

Menaḥem ben Jacob Shalem and the Study of Philosophy in Late Medieval Prague*

1. The Position of Aristotelian Philosophy in Ashkenazic Culture

As the contributions gathered in this volume show, the study of Aristotelian science and philosophy was an important and multi-faceted cultural practice in late medieval Bohemia, one that found its expression in diverse institutional frameworks, most prominently at the mendicant *studia* and the university founded in Prague in 1348. Surviving manuscript copies and the glosses they contain show that philosophical texts attracted readers from different intellectual and social milieus. Literary works written for a popular audience also attest to the dissemination of philosophical ideas in the vernacular. In short, studying the arts in late medieval Bohemia was an established pursuit that shaped the local intellectual and religious discourse, and tied it to contemporary debates taking place across the whole continent.

What was the place of the Jewish community of Prague within this intellectual landscape? Did the Jews living in late medieval Bohemia, and eastern Europe more generally, participate in the flourishing study of philosophical and scientific disciplines in ways that at least to some extent mirrored the practices of their Christian neighbors? More fundamentally, is it at all meaningful to speak of philosophical interests of late medieval Jews living north of the Alps?

Traditionally, the answer offered by intellectual historians of Judaism to the latter question has been negative. Unlike their Sephardic counterparts, who were nourished by the philosophical and scientific traditions of Islamic culture and who later passed their rationalistic lore to the Jewish rabbinic elites of Provence, Ashkenazic scholars of northern France and Germany throughout the Middle Ages

* This article was completed thanks to a postdoctoral research fellowship at the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences. I would like to thank Joseph Davis, Lucia Raspe, and Tamás Visi for helpful comments on various versions of this paper. Needless to say, all remaining errors are my own.

Milan Žonca • Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague, milan.zonca@ff.cuni.cz

Studying the Arts in Late Medieval Bohemia: Production, Reception and Transmission of Knowledge, ed. by Ota Pavliček, Turnhout, 2021 (Studia Artistarum, 48), p. 27–47

© BREPOLIS  PUBLISHERS

10.1484/M.SA-EB.5.122631

This is an open access chapter made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 International Licence.

showed very little interest in the study of philosophy and natural science. Medieval Jews living under Christian rule and interested in philosophical knowledge were mostly ignorant of both Arabic and Latin, and thus did not share a common technical language with their Christian counterparts, nor were Christian universities open to Jewish students. While scholars have recently re-evaluated the degree of interaction between medieval Latin and Hebrew learned cultures, the reception of Christian scholastic thought in the Jewish milieu seems to have been limited to a relatively small number of individuals who were active in specific socio-historical contexts¹.

Furthermore, medieval Ashkenazic Jews mostly lacked access to the corpus of philosophical writings and translations produced by Jewish scholars of the south, including perhaps the greatest work of medieval Jewish philosophy, Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*². In the rare instances of confrontation with the elements of "Greek wisdom" or rationalistic "Gentile dialectics" within their own culture, Ashkenazic scholars perceived philosophy as a threat to Jewish religiosity – a wasteful pursuit which not only unduly nourished competitiveness, excessive intellectualism and religious negligence, but also problematized the established interpretation of Jewish tradition and endangered the process of halakhic thinking³. Thus, during the controversies surrounding the study of the philosophical works of Maimonides in Provence in the 1230s, Jewish scholars from northern France weighed in with their critical opinion and showed little sympathy for the philosophically influenced allegorical interpretation of the Bible and Talmud championed by adherents of Maimonides, although it seems that their attitude to the interpretation of anthropomorphism in the Jewish canon was much less literal and more nuanced than their rationalistic opponents insinuated⁴. Some Jews, especially those influenced by the metaphysical speculations of Ashkenazic Pietists (*ḥasidei Ashkenaz*), appropriated philosophical motifs and terminology in their discussions of

-
- 1 See for instance the studies collected in *Latin-into-Hebrew: Texts and Studies*, A. FIDORA, H. J. HAMES, Y. SCHWARTZ (eds.), 2 vols, Leiden / Boston, Brill, 2013.
 - 2 Ashkenazic scholars remained ignorant of, or uninterested in, the philosophical contents of the *Guide*. The Tosafists who took part in the so-called Maimonidean controversy in the 1230s probably had some access to the text of the *Guide of the Perplexed* or its parts, see J. SHATZMILLER, "Les tossafistes et la première controverse maimonidienne: le témoignage du rabbin Asher ben Gershon", in G. DAHAN, G. NAHON, E. NICOLAS (eds.), *Rashi et la culture juive en France du Nord au Moyen Âge*, Paris, E. Peeters, 1997, p. 55–82 (in particular p. 56–57). However, Ashkenazic scholars rarely cited the *Guide*, with the notable exception of Isaiah di Trani, who was of Italian origin, but received his education in Ashkenaz. See E. KANARFOGEL, *The Intellectual History and Rabbinic Culture of Medieval Ashkenaz*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 2012, p. 515–518.
 - 3 For a pertinent example, see J. GALINSKY, "An Ashkenazic Rabbi Encounters Sephardic Culture: R. Asher b. Jehiel's Attitude Towards Philosophy and Science", in *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts*, 8 (2009), p. 191–211. "Gentile dialectics" is rejected in *Sefer ḥasidim*, ed. Y. WISTINETZKI, Berlin, Mekizei Nirdamim, 1897, no. 752; see also I. M. TA-SHMA, "Mizwat Talmud-Torah ki-ve'ayah datit we-hevratit be-Sefer ḥasidim", in *Bar Ilan*, 14–15 (1976), p. 98–113; reprinted in I. M. TA-SHMA, *Halakhah, minhag u-mezi'ut be-Ashkenaz, 1000–1350*, Jerusalem, Magnes Press, 1996, p. 112–129 (esp. p. 119).
 - 4 E. KANARFOGEL, "Varieties of Belief in Medieval Ashkenaz: The Case of Anthropomorphism", in D. FRANK, M. GOLDISH (eds.), *Rabbinic Culture and Its Critics; Jewish Authority, Dissent, and Heresy in Medieval and Early Modern Times*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 2008, p. 117–159; E. KANARFOGEL, "Anthropomorphism and Rationalist Modes of Thought in Medieval Ashkenaz: The Case of R. Yosef

Divine unity and the nature of prophetic vision⁵. They also turned to theological interpretations of the natural world⁶. For most Ashkenazic scholars, however, philosophy and natural science constituted a marginal intellectual interest. The rationalist impulse remained, as David Berger has put it, “alien to the deeply embedded instincts” of Ashkenazic culture⁷.

However, the Ashkenazic reluctance to appropriate philosophical rationalism as the primary hermeneutical device applied to the Jewish tradition does not mean that Ashkenazic culture remained oblivious to the dissemination of philosophical texts, or that the study of Aristotelian philosophy played no role whatsoever in late medieval Ashkenazic religious practice. In 1972, Ephraim Kupfer suggested that the cultural profile of Ashkenazic Jewry described above was transformed in the late Middle Ages, and should be reinterpreted accordingly⁸. Discussing several instances of the study of philosophy among Ashkenazic rabbis of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, Kupfer posited “interest in philosophy among various groups of Ashkenazic Jews” in the late Middle Ages⁹. Kupfer’s assertion has not remained uncontested. In the last twenty-five years, historians of medieval Jewish culture have offered more nuanced views of the place of philosophy in late medieval Ashkenaz, arguing that the study of Maimonides’s philosophical texts and the appropriation of rationalistic attitudes was much less systematic and more geographically and socially circumscribed than suggested by Kupfer¹⁰. Nevertheless,

Bekhor Shor”, in *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts*, 8 (2009), p. 119–138; E. KANARFOGEL, “Ha-omnam hayu ba’alei ha-tosafot magshimim?”, in A. (Rami) REINER et alii (eds.), *Ta-Shema: Mehqarim bemada’ei ha-yahadut le-zikhro shel Israel M. Ta-Shma*, Alon Shevut, Hoza’at Tevunot-Mikhlelet Herzog, 2011, p. 671–703; KANARFOGEL, *The Intellectual History and Rabbinic Culture of Medieval Ashkenaz*, p. 489–529.

