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THE JEWISH KALAM

By HARRY A. WOLFSON, Harvard University

IN THEIR OWN LITERATURE, written in Hebrew or Aramaic or in a mixture of both, the Jews who came under Muslim rule in the seventh century had no philosophic works corresponding to the philosophic writings of the Church Fathers possessed by the Christians who came under Muslim rule at the same time. Toward the end of the ninth century, however, philosophic works in Arabic of a Jewish content began to appear among them, and such works continued to flow, both in the East and in Spain, until the end of the twelfth century, though isolated philosophical works occasionally appeared also after that time.¹

A general characterization of that Jewish philosophic literature in Arabic from its very beginning to its own time is given by Maimonides in his introductory remarks to his systematic presentation of the Kalam in his *Moreh Nebukim*.

"As for the little bit of Kalam regarding the subject of the unity of God and whatever is dependent upon this subject, which you will find among the Geonim and the Karaites, it all consists of matters which they borrowed from the Mutakallimūn of Islam."² He then goes on to say that, since among the Muslim Mutakallimūn the first sect to appear was that of the Mu'tazilites, "it was from them that our correligionists borrowed whatever they borrowed and it was their method that they followed,"³ but, as for the new views which appeared later with the coming of the Ash'arites, "you will not find any of them among our correligionists, not because they judiciously chose the former view in preference

¹ Cf. Steinschneider, *Die arabische Literatur der Juden*, §§ 25 ff.

² *Moreh Nebukim* I, 71, p. 121, l. 28-p. 122, l. 2 (page references are to the Arabic edition by I. Joel, Jerusalem, 1930/31).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 122, ll. 4-5.

to the latter but rather because it just happened that they had taken up the former view [first] and adopted it and assumed it to be something incontestably demonstrated.”⁴ Then, in contrast to those Jewish speculative theologians in the East, he says: “As for the Andalusians from among the people of our religion, they all hold on to the words of the philosophers and are favorably disposed to their views in so far as they are not contradictory to any fundamental article of religion, and you will not find them in any way at all to have followed the methods of the Mutakallimūn, the result being that in many things they follow pretty near our own method in the present treatise, [as may be noticed] in the few works that we have of their recent authors.”⁵

In this passage, Maimonides makes three significant statements. First, the influence of the Mutakallimūn upon the speculative Jewish theologians of the East, namely, “the Geonim,” that is, the Rabbanites, and their opponents, “the Karaites,” is to be found only in their treatment of “the unity of God and whatever is dependent upon it.” Second, with regard to “the unity of God and whatever is dependent upon it,” both the Rabbanites and the Karaites of the East followed the Mu‘tazilite Kalam, whereas the extant writings of the Jewish philosophers in Spain show no influence whatsoever of the Kalam. Third, the preference of the Geonim and the Karaites for the views of the Mu‘tazilites was not the result of a deliberate choice but rather of the mere chance of their having become acquainted with the Mu‘tazilite views first.

Each of these statements calls for comment.

The first statement was meant to exclude such characteristic views held by the Mutakallimūn as atomism and the

⁴ *Ibid.*, ll. 6-9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, ll. 9-13. Cf. *Moreh Nebukim* I, Introduction, p. 10, ll. 26-27, where, after stating that his work deals with certain recondite topics, Maimonides adds: “on which no book has been composed by any one in our religious community during this length of captivity, in so far as their writings on such topics are extant among us.” Cf. also Munk, *Guide des Égarés*, I, 71, p. 339, n. 1.

denial of causality. With regard to atomism, while it was followed by "the Karaites" of the East, such as Joseph al-Baṣīr and Jeshua ben Judah, who were presumably known to Maimonides, it was not followed by "the Geonim" nor, it may be added, by later Karaites, such as his own contemporary Judah Hadassi ⁶ and probably also others,⁷ who were unknown to Maimonides. With regard to the denial of causality, it was definitely not followed by "the Geonim" and it is doubtful whether it was followed by "the Karaites" of the East.

