘*arabiyya* and *shu‘ūbiyya*, see JT Monroe, *The Shu‘ūbiyya in al-Andalus* (UC Press, 1970) and G. Larsson, *Ibn García’s Shu‘ūbiyya Letter* (Brill, 2003). For other discussion of the definition of national or group identity against Arabness, see E. Alfonso, *Islamic Culture through Jewish Eyes* (Routledge, 2008).

directly, suggesting the existence of a taboo that only he dared to transgress. Ultimately, that is by the dawning decades of the fourteenth century when the colophon that is the central focus of the third chapter may well have been produced, was both a greater touchstone within the Jewish philosophical community and utilized with greater facility and comfort within the writings produced by its members.<sup>91</sup> With his trade and his religious practice founded in an education that treated Ghazālī in such a forward-thinking manner (that is, in a way that much more closely approximates the general approach taken by fourteenth-century thinkers than the one adopted by those working in the twelfth) it is unsurprising that Samuel would make for an especially attractive candidate to render the pseudepigraphical author of the Hebrew Alexander in precisely the specific and peculiar way that the colophon does.

### 1.3 A HEBREW *MESTER DE CLERECÍA*?<sup>92</sup>

Chronology and geography also point to a third context in which we may understand Samuel's work, namely that of the developing compositional norms for Castilian writers in Toledo. In a certain respect, the conventions of those

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<sup>91</sup> Several examples of this phenomenon appear in Steven Harvey, "Why Did Fourteenth-Century Jews Turn to Alghazali's Account of Natural Science?" *JQR* 91:3-4 (2001), 359-76.

<sup>92</sup> Foundational works about the genre of *mester de clerecía* include Isabel Uría Maqua, *Panorama crítico del 'mester de clerecía.'* Madrid: Castilia, 2000; and Francisco Rico, "La Clerecía de mester," *Hispanic Review* 53:1 (1965), 1-23.

norms, *mester de clerecía* (the cleric's charge), are very clearly defined in terms that should make introduction of the term into a discussion of a corpus of Hebrew-language rationalist prose anathema. But in other respects, not only is the designation valid, it also provides a particularly useful lens through which to synthesize and contextualize the forces of Samuel's education. The idea of a Hebrew corpus of *mester de clerecía*, and more specifically that by the fourteenth century there was a certain degree of memory of that corpus and its authors, accounts for some of the otherwise inexplicable tensions and juxtapositions between the Hebrew Alexander Romance and its theological appendages within the London/Beinecke codex.<sup>93</sup> By positing a *mester* framework in which we may read Hebrew texts (and, in Part II, in which we will read both their Arabic and Latinate counterparts) it will subsequently be possible to explain the role of the Pseudo-Samuel and the colophonist in the creation of a part of this peculiar fourteenth-century Alexandrine historiography.

Through the vehicle of the opening stanzas of the poem, the anonymous thirteenth-century Castilian poet, writing contemporaneously and co-locally

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<sup>93</sup> Defining the specific elements comprised within a wider Andalusí/Hebrew/Judaeo-Arabic *mester de clerecía* corpus or canon is neither relevant nor necessary here but could perhaps be the subject of a separate project. Pertinent here are only the general parameters of this more inclusive definition of *mester de clerecía* in order to situate Samuel ibn Tibbon and the memory of him within that writerly and clerical culture.

with Samuel, defines a particular task, or *mester*, for himself in terms of its literary qualities, its relationship to the church, and the personal ethical responsibilities of its practitioners. Scholars generally no longer refer to these first five stanzas of the *Libro de Alexandre*, as they once did, as the manifesto of *mester*. But the fact remains that texts that are counted as part of the *mester de clerecía* corpus conform to a poetics that is, while equally regimented, completely alien to the poetics that governs Hebrew writing in the Arabophone world. At the level of the poetics, *mester de clerecía* does inherently involve the *cuaderna vía* or Alexandrine verse form, namely 14-syllable bi-rhymed stanzas of four lines each and cannot be construed as an exportable or extrapolatable form. But the *mester de clerecía* also comprises a second element of equal importance, namely that of a particular scribal culture; a variety of recent studies have focused upon the clerics' shared educational histories, authorial and scribal techniques and religious attitudes. And at this level of clerisy rather than poetics we may situate Samuel's scribal education into the context of a more broadly-defined *mester de clerecía*.

Even within the canonical construction of the *mester de clerecía*, there is already a tension between the geography — Castilian the loci of production — and the more pan-Iberian and pan-European stylistic and linguistic elements that both contribute to the development of the form and are borrowed into it

later.<sup>94</sup> And as such, the suggestion that translations of literary and other texts into Hebrew cannot be excluded on the grounds of language, form or even an argument of “nativeness.” Not all *mester de clerecía* is fully Ibero-romance in its language or origins and so the genre can therefore comprise literatures that have a more tangential linguistic or geographical connection as long as the cleric’s *mester* is clearly a part of the textual production.

Yet it is that very question of nativeness that makes the *mester de clerecía* a particularly useful lens through which to view Samuel’s education, his scholarly output and the pseudo-canonical texts that are attributed to him because it strengthens Samuel’s existing ties to the heart of the peninsula and makes it that much more logical that he would have been viewed as fully Toledan on the part of the colophonist who was constructing his oblique history of that time and place. Despite not writing in the language of the canon of the *mester de clerecía*, Samuel was educated in a similar way and sojourned in Toledo precisely during the years in which the Castilian canon of *mester de clerecía* was being formed and committed to writing. The colophonist of the Hebrew Alexander and the Pseudo-Samuel evoked one of these clerics, sensibly making their own *mester* into Samuel’s.

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<sup>94</sup> Francisco Rico, “La clerecía de mester,” *Hispanic Review* 53:1-2, 4-5.

As we see in the erstwhile manifesto found at the beginning of the Castilian *Alexandre*, the cleric sees himself as balancing the artistic ideals of his form and the religious requirements of his profession. He defines his task first as being sinless, a characteristic that, he says, stands it in contrast with the literature of the *juglaría* (although the distinction has become less important in recent scholarly literature). But more importantly, the text also makes a pronounced expression of the scribal culture and both the rules that govern it and the materiality of its production. The poet emphasizes the precision with which his composition must be made: “Express yourself through rhymed verse in *cuaderna vía* and measured syllables, [a feat] which requires great skill...and I do not want to see a long prologue, nor much exposition; just get to the point that I am hoping to learn from you.” This echoes distinctly Judah’s admonition to his son that he write precisely and also with poetic precision:

Strive to make your prose writing sweet, concise and elegant and do not even attempt rhyme unless it will come to you perfectly...Also do the same in poetry. Distance yourself from heavy expressions and using too many words. The words should be pleasant and light on the tongue, and the verbal forms should be common ones. Do not import foreign expressions;<sup>95</sup> even though they can be explained through analogies, the most

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<sup>95</sup> This is a fascinating bit of advice for a translator and coiner of scientific and philosophical terminology to give to his son and is illustrative of the deep gulf between the conventions of poetry and prose composition.

important thing is that they are not naturally a part [of the language].<sup>96</sup>

Just as the Alexander poet describes his ideal “libro” as being without dense circumlocutions, so too does Judah advise his son to form his compositions in clear, plain and integral Hebrew. Both authors also emphasize the need for mastery of the style: The *Alexandre* poet says so explicitly, and Judah urges Samuel not to attempt writing in difficult *saj*‘ [trans.] unless and until he can meet the standards of the form.<sup>97</sup>

The importance of the physical codex is also emphasized in both manifestos: When the Castilian poet writes that he “wish[es] to read a book about a pagan king,”<sup>98</sup> he emphasizes the physical nature of the written word and its desirability over the more fleeting character of oral poetry.<sup>99</sup> Although the particular line does not itself read as an enthusiastic endorsement of the book as a form, it does, in fact, represent a turning point and a shift from the oral to the written. So this very quiet mention is itself a forceful endorsement

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<sup>96</sup> Abrahams, 69.

<sup>97</sup> This, too, is interesting advice in light of modern scholarship, where there is some debate about the value of translating *saj*‘ into rhymed prose in European languages, where both meaning and elegance might be sacrificed to preserve the rhyme scheme of the original Hebrew.

<sup>98</sup> *Libro de Alexandre*, ed. Juan Casas Rigall. Madrid: Castalia, 5.

<sup>99</sup> A comprehensive discussion of the terms that are used to describe writing and narration may be found in Francisco Javier Grande Quejigo, “Quiero leer un libro: Oralidad y escritura en el mester de clerecía,” *La memoria de los libros*, vol. 2, ed. Pedro Cátedra. Instituto de Historia del Libro y de la Lectura, pp. 101-12.



of the value of the book within the cleric's world. Judah, too, prioritizes the written word in his instructions to his son: "Guard them [your books] against the humidity settling in and against mice and all other damage because they are your great treasure."<sup>100</sup> Judah's letter to Samuel mirrors the elements of writing and style advocated by the first stanzas of the *Libro de Alexandre*, a coincidence suggestive of a far more widespread, singular culture of scribal activity within Toledo and in the scribal centers in contact with it. The attention to stylistic detail and elegance and the bibliophilia advocated by the *mester de clerecía* was not limited to Catholic clerics but was shared by scribes of other faiths who were in contact with the movement.

Additionally, the phrase *cuaderna vía* can shed some light on this broadening definition of the *mester de clerecía*. It is usually construed as a reference to the aforementioned metrical and rhyme scheme, but it has also been suggested that it is, instead, a reference to the *quadrivium*, ie astronomy, mathematics, music and poetry, and engineering, added to the basic liberal arts curriculum, the *trivium*, which included the study of rhetoric, grammar and logic.<sup>101</sup> Again, the elements of curriculum are front and center in the definition

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<sup>100</sup> This section of the ethical will contains a host of instructions to Samuel about how to treat physical codices both in terms of usage and storage. These seem to reflect, indirectly, what we know about the contemporaneous binding practices used to make both Hebrew and Arabic codices, and which might be worth investigating further in a separate context.

<sup>101</sup> Willis 1956, 217.

of *mester de clerecía*, and the curricular elements that were necessary for the Castilian clerics are virtually identical to the subjects that Judah wished to impress upon his son. The scope of the educational values of twelfth and thirteenth century Toledo is not nearly so narrow as has been suggested. If there can ever have been said to have been a clerical curriculum, then Samuel studied it every bit as much as the Castilian Alexander poet.

Resolving the tension between religious devotion or expression and literary output is an additional intellectual struggle undertaken by the Hebrew and Castilian clerics. One of the most prominent features of the *mester de clerecía* is the proximity of literary texts to a religious underpinning. As noted earlier in this section, the Castilian Alexander poet uses the phrase “without sin” to distinguish between his type of writing and another contemporaneous and popular type, namely *juglaría*. Obviously modern scholarship does not make that kind of moral distinction between the two genres. But it has also even come to flatten out the aesthetic distinctions in this case. To the Castilian clerics, the texts produced under the rubric of their own *mester* contain content that is superior to texts produced by their secular counterparts, the *jonglares*, and are distinguished that way rather than through the distinct usages of formal elements. Judah’s aspirations for his son similarly concern the laudable

religious content of his study and devotion rather than the form that either would take.

This kind of contention is not new. Famously, James T. Monroe has argued that *maqāmāt* (particularly those of Badī‘ al-Zamān al-Hamadānī) ought to be read in the same vein as European picaresque literature.<sup>102</sup> Even more relevant David Wacks’ explicitly argues for the inclusion of Hebrew-language literature in the Spanish canon.<sup>103</sup> Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo described Judah Halevi as Castilian, calling him Abū l-Ḥasan el Castellano.<sup>104</sup> There are two ways of posing the question: Ought the traditional definitions of genre and literary movement be broadened to include writers in other languages, or, do we recognize these terms as mere infelicitous shorthands for what were essentially, and more and more evidently, simply the Iberian modes of writing?

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<sup>102</sup> James T. Monroe, *The Art of Badī‘ az-Zamān al-Hamadhani as Picaresque Narrative*. Beirut: American University Press, 1982.

<sup>103</sup> David Wacks, “Towards a History of Hispano-Hebrew Literature in its Romance Context,” *eHumanista* 14 (2010), 178-209.

<sup>104</sup> Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo. *Estudios de critica literaria*. Madrid, 1893. The mid-century inclusion of the Hebrew poets in the Castilian canon is, nonetheless, occasionally done with a whiff of misplaced imperial superiority, made manifest in phrases such as “nuestros hebreos peninsulares.”

#### 1.4 SOME INTERMEDIATE CONCLUSIONS

Whether we examine Samuel's education from the perspective of its Ibero-Romance surroundings or from the Andalusí Arabic literary tradition that most directly contributed to it, the sum total of Samuel's education grounds him firmly in a Toledan, Alexandrine world. The records of the lessons he received, unique only for the star quality of his teachers and not for the principles they imparted to young men of a certain social and intellectual standing, represents an endogamous, Iberian education, rarified but responsive and responsible to the world, that reflects the Andalusí heritage of his teachers and situates him well for his return to the libraries of Toledo both in person in the early years of the thirteenth century and as a memory in the middle of the fourteenth. In particular, if we accept the argument that has been made that we may read Maimonides in an Almohad mode and emphasize the reuse of Ghazālī by the Almohads, among others, then we may certainly argue that there is an Almohadist strain in Samuel's education; an element which we shall see was critical in how the later historians perceived Samuel's position as intellectual and translator.

As we proceed now to a close reading of the colophon appended to the London/Beinecke manuscript of the Hebrew Alexander romance, the ways in

which Samuel's education made him an appealing touchstone for the colophonist will help to make sense of what is an otherwise puzzling short text.

## Chapter Two

### ‘These Are the Words of Samuel, Who Translated this Essay from the Hagarite<sup>105</sup> Language’: The Student Speaks

The moment has come to let Samuel speak for himself. Thus far we have seen how his education as a translator and the work that he carried out nests into the broader intellectual, religious and even political trends that were current to his lifetime. Shortly we will examine one of the ways in which others preserved his legacy after his death. But did his own vision for his and his family’s project and its place within the changing intellectual landscape coincide with how his teachers intended him to craft it or how it corresponded to some of the surging philosophical and religious trends of the day? Again, it is fortunate that he left enough texts — letters and translator’s prefaces, in the main — that it is possible to discern an answer. Rina Drory observes that this self-conscious kind of assertion is a function of the relative newness of the Arabic-to-Hebrew translator as a professional role: “It may be typical of the vanguard to feel an (almost compulsive) need to comment frequently on their profession, thereby legitimizing it over and over again.”<sup>106</sup> Samuel wrote self-consciously about translation in enough places in his oeuvre that it is possible

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<sup>105</sup> Under normal circumstances I would, of course, simply translate the locution *ha-safah ha-hagarit* as *the Arabic language*; but here, since this chapter features a discussion of the difference between the terms *hagarit* and ‘*aravit* for *Arabic*, I leave it more literally.

