

1 Moses Maimonides

An Intellectual Portrait

I. I. INTRODUCTION

Moses Maimonides was born in Cordova, Spain, in 1138 and died in Cairo in 1204. Cordova was then the capital of Andalusia (Muslim Spain) and the largest and most affluent city in Europe. Under the Spanish Umayyads (756–1031), Cordova thrived as a cultural center and political capital. Andalusia reached a high level of civilization, with art, literature, history, science, music, and jurisprudence flourishing as nowhere else in Europe. The reign of enlightened Caliph ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān III (912–61) marked the beginning of a period of cultural flourishing for Andalusia, including its Jewish communities. The caliph embraced a tolerant policy, integrating the diverse religious communities and ethnic groups in his state. In such an environment, the Jews found a niche and prospered. ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān, a devotee of both religious and secular learning, attracted literati and scientists by giving them generous endowments. A multitude of libraries, mosques, madrasas [colleges], and hospitals enticed scholars from the eastern part of the Islamic world to emigrate to the west, bringing with them intellectual treasures that made Andalusia culturally preeminent for many centuries.

The Jewish Quarter, where Moses and his family lived, was located close to the Great Mosque and the royal palace, in the southwestern section of the city, near the Guadalquivir River and its ancient Roman bridge. Jews passed by the Great Mosque, overwhelmed by its vastness, peering curiously through the gates at the arcades and multiple rows of high double, horseshoe arches, sensing its allure, mystery, and otherness. The Qur’ānic inscriptions over the mosque’s gates proclaimed Islam’s dominance and superiority over Judaism

and Christianity, promising paradise to Muslims who had surrendered themselves to Allah and divine punishment to those who did not take heed.

Maimonides' ancestors were scholars who had served as judges and communal leaders. In the epilogue to his *Commentary on the Mishnah* he lists seven generations of eminent sages and magistrates, and he says that he began the commentary when he was twenty-three and completed it in Egypt when he was about thirty.¹ He was then a newcomer to Egypt, an émigré from the West who needed to establish his identity; by invoking his illustrious ancestry he implied a basis for personal authority.

Maimonides shared the prevailing view that Andalusian Jews were descended from the Jerusalemites exiled after the destruction of the Second Commonwealth in 70 C.E. From his Andalusian heritage he drew a sense of aristocracy and noblesse oblige.² The splendor of Andalusia under 'Abd ar-Raḥmān III and his son was reflected in the brilliance of Jewish learning of the time. The erudite Ḥisday ben Shaprut became court physician and advisor to the caliph thanks to his linguistic competence (in Hebrew, Arabic, Latin, and the Romance dialect) and medical skill. When Emperor Constantine sent the caliph an illuminated Greek manuscript of Dioscorides' *De materia medica*, the classic work on pharmacology, Ḥisday, along with a Byzantine monk, translated it into Arabic. He carried out many diplomatic missions for the dynasty.³

The caliph appointed Ḥisday head of the Jewish communities in his realm and authorized him to run their affairs and represent them at court. Jews gave him the title *Nasi* [prince]. He was a patron to intellectuals, and his literary salon became a gathering place for poets, grammarians, scholars, scientists, and philosophers. He was the archetypal Jewish courtier, faithful to his heritage yet ready to adopt the cultural values of the surrounding environment, combining traditional learning in Bible, Talmud, and *Midrash* with proficiency in logic, mathematics, and astronomy. He orchestrated the Jewish cultural renaissance centered in Cordova, making Jewish religious and secular culture in Andalusia independent of the Baghdad academies and the Geonim.

Another Jewish courtier who became a cultural paragon in the collective memory of Andalusian Jewry was Samuel ben Joseph Ibn Naghrila (993–1055), a gifted calligrapher and literary stylist in

Arabic, who in 1013 became vizier to the Zīrid rulers of Granada and head of the Jewish communities of Andalusia with the title *Nagid*. Ibn Naghrila was resourceful and multitalented, a brilliant administrator, poet, and rabbinic scholar. Aside from composing poems on love, wine, and old age, he also wrote war poetry.⁴

The synthesis of traditional Jewish learning with secular knowledge among these courtiers became the hallmark of the educated Andalusian Jew and served as a model for emulation. The courtiers were men for whom the Arabic ideal of *adab*, a cultured refinement, was fundamental in their educational program. They created a cultural identity of their own by writing Hebrew poetry redolent with biblical resonances. Andalusian Jewry celebrated the heroic achievements of these men, and the exemplar of the cosmopolitan and cultured courtier, learned in the secular sciences and in Jewish law and lore, set a precedent for Maimonides as he later fashioned his career.

Maimonides placed himself squarely in an Andalusian tradition of learning and looked to the sages of Sefarad as his authorities in legal matters. His father had been a pupil of Rabbi Joseph Ibn Migash (1077–1141), head of the academy of Lucena. Foremost among the Lucenan masters was Rabbi Isaac Alfasi (1013–1103). Rabbi Maimon transmitted Ibn Migash's teaching to Moses, who called the Lucenan sage "my teacher," though he had never studied with him. Maimon must have brought the precocious lad to visit Lucena – only forty-three miles from Cordova – but Ibn Migash died in 1141 when Moses was just three years old. Maimonides revered these scholars, but he did not hesitate to be critical toward them, including his father, demonstrating early on an independence of authorities evident later in his stance toward Aristotle and Galen.

Lucena was also a center of secular culture for Andalusian Jews. The city welcomed intellectuals, including the poets Moses and Abraham Ibn Ezra, Judah Halevi, Joseph Ibn Sahl, and Joseph ibn Ṣaddīq, as well as the grammarian Jonah Ibn Janāḥ. These were rabbinic sages steeped in secular subjects, imbued with cultivated literary taste, and gifted with poetical talent. Joseph Ibn Ṣaddīq studied Rabbinics in Lucena, then became a judge in Cordova in 1138, and also wrote poetry, a treatise on logic, and a philosophical work praised by Maimonides⁵: "As for the *Book Microcosm*, which R. Joseph Ibn Ṣaddīq composed, I have not seen it. But I knew the

man and his discourse,⁶ and I recognized his eminence and the value of his book, for he undoubtedly followed the system of the Sincere Brethren."⁷

With the death of Ibn Migash, in 1141, rabbinic learning declined in Andalusia. The historian and philosopher Abraham Ibn Daud wrote that after Ibn Migash "the world became desolate of academies of learning."⁸ The decline coincided with political instability in the wake of the Almohad invasion. The sons of Ibn Migash fled to Toledo, and other scholars followed a similar route northward to Christian regions of Spain and southward to Morocco.

1.2. THE ALMOHAD INVASION

Muḥammad Ibn Tūmart founded the fundamentalist Almohad movement in the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco among the *Maṣmūda* Berbers, who recognized him as the *Mahdī*, a divinely guided messianic redeemer. He fought to restore the pristine faith of Islam, based on the Qur'ān and the Sunna, and to enforce the precepts of the sacred law. The Almohads united North Africa and Andalusia under the rule of a single empire.⁹ Suddenly, Jews who had been living in Spain for a millenium had to prove that they belonged there, and if they were not willing to embrace Islam, their choice was exile or death. The Almohads invaded Andalusia and occupied Cordova in 1148, and the Maimon family left the city then when Moses was just ten years old.

1.3. ANDALUSIAN YEARS

For a period of some twelve years the Maimon family wandered from place to place in Andalusia. During those years, young Moses became absorbed in the sciences, beginning, as was typical, with logic, mathematics, and astronomy. The first subject he studied was astrology, which he later rejected as baseless and useless.¹⁰ However, astrology was tied in with a knowledge of astronomy. Understanding the calendar required knowledge of astronomy to determine the time of the new moon, to synchronize lunar and solar time, to calculate the periods of seasons, and to compute the Metonic cycle of intercalated months. But studying traditional sources with Talmudists could not

provide him with the scientific knowledge he needed, and he realized that he had to study the secular sciences.¹¹ His scientific curiosity brought him into contact with Muslim intellectuals. He convened with students of the philosopher Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn aṣ-Ṣā'igh Ibn Bājja and with a son of the astronomer Jābir Ibn Aflaḥ.¹² Later, Maimonides and Joseph ben Judah, his pupil, edited and revised Jābir Ibn Aflaḥ's *Book of Astronomy*, in which the Andalusian astronomer had criticized Ptolemy's *Almagest*.

1.4. THE ANDALUSIAN SCHOOL OF ARISTOTELIAN STUDIES

Maimonides' philosophical orientation places him in the milieu of the twelfth-century Andalusian School of Aristotelian studies.¹³ The pioneer of the Aristotelian revival in Spain was Abū Bakr Ibn Bājja (Avempace) (d. 1139), followed by Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 1185) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes, d. 1198). These Spanish Aristotelians were translated into Latin and had made a profound impact on Latin Scholastic philosophy. This school shared a system of ideas, similar sources and terminology, a common set of definitions and problems, and a shared method of discussing the issues. A Neoplatonic component influenced Aristotelian metaphysics, so that the term "Neoaristotelianism" is appropriate.¹⁴ The political philosophy of the Spanish school was Platonic, and was crowned by Averroes' *Commentary on Plato's Republic*.¹⁵

Like Maimonides, Averroes was born in Cordova. We have no record of an encounter between these two colossi, though legend has them meeting in Lucena. Toward the end of Averroes' life, in 1195, he was banished from Marrakesh to Lucena, his teachings condemned and his philosophical works torched as dangerous to religious faith. In Lucena he certainly met many Jews, as it was mostly a Jewish city, but Maimonides was in Egypt at the time. Some claimed that Averroes' ancestors were of the Jewish faith.¹⁶

Maimonides knew Averroes' works and admired his commentaries on Aristotle. He wrote to his pupil Joseph ben Judah in 1191, presumably after finishing the *Guide*, that he had recently received all of Averroes' books on Aristotle except for *De Sensu et Sensibili*, adding that in his opinion Averroes "hit the mark well."¹⁷ He had not found time, he says, to study all his books until now.¹⁸ Maimonides

later advised Samuel Ibn Tibbon to study Aristotle's works with the commentaries of Alexander, Themistius, or Averroes.¹⁹

The two gentlemen of Cordova had much in common. Both were descendants of venerable Andalusian families of scholars and judges. Both displayed Andalusian pride, a drive for independence, and a sense of supremacy over past authorities, especially their predecessors in the eastern part of the Islamic world.²⁰ Both were outstanding jurists and physicians, and both mastered the sciences and wrote philosophy. Both embraced a naturalistic Aristotelianism and taught that the religious law summons us to philosophize.²¹ Writings of both Averroes and Maimonides were translated into Latin soon after their demise, introducing Aristotelian rationalism into medieval Christian thought.

Maimonides esteemed Aristotle, but he was not the hard-bitten apostle that Averroes was. Averroes carefully pruned Neoplatonic branches from his Aristotelian tree, discarding emanationism as cryptocreationism, accusing al-Fārābī (Alfarabi) and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) of corrupting the true doctrine of Aristotle, "the first philosopher," with whom the sciences reached their summit. Maimonides did not shun the Neoplatonic or mystical sides of Alfarabi and Avicenna, nor did he represent Aristotle as a consummate scientist, but as an earnest seeker of the truth who propounded plausible theories in a tentative way. Maimonides' view of Aristotle as an aporetic philosopher reflected his own view of what philosophy should be.²²

Later, in the *Guide*, Maimonides continued to ponder scientific problems that he confronted early in life, mainly the conflict between the Aristotelian paradigm of celestial physics and Ptolemy's system with its epicycles and eccentrics. It was necessary to devise a mathematical model to explain the observed movements of the heavenly bodies, such as the retrograde motion of planets, but Maimonides never solved this problem and hoped that in the future some scientist might succeed in doing so.²³ Maimonides did not exaggerate the difficulties of these astronomical conundrums so as to have a weapon in the theological debate with Aristotelianism.²⁴ The difficulties were, in fact, insurmountable in his day. He would have had to live until the heliocentric astrophysics and laws of planetary motions of Johannes Kepler (1571–1630) and Isaac Newton (1643–1727) to have answers to the astronomical puzzles that occupied him in

his youth and throughout his life. He did not acknowledge ignorance to make room for faith but out of intellectual honesty.

Maimonides paid tribute to the philosophical legacy of Andalusian Jews: "As for the Andalusians among the people of our nation, all of them cling to the affirmations of the philosophers and incline to their opinions, in so far as these do not ruin the foundation of the Law. You will not find them in any way taking the paths of the *mutakallimūn*."²⁵ This is not strictly true, as Baḥya Ibn Paqūda and Joseph Ibn Ṣaddīq were not averse to *kalām* arguments. Despite this general adulation, Maimonides hardly quoted his great Andalusian forebears, such as Abraham Bar Ḥiyya, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Judah Halevi, Abraham Ibn Ezra, or Abraham Ibn Daud. He also deplored the poetic–didactic *azharot* (liturgical poems enumerating the 613 commandments) written in Spain, such as those by Ibn Gabirol. He finds a mitigating circumstance only in that the authors were poets and not rabbinic scholars.