The second statement is subject to several qualifications. The expression "the unity of God and whatever is dependent upon it," judged by what we actually find in the writings of the Geonim and the Karaites which reflect a Kalam background, includes not only discussions of the meaning of the unity of God but also discussions of proofs for the existence and incorporeality of God, proofs for the denial of the reality of attributes, and proofs for the creation of the world and the freedom of the human will. Now it is true that in all these discussions both the Rabbanites of the East and the Karaites followed the methods of the Muʿtazilite Mutakallimūn, but still there were certain differences between them. Thus, while both Rabbanites and Karaites deny the reality of attributes, Joseph al-Baṣīr, the Karaite, followed Abū Hāshim's theory of modes, whereas Saadia, the Rabbanite, expresses himself in a way which excludes the theory of modes, and so does also al-Muḳammaṣ. Similarly with regard to the proofs of the creation of the world, which serve also as proofs for the existence of God, while both the Rabbanites of the East and the Karaites use arguments which are characterized by Maimonides himself as those of the Kalam, the Karaites, who adopted the Kalam theory of atoms, use these arguments in their original Kalam form as based upon atomism, whereas

⁶ *Eshkol ha-Kofer* 28, p. 19c-d.

⁷ Cf. Aaron b. Elijah of Nicomedia, *Eṣ Hayyim* 4, pp. 17-18. Some of my general statements in this and the next two paragraphs are based upon discussions of the respective subjects in my forthcoming work *The Philosophy of the Kalam*.

Saadia, rejecting atomism, uses the same arguments in a modified form, from which the theory of atoms was eliminated.

So also, with reference to his statement on the difference between the spokesmen of Judaism in the East and those in Andalusia, while it is true that some of the Jewish philosophers in Spain abandoned the Kalam method of proving the creation of the world and the existence of God, two of them, Baḥya ibn Paḳuda and Joseph ibn Ṣaddīq, like Saadia of the East, used the modified form of the Kalam arguments for the creation of the world and hence also for the existence of God. Undoubtedly his generalization was meant to refer only to those whom he includes in what he describes as "their recent authors" and evidently Baḥya ibn Paḳuda and Joseph ibn Ṣaddīq were not included by him among them. With regard to the problem of attributes, though it would seem to be included in the subject of "the unity of God" and hence it would also seem to be included in his generalization about the difference between the spokesmen of Judaism in the East and those of Andalusia, it can be shown that it is really not included in that generalization, and this for two reasons. First, fundamental issue in the problem of attributes there was no difference between the Muʿtazilites and those whom Maimonides calls "the philosophers." Second, the generalization refers only to those topics which are dealt with in the subsequent chapters on the Kalam; the attributes are dealt with in earlier chapters.

The third statement, implying that were it not for the fact that the Geonim and Karaites had committed themselves to the views of the Muʿtazilites before the rise of the Ashʿarites they might have followed the latter, is somewhat puzzling. There is no difference between the Muʿtazilites and the Ashʿarites in their methods of proving the creation of the world and the existence and unity and incorporeality of God. There is a difference between them only on such general religious questions as attributes and the freedom of the will, and also on such a purely Muslim question as the eternity of

the Koran. When, therefore, Maimonides by implication, says that but for the prior appearance of the Mu'tazilites the Geonim and Karaites might have followed the Ash'arites, does he mean to say that they might have followed the Ash'arites in accepting their view on the reality of attributes and predestination? But there is no ground for such an assumption. The belief in the reality of attributes and the belief in predestination did not originate with the Ash'arites. They had been well established in Islam even before the Mu'tazilites came into being. The controversy in Islam over both these doctrines was known to the Geonim and the Karaites, and still they aligned themselves with the Mu'tazilites in rejecting the orthodox Muslim position, later espoused by the Ash'arites, on both these doctrines. Moreover, while it is true that Ash'ari's views may not have been known to Saadia at the time he wrote his *Emunot ve-De'ot* in Baghdad during the year 933, though the orthodox preaching and writing of Ash'ari took place during the years 912-935, the last of which years he spent in Baghdad, where he died, Joseph al-Basir, the Karaite, quotes the Ash'arites and refutes them. How, then, could Maimonides say that the agreement of the Geonim and the Karaites with the Mu'tazilites was due to the mere chance that the Ash'arites were unknown to them?