<sup>106</sup> Rina Drory, *Models and Contacts*. Leiden: Brill, 2000. 230.

to assemble a basic list of principles that can be said to have guided his work as a translator, namely collation of texts, consultation with linguistic and exegetical references and with other translations of the same work, querying the author where possible, and development of new vocabulary.<sup>107</sup> It is also possible to discern the role he ascribed to his teachers in his own perception and memory of his development as a scribe and translator, as well as his attitudes about the relative merits of the language pairs with which he dealt: Hebrew and Arabic, sacred and vulgar, pairings which, it must be noted, echoed but did not map neatly onto their counterparts within contemporaneous Maghrebi Islam.

The basis of this chapter is the collection of Samuel's excurses on these topics from two major texts that came into existence as much as three decades apart but very much in conversation with each other and as part of a broader literary innovation transpiring in the Hebrew literature that had its origins in the Arabophone world. The two texts are Samuel's preface to his *Moreh ha-Nevuḥim*, the first Hebrew translation of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and his preface and prooemium to his own Hebrew-language commentary on the biblical book of Ecclesiastes. Samuel began his translation of the *Guide* in the 1190s and it was disseminated beginning in 1204. The commentary on

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<sup>107</sup> This list is defined and collected in Robinson 2010, section 4.

Ecclesiastes and its preface were written after 1213, the year when the emended version of Samuel's *Moreh* appeared together with the gloss-appendix known as *Perush ha-millim ha-zarot* (given in some editions as *ha-millot ha-zarot*).<sup>108</sup> The texts themselves are self-explanatory: *Moreh ha-Nevuḥim* is the Hebrew translation of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, and Samuel's version, the first, ultimately became the authoritative one among Jewish communities in Europe owing to the literal style that Samuel employed as a translator; the commentary on Ecclesiastes is an exploration of that biblical text that includes both Hellenistic Jewish and classical Hellenic sources as interpretive ciphers. Both texts have a preface, and the reason for juxtaposing these two in particular is because their appearance very much bookended the debate over divergent approaches to translation insofar as it occurred during Samuel's professionally active lifetime. The preface to the translation of the *Guide* is, in essence, Samuel's manifesto as a translator, while the preface to the commentary on Ecclesiastes, written after the appearance of al-Ḥarīzī's competing translation of the *Guide*, is in many ways both an indirect and very bombastic and direct response to the challenge that the very existence of al-Ḥarīzī's translation posed to Samuel's own. The two prefaces represent

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<sup>108</sup> Robinson 2007, 28 and ff.



terminal points in the evolution of Samuel's thinking as a translator and theorist.

It is interesting that Samuel used these prologues to discuss the changing nature of authorship because the prologue was a form that was itself rapidly changing and evolving during the years when he worked.<sup>109</sup> Just as he consolidated the authorial credo of a school of translators through his writing about translation and authorship issues but also simply through the fact of his work, Samuel was likewise responsible for the solidification of the conventions of the prologue or preface form. Rabbinic-period prologues were wholly distinct in form and in the sources from which they derive their authority from the Hellenistic prologues that served as the model for eastern Arabic writing; through contact with the Greek-into-Arabic translation movement, the Hebrew prologue came to resemble its Greek and Arabic counterparts beginning in the ninth and tenth centuries in the Islamic East.<sup>110</sup> Karaite biblical commentators and Sa'adya Gaon were ultimately the catalysts for these innovations, but their slow adoption and the continued atypicality of the prologue within the Hebrew tradition allowed Samuel to assert his own innovations. Through the medium

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<sup>109</sup> James T. Robinson, *Samuel Ibn Tibbon's Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 28-33.

<sup>110</sup> James T. Robinson, *Samuel Ibn Tibbon's Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 28-33; and Daniel Frank, *Search Scripture Well*. Leiden: Brill, 252-4.

of this new form that Samuel was helping to create, he articulates an even finer description of the authorial processes in play.

Through these two aforementioned texts we see that Samuel believed himself and other translators to be authors in their own right, seemingly following in his father's literary-intellectual footsteps, where he construed of direct quotation as borrowing, but adaptation as an entirely distinct authorial act. By writing about the Arabic language itself and its relationship to Hebrew, about prosody, about the nature of authorship, and about the value of the physical codex, Samuel consolidates the Tibbonid framework and articulates its place within the competing intellectual and political trends that helped to spawn it.

## I. SAMUEL ON ARABIC AND HEBREW<sup>111</sup>

Samuel's Hebrew-language preface to his *Moreh ha-Nevuḥim* is a particular treat for readers who have themselves studied Arabic. He describes some of the problems that can govern and stymie the translation of a text from Arabic into Hebrew in terms of the grammatical and syntactic differences between the two languages with the palpable tone of exasperated wonderment that is all too familiar to anyone who has learned or tried to explain that in the

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<sup>111</sup> Further research related to this section and the next will also engage with the existing scholarly literature, in particular works by Alfonso, Allony, Blau, Brann, Drory, Haberman and Sadan.

classical Arabic language, a non-human plural noun is in grammatical agreement with verbs and adjectives in the singular, feminine form:

Many times there will be call for one word that is grammatically masculine in the Hebrew language but that is grammatically feminine in Arabic; and the same is true for singulars and plurals. And what's more, in Arabic verbs come before nouns, and so it goes according to their custom; and even though a noun might appear in the plural, they will put the verb in the singular form in many instances. So it happens that in certain places the masters of the language have needed to render a verb in the singular in our language when it refers to every single one of the plural nouns that come after it. Furthermore, there is no distinction in Arabic between uses of the feminine singular and the masculine plural.<sup>112</sup>

By drawing attention to the fact that in Arabic, certain words are grammatically feminine while the same words (either synonyms or cognates) are grammatically masculine (eg., that the word for night, *layla*, is grammatically masculine in Hebrew and feminine in Arabic and both languages share the sign for the feminine ending) or that certain concepts are expressed definitely in one language while the same concept is expressed in the abstract in the other, and by and suggesting that this is one of the major problems facing translators, Samuel implicitly advocates for his own, literal style of translation. Equally implicitly he argues against the holistic style preferred by Maimonides<sup>113</sup> and practiced by al-Ḥarīzī. In other words, the fact that one might have to use a

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<sup>112</sup> Moses Maimonides, *Moreh ha-Nevu'im*, trans. Samuel ibn Tibbon, ed. Yehudah Even-Shmuel. Jerusalem: Mosad Rav Kook, 118. (In this chapter, translations from Samuel's prologue to the *Moreh*, are my own; all others are as noted. A full translation of this text and notes for its study are currently in preparation.)

<sup>113</sup> This is discussed in some detail in the previous chapter.

plural noun to translate a singular noun is not a problem when one's approach to a translation is, as Maimonides suggested, to come to an understanding of the work on its own terms and then for the translator to explain it in his own words.

It is interesting to consider other ways in which Samuel talks about the two languages. First, when he makes the comparisons described in the previous paragraph, that is, between two grammatical characteristics that differ between the two languages, the contrast is always framed as being made between “the Arabic language” and “our language.”<sup>114</sup> By using this kind of locution, Samuel identifies deeply and personally with Hebrew. Of course, the question is much more complicated than this, as will become clear in this chapter. The loss of Arabic among the Jews in the Christian north of Iberia and in Provence, combined with the continued contact of the intellectual elites with their counterparts in the Almohad-governed south and in North Africa, where the principle of vernacularism, particularly with respect to prayer, was on the rise, meant a complete transformation of the position of Hebrew both within the Jewish community and vis-à-vis the Arabic language. As a Jewish author serving the needs of a Hebrew-speaking community, Samuel might very

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<sup>114</sup> In some instances, it seems as if the locution “our language” refers to the interstice between the original text and the translation, implying a sort of coded language common to translators. This is not a clear enough usage, however, to argue it conclusively.

naturally have identified with or preferred Hebrew as a literary, philosophical, scientific and religious language. But that is hardly the end of the story.

First of all, in certain places in the prologues Samuel seems to express a particular grief over the loss of the literary culture that grew up in Andalusian Arabic, and nostalgia for both that culture and the place where it thrived. At the beginning of the translator's prologue to the *Guide*, Samuel describes the circumstances that led him to begin to write that translation:

[As for] the Arabic language, I know only a little bit of it because I did not grow up among its speakers or in the lands where it is spoken, nor was I brought up according to its customs. And what's more, I am aware of my own great deficit in understanding all the words and matters of this noble book, the treatise *The Guide of the Perplexed*, because many of these matters are very deep indeed and it comprises much and lofty wisdom, but it has disappeared from the eyes of many people from among our nation, and perhaps even from the sight of everyone because they do not occupy themselves with these matters nor do they achieve [any understanding of] them. And so I opened my eyes to just the edge of it all, because I had but the rudiments of an Arabic-language library, which I know very little of, and which has moved me to study them to the best of my limited ability.

After a description of how Arabic-language learning had fallen by the wayside among the Jewish communities in the south of what is today France, he continued:

So they called upon me, Samuel bar Judah ibn Tibbon, of blessed memory and put their request to me, since they knew that I knew a little bit of Arabic and because within their borders there was no other man who knows more of that language than I do they

energetically asked me to translate it for them as much as I could. And even though I replied by telling them about my little experience in translating, they said to me: ‘Even so, there will be some benefit to it; even if the translation is lacking or insufficient with respect to the honored matters that are enumerated in this book, it will still be enough for us.’ I could find no excuse that would be sufficient to put them off, so I made myself as their trusted confederate and I translated it with a bit of effort.<sup>115</sup>

Much in these two passages suggests that Samuel wished to identify with the Arabic literary culture as much as he did with the developing Hebrew one. His first comment, in which he attributes his paltry knowledge of Arabic to not having grown up in a fully Arabic-speaking environment, bespeaks a grief over the loss of that environment through the recognition of the cultural capital that is missing in its absence.<sup>116</sup> Although he does not directly ascribe his “deficit in understanding” to the fact of his lacking skill with the Arabic language or the absence of Andalusí culture, the juxtaposition against the first sentence is telling. In light of all of his father’s concern for Samuel’s Arabic library noted in the previous chapter, it is impossible to overlook Samuel’s remark about the paucity of his collection of Arabic books. (We will return to this and explore it more fully in the third section in the context of the discussion of Samuel’s valuation of the codex.) Beyond the specifics, though, a tone of genuine regret, contrition and diffidence pervades this passage in a way that it does not in other

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<sup>115</sup> Ibn Tibbon, Preface to *Moreh*, p. 116.

<sup>116</sup> The remark that he was not “brought up according to its customs” raises questions about how Samuel viewed the very Arabic education he seems to have received at his father’s hands.

formulaic, rhetorical expressions of humility, such as the rather off-handed one — “Far be it from me to consider myself wise”<sup>117</sup> — that opens this prologue. Samuel’s close identification with Hebrew over Arabic must not be taken to mean that he did not also identify himself very closely as having had a part of (or having lost out on a birthright claim to) the Arabic literary culture of al-Andalus.<sup>118</sup>

Second, a peculiar and anachronistic locution in the heading of the prologue to the *Moreh* draws further attention to some of the questions about language that lie just beneath the surface of Samuel’s prologues. The introductory line, added by a later editor, reads: “These are the words of Samuel ben<sup>119</sup> Judah ibn Tibbon, of blessed memory, translator of this essay from the Hagarite language into the Hebrew language.”<sup>120</sup> This is not especially significant because it is not Samuel’s own description of his task. However, it is interesting here for two reasons: First, because it evokes and points to the absence of the alternative name that one would expect to find in a Tibbonid

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<sup>117</sup> Ibn Tibbon, Preface to *Moreh*, p. 116.

<sup>118</sup> This in particular is one of the places where this chapter will benefit from further engagement with the existing scholarly literature on language and nostalgia.

<sup>119</sup> It is interesting to note that this later redactor does not mirror Samuel’s own use of patronymics, where he refers to himself as Samuel bar Yehudah, as does the colophonist who is the subject of the next chapter and who attempts to forcibly add a pseudepigraphical work to the canon of Samuel’s writings and translations. Sadan (1994, p. 325) remarks upon the fact that authors’ patronymics were generally represented according to their own preference rather than according to any kind of standardization. As an additional note, while both Baneth and Sadan would ultimately accuse him of overstatement, Nehemiah Allony writes about the role of Hagar in “Spanish” Hebrew poetry. [give citation for Baneth and Allony]

<sup>120</sup> Ibn Tibbon, Preface to *Moreh*, 117.

text, namely Ishmaelite, rather than the given term, Arabic<sup>121</sup> and second, because the connection between the Arabic language and Hagar as its matriarch is one that Samuel's rival, Judah al-Ḥarīzī does employ in his praise of the merits of Hebrew. The opening sections of both his *Maqāmāt* collections, a translation of the Arabic work of al-Ḥarīrī, and the *Sefer ha-Taḥkemoni*, which are wholly different kind of prologues with wholly different literary origins, is well-known as an example of *faḍā'il al-luḡha*, an Arabic genre imported into Hebrew in which an author praises the merits of the language in which he is writing. This has implications for a wide variety of literary debates, ranging from the contentions between Arabophone Abbasid authors and their Persian-language *shu'ūbī* counterparts to the attempts by Hebrew language writers to elevate their own sacred language to be on a par, literarily, with Arabic.<sup>122</sup> And in the former contribution to the form, al-Ḥarīzī writes:

They have enslaved the tongue of the Israelites to the tongue of Kedar and they said: 'Come down and let us sell her to the Ishmaelites.' And they said to her: 'Bow down, that we may go over.' And they took her and cast her into the pit until she perished among them. And the tongue of Kedar blackened her,

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<sup>121</sup> In fact, this raises the question of whether Samuel's steadfast use of *Arabic* rather than *Ishmaelite* to name the language is an attempt to place himself on a level with the Eastern grammarians who drew on the expertise of the "Arabs," that is, the Bedouins, as the source of authority for their analyses of the language. That would be quite interesting in light of the Almohad practice of inventing all sorts of genuine Arab genealogies, but this all requires further investigation and does not bear directly on the matter at hand.