- 5 J. DAN, *Torat ha-sod shel hasidut Ashkenaz*, Jerusalem, Bialik Institute, 1968, p. 130–143; J. DAN, “Ashkenazi Hasidism and the Maimonidean Controversy”, in *Maimonidean Studies*, 3 (1992), p. 29–47 (in particular p. 32–38); E. R. WOLFSON, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 195–197.
- 6 D. I. SHYOVITZ, *A Remembrance of His Wonders: Nature and the Supernatural in Medieval Ashkenaz*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017.
- 7 D. BERGER, “Polemic, Exegesis, Philosophy, and Science: On the Tenacity of Ashkenazic Modes of Thought”, in *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts*, 8 (2009), p. 27–39 (in particular p. 39).
- 8 E. KUPFER, “Li-demutah ha-tarbutit shel yahadut Ashkenaz we-ḥakhmeiha ba-me’ot ha-14–15”, in *Tarbiz*, 42 (1973), p. 113–147.
- 9 KUPFER, “Li-demutah ha-tarbutit shel yahadut Ashkenaz we-ḥakhmeiha ba-me’ot ha-14–15”, p. 113.
- 10 For a summary of Kupfer’s thesis and the debate surrounding it, see D. B. RUDERMAN, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995, p. 55–60; J. M. DAVIS, “Philosophy, Dogma, and Exegesis in Medieval Ashkenazic Judaism: The Evidence of ‘Sefer Hadrat Qodesh’”, in *AJS Review*, 18-2 (1993), p. 195–222 (esp. p. 198–202). Israel Yuval has argued *contra* Kupfer that the influence of philosophy on late medieval rabbinic authorities was minimal, see I. J. YUVAL, *Ḥakhamim be-doram: ha-manhigut ha-ruḥanit shel yehudei Germanyah be-shilhei yemei ha-beinayim*, Jerusalem, Hebrew University, 1988, p. 301. Joseph Davis and Joseph Dan have suggested that the new interest in philosophy was driven by traditional Ashkenazic exegetical concerns, approached with new emphases. See J. M. DAVIS, “R. Yom Tov Lipman Heller, Joseph b. Isaac Ha-Levi, and Rationalism in Ashkenazic Culture, 1550–1650”, Cambridge, MA, Diss. Harvard University, 1990, p. 76–81, 91–94; J. DAN, “Ḥibur yihud ashkenazi min ha-me’ah ha-14”, in *Tarbiz*, 44 (1974), p. 204–206 (in particular p. 204–206). Interaction with non-Jewish culture has also been suggested as a possible influence by Joseph Davis, as well as by Tamás Visi. See DAVIS, “R. Yom

most agree that the material presented by Kupfer does suggest that by the end of the fourteenth century, philosophical motifs and ideas were starting to penetrate Ashkenazic religious discourse.

The focal point of this new development seems to have been located in Prague. Here, a small group of Jewish readers and scholars interested in Aristotelian philosophy, as mediated primarily through Maimonides, emerged at the turn of the fifteenth century and spread further to the east in subsequent generations. These Jewish readers were engaged in a focused study of philosophical texts of Jewish as well as non-Jewish origin, including the works of Aristotle and his later commentators. They studied these texts in Hebrew translations produced decades earlier, for the most part in Provence. They discussed matters of philosophical exegesis with each other and attempted to define the relationship between philosophical and scientific knowledge on the one hand, and the knowledge received through religious tradition, including the mystical and esoteric tradition known as the Kabbalah, on the other. Last but not least, as we shall see, they were also eager to disseminate philosophical knowledge among their contemporaries. At least one member of this group – a Jewish scholar named Menahem ben Jacob Shalem, whose writings I shall examine in more detail – even ventured to produce texts dedicated to the detailed exposition of philosophical motifs and to the exploration of the relationship between Aristotelian philosophy and traditional Jewish religious practice.

Parts of the philosophical output of the members of this group have already been studied by Kupfer, and more recently by Tamás Visi¹¹. However, a thorough treatment of the contours of their philosophical outlook still remains a *desideratum*. The following examination has a more limited aim, and is primarily concerned with patterns of text transmission and the modes of their study, hopefully contributing – albeit modestly – to the historical contextualization of this phenomenon.

What did it mean for late medieval Jews in Prague to devote their attention to the writings of Aristotle and his Jewish followers? As I have argued elsewhere, late medieval Ashkenazic Jews turned to the study of philosophical texts in order to rectify the perceived shortcomings of the religious life of their communities¹². They appropriated philosophical concepts primarily in order to shed light on traditional

Tov Lipman Heller, Joseph b. Isaac Ha-Levi, and Rationalism in Ashkenazic Culture, 1550–1650”, p. 83–86; T. VISI, “The Emergence of Philosophy in Ashkenazic Contexts: The Case of Czech Lands in the Early Fifteenth Century”, in *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts*, 8 (2009), p. 213–243 (in particular p. 214–221, 227–234); T. VISI, *On the Peripheries of Ashkenaz: Medieval Jewish Philosophers in Normandy and in the Czech Lands from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century*, unpublished habilitation thesis, Palacký University, 2011, accessible from: <https://www.academia.edu/2045530>; T. VISI, “Plague, Persecution, and Philosophy: Avigdor Kara and the Consequences of the Black Death”, in E. SHOHAM-STEINER (ed.), *Intricate Interfaith Networks in the Middle Ages: Quotidian Jewish-Christian Contacts*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2016, p. 85–117.

¹¹ See the notes above.

¹² See M. ŽONCA, “The ‘Imagined Communities’ of Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen: Heresy and Communal Boundaries in *Sefer Nizzahon*”, in C. CLUSE, L. CLEMENS (eds.), *The Jews of Europe Around 1400: Disruption, Crisis, and Resilience*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2018, p. 119–143 (in particular p. 124–133).

questions surrounding focal topics of religious metaphysical speculation, such as the correct understanding of Divine unity and incorporeality, the nature of prophetic vision and the immortality of soul. The Ashkenazic patterns of philosophical study were influenced by the practice of the esoteric transmission of mystical texts, as well as by the accumulative, gloss-oriented modes of halakhic study. Analogously to their traditional approach to authoritative texts of Jewish religious law, Ashkenazic scholars interested in philosophical study focused on a small number of canonical texts produced by accepted authorities such as Maimonides and his later interpreters, and disseminated these texts along with comments explaining and elaborating on their contents.

As we shall see, they followed “radical Maimonidean commentators” such as Moses Narboni, a fourteenth-century Provençal Averroist active in northern Spain, in perceiving the *Guide of the Perplexed* as a repository of esoteric wisdom which, like the Bible and the rabbinic literature as a whole, is “encoded” in an Aristotelian key¹³. While Maimonides himself tried to conceal the esoteric stratum of his work from the uneducated masses by employing deliberate contradictions, the dissemination of Aristotelian learning in later generations led Narboni and the commentators who followed his suit to believe that such caution was no longer necessary¹⁴. The Ashkenazic students of philosophy in Prague, therefore, belonged to a group of Jewish scholars for whom the study of Aristotelian science was more than a speculative pursuit; it was rather an integral part of their Jewish religious practice, an essential element of their interaction with sacred texts and authoritative tradition. Furthermore, they believed that the study of philosophical truth was not only an intellectual, but also a spiritual quest, aiming to secure Divine protection in this world and survival of the soul after death. They acknowledged that this quest was available only to the select few, but at the same time felt no need to conceal their conviction that the knowledge acquired through the study of philosophy is superior to knowledge received from other sources, including religious traditions¹⁵.

2. Maimonides and the Study of the *Guide of the Perplexed* in Bohemia

The first dated Ashkenazic copy of the *Guide of the Perplexed* is an illuminated manuscript produced in 1349 by a certain Jacob ben Samuel *Nahlif*. The manuscript, known as the “Norsa Codex”, contains elaborate calligraphy and seems to have been illuminated in several stages in the German-speaking areas of Central Europe¹⁶. In

13 On Narboni’s commentary on the *Guide of the Perplexed*, see G. HOLZMAN, “Be’uro shel R. Moshe Narboni le-More nevuḥim la-Rambam”, in *Da’at*, 74–75 (2013), p. 197–236.

14 A. RAVITZKY, “The Secrets of the Guide to the Perplexed: Between the Thirteenth and Twentieth Centuries”, in I. TWERSKY (ed.), *Studies in Maimonides*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1990, p. 159–207 (in particular p. 165–167).

15 ŽONCA, “The ‘Imagined Communities’ of Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen”, p. 128–133.

16 On the “Norsa Codex”, see T. METZGER, “Le manuscrit Norsa. Une copie ashkenaze achevée en 1349 et enluminée du *Guide des égarés* de Maimonide”, *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*,

the colophon, the scribe mentions that he finished the manuscript in the year when “light turned into darkness”, probably referring to the attacks that devastated Jewish communities in Central Europe during the Black Death.

A breakthrough in systematic philosophical study seems to have occurred in the second half of the fourteenth century. In the late 1360s or early 1370s, an otherwise unknown author named Solomon ben Judah ha-Naši composed a commentary on the *Guide* “after having spent two years in the land of Ashkenaz with the esteemed master Rabbi Jacob, son of Rabbi Samuel”¹⁷. The name suggests that the addressee of the commentary may be identical with the scribe who copied the Norsa Codex. The commentary was meant to serve as a study tool, a handbook for a student interested in systematic philosophical study. According to the proclamation of the author himself, he wrote it “as a reminder of the secrets contained [in the *Guide of the Perplexed*], of its glosses, the connections between its chapters, and the secrets of its terminology[...]”¹⁸.