Reference to Jewish followers of the Muslim Kalam, with the mention of only the Karaites, is to be found also in Judah Halevi's *Cuzari*. In one place of this work, just as Halevi was about to make the rabbi expound for the king the Neoplatonized Aristotelian system of philosophy, he makes the rabbi say: "I will not make you travel the road of the Karaites who went up to theology without a flight of steps (*daraj: madregah*), but I will provide you with a clear outline, which will allow you to form a clear conception of matter and form, then of the elements, then of nature, then of the soul, then of the intellect, then of theology."⁸ On the face of it the passage

⁸ *Cuzari* V, 2, p. 294, l. 18-p. 296, l. 1; p. 295, l. 18-p. 297, l. 2 (ed. Hirschfeld).

would imply that what he objected to was the fact that the Karaites plunged right into theology without a preliminary study of physics.⁹ But this, if we take the works of Joseph al-Baṣīr and Jeshua ben Judah as examples, is not an exact description of their method. They do not plunge right into a discussion of theology. They rather start with a discussion of the need of rational speculation in dealing with theological problems. They then go on with explanations of certain terms and concepts used in the physical sciences, in the course of which they discuss the proofs for the creation of the world. It is only then that they take up the discussion of theological problems, such as the existence, the unity, the incorporeality of God, and attributes. This indeed is the method of the Kalam, but it is this method that is also used by such non-Karaite Jewish philosophers as Saadia and Baḥya.

In explanation of Halevi's statement it may be suggested that the expression "without *daraj*," which for the time being I have translated literally by "without a flight of steps", does not mean that the Karaites plunge right into theology without prefacing it by a preliminary discussion of physical concepts; it rather means that the physical concepts which the Karaites discuss preliminary to their discussion of theology are not those of a graded order of beings in a process of successive emanation, such as he himself describes later in his exposition of the Neoplatonized Aristotelian system of emanation, where he speaks of "the knowledge . . . of the rank (*martabah*: *madregah*) of Intelligence in its relation to the Creator, the rank of soul in its relation to intelligence, the rank of nature in its relation to soul, and the rank of spheres and stars and generated things in their relation to matter and form."¹⁰ The term *daraj* is thus used here as the equivalent of the term *martabah* in the sense of "rank," "order," "hierarchy." Both these terms, it will be noticed, are in the Hebrew version of the *Cuzari* translated by *madregah*. What Halevi means to

⁹ Cf. commentaries *ad. loc.*

¹⁰ *Cuzari* V, 12, p. 316, ll. 15-24; p. 317, ll. 9-18.

say here is that, unlike the Karaites, such as Joseph al-Baṣīr and Jeshua ben Judah, who, as followers of the Kalam, preface their exposition of theology by a discussion of such concepts as thing, existent and nonexistent, eternal and created, atom and accident, motion and rest, I shall preface my exposition of theology with a discussion of concepts more fashionable in the current philosophy of emanation and shall begin with the lowest, matter, and go up step by step to form and element and nature and soul and intellect until I ultimately arrive at a discussion of theology.

According to both Halevi and Maimonides, then, there were among Jews those who followed the Kalam. Halevi, confining his discussion in that place to purely philosophic problems, mentions only the Karaites; Maimonides dealing also with theological problems mentions both Rabbanites and Karaites, describing their writings on these problems as "a little bit of Kalam," by which he means that they are few in number, and characterizing them as belonging to the Mu'tazilite type of the Muslim Kalam, by which he means that they all maintain certain traditional Jewish views on the unity and incorporeality of God and on the freedom of the human will which agree with views which in Islam were maintained by the Mu'tazilites over against the Ash'arites, and that they all, in their attempts to support these Jewish traditional views, use arguments which they borrowed from the Mu'tazilites.

But the few written works of the Geonim and the Karaites anonymously referred to by Maimonides, as well as those which are known to us and are still extant, are not to be taken as the measure by which we are to estimate the extent to which discussions of speculative theology were carried on among Jews in Arabic countries during the period that the Kalam flourished in Islam. That was an age when not all who discussed or even taught philosophy or theology and had something new to say on either of these subjects committed their thoughts to writing. In works of Muslim authors of that