<sup>122</sup> An excellent description of these competing trends among additional authors within the Jewish community may be found in Alfonso 2008, 26-30.



and like a lion, tore her. An evil beast devoured her. All of them spurned the Hebrew tongue and made love to the tongue of Hagar... Their hearts were seduced when they saw how excellent was the poetry that Hagar, Sarai's Egyptian handmaiden had borne. And Sarai was barren!<sup>123</sup>

And al-Ḥarīzī alights upon the same biblical comparison in his prologue to Maimonides' Arabic-language introduction to his *Commentary on the Mishnah* (*Kitab al-Sirāj*), a text of which Samuel would also translate a small part (*Avot*) into Hebrew:

When I understood what they said, I hurried without waiting, fulfilled their word, and translated the commentary of this master from Arabic into the Holy Tongue. I turned its light from the west towards the east... I have translated it from the dark language of Kedar into the language of gold and glory. This is because I was jealous for the commentaries which the Torah carried, which deserve the rights of the first born, and yet were born on the knees of Hagar, Sarah's slave, while Sarah remained barren. In wonderment, I asked: 'Can holiness and worldliness be joined? How can light and darkness be united?' But the sage's intention was to give wisdom to the simple, so he wrote in Arabic for the sake of those who do not know the Holy tongue but only Hagarite, and their language is 'half in the speech of Ashdod and they could not speak in the Jews' language.'<sup>124</sup>

These passages, in which al-Ḥarīzī uses the same terminology as the later editors of Samuel's *Moreh ha-Nevuḥim* here serve to call further attention to the ways in which Samuel himself does and does not talk about the Arabic

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<sup>123</sup> Trans., Drory, 218.

<sup>124</sup> Trans. Drory, 229. The teasing apart of the connotations that the word *Hagarite* carries for language and religion simultaneously but in parallel is something that will be considered in a future version of the present project.

language. It also provides a context for the usage of this term in the canon of the Pseudo-Samuel, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

For the moment, though, it is worth situating these passages and their broader ideas of the merits of the Hebrew language into the bigger picture. The question of *faḏā'il al-luġha* (merits of the language) is perhaps the most salient in terms of discussions and descriptions of Arabic and Hebrew poetics.

Although Samuel was neither a poet nor a critic of poetry, it is nevertheless an area where he continues his discussion of the languages he dealt with in his translations. In other words there is more to say about Samuel's opinions regarding Arabic; but since the other cases also concern different aspects of literary production, they are best discussed separately. This question will also raise some additional issues about internal (to Samuel as well as to the Provençal community) linguistic conflict as a mirror to the changing relationship between sacred and profane languages (or sacred and profane uses of languages) in the wider world inhabited by Samuel and his texts.

## II. SAMUEL ON PROSODY<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> It will eventually be important to reconcile Samuel's and Maimonides' attitude towards poetry. Several somewhat recent publications — James T. Monroe, "Maimonides on the Mozarabic Lyric," *La Corónica* 17:2 (1988) 18-32; Angel Saenz-Badillos, "Maimonides y la poesía," *Sobre la vida y obra de Maimonides*, ed. Jesus Pelaez Rosal. Córdoba: Ediciones Almendro, 17-26; and Joseph Yahalom, "Maimonides and Hebrew Poetry," *Peamim* 81 (1999) 4-14 — have attempted to problematize the received wisdom that Maimonides was

Poetry — even more so than grammatical and lexicographical writing — was perhaps the most important area where contact and conflict between Hebrew- and Arabic-language writers pushed the development of Hebrew literature forwards; the history of poetry in medieval Iberia, particularly between the tenth and fourteenth centuries, is as much the joint history of language and religion as it is the history of literature. The earliest Hebrew poetry did not use quantitative meter; this innovation was pioneered by the 10<sup>th</sup>-century poet, the aforementioned Dūnash ben Labrāṭ, and from there on out, poetry (and in particular the secular poetry that flourished in Iberia) became an important way for Jewish authors to showcase their sacred language and demonstrate its parity in all areas with Arabic, the sacred language of their Muslim counterparts. [fn is called for]

And so it is natural that a translator who was self-consciously creating a canon of texts worth studying in Hebrew should weigh in on the form; but his attitude was generally that prosody was not the best way to elevate Hebrew. His general resistance to poetry is not entirely out of character for a writer for whom the relative values of Arabic and Hebrew were in flux, as was shown above; although Hebrew continued to be used as a poetic language, it also increasingly became the utilitarian language of both prayer and commerce,

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generally opposed to the composition and recitation of poetry; however, the state of the question is insufficiently resolved at present to be able to make a useful comparison.

while the role of Arabic was limited to the nostalgic Andalusí legacy of prestige. But because of the continued importance of Hebrew, the near dichotomy drawn between the two languages through the medium of poetry cannot have been nearly as resonant for someone in Samuel's position.

Before considering Samuel's own opinion about Arabic and Arabizing Hebrew poetry, however, it is worth returning for a moment to the didactic epistle from his father and to the statements there on poetry:

Take care not to make mistakes in your language, in your verb forms or grammar or usages of masculine and feminine forms because one will frequently make mistakes with these owing to his use of a foreign tongue.<sup>126</sup> And the mistake that you make will follow you and you will be remembered by it for your whole life. The sages said, 'Who is it who exposes himself as nude in one place and finds he is seen that way everywhere?' They answered themselves saying, 'It is the one who writes something and makes mistakes in it.' Be careful in your use of conjunctions and adverbs, how you bring them to bear in the text and how verbal usages fit with them. I have already begun to compose a book for you on the subject — may God let me live long enough to finish it! — called *The Secret of Style*. If you should have a doubt about something and have no book to check the matter in, distance yourself from [using] it. Always try to make your writing concise and pleasing, and do not even attempt to add verse to your writing unless it will turn out perfectly. Do not write in heavy style, because heaviness will ruin your writing. Additionally, it will be unpleasant to your readers and listeners. Do the same thing in your poetry. Distance yourself from weighting down your style and from using excesses verbiage. Use words that are sweet and light on the tongue. Verb forms should be common ones, and do not introduce any foreign verb forms or words except if you are using

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<sup>126</sup> The phrase is *leshon ha-lo'ez*; Abrahams renders it as "the vernacular." It is the Hebrew parallel to the Arabic *ʿajamī*.

them in metaphors, though they will still seem unnatural. Remember what I told you when you wrote *yishvi* when you should have written *shivti*.<sup>127</sup> Avoid any occurrences like that while you work, and choose only what will be sweet to your own palate and pleasant for your listener.<sup>128</sup>

The first thing that one notices when reading this passage is the way that it echoes through Samuel's own commentary on Arabic. In particular Judah's observation that constant use of "the foreign tongue" can make it difficult for an author to be precise in his deployment of Hebrew verb forms and grammatical gender seems to have made an impact on Samuel in terms of his own comparison (in his prologue to the *Guide*) of the grammatical differences between Hebrew and Arabic and his conclusion that those differences make translation difficult. The conclusion of this passage relates Judah's specific notions about the qualities of poetry. Although it is light on specifics, taken as a whole it upholds the Arabic poetic values that had newly become a part of the Hebrew poet's toolkit. Judah reminds Samuel that poetry should be euphonic, metrical, and terribly clever in its diction. But Samuel ultimately had other ideas about the subject.

Samuel writes about poetry in a section of the *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* referred to as the philosopher's prooemium, "a long excursus in

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<sup>127</sup> Here Judah is referring to corrections he made in the past to his son's writing.

<sup>128</sup> Abrahams 68-8, translation mine.

which he explains the philosophical convention of writing prefaces.”<sup>129</sup> While it is technically included in the first chapter of the body of the commentary rather than within the preface itself — a distinction which Samuel himself does make, as we shall see in the following section — the nature of its content makes it logical for inclusion in the discussion of the preface. The discussion of poetry comes in the context of a sort of taxonomy of types of writing:

The third species of discourse is speech expressed according to poetic figures. The logicians have already explained its methods, for it too is a type of syllogism. They say that poetic statements establish an image in the heart of he who hears them by using words that imitate and create images by means of far-fetched figures and exaggerations. [They do this] in order to praise or condemn something so as to lead the listener’s heart to love the thing they praise or hate or avoid the thing they condemn — all because of the image that results from the imitations. They stir his heart, even though he does not believe them. In fact, he knows they are not [true].

The art of poetry has many other conditions as well, either common to all or specific to each nation. They have been mentioned by Aristotle in his book about poetry.<sup>130</sup> He also mentioned that in the poetry of some nations no attempt is made to make the last letters [of the line] the same, but only to make them equal in the time it takes to read them. Likewise, he said that poetry of some nations does not require that there be a uniform meter based on vocalization, that is, that the long and short vowels

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<sup>129</sup> Robinson 2007, 31.

<sup>130</sup> Robinson observes that the references here are, in fact, to al-Farābī’s *Book of Poetry* rather than to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, an equivocation (whether intentional or not) that is interesting insofar as many of the changes to the shape of prose, poetry and books at this precise moment in time have very deep Aristotelian roots. And in spite of Maimonides’ explicit instruction in his letter to Samuel that he should not waste time on the study of Yaḳyā’ al-Biḳriq, that is precisely whose translation of the *Poetics* he would have read; he is following Maimonides’ instructions to the letter while taunting the reader (and perhaps Maimonides himself) with his willingness to disregard that advice.

be of like number and placement [in each line]; for whatever is lacking can be compensated with melody. Nevertheless, there was, no doubt, some ordering in this [system], for melody cannot be used to compensate for any discrepancy. I have written all this for you because it seems that at the time of David and Solomon, their poems were of this sort, for their poems will not be found to contain either meter or rhyme. It might well be said that in this their poems had an advantage over those that are produced nowadays, because their path was so narrow. They could set forth in their poetry exactly the meaning they wished to set for and in its complete form. But nowadays [poets] have accepted upon themselves many preconditions, things they must do or avoid doing, and have thus greatly narrowed the path before them so that they cannot move to the right or to the left. This led them to force [the meanings of words], to abbreviate and leave out, and they permit themselves [to say] foolish things. All of this leads them to destroy the meanings, or at least to make them difficult to understand. I have written at length about this in order to honor the poems of David and Solomon and establish means to defend them. There may be other species of discourse as well, but we do not need to mention them here.<sup>131</sup>

In this passage, Samuel expresses his opinions about both biblical and Arabic poetry and in doing so expresses a deep ambivalence about the relationship between the component parts of his literary world. Samuel begins this passage with a criticism of poetry in general because it glorifies its own potential to manipulate sense and meaning. When he moves on to distinguish between different types of poetry, he seems to warm to and even slightly praise Arabic prosody by highlighting deficiencies in other kinds of poetry; but ultimately, he concludes that David and Solomon composed poetry in the ways that are, by

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<sup>131</sup> Robinson, trans., paragraphs 66-7.

comparison with Arabic prosody, lacking and that he would ultimately defend their compositions as preferable. In sum, Samuel seems to prefer the biblical model of poetics rather than the Arabizing model for Hebrew poetry that had emerged from Iberia but is equivocal and does not seem to be prepared to extend his discomfort with the effects of poetry into the contemporaneous debates over the relative value of esotericism and exotericism.

Samuel's unease ultimately extends to the whole of poetry, as evidenced by the fact that he uses "poet" as an epithet to insult al-Ḥarīzī when talking about the latter's work as a thinker and translator. In his *Perush ha-millim ha-zarot*, the gloss-appendix that appeared with Samuel's revised version of the *Moreh* subsequent to the publication of al-Ḥarīzī's competing version, he wrote:

the poet thought that every word which Maimonides noted as being equivocal was noted by him as signifying something about God. This is not so. Maimonides mentioned many biblical terms having to do with a secret of the secrets of the Torah or secrets of the faith, although there is no need to mention them in connection with God.<sup>132</sup>

By juxtaposing Judah al-Ḥarīzī's role as a poet — which Samuel emphasizes at the expense of signaling his significant role as an author of prose texts — with

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<sup>132</sup> Aviezer Ravitzky, trans. in Ravitzky, "Samuel ibn Tibbon and the Esoteric Character of the Guide of the Perplexed," *AJS Review* 6 (1981), 105.



ideas and interpretations, he is, at the very least, disparaging the profession and the ability of its practitioners to create thoughtfully.

In sum, Samuel denigrates the composition of poetry in a variety of ways, even using less strong terms to describe the very act of composing it than those he uses to describe the act of translating a prose text. By doing that, he separates out the kind of texts he was creating from poetry; each of these was emblematic in its own way of the lost Iberian literary culture, and while Judah was able to appreciate the value of both, Samuel prefers “natively” Hebrew poetry because of its utility and directness. In many ways, this is similar to what he achieves through his translations of Arabic-language philosophical and scientific texts: Meaning is conveyed. Samuel’s attitudes towards poetry are consistent with the changing role of Hebrew as it was increasingly used in some of the ways that Arabic had once been: as a *lingua franca* and a language of utility. And instead of preferring the poetic style native to the language that was becoming obsolete, he prefers that of the one that is at once newly useful and always already sacred.

### III. SAMUEL ON THE CODEX

In addition to writing about text and language as pieces of production by authors (and thus, by definition, translators) Samuel also writes about the form

that encompasses it, namely the codex or the physical book. To begin, it has already been noted that the preface in the form that it existed was a relatively new literary development. Samuel is, thus, obligated to articulate the evolving definition both for his reader's sake and to clarify his own position: "I will interpret those other verses in accordance with what seems to me to have utility with respect to a notion in this book. I also intend to write at greater length in this preface itself — *which is one of the parts of this commentary, just as the preface of every book is its first part* — than I have done so far."<sup>133</sup> However, his spirited defense of the book goes far beyond simple definition of its parts. The codex becomes a concrete locus for Samuel to further argue his case in the various textual matters that have already been discussed, as well as to further his father's claims that it is the codex itself that is the seat of authority.