As Michael Nehorai noted, Solomon ben Judah’s commentary is characterized by his tendency to identify philosophy with prophecy. For Solomon, philosophical study was therefore a necessary part of the process of ascent towards the divine:

[J]ust as anyone who climbs a ladder will need to ascend step after step if he wants to get to the top of the ladder, so anyone who wants to reach God will have to attain Him through an investigation of his actions which point to his true reality, step after step, until he will apprehend Him who is above him¹⁹.

According to Solomon, the survival of soul is completely dependent on acquiring the intelligibilia; however, the knowledge of truth must be received intentionally, not only contingently from tradition or without analysis of empirical facts²⁰.

Solomon’s commentary was probably not widely disseminated, and in fact, only two manuscript copies survive²¹. Nevertheless, it seems to have stimulated philosophical interests among other Jewish readers in the area. In 1396, a manuscript of

46-1 (2002), p. 1–73; C. FARNETTI (ed.), *Il codice Maimonide e i Norsa. Una famiglia ebraica nella Mantova dei Gonzaga. Banche, libri, quadri. Catalogo della mostra*, Roma, 2018. Menahem Schmelzer’s suggestion that the manuscript originated in Krems, Austria, is unsubstantiated. See M. MOSCONE, “The ‘Norsa Codex’ of Maimonides’s *Guide for the Perplexed*”, in C. FARNETTI (ed.), *Il codice Maimonide e i Norsa*, p. 36–49 (p. 48, n. 27).

17 MS Cambridge, University Library, MS Add. 393 [IMHM F 16311], fol. 3r. The translations from primary sources in Hebrew are mine unless noted otherwise. Verses from the Hebrew Bible are cited according to the JPS Tanakh translation. On Solomon ben Judah, see M. ZVI NEHORAI, *R. Shlomo bar Yuda ha-Naši u-ferusho le-Moreh ha-nevukhim*, Jerusalem, Diss. Hebrew University, 1978.

18 MS Cambridge, University Library, MS Add. 393 [IMHM F 16311], fol. 3r.

19 NEHORAI, *R. Shlomo bar Yuda ha-Naši u-ferusho le-Moreh ha-nevukhim*, p. 30; translation on p. 2 of the English summary.

20 NEHORAI, *R. Shlomo bar Yuda ha-Naši u-ferusho le-Moreh ha-nevukhim*, p. 26–33.

21 MS Jerusalem, National Library of Israel, MS 38°7407 (formerly London, Rabbinic Seminary, MS 52) [IMHM F 4722] and the Cambridge manuscript cited above (see n. 17).

the *Guide of the Perplexed* was copied in Prague for a certain Simeon²². This could have been Simeon ben Samuel of Regensburg, a writer who quoted from *The Guide* in his *Hadrat kodesh* (*The Splendor of Holiness*), a mystical commentary on Maimonides's thirteen principles of faith written in 1400²³. Simeon also corresponded with Avigdor Kara, a scholar active in Prague and a member of the local rabbinic court, who was also interested in harmonizing the philosophical doctrine of God's unity as defined by Maimonides with Kabbalistic ideas²⁴. Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen, an important Ashkenazic rabbinic authority of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and the author of the popular polemical text *Sefer nizahon* (*The Book of the Polemic*), mentioned Solomon ben Judah in his philosophical work *Sefer ha-eshkol* (*The Book of the Cluster*), written in 1413, and also used his commentary²⁵. Lipman sat on the *bet din*, the rabbinic court of Prague, together with Avigdor Kara and his colleague and friend Menahem ben Jacob Shalem. The latter was also an avid student of Maimonides and Aristotelian philosophy, and produced numerous glosses on Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*, on Moses Narboni's commentary on this work, and separate treatises exploring philosophical themes in the *Guide*. It is to Menahem's work, its transmission and dissemination, that I now turn in more detail.

3. Menahem ben Jacob's Background and Education

As is often the case with medieval Jewish students of philosophy, very little is known of Menahem ben Jacob²⁶. In the following section, I summarize the information available on his background, and evaluate different theories proposed regarding the

-
- 22 MS Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, MS Levy 116 [IMHM F 1562]. The colophon is found on fol. 144r. See also KUPFER, "Li-demutah ha-tarbutit shel yahadut Ashkenaz we-hakhmeiha ba-me'ot ha-14–15," p. 147. According to a note appended in a later hand, the manuscript was found in a stone wall in the town of Nagyszombat, today Trnava in Slovakia.
- 23 On *Hadrat kodesh* and its use of Maimonidean philosophy, see DAVIS, "Philosophy, Dogma, and Exegesis in Medieval Ashkenazic Judaism".
- 24 In one surviving letter to Simeon, Avigdor Kara summarized to Simeon the contents of his (lost) treatise titled *Even sapir* (*The Sapphire Stone*) dedicated to harmonizing the Kabbalistic doctrine of ten *sefirot* (divine aspects or emanations) with the philosophically defined doctrine of God's unity. Kara claimed that the *sefirot* reflect the Aristotelian ten categories. See Y. HERSHKOWITZ, "Kitvei R. Avigdor Kara", in *Yeshurun*, 30 (2014), p. 53–87 (in particular p. 73–75).
- 25 Y. KAUFMANN, *Rabi Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhoyzn: ba'al ha-nizahon, ha-hoker we-ha-mequbal*, New York, Jewish Theological Seminary, 1927, p. 127, l. 11; p. 145, l. 29. According to Nehorai, the philosophical ideas in *Sefer ha-eshkol* are taken almost exclusively from Solomon ben Judah's commentary. See NEHORAI, *R. Shlomo bar Yuda ha-Nasi u-ferusho le-Moreh ha-nevukhim*, p. 5. Furthermore, one of the surviving manuscripts of Solomon's commentary contains a gloss that refers to Lipman's *Sefer nizahon* and may have been written by Lipman himself. See MS Cambridge, University Library, Add. 393, fol. 41v. On Lipman's attitude to philosophy, see also V. SADEK, "Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen and His Rationalistic Way of Thinking", in *Judaica Bohemiae*, 24-2 (1988), p. 98–113; O. ELIOR, "Rabi Yom Tov Lipman Milhoyzn hoker et kolot ha-galgalm", in *Mada'ei ha-yahadut*, 49 (2013), p. 131–155.
- 26 On the difficulties of research tracing the lives and careers of medieval Jewish science, see for instance Y. SCHWARTZ, "Imagined Classrooms? Revisiting Hillel of Verona's Autobiographical Records", in A. SPEER, T. JESCHKE (eds.), *Schüler und Meister*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 2016, p. 483–502 (p. 484–485).

roots of his philosophical interests. I believe there is enough evidence to suggest that Menahem ben Jacob Shalem was very likely born and spent the larger part of his productive life in Ashkenazic lands, and more specifically in Prague.

Menahem ben Jacob's identity is difficult to pin down in part because of the fact that he appears in the manuscripts with different bynames. When signing his glosses or longer texts, Menahem referred to himself as either "Menahem" (or "the humble Menahem"), or "Menahem ben Jacob Shalem". Ephraim Kupfer has argued convincingly that "the divine philosopher" Menahem Agler (or Aglar) who wrote a reply to a query written by the Austrian rabbi Abraham Klausner (d. 1407/8) concerning philosophical interpretations of Divine unity and prophetic vision, was in fact Menahem ben Jacob Shalem²⁷. Could the bynames "Shalem" and "Agler/Aglar" reveal some information about the author's background?

Kupfer has suggested that the byname Agler refers to the city of Aquileia in northern Italy, and that Menahem adopted it during his stay there²⁸. In contrast, Robert Bonfil interpreted the sobriquet as a reference to the author's origin rather than place of residence, associating it with the city of Aguilar de Campoo in northern Spain. According to Bonfil's interpretation, Menahem ben Jacob may have been among the Jews who left the community after its destruction in 1366 and settled in Germany or Bohemia²⁹. While Kupfer's interpretation corresponds with the migration patterns of Ashkenazic Jews to northern Italy in the late Middle Ages, and also seems to be corroborated by the fact that some of Menahem's texts have been transmitted in manuscripts of northern Italian origin, his heavy reliance on texts written and commented by Moses Narboni (d. after 1362), who was active in northern Spain in the mid-fourteenth century, makes Bonfil's hypothesis plausible as well³⁰. Adding a further layer of complexity to the question, the byname "Shalem" has led Moshe Idel to suggest that Menahem was either from Jerusalem or spent some time there³¹. While the presence of a group of Ashkenazic scholars residing in Jerusalem has been attested for the 1380s, the evidence adduced by Idel in support for Menahem's personal connection to the Land of Israel is not entirely convincing³².