time we find references to Jewish philosophers and theologians, of whom some are known only through some casual quotations by other authors and some are mere names. Thus Mas'udī (d. ca. 956) refers to a certain Abū Kathir Yaḥyā al-Kātib of Tiberias, whom he describes as a teacher of Saadia and as one with whom he "had many discussions in the lands of Palestine and the Jordan concerning the abrogation of the Law (الشرائع = *Torah*), the difference between *torah* and 'abodah (اعبدا), and other subjects."¹¹ Nothing is known about him from other sources, though some modern scholars try to identify him with a certain Karaite Hebrew grammarian.¹² Mas'udī also mentions two people whom he did not know personally, Da'ūd, surnamed al-Muḡammaṣ, who lived in Jerusalem, and Ibrahīm al-Baghdādī.¹³ Of these two, the first is known as the author of a work of the Kalam type; the latter is a mere name. He then mentions that at Rakka in Iraq¹⁴ he discussed philosophy and medicine with a certain Yahuda ibn Yūsūf, surnamed Ibn Abū al-Thanā, who was a pupil of Thābit ibn Ḳurra al-Ṣābi, and in the same city he held also discussions with Sa'īd ibn 'Alī, surnamed Ibn Ashlamia.¹⁵ Of these two the first is known only through a quotation in Kīrkisānī;¹⁶ the latter is a mere name. Finally, he reports that he had discussions with "those of their [i.e., Jewish] Mutakallimūn whom we have met in Baghdad, such as Ya'qūb ibn Mardawaih and Yūsūf ibn Kayyūmā," concluding with the following statement: "The last one of them, whom we have seen from among those who came to visit us from Baghdad after the year 300 [=912], is Ibrahīm al-Yahūdī . . . He was the most subtle in speculation, and more

¹¹ Mas'udī, *Al-Tanbīh wa'l-Ashrāf* (ed. M. J. de Goeje), p. 113, ll. 4-6, 13-15. Cf. Munk, *Guide*, I, 71 (p. 337, n.).

¹² Cf. Malter, *Saadia*, p. 53 nn. 22, 23.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, p. 113, ll. 12-13. The name al-Muḡammaṣ is corrupted in the text.

¹⁴ In the text of Mas'udī it is erroneously described as in Egypt (cf. Steinschneider, *Die arabische Literatur der Juden*, § 24, n. 1, p. 37).

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 113, ll. 15-18.

¹⁶ Cf. Steinschneider, *op. cit.*, § 24, p. 36.

skillful in argumentation than all their Mutakallimūn in modern times.¹⁷ Nothing is known about any of these three names. ʾĪsā ibn Zurʿa (943-1009) mentions a certain Abū al-Ḥayr Dāūd ibn Mūsaf, of whom he says that "he was one of the principal Mutakallimūn of the Jews and the foremost thinker among them."¹⁸ Referred to as Abū al-Ḥayr al-Yahūdī, he is also mentioned by Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 1009) as a member of a group of philosophers in Baghdad formed around Abū Sulaymān Muḥammad ibn Ṭāhir al-Sijistānī.¹⁹ But there is no mention of him in Jewish literature. Moreover, Saadia himself discusses two views in connection with the doctrine of creation, of one of which he says that it has been reported to him of "certain persons of our own people"²⁰ and of the other that it is entertained "by one of our people whom I have known."²¹ Neither of these views is traceable to any written work. Similarly toward the end of a Bodleian manuscript of the Arabic text of the first part of Maimonides *Guide of the Perplexed* there is a marginal note, purported to have been written by Maimonides himself, in which among well-known Jewish theologians and philosophers it mentions two unknown philosophers, one of whom has been identified as a contemporary of Saadia, who is mentioned in some other source, and the other is not mentioned anywhere else.²²

From all this we may gather that, besides those speculative theologians who have written books and whose books have come down to us, there were others who did not write books or whose books have not come down to us. We also gather that all those Jewish speculative theologians of that period, both the known and the unknown, were referred to as Mutakallimūn. We have seen how Masʿūdī applies this term to those

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 113, l. 18-p. 114, l. 4.

¹⁸ Quoted from a manuscript by Munk, *Guide* I, 71 (p. 337, n.).

¹⁹ Cf. Goldziher, "Mélanges Judeo-arabe," *REJ*, 47 (1903), pp. 4-46.

²⁰ *Emunot* I, 3, 2nd Theory, p. 43, l. 17.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 6th Theory, p. 57, l. 2.

²² Cf. Munk, *Guide* I, p. 462, n. to p. 459.

Jewish theologians of Baghdad. We also find that Ibn Ḥazm applies the term Mutakallimūn to Saadia, Muḥammas, Ibrahīm al-Baghdādī, and Abū Kathir of Tiberias.²³ And so also Moses ibn Ezra, writing in Arabic, speaks of "the most glorious Mutakallimūn, Rabbi Saadia and Rabbi Hai and others."²⁴

Knowing then as we do that, besides those glorious Jewish Mutakallimūn who speak to us from the pages of their writings, there was among the Jews during the period of the Muslim Kalam a host of mute Mutakallimūn unknown to glory, we should like to find out whether all those unknown Jewish Mutakallimūn, like those known to us through their writings, represented in Judaism a kind of Kalam which was like that of Muʿtazilism in Islam or whether among them there were also those who deviated from that standard type of the Jewish Kalam. Moreover, knowing as we also do that the later Jewish religious thinkers in Spain, who are described by Maimonides as philosophers, while differing from the earlier Jewish religious thinkers of the East in their method of demonstration, did not differ from them in their views on problems which in Islam were a matter of controversy between Muʿtazilites and orthodox, we should like to know more generally whether among Arabic-speaking Jews from the time of Saadia to that of Maimonides there were any groups of people or any individuals who deviated from the common pattern of views which we find in the works of Jewish religious thinkers of that period.