The role played by Samuel's personal library — the one that his father had advised him in his letter to catalogue well — in his work as a translator is not one that goes unremarked in the prologues. In the preface to his translation of the *Guide*, Samuel describes the principles that governed his work on that text. One of them involved consultation with reference works: "I would take note of every word coined in the books that my father translated, that is, in the translations of my father and teacher, of blessed memory, as well as in the

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<sup>133</sup> Robinson 2007, paragraph 14. Emphasis mine.

books of Arabic and Hebrew grammar that are in my possession.”<sup>134</sup> By making this one of the principles that would guide his work, Samuel rests his own work on two authorities: that of his father’s earlier work, and that of the books he has chosen to make a part of his own collection. A second principle likewise suggests that Samuel saw a twin role for the wisdom of his predecessors and for the wisdom contained in within books: “If I have any doubt remaining about anything, I should contact the great rabbi who was the author and creator of the book and ask him to illuminate it for me. Indeed, I had already him asked a great number of questions in writing about matters in which I still had doubt. It seemed as if there were a few inscrutabilities in the book because the book as it has come to us was uncorrected.”<sup>135</sup> By noting a seemingly minor point of what is, essentially, procedure, Samuel highlights the critical place of the physical exemplar of the text to be translated and its condition. The way in which these two principles are articulated seems to make them stand as prooftexts for Judah’s instructions to Samuel on the proper care of his personal library.

It is also worth noting that Samuel not only harkens back to his father to support his argument, but also places the idea of the book’s esteem into the

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<sup>134</sup> Ibn Tibbon, *Moreh*, p. 117.

<sup>135</sup> Ibn Tibbon, *Moreh*, 116. The reference to the inscrutabilities in the text refers to Samuel’s personal copy of the *Guide*, which he sent to Maimonides in the hopes that the master might emend the text in several places where there seemed to be scribal errors.

much longer trajectory of Jewish history. In one instance he notes: “Moses our Master is the first person we find who provided both kinds of utility. We do not find any earlier sage or prophet — not even Shem or Eber — who composed a book. On the contrary, they only taught and gave instruction in person.”<sup>136</sup> These two factors — the book’s long Jewish history and the reduplicative value of the book — recur throughout Samuel’s writing (and will be evidenced in the examples that are yet to follow).

In fact, Samuel was unapologetic about the esteem in which he held books, even going as far as to argue that a lengthy tome, rather than any other form, would be required for the studying of particularly esoteric teachings. As the prologue to the *Guide* (among other texts) makes clear, Samuel saw himself as a defender of Maimonidean esotericism and as such declared his intention to participate in the production of lengthy books to serve that end, which he continued to emphasize across his career. Even in the preface to the *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* he was still doing so: “I do not intend to be brief, in order to decrease the quantity of paper and reduce its body size, or to make it easier for whoever studies it.”<sup>137</sup> Here he has simultaneously defended both the

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<sup>136</sup> Robinson 2007, paragraph 5.

<sup>137</sup> Robinson 2007, paragraph 37.

place of the book and the space it occupies along with the principle of making certain types of knowledge less accessible.

Additionally, once the challenge of the second Hebrew translation of the *Guide* had been made, he continued his assault on al-Ḥarīzī through the medium of the book as well as through the aforementioned discussion of the relative values of different types of poetry and of the Arabic language. One passage in particular is worth quoting at some length both because of the way that, alongside its defense of the codex, it also issues a subtle critique of al-Ḥarīzī and a further defense of esotericism. It anticipates many of the themes that would be recalled centuries later by Leo Strauss in the eponymous introductory chapter of his collection of essays, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*:

The wise instructor has many stratagems, digressions and circumlocutions with which he can make the understanding student understand his purpose, even when it is not made clear or explained. He cannot do this when writing in a book. For example, someone might say to an associate: ‘you did really well when you did that thing,’ while the person addressed understands that, in the former’s opinion, what he did was really bad. He understand this not from the words themselves — which are contrary to the speaker’s purpose — but from the affectations and accidents of speech: from the appearance of the speaker’s face, which may become red or green like an angry man; from his tone of voice — that is, rather than speaking in a genteel tone and in the way one speaks when speaking in a straightforward manner, he speaks with the tone of someone speaking about something he considers bad; or from other things he might attach to the words or attach the

words thereto. Many examples of this type have been enumerated by the logicians.

All of this is difficult to do in a book. In fact, some of them — such as facial gesture and tone of voice — cannot be used in a book in any way. Even what can be done in a book — such as the juxtaposing of one thing to another and other similar things, which an author can do to attract the students' attention, and guide him toward the purpose — can only be done when both are wise, that is, both author and reader. The author must know how to 'whisper' and make allusions, such that his purpose can be understood from what he writes without revealing a secret — without making it understood to every man and thereby breaching the fence by revealing what is not permitted. His reader must likewise be someone who can 'draw up the deep thing' that is, someone who understands 'whispering' — who can understand the intended meaning with only the slightest allusion. Due to the difficulty of transmitting chapter headings in a book, because of these two reasons, there were few books of wisdom in our community, as the True Sage explained in his Noble Treatise. Nevertheless, any person who found in himself the ability to transmit chapter headings in written form, without revealing any secret, did not refrain from composing or writing something about wisdom, so that the people who have understanding — though they are few — could understand his intention. In this way he could benefit people in these two ways: with the utility that derives from his mouth and tongue during his lifetime; and the utility that derives from his work during his life and after his death.<sup>138</sup>

This long passage is the most direct response to and critique of al-Ḥarīzī's translation. Aviezer Ravitzky explains that the frequent references to chapter headings here represent Samuel's attempt to suggest that his rival's florid prose and regular divisions of the text erase much of its original hidden

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<sup>138</sup> Robinson, paragraphs 13-14.

meaning, which his very literal style of translation can neatly preserve for the astute reader.<sup>139</sup> The opprobrium generated by al-Ḥarīzī's *Moreh* in Samuel's mind is articulated in terms of how the book itself is constructed. The fact that the responses to al-Ḥarīzī fit so squarely in with his discussion of the various aspects of translation and book culture suggests real, deep difference between the two men and their conceptions of how best to carry out their duties.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

It is not new to suggest that Samuel's theory of translation is deeply and consistently simple, privileging the shape — and all the ambiguities — of the original over the music of the target language; he makes this clear even down to the level of his grammatical descriptions of the languages he manipulates into text. What has not yet been observed is the extent to which Samuel's translations and his own theories of translation both evoke and reflect the state of linguistic flux of the Andalusī Jewish exiles and their descendants and intellectual cohort. Just as Samuel's work was helping to usher in a renovated set of parameters for the use of Hebrew and to alter its relationship with Arabic in terms of utility and pure prestige, that work reflects the awareness of and unease with those changes. And in this state of flux, Samuel's authority and the

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<sup>139</sup> Ravitzky 1981, 104 and ff.

validity of his methods were not immediately accepted; even though this is something that is frequently overlooked in modern scholarship, it was keenly felt both during Samuel's lifetime, as we can see in the conflict between him and Judah al-Ḥarīzī, and in his constant reassertion of his own principles, as well as for several generations afterwards, as we shall see in the next chapter.



### Chapter Three

#### “This Text Was Translated from Arabic by Samuel Ibn Tibbon”: The Colophon that Wasn’t

It was an afterthought, almost: A colophon scribbled at the end of a single sixteenth-century Italian manuscript copy of an ostensibly thirteenth-century Hebrew-language Alexander romance.

The Hebrew Alexander romances are themselves a minor branch of the genre of texts referred to as Alexander Romances, texts that are translations of and elaborations upon the life of Alexander the Great composed in Greek by an author known to history as the Psuedo-Callisthenes. Three versions of a Latin translation of the Greek, known as the *Historia Proeliis* and distinguished from amongst themselves by modern scholars as J1, J2 and J3, form the basis of the versions extant in both Romance and Semitic languages.<sup>140</sup> The existence of information and legends concerning the life of Alexander within other Jewish and Hebrew-language textual traditions, ranging from Midrash and Talmud to the historical writings of Josephus to episodes in medieval frame-tale-style wisdom literature, allows for the particular distinctions found in the Hebrew versions. Similarly, the identification as Alexander of the figure known as “Dhū l-Qarnayn” (an association that may be found to have been made explicit

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<sup>140</sup> W.J. van Bakkum, “Alexander the Great in Medieval Hebrew Literature,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 49 (1986): 218-26.

beginning in the thirteenth century, in the early works of al-Ṭabarī) who appears along with Moses in Sūra 18 of the Qurʾān, provides additional source material that the translators of Arabic versions had to contend with and include or explain in their works.<sup>141</sup>

Virtually every major literary tradition manifests at least one version of the Alexander Romance, as well as additional texts referred to collectively as Alexander legends, based on other source material. Contemporary scholarship recognizes a phenomenon whereby Alexander is all things to all men, illustrated by the fact that British Victorian-era historians painted the portrait of an efficient administrator of a vast colonial empire while to Greek nationalists he is the father of their nation and to German writers of a certain mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century ilk, his is the progenitor of a master race, all portrayals that, while technically accurate with regard to Alexander, tell us more about his biographers than about himself. The proliferation of medieval versions suggests that, like their modern counterparts, medieval readers, both the archetypal and the not, found something of value and of themselves in Alexander's life. A favorite example of this is the late medieval Aljamiado-Morisco version, written shortly before the expulsion of the Moriscos from the

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<sup>141</sup> Brannon Wheeler, "Q18: 60-65 in Early Islamic Exegesis." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 57:3 (1998), 191-215.

Iberian Peninsula by Felipe III, in which Alexander is portrayed, anachronistically, as the protector of Muslims.

The colophon appended to this Hebrew Alexander manuscript, which names Samuel ibn Tibbon as its own translator and claims that he was a better translator of Maimonides than Judah al-Ḥarīzī, cements the text's status as a mirror of its own time rather than of the fourth century B.C.E. But there is a twist. Samuel ibn Tibbon was not the Hebrew translator of the text, and so through the colophon, the text becomes a reflection of three time-periods: that of Alexander, that of Samuel, and that of the colophonist. The relationship between the last two of these is the main subject of this chapter.

The colophon itself was almost certainly of no greater consequence to the copyist than the rest of the text, and its spurious and anachronistic appearance means that its message was even more likely irrelevant in any kind of concrete, diachronic way to the composer of the text. It obviously mattered to someone, at some later point — the manuscript evidence puts its most likely genesis in the fourteenth century. While this shadowy figure's motives for inventing a provenance for this text may seem the stuff of great footnotes and of novels by Umberto Eco they are in fact deeply rooted in the textual debates of the period he inhabited, debates which spoke directly to the period inhabited by his would-be namesake, Samuel ibn Tibbon, inhabited. Even though it is not

native to the thirteenth century, this brief colophon poses a salient set of questions about the Toledo of that time, and of its environs and exiles, drawing in the most larger-than-life figures. It forces into the arena of the literary a debate over the identity of an emergent nation within a nation before a time when we might even speak of nationhood in its strictest sense, holding the Andalusí sensibilities that still prevailed in Toledo in stark contrast with the Christian-influenced European cultural, artistic and religious values taking shape in the south of what is today France. For an afterthought, for an addition to the text whose provenance puts its only witness squarely in early modernity, it is laden with meaning for the medieval. By asserting that a Hebrew-language Alexander romance is the most appropriate locus to debate the relative merits of different translations of Moses Maimonides' religious-philosophical writings, the anonymous colophonist raises the significant questions about authorship, translation and textual privilege and privileging.

The colophon appended to the end of the manuscript is likely as much a work of fiction as the Alexander text it follows. Yet both texts manage to make the same claims about history and intellectual endeavor. That is, they both contain kernels of remembered history and assertions of thematic truths cloaked in an imaginative narrative that insists upon the universality of ideas and advocates for their universal dissemination. The Alexander text functions

as Alexander texts do, and the colophon is a witness first to the world in which the colophonist himself lived and worked, a world that had already seen the advent and nationalization of Castilian and which was poised, though not yet inexorably, overlooking the edge of the modernity that would come to bear in Spain in the fifteenth, when that language would become the companion of its own broader empire; and second back to the end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth in Toledo, where texts are being translated in multiple versions and competing for dominance and readership. Even though he does not write a fully historical version of events, attributing to Samuel ibn Tibbon a text he most likely did not personally translate, the colophonist is first and foremost a historian, recording, about a century after the fact, his view of a debate that, by the time he lived, was largely resolved.

I will propose in this chapter that the colophonist who invents the Pseudo-Samuel ibn Tibbon is arguing from at least a century thence, and with the knowledge that his would-be namesake was victorious, that Samuel's method was superior to Judah al-Ḥarīzī's and that this argument both reflects the outcome of the changes in the status of Hebrew that were afoot during Samuel's lifetime and the Tibbonids' role in effecting those changes. The colophon likewise stands as an artifact — the logical conclusion — of those changes. In order to remember the period when Samuel's primacy as the

translator of the *Guide* was not yet assured, the anonymous colophonist re-argues the case; and in doing so, he elects the historical and literary moment by which his readers, at least, will remember that period in time. The argument no longer had to be made, but the colophonist made his Pseudo-Samuel write as if the debate over translation and textual authority were happening anew, with that singularity as his memory and knowledge of the period in which the real Samuel lived. By making an ahistorical claim a century or so after the fact, the colophonist manages to portray the intellectual life of Toledo during the last decades of the twelfth century and the first decades of the thirteenth from his vantage point in the middle of the fourteenth century; and in doing so, he perhaps inadvertently opens a window onto the development and developing notion of individual authorship set against the contemporaneous, ever-expanding intellectual agenda rooted in the reinvigoration of the debates over how to carry Maimonides' writings and theology into the future.