27 KUPFER, "Li-demutah ha-tarbutit shel yahadut Ashkenaz we-ḥakhmeiha ba-me'ot ha-14–15", p. 124.

28 KUPFER, "Li-demutah ha-tarbutit shel yahadut Ashkenaz we-ḥakhmeiha ba-me'ot ha-14–15", p. 124.

29 R. BONFIL, "Sefer 'alilot devarim – Pereḳ be-toldot he-hagut ha-yehudit ba-me'ah ha-arba' e'sreh", in *Eshel Be'er Sheva*, 2 (1980), p. 229–264 (esp. p. 237, n. 38).

30 Narboni's commentary was completed in Soria in 1362. See HOLZMAN, "Be'uro shel R. Moshe Narboni le-More nevuḥim la-Rambam", p. 200.

31 To the best of my knowledge, Moshe Idel never published his theory, but he seems to have mentioned it in personal communication with a number of scholars. See E. REINER, *'Aliyah we-'aliyah la-regel le-Erez Yiśra'el'*, Jerusalem, Diss. Hebrew University, 1988, p. 143, n. 93; DAVIS, "Philosophy, Dogma, and Exegesis in Medieval Ashkenazic Judaism", p. 201, n. 23; D. BERGER, "Judaism and General Culture in Medieval and Early Modern Times", in J. J. SCHACTER (ed.), *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures: Rejection or Integration?*, Northvale, NJ / Jerusalem, Jason Aronson, 1997, p. 57–141 (esp. p. 122, n. 113).

32 Commenting on the *Guide of the Perplexed* (henceforth *GP*), II. 40, where Maimonides discussed the criteria which must be met by any true prophet, Menahem mentioned "the religion of those, who were led to apostasy by Jesus. It was established in the church in the town of Latrun and it is called 'the new religion'" (דת תשמדי ישו שנעשה בכנסייה בעיר לאטרון והיא אשר יקראהו דת חדשה), MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 573 [IMHM F 22078], fol. 152r; cf. MS St Petersburg, Russian Academy of

Another piece of evidence is presented by a manuscript that is probably Menaḥem ben Jacob's autograph. It is a copy of the legal compendium *'Amudei ha-golah* (better known as *Sefer miẓwot ẓaṭan*) by Isaac of Corbeil (d. 1280), supplemented by later glosses by Perez of Corbeil and Moses of Zurich. The manuscript, which is now held at the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma, was finished on 25th Tevet 5141 (22nd December 1380) and its scribe identified himself as Menaḥem ben Jacob³³. He used an Ashkenazic semi-cursive script characteristic of the period and, more importantly, he marked the Hebrew word *shalom* in numerous places throughout the manuscript, a practice commonly used by scribes to identify themselves³⁴.

'Amudei ha-golah was an extremely popular introduction to halakhic rules, originally intended for use among wider strata of Jewish society, including women. Given the fact that the scribe copied this manuscript for his own use, it is reasonable to assume that he was a young man, not an advanced scholar³⁵. In light of this evidence, it seems probable that Menaḥem was born in the late 1350s or early 1360s. The suggestion that he spent his youth in Bohemia is further corroborated by the fact that Avigdor Ẓara, Menaḥem's later colleague at the *bet din* of Prague, who was also born in the late 1350s or early 1360s, seems to indicate they studied together in Prague³⁶. Finally, in his correspondence with Abraham Ẓlausner, Menaḥem (Agler) mentioned the thirteenth-century Ashkenazic Tosafist Moses Taḳu and his anti-philosophical polemical treatise *Ketav tamim* (*The Upright Writing*) – which he heard being described as *Ketav ẓame'* (*The Unclean Writing*) in his youth. This could also suggest that he spent his early life in an area where this rather obscure anti-philosophical text of Ashkenazic origin was accessible.

More importantly, when signing his glosses, Menaḥem always used the name Shalem in conjunction with the name of his father. The sobriquet therefore did not belong to himself, but to his father Jacob. As such, it could have been a reference taken from Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*, alluding to its bearer as an "individual endowed with perfect apprehension" ("ha-ish ha-shalem be-haṣagato" in Samuel ibn Tibbon's translation of the *Guide*), whose intellect is constantly occupied with God³⁷. If this is indeed the case, then it is reasonable to assume that Jacob Shalem was also an active student of philosophical texts, and that he strove to

Sciences, C 47 [IMHM 69303], fol. 154v). While the reference to Latrun, a medieval crusader castle near the ancient Emmaus Nicopolis, one of the places traditionally identified as the site of Jesus's revelation to his disciples after the resurrection, might betray Menaḥem's knowledge of the geography of the Land of Israel, the gloss could also be read as a reference to Lateran and the important church councils held there in the Middle Ages. I would like to thank Tamás Visi for this suggestion. Furthermore, except for two brief glosses containing Arabic equivalents of individual Hebrew terms, there is no evidence that Menaḥem knew Arabic. See MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 585, fols 17r, 51v. On Ashkenazic Jewish scholars present in Jerusalem in the second half of the fourteenth century, see E. REINER, "Bein Ashkenaz li-Yrushalayim", in *Shalem*, 4 (1984), p. 27–62 (in particular p. 48–62).

33 MS Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, Cod. Parm. 3158 [IMHM F 13898], fol. 233r.

34 MS Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, Cod. Parm. 3158 [IMHM F 13898], fols 10r, 11r, 15v, 20v, 22v, 23r, 47v etc.

35 Furthermore, he referred to his father using an honorific title indicating that he was still alive.

36 VISI, "Plague, Persecution, and Philosophy", p. 111.

37 MOSES MAIMONIDES, *GP*, III. 51. English translations from *GP* are cited from MOSES MAIMONIDES, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, transl. by S. PINES, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1963 (here at p. 624).

achieve the ideal presented by Maimonides as the pinnacle of intellectual worship. Given the fact that his son Menaḥem seems to have been acquainted with Solomon ben Judah ha-Naśi's commentary on the *Guide of the Perplexed*, we could even speculate that Jacob Shalem might have been the "master Jacob ben Samuel" who studied the *Guide* with Solomon in the late 1360s, as mentioned above.

To come back full circle, it is even possible that Jacob Shalem did indeed have the very ties to the Land of Israel which have previously been ascribed to his son Menaḥem. This is suggested by the contents of two manuscripts which were copied in Jerusalem by the same scribe during the 1380s for a certain Jacob ben Samuel³⁸. One of them, now held in the Vatican Library, is a collection of *miscellanea* also containing philosophical texts, such as the handbook on logic and its application in biblical exegesis *Zeror ha-kesef* (*Bundle of Silver*) by Joseph ibn Kaspi (d. after 1332), and Averroes's *Middle Commentary* on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in the Hebrew translation of Ḳalonymos ben Ḳalonymos (d. after 1328)³⁹. While the larger part of this manuscript was copied in Sephardic handwriting by a scribe named Moses, one section, which could have been copied by the owner himself, is written in an Ashkenazic hand, and contains the treatise on scribal practice *Barukh she-amar* (*Blessed is He who spoke*) written by Samson ben Eliezer, a scholar with ties to Prague⁴⁰.

While the evidence is by no means conclusive, it is tempting to see Jacob ben Samuel, the Ashkenazic scribe who copied the *Guide of the Perplexed* in 1349 and studied the text with Solomon ben Judah in "the land of Ashkenaz" in the late 1360s, Jacob ben Samuel, the Jew residing in Jerusalem in the 1380s and interested in philosophical texts, and Jacob, the father of Menaḥem ben Jacob "Shalem" as in fact one and the same person. One could then speculate that Menaḥem obtained his Jewish education, including education in philosophical texts in Hebrew, primarily from his father Jacob "Shalem".

4. The Purpose of Philosophical Study according to Menaḥem ben Jacob

As already mentioned, the corpus of philosophical texts written by Menaḥem ben Jacob Shalem is fragmentary and survives in several manuscripts. Furthermore, some of his texts seem to have been lost⁴¹. In the following section, it is therefore

38 MS Cambridge, University Library, Add. 3112 [IMHM F 17554], copied in 1388; MS Vatican, BAV, ebr. 283 [IMHM F 340].

39 For a description of this manuscript, see B. RICHLER, *Hebrew Manuscripts in the Vatican Library: Catalogue*, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2008, p. 208–210.

40 Samson ben Eliezer was an orphan raised in Prague, as he recounts in the introduction to his work. See *Ḳovez sifrei StaM*, ed. M. M. MESHU-ZAHAV, Jerusalem, Mekhon ha-talmud ha-yisre'eli ha-shalem, 1981, p. 15. In the 1380s, Samson ben Eliezer was also a teacher of Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhausen, see *Ḳovez sifrei StaM*, p. 198.