That in general, corresponding to the influence of Muʿtazilism upon religious rationalization among Jews in Muslim countries, there was also an influence of Muslim orthodoxy upon those Jews who opposed religious rationalization may be gathered from the literature of the time. Early in the

²³ *Fiṣal* III, p. 171, ll. 23-24 (ed. Cairo, 1317-27); cf. I. Friedlander, *Jewish Quarterly Review*, N.S., 1 (1910-11), p. 602, n. 5.

²⁴ Quoted from his *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍarah waʾl-Mudhākarah* by M. Schreiner in "Zur Geschichte der Polemik etc.", *ZDMG*, 42 (1888), p. 602, n. 5.

tenth century, when religious rationalization had just made its appearance among Jews, Saadia tried to forestall opposition to it by introducing a fictitious "some one", a Jew, who, he says, might question the advisability of probing rationally into matters religious on the ground that "there are people (*al-nās: ha-'am*) who disapprove of such an occupation, being of the opinion that speculation leads to unbelief and is conducive to heresy."²⁵ The term "people" here, as may be judged from Saadia's answer, refers to Muslims. What Saadia, therefore, does here is to make a Jew raise doubt concerning religious rationalization by citing against it the opinion of orthodox Muslims. In his answer, Saadia says: "Such an opinion is held only by the common people among them"²⁶—that is, among the Muslims. Saadia then adds that, should that some one try to infer an objection to religious rationalization from a certain passage in the Talmud, he can be shown to be wrong.²⁷ In his entire discussion of the problem, it will be noticed, Saadia never refers to the existence of actual opposition to religious rationalization among the Jews of his time. All he does is to set up a fictitious Jewish character who, having heard that among Muslims there were those who objected to religious rationalization, tried to find support for such objection in some rabbinic passage.

A century later, however, perhaps as a result of the effect of religious rationalization upon certain Jews, we find among Arabic-speaking Jews outspoken opposition to it, reëchoing sentiments like those heard among orthodox Muslims. Thus Ibn Janah, himself a physician, logician, and philologist, the author in Arabic of one of the most important Hebrew grammars and lexicons, commenting upon the verse, which he takes to mean "beware of the making of many books without end" (Eccl. 12: 12), says: "By this warning the sage prohibits only the preoccupation with the study of those books which,

²⁵ *Emunot*, Introduction 6, p. 20, ll. 18, 20-21.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21, l. 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21, ll. 5 ff.

according to the claim of those who have made a study of them, lead to a knowledge of the principles and the elements whereby one may investigate most thoroughly the nature of the upper world and the lower world, for that is a matter of which the real truth one cannot come to know and the end of which one cannot attain. Moreover, it injures religion and destroys faith and wearies the soul without any compensation and without any satisfaction, as the verse continues to say, 'and much study is a weariness to the flesh.' It is to this, too, that the sage makes allusion in his statement, 'all things are full of weariness: man cannot utter them' (Eccl. 1: 8), that is to say, they are things which cause weariness because they are incomprehensible. According to the sage, therefore, the proper thing is to abandon oneself to God, to obey that which has been commanded in the Law, and resignedly to cleave to faith, as he says subsequently: 'the end of the matter, all having been heard: fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole man' (Eccl. 12: 13)—and leave alone that the truth whereof is past comprehension."²⁸

But still we should like to know how far did that opposition go. Was it merely against the use of rational methods of demonstration of religious beliefs? or was it also against certain rationalized beliefs themselves? We would especially like to know whether among these Jews who opposed philosophic rationalization of religion there were any who, like the orthodox in Islam, openly advocated the reality of attributes and predestination or, like some orthodox in Islam, also advocated openly the corporeality of God.

Let us examine these three questions one by one.