I.5. FEZ

The Maimon family immigrated to Fez in around 1160 when Maimonides was in his early twenties.²⁶ Jewish custom required that a man take a wife by the age of eighteen, but there is no evidence that Moses was married at this time. A man might claim that his heart cleaved to the Torah, preventing him from fulfilling his marital obligation. And Moses would have desired to be settled before marrying.²⁷ He had three sisters, who may have gone to Fez at this time as well. We never meet his mother. Legends have her dying in childbirth.²⁸ In fact, we know little about women of this period unless they were learned or entered the public sphere in business or trade, which was rare.

The five-year period of Maimonides' residence in Fez, from around 1160 to 1165, came under the shadow of Almohad oppression. Given the alternative of conversion to Islam or death, numerous Jews chose conversion, many becoming pseudo-Muslims, or crypto-Jews, called *anusim* [coerced]. This subterfuge in twelfth-century Morocco prefigures the Marrano phenomenon in late medieval Christian Spain.

About four years after arriving in Fez, Maimonides wrote his *Epistle on Forced Conversion*, reassuring his suffering brethren of divine care and future redemption.²⁹ He wrote the epistle in reaction

to a widely circulated responsum by a rabbinic scholar who had instructed Jews to accept martyrdom rather than submit to Islam. This legal opinion implicitly invited mass martyrdom, as had occurred in the Rhineland during the First Crusade.

Maimonides reacted strongly to the responsum. He believed that if forced converts are no longer Jews, they and their children are lost forever. Like his father, he emphatically instructed them to pray and observe the commandments clandestinely. He did not rely on *halakhah* alone. He appealed also to *aggadah* and to historical precedent, as did the sages of Italy and Ashkenaz in permitting Jews to sacrifice their lives to avoid apostasy.³⁰ This epistle is a responsum, in which juridical analysis, entailing judgment on the basis of real circumstances and applying the religious law to life situations, outweighed the letter of the law. Later on, in his legal responsa written in Egypt, Maimonides did not consistently follow strict law. He instructed leniency in certain cases in which punctiliousness on legal rules could lead to untoward consequences.³¹

His final advice to Moroccan Jews was to leave the country of persecution for places where one could practice one's faith openly.³² He included himself among the collective "we" who were forced to convert to Islam, implying that he then lived as a crypto-Jew himself. A Muslim historian, Ibn al-Qiftī (1172–1248), reports that Maimonides feigned Islam publicly, adhering to its rituals, studying the Qur'ān, and praying in a mosque.³³ Later, when he was in Egypt, a jurist named Abū l-ʿArab Ibn Muʿīsha, who had lived in Fez, met him and accused him of having converted to Islam in Andalus.³⁴ Abandoning Islam after converting was punishable by death according to Islamic law. Al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil, Saladin's chief administrator and Maimonides's patron, saved him by contending that conversion under coercion was invalid.³⁵

Ibn al-Qiftī, who gave us this account, was a contemporary of Maimonides and lived in Cairo until 1187. Later, in Aleppo, he befriended Joseph ben Judah, Maimonides' pupil, from Ceuta, who also feigned Islam according to this historian.³⁶ Although Ibn al-Qiftī's book has come down to us in a later recension, and contains some errors, we have no reason to doubt the information on Maimonides and Joseph ben Judah. Simulating Islam is explicable under the circumstances. Both Joseph ben Judah Ibn Shimʿon and Joseph ben Judah Ibn ʿAqnīn had done the same.

We must not regard the Maghrib at this time as a cultural and intellectual wasteland. Despite their religious intolerance, the Almohads sponsored the study of philosophy and the sciences. Ibn Tūmart had adopted a theology based on the ideas of al-Ghazālī (Alghazali) and had taken a strong stand against belief in positive divine attributes. The works of Alghazali were popular in the West. Maimonides was familiar with Alghazali's writings, perhaps from this time.³⁷

This direction in Almohad intellectual life was congenial to the cultivation of rational discourse. Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb, having lived in Seville as a young man, attained literary refinement and an interest in philosophy and poetry, and amassed an impressive library. He welcomed Ibn Ṭufayl and Averroes to his court as physicians and advisors. His son and successor, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb, was receptive to learning as well, though it was under him that Averroes was temporarily banished to Lucena, his books torched.

Maimonides may have been influenced by Ibn Tūmart's theology in his own strong stand against positive divine attributes, in favor of a spiritualized conception of the deity, and in his attempt to formulate the basic beliefs of Judaism in a creed (the thirteen principles of faith). Maimonides' vigorous condemnation of anthropomorphism as superstitious idolatry recalls the reforming zeal of Ibn Tūmart.

1.6. MEDICAL STUDIES

Maimonides began his medical training in Andalusia and continued these studies in the Maghrib. He had high regard for Maghribi physicians, in particular Abū Marwān Ibn Zuhr (Avenzoar of the West, ca. 1092–1162), whose teachings he studied, and he also was in direct contact with his son Abū Bakr (1110–98). Abū Bakr became personal physician to Caliph Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr (ruled 1184–99). Abū Marwān Ibn Zuhr had served the Almohad 'Abd al-Mu'min as physician and vizier. He was a friend and collaborator of Averroes and dedicated a medical manual to him, on which basis Averroes wrote his great medical work *al-Kulliyāt* (*the Book of Generalities*, *Colliget* in the Latin West). He referred in his medical writings to contacts he had with physicians in the Maghrib, and it is clear that he received formal medical training while residing in Fez.³⁸

1.7. EARLY WRITINGS

Maimonides began writing about scientific and philosophic subjects as a young man. He wrote a treatise on the calendar (*Ma'amar ha-ibbur*) in 4918 A.M. (= 1157–58 C.E.). It was a practical guide for teaching a novice rather than a theoretical discussion. He therefore wrote briefly and gave tables for easy comprehension.³⁹ His zeal for order already expressed itself here in systemization and organization of knowledge, in simplifying complicated topics, making them easy to grasp and memorize. There are two sections of seven and three parts, in which he discussed lunations [*moladot*] and seasons of the year [*tequfot*].

His serious application to the calendar and mathematical astronomy came later in his *Laws of the Sanctification of the Moon* in the *Mishneh Torah*.⁴⁰ In his *Commentary on the Mishnah* he announced his intention to write a treatise on the calendar, with demonstrative proofs that no one could refute.⁴¹ As the *Treatise on the Calendar* was an elementary booklet, he had no reason to regard it as fulfilling the urgent need for authoritative guidance on calendar issues, which went to the heart of Judaism. By 1166 he was busy writing the *Laws of the Sanctification of the Moon*, which is the eighth treatise of the *Book of Seasons* in the *Mishneh Torah*. This brief treatise was written over a period of twelve years and consisted of nineteen brilliant chapters, in which he distinguished himself as a master of the subject.⁴² The second part of *Sanctification of the New Moon* (Chapters 6–10), written in 1166, is an elaboration and enhancement of the brief *Treatise on the Calendar* and fulfillment of the promise he had made in his *Commentary on the Mishnah*.⁴³

The numerical values he assigns to astronomical and calendar phenomena are the same in the *Treatise on the Calendar* and the *Sanctification of the New Moon*. He posits in both that daylight and night are each 12 hours all year long. These were “seasonal hours,” meaning that an hour’s length varied depending on the season of the year. An hour has 1,080 parts, a number divisible by all integers from 1 to 10 except 7. The interval between successive solar–lunar conjunctions is 29d, 12h, 793 parts.⁴⁴ The seasons are 91d, 7h, and 540 parts. A lunar year is 354d, 8h, 876 parts, a solar year 365d, 6h. The first cycle began at 1 A.M., on Monday evening 1 Tishre, 5h, 204 parts. These values are ancient, and therefore it is not surprising that

they show up in Maimonides' writings, but the total concurrence is significant.

One of Maimonides' early scientific works was a revision of a mathematical and optical work, *al-Istikmāl wa-l-manāẓir*, by Yūsuf al-Mu'tamin of the Hūdīd dynasty in Saragossa (reigned 1081–5).⁴⁵ Members of the family of Ibn Hūd al-Mu'tamin taught the *Guide* to a circle of Jews in Damascus.⁴⁶

It was probably during these early years, perhaps in Fez, that Maimonides composed his *Treatise on the Art of Logic*.⁴⁷ He addressed the work to a Muslim, and gave no hint of his own religious identity, nor did he cite the Bible or Talmud. The addressee, real or fictional, had requested a concise explanation of logical terminology, a first step in studying logic. This is an introductory work depending much on Alfarabi, whose logical works he recommended to Ibn Tibbon. In the final (fourteenth) chapter of the treatise, Maimonides discussed the philosophic sciences. In the section on political philosophy, he distinguished between the secular laws of the philosophers and the divine commandments in force "in our time." The language implies that he did not restrict "divine commandments" to Judaism but included Christianity and Islam as well.⁴⁸

He showed here his fondness for number symbolism. He noted at the end that the treatise has fourteen chapters, in which 175 terms are discussed (7×25). Chapter 2 treats 2×7 terms, and Chapter 10 studies the ten categories. In Chapter 7 he discussed the fourteen moods of the valid syllogism. Philosophy or science has seven parts. Each chapter repeats the terms studied, except Chapter 10, giving the last four a kind of independence.⁴⁹ His numerology is a mnemonic device and an aid for scribes, but it also reveals an absorption in numerical symbolism and partiality for heptads, which we find later in the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Guide of the Perplexed*. It is also a kind of identification mark identity, a "numerical signature" (as Gad Freudenthal expresses it).

While writing on scientific subjects, Maimonides did not neglect traditional studies. He wrote a commentary on three of the six orders of the Babylonian Talmud, omitting four tractates that he could not finish for lack of time, and he wrote a commentary on Tractate *Hullin*, dealing with issues of ritual purity, and glosses over difficult passages in the entire Talmudic corpus. More significant was his *Precepts of the Jerusalem Talmud*, done along the lines of Isaac

Alfasi's *Book of Precepts*.⁵⁰ The Jerusalem Talmud is more concise than its Babylonian counterpart and contains less nonlegal material. Rabbinic scholars used the Babylonian Talmud, which came later, as the official source for legal instruction, and the Jerusalem Talmud was therefore not studied as much. Maimonides praised it for explaining the reasons for normative legal decisions, whereas the Babylonian Talmud merely stated decisions without giving their rationale.

1.8. COMMENTARY ON THE MISHNAH

Maimonides began his *Commentary on the Mishnah* shortly after arriving in Fez. It was an overwhelming task that absorbed much of his time and energy, as he reproduced the entire text of the Mishnah to which he appended his commentary. It is written in Judaeo-Arabic, and various translators rendered it into Hebrew. Much of it is preserved in a fair autograph copy in neat semicursive script with corrections.⁵¹ His son Abraham added corrections, following his father's instructions, and even his descendants added their comments. There are also autograph draft copies written in a cursive script preserved in the Genizah, showing many deletions and corrections. He even added passages to his *Commentary on the Mishnah* (completed 1168) after finishing the *Guide* in 1190.⁵² Because Maimonides was constantly refining his thoughts and correcting his works throughout his life, and they were copied at different times, various versions were put into circulation.

In his introduction to the *Commentary on the Mishnah*, he discussed the nature of the Oral Law and prophecy and explained the history and sources of the religious law. Elucidating the Oral Law was critical because the Karaites denied its validity and rejected the Talmud as an authoritative text.

In the introduction to Tractate *Sanhedrin*, Chapter 10 of the Babylonian Talmud, called *Pereq Heleq*, Maimonides outlined the fundamental principles of Judaism.⁵³ He defined the true meaning of monotheism, prophecy, revelation, providence, reward and punishment, the messianic era, and resurrection of the dead. Defining Judaism was an innovation that may have been influenced by the precedent of the Almohad creed [*ʿaqīda*] (see Section 1.2). In the Introduction to Tractate *Avot*, known as the *Eight Chapters*, Maimonides

discussed philosophic ethics, thereby inserting Greek philosophy into the very bosom of Judaism.⁵⁴

1.9. THE BEAUTIFUL LAND

Maimonides and his family departed from Morocco on 4 April 1165. During the voyage, on 18 April 1165, the sea became stormy and an enormous wave almost inundated the ship.⁵⁵ He vowed that he, his family, household, and descendants would fast annually to mark the event, and that he would remain in solitude on that anniversary every year, praying and studying all day long in privacy. Just as on that day at sea he found only the divine presence, so he vowed not to see anyone on that day every year unless absolutely necessary. His natural tendency was for solitude and private meditative prayer, the highest form of worship (*GP* 3.51). In the midst of a terrifying storm at sea, his life trembling in the balance, he felt the divine presence.

The voyage from Morocco to the Holy Land lasted a month until the family finally disembarked safely in Acre: "And thus," he says, "I was saved from the forced apostasy."