41 In his letter to Abraham Ḳlausner, discussed in more detail below, Menaḥem mentioned a treatise which he had dedicated to the nature of God's presence in the world and which he called *Tokhmit 'olam* (KUPFER, "Li-demutah ha-tarbutit shel yahadut Ashkenaz we-ḥakhmeiha ba-me'ot ha-14–15", p. 141).

not my ambition to present an exhaustive summary of Menaḥem's thought; rather I shall point to some important motifs that reappear in Menaḥem's writings and trace the transmission of his texts. In conjunction, these investigations should help us find the answer to the question of why Ashkenazic scholars like Menaḥem studied philosophical texts at all.

In the article mentioned above, Ephraim Kupfer focused his attention on the surviving correspondence between Menaḥem Agler/Aglar and Abraham Ḳlausner, a leading Austrian rabbi of the late fourteenth century. Since they had not been able to meet for a long time, Ḳlausner asked Menaḥem for written instruction on the "deep secrets [...] concerning the main principles of [God's] unity that a man must know"⁴². Ḳlausner's specific query focused on the anthropomorphic language of the Bible and on the nature of prophetic vision. His letter was motivated, he wrote, primarily by his encounter with contradictory statements concerning the nature of the form of God revealed to the prophets in various texts he had studied. In his inquiry, Ḳlausner quoted on the one hand the opinions of Se'adyah Ga'on, Maimonides, the anonymous author of the liturgical poem *Shir ha-yihud* (*The Hymn of Unity*), and Abraham ibn 'Ezra, who advocated the created and incorporeal nature of these visions, and on the other the more literal and anthropomorphic interpretations of Elḥanan ben Yaḳar of London and Moses Taḳu, two Ashkenazic scholars who flourished in the first half of the thirteenth century⁴³. Ḳlausner seems to have been particularly troubled by Se'adyah's unsparing condemnation of all adherents of the doctrine that God communicates with people directly, and not through an intermediary entity called the "Created Glory", as heretics⁴⁴.

In his response, Menaḥem explained to Ḳlausner some of the most crucial tenets of Maimonidean philosophy, such as the non-corporeality and non-affectivity of God, sharply denying the literal interpretation of biblical anthropomorphism. Many of his arguments were borrowed from Maimonides's introduction to Part Two of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, where Maimonides presented a summary of twenty-six premises of Aristotelian science required to demonstrate the existence and oneness of God. Menaḥem also offered philosophical proofs of the immortality of the soul, emphasizing that according to the philosophers no faculties of the soul remain after death, except the intelligibilia acquired during life⁴⁵.

In one of his glosses on the *Guide*, he also referred to a separate text he had written on the subject of Divine providence (MS St Petersburg, Russian Academy of Sciences, C 47, fol. 187r): וכבר יש לנו מאמר: קטן בהשגחה התבאר בו עניין זה יותר רחב.

42 KUPFER, "Li-demutah ha-tarbutit shel yahadut Ashkenaz we-ḥakhmeiha ba-me'ot ha-14-15", p. 134: הנה מרחוק כתבתי לך גלות לי מדברים נסתרים ועמוקים, והנה ארכו הימים שלא באנו יחד, לכן כתוב לי שנים ושלשה דברים מעיקרי הייחוד שאדם חייב לדעת.

43 On Elḥanan ben Yaḳar, see G. VAJDA, "De quelques infiltrations chrétiennes dans l'oeuvre d'un auteur anglo-juif du XIII^e siècle", in *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 36 (1961), p. 15-34; J. DAN, "Ḥug 'ha-keruv ha-meyuḥad' bi-tenu'at ḥasidut Ashkenaz", in *Tarbiz*, 35-4 (1966), 349-372 (in particular p. 361-364); J. DAN, *Toldot torat ha-sod ha-ivrit*, Jerusalem, Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2012, VI, p. 750-791.

44 KUPFER, "Li-demutah ha-tarbutit shel yahadut Ashkenaz we-ḥakhmeiha ba-me'ot ha-14-15", p. 135.

45 KUPFER, "Li-demutah ha-tarbutit shel yahadut Ashkenaz we-ḥakhmeiha ba-me'ot ha-14-15", p. 143-145.

Throughout the text, Menaḥem quoted primarily from the works of Maimonides, but also from Samuel ibn Tibbon's *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. Occasionally he mentioned non-Jewish philosophers in general; however, the only non-Jewish work referred to by name is Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* (*Sefer ha-mofet*). It was in this text, Menaḥem noted, that Aristotle defined the concept of "demonstrative knowledge", i.e. knowledge based on deduction from premises, which is the highest form of knowledge⁴⁶. However, it seems that Menaḥem felt that Aristotle's authority would not be sufficiently convincing, and he therefore added that in the Talmud, too, specific reasons are adduced for every legal ruling. According to Menaḥem, the demonstrative knowledge of the metaphysical principles outlined by Maimonides is the safest way to achieve the survival of the soul after death. He proclaims his readiness to give further instruction to Klausner should he desire to ascend to this level and acquire demonstrative knowledge of God's unity. But he also – somewhat grudgingly – acknowledges the other option: "[I]f you are satisfied only with tradition and the strong faithfulness in your heart [...], there is no need for you to trouble your intellect [with philosophy] and [you may] stay where you are⁴⁷." For Menaḥem, those who rely exclusively on knowledge received by tradition may still hope to achieve personal salvation, however, the formulations throughout his letter make it clear that he found the "philosophical path" safer, and therefore preferable.

Clearly, Klausner approached Menaḥem as an expert in esoteric knowledge, asking for instruction regarding the "secrets" of the correct – philosophical – understanding of God. In his reply, Menaḥem summarized some basic elements of the Maimonidean lore and offered further, more advanced guidance, if necessary. A glimpse of what this advanced instruction in "philosophical ascent" might entail is offered by a fragment of a treatise written by Menaḥem which has survived in a manuscript now located in Oxford⁴⁸. This treatise originally consisted of at least three parts. The first two chapters of Part One are missing, but the content of chapters I. 3–5 suggests that the discussion followed the structure of one of the last chapters of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, III. 51. As Maimonides himself admitted, this chapter

is only a kind of conclusion, at the same time explaining the worship as practiced by one who has apprehended the true realities peculiar only to Him after he has obtained an apprehension of what He is; and it also guides him toward achieving this worship, which is the end of man, and makes known to him how providence watches over him in this habitation, until he is brought over to the bundle of life⁴⁹.

In this chapter, Maimonides presents his well-known parable of the palace, illustrating the different – mostly insufficient – ways in which human beings attempt to approach God and acquire knowledge about Him. While acknowledging the

46 KUPFER, "Li-demutah ha-tarbutit shel yahadut Ashkenaz we-ḥakhmeiha ba-me'ot ha-14–15", p. 145.

47 KUPFER, "Li-demutah ha-tarbutit shel yahadut Ashkenaz we-ḥakhmeiha ba-me'ot ha-14–15", p. 146: אבל אם יספיק לך הקבלה בלבד והאמונה החזקה התקועה בלבך [...] אז אין צורך לך להטריד שכלך ותעמד במקומך.

48 MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 585 [IMHM F 17390], fols 20r–58r.

49 GP, III. 51 (transl. PINES, p. 618).

essential role of an intellectual understanding of God, Maimonides claims that the aim of human life is to achieve the “worship of the heart”, passionate love exercised through exclusive concentration on God, perfectly apprehended⁵⁰.

Menaḥem’s treatise seems to have been conceived as a guidebook offering a student of philosophy instruction in how to integrate the acquired knowledge into one’s religious practice, transcend the intellectual dimension of the philosophical pursuit and achieve the benefits offered by God to those who acquire correct knowledge about Him. Following the structure of the aforementioned chapter from the *Guide*, the last three chapters of the first part of Menaḥem’s treatise address guidance towards the correct, philosophically informed worship of God (ch. I. 3), the causes of Divine providence (ch. I. 4) and the immortality of the soul (ch. I. 5). The text is a pastiche of quotations taken primarily from the *Guide* and from the commentary of Moses Narboni, occasionally elucidating their position on the matters under discussion.

Menaḥem devoted particular attention to the relationship between philosophical knowledge and traditional religious practice. He emphasized that while Maimonides considered the practice of religious rituals like fasting or prayer to be subordinate to an intellectual knowledge of God, he nevertheless did not deny their usefulness in leading the mind towards contemplation of God and an understanding of His essence. Even animal sacrifice offered in the Jerusalem Temple was efficient only because it induced separation that would enable the sacrifice’s mind to focus exclusively on God⁵¹. The same effect can be achieved more reliably by the study of philosophy. Menaḥem accepted Narboni’s idea that if a philosopher is unified with the Active Intellect and receives the divine overflow, his body will become incorruptible like the celestial bodies⁵². He claimed that the miracles of Daniel in the lion’s den (Dn 6) and the three youths in the fiery furnace (Dn 3) prove that those who receive prophetic inspiration are protected in a special way against bodily harm⁵³.