With regard to the belief in the reality of attributes, there is nothing in the Jewish Scripture, as in fact there is nothing in the Muslim Koran, that could provoke the rise of such a

²⁸ *Kitāb al-Luma'*, ed. J. Derenbourg, Ch. XXIV, p. 267, ll. 11-21; *Sefer ha-Rikmah*, ed. M. Wilensky, Ch. XXIV (XXV), p. 282, ll. 9-16; cf. S. Munk, "Notice sur Abou'l-Walid Merwan Ibn-Djana'h," *Journal Asiatique*, 16 (1850), pp. 45-46.

belief spontaneously. Nor is there to be found among the Jews of that time the particular external circumstance, namely, the influence of Christianity, which caused the rise of the belief in the reality of attributes in Islam.²⁹ Nor is there any reason to assume that any of the simple-minded pious Jews could have acquired such a belief by having merely heard orthodox Muslims utter it in the recitation of their creed.³⁰ Still less is there reason to assume, without positive evidence, that any of the learned among Jews could have become persuaded by the arguments of orthodox Muslim theologians—arguments mainly defensive—to adopt a belief which constantly stood in need of defense. When, therefore, the spokesmen of Judaism of that time, in their published writings, with one voice reject the reality of attributes, we have reason to believe that no such belief found any followers in Judaism.

The case of predestination is somewhat different. Though the Jewish Scripture is more explicit than the Koran in its assertion of free choice by man, still, like the Koran, it is just as emphatic in its assertion of the power and foreknowledge of God. Even among the rabbinic assertions of free will, there is one in which the expression “freedom of choice is given” is qualified by the statement that “everything is foreseen.”³¹ Moreover, in rabbinic literature, despite its many explicit assertions of free will, there are certain statements which would seem to imply predestination, such, for instance, as the one discussed by Maimonides himself, namely, that God predesignates “the daughter of so and so for so and so and the wealth of so and so for so and so.”³² In the case of

²⁹ Cf. my paper “The Muslim Attributes and the Christian Trinity”, *Harvard Theological Review*, 49 (1956), pp. 1-18.

³⁰ Cf., e.g., the creed called *Fik̥h Akbar* (II) in Wensinck's *Muslim Creed*, pp. 188-189 (Arabic, p. 6, l. 1-p. 9, l. 2) and the creed of Nasafī in Elder's translation of Taftāzānī's commentary on it, pp. 49, 58 (Arabic, p. 69, l. 2-p. 77, l. 9).

³¹ *M. Abot* III, 15.

³² *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana*, ed. Buber, pp. 11b-12a; *Genesis Rabbah* 68, 4. Cf. *Teshubot ha-Rambam* 159 (*Ḳobeṣ* I, p. 34c), 348 (ed. Freimann, p. 309).

this problem, then, it would be reasonable to assume that, when Arabic-speaking Jews became acquainted with the Muslim discussions about free will and predestination and got wind of how in Islam those who believed in predestination tried to interpret the Koranic verses that seemed to affirm free will, there would be some among them who would come to believe in a similar view of predestination. It happens, however, that among all the Jewish philosophers prior to Maimonides, who argue against predestination, or against those who believe in predestination, there is not a single one who suggests, however slightly, that those against whom he argues were Jews.

Direct information with regard to the problem of predestination and free will among Jews in Muslim countries may be gathered from statements in two works of Maimonides.

In his *Mishneh Torah*, in the course of his expounding on the basis of scriptural and rabbinic passages the traditional Jewish view of free will. Maimonides urges the reader to pay no heed to "that which is said by the ignorant (טפשי) among the gentiles and most of the uninformed (גוילמי) among the Jews, to wit, that the Holy One decrees concerning man at the beginning of his formation [in his mother's womb] whether he should be righteous or wicked."³³ The Hebrew term *ṭippeshim* in the expression "the *ṭippeshim* among the gentiles," I take it, is used by him as the equivalent of the Arabic terms *bulh* and *jāhīlūn* or *juhhāl* which are used by him in his *Moreh Nebukim* in the sense of those who follow only tradition and are either ignorant of philosophy or are opposed to it.³⁴ In other words, the term *ṭippeshim* is used

³³ *Mishneh Torah*, *Madda*^c, *Teshubah* V, 2.