Acre was the capital of the Crusader towns of Syro-Palestine. The city was a European enclave with many Christian quarters named for its residents. All of the city's mosques except one had been converted into churches. The Maimon family remained in Acre through the summer of 1165. Then in October, Maimon ben Joseph, along with his sons Moses and David, accompanied by a local scholar named Japheth ben Elijah, made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where they remained for three days. Maimonides wrote that they traveled from Acre to Jerusalem "at a time of danger," alluding to the ongoing hostilities between the Crusaders and Muslims. They worshiped in the vicinity of the Temple Mount, the esplanade where the Second Temple stood until 70 C.E. It was customary for Jews at such a moment to lament the ruins and to rend their garments while reciting Isaiah 64:9–10.

After visiting Jerusalem, the small group traveled to Hebron, the site of the tomb of the Patriarchs at the Cave of Makhpelah, sacred to Christians and Muslims as the tomb of Abraham. They then returned to Acre, remaining there until May 1166, when they left for Egypt. They must have traveled by sea, with all its dangers, for traveling overland through the desert was expensive and even more perilous.

I.10. EGYPT

In 1166, Maimonides and his family arrived in Alexandria, where they resided briefly before traveling to Fuṣṭāṭ (Old Cairo). The Maimon family settled in the Mamsusa Quarter of Fuṣṭāṭ, bordering on Qaṣr ash-Shamʿ just outside its walls, a short walk from the two main Rabbanite synagogues.⁵⁶ Mamsusa had many Christian residents and some Muslims living alongside Jews.

Three Jewish communities coexisted in Fustat, each with its own synagogue. The sectarian Karaites were the more affluent members of Jewish society. Two Rabbanite communities were organized around their places of worship – the Synagogue of the Iraqians and the Synagogue of the Palestinians. The Synagogue of the Iraqians supported the academies in Iraq, followed their ritual, and came under the authority of their Gaonate. The Synagogue of the Palestinians adhered to the Palestinian rite – the triennial lectionary cycle for instance – and supported the Palestinian academy. The Palestinian Synagogue controlled matters of official authority in Egypt and was institutionally under the jurisdiction of the Jewish centers of learning of Syro-Palestine. But by this time, the Palestinian academy had relocated to Fustat along with many of its scholars. The two main Rabbanite synagogues were located within the walls of Qaṣr ash-Shamʿ on the same street. As Maimonides followed the Babylonian rite, he would have worshiped in the Synagogue of the Iraqians. When he achieved authority in Egypt, he tried to unify the rites by eradicating the customs of the Palestinians. Moses Maimonides and his son Abraham tried unsuccessfully to introduce synagogue reforms in the direction of decorum and piety. Abraham says that his father did not attend either of the synagogues on a regular basis but rather held prayer services in his own study hall [*bet midrash*].

The Synagogue of the Palestinians, called the Ben Ezra Synagogue, has survived the ravages of time and is still standing today. This is fortunate, as the building contains a store chamber where discarded manuscripts were deposited. Untouched for centuries, these records survived very much intact because of the dry climate. The collection, when rediscovered, became a scholar's treasure, known as the Cairo Genizah (from the Hebrew word *ganaz*, meaning "to hide," "to store away").⁵⁷

Maimonides's first five years in Egypt, from 1166 to 1171, were the twilight period of the Fāṭimid dynasty (969–1171), a phase marked by chaos and upheaval, with regents or viziers replacing young and weak caliphs.⁵⁸ Under the Fāṭimids, Egypt had enjoyed great economic prosperity despite the usual disasters of famine and urban unrest. Egypt was favorably located at the junction of two international trade routes, having access to the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. The dynasty stimulated Mediterranean trade and restored the ancient trade routes between Egypt and the Far East through the Red Sea. This route was of vital importance for the India trade, in which many Jewish merchants were involved, including Moses Maimonides and his family.

The Fāṭimids were relatively liberal rulers, and Maimonides benefited from the open and tolerant atmosphere of Fāṭimid Egypt. Under the Fāṭimids, Cairo became a cosmopolitan center of religious and secular knowledge. Caliph al-Muʿizz (d. 975) established the al-Azhar Mosque in Cairo (972) shortly after the conquest of Egypt. It was an institution of religious learning and training for Ismāʿīlī missionaries, and it offered free public education and even classes for women.

The Ismāʿīlī belief in a single philosophic truth at the heart of different religions opened the door to the study of philosophy and the sciences, and an ethos of free inquiry and unrestricted scientific thought lured intellectuals to the Fāṭimid court. The life of the intellect was accessible to all religious groups, and scientists could exercise their powers freely and contribute to the advancement of knowledge. The caliphs encouraged literary activity, wrote poetry, and sponsored the decorative arts. Under their rule Cairo became a resplendent cultural metropolis along with Baghdad in the East and Cordova in the West.

The Ismāʿīlī chief missionary taught Ismāʿīlī doctrine in secret sessions in a special room in the caliphal palace reserved for the intellectual elite and spiritually qualified. The royal palace also housed the magnificent Fāṭimid library. An institution called the Academy of Science [*Dār al-ʿilm*] was devoted to the sciences and religious subjects. Books from palace libraries were transferred to the institute, where people could read, and study and copy texts. Experts gave lectures there on language, religious disciplines, and the natural sciences.

I.11. ISMA'ILISM AND NEOPLATONISM

During Maimonides's six years under Fāṭimid rule he had access to Ismā'īlī writings and to lectures by Ismā'īlī missionaries. There is an affinity between Ismā'īlī thought and Maimonides' philosophic theology. Maimonides' extreme formulation of an apophatic theology was apparently influenced by Neoplatonic writings.⁵⁹ His vocabulary is close to the terminology of Ismā'īlī missionary and philosopher Ḥamīd-ad-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. sometime after). His statement that by a series of negations we achieve positive knowledge about something resembles al-Kirmānī's "affirming by the method of negation."⁶⁰ Alfred L. Ivry has stressed Maimonides' dependence on Ismā'īlī and Neoplatonic doctrines.⁶¹ Maimonides' familiarity with Neoplatonic and Ismā'īlī texts need not have begun with his arrival in Fāṭimid Egypt. He may have been acquainted with this literature already in Andalusia and the Maghrib. Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh Ibn Masarra (883–931) had introduced a kind of Neoplatonic Gnosticism into Andalusia in the tenth century, and the Epistles of the Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā' were widely disseminated there and in the Maghrib.⁶²

Isma'ilism embodied Jewish and Judeo-Christian motifs, making it attractive to Jews and Christians. Some Jews converted to this version of Islam, whereas others wrote in an Ismā'īlī mode.⁶³ Jewish Isma'ilism was, however, a bridge to apostasy. A negative reference to Ismā'īlī doctrine occurs in the *Guide*, in which Maimonides criticized those who interpret miracles figuratively (by *ta'wīl*), citing the Islamic esotericists [*ahl al-bāṭin*].⁶⁴ His disapproval may have been qualified, however, for he used the term *ta'wīl* in the same context to describe his own system of interpreting biblical texts.⁶⁵

Maimonides rejected the astrology of Jewish Isma'ilism, popular in Yemen and in Nethanel Fayyūmī's *Bustān al-ʿuqūl*, particularly predictions about the coming of the Messiah.⁶⁶ He may have linked this aspect of Isma'ilism with the astral mysticism of the Sabians, which he rejected.⁶⁷

I.12. COMMERCE AND TEACHING

Maimonides came to the attention of the ruling Fāṭimid dynasty as a protégé of the talented administrator al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil, then serving Caliph al-ʿĀḍid (reigned 1160–71) and his vizier, Shāwar. Ibn al-Qiṭī

says that during the last days of the Fāṭimids Maimonides taught the ancient sciences, such as mathematics, logic, and astronomy.⁶⁸ These sciences were taught at the caliphal palace and at the Academy of Sciences, but we do not know where he actually lectured.

Ibn al-Qifṭī reports that Moses engaged in commerce in precious gems and the like. The family may have traded in jewelry already in Spain and Morocco. Because they traveled from place to place, it was expedient to sell small articles that were valuable and portable. Most precious gems were imported from India and the Far East. He maintained an interest in the India trade as a sedentary merchant throughout his life. In a letter to his pupil Joseph ben Judah, written in 1191, when Joseph was in Aleppo and about to travel to Baghdad, Moses instructed him to settle accounts with a certain Ibn al-Amshāṭī when the man arrives from India.⁶⁹ Members of the Amshāṭī family were great merchants active in the India trade.⁷⁰ In the same letter, Moses advised Joseph not to teach professionally and neglect his business affairs, but rather put his main effort into business and medical studies and study the Torah for its own sake, not for income. Joseph followed this advice, and, after traveling to Baghdad with merchandise, he went on to India, returning safely, and then invested in real estate. He became a physician at the court of Sulṭān aẓ-Zāhir Ghāzī, a son of Saladin (Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn), in Aleppo.

It was not uncommon for physicians to engage in commerce. The successful ones had extensive contacts with members of the merchant class. Those who were affluent had capital to invest, and they had a vested interest in commerce, especially in pharmaceuticals and precious stones. The illustrious poet-philosopher Judah Halevi (d. 1140), also a physician, had close contacts with merchants and engaged in trade. In fact, many traders were scholars, the merchant-scholar becoming an ideal type in this age – men such as ha-Levi's friend, the India trader Ḥalfon ben Nethan'el, the eleventh-century merchant-banker Nahray ben Nissim, and Abraham ben Yiju.⁷¹

Maimonides disapproved of using religious office or teaching Torah for a livelihood, an unpopular view then as today. People were routinely remunerated for religious offices, and they raised funds to support communal officials and academies. Opposing this, Maimonides invoked an unimpeachable precedent. The Talmudic sages, he pointed out, did not seek money from people or raise funds for their academies and for their exilarchs, judges, or teachers

of Torah. They maintained themselves from ordinary employment. They were hewers of wood and drawers of water, and some were even blind, but they devoted themselves to the study of Torah without remuneration.⁷²

During Maimonides's early years in Egypt he solidified his reputation as a religious authority by finishing his *Commentary on the Mishnah* (1168). Travel and hardships had delayed completion of the commentary. In a postscript, he excused its defects and explained how hard it had been to achieve. He was aware of its flaws and invited his critics to judge him gently, for what he embarked on was not a minor thing, and to carry it out was not easy for someone whose heart was constantly preoccupied with adversities because of exile and wandering *from one end of heaven to the other* (Deuteronomy 4:32). While traveling overland and at sea, he continued studying secular sciences as well. Throughout his life he bore aloft these two beacons, Torah and science, and they were a consolation for him in stressful times.⁷³

1.13. HARD TIMES

During his early years in Egypt, Maimonides suffered several disasters, including his father's death and the Crusader invasion of Egypt that led to the burning of Fustat in 1168. But the worst disaster of Moses' life until then was the death of his beloved brother David, who drowned at sea on his way to India, while in possession of much money belonging to Moses, to himself, and to others, leaving a young daughter and his widow in Moses' care.⁷⁴ For about a year after the evil tidings reached him, Moses remained "prostrate in bed⁷⁵ with a severe inflammation, fever and numbness of heart,⁷⁶ and well nigh perished." He wrote eight years later that from then on he has been in a state of disconsolate mourning: "How can I be consoled? For he was my son; he grew up upon my knees; he was my brother, my pupil. It was he who did business in the market place, earning a livelihood, while I dwelled in security." David has gone on to eternal life, leaving Moses "dismayed in a foreign land."⁷⁷ "Were it not for the Torah, which is my delight, and for scientific matters, which let me forget his sorrow, *I would have perished in my affliction*" (Psalm 119:92).

Maimonides suffered a physical breakdown and mental anguish after his brother's death. He was overwhelmed with grief and a sense

of irretrievable loss as though his own life had ended. His paralyzing illness and protracted sorrow point unmistakably to a severe depression, the kind that occurs when a person sensitized by stressful life events, especially traumatic separation, suffers the loss of a loved one.⁷⁸ Such an episode makes the victim susceptible to recurrences of depression throughout life.

Biographers have written that as result of David's death Maimonides had to relinquish the life of a scholar and take up medicine as a profession, but there is no evidence for such a transition. Maimonides had studied medicine in North Africa before coming to Egypt and attained prominence as a physician in his early days in Egypt even before David's demise.