Occasionally, Menaḥem introduced other sources as well – in the discussion of the immortality of the soul in chapter I. 5, he included a summary of chapter I. 11 of the *Wars*

50 *GP*, III. 51 (transl. PINES, p. 621): “[A]fter apprehension, total devotion to Him [i.e., God] and the employment of intellectual thought in constantly loving him should be aimed at.”

51 MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 585, fol. 44v: “הוא יעשה ככללו כשהיה ההתבודדות במעשה הקרבן תעלה המחשבה בוי' כי נשא לבבינו אל כפים אל אל בשמים / ואו יעשה לנו מה שנרצה וישפיע הרוחניות על הראוי לקבלו.” “[I]t is possible that the cult in the Jerusalem Temple was favorable to the Heavens in general [i.e., to God – as opposed to merely influencing celestial bodies, which is what ancient pagans believed – M.Z.], because as a result of its separation [from the objects of sensation] (*hitbodedut*) during the act of sacrifice, the thought [of the sacrificer] would rise to the Holy One, blessed be He, for [it is written:] ‘Let us lift up our hearts with our hands to God in heaven [Lam 3:41]: Then He will do for us what we want, and the celestial influence will descend upon anyone who is worthy to receive it.”

52 MOSHE NARBONI, *Be'ur le-sefer More nevuḥim*, ed. J. GOLDENTHAL, Wien, K. k. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1852, fols 64r–v (on *GP*, III. 51).

53 MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 585, fols 24v–25r: “ועזריה מישאל וחנניה ובגוב אריות וזולת הנגלה המפורסם // על כן צדק המפרש הנוכ' באמר כי איננו בתוך כבשןהאש כי לא יסובל שיהיה עניין נבואיי זולת הנגלה המפורסם / לא חיות רעות אלה שלה מלאכיה וסגר פום אריותא אז מטבע ההיה וההפסד על כן יזיק לו לא אש ולא מים / לא חיות רעות אלה שלה מלאכיה וסגר פום אריותא.” See also *VISI, On the Peripheries of Ashkenaz*, p. 220–223.

of the Lord by Gersonides, and also quoted arguments taken from al-Ghazzālī's *Intentions of the Philosophers* (translated into Hebrew as *Kawanot ha-filosofim*), a work for which he also produced glosses that survive in the same manuscript⁵⁴.

In Part Two of the treatise, Menaḥem offered further guidance towards achieving the worship mentioned by Maimonides in the *Guide* III. 51. In contrast to chapter I. 3, where he only summarized Maimonides's argument regarding the prerequisites necessary for achieving philosophically informed worship, in this part Menaḥem delved into more details, likening the relationship between his instruction and Maimonides's instruction to the relationship between Ezekiel's and Isaiah's descriptions of the divine chariot mentioned in *GP* III. 6. According to Menaḥem, Isaiah's description was brief because his contemporaries were "spiritual people" (*anshei ruah*), while Ezekiel's listeners, already living in exile, needed a more detailed description of the divine chariot⁵⁵. Analogically, Menaḥem's generation would benefit from more detailed instruction regarding the preconditions necessary for philosophical worship, presumably because they lacked the ethical qualities of their predecessors.

The basis for Menaḥem's outline of these preconditions was a rabbinic text taken from the *Mishnah* (mSoṭ 9:15), which quotes rabbi Pinḥas ben Ya'ir, a second-century Tannaitic sage. Rabbi Pinḥas describes a sequence of virtues that gradually bring about the second coming of Elijah and the resurrection of the dead⁵⁶. Menaḥem claimed that his attention was drawn to this text by his friend Avigdor Ḳara, who suggested it might be identical to the text referred to in the Talmud as *Seder Eliyahu* (lit. "the order of Elijah"), and that its instruction was relevant for the philosophical worship discussed by Maimonides in the *Guide*, III. 51⁵⁷. Menaḥem

⁵⁴ MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 585, fols 99r–199r.

⁵⁵ MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 585, fols 34r–v: ששעניו: באור ובין באור שהשניו: כי אם הישרת הרב לבד והוא ההרגל והלמוד / לפנות המחשבה בהרבות הבדידות וההפרדות // ובכאן נבאר ההישרה אשר נצטרך אליה בזמנינו זה והוא סוף הגוף ושמירתו בטהרה ובנקיות כמו שזכרנו בסוף העניין השלישי מח"א // וידמה יחס הישרתינו להישרת הרב ע"ה ליחס באור יחזקאל עניין המרכבה לבאר ישעיה עניין המרכבה // וזה שאמי הרב פ"ו ח"ג שישעיהו לא היו אנשי רוח צריכים לבאר להם הפרט ההוא ובני הגולה היו צריכי לפרט זה / גם ישעיהו יהיה יותר שלם מיחזקאל / Cf. bḤag 13b.

⁵⁶ "With the footprints of the Messiah presumption shall increase and dearth reach its height; the vine shall yield its fruit, but the wine shall be costly; and the empire shall fall into heresy and there shall be none to utter reproof. The council-chamber shall be given to fornication. Galilee shall be laid waste and Gablan shall be made desolate; and the people of the frontier shall go about from city to city with none to show pity on them. The wisdom of the Scribes shall become insipid and they that shun sin shall be deemed contemptible, and truth shall nowhere be found. Children shall shame the elders, and the elders shall rise up before the children, for the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law: a man's enemies are the men in his own house [Mic 7:6]. The face of this generation is as the face of a dog, and the son will not be put to shame by his father. On whom can we stay ourselves? – on our Father in heaven. R. Phineas ben Jair says: Heedfulness leads to cleanliness, and cleanliness leads to purity, and purity leads to abstinence, and abstinence leads to holiness, and holiness leads to humility, and humility leads to the shunning of sin, and the shunning of sin leads to saintliness, and saintliness leads to [the gift of] Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit leads to the resurrection of the dead. And the resurrection of the dead comes through Elijah of blessed memory." English translation quoted from H. DANBY, *The Mishnah*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1933, p. 306.

⁵⁷ MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 585, fol. 34v: אמר מנחם ב"ר יעקב ימים נבוכתי בהוראת העניין / עד כי שלח לי אחי הגדול ה"ר אביגדור קרא הנכפל בדברי רז"ל והוא אמרם סדר אליהו דלא הוה ידיעה לי מאי היא /

real, namely from seeking to rule over other people and to make them acknowledge his greatness, admire and serve him. Rather, he should see all people as animals and not care to receive honors from them. He should consider the masses of uneducated people as bad and dangerous animals, so much so that he would not socialize with ordinary people except for the most necessary reasons. [...] Finally, he should direct his desire to know the secrets of the existence [of the world] and of its causes and of the attributes of the Exalted one and of His holy names, and how to conduct himself and act in the world, how things exist from their first beginning, how the causes and the things which are caused are ordered, and how they all ascend to the one cause of all causes, and especially the matters that we shall explain with God's help in the following third part [of this treatise]. He should accustom himself to study it often so that he will concentrate on these matters very forcefully. In our time, most people will not be able to accomplish this, except through great self-denial, eating of bread and drinking of water or light drink and through mortification of flesh by lying on a hard surface and staying in isolation and by constant reading of scientific books, until the mind does not desire anything except divine matters. A man of such qualities will undoubtedly be protected by great individual providence [...] ⁶².

For Menaḥem, the mystical and ascetic dimension was the focal point of the philosophical pursuit and he seems to have consciously highlighted these motifs in Maimonides's writings. This attitude is further underscored in the third part of the treatise, which is devoted to the different names of God in Hebrew and their mystical properties, which is a subject also discussed briefly by Maimonides in the *Guide* ⁶³. This part originally contained six chapters, but only two chapters survive, and the rest of the treatise is now lost.

In the first chapter, Menaḥem examines the Tetragrammaton and the "great secret" that is, according to Maimonides, associated with this special Divine name ⁶⁴.