### 3.1 THE MANUSCRIPT: TEXTUAL AND PHYSICAL PROVENANCE

The first 200 years of the manuscript's provenance are unaccounted for. The first record we have of its existence is in the possession of one Daniel Itzig, a cousin of the famed Mendelsson family and titular Court Jew during the

rule of Freidrich Wilhelm II over Prussia (r. 1786-97); his imprinted insignia is still visible on the first and last pages of the volume. After Itzig's death, the manuscript came into the possession of the institution formerly known as Jews' College London, now the London School of Judaic Studies, where it was rebound in a binding typical of the style current in nineteenth-century western Europe. When the LSJS decided in 1999 to sell off its entire manuscript collection through Christie's in New York, an anonymous buyer purchased the manuscript for just over \$12,000, more than six times the price it was expected to bring, subsequently donating it to Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.<sup>142</sup> The script is typical of Italian manuscripts produced in the mid-sixteenth century and the scribe seems to have been fairly careful, with fewer than ten single-word omissions across the whole manuscript, all corrected in the margin in the same hand. The manuscript came into contact with water at some point during its time in London, and the tide-line interferes with legibility in a few places. A few eighteenth-century European calligraphic marks in the margins are, as yet, unidentified, but could potentially yield additional information about the manuscript's travels in Europe.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Christie's. *Important Hebrew Manuscripts and Printed Books: Wednesday 23 June 1999*, 22-3. The disposition of this lot is reported on the auction house's web site: [http://www.christies.com/LotFinder/lot\\_details.aspx?from=salesummary&intObjectID=1525472&sid=26bd1fd0-a9bb-4d0a-86c7-ce4fb6a05dd2](http://www.christies.com/LotFinder/lot_details.aspx?from=salesummary&intObjectID=1525472&sid=26bd1fd0-a9bb-4d0a-86c7-ce4fb6a05dd2) (accessed 6/10/10).

<sup>143</sup> Although they are not critical to the present project, I am still investigating these marks in the hopes that they will yield more information about the manuscript's provenance.

The text of the romance represents a Hebrew adaptation of an Arabic version, now lost, of the most widely disseminated version of the *Historia Proeliis*, typically given the notation J2; the existence of the Arabic version alleged in the colophon is confirmed by the frequent usage of highly Arabizing syntax in the Hebrew version. In addition to the London/Beinecke manuscript, a second complete manuscript of the Hebrew version, minus the evocative colophon, forms part of the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France,<sup>144</sup> and partial copies of the same exist in collections in Oxford and Modena; a third partial copy known to have existed in Damascus is now lost.<sup>145</sup>

The Latin version upon which the Hebrew version under discussion was based, an adaptation of the aforementioned Pseudo-Callisthenes' life of Alexander (as noted earlier), is itself also the basis for the canonical Castilian version of the life of Alexander, which will be the subject of future research. The Hebrew text also contains a fairly long interpolation based on the text of *Sefer Yosifon* a historical account of the Jews in late antique Greco-Roman Palestine produced in tenth-century Italy that includes a section on Alexander's relationship to them. Another source may have been the collection of philosophers' dicta known in Hebrew as *Sefer Musrei ha-Filosofim*. Both of

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<sup>144</sup> W.J. van Bakkum. *A Hebrew Alexander Romance According to MS Heb. 671.5 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale*. Groningen: Styx, 1994.

<sup>145</sup> W.J. van Bakkum. "Alexander the Great in Hebrew Literature," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 49, 218.



these texts will be discussed in greater detail towards the end of this chapter for their twin connections with the Alexander text and with the translators implicated by the colophon.

### 3.2 THE TEXT

The colophon, which appears below the last few lines of text on the last page of the manuscript, reads:

This book was completed, having been translated<sup>146</sup> by the sage and the true investigator of the secrets of life and wisdom, R. Samuel bar Judah Ibn Tibbon (of blessed memory) of Rimon-Sefarad [Granada]; he translated it at the same time as he translated *The Guide*, which cannot be valued in the gold of Ofir. This book is found in the hands of few people in the translation of al-Ḥarīzī, which is very error-ridden because *he adapted it from its language*,<sup>147</sup> but the excellent above-mentioned translator (let his recompense be complete!) translated it from Arabic<sup>148</sup> into Hebrew. Perfected and completed, praise be to the Lord of the Worlds. He alone is God and there is no other.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Steven Bowman, in his review of the critical edition (see bibliography for full details), rightly notes that van Bakkum does not adequately problematize the meaning of the word *he'etiq* in the colophon; although van Bakkum gives it the meaning *to copy*, I have rendered it here as *to translate*, both because this manuscript is not, in fact, an autograph and, more significantly, because that same root is consistently used to mean *to translate* in the correspondence on translation between Samuel Ibn Tibbon and Moses Maimonides. However, it should not be read with this sense across the board; see following footnote.

<sup>147</sup> The phrase given here in italics is usually translated to reflect editorial and scholarly belief that a word is missing, as follows: "...he translated it from the [...] language." My argument in support of the reading given here and against the emendation of the text follows later in this chapter.

<sup>148</sup> Lit.: "... from the Hagarite language." This locution was discussed in part in chapter two, and will be discussed again below.

<sup>149</sup> The Hebrew text is found in Van Bakkum 1992, 204. All translations are my own except where noted.

It is a bullion-cube of an afterthought, with each phrase raising a new question or offering insight into the mentalité of this scribe in particular and, more generally, of the community of Andalusī exiles and their descendants living in the south of France, and those who wrote about them and their ideas later. The colophon suggests an identity for the translator, namely Samuel ibn Tibbon; connects this translation with Samuel's translation of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*; and does all of this before then insisting that Samuel ibn Tibbon is a superior translator to Judah al-Ḥarīzī and lampooning the skills of the latter.

Additionally, the colophon defines a cast of characters involved in the otherwise-anonymous text's production — both the cast it explicitly asks us to believe in and the one we can extrapolate from its own mere existence: In the first case, there is, perhaps, only Samuel. In the second, there is Samuel, acting as the front or the authority-giving face of the project; there is Pseudo-Samuel, the otherwise anonymous man we must assume translated the text from Arabic since all extra-textual indications (again, to be outlined in the pages to follow) are that the flesh-and-blood, historical Samuel ibn Tibbon did not compose this text; there is Judah al-Ḥarīzī, the writer and translator made to serve only as counterpoint to Samuel's literary program; there is the colophonist himself, the perpetrator of this fantastic literary delusion; there is the sixteenth-century

Italian copyist; and there are the two giants who loom in the background: Alexander the Great and Moses Maimonides. This enlarged cast serves as a very concrete way for the colophonist to focus the reader's attention on the processes that result in defining a canon of religious and intellectual identities: the juxtaposition of Samuel and Judah is representative of debates over how to transfer a text from one language and culture into another and conveys the prestige held by the most important translators; the inferred presence of Pseudo-Samuel simultaneously emphasizes that same prestige but also the flip side of it, namely that the name could come to be more important than the individual bearing it; the addition of Maimonides to a text that is as far from related to his work and ideas as it was possible for a text to be in the immediate wake of his death is demonstrative of the reach of his influence and the permanent presence of issues of religious identity in the minds of the post-Andalus Iberian Jews; and finally, by writing such a fantastical, attention-grabbing coda to the text the colophonist reminds his readers of the stakes by invoking all of these elements.

The rest of this chapter will serve, then, to explicate the colophon, phrase by phrase, and then to set it into a wider panorama of the textual attitudes and activities of the constructors of at least one incipient nation. As noted earlier, the manner in which the colophon draws the matter of religious doctrine and

interpretation into a text that itself has more of a historiographic bent is critically important. It is suggestive of an intellectual environment that places a premium on translation of text from one culture to another simultaneous with the translators' own moves between the culture and language into which they were born into the one they were helping to create by their work.

But finally, before moving on to the close reading of the colophon or even a text-based discussion of its veracity, it bears mentioning that considerations within the realms of genre, known types of forgery, and what John Dagenais so lyrically calls “the ethics of reading in manuscript culture” suggest that the central claim of the colophon is quite likely to have been a fiction.<sup>150</sup> Over the past two decades scholars largely in Israel have undertaken systematic and thorough study of the colophons appended to Hebrew manuscripts.<sup>151</sup> Their research has shown, among other defining characteristics of Hebrew colophons, that the majority of these miniature texts do not appear until the fifteenth century, at least as far as literary production within the wider Sephardic community is concerned,<sup>152</sup> thereby already making the Alexander

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<sup>150</sup> John Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture*. Princeton: UP, 1994.

<sup>151</sup> See bibliographic entries for Colette Sirat and Malachi Beit-Arie.

<sup>152</sup> Malachi Beit-Arie, “Colophonated Hebrew Manuscripts Produced in Spain and the Distribution of Localised Codices,” *Signo: Revista de Historia de la Cultura Escrita* 6 (1999), 161-78.

colophon a chronological improbability — though by no means an impossibility.

Some of the earliest colophons also provide information that shores up what we know about the various centers of translation and manuscript production, both in terms of the identities of individual copyists, students and teachers active in those centers and also in terms of the depth of knowledge about the extent to which copying was a communal activity.<sup>153</sup> However, the analysis of Hebrew-Sephardic colophons has, to date, been largely onomastic and topographical, concentrating on the frequency with which names are repeated and the number of colophoned codices produced in various regions either ruled by Iberian principalities (like Sicily, for example) or populated by Jewish communities that had left or had connections to Spain (like North Africa). Little seems to have been said thus far on the nature of biblical quotations or extra-textual references found within the colophons, leaving room for a more comprehensive textual study; the raw codicological data are made available for further analysis through a database known as SFAR-DATA.<sup>154</sup> In other words, it may be difficult to fully contextualize this

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<sup>153</sup> Michael Reigler, “Were the Yeshivot in Spain Centers for the Copying of Books?,” *Sefarad* 57:2 (1997), 373-98.

<sup>154</sup> The database is not yet fully accessible outside of the Jewish National and University Library. The information is being made available in increments at the web site: <http://sfardata.nli.org.il/sfardataweb/home.aspx> (accessed 6/18/11).

colophon within the corpus of Hebrew colophons without first engaging in a more general textual study of that corpus.<sup>155</sup>

In spite of the fact that the existing analyses are mostly descriptive and focus only on certain aspects of colophon-writing, through that work it is still possible to gain a better understanding of falsified colophons, that is, exemplars of the genre that state a claim about the origins of a text or particular manuscript that can be demonstrated to be historically false. Several factors suggest an alternative history for a manuscript than the one that actually led to its creation. They range from the facile — a scribe might simply have transcribed a date incorrectly or might have correctly transcribed an error that had been introduced into his *Vorlage* — to the status-seeking — particularly in the case of pietistic and religious texts a less-literate patron might have paid a scribe to copy a manuscript (particularly a Torah scroll) as though the patron himself had copied it even though such a respected undertaking would have been beyond his abilities — to the practical — the head of a workshop might have assumed credit for a manuscript copied in whole or part by his disciples<sup>156</sup> — to the tributary — it was not uncommon for a student to use the colophon to ascribe a manuscript copy of an important text to his teacher, a

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<sup>155</sup> A possible future project.

<sup>156</sup> This particularly comes into play beginning in the 13<sup>th</sup> century when Christian textual Hebraism takes off and the demand for Hebrew manuscripts skyrocketed.

sign of respect and submissiveness.<sup>157</sup> None of these circumstances describes anything like what is seen in the colophon of the London/Yale manuscript. The colophon is out of the ordinary if it is genuine, then, but is also out of the ordinary if it is a fake.

Nevertheless, the fact of the claims being asserted in the colophon speaks volumes. As I will demonstrate in the following section, it hardly matters whether we may call the translator Samuel or must simply resign ourselves to his being a Pseudo-Samuel. Because of both the particular medieval readership practices and because of the notorious unreliability of the medieval colophon, The translator's identity is not crucially important; the simple fact of its assertion in combination with all the other elements of this briefest of textual digressions, of this decades-delayed afterthought, provides a clear insight into how the generation of readers that grew up in Maimonides' wake and in the aftermath of the first of the many instances when they would lose their beloved Sefarad understood the relationship between text and the sacred.

Finally, now in the pages that follow, I will address each claim made by the colophon, in the order in which it appears in the text, in order to parse it

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<sup>157</sup> Colette Sirat, "The colophon," *Hebrew Manuscripts of the Middle Ages*. Cambridge: UP, 208-11.

and draw out its internal peculiarities and the curiosity of its juxtaposition against the Alexander romance with which it appears.

3.2.1 “THIS BOOK WAS COMPLETED, HAVING BEEN TRANSLATED BY ... SAMUEL B. JUDAH IBN TIBBON.”

If a colophon to the Alexander text were to be written today, it might inform its reader that the book was not translated by Samuel ibn Tibbon; or that the book was translated by someone claiming to be Samuel; or by someone who had no interest in representing this work as having been by Samuel but that once the book was translated, its afterlife was in the hands of its readers. More likely, a modern colophon would simply ignore the famous identity of the alleged author; one might assume this not only because the thought of a modern reader adding a colophon to such a text is thoroughly fantastical owing to the evolution of readership practices since the middle ages, but also on the basis of the way the text has been ignored in modern studies of the Tibbonid school and of Samuel's own production, even down to the discussion of the texts that have been attributed spuriously to him. Even in the canon of texts written by the Pseudo-Samuels of history, the Hebrew Alexander romance does not rank.



That such a pseudo-canon attributed to Samuel ibn Tibbon exists at all is indicative of the value for later writers of attaching Samuel's name to their works. Among them is a translation of some works of Averroes (in addition to the ones that are accurately attributed to Samuel) and of Maimonides' introduction to *Mishnah Sanhedrin* suggested by Isaac Abravanel. And most relevant is the Hebrew translation of 'Alī ibn Riḍwān's Arabic version of Galen's *Ars Parvae*. This attribution is particularly interesting in this context because it is made not through an assertion in a later text but by a colophon appended to the end of a single manuscript, Paris 1114: "Here ends the philosopher 'Alī ibn Riḍwān's commentary to the book *Ars Parvae* attributed to Galen, translated by Samuel bar Judah ibn Tibbon in the city of Beziers which he completed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Elul in the year (4)959; blessed is the Helper, amen." The Alexander romance is not strictly in keeping with these texts, but nevertheless should still be considered along with the others authored by various Pseudo-Samuels (if not by Samuel himself).

The distinction between Samuel's spurious and veracious translations can be made on the basis of a variety of factors ranging from the comparison of linguistic signatures from known exemplars of Samuel's work to extra-textual evidence. In addition to reading a text and determining whether it sounds like Samuel, scholars can extrapolate Samuel's role or lack thereof from what little

is secure about the absolute chronology of his life. We may also discern the intellectual agenda that might be manifest in the translation,<sup>158</sup> and consider even the typology of texts that were translated.