1.14. ASCENT TO POWER

Nevertheless, there was a momentous transformation in Maimonides' life after the tragedy. About a year later Maimonides became *ra'īs al-yahūd* [Head of the Jews], the supreme religious authority over Egyptian Jewry.⁷⁹ He was then thirty-three years old and had been in Egypt for five eventful years. He became Head of the Jews in August–September 1171, at the time Saladin became sultan over Egypt and founded the Ayyūbid dynasty. We cannot prove a link between the two events, but al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil, Saladin's chief administrator and Maimonides's patron, was instrumental in the Ayyūbid success. During the first years of Ayyūbid rule, al-Fāḍil gave Moses a stipend, evidently for medical services to the dynasty and to his own household. Ascending the rungs of Egypt's social hierarchy required the protection of a powerful patron, and Maimonides's career hinged on the meteoric ascent of his benefactor. Attaining this position required rare skill for overcoming the shoals of Egyptian politics and the rapids of Jewish affairs. Evidence points to his having been Head of the Jews for short periods of time, in 1171–3, and later in the 1190s.⁸⁰

The Head of the Jews was the highest judicial authority in the community. He appointed chief judges and they in turn appointed and supervised communal officials outside Cairo with his concurrence. His power in the community depended on his weight with the government. As Head of the Jews in Egypt, Maimonides had broad communal responsibilities – supervising marriage, divorce, and inheritance;

overseeing synagogues and public property; and administering the poll tax. The Head was sometimes called *Nagid*, but Maimonides did not assume this title, though he was given this epithet in letters. After the headship of Samuel ben Ḥananyah (1140–59) the title *Nagid* was not used until Abraham, son of Moses, took over.⁸¹ In general, Maimonides looked on exalted titles held by his Jewish contemporaries – the Geonim in Iraq, for instance – with ironic disdain.

Even when Moses was not officially Head of the Jews, his role as a respondent (*rav* = *muftī*) to legal queries from Egypt and elsewhere – North Africa, Sicily, Syro-Palestine, Baghdad, and Yemen – made him the leading Jewish religious authority in Egypt and beyond. People addressed him by the title *ha-rav ha-gadol be-yisra'el* [the great teacher in Israel]. He was the president of a council, called *majlis* or *yeshivah*, an institution for study and instruction in the law, in which he made legal decisions in consultation with colleagues. The council deliberated cases brought from lower courts, thereby acting as a kind of supreme court. People appealing the judgment of a lower court would submit petitions to Maimonides and his *yeshivah*, and he and his colleagues instructed the court or local community on how to respond to the situation. They also issued legal ordinances [*taqqanot*] to reform communal practices.

Moses married into a prestigious Egyptian family renowned for its learning and piety. As a newcomer to Egypt, this was a way of gaining acceptability and status. His wife was a daughter of a government official, Abū l-Maḥāsin Misha'el.⁸² Moses' brother-in-law, Abū l-Ma'ālī, married Moses' sister, becoming thereby his brother-in-law twice over.⁸³ A son of this sister, Abū r-Riḍā', assisted Maimonides with his medical writing and later became a famous physician in his own right, serving Sultan Qilij Arslan in Seljuq Anatolia. A letter of congratulations on Moses' marriage, from the Cairo Genizah, describes the bride as being from an aristocratic family [*bat tovim*]. The wedding took place after Moses was thirty-three, as he is called in the letter "the great *rav*," a title he assumed in 1171.⁸⁴ The marriage connected Maimonides with Egypt's elite society. Abū l-Ma'ālī was secretary to Saladin's wife, mother of Saladin's oldest son, al-Malik al-Afḍal. Maimonides later administered to al-Malik al-Afḍal as physician, and his patron, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil, served as chief administrator to al-Afḍal.

Abraham ben Moses (1186–1237), his only son, was born when Moses was forty-six. People theorize that Abraham was the offspring of a second marriage, that a first wife died, but there is no evidence for this. He may have married many years before Abraham was born and had daughters about whom we hear nothing.

Abraham studied with his father, emulated him, and carried on his struggle to unify and regulate religious practice. Moses groomed his son for leadership by having him observe as he carried out communal supervision. Abraham studied philosophy and medicine and became a well-known physician, but the mainspring of his character was his devotion to Sufism. He followed his father's career as physician and communal leader, succeeding him as head of Egyptian Jewry.⁸⁵

Abraham married into a family of learning and wealth. He married the daughter of Ḥananel, a pious judge and learned merchant, son of Samuel ben Joseph, who served in Maimonides's court. Samuel's uncle was the great India trader Abraham ben Yiju.⁸⁶ Abraham ben Yiju, of al-Mahdiyya, Tunisia, was the quintessential learned merchant of the time. A scribe by profession, known for his fine calligraphy, he also wrote and collected poetry and composed responsa on legal issues. He was "the most important single individual of the India papers preserved in the Genizah."⁸⁷ Maimonides certainly knew ben Yiju, who spent time in Fustat, and may even have helped him with legal problems ensuing from his marriage to a freed Indian slave woman (Ashu, renamed Berakhah [Blessing]).⁸⁸ Abraham Maimonides' marriage to the daughter of a learned man was vital for the financial autonomy of the spiritual leader, which his father stressed, and it united the House of Maimonides with the House of ben Yiju.

Abraham served as a physician in the Nasiri hospital, founded by Sultan Saladin. There, he met the famous Muslim doctor and historian of medicine, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, who gave a brief biography of Abraham in his history of physicians.⁸⁹ Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a's father had been a pupil of Maimonides, an instance of the general collegiality and collaboration that took place among physicians of diverse religious backgrounds.

1.15. THE AYYŪBIDS

Maimonides lived through a dramatic turning point in Egyptian history, marked by a Sunnī restoration after two centuries of Shī'ī

(Ismāʿīlī) rule. A foreign Kurdish–Turkish and Syrian army became the mainstay of the dynasty, and the Shāfiʿī and Malikī legal schools replaced the Ismāʿīlī rite and the Ayyūbid dynasty favored the Ashʿarī school of theology.⁹⁰ Maimonides was therefore closer ideologically to the deposed Fāṭimids than to the reigning Ayyūbids. A rhymed epitome of this theology dedicated to Saladin was made a textbook in schools. The Ashʿarīs espoused a doctrine of occasionalism in nature, believing that God creates events anew every moment. Maimonides criticized the denial of natural causation as undermining the possibility of science.⁹¹ His own views were thus at variance with the prevailing doctrines of the Ayyūbid religious establishment.

Dedicated Sunnīs, the Ayyūbids relentlessly stamped out vestiges of Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlism and other forms of heresy. The most striking event of this kind was the execution of the philosopher Shihāb ad-Dīn as-Suhrawardī in Aleppo (1191) by Saladin’s son al-Malik aẓ-Zāhir Ghāzī, with orders coming from Saladin himself in a letter that was probably drafted by al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil.⁹² The execution of as-Suhrawardī was a cause célèbre. Bahā’ ad-Dīn Ibn Shaddād, a biographer of Saladin, commended Saladin’s deed as an act of piety. Saladin, he wrote, believed in resurrection of the body and despised philosophers and deniers of the divine attributes.⁹³ Under these circumstances, we can understand Maimonides’s discretion in the *Guide* and elsewhere.

1.15.1. *Al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil*

Al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil [The Excellent Judge] al-Baysani (1135–1200), Maimonides’s patron, was poet, litterateur, administrator, statesman, model stylist, and avid bibliophile.⁹⁴ Maimonides dedicated his book *On Poisons and Antidotes* to al-Fāḍil, who had requested first aid advice for poisonous bites or stings and precautions against poisons. Al-Fāḍil requested that ingredients for preparing certain antidotes, like the *theriaca*, lacking in Egypt, be imported from distant countries, for aside from opium none of the necessary ingredients for compounding them were available in Egypt. Jews were prominent importers of pharmaceuticals, and Maimonides could help obtain the required ingredients.

Al-Fāḍil amassed a great library in his palace, which he later transferred to the madrasas [college] he established. Maimonides’

profound knowledge of Arabic philosophy, science, theology, and jurisprudence presupposes contact with a first-class library of this sort.

1.15.2. *Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk*

Maimonides had ties of friendship with the poet al-Qāḍī as-Saʿīd Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk (ca. 1155–1211), also a protégé of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil. Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk wrote a famous book on strophic poetry and was the first to import this Andalusian–Maghribi genre into Egypt, where it gained popularity in raffiné circles. His laudatory poem on Maimonides was included by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a in his history of physicians.⁹⁵

Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's circle of companions, described as “lovers of discussion,” included our Mūsā ibn Maymūn. Ibn Sanā' recorded a discussion of theology involving a Shī'ī scholar from Aleppo and ar-Ra'īs Abū 'Imrān Mūsā al-Yahūdī. And so we find an Egyptian Sunnī, along with a Shī'ī from Aleppo and an Andalusian Jew, convening in Cairo to engage in an intellectual interchange.⁹⁶

1.16. DEALING WITH AFFAIRS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

As the highest religious authority in Egypt, Maimonides received many queries on aspects of Jewish law. Over 500 of his responsa survive. They are priceless witnesses to the way his mind worked as he applied the law to actual life situations.⁹⁷ We have his opinions on a broad spectrum of issues – synagogue decorum, business partnerships, marriage, divorce, inheritance, orphans and widows, ownership and rental of property, trusteeship, debts, conversion to Judaism and apostasy, circumcision, menstruation, charity, court procedure, legal documents, and so on. We also have documents illustrating his personal involvement in release of captives and care of synagogues.

Pursuing communal responsibilities was for Maimonides a pious activity, a form of *imitatio Dei*. As God is governor and sustainer of the universe, bestower of providential care and justice, so the leader of the community embodies these attributes in his guidance of his people.

I.17. EPISTLE TO YEMEN

In 1172, Maimonides – then thirty-four and *ra'īs al-yahūd* for one year – wrote an epistle to the Jews of Yemen, who were suffering the torment of forced apostasy, as had the Jews in Spain and North Africa.⁹⁸ It is one of his best-known writings, and it endeared him to Yemenite Jews forever. He placed their anguish within a divine plan, assuring them that their trials will end, that a messianic advent awaits them in the near future. We know that the Yemenites included his name in the Kaddish prayer, but this was not a special privilege, as they did the same with other Egyptian Heads of the Jews.

The formal addressee of the epistle was Jacob son of Nethanel Fayyūmī, who had written a letter to Maimonides describing the plight of the Yemenite Jews, but it was also addressed to all “our brothers, our scholars, all the disciples of the communities in Yemen.” Although he wrote to Jacob and other scholars, Maimonides wanted the epistle to be read with ease by all men, women, and children, and he wished the message to be understood by all the communities in Yemen. He therefore wrote in Arabic, bidding the recipients to instill his message in the youths, children, and women, to reinforce their weakened and unsettled faith.

The “forced apostasy at the two ends of the world, east and west” – the Maghrib and Yemen – impelled Maimonides to utter a harsh judgment on the Islamic nation [*umma*]: “Never has a people arisen against Israel more hurtful than it, nor one which went so far to debase and humiliate us and to instill hatred toward us as they have.”⁹⁹ In speaking of the Islamic nation and its hurtful legislation, he uses a word – *nikāya* – that connotes “spiteful harm,” suggesting hatred springing from envy.

Maimonides writes as a physician, a healer, who sends a pharmacopoeia, a medicine of the soul, a restorative, relieving pain and distress.

Maimonides worked out a philosophy of history to explain the supremacy of Islam and the humiliation of Jews and Judaism. He quoted biblical verses, mainly from the Book of Daniel, anticipating all the vicissitudes that came to pass, predicting the contemporary suffering. He applied the prefiguration verses as a soothing balm on aching hearts, for if the anguish and grievous ordeals can be viewed as the unfolding of a grand design, they are easier to comprehend and

endure. Moreover, there are divine promises of ultimate triumph and vindication.

Like others before him, Maimonides perceived catastrophe, wars, upheavals, and apostasy as presentiments of the footsteps of the Messiah. He viewed the Crusades as the ultimate showdown between the two great world powers, Christendom and Islam, and as a prelude to the final redemption of the Jewish people. He saw these events as messianic travails, "the pangs of the Messiah," harbingers of the restoration of prophecy and a messianic advent in the near future.

Despite the rabbinic prohibition against calculating the End of Days, Maimonides claimed to possess an extraordinary family tradition, going back to "the beginning of our exile from Jerusalem," according to which the prediction of Balaam in Numbers 23:23 alludes to the future restoration of prophecy to Israel in 4970 A.M. (1209–10 C.E.).¹⁰⁰ The restoration of prophecy to Israel is one of the preliminaries of the messianic advent. This, said Maimonides, is the most valid calculation of the End communicated to us, but we have been forbidden to promulgate it so that people do not think that the Messiah has tarried unduly long. Maimonides ends with qualified assent: "God is the best knower of the truth," leaving room for error.¹⁰¹

The prediction of a messianic advent was intended to raise the spirits of the Yemenite audience. Yet the anticipation of such an occurrence in the near future drove his historical outlook. He perceived his role as precursor of the restoration of prophecy. He saw himself as a Moses *redivivus*, a redeemer and savior of his people. A mainspring of his personality was this identification with the biblical Moses. Maimonides wrote the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Guide of the Perplexed* to reconstitute the Jewish people as strong, wise, and understanding, to prepare it for the anticipated messianic age. This was an active Messianism built on natural preparation, not a passive Messianism based on eschatological visions of divine interventions.¹⁰²

1.18. MISHNEH TORAH

In the years 1168–77, Maimonides, then in his thirties, compiled his monumental compendium of Jewish law, the *Mishneh Torah* [*Repetition of the Torah*] in fourteen books, the numerical value of

the Hebrew word for “hand,” and therefore called *ha-Yad ha-ḥazaqah* [the *Mighty Hand*].¹⁰³

The *Mishneh Torah* established Maimonides’s reputation worldwide and for all time as the authority par excellence on Jewish law. Whereas at the end of the *Commentary on the Mishnah* he was diffident and apprehensive of criticism, he was now confident, knowing that his great work on jurisprudence was in its form, method, style, scope, and structure absolutely unprecedented, in fact revolutionary. The *Mishneh Torah* was also unsurpassed and altered the whole realm of rabbinic literature. It became the benchmark for all subsequent writing on Jewish jurisprudence.