³⁴ Cf. the Arabic terms *بُهْل* and *جاهلون* or *جهال* as used in *Morah* I, 32, p. 47, l. 13; I, 50, p. 75, l. 2; I, 59, p. 96, l. 11. Samuel Ibn Tibbon translates them in all these passages by פתאים, "simple ones." In *Moreh* I, 35, p. 54, l. 30, the Arabic term *بُهْل* is translated by the Hebrew term סכלים, "ignorant ones." So also Bahya, according to Judah Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew version defines פתאים as those who take such a doctrine as the unity of God on mere tradition without any rational

by him here either in the sense of non-rationalists or in the sense anti-rationalists. As for the term *gelamim* in the expression "most of the *gelamim* among the Jews," it is quite clearly used by him in the sense of his own explanation of the term *golem* in his Commentary on *Abot* as meaning an uneducated and uninformed person who, on account of his lack of knowledge, unwittingly gives utterance to erroneous views, the term having acquired that meaning, he goes on to explain, after the analogy of its use in the sense of an unfinished vessel lacking in form.³⁵ Thus also in his responsum to the proselyte Obadiah, Maimonides impliedly refers to a Jew who takes Agadic statements suggestive of predestination literally as one who is the opposite of a person "who is a wise man with a discerning mind capable of perceiving the way of truth."³⁶ Accordingly by "the *ṭippeshim* among the gentiles" he refers to the dominant orthodox sect in Islam, "the People of Tradition" (*ahl al-sunnah*), to whom the denial of free will was a fundamental doctrine which they upheld against all those who defended that principle. By "most of the *gelamim*

proof and demonstration. Cf. *Hobot ha-Lebabot*, Introduction (Arabic ed. A. S. Yahuda) p. 13, ll. 11-13: **אם נדעהו מצד הקבלה שנאמר**

שאלהינו אחד כאשר יאמרו הפתאים (العامّة) מבלי את ומופת Underlying his **הפתאים** Judah Ibn Tibbon may have had the Arabic **الاعماء**

"the ignorant ones", instead of **العامّة** "the common people", of the printed edition, or he may have taken the latter term to mean "the ignorant

ones". Elsewhere he translates **عوالم**, the plural of **عالم** by the Hebrew **עמי הארץ**. Cf. *Emunot ve-De'ot*, Introduction 6 (Arabic ed. S. Landauer) p. 21, ll. 1, 2, 4; II, 5, 86, l. 5. Cf. quotation from *Emunah Ramah* below n. 40. Cf. also quotation from the Mu'tazilite Ibn 'Aqil in George Makdisi's edition and translation of "Ibn Qudāma's *Censure of Speculative Theology*", § 28, p. 18, ll. 4-5 (English, p. 12): "The stupid person (*al-ahmak*) is he who is bedazzled by his forebears and has blind faith in the teaching of his elders, trustfully following their authority without examining their teaching."

³⁵ Commentary on *Abot* V, 7, whence also his use of the term *golem* in the technical sense of "matter," as contrasted with "form," in his *Mishneh Torah* (cf. *Yesode ha-Torah* IV, 8).

³⁶ *Teshubot ha-Rambam* 159 (Kobes I, p. 134c), 348 (ed. Freimann, p. 309).

among Jews," however, he could not have referred to any group of Jews who openly opposed free will, for we have Maimonides' own testimony in his *Moreh Nebukim* that free will "is a fundamental principle to which, thank God, no opposition has ever been heard in our religious community."³⁷ The reference in "most of the *gelamim*" cannot be but to individual uneducated Jews who, with an inconsistency characteristic of simple-minded believers, professed a blind belief in God's power as extending over human action, without openly denying free will and, so much the more, without openly opposing those who profess a belief in free will.

It is thus clear that not even in Arabic-speaking countries, where belief in predestination dominated among non-Jews, was there open opposition to free will among Jews, though most of the ignorant among the Arabic-speaking Jews in those Arabic-speaking Muslim countries, while not openly denying free will, spoke like their non-Jewish neighbors of the extension of the power of God over the actions of man.

So also is the case of the problem of the incorporeality of God. In the Jewish Scripture as in the Muslim Koran, while there are direct injunctions against likening God to any created beings, God is constantly described in anthropomorphic terms. Similarly in the post-Biblical traditional Jewish literature, the rabbis, evidently in pursuance of their own principle that the scriptural anthropomorphisms should not be taken literally, allowed themselves to describe God in anthropomorphic terms, evidently expecting not to be taken literally. In this case, too, it would be reasonable to assume that when Arabic-speaking Jews became acquainted with Muslim discussions about the problem of the corporeality and incorporeality of God and got wind of how in Islam those who believed in the corporeality of God interpreted the Koranic verses prohibiting the likening of God with other beings, there would be some among them who came to believe

³⁷ *Moreh* III, 17, Fifth Theory, p. 338, l. 30.

in a similar view of the corporeality of God. But whether there actually were such believers and who they were is a subject which bears investigation.