The scholarly silence on this particular colophon is not complete, however. One exception to the rule that the Alexander romance is omitted is its presence in Colette Sirat's *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, in which the author takes Samuel's authorship as given and uncontroversial.<sup>159</sup> This conclusion is particularly bizarre given that the same author wrote one of the canonical works on Hebrew manuscripts and colophons. The other major exception came when partisans of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* addressed the identification briefly — and, more importantly, very dismissively — as part of their comprehensive project of documentation of medieval Hebrew and Judaeo-Arabic literature. One of these, Moritz Steinschneider, who was responsible for cataloguing the Hebrew manuscripts and for writing histories of their literature<sup>160</sup> that were authoritative in their day and still hold great value for contemporary scholars, argued that Samuel could not have been the

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<sup>158</sup> Such an agenda and the formative intellectual experiences that would have led Samuel to hold such views are the subject of the second chapter of this section. Thus, the discussion here will remain focused primarily on the other factors that come into play in identifying Samuel as the author of texts and in using his name to elevate the stature of texts he had not written.

<sup>159</sup> Sirat 2004, 217.

<sup>160</sup> Representative of these are: *Die Hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters*, Berlin, 1893; *Polemische und Apologetische Literatur in Arabischer Sprache Zwischen Muslimen, Christen und Juden*, Leipzig 1877.

translator of the Alexander romance because a member of such an important and intellectually sophisticated school of translators would not have undertaken a prose history or a romance.<sup>161</sup> This opinion, later echoed by Steinschneider's disciple Israel Levi,<sup>162</sup> is, of course, immediately contradicted by the existence of texts that were translated or reworked by the most prominent and skilled translators; the prime example of this is Judah al-Ḥarīzī's reworking of al-Ḥarīrī's *maqāmāt* in a strenuous assertion of *faḍā'il al-lughā*.<sup>163</sup> The dignity of the translator, then, can hardly be considered seriously as a reason to doubt Samuel's authorship.

In spite of its seriously flawed assumptions, Steinschneider's argument does bring to the fore an interesting element of medieval translation practice, namely the selection and relative value of different texts and types of texts that were to be translated. His argument rests upon the assumption that the Alexander romance would not have fit within any coherent translation program typical of the systematic approach to texts adopted by translators then and there

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<sup>161</sup> Cited in van Bakkum, 1994.

<sup>162</sup> Israel Levi, "Les Traductions Hébraïques de l'Histoire d'Alexandre," *Révue des Études Juives* 3 (1881), 238-50.

<sup>163</sup> Although this is objectively the best and best-known example of an excellent and famous Hebrew translation of an Arabic rhymed-prose text not primarily of a philosophical nature, in the context of the Alexander colophon, it represents something of a circular argument: Our colophonist regarded al-Ḥarīzī to be a vastly inferior translator compared to Samuel, so using him as proof against Steinschneider's contention that the best of the class would not have undertaken to translate such texts would no convince our colophonist or any reader who adopted his stance. Although the one curious literary insult certainly does not imply the other, both the insults and the insulters make strange and strangely harmonious bedfellows.

that Samuel might have been in the course of establishing for himself.

Translation programs tended to be coherent and to speak to the interests or values of either the translators or the patrons; in other words, even though Steinschneider's conclusion was incorrect, his thought process did not come completely out of left field but, rather, out of consideration of an important characteristic of medieval translation.

As noted, Maimonides' letter to Samuel provides counsel on the texts that are worthy of study and translation: The works of Aristotle above all else, but only with the aid of good commentaries like those of Alexander of Aphrodisias; Alfarabi over Avicenna; Ibn Bājja but not al-Rāzī; and Averroes, but, crucially, not the works spuriously attributed to him. Because a text that is falsely attributed to Samuel becomes part of the battlefield over the merits of the different translations of the *Guide*, Maimonides' admonition that Samuel avoid wasting his time on texts that are falsely attributed to Aristotle gains additional meaning. This contradiction represents just one of the instances in which Maimonides' advice about how best to translate his own work (and work in general) ranges from being ignored in the abstract to being countermanded in practice. It becomes ever clearer that the translation programs undertaken by those claiming his intellectual inheritance and asserting themselves as his followers could very well not have passed muster with the master. Yet like the

historical memory of Alexander that becomes its own, varied, legends, that same kind of memory of Maimonides, even shortly after the man's death, becomes a similar vessel: in the face of all the writings and admonitions and advice, the magnitude of the myth allows each reader, each follower, to fashion his own personal Maimonides.

Another element that allows us to better flesh out our understanding of the editorial sensibilities that guided the ruling in or out of types of texts in general or of particular texts in specific instances is primarily a codicological one. Although the original Arabic version of Maimonides' reply to Samuel is lost, the Hebrew version that Samuel himself translated survives in manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, the Adler Collection, in a private collection in Istanbul, and in the De Rossi collection in Verona. Steinschneider discovered another copy, referred to as MS Kaufmann; and although it was known to contemporaneous scholarship, which recorded some of its variant readings, the manuscript itself was lost before it could be published in its entirety.<sup>164</sup> None is considered to be a completely accurate representation of what Maimonides himself wrote, but Isaiah Sonne published a comprehensive critical edition in 1939 and Isaac Shailat published another in 1988 in his collection of Maimonides' letters. Most of the versions, as well as the critical editions of

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<sup>164</sup> Marx, 374-81.

course, spell out in detail the preferences for certain texts and authors delineated above, the aforementioned preference for Alfarabi over Avicenna and the preference for the real Aristotle over any Pseudo-Aristotle. However, the Verona manuscript, which many scholars believe to represent an exemplar of Samuel ibn Tibbon's own handwriting, treats this section in an entirely different and telling way. The above-quoted paragraph is replaced by the following appraisal made by the copyist (who, again, was probably Samuel himself): "And after this [Maimonides] indicated the books in these sciences that one ought to read and the books that are not worth my time wasted in reading them. I do not need to copy them for you."<sup>165</sup> Samuel's abridgment of the list reflects his assumption of a mantle of textual authority. A canon of useless books had been delineated for him to avoid disseminating to the community. As long as he translated what Maimonides had deemed to be of worth and ignored the rest, then the community had no need even to be made privy to what was missing, since there was ostensibly no value in it. Maimonides stands as the first authority, making the determination of value; Samuel occupies a second level of authority, disseminating only the valuable and concealing the texts that lack value.

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<sup>165</sup> Trans., Harvey in Harvey 1992, 51.

Both the emendation to the Verona manuscript of the Maimonides letter and the colophon appended to the London/Beinecke manuscript of the Alexander romance essentially perform the same function; that is, they ask the reader to accept Samuel's authority as arbiter of textual value. In the case of the former, the manuscript asks the reader to accept an omission of information and believe the author's assertion that what is missing is not worth knowing or even being aware of. In the case of the latter, the colophon asks the reader to accept, on the sheer face of it, its ranking of the translations, going so far as to dismiss the value of texts that the readers might already have in their possession. Returning full circle, then, one may conclude that Steinschneider's methodology and approach to this particular question, when fed with solid textual evidence rather than assumptions guided by late nineteenth-century biases about what constitutes intellectual value, ends up being suggestive of exactly the opposite of what he concluded. Rather than being a text beneath the dignity of Samuel's ability, the Alexander romance and its colophon pertain concretely to a variety of debates about literature and editorial practice that were current among its medieval readers.

Nevertheless, there is really little doubt about the accuracy of the substance of Steinschneider's conclusion even if his rationale was flawed. An overlay of the chronology of Samuel's life and of the place of the Hebrew

Alexander romance among related texts further calls into question the plausibility of Samuel's authorship of the text. In the introduction to his edition of the text, W.J. Van Bakkum posits a *terminus post quem* for the text, a date after which it could not possibly have been composed. The basis for this terminal point is the use of the Alexander episode in Abraham ibn Daūd's *Sefer ha-Qabbalah* as an additional source for the Hebrew Alexander romance;<sup>166</sup> this would mean that the text could not predate 1160. However, the dependence of the text in the London/Beineke manuscript on the text of *Sefer ha-Qabbalah* is not a complete certainty. The correspondence between the two seems limited — restricted perhaps to a single sentence — and given that, in combination with the preponderance of Alexander sources available in the environment and the intellectual exchange among the literate elites in the north of the Iberian Peninsula and the south of France, a direct relationship between the text may be compelling neither in and of itself nor as a tool for dating any other texts.

Resulting from the contention of 1160 as a *terminus post quem*, an additional argument against Samuel's authorship presents itself. As noted briefly above, pairing absolute chronology with the events of Samuel's life has proven to be a treacherous and imprecise undertaking. Standard chronology gives Samuel's date of birth around 1150. The difficulty that this would present

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<sup>166</sup> Van Bakkum 1992.



for the Alexander text is that Samuel would have been just ten years old at the upper limit of the text's chronological window of composition, making it unlikely that he could have undertaken such a massive translation project. In his review of Van Bekkum's edition, Steven Bowman argues that "by the age of ten, a medieval prodigy would have had five years at least of sound Hebrew training and, no doubt, ibn Tibbon's father would have already initiated him into the intricacies of Arabic... hence the age of ibn Tibbon may be irrelevant to the argument of date."<sup>167</sup> While optimistic and probably ultimately correct in its conclusions, Bowman's line of thinking is also not wholly convincing. First, the length of the text is much longer than what one would expect to find in a corpus of schoolboys' exercises; prodigy or not, the sheer extent of this text would probably have been beyond the capacities of a child. And while lacking the philosophical intricacies of a text like the *K. al-Shifā'* or the *Ars Parvae*, the Hebrew Alexander is not a historiographically simple text.

In sum, although it is unlikely that Samuel translated the Alexander romance from its lost Arabic version into the Hebrew one that is preserved, the reasons for such an unlikelihood that have been presented up to now are not convincing. It may seem doubtful that Samuel would have translated the text because his name appears associated with only one manuscript and because

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<sup>167</sup> Steven Bowman, "Review: Two Hebrew Alexander Romances," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 48:1 (1997), 167.

there is no external evidence that this text was part of his portfolio or even on his radar screen more than it would have been for any intellectual aware of all of the Alexander literature. It is unlikely that the colophon accurately describes the text's paternity, but barring the appearance new evidence of Samuel's activities as a translator, there is absolutely no way to be sure. And in the absence of a compelling reason to think that this was his work, the default position must remain that he was not.

### 3.2.2 HE TRANSLATED IT AT THE SAME TIME AS HE TRANSLATED *THE GUIDE*<sup>168</sup>

The implications of the next phrase of the colophon might perhaps be explained best by analogy: listening to Leonard Bernstein's *Jeremiah* symphony, one is apt to have the surprisingly dissociative experience of getting up from the music and maybe even from the notes and going about his activities only to discover himself spending the rest of the day humming "Tonight, tonight, the world began tonight" — in other words, lyrics to the music that Bernstein composed for the decidedly un-*Jeremiah*-like *West Side Story*. Having begun his earliest work on *West Side Story* while completing his first symphony-orchestral work, Bernstein inhabited a single, coherent musical

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<sup>168</sup> Although the content of the Alexander romance itself is, strictly speaking, beyond the scope of the present study, a future iteration of this section will explore that text as an artifact itself of the Maimonidean controversies.

universe. And although the works are wholly distinct, both in ways that were out of Bernstein's control and ways which only he determined, motifs that appear in one recur in the other, progressions of notes that progressed through Bernstein's head progressed onto the page in variations that fit each of the different contexts. This wasn't laziness but simply the expression of a unified theory of the sounds of his head.

The Alexander colophonist, in the next phrase of his short text, asserts the existence and relevance of a similar, single, coherent intellectual universe inhabited by the translator. Although it is couched in terms of chronology, the order in which the texts were composed cannot be the only thing at stake in this phrase, which also encodes a connection, real or imagined, between the two texts — the Alexander romance and the *Guide* — which seemingly have little else in common. If it were the case that all the colophonist wanted to do was to establish a chronology (again, either a genuine one or one that would serve his imaginative purposes), he could easily have added a date well within the conventions of the genre.

Dated colophons (both those with veracious dates and those whose dates range from questionable to mistaken to forged) are not uncommon. The scribe who added the colophon to the text might have deployed any number of techniques in order to inform his future readers of the chronology of the text:

colophon dates are indicated according to a variety of calendar epochs and in a variety of forms and mark the dates of a whole host of scribal feats and lifecycle milestones.<sup>169</sup> However, the colophonist seems at first not to have done any of this, choosing instead to date his text by pegging it to another; one cannot consider that idiosyncratic choice to have been made lightly. This next phrase of the colophon does assert chronology — this Hebrew version would have been translated between the 1190s and 1213, the years when Samuel is known to have been translating the *Guide* — but also opens a discussion of the relationship between the Alexander text and others, and further characterizes the intellectual environment in which the text was translated.

An absolute chronology may be hidden within. The manuscript copy of the text that is still extant has been dated to 1520, though this tells us nothing about the date of the Vorlage (which we know to have existed based on the type of scribal errors corrected in the margins). It seems possible that the scribe encoded a date in the acronym he used to end his series of doxologies. The letters *bet-yud-lamed-alef-nun* stand for the phrase *barukh adonai le-‘olam amen*. In many cases, scribes used doxologies and individual words within biblical verses copied at the end of the colophon as alpha-numeric indicators of the year in which the copy was made. Taking the letter *bet* to indicate that this

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<sup>169</sup> Sirat, *Hebrew Manuscripts*, 219-20.

was the year in which the text was copied, we are left with a sum of 193 (with the number five indicating the number of millennia from creation being frequently omitted), which would correspond to the year 1333. If that is an accurate date, the addition of the colophon dates to just over a century after the text was translated. But given the significant ways in which this departs from the typology of dating colophons through wordplay,<sup>170</sup> the suggestion that this acronym might indeed represent a date remains highly speculative. Even if the acronym does encode a date, it is the date of the colophon and of the assertions of identity made therein and not the date of the translation itself; this should be understood as an important clue as to the nature of the colophon but not one that can be used to assess the chronological claims that hinder or further the suggestion of Samuel as translator. Finally, it seems that the colophonist's mention of Samuel's translation of Maimonides is not meant to be a chronological point of reference but rather an ideological and stylistic one. The addition of a concrete, if covert, date to the colophon would seem to support this suggestion; in other words, there would have been no need to date the colophon a second time by pinning it to the translation of the *Guide* if it were already pinned to a specific year.

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<sup>170</sup> See, especially, Sirat, *Hebrew Manuscripts*, 271-20.