62 MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 585, fols 42r–v: להישיר עצמו לזאת התכלית / והם זהירות נקיות פרישות טהרה קדושה ענוה יראת ירגיל עצמו לקנות לנפשו השמנה מדות אשר קדם ביאורם / וחס וזהירות נקיות פרישות טהרה קדושה ענוה יראת חטא חסידות / ושורש כל אלה המדות שישתדל לחסר צרכי החמר ממאכל וממשות' ומיתר התענוגי הגופניים וירחיק התאוות ויכניע לבבו עד שלא ישתוקק למותרות כלל ויקבל עליו זה בשבועי' וגדרי' אין שיוכל לעשות לזה סייגים יעשה והוא שיתרחק עצמו מן הקבוץ על המאכל והמשתה עד שלא יאכל עם אדם חוץ לביתו ואפי' בסעודת מצוה / ועיקר העניין שלא ירדוף אחר הכבוד כלל / ויבטל מחשבתו ותשוקתו לרשויות ולשררות שאינם אמיתיות ר"ל בקשת הנצוח או הגדיל העם לו והמשחיך כבודם אליו ועבודתם אותו // אלא יראה האנשי' כלם כבהמות עד שלא יחוש על הכבוד מהם // ויראה המון עמי ארץ כחיות רעות מזיקות עד לא ישתתף עם אדם המוני כי אם לצורך מצרכיו ההכרחיים מאד // אמ' ר"ל ת"ח שלא ידבר עם עם <אך הרי הוא כקיתון של זהב / וכשידבר עמו הרי הוא כקיתון של כסף / וכשיאכל כל וישתה עמו הרי הוא כקיתון של חרס ח"ו אם נשבר אין לו תקנה // סוף דבר לא יהיו תשוקותיו רק לדעת סודות זה המציאות וידיעת סיבותיו וידיעת תארי הראשו' ית' ושמותיו הקדושי' והנהגתו ופעלתו בעולם / ואיכות מציאות הדברים מן ההתחלה הראשוני' איכות סידור הסבות והמסובבים ואיכות עליתם אל אחד שהוא מסבב כל הסיבות / וביחוד העיון בענייני' אשר נבאר בג"ה ית' בתלק השלישי שיבא אחר זה / וירגיל עצמו לעיין בו תדיר עד שיהיה שוקדני על אותם העניינים בשקידה חזקה וזה לא ישלם לרוב אדם בזמנינו זה כי אם בסיגוף גדול באכילה לחם ושתיית מים או שחר קל ובהצטערות הגוף בשכיבה קשה ובבידודות והפרדות רב / ובקריאתו תמיד בספרי' המחוברי' בחכמו עד שלא ישתוקק במחשבתו לדבר אחר זולתי לענייני' האלהיים / והאישי אשר זה תארו אין ספק שיושג בהשגחה פרטית עצומה

63 GP, I, 61–64.

64 GP, I, 62 (transl. PINES, p. 150): "The men of knowledge have transmitted this, I mean the mode of pronouncing [the Tetragrammaton], but they did not teach it to anyone except once a week to a worthy

According to Menaḥem, he had struggled for a long time to identify this secret, until he realized that it must refer to the twenty-six premises of Aristotelian physics and metaphysics laid down by Maimonides in his introduction to Part Two of the *Guide*. For Maimonides, these premises served as the basis for his proof of the existence of God and his incorporeality. Because the numeric value of the Hebrew letters forming the Tetragrammaton – *yod, he, waw, he* – is twenty-six, God's true nature, which is being revealed in this unique name, is according to Menaḥem available only to those who have internalized the elementary axioms of Aristotelian science⁶⁵. The following chapter is therefore dedicated to a summary of Maimonides's twenty-six propositions, which is based primarily on Narboni's commentary. The chapters discussing further divine names taken from the Jewish tradition (the names containing twelve and forty-two letters, the name "I am that I am", *Shaddai*), and presumably offering their philosophical interpretation, are unfortunately lost.

This brief summary makes it clear that Menaḥem ben Jacob Shalem approached philosophical inquiry in a specific way. Menaḥem emphasized the mystical and ascetic elements of Maimonidean teachings and presented the pursuit of Aristotelian science as a solitary, esoteric pursuit, the purpose of which is primarily to achieve Divine protection and mystical union with God⁶⁶. The Ashkenazic turn to philosophical material could therefore be seen as part of the process of the diversification of esoteric currents in Ashkenazic culture after the Black Death, as described by Israel Yuval and Tamás Visi⁶⁷. The tendency to blur the boundaries between rationalism and mysticism, and the interest in new ways to interpret the established elements of Jewish tradition, were characteristic not only of Menaḥem, but also of his contemporaries, such as Kara, Mühlhausen and Simeon ben Samuel of Regensburg⁶⁸.

5. The Transmission and Dissemination of Menaḥem's Texts

To conclude this brief survey, a closer look at the activities of the scribes who disseminated Menaḥem's works in the course of the fifteenth century will help us assess the influence of his philosophical interests upon later generations of Ashkenazic Jews. As we shall see, Ashkenazic manuscript owners and copyists who transmitted

scholar. I believe that the dictum 'the sages transmit the name having four letters once a week to their sons and pupils' refers not only to their teaching the mode of pronouncing this name, but also to their making known the notion because of which this name has been originated without any derivation. Accordingly, there also would be in this notion a great secret."

65 MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 585, fols 45v–46r.

66 A. ALTMANN, "Das Verhältnis Maimunis zur jüdischen Mystik", in *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 80-4 (1936), p. 305–330.

67 I. J. YUVAL, "Magie und Kabbala unter den Juden im Deutschland des ausgehenden Mittelalters", in K.-E. GRÖZINGER (ed.), *Judentum im deutschen Sprachraum*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1991, p. 173–189; VISI, "Plague, Persecution, and Philosophy", p. 90–95.

68 DAVIS, "Philosophy, Dogma, and Exegesis in Medieval Ashkenazic Judaism", p. 220–221; KAUFMANN, *Rabi Yom Tov Lipman Mithloyzn: ba'al ha-nizahon, ha-ḥoker we-ha-mekubal*, p. 36–44.

Menaḥem's texts were active in areas east of Prague, in Lesser Poland. While the surviving manuscripts attest to the fact that interest in the study of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, accompanied by esoteric commentaries as well as other philosophical texts, persisted during the fifteenth century, there is also evidence that its impact upon "mainstream" Ashkenazic culture was much more limited than suggested by Kupfer.

Two manuscripts containing the larger portion of Menaḥem's works, namely a collection of various philosophical texts including the treatise discussed above (MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 585) and a copy of Narboni's commentary on the *Guide* with glosses by Menaḥem (MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 573), were copied by the same scribe, Yeruḥam ben Solomon Fischl. MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 585 was copied between 1465 and 1467 in the towns of Jaroslaw and Sandomierz, and apart from Narboni's commentary accompanied by Menaḥem's glosses it also contains the latter's glosses on al-Ghazzālī's *Intentions of the Philosophers*, a text which gained popularity among Jewish scholars in the fourteenth century as a handy collection of different philosophical opinions⁶⁹.

Almost twenty-five years after finishing this collection of philosophical texts, in 1490, Yeruḥam ben Solomon copied Moses Narboni's commentary on the *Guide of the Perplexed* accompanied by numerous glosses, some (but not all) signed with the name Menaḥem ben Jacob. In the meantime, the scribe had moved to the nearby town of Hrubieszów, where according to the colophon he copied the book for a certain rabbi Jacob, "may the Supreme [Lord] grant him to obtain the crown of wisdom and the understanding of secrets and may he see the wonders of his Torah"⁷⁰. According to a note added to the colophon in a different hand, Jacob's daughter Rachel later sold the book to a certain Yeḥi'el ben Simeon. Since notes written by the owners of the manuscript in the first half of the sixteenth century mention a certain Eleazar of Hrubieszów, it seems that the manuscript stayed in the area of its origin for some time. It should be noted, however, that the manuscript contains few later glosses, so the extent to which it was read and studied remains open to question.

When copying Menaḥem's glosses to Maimonides and Narboni, Yeruḥam ben Solomon seems to have used an older text. One older manuscript containing Menaḥem's glosses on Narboni's commentary is now located in the Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg⁷¹. The St Petersburg manuscript contains the text of the *Guide*, Narboni's commentary, and a number of marginal glosses, again both signed and anonymous. Some of the signed glosses are attributed to an otherwise unknown Joseph "called the Intelligent" (*Josef ha-niḳra' Maškil*)⁷².

The manuscript was clearly intended as a handbook for the study of the *Guide of the Perplexed*. In addition to the text of the *Guide* and Narboni's commentary on it,

69 S. HARVEY, "Why Did Fourteenth-Century Jews Turn to Alghazali's Account of Natural Science?", in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 91-3/4 (2001), p. 359–376.

70 MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 573, fol. 227v: וְרֵאוּת מִתּוֹרָתוֹ, וְלִרְאוּת תְּעִלּוּמוֹת, וְלִחֲכִים לְהַבִּין תְּעִלּוּמוֹת, וְלִרְאוּת מִתּוֹרָתוֹ. נִפְלְאוֹת לְהִיט לְשֵׁם לְהַפְאֵרָת וּלְתַהֲלָה וּלְשִׁמְר עֲמוּ עַד יִפְאֵר עֲנוּיִם בִּישׁוּעָה.