Maimonides elucidated the motivations, methods, aims, and general stylistic features of the *Mishneh Torah* in many texts and in various ways.¹⁰⁴ One motivation for compiling a totally new legal compendium was his sense of collective intellectual decline resulting from grueling and stressful times, causing difficulties in comprehending the interpretations, responsa, and legal precepts that the Geonim composed, not to mention the two Talmuds and *Midrashim*, all of which demand sufficient wisdom to understand the laws of the Torah correctly. This motivation, based on cultural pessimism, parallels Maimonides’ account of Judah ha-Nasi’s motives in reducing the Oral Law to writing when he compiled the *Mishnah*. Judah ha-Nasi realized that the number of disciples was diminishing because of the overwhelming expansion and power of the Roman Empire and Jews taking flight to the ends of the earth.¹⁰⁵ Maimonides wanted to justify in both cases the necessity for writing down oral traditions. For him, as for Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, all teaching should be oral, the written word serving as a mnemonic. He discerned that the community lacked a true legal compendium with correct, precisely formulated opinions.¹⁰⁶ The vicissitudes of the times and loss of knowledge made imperative a compendium that would be concise and serve as an *aide-mémoire*.

Along with the collective need for a legal compendium there was a private need, as Maimonides explained to Joseph ben Judah. In fact, he put the private need first, saying that he composed the *Mishneh Torah* in the first place for himself so as to be released from study and research and for the time of old age when his memory would fail him. Old age and the prospect of a feeble memory is a perennial motif for justifying writing, but he seems to have meant this literally.

Along with external troubles and a decline in intellectual power, he anticipated personal anxieties, infirmities, and weakness.

Although the *Mishneh Torah* is a legalistic study, it also contains passages on philosophical theology, systemizing principles of faith, ethics, and even medicine. The first part, the Book of Knowledge, contains sections on the Foundations of the Law, Ethics, and Laws of Repentance.¹⁰⁷

Maimonides intended his legal work to serve as a compendium of the entire Oral Law up to the redaction of the Talmud and the interpretations of the Geonim. Hence he titled the work *Mishneh Torah*, because when a person first reads the Written Law and then this compendium he will know the entire Oral Law without needing to consult any other book. A "Repetition of the Law" is ascribed to the first Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy (17:18).

The *Mishneh Torah* is a comprehensive digest of the religious law, its prospect determined not by the actual historical situation, wherein the amplitude of the religious law was constricted by conditions of Exile, but by the vista of a restored national sovereignty. In the messianic age, all the ancient laws will be reinstituted. Significantly, the last book of the entire *Mishneh Torah*, the Book of Judges, contains regulations concerning the jurisdiction of the supreme court, treatment of rebels, and precepts pertaining to kings and wars, that is, communal obligations that are pertinent only under a reborn sovereignty in a messianic age.¹⁰⁸ The Book of Judges appropriately culminates with a vision of the messianic era. There, Maimonides represents Jesus and Muḥammad as paving the way for the Messiah and preparing all mankind to worship the Lord, "for they fill the entire world with talk of the Messiah, the Torah, and the commandments."

Above all, Maimonides intended to facilitate and simplify the law, to make it comprehensible and intelligible. The governing passion of Maimonides's mind was order and harmony, clarity and simplicity. He tried to arrive at first principles to explain diverse facts, precepts, and regulations. He strived to control complex material and make it accessible to inquiring minds. The *Mishneh Torah* exemplifies his drive for simplicity and order by topically arranging the scattered statements in the Talmud into groups of laws arranged under rubrics – The Laws of the Sabbath, The Laws of the Tabernacle, The Laws of Civil Damages, The Laws of the Murderer, and so on.

Without benefit of concordances, databases, and electronic texts, he combed all of rabbinic literature, the Talmuds and Midrashim, for references to a specific topic. He was justifiably proud of this feat of memory and organization.

He wanted the *Mishneh Torah* to serve as a basis for repetition, contemplation, and spiritual exercises that deepen one's devotion to the right way of life. He directed his pupil Joseph ben Judah to persevere in studying the *Mishneh Torah* by heart. Memorization was a spiritual exercise of assimilating and internalizing teachings and deepening their effect in such a way as to transform a person's consciousness.¹⁰⁹ Maimonides' literary technique here, as in his medical works, was to divide the text to be remembered into short pieces [*halakhot* or *fuṣūl*] easy to memorize. His was a memory culture, as ours is documentary and electronic.¹¹⁰

1.19. COURT PHYSICIAN

Maimonides moved in the highest intellectual and political circles in Cairo thanks to his skill as a physician, his learning, and his savoir faire. In a letter written in 1191,¹¹¹ he boasted to his pupil Joseph ben Judah that he had acquired a very great reputation in medicine among the distinguished men of the realm, such as the chief judge,¹¹² the army officers [*amirs*], the court of al-Qāḍi al-Fāḍil, and other leaders of the country, from whom he does not receive any payment.

In the same year, the Baghdadian physician-philosopher 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī came to Cairo and asked to meet only three people, among them the *ra'īs* Mūsā ibn Maymūn al-Yahūdī.¹¹³ Al-Baghdādī says that Mūsā came to see him, and he described the Jewish sage this way: "He was of superior merit, but love of authority and serving powerful people prevailed over him." In a different version of his autobiography, 'Abd al-Laṭīf relates that he found in Cairo only two scholars studying the ancients, one a Maghribi Jew, called Mūsā ben Maymūn, "who has extensive knowledge and great intellectual gifts, but was too much concerned with worldly success and frequenting the great [as their physician]."¹¹⁴ This is intriguing testimony of an eyewitness, but al-Baghdādī tended to be hypercritical in evaluating his contemporaries. In his description he added a comment on the *Guide*: "He [Mūsā ibn Maymūn] wrote a book for the Jews and called it *Kitāb ad-dalāla*, and cursed whoever would write it in a

non-Hebrew script. I read it and found it to be a bad book which destroys the foundations of religious laws and beliefs, whereas he thought that he was restoring them." This testimony may indicate that the *Guide* was available in Arabic script shortly after its completion (ca. 1190).

The other Cairene intellectual al-Baghdādī met, Abū l-Qāsim ash-Shāʿirī, a man whom Maimonides would have known, introduced the visitor to the books of Alfarabi, Alexander of Aphrodisias, and Themistius. Ash-Shaʿārī's philosophical orientation was therefore close to that of Maimonides.

Outstanding physicians customarily served in royal courts, as did Galen and the Muslim physicians Abū Bakr ar-Rāzī, Avicenna, Abū Marwān Ibn Zuhr, and Averroes. Jewish physicians followed this pattern, but they also served as representatives of their community, as did Maimonides' predecessors, Samuel ben-Ḥananyah ha-Nagid, Nethanel ben Moses, and his brother Sar Shalom. The status of courtier-physician demanded an array of talents – medical expertise, linguistic versatility, political shrewdness, and tact. The courtier-physicians were distinguished by an aristocratic lineage and a sense of noblesse oblige, and they cultivated an intellectual heritage of Jewish learning united with Greek wisdom.

According to the historian Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa, Maimonides served as court physician to Saladin, and we have no reason to doubt this, although we lack independent evidence.¹¹⁵ Maimonides definitely served Saladin's eldest son, al-Malik al-Afḍal and dedicated two of his medical works to him – *On the Regimen of Health* and *On the Cause of Symptoms*. Al-Malik al-Afḍal held power in Egypt briefly, for about two years (1198–1200). Maimonides wrote his *Regimen of Health* in 1198 during the first year of al-Afḍal's reign, and he composed *On the Cause of Symptoms* in 1200 when he was confined by an illness. He explained that his own infirmities and weak constitution prevented him from visiting the prince in person. He therefore wrote his opinions, answering medical questions and assessing counsel given by other physicians. Al-Malik al-Afḍal, a young and frivolous profligate, was subject to attacks of depression and indigestion. In these two works, written for this despondent hedonist, Maimonides was acting as physician of the soul.

Serving royalty was not an unalloyed blessing. Maimonides complained in his correspondence that attending the imperial entourage

was an exasperating responsibility. He described his taxing daily routine in a famous letter to Samuel Ibn Tibbon, translator of the *Guide*.¹¹⁶

Members of the royal family made assorted demands. Saladin's nephew, Taqī ad-Dīn Ibn 'Umar, beset by a bevy of young maidens, aspired to have his ardor enhanced, yet his overexertion had drained him to the point of febrile emaciation. In response to a request, Maimonides wrote a medical work *On Cohabitation* for the prince, prescribing aphrodisiac concoctions but also counseling temperance in erotic pursuits. These, he claimed, debilitate, enfeeble, and attenuate the body. Here we find the Sage of Fustat, the Great Eagle, applying his vast medical skills to the awesome task of resuscitating the waning vigor of an impotent potentate.

I.20. MEDICAL PRACTICE

Medicine in the Arab-Islamic milieu was based mainly on the Greek Hippocratic Corpus and the works of the Roman physician Galen of Pergamum (129–216/17 C.E.). The classical medical library was translated into Arabic in the ninth and tenth centuries and became accessible to the great Muslim physicians, who added their own experience and wisdom. In medicine, as in other fields, Maimonides strived to reduce complexity to system and order. He chafed under Galen's prolixity and reduced the Roman physician's massive literary output to a single book of extracts that a physician could carry around in his pocket. He also wrote a work called *Medical Aphorisms*, containing about 1,500 passages culled mainly from Galen, with critical comments, providing the physician with a handy desk manual, reducing Galen's 129 books to one. Again, he wanted people to be able to master a field by learning its essentials by heart. He cited Galen often and regarded him as a great medical authority, but had little use for him as a philosopher. Even on medical issues, he was not a mere follower of Galen's authority. He had a way of dismissing physicians as not philosophical enough, as he did also with Abū Bakr ar-Rāzī.

Maimonides' medical writings contain no references to Talmudic medicine, nor is there a hint of magic, superstition, or astrology, widespread at the time in medical practice. In his *Medical Aphorisms*, he disapproved of magic medicaments that he found in works

of Abū Marwān Ibn Zuhīr, whom he otherwise admired. He was understanding, however, when the power of suggestion assists the patient, as when women in childbirth used amulets.¹¹⁷ In principle, Maimonides divorced medicine and science from religion. For al-Malik al-Afdāl's melancholy he prescribed wine and music, both strictly forbidden to Muslims.¹¹⁸ He asked his patient not to censure him for recommending what the Islamic law prohibits, for he has not ordered that it be done, but merely prescribed what medicine dictates. The physician, *qua* physician, must advocate a beneficial regime regardless of the religious law, and the patient has the option to accept or decline. If the physician does not prescribe what is medically beneficial, he deceives by not offering his true counsel. The religious law, Maimonides explains, is for the next world, whereas medicine aids the body in this world.¹¹⁹ When dealing with medicine, he viewed religion from the perspective of a scientist.

1.21. THE *GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED*

Maimonides began his celebrated masterpiece, the *Guide of the Perplexed*, in 1185, when he was forty-seven, and completed it in around 1190, when he was fifty-two. This is the third and last volume of his trilogy, following the *Commentary on the Mishnah* and the *Mishneh Torah*. He wrote the *Guide* in Judaeo-Arabic, and it was translated in his lifetime into Hebrew and then into Latin and other European languages.¹²⁰

1.21.1. *The Addressee*

Maimonides dedicated the work to Joseph ben Judah Ibn Simeon, who had studied philosophy previously with a Muslim teacher. Joseph had survived as a forced convert during the Almohad persecutions until he found an opportunity to escape to Alexandria. From there he sent letters and poetic compositions to Maimonides, who was impressed and invited Joseph to be his pupil.¹²¹ Eventually, Joseph left Fustat for Aleppo, Syria, in 1185, and remained in touch with his teacher by correspondence. Maimonides went on teaching him by sending chapters of the *Guide* in the form of an extended epistle, addressed to Joseph and to those like him.