On the surface of it, then, this piece of the colophon is an assertion of a timeline: the translation of one happened contemporaneously to the translation of the other. A timeline of other texts can be established based on intra-textual evidence:<sup>171</sup> The Latin *Historia Proeliis*, composed in 1182, a text whose contribution to the Hebrew Alexander concretely ties this Hebrew version to the other Alexander-related literary activity underway in Toledo at the time and demonstrates that it happened in concert with the broader context rather than in parallel or on the periphery; the relationship between *Sefer Yosifon*, which is the source of the pericope usually referred to as Interpolation B in the London/Beinecke manuscript, and *Sefer Musrei ha-Filosofim* (the latter having been translated into Hebrew by Judah al-Ḥarīzī from an Arabic book of dicta by Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, the renowned father of the earlier translation movement in the eastern Mediterranean) and the wider Hebrew Alexander tradition pushes the dating scheme later;<sup>172</sup> the Alexander episode in Abraham ibn Daūd's *Sefer ha-Qabbalah* is thought to derive from this text, a relationship that fixes the

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<sup>171</sup> Here I refer only to the text of the London/New Haven manuscript and closely related (though not identical) texts, such as MS Paris; other Hebrew Alexander romances exist which draw more heavily on Talmudic and Midrashic sources and less on the sources that fall under the generic category of wisdom literature or which purport to be historical in nature.

<sup>172</sup> Additionally, the relationship between the Alexander and the *Musrei ha-Filosofim*, translated from Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq's Arabic by none other than Judah al-Ḥarīzī, further problematizes the relationship between the text and the colophon. The colophon will next ask the reader to support the translatorial camp of a man who made use of extensive borrowings of the work of a fellow translator whom the colophonist would have the reader regard as a lesser rival. This seems to allow for a very nuanced idea of superiority — not disregarding potential source material simply because its practitioner was less skilled or held opposing views, but rather making use of what is valuable in existing material.

text with a *terminus post quem* of 1160 (and thereby making Samuel's alleged role in its composition unlikely). The colophonist's claim, then, allows for the establishment of a much narrower window of absolute chronology in addition to the relative one which may be divined from the texts from which the London/Beinecke Alexander draws and those to which it contributes.

For the most part the claim — and therefore any diachronic connection established between the production of the two texts — is difficult to assess, given the chronological problems that present themselves when we try to order the texts of Samuel's life. But it is about more than just the chronology. The colophon informs the reader that the translation of the Alexander Romance was contemporaneous with the translation of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, thereby explicitly connecting this Alexander text, one stripped of its most explicit Jewish references,<sup>173</sup> and the *Guide*, an elaborate articulation of principles of faith and philosophical appreciation of the world. In other words, even if Steinschneider's early dismissal of the historical precision of the colophon was not unwarranted, the colophon still cannot be dismissed as an

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<sup>173</sup> While at once "Alexander was taken over by Jewish writers and copyists, in that they make him confront not only his own limitations, his mortality and his consequent wisdom, but also Israel and God" (van Bekkum 1986, 226), of all of the Hebrew Alexanders, the text reflected in the London/Beinecke manuscript least subjects Alexander to these forces, with the "adaptations...carried out incompletely and unsuccessfully" (van Bekkum 1992, 25). The ostensible failure to fully "Judaize" the text can be seen most concretely in the episode in which Alexander visits Jerusalem and explains to his lieutenants that he has not prostrated himself before the *cohen* (priest), but rather before his ornate gear; contrast this text's handling of Alexander's relationship to Judaism particularly to Josephus' Alexander. A separate investigation into this text as an artifact of the Maimonidean controversies will, hopefully, begin to address some of the issues mentioned in the present footnote.

inaccurate representation of a historical gestalt. In sum, this is a probably-ultimately-unknowable assertion of the colophonist that nonetheless seems to make greater sense out of his attempt to connect this specific Alexander text to the greater Alexander tradition and to the Hebrew Maimonides translations.

If Samuel did translate the Alexanderroman at the same time as he translated the *Guide* as the colophon suggests (or perhaps even if the Pseudo-Samuel translated the Alexander at the same time as Samuel translated the *Guide*, or if the readership simply melded those two activities in their minds or in their imaginary of the mind of an author), then the existence of one text so present in his mind might suggest that we could find traces of it in the other.

Another way in which the chronology of this part of the colophon leads to a more informed picture of the text's literary milieu beyond the pure chronology is this: In addition to the coincidence of the Hebrew Alexander with the other Iberian undertakings and adaptations of the Alexander romance, those years also coincide with Samuel's presence in Toledo while he consulted manuscripts there for the *Sefer Otot ha-Shamayim*.<sup>174</sup> If we assume all that we know about this text from the text itself to be true, that could very well place a Samuel ibn Tibbon working on his Hebrew translation of an Arabic version of

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<sup>174</sup> Although it may be beyond the scope of the present discussion, a comparison of the astronomical discussions throughout the Hebrew Alexander with both the *Otot ha-Shamayim* and the astronomical portions of the Alexander source-texts might prove to be fruitful in better defining the scope of Samuel's interests as well as possibly further fixing (or not) the authorship of the Hebrew Alexander.



the *Historia Proeliis* in Toledo, consulting manuscripts for his *Sefer Otot ha-Shamayim*, precisely at the time — roughly between the years 1208 and 1212 — when the most important Alexander-romance literary activity was taking place in that city. In other words, Samuel was, indeed, in Toledo when the *Libro de Alexandre* was coming into being. Even if none of the colophon is historically true, the colophonist was not simply inventing a literary-historical world for himself; rather, he used the one that existed to assert his opinions about text, authorship and nation. This is not simply a question of chronology; rather, it becomes one of canon formation.

Finally, this assertion opens the door for using the Alexander Romance as the locus for discussing the translation of Maimonides' works; it opens up the textual horizons of the discussion and also makes it more explicitly about widening circles in which those ideas might be disseminated. The importance of this universalizing impulse continues to be asserted throughout the rest of the colophon. By making a chronological and onomastic comparison between the two translations, the colophonist asserts a connection between them; even if the basis of that connection is the stuff of fiction — even if Samuel was not the translator and the Hebrew versions were not contemporaneous — the point remains that the colophonist intended to draw that connection and assert a place for both the real and pseudo-Samuels in the debates that followed.

### 3.2.3 THIS BOOK IS FOUND IN THE HANDS OF A FEW PEOPLE IN THE TRANSLATION OF AL-ḤARĪZĪ

Investigation up to this point reveals very little recorded in the way of numbers of manuscripts and where and among whom they circulated. While future research may yet reveal more details along those lines, this may also prove to be yet another claim made by the colophonist, the historical veracity of which will always remain difficult to determine one way or the other.

With that caveat noted, though, it is worth mentioning that Yair Shiffman, through his discussions of Shem Ṭov ibn Falaquera's commentary, *Moreh ha-Moreh*, opens up this avenue of investigation by attempting to determine the contents (or "edition") of the Arabic text from which Ibn Tibbon, al-Ḥarīzī and Falaquera translated, respectively, and does so by delineating the differences between their readings of one of Maimonides' discussions of Genesis (Guide II: 30), Falaquera's critique of his two predecessors, and the various editions used by modern translators of the text, notably Munk (editor of al-Ḥarīzī's Hebrew translation) and Pines (English translator of the *Guide*). He comes to no concrete conclusion except that there is a possibility that Samuel ibn Tibbon had at his disposal a version of the text that omitted an adverb that described the extent to which the serpent did not have contact with Adam. (It

remains a possibility, of course, that Samuel's copy contained the word and he neglected to translate it.) That same omission occurs in the 1872 Warsaw edition and its 1960 Jerusalem reprint,<sup>175</sup> which suggests to Shiffman that their respective editors had access to the descendant of the Arabic used by Samuel (rather than consider the possibility that the edition of the Arabic was influenced by the Hebrew translation). This is all highly suggestive, yet inconclusive, as the author acknowledges: "Falaquera's discussion also reveals which edition he had of the *Guide*, so we can compare it with the editions at our disposal. Such a comparison can serve as a starting point for research about the versions of the *Guide* which were in the possession of its commentators."<sup>176</sup> In sum, while it may not be possible to conclude anything about the colophonist's claim here, it may be possible, and indeed fruitful, to tell a little bit about the differing Arabic texts consulted by the various translators and commentators simply by comparing their Hebrew translations.

One final interesting matter of note with respect to the question of the dissemination of the two different Hebrew versions of the *Guide* is that it was

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<sup>175</sup> Moses Maimonides, et al., *Guide of the Perplexed with Commentaries*. Warsaw: Goldman, 1872; Jerusalem 1960, reprint.

<sup>176</sup> Shiffman, p. 60.

al-Ḥarīzī's translation that held greater appeal for Christian Hebraists and was more widely circulated amongst them than Samuel's was.<sup>177</sup>

1.2.5 ... WHICH IS VERY ERROR-RIDDEN BECAUSE HE ADAPTED IT FROM ITS LANGUAGE, BUT THE ABOVE-MENTIONED TRANSLATOR (LET HIS RECOMPENSE BE COMPLETE!) TRANSLATED IT

The next phrase represents the biggest textual difficulty that the colophon presents in that it seems to reflect an error in the text: An omission of some kind of modifier of the word *ha-lashon* that would indicate the kind of language from which it was translated, adapted or interpreted. At very first blush, it would seem that the phrase is simply missing the word “Arabic,” in other words, that an adjective was dropped as a matter of scribal error. But immediately one realizes that this in and of itself cannot be a valid criticism for the author of the colophon to wield as Samuel ibn Tibbon also translated it from Arabic as, in fact, any translator of the *Guide* would have to do. Instead, the second half of this phrase, the contention that he “translated it from the [...] (sic) language,” as it is usually and elliptically rendered in English, is in fact an elaboration upon the first half, the one that holds that Judah's translation is inferior to Samuel's. With this phrase as it is, the colophonist here distinguishes between Samuel's literal style of translation and Judah's literary

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<sup>177</sup> Aharon Mirsky, “Al-Ḥarīzī, Judah ben Solomon,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol 1. Jerusalem, 1972, 656.

style and prefers the former over the latter; in doing so he signals that the status of Samuel's translation as the canonical one was perhaps not always as secure as it looks to have been in retrospect.

One difficulty in assuming that this should have read *the [something] language* is that in all other cases in the body of the text, the copyist is meticulous about correcting his omissions with a marginal note. So if nothing else, it is safe to say that the manuscript from which MS London/Beinecke was made, if not the very first manuscript in which it appeared, also read "he translated it from the language." But the principle of textual criticism that the text should be emended only as absolutely necessary, as well as the failure to imagine what sort of adjective could even make sense in the alleged lacuna both impel the reader toward a solution that assumes that the text preserved is the text written by the colophonist. Although it is usually a risky and losing gambit to speak of an author's intentions, I will go at least as far here as to suggest that the text that was written down was the text that the author intended to have written down.

A bit of background is necessary before explaining the solution: In the translation that accompanies his edition of the text, van Bekkum translates *he'etiq* as *he copied*. Two problems present themselves in this reading: first, he uses that correspondence between words consistently; this both strips the

Hebrew word of much of the depth of its meaning concerning translation rather than mere copying — and in fact nobody suggests or could suggest that this manuscript was copied in Samuel ibn Tibbon’s own hand — and fails to treat the second instance of it in the colophon differently from all occurrences of this word, as I will presently propose should be done to understand the text correctly. Additionally, his reading still requires the reader to supply a missing adjective.

Assuming a missing word in this case will always lead the reader astray. Instead, a brief review of Samuel ibn Tibbon’s and Judah al-Ḥarīzī’s distinct styles of translation — themselves already well-documented — allows for a plausible explanation of the phrase as it stands, requiring no further emendation of the text and solving an otherwise intractable textual problem. And so, rather than suggesting that al-Ḥarīzī translated the text from some unnamed specific language or type of language, the colophonist seems to be suggesting that al-Ḥarīzī adapted the original language of the *Guide* rather than translating it directly. The correct understanding of this phrase, then, is not *he translated it from the [...] language* but rather *he adapted it from its language*. The reading “he adapted it from its language” is indicative of al-Ḥarīzī’s preference for not translating literally, a characteristic of his work that has already been noted here and elsewhere, and to which al-Ḥarīzī himself alludes.

It is worth mentioning that the semantic range of the root ‘-T-Q is, in fact, expansive enough to include meanings that are closer to *adaptation*, or even to van Bekkum’s *copying*, than *translation* in the strictest sense. That meaning, *copying*, is attested first in the Book of Proverbs (25:1) as the verb describing the transcription of Solomon’s proverbs by scribal servants at the Judean court of Hezekiah: “These are also proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, transcribed (*ašer he‘etiqū anšei ĥizqiyah*).” The Anchor Bible apparatus describes the development of the word (in its context in this verse) up to that point as implying both movement and textual activity of special note:

“The root ‘-*t-q* basically means ‘move’ or ‘change place’... applying this notion to the present verse allows for a range of activities. ‘Copy’ is a common translation (RSV, et al.), but mere copying was a constant activity for all texts and would not warrant special mention in a title. Also, the verb is plural, whereas, judging from scribal colophons elsewhere, a manuscript would be copied by a single scribe, not several. Sa‘adia explains the verb as meaning to inscribe orally transmitted proverbs. This would normally be expressed as *kātab* ‘write.’ *He‘tiqû* may mean ‘assembled’ or ‘collected.’ Though the expected verb for this is ‘*āsap* ‘collect,’ *he‘tiqû* could express this idea by suggesting the transfer of sayings from various texts or from the memory of various people into a collection.”<sup>178</sup>

In sum, then, what is perhaps the latest attestation of the verb in the Hebrew Bible begins to suggest usages beyond the most standard of scribal practices,

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<sup>178</sup> Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor-Yale Bible 18B. New Haven: Yale UP, 2009. 777.

something which, after the definition *translation* becomes a common one for the root, may help carry over the sense of *adaptation* rather than *literal translation* into our colophon.<sup>179</sup>

The colophonist's was, of course, not drawing strictly on the Hebrew of the Bible but a language mediated through the analyses of the medieval lexicographers; a variety of these even directly bear upon the intellectual and linguistic environment in which the colophonist worked and the one from which his work evolved, where we find it defined in Sa'adya's *Egron* and used, among others, in the work of Judah ha-Levi and Abraham ibn Ezra. It is also defined in Judah ibn Tibbon's *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, the Hebrew translation of Jonah ibn Janāḥ's Arabic-language glossary of Hebrew roots, most of the examples given of words built from that root fall into entirely different semantic ranges, though the entry does cite the above-mentioned verse from Proverbs 25. Judah ibn Tibbon does, however, use the verb to describe his own activity with respect to the volume in his translator's prologue. Additionally, as noted above, he advises his son in the course of his ethical will to undertake his weekly reading from the Bible in Arabic "because it will be useful to you in