71 MS St Petersburg, Russian Academy of Sciences, C 47 [IMHM F 69303].

72 MS St Petersburg, Russian Academy of Sciences, C 47 [IMHM F 69303], fols 7r–12v, 13v, 81v, 147v, 157v. Joseph's gloss on fol. 12r contains a summary of the contents of the *Guide of the Perplexed*.

it contains the commentaries of Joseph ibn Kaspi ('*Amudei ha-kesef*) and Shem Tov ibn Falaquera (*Moreh ha-moreh*), Samuel ibn Tibbon's *Explanation of Foreign Terms* (*Perush milot zarot*) and the Hebrew translation of Maimonides's *Treatise on Logic* (*Milot ha-higayon*), as well as parts of his *Commentary on the Mishnah*. Originally, the manuscript also contained *Ruah hen*, a popular introductory handbook to the study of Aristotelian science written by an anonymous Provençal Jewish scholar in the thirteenth century, and several minor works of scientific and mystical nature, including the Hebrew translation of Johannes de Sacrobosco's *De sphaera*⁷³. This part was later bound with another manuscript; its colophon, however, still refers to the manuscript as a copy of Narboni and *Ruah hen*⁷⁴. It is thanks to this colophon that we are able to identify the scribe, a certain Judah ben Jacob, and the date of its production, 1457.

The scribe Judah ben Jacob copied philosophical texts for other owners as well. In 1440, Judah copied Jacob Anatoli's Hebrew translation of Averroes's Long and Middle Commentaries on *Posterior Analytics* for a certain Eliezer ben Joseph⁷⁵. In 1446, he copied a whole collection of Averroes's Middle Commentaries on Aristotle's works of natural philosophy (*De caelo et mundo*, *De generatione et corruptione*, *Meteorologica*, *Book IX of Historia animalium*) for an owner identified as Yehi'el Katz⁷⁶. Notably, Yehi'el Katz's name is appended to one of the glosses in the Oxford manuscript Opp. 573; however, the same gloss appears without attribution in the St Petersburg manuscript⁷⁷.

The manuscript of Narboni and *Ruah hen* was copied for a certain Abraham ben Solomon ha-Sefardi ("the Spaniard"). Abraham himself added glosses to Narboni's and Kaspi's commentaries in his own hand⁷⁸. Furthermore, two folios written in Abraham's hand contain a number of verses and short poems containing the name Abraham or Abraham ben Solomon in acrostic. One poem is a versed summary of the thirteen basic principles of faith of Maimonides. Another is particularly enlightening, as it provides a glimpse of the life of someone who seems to have been a Sephardic intellectual in Eastern Europe. In the poem, Abraham laments the fate of a man, presumably himself, who was "blown about by the wind of time, taken out from the sheath of scholars and thrown into the rugged climate of the land called *Rus*". He complains that

the wandering is heavy upon him [...], he resides among a nation that is full of hatred toward him and wrath which is burning like a sudden flame. Their voices resemble [the voices of] ostriches, their faces [the faces of] wolves in the woods and

73 On *Ruah hen*, see O. ELIOR, *Ruah hen yahalof'al panai: Yehudim, mada' u-keri'ah*, 1210–1896, Jerusalem, Mekhon Ben-Zevi, 2016.

74 MS Cambridge, MA, Harvard University, Heb. 38 [IMHM F 34447], fols 59r–89r. For the colophon, see fol. 68v.

75 MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 143 [IMHM: F 22390].

76 MS Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, Schoenberg Collection, Ljs 453 [IMHM: F 4709], fols 1r–250v.

77 MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 573, fol. 48r.

78 MS St Petersburg, Russian Academy of Sciences, C 47, fol. 42v, 65r, 101v, 231r.

of apes. When they see among themselves an intelligent man, they become jealous of him and ask him: “What is your business here⁷⁹?”

More importantly, Abraham clearly had access to Menaḥem’s writings, for he copied an excerpt from Menaḥem’s treatise discussed above in a marginal gloss⁸⁰. It seems, therefore, that at least some of the glosses attributed to Menaḥem ben Jacob in the two manuscript copies of Maimonides and Narboni were excerpted from his longer treatises by later students or copyists⁸¹. In other words, it is likely that Menaḥem’s comments in his longer treatises, interwoven as they are with extensive quotations from Maimonides and Narboni, were at a later stage rearranged to follow the structure of the *Guide* and turned into marginal glosses. Such interaction would show that Menaḥem’s texts were being used in the mid-fifteenth century as a textbook of sorts for the study of Maimonidean philosophy.

One of the glosses written in Abraham’s hand refers to a teaching concerning the Divine name which was received from “rabbi Ḥasdai of Barcelona”⁸². It seems likely that Abraham refers to an interpretation he received himself, but the identity of rabbi Ḥasdai is unclear – it seems unlikely that it could have been Ḥasdai Crescas, who died in 1410⁸³. In any case, the presence of Abraham, a Spanish Jew, in Eastern Europe gives evidence of intellectual transfer between Ashkenazic and Sephardic areas in the fifteenth century. However, as his poetic complaints clearly suggest, Abraham’s intellectual pursuits were far from widespread in his newly adopted home.

Finally, one should also examine the possible connection between Ashkenazic students of Menaḥem’s texts and Maimonidean philosophy in general, and the group of translators from Hebrew to Ruthenian who in the late fifteenth century created a corpus sometimes labeled “the literature of the Judaizers”⁸⁴. It is noteworthy that at least two texts translated to Ruthenian from Hebrew, namely Johannes de Sacrobosco’s *De sphaera* and Maimonides’s *Treatise on Logic*, are included in Judah ben Jacob’s manuscript containing Menaḥem’s glosses on Narboni, while

79 MS Cambridge, MA, Harvard University, Heb. 38, fol. 69r: ומיניע גבר מנדון / ובראות רוח הזמן מתנועע / והכביד הנדוד עליו ואין לו מעורר / להשכיבו באקלים נעון ורעון / אשר ידמו בקולם ליענים / דמות זב יער וקופר / בראתם אנוש נבון בתוכם / יקנאו בו ויאמרו לו מה לך פה //

80 MS St Petersburg, Russian Academy of Sciences, C 47, fol. 50v. The excerpt in question concerns the interpretation of the secret of the Tetragrammaton discussed above.

81 The passage cited above, n. 53, is reproduced as a gloss in MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 573, fol. 225r. Similarly, Menaḥem’s polemical glosses against Kabbalah, cited by KUPFER, “Li-demutah ha-tarbutit shel yahadut Ashkenaz we-hakhmeiha ba-me’ot ha-14–15”, p. 122–123, are in fact excerpted from a longer letter concerning the philosophical interpretation of sacrifices (MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Mich. Add. 25, fols 65r–85r). See M. ŽONCA, *Difference and Intellectual Diversity in Late Medieval Ashkenaz, 1350–1500*, London, Diss. Queen Mary, University of London, 2015, p. 95–126.

82 MS St Petersburg, Russian Academy of Sciences, C 47, fol. 49v.

83 For this suggestion, see VISI, “Plague, Persecution, and Philosophy”, p. 95.

84 M. TAUBE, “Transmission of Scientific Texts in 15th-Century Eastern Knaan”, in *Aleph*, 10-2 (2010), p. 315–353; M. TAUBE, “Jewish-Christian Collaboration in Slavic Translations from Hebrew”, in V. IZMIRLIEVA, B. GASPAROV (eds.), *Translation and Tradition in “Slavia Orthodoxa”*, Zürich, LIT Verlag, 2012, p. 26–45.

al-Ghazzālī's *Intentions of the Philosophers*, also partially translated into Ruthenian from Hebrew under the title *The Book Called Logic* (*Книга глаголемаа Логика, сиречь Словесница*, also known as *The Logika of the Judaizers*), can be found in Yeruḥam ben Solomon's Oxford manuscript with Menaḥem's comments. According to Moshe Taube, the Slavic translator of the *Logika* probably used a "very close ancestor" of the Oxford manuscript as his model⁸⁵. As Taube has noted, the translator of the text known as the *Logika of the Judaizers* was a learned Jew with an impressive knowledge of medieval philosophy, who often added explanatory glosses into his translation⁸⁶. Further examination of the *Logika*, which lies beyond the scope of this article, should establish whether the text used by the Jewish translator also contained Menaḥem's glosses on the *Intentions*. This would in turn contribute to a better understanding of the later reception of philosophical texts produced by Ashkenazic Jewish scholars active in late medieval Prague.

85 *Logika of the Judaizers: a Fifteenth-Century Ruthenian Translation from Hebrew: Critical Edition of the Slavic Texts presented alongside their Hebrew Sources*, ed. M. TAUBE, Jerusalem, Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2016, p. 140.

86 TAUBE, "Jewish-Christian Collaboration in Slavic Translations from Hebrew", p. 38.