He sent the parts of the *Guide* by installments. Maimonides says in a letter to Joseph that he is sending (or has sent) him six quires of the *Guide*.¹²²

In a witty allegorical letter of rebuke,¹²³ Joseph complained that he had legally married Maimonides' daughter Pleiades (= the *Guide of the Perplexed*),¹²⁴ but that his bride (the *Guide*) was faithless even under the bridal canopy – others possessed her before Joseph himself: "All of this was before two firm witnesses,/ Ibn 'Ubaydallah and Averroes, friends./ While still in the bridal canopy she was unfaithful to me/and turned to other lovers."¹²⁵ Joseph says that the father–author abetted this. In his response, Maimonides spurned this as a false allegation made out of envy. He calls Joseph *kesil*, meaning both Orion and fool. As for Averroes, he writes, "Contrary to the law¹²⁶ he summoned two mixed kinds to witness."¹²⁷ Maimonides denied a connection of Averroes with the *Guide*. His letter is humorous and irreverent, and scholars doubt its attribution to Maimonides, as though he were incapable of levity.¹²⁸ Consider this riposte in his letter to Joseph: "She [the *Guide*] was reared to be steady/ in the [heavenly] sphere/¹²⁹ and he took her for a harlot,/ for she had covered her face" (Genesis 38:15).¹³⁰ But I suggest that we not view Maimonides as though he were an Eastern European rabbi from a Lithuanian *yeshivah*. He was, after all, a Sefaradi. A man who could write that if we ascribe anger to God, He will be angry with us,¹³¹ was not the austere humorless figure we often encounter in Maimonidean scholarship.

1.21.2. *Style of the Guide*

We must note the *Guide's* form of discourse and the parameters of genre, convention, and audience that affected its creation. Maimonides does not call it a book [*kitāb*] or epistolary essay [*risāla*], but *maqāla*, which means "statement" or "utterance." The *Guide* is recorded discourse and the style intimate and conversational. Maimonides speaks to the addressee as "you," as he did in previous works, thereby making the reader feel that the author is speaking directly to him or her.

As Maimonides is communicating oral discourse in writing, the reader of the *Guide* should not expect anything beyond intimations, and these are dispersed among other subjects. The message of the

Guide is scattered throughout its chapters, and the reader must pick up hints and join them to form a coherent account.¹³² Maimonides gave keys for unlocking its secrets throughout the text. He guided by allusion rather than by imparting an authoritative body of teachings, as Plato saw knowledge not as information transmitted from teacher to pupil but as a manner of being and thinking communicated through dialogue. Maimonides claimed total authorial control, claiming that nothing in the text is arbitrary and you must read it with keen care.¹³³

Medieval commentators appreciated the *Guide's* esotericism, but it was Leo Strauss in modern times who rediscovered esoteric writing and called attention to the obscure nature of the *Guide*, including its number symbolism.¹³⁴ Maimonides wrote as a pedagogue, wanting the reader to discover the truth on his or her own.¹³⁵ Strauss writes, "The *Guide* as a whole is not merely a key to a forest but is itself a forest, an enchanted forest, and hence also an enchanting forest: it is a delight to the eyes. For the tree of life is a delight to the eyes."¹³⁶ Strauss's approach has alienated some readers who plunge into "The Literary Character of the *Guide for the Perplexed*" without reading the superscription from Aristotle and wind up in difficulties and knots.¹³⁷

The numerical symbolism, playful and serious, persists in the *Guide* and helps us follow its message. Aside from the structure of the whole, seven is vital to the most important discourses of the *Guide*, such as the causes of contradiction, Jacob's ladder, and the parable of the palace (*GP* 3.51). He divides the scriptural commandments into classes different from the classification of the *Mishneh Torah*, yet the number remains fourteen.¹³⁸ The account of the chariot, which is the *Guide's* main theme, has seven sections, beginning with 1.1–70. The middle section of these *Heptameres*, the account of the chariot, the deepest secret, has seven chapters.¹³⁹ Maimonides alerts us to the significance of seven when he says that the Hebrews often use seven,¹⁴⁰ and that the Law uses seven in the case of Passover because it imitates natural things and brings them to perfection in a way.¹⁴¹

The number seven was regarded in antiquity as a symbol of completeness and perfection. It underlies the creation narrative in Genesis 1:2–3.¹⁴² It is also built into a cosmic plan of seven planets, seven

days, and seven stars of Pleiades and Orion.¹⁴³ The idea that numbers are constitutive of the structure of the universe goes back to Plato and to Pythagoreanism and was used by the Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā'.¹⁴⁴

1.21.3. *The Purpose of the Guide*

Maimonides began and ended the *Guide of the Perplexed* with poems. A manuscript leaf with the first poem in what appears to be handwriting exists in the Cairo Genizah, originally bound, it appears as the cover of the work.¹⁴⁵

Maimonides wants to raise the reader from imaginary and superstitious beliefs that cause fear to a rational consciousness that brings equanimity. The reward is a new vision of the world, intellectual serenity, self-transformation, and spiritual conversion. The aim of the *Guide* is to enlighten and to give peace and tranquility to body and soul: "And when these gates are opened and these places are entered into, the souls will find rest therein, the eyes will be delighted and the bodies will be eased of their toil and of their labor."¹⁴⁶

It teaches philosophical truths without hindering religious commitment, showing that philosophy need not disrupt social norms or destroy religious beliefs. Religion conveys the abstract truths of philosophy in the form of images and symbols, Maimonides argues, religion is not merely a mythic representation of rational verities; it also takes over where science reaches its limits. No philosophical system can give a rational account of the universe as a whole. Maimonides believed that human intelligence is limited, that there is a transcendental mystery beyond reason, and that we find traces of this mystery shimmering through the beauty and harmony of nature.

The *Guide* urges human beings to become fully human by perfecting their reason and living in accordance with wisdom. Beyond that, Maimonides instructs us to contemplate the beauty and harmony of the universe and to experience the divine presence everywhere, in a silent room, in a storm at sea, or in the starry sky above, so that we come to a "passionate love of God."¹⁴⁷ The horizon of the ordinary human world, he wrote, is transformed by revelatory moments. "We are like someone in a very dark night over whom lightning flashes from time and time again."¹⁴⁸

Aware of how easily governments and peoples, and with them, individuals, can be brought to ruin, Maimonides held aloft, amid the chaos and turmoil of his epoch, a love of order, restraint, and moderation. His ethical system is a form of therapy, a cure for excessive desires, illusions, false standards, and extreme tendencies. If people live by reason and in harmony with nature, following ethical and religious precepts and adhering to a regimen of health, they can escape "the sea of chance" as far as humanly possible.

This kind of philosophy, which is not merely intellectual but transformative, leading to a life of wisdom, emerges from ancient thought, from the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. Pierre Hadot, the French historian of philosophy, has shown that ancient philosophy was not merely the study of philosophic systems but philosophy as "a way of life," a life focused on the pursuit of wisdom. It is in this philosophic tradition that Maimonides takes his bearings. The *Guide* resumes the psychagogical (the art of leading souls) character of Socrates' speeches, which were aimed at the spiritual edification of interlocutors. The philosopher in the Hellenistic period is a compassionate physician, a person who heals human suffering and whose main concern is "care of the soul." Philosophy as therapy treats not only cognitive issues but also irrational fears and anxieties. This is precisely what Maimonides does in the *Guide* and the reason why its influence has been so formidable.

Maimonides, the foremost exponent of Jewish rationalism, was convinced of the limitations of human reason. In the realm of nature reason can produce scientific knowledge. There are, however, matters that the intellect is totally incapable of apprehending, as reason has an absolute limit.¹⁴⁹ We are like someone in a deep dark night, only intermittently illumined by lightning flashes. Sometimes the truth flashes as though it were day, and afterward matter and habit conceal it as though it were night. We must stop at this limit and contemplate the revealed doctrines taught by the prophets that we cannot comprehend by ourselves or prove scientifically.

He had a belief in the order and harmony of the universe and a conviction that there is a supreme intellect that manifests itself in nature. He saw in nature a marvelous structure that we can understand only very imperfectly, and that must fill us with a feeling of humility. To know that what is mysterious for us really exists and shows itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty is

the essence of true religious feeling. This is the *amor dei intellectualis*, which he speaks of as a rapturous obsession.¹⁵⁰ It is at a point where rationalism and mysticism intersect.

1.22. TREATISE ON RESURRECTION

Maimonides wrote his *Treatise on Resurrection* in 1191 in reaction to a letter that Samuel ben Eli, head of the Baghdad academy, wrote to Yemen, claiming that Maimonides did not believe in the resurrection of the dead.¹⁵¹ The ensuing debate on resurrection was a battle in a war between Maimonides and the Baghdadian scholars. These battles had usually been fought on legal grounds, but here the field is philosophical–theological. At stake was leadership of the Jewish communities in the Middle East.

Samuel ben Eli's allegation could have embroiled Maimonides with the Ayyūbid political and religious authorities. The philosopher Shihāb ad-Dīn as-Suhrawardī had been executed in the same year for heresy, including denial of resurrection (see Section 1.15).

In a letter to Joseph ben Judah, Maimonides asserted that people distorted his views on resurrection.¹⁵² He had to convince his audience that he believed in it, and explained that resurrection is a generally accepted belief among the religious community and that it should not be interpreted symbolically. By “generally accepted belief” Maimonides meant a commonly accepted opinion, unproven but believed by broad consensus and worthy of consent. Resurrection of the dead is a foundation of the religious law by consensus within the religious community. All who adhere to the community are obligated to believe in it, but it falls short of being a philosophic truth.

1.23. LETTER ON ASTROLOGY

Maimonides wrote his *Letter on Astrology* in 1195 in response to a query by sages in Montpellier in southern France concerning the validity of astrology.¹⁵³ At this time, most philosophers and scientists accepted astrology as a valid science. Maimonides replied curtly that obviously the *Mishneh Torah* has not reached these sages, for if it had, they would have known his opinion about all those things they asked, as he had explained this entire question in Laws Concerning Idolatry.

In this letter, Maimonides gave an original interpretation of the reason for the destruction of the Second Commonwealth in 70 C.E. What annihilated the kingdom, destroyed the temple, and brought Jews to their condition of exile was that their forefathers imagined books of astrology to be illustrious sciences having great utility, and consequently did not study the art of war or the conquest of lands but imagined that those things would help them. No other Jewish thinker gave such a naturalistic explanation for the destruction of the Second Temple, one that offered also a prognosis for the future: The Jewish commonwealth could not be reestablished unless the people learn the art of war.

The *Letter on Astrology* initiated a long correspondence with the sages of southern France, leading to his sending replies to questions on the *Mishneh Torah* and copies of the *Guide* for a local scholar, Samuel Ibn Tibbon, to translate into Hebrew. His letter to Samuel Ibn Tibbon (dated 30 September 1199) indicates that he was not satisfied with the translation. He offered general advice not to translate literally but by sense, and he made many suggestions on specific passages.¹⁵⁴ In this letter, he discouraged Ibn Tibbon from visiting him and even said that, if he comes, he would not be able to spend even an hour with him. There has been much speculation about this rejection. A daring theory holds that Maimonides was displeased that Ibn Tibbon had revealed the secrets of the *Guide* (a radical Aristotelianism).¹⁵⁵

We now have an autograph letter by Maimonides, which appears to be to Samuel Ibn Tibbon, in which he speaks of his incapacity¹⁵⁶:

I request of his honor, R. Samuel the sage, the pious (may his Rock preserve him), that he judge me in the scale of merit in everything, whether to a great or lesser extent. He is surely aware that I esteem him, and his stature is eminent in my heart. But my capacity is limited, and time presses, nor can a man reveal all the circumstances for various reasons. In any case, the merciful one desires the heart. May his peace increase.

Again he speaks of pressure and lack of time, adding tantalizingly that he cannot reveal all the (extenuating) circumstances. Friedman suggests tentatively that he may be alluding to political rivalry. He became once again Head of the Jews in the 1190s, and he was occupied with his service as physician to the royal entourage, while his own health was delicate.

1.24. DEMISE

Maimonides refers often in his letters to his fragile health, his complaints becoming more frequent during the last decade of the twelfth century when he was burdened with obligations to the royal court and the community. According to his grandson David, Maimonides died on 13 December 1204. Given his age and infirmities, it is likely that this date, at least the year, is correct. When his nephew Abū r-Riḍā' copied his *Commentary on Hippocrates' Aphorisms* in 1205, he wrote that his illustrious uncle was dead. According to Ibn al-Qifṭī, Maimonides requested that his descendants have him buried in Tiberias. A tombstone marks the gravesite where he is believed to be interred. However, we cannot be sure, and, like the biblical Moses, "no one knows his burial place to this day" (Deuteronomy 34:6).