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<sup>179</sup> It is also interesting to note the pattern of usage for the *qal* adjective, *ʿataq*, which carries the implicit meaning of haughty speech (or, in a fabulous turn of phrase in the JPS, "vainglorious bluster").



terms of your Arabic vocabulary and of translating, if you should want to translate.”<sup>180</sup>

*He‘etiq* obviously may be used to describe translation in general; but the early substratum of meaning that suggests notable or irregular activity, Judah’s own personal embrace of the word, and well as the fact that it is the only thing that distinguishes (and, all the more so, is the only thing that *can* distinguish) between the two translations of the *Guide*, together become highly suggestive of the notion that verb *he‘etiq* as used in the colophon suggests more than just translation and serves to highlight the colophonist’s preference for Samuel’s literal style against the preference of some of his contemporaries for the more literary al-Ḥarīzī adaptation.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the usage of ‘-T-Q that I have proposed here is fairly consistent with its usages elsewhere in Samuel ibn Tibbon’s own work; and therefore it would not be surprising to find a congruent usage in a colophon attributing a work to a pseudo-Samuel. First, in the *Perush ha-Millim ha-Zarot*, he writes: “Its first meaning is the transfer of a body from one place to another... Likewise, when one translates a book from one language to another it is called *ha‘ataqat ha-sefer*, that is, the transfer of its words from one language to another. Likewise, the Arabs call the reports

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<sup>180</sup> Abrahams, 65-6.

transmitted by tradition *divre ha'ataqah*<sup>181</sup> for the same reason.”<sup>182</sup> And second, Robinson argues that in his exegesis of Proverbs 25:1, Samuel ibn Tibbon understands the verb *he'etiqū* in line (“proverbs... which Hezekiah’s men transmitted) with Sa’adya’s translation of it *naqlū, they transmitted*.<sup>183</sup> This would seem to suggest that, even though he ultimately disagreed with Maimonides’ method of translation, he at least understood its value and its place among most translators.

Two conclusions are to be drawn from this reading of the text: first, that a shift towards literal translation as a community standard and ideal happened over time and was not universally held;<sup>184</sup> and second, that in spite of having been resident in Toledo during some of the years in which he was translating the Guide, and in spite of having received advice to the contrary from Maimonides himself, Samuel’s translation reflects the Provençal preference for fidelity to the literal word as compared to the Toledan preference for holistic meaning.

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<sup>181</sup> It is interesting that he does not give an Arabic equivalent for the term here.

<sup>182</sup> Trans., Robinson 2007, 161.

<sup>183</sup> Robinson 2007, 161-2.

<sup>184</sup> We know this to be the case in other settings as well, most notably in the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century Levant where Sa’adya Gaon translated most of the Hebrew Bible into Arabic twice: Once literally for the masses and a second time in a fashion both more literary and more explicitly aware of a variety of exegetical traditions for the fraction of readers who would benefit from the greater depth of insights. This is actually quite interesting in light of a question that will arise in the following chapter, concerning which Arabic translation of the Hebrew Bible Samuel’s father, Judah ibn Tibbon, would have counseled him to read in his ethical will. Did the translator Samuel cut his eye teeth on literal Sa’adya or literary Sa’adya?

### 1.3 CONCLUSION

The colophon of the London/Beinecke codex is a startling and revealing text in its own right in addition to being an addendum to a Hebrew Alexander romance. It is an artifact both of the Maimonidean controversies and of a smaller controversy, that is, the competition for primacy between Maimonides' two earliest Hebrew translators. It sheds light on the later construction of Samuel as the victor in that competition and as such merits consideration as a text on its own in addition to being a component part of the Alexander romance.

## Conclusion

All told, then, who was Samuel ibn Tibbon, and why should we care?

He was not Provençal though he lived in Provence and enjoyed the role, at least informally, as community spokesman. He could not be Andalusí, though he might have chosen that identity for himself. He was not a *mutakallim* in spite of his integrated Aristotelian-Jewish view of his decreasingly Islamicate world. He was, though, educated in the grandest traditions by some of the greatest minds as they were, physically and intellectually, on the run from the vacuum where their cultural project had been but simultaneously incorporating the best of the ideas that seeped out of that vacuum and of what filled it. Samuel became a first-rate intellect and cultural paragon not because he could balance life as a Jew of Arabo-Islamicate cultural background negotiating in a newfound Christian and curiously Hebraeo-Latinizing world, but rather because he could remain both Andalusí and an Almohadist just as those two cultural forces were tearing each other to shreds and leaving only one clear and ultimate victor.

His struggle was to inhabit a literary and religious space between what should have been a celebrated rise of Hebrew – a triumph, however inadvertent and circumstantial, of its *faḍā'il*, its merits — and a rapidly receding Arabic

whose literary legacy and cultural customs and currency would die an unwelcome death in part (again inadvertently) at his beckoning.

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Quite a great deal more can be said about this topic than there has been space to explore here. What lies ahead for this project is divisible into two categories: first are the specific texts, ideas and points of discussion that I did not treat fully and intend to explore for the expanded and revised version that will eventually comprise a book. This section will also include several broader questions that I hope to answer more satisfactorily with further study. Second is the statement of a methodology that will govern my approach to future research.

Some of the additions are thematic in nature. I should like to be able to arrive at some broader and more concrete conclusions about the nature of canonicity suggested in this material and how it might be extrapolated to similar literature. This will be achieved in several ways: first, I intend to expand the discussion in chapter one on the incorporation of al-Ghazālī to include the engagement or non-engagement of other Jewish philosophers with Ghazālī's work as well as Judah's possible incorporation of other surprising elements of non-Jewish religious writing into his own texts. This piece of the discussion also will be eventually expanded to comprise some of the

incomplete thematic elements that are at least signaled in chapter one. A further way in which this will be achieved is through a much more in-depth discussion of the history of Hebrew and the Tibbonids' place in it. There are a number of issues, such as the question of Samuel's attitude towards poetry vis-à-vis Maimonides' attitude toward poetry, and some of the foundational questions about Iberian Hebrew codicology, where even the basic background is still incomplete and some serious research digressions must be embarked upon before returning to the Tibbonid questions at hand.

The scope of the corpus for this project was necessarily limited. It included only the letters between Samuel ibn Tibbon, his father, and Moses Maimonides; the prologues that bookend Samuel's rise to textual and religious authority and the later challenges to it that were made during his lifetime. In order to achieve one of the goals of the wider project, namely a more comprehensive theory of the translation of religious texts in and around Toledo, the corpus should be expanded somewhat to include additional texts that grapple with both questions of language and of the thought processes that allow for the religious and philosophical and logical frameworks pose such questions. First and foremost these texts include relevant additional writings by Judah ibn Tibbon and Maimonides, such as the epilogue to *Sefer ha-Shorashim* and the prologue to *Sefer ha-Riqmah*, two translations created by Judah ibn

Tibbon of Arabic-language works on Hebrew by Jonah ibn Janāḥ, and *Guide* I.69-73, in which Maimonides discusses the value and nature of *kalām*. By expanding the range of texts to include more grammatical and lexicographical writings, one of the goals I hope to achieve is the strengthening of my discussion of the relative positions of Hebrew and Arabic in the moment of historical and linguistic flux that Samuel and his cohort inhabited. I would also like to give greater voice to Judah al-Ḥarīzī with respect to his role in creating the memory of Samuel ibn Tibbon, including a closer look at his *Sefer Musrei ha-Filosofim* and an analysis of his prologue to his own Hebrew translation of the *Guide*, thereby deepening the basis on which to analyze both the process by which Samuel's version was consolidated as the authoritative one and by which the peculiar artifact of the Alexander colophon came into being. Finally, it would also very much be worth a much more careful consideration of Shem .Tov ibn Falaquera's *Moreh ha-Moreh*, particularly the passages in the third chapter of that work in which he compares specific details and broader values of Samuel ibn Tibbon and Judah al-Ḥarīzī as translators of the *Guide*.

And these two later texts — al-Ḥarīzī's *Moreh* and Falaquera's reduplicative commentary — bring me to plans for further research based on chapter three and the addition of an entire second, mirror-image half of the project. Part of the working process has been the dawning realization that this

is as much, if not more, a fourteenth-century project than a twelfth-century one.

The Alexander romance with the curious codicological features that is the central of the third chapter was truly my point of entry, and it must be considered not as its authors would like us to have read it but rather as it was created and in its original context; and, furthermore, it is the parallels between it and a Latinate codex that also includes both an Alexander romance and statements of Almohad doctrine that I intend to make the focal point of version of this project that I will revise and expand for eventual publication as a book.

It is the revision of this third chapter which will bring about the greatest changes to the shape of the project simply because that will be the point of departure for adding a whole second half to this work: An intellectual and religious portrait of a Christian Arabic-into-Latin translator, also working in Toledo in the first decade of the thirteenth century, and also, just like Samuel, memorialized in a pseudo-canonical, possibly fourteenth-century work that incorporates both an Alexander Romance (in fact, the *Historia Proeliis*, the Latin version from which the Pseudo-Samuel's Hebrew version was ultimately created) and statements about the translation of doctrine. The major expansion of chapter three will be to dramatically strengthen the fourteenth-century context into which it must be set. This will be achieved primarily through a much fuller discussion of the Maimonidean controversies, after which I will



attempt to situate the pseudo-Samuel and the colophonist much more concretely and precisely in that particular intellectual debate on the basis of what little is in the codex and the ways in which the text itself treats (and fails to treat) various Jewish intellectual and religious traditions that are easily incorporated into a life of Alexander.

After this, I intend to more fully investigate an aspect of this broader literary universe that I have begun to consider but decided to exclude from the present iteration of the project in order to be able to highlight and focus on developing a methodology to combine the intellectual portrait with the study of the historical memory of a single individual. Having accomplished that — by establishing what kinds of textual production are most contributive to canonicity and considering how a now-canonical author was educated with respect to them and how he himself came to view them, as well as how all of this was remembered later as a central piece of literary history — I can now much more sensibly and consistently apply those principles to a second case, namely that of Mark of Toledo.

Mark was a Toledan cleric and translator who generally worked at the behest of the archbishop of Toledo, Rodrigo Ximénez de Rada, and who was responsible for the second-ever Latin translation of the Qur'ān and the first translation in wide circulation in the Iberian Peninsula. It was revolutionarily

different from the first translation, penned by Robert of Ketton, in that it was not polemical in its renderings or commentaries. That is to say, whereas Ketton's translation went out of its way to describe different chapters and pronouncements as blasphemous or in error, Mark translated the texts as they were, did not add theologically motivated chains of adjectives and entitled the book *Liber Alchorani*, the *Book of the Qur'ān*, rather than, as Ketton had, *Lex Mahomat*, the *Laws of Muḥammad*, thereby clearly respecting the original title of the work rather than suggesting that it was the law code of a false prophet. Seven manuscripts survived eight centuries, coming out of one of the most notoriously anti-book (and especially anti-Muslim and anti-Arabic book) cultures in pre-modern Europe; one can only imagine how many more there would have been when they were originally copied in the thirteenth and into the fourteenth centuries. The codex that is most interesting for my purposes is Mazarine MS 780, which may be roughly contemporary (or slightly later) with the London/Beinecke codex and which, like its Hebrew-language counterpart, contains an Alexander romance and several statements of translated doctrine that, by their very existence, are comments on the process. As noted, the Alexander romance in question is the *Historia Proeliis*, and it is bound in with the first Latin translation of Ibn Tūmart's *'Aqīdah* — the creed of the man who, proclaiming himself to be the Mahdi and dramatically influenced by the

work of al-Ghazālī, was the very founder of the Almohad movement — and the first philologically-minded Latin translation of the Qur’ān. Like the Hebrew Alexander romance bound with the statement about how best to translate the “Almohad fundamentalist” Maimonides, this codex is, by its very existence, a late argument about the nature of intellectual production during the run-up to Las Navas de Tolosa. The existence of these two codices begins to suggest a pattern of remembering the following things about this time period: the advent of Almohadism, the changing nature of doctrine and its role in society, and the rapid translation of important texts shifting the literary, intellectual and religious landscapes. It is an argument by codicology for a very particular vision of that time period. Part of the goal of the extended project will be to investigate the notion of the establishment of historical memory in general, and in particular how and why this was the memory that was created and saved in the later period in question about the earlier one.

Mark’s and Samuel’s worlds intersect in both concrete and abstract ways. We can place both of them in the libraries of Toledo during the same years of the second half of the first decade of the thirteenth century. Their theological concerns touch upon the same themes and respond to the same political and religious pressures. And finally, they are both memorialized through the same peculiar and evocative kind of codex.

Two additional places where these came into contact are in the realm of Christian Hebraism and in the work of one of the later scions of the Ibn Tibbon family, Jacob ben Machir, whose perpetual tables of the night skies have been suggested as the source for Dante's calendrical calculations in the *Divine Comedy*.<sup>185</sup> Neither of these is necessarily deeply enough connected to merit much space in the final version of the project, though each might be worth mentioning simply as a way of strengthening the ties between Samuel's and Mark's overlapping worlds; and either one could be the subject of its own, similarly-minded project. The aforementioned Judaeo-Christian triumph of Hebrew also sits in the background of this kind of connection and comparison between Samuel and Mark. Perhaps without being aware of it or without wishing it to be so, they were both part of this same phenomenon, alongside all the others where the connection is even more explicit.

In sum, then, while this is the nearly complete portrait of one scribe and translator living and working at this time and of his literary and pseudo-literary legacy, it is only half the picture of a broader set of intellectual circumstances under which he found himself laboring and which very much shaped the way that this period would be remembered as a totality.

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<sup>185</sup> E. Moore. "The Almanac of Jacob ben Machir ben Tibbon," *Modern Language Association Review* 3:4 (1908) 376-8; and J. Boffito and C. Melzi d'Eril, eds. *Almanach Dantis Aligherii*. Florence: Leo Olschki Bibliopola, 1909.

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