NOTES

1. Maimonides gives the year as 1479 S.E. (Seleucid Era) = 4928 A.M., beginning 16 September 1167. He was born then in 4898, beginning 18 September 1137, and so in 1137–8. See Havlin 1972, 1985; Friedman 1993, pp. 540–1. The conventional date 1135 is based on his grandson's statement that he was born on Passover, 30 March 1135. A later embellishment gave the exact hour of his birth – 1:00 P.M.
2. *Epistle to Yemen*, Shailat 1988, *Letters*, p. 105; trans. Kraemer, in Lerner 2000, p. 124; Hebrew letter accompanying the *Guide*, ed. Baneth, *Epistles*, p. 12; and see Friedman 2002, p. 68, n. 98.
3. On Ḥisday ben Shaprut, see Ashtor 1973–9, Chap. 5.
4. See Brann 2002, pp. 24–90, with ample bibliography.
5. In his letter to Samuel Ibn Tibbon, Shailat 1988, p. 552.
6. See 2 Kings 9:11.
7. The famous Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafa', whose tenth-century encyclopedia was current in Spain; see Fierro 1996. Cf. Pines 1963, p. lx.
8. Abraham ibn Daud, 1967. *The Book of Tradition*, ed. and trans. G.D. Cohen, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.
9. Le Tourneau 1969; Halkin 1953; Corcos-Abulafia 1967; Hirschberg 1974, pp. 37, 123–27.
10. *Letter on Astrology*, ed. Shailat 1988, *Letters*, pp. 480–81; trans. Lerner, 2000, p. 180.
11. In his *Commentary on Rosh ha-Shanah* 22b (p. 18), he wrote that the moon can be seen in the East before sunrise and the same day in the West after sunset, but in *CM*, Rosh ha-Shanah, 2.9, he said that whoever

thinks this is “nothing but an utterly ignorant man, who has no more sense of the celestial sphere than an ox or an ass” (cf. 1 Sam 12:3). Lieberman, *Hilkhot ha-Yerushalmi*, pp. 13–14, suggested that Maimonides wrote the *Commentary on Rosh ha-Shanah* when he was young before studying astronomy and that later he was self-deprecating. In the early work, he spoke of ten celestial spheres, whereas his later view was that there were nine (as in Ptolemy’s *Planetary Hypotheses*); see Tanenbaum 1996; but cf. Davidson 2001, pp. 114–17, denying attribution to Maimonides. However, a superscript indicates that Rabbi Samuel ben R. Abraham Skeil copied it from the writing of Maimonides. The vocabulary and presentation of astronomical and calendrical data with illustrations bear the earmarks of Maimonides’ writing, as does a reference to our master Joseph ha-Levi (Ibn Migash) (p. 4).

12. *GP* 2.9, p. 268.
13. Pines 1963, p. ciii; Kraemer 1999.
14. See Merlan 1963.
15. Ed. and trans. E. I. J. Rosenthal 1956; trans. Lerner 1974. Strauss (1936) was the first to point out the Platonic influence in the political thought of these Aristotelians.
16. Urvoy 1998, p. 18.
17. Averroes’ epitome of the *Parva Naturalia* includes six of the nine Aristotelian treatises, the first being *De sensu et sensibili*. See Peters 1968, p. 46.
18. Baneth, *Epistles*, p. 70. The phrase “all his books” may mean books aside from the commentaries. This may imply that he had studied some of Averroes’ books before this time. A. Altmann and H. A. Wolfson believed that when Maimonides wrote the *Guide* he did not know Averroes’ writings. See Altmann 1953, p. 294, n. 3; 1969, 109, n. 3. Wolfson 1929, p. 323.
19. Shailat, *Letters*, p. 552. See S. Harvey 1992.
20. See Sabra 1984, pp. 143–4, for Averroes.
21. W. Z. Harvey 1989.
22. Kraemer 1989.
23. This issue has been much discussed, e.g. by Pines 1963, pp. lxxi–lxxii, cix–cxi; Kraemer 1989; Langermann 1991a, 1996, 1999; Kellner 1991b, 1993c; W. Z. Harvey 1997.
24. See Pines 1963, p. cx. He also notes that Maimonides was concerned with the requirements of scientific theory as well. Pines 1979, p. 29, makes a stronger statement, that Maimonides’ emphasis on the limitations of human science, perhaps his greatest contribution to philosophical thought, was aimed at making room for faith, anticipating Kant.

25. See *GP* 1.71, p. 177. Before this passage Maimonides criticized some Geonim, placing them in the dubious company of the Karaites as having adopted theological arguments from the Islamic *mutakallimūn* (p. 176).
26. Maimon ben Joseph wrote his *Epistle of Consolation* in Fez in 1471 S.E., corresponding to 1159–60 C.E.; ed. and trans. L. M. Simmons, 1890.
27. See *MT* 1, Character Traits, 5.11; 1, Study of the Torah, 1.5; 4, Marriage, 15.2.
28. Avishur 1998, p. 54 and see Index, p. 381.
29. *Iggeret ha-Shemad* is also called *Ma'amar Qiddush ha-Shem* (*Treatise on Martyrdom*); ed. Shailat, 30–59; trans. and discussion of Halkin and Hartman in Maimonides 1985b, pp. 13–90; see Soloveitchik 1980; Hartman 1982–3; Abumalham 1985. Davidson 2001 rejects this epistle as inauthentic, as he does Maimonides' commentary on BT Rosh ha-Shanah, his composition on the calendar, and *Treatise on Logic*. Such a rejection would seem to require assigning these not inconsequential works to some other author.
30. See Grossman 1992; Hartman 1982–3.
31. See, for instance, *Responsa*, 1986, ed. Blau, no. 22, p. 15.
32. He gives similar advice in the *Epistle to Yemen*, ed. Shailat, p. 92; trans. Kraemer in Fine, 2001, p. 111; and see *MT* 1, Character Traits, 6.1; 1, Study of the Torah, 5.4.
33. *Tārīkh al-ḥukamā'*, p. 318; trans. Kraemer in Fine, 2001, p. 424. Ibn al-Qifṭī says that this happened toward the end of Maimonides' life.
34. It should be the Maghrib instead of Andalus, though Andalus could be used in that sense. For the jurist–theologian–poet Abū l-ʿArab Ibn Muʿīsha al-Kinānī as-Sabtī (d. 585/1189), see al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ at-ṭīb*, (1988) III, 326; Ibn al-ʿAdīm, *Bughyat at-Ṭalab fī tārīkh Ḥalab*, IV, 1827–28. And see Munk 1851, p. 329, who cites the Muslim historian adh-Dhahabī.
35. Based on the principle that there is no coercion in religion [*lā ikrāha fī d-dīn*] in Qur'an 2.256.
36. *Tārīkh al-ḥukamā'*, p. 392. See also Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa (1965), *Uyūn al-anbā'*, p. 582. Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa knew Abraham, son of Maimonides. There are other sources as well, but these are contemporary.
37. Gileadi (1984) claims that the *Guide's* title, *Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn*, is taken from Alghazali: and see Lazarus-Yafeh 1997 on Alghazali's influence on Maimonides. Pines omitted Alghazali as a source for Maimonides in his "Translator's Introduction" (1963) and discounted the influence of Ibn Ṭufayl.
38. See Maimonides, *On Asthma*, ed. and trans. G. Bos 2002, xxv–xxvi. This is the first of the medical writings since Meyerhof to be edited and translated in a scholarly fashion.

39. Ed. Lichtenberg 1859, II, 17a–20b; trans. Dünner 1959; ed. and trans. Weil and Gerstenkorn 1988; and see Baneth 1908–14. The treatise was written in Arabic, but all we have is a Hebrew version.
40. See Maimonides 1956a; and see Obermann, Introduction, pp. xlv–xlv. For previous works, see Obermann’s Introduction, p. xlv, n. 35. And see Langermann 1999, I, 8, 16. See in general S. Stern 2001.
41. CM Rosh ha-Shanah 2:7 and Sukkah 4:2. In the *Treatise of the Calendar* he did not explain the causes for phenomena but set out only premises and principles. In CM ‘Arakhin 2.2, he praised someone in Andalusia who had composed a fine composition on the calendar, possibly alluding to Abraham bar Ḥiyya, whose *Book on the Calendar* he evidently used in Sanctification, Chapters 6–10; see Maimonides 1956a; Obermann, Introduction, xlv–xlv. Cf. Davidson 2001, p. 118.
42. O. Neugebauer, in his commentary on Sanctification, said that it shows “the great personality of the author and supreme mastery of a subject, worthy of our greatest admiration”; Neugebauer 1983, 324 [384]. As for the number of chapters, notice that $19 = 12$ Zodiacal signs + 7 planets (*GP* 3.29, pp. 519–20) and is also the number of years of the Metonic cycle.
43. See also Maimonides 1956a; Obermann, Introduction, pp. xxxi–xxxiii.
44. Neugebauer 1983, 327 [387].
45. See J. P. Hogendijk 1986, cited by Langermann 1996, p. 107, n. 2. And see the discussion in Langermann 1984, pp. 59–65, accompanied by treatment of a treatise he assigns to Maimonides titled *Notes on Some of the Propositions of the Book of Conics* [of Apollonius of Perga (241–197 B.C.E.)]; see *GP* 1.73, p. 210. The treatise contains a commentary on *Conics*, Book VIII, based on Ibn al-Haytham’s restoration of the book. See also Rashed 1987. Freudenthal 1988, p. 114, n. 3, raised doubts about its authorship by Maimonides, a skepticism he still holds and that is shared by Roshdi Rashed, as he informed me (personal communication July 21, 2003).
46. This was the Sufi scholar Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Adūd ad-Dawla ibn Hūd al-Judhāmī (d. 1300), a nephew of al-Mu’tamin. See Kraemer 1992.
47. To the editions and translations mentioned in Kraemer 1991b, p. 77, n. 1, add Brague 1996 (Arabic text with French translation).
48. The treatise is philosophical (his only philosophical writing), and as such is universal. He introduces the first chapter speaking of “we” (logicians) (Strauss 1983, p. 208). He uses the Qur’ānic form for the name of Jesus and uses as an example of a writer Ishāq the Sabian, the great epistolary stylist (see also Brague 1996, 17–18, but note that Maimonides uses the

Islamic term *ṣalāt* for prayer throughout his writings, as well as *duʿāʾ* for individual prayer). Maimonides does not hesitate to use Qurʾanic locutions even in purely Jewish writings, as the epithet *kālim Allah* [God's spokesman] for Moses in the *Epistle to Yemen*; ed. Shailat, p. 90; trans. Kraemer in Fine 2001, p. 108. Giving as an example of temporal priority Moses and preceding Jesus (which disturbed Davidson) was commonplace, and was simply chronological without any theological implications.

49. See Strauss 1959, p. 165; Brague 1996, p. 13. As Strauss says, these considerations are "necessarily somewhat playful. But they are not so playful to be incompatible with the seriousness of scholarship."
50. Ed. Lieberman 1947.
51. The fair copy is given in facsimile in Maimonides 1956b. The text was edited and translated into Hebrew by Qāfiḥ 1963; and see for autographs Blau and Scheiber 1981; Hopkins 2001.
52. See the text in ed. Shailat, *Letters*, p. 370 and p. 142, n. 18. Maimonides says there that the greatest principle of the Torah is that the world is created [*muḥdath*] by God *ex nihilo*, and that he only had recourse to the idea of eternity according to the philosophers so that the demonstration [*burhān*] of God's existence should be absolute, as he has explained in the *Guide*. This addition is a denial of the view, apparently already current, that Maimonides actually accepted the Aristotelian position. See also Kellner 1986, p. 544.
53. Hyman 1967; Kellner 1986, pp. 10–17.
54. *Ethical Writings of Maimonides*, trans. Weiss and Butterworth 1975, pp. 59–104; Weiss 1991.
55. Ed. Shailat, *Letters*, pp. 224–5; trans. Kraemer in Fine 2001, pp. 421–2 (correct 12 October 1166 to 1165 C.E.). Not all scholars accept this text as authentic.
56. For Qasr ash-Shamʿ (also called the Fortress of Babylon), see Lambert 1994; and see Goitein 1967–93, Index, 38.
57. For the synagogue, see Lambert, 1994; and for the Genizah, see Goitein, 1967–93, I, pp. 1–28; Reif 2000.
58. On the Fāṭimids, see Sanders 1998; Walker 1998.
59. Pines 1963, p. xcvi.
60. *GP* 1.59, pp. 138–9, and 1.60; see Pines 1980, pp. 296–7, citing al-Kirmānī's *Raḥat al-ʿaql*.
61. Ivry 1986, 1991, 1995.
62. See n. 9 in this chapter.
63. Pines 1947; S. M. Stern 1983; Kiener 1984.
64. Pines translates: "Islamic internalists" in *GP* 2.25, p. 328.

65. Pines 1980, Appendix VI, p. 294.
66. See *Epistle to Yemen*, ed. Shailat, *Letters*, p. 100, trans. Kraemer in Lerner 2000, p. 120.
67. See Corbin 1986.
68. Ibn al-Qiftī, *Tārīḥ al-ḥukamā'*, p. 318; trans. Kraemer in Fine 2001, p. 423.
69. Maimonides 1985a, p. 70.
70. See Goitein 1980, p. 163 and n. 32. M. A. Friedman suggests that he is Samuel Ibn al-Amshāṭī; Friedman 1988–9, pp. 182–3.
71. For Halevi, see Gil and Fleischer 2001; and for India traders, see Goitein 1973. Goitein's *India Book* is being edited by M. A. Friedman.
72. *CM*, Avot, 4.7, ed. Qāfiḥ, pp. 441–2; *MT* 1, Study of the Torah, 1.9, 3.10–11. And see *MT* 7, Gifts to the Poor, 10.18.
73. See his letter to Japheth ben Elijah, ed. Shailat p. 230; trans. Kraemer in Fine 2001, p. 425; and his letter on his son Abraham; ed. Baneth, *Epistles*, p. 95; trans. Kraemer in Fine 2001, p. 427; and see *MT* 1, Repentance, 10.6.
74. David's letter to Moses before his journey has been miraculously preserved; see Goitein 1973, pp. 207–9; and Moses describes his reaction in his letter to Japheth ben Eli; ed. Shailat, 228–30; trans. Kraemer in Fine 2001, pp. 424–5.
75. In *MT* 12, Property and Presents, 8.2, Maimonides uses the expression “prostrate in bed” in the sense of “dangerously ill.”
76. He weaves verses from Scripture to describe symptoms of melancholia, viz. Deuteronomy 28:22, 28, 35 and Job 2:7.
77. Cf. Exodus 2:22, 18:3, in which the biblical Moses says, “I have been a stranger in a foreign land,” meaning Egypt. A foreign land as opposed to eternal life also suggests life in this world.
78. See Freud 1937.
79. Goitein 1966, 1980; Friedman 1988–9; Cohen 1989; Ben-Sasson 1991. Both Ibn al-Qiftī (1903, p. 392) and Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a (1965, p. 582) report that he was Head of the Jews [*ra'īs al-yahūd*] in Egypt. This was a title conferred by the government. And in Genizah documents he is called *ra'īs* (or *rayyīs*) in contexts in which it implies “head” in this sense. But cf. Levinger 1990 (also in 1989) and Davidson 1997, who denies that Maimonides was ever Head of the Jews.
80. I have found evidence in the Genizah papers that Sar Shalom Halevi, whom Maimonides replaced, was again Head of the Jews in 1173, that is, if we can assume that documents written under his jurisdiction [*bi-reshuteh*] imply this. See Mss. Or 1080 J 7 and Or 1080 J 8 from March–April, 1173.

81. Descendants of Maimonides for two centuries were Nagids in Egypt, from his son Abraham (1186–1237) to his great-great-great grandson David ben Joshua (1335–1415).
82. This is reported by Ibn al-Qifṭī 318–19; see trans. Kraemer in Fine, 2001, p. 423.
83. It is known in Arabic as a *mubādala* [exchange] marriage.
84. Friedman 2001, pp. 194–211.
85. On Abraham, see the brilliant portrait by Goitein in 1967–93, Vol. 5, pp. 476–96. See also Avrom Udovitch's reference to the concluding paragraph in his Foreword to the volume, p. xv.
86. Friedman, "The 'Family of Scholars' and the House of Maimonides," "Ibn al-Amshati – A Family of Merchants, Philanthropists, Sages and Pietists" [Heb.], appendices to the *India Book* (published).
87. Goitein 1973, p. 186. Goitein and Friedman 1999. Ibn Yiju is featured in a lovely novel by Amitav Ghosh 1993; and see also Ghosh 1992. He resided in India for a long time, from 1137 through 1149. The earliest document in Ben Yiju's records is a bill of manumission for the female slave Ashu, written in 1132 in Mangalore, on the Malabar Coast of India. Ben Yiju married her and named her Berakhah [Blessing], daughter of Abraham.
88. See *Responsa*, 1986, ed. Blau, no. 211, pp. 373–5, in which he flexes the law in cases in which a man marries a female slave with whom he lived before her release and conversion. Ben Yiju himself had written a responsum on the subject, which is included in Goitein's *India Book*.
89. He writes, "I met [Abraham] in the year 631 or 632 [October 1231–September 1233], while working in the hospital there, and found him to be a tall sheikh of lean body, pleasant manners, refined speech, and distinguished in medicine"; Goitein 1967–93, 5. 477.
90. On the Ayyūbids, see Chamberlain 1998.
91. See especially *GP* 1.73, pp. 202–3.
92. See Ziai 1992.
93. Bahā' ad-Dīn Ibn Shaddād 2002, *an-Nawādir as-sulṭāniyya*, trans. Richards, p. 20.
94. Helbig 1908; Dajani-Shakil 1993.
95. 'Uyūn al-anbā', 582–83; trans. Rosenthal in Fine 2001, p. 427.
96. Rosenthal 1981.
97. 1986, ed. Blau 1986.
98. Ed. Shailat, *Letters*, pp. 82–111; 1985b, trans. and discussion in Maimonides 1985b, pp. 91–207; trans. Kraemer in Fine 2001, pp. 14–27. See Friedman 2002.

99. Maimonides alludes to Qur'ān 2:61, which says, speaking of the people of Moses, "And humiliation and wretchedness were stamped upon them."
100. He mentions Balaam's prophecy regarding the advent of King David and the Messiah in *MT* 14, Kings and Wars, 11.1. He discusses Balaam's role as prophet in *GP* 2.41, pp. 42, 45 and 3.22.
101. Hartman 1985, pp. 202–10, doubts that Maimonides believed in the tradition. For a thorough discussion, see Friedman 2002, pp. 50–63.
102. Kraemer 1984.
103. Even its parts are numerologically significant. The Book of Knowledge, for instance, is divided into five parts, two of seven chapters, two of ten, and one (Laws of Idolatry) of twelve (see Foundations of the Torah 3.6). For the view that fourteen is "sheer coincidence," see Fox 1990, p. 15.
104. See especially Twersky 1980.
105. *MT* Introduction, trans. Lerner 2000, 139–40.
106. Letter to Joseph ben Judah, ed. Baneth, *Epistles*, pp. 50–54; see trans. Kraemer in Fine 2001, p. 425.
107. Alghazali began his *Revivication of the Religious Sciences* with a Book of Knowledge. It has been shown (Kraemer 1979) that Maimonides follows, especially in Foundations of the Torah, Alfarabi's scheme (based ultimately on Plato) of the opinions that ought to be posited in the virtuous, or excellent, city. The correspondence may be detected both in order of presentation and in the themes themselves.
108. Blidstein 2001.
109. Hadot 1995.
110. See Carruthers 1992, pp. 7–8.
111. Baneth, *Epistles*, p. 69; 1975, *Ethical Writings of Maimonides*, trans. Weiss and Butterworth, p. 122.
112. The chief judge (not identified by Baneth) was 'Abd al-Malik ibn 'Īsā Ṣadr ad-Dīn Ibn Dirbas (Durbas) (d. 605/began July 1208), an Ash'arī and Shāfi'ī of Kurdish background, who replaced a Shī'ite judge on 23 Jumādā II, 566 = 3 March 1171. He served until 18 Rabī'ī, 590 = 13 March 1194, when he was replaced with Zayn ad-Dīn 'Alī ibn Yūsuf ad-Dimashqī. Maimonides' proximity to the Muslim chief judge relates to his role as a judicial authority. He refers about ten times to Muslim judges in his responsa; see Blau, *Responsa*, 3.219.
113. See Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a 1965, pp. 687–88; trans. Kraemer in Fine 2001, p. 427. For two other meetings with Maimonides, see Fenton 1982, and Isaacs 1993.
114. S. M. Stern 1962, p. 64.
115. 'Uyūn al-anbā', p. 582.
116. Shailat, *Letters*, pp. 550–51; trans. Kraemer in Fine 2001, p. 428.

117. And see *MT* 1, Idolatry, 11.11.
118. 1974b, *On the Cause of Symptoms*, ed. and trans. J. O. Leibowitz and S. Marcus, pp. 15–3.
119. Cf. *MT* 1, Idolatry, 11.12, on the Torah being medicine for the soul.
120. The *Guide* remains unedited in a critical edition based on available manuscripts; see Hill 1985; Sirat 2000; and Langermann 2000.
121. Munk 1842; Yahalom 1997.
122. Baneth, *Epistles*, pp. 67–68.
123. Baneth, *Epistles*, p. 23.
124. Pleiades has seven stars and is known to be a guide at night.
125. Ibn ‘Ubaydallāh is the name of Maimonides’ family after his eponymous ancestor. This is the first time Averroes is connected with the *Guide*.
126. Cf. Esther 4:16.
127. Cf. Leviticus 19:19 and Deuteronomy 22:9. The two kinds to witness are Maimonides with Averroes, who is not permitted to be a witness according to Jewish law.
128. Baneth, *Epistles*, 17–30.
129. Combines Lamentations 4:5 and Exodus 17:12, in which the stem *’-m-n* is used in two different senses, and alluding to a third, faithfulness, thus a triple paronomasia.
130. Tamar had covered her face, and so her father-in-law Judah took her for a cult prostitute. Maimonides signals that whereas his daughter was modest and covered her face, Joseph son of Judah took her for a prostitute. (He may also be alluding to the veiled character of the *Guide*.)
131. *GP* 1.36, p. 84.
132. We find the method dispersal [*tabdīd*] in alchemical writings, which were highly esoteric and depended on this style along with alphanumeric symbolism; see *GP* Introduction, p. 607; Kraus 1986, 32, 42–3, 49, and 336.
133. Strauss 1958, p. 121; 1962, p. 60 (re Plato). He uses the expression, “the law of logographic necessity.” We may see in this an application of Talmudic hermeneutics.
134. “How To Begin To Study” (1963).
135. Strauss, in teaching the *Guide*, used the same method. Lenzner stresses this in his fine dissertation (2003) and in 2002. Others are less circumspect and wish to reveal esoteric teachings, perceiving hidden doctrines from radical Aristotelianism to extreme skepticism, just as the “real” Strauss is supposed to be a Nietzschean anarchist or an archconservative (or both). Scholars assume that Strauss intimated that Maimonides was an Aristotelian in cosmogonic questions (eternal

universe), and that this was his own view, but nothing could be further from the truth.

136. Strauss 1963, pp. xiii–xiv, alluding to (aside from Heidegger and Weber) *GP* Introduction, p. 20; and cf. p. lvi, where he quotes it again differently. Cf. Genesis 3:6 and Proverbs 3:18.
137. See the review of Strauss (1963) by Fox (1965), in which he criticizes Strauss's own veiled writing.
138. Strauss 1952, p. 87, n. 143; 1959, pp. 165–66; 1963, p. xxx.
139. The number four is vital for the chariot; see *GP* 2.10, p. 272 ("the number four is wondrous").
140. *GP* 2.29, p. 339.
141. *GP* 3.43, p. 571.
142. For the remarkable use of seven and its multiples throughout Genesis 1:1–2:3, see Levenson 1988, citing U. Cassuto.
143. Langermann 1999, I, 33, discusses Abraham Ibn Ezra's numerical symbolism; and see Giora 1988.
144. Netton 1982, pp. 9–16; Schimmel 1993, p. 18. And see Kraus (1986), Chapter 5. The number seven is fundamental for the *Ismā'īlīs*, but also for Islam in general. The *shahāda* [declaration of faith] has seven words and so does the *Fātiḥa* [the opening Surah of the Qur'an, used in liturgy]; and see Surah 15:87. Ibn Tufayl, in *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, as is well known, has his hero pass through seven-year stages toward perfection (Schimmel 1993, p. 128).
145. Ms. J 2.39 recto. The verso has the beginning of the "Epistle Dedicatory." A card in the volume is signed P[aul] F[enton], who had noted this document. The *Guide* also ends with a poem. L. Strauss, in a letter to S. Pines (August 20, 1956, in the Strauss archives at the University of Chicago, called to my attention by Ralph Lerner), which I am publishing, suggests an improved translation of the Epistle Dedicatory, and raises the question why Pines omitted the prior Hebrew verses, "which, incidentally, consist of twenty-six words."
146. *GP* Introduction, p. 20.
147. See S. Harvey 1997.
148. *GP* Introduction, p. 7.
149. *GP* 1.31.
150. *MT* 1, Principles of the Torah, 2.2, 4.12; 1, Repentance, 10.3; *Guide* 3.51.
151. Ed. Finkel (1939); ed. Shailat, *Letters*, pp. 319–76; ed. Halkin and Hartman 1985b, 209–92; trans. Fradkin in Lerner 2000c, pp. 154–77; and see Lerner 2000, pp. 42–55; Stroumsa 1999; and Langermann 2000. The texts published by Stroumsa and Langermann have put to rest any doubts about the authenticity of the treatise.

152. Ed. Baneth, *Epistles*, pp. 66–67.
153. Text in Marx 1926; Shailat, *Letters*, pp. 478–90; trans. Lerner 2000, pp. 178–87; and see studies by Langermann 1991b; Freudenthal 1993; Fixler 1999; Kreisel 1994; Sela 2001b; Lerner 2000, pp. 56–64.
154. Shailat, *Letters*, pp. 511–54.
155. See the discussion in Fraenkel 2002, pp. 36–7. This had been proposed by A. Ravitzky, but (as Fraenkel shows) it was based on a poor text of Abraham Maimonides' *Wars of the Lord* rather than on the Margaliyot edition.
156. The document is preserved in TS AS 149.41. See Friedman 2001, pp. 191–4.