Let us then study and analyze certain passages which may have a bearing on this question.

The most promising passage is to be found in Saadia's *Emunot ve-De'ot*, written in Baghdad during the year 933. In the Introduction to this work, after intimating that his work was written for the benefit of both non-Jews, to whom he refers as "my species, the species of rational beings," and Jews, to whom he refers as "our people, the children of Israel,"³⁸ he enumerates three types of people, evidently among both non-Jews and Jews, whom he envisaged as readers of his book: first, "many believers whose belief was not pure and whose creeds were not sound"; second, "many deniers of the faith who boast of their unbelief and look down upon men of truth, although they were themselves in error"; third, "men sunk, as it were, in seas of doubt and overwhelmed by waves of confusion."³⁹

Of these three types of readers envisaged by Saadia, only the first type may be assumed to include those who believed in the corporeality of God, and in fact there is one long passage which deals with this type of readers. We shall, therefore, have to find out whether that passage contains any reference to such believers among Jews. Now, the passage in question begins with a twofold division of those who believed in the corporeality of God: (1) "those who believe that they can picture God in their imagination as a body" and (2) "those who, without expressly attributing to Him corporeality, yet they arrogate for God quantity or quality or place or time or other such categories; however, when they make these arrogations, they really insist upon His being corporeal, for

³⁸ *Emunot*, Introduction 2, p. 4, ll. 15-16; cf. Kaufmann, *Attributenlehre*, p. 150; Malter, *Saadia*, p. 200, n. 470.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4, ll. 15-20.

such characteristics appertain only to body.”⁴⁰ He then illustrates these two kinds of believers in the corporeality of God by mentioning two kinds of Christian Trinitarians, namely, “the common people among them” and “their elite,” and by alluding indirectly also to similar two kinds of corporealists among the Muslim Attributists.⁴¹ But no reference or allusion is made by him to similar believers in the corporeality of God among Jews. Of course, there existed during the time of Saadia the arch-anthropomorphic work *Shi’ur Qomah*, which both Karaite and Muslim writers held up as evidence of the Jewish belief in the corporeality of God. But this work does not preach the corporeality of God; it only describes God in corporeal terms, the like of which, though in a lesser degree, is to be found in certain passages of both the Bible and the Talmud, and Saadia is reported to have written a work, no longer extant, in which he maintains that, if that work is really of the authorship of Rabbi Ishmael, and not of that of some irresponsible person, who need not be paid attention to, then its corporeal descriptions of God should be interpreted figuratively in the same way as similar corporeal descriptions of God in Scripture are, according to Jewish tradition, to be interpreted figuratively.⁴² Thus, according to Saadia, in any work of a responsible author, the mere use of anthropomorphic descriptions of God is not to be taken as a belief in the corporeality of God and still less the advocacy of such a belief.

Bahya, however, in his work *Hobot ha-Lebabot*, written in Saragossa during the latter part of the eleventh century, alludes to a type of pious man among Jews, who, because of his failure to comprehend the figurativeness of scriptural anthropomorphisms, unknowingly forms a corporeal conception of God. But the pious believer of this type is described

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* II, Exordium, p. 76, l. 19-p. 77, l. 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* II, 5, p. 86, ll. 5, 7, and cf. my paper “Saadia on the Trinity and Incarnation”, *Studies and Essays in Honor of Abraham A. Neuman*, pp. 547 ff.

⁴² *Perush Sefer Yeşirah* by Judah b. Barzillai, pp. 20-21.

by him as “ignorant and foolish” (*al-jāhīl al-ghabī: ha-kesil ha-peti*), who, he says, is to be forgiven only when his ignorance is due to a lack of capacity to learn, but he is to be held responsible for his erroneous belief if he has the capacity to learn and to know better and fails to do so.⁴³ Quite evidently what he means by this is that no learned Jew, not one learned in philosophy but one learned in Jewish lore, could believe in the corporeality of God.

Similarly Abraham ibn Daud in his *Emunah Ramah*, which appeared in Toledo in 1168, says that “the belief of the common people, who are wont to follow the popular notion of God, is [that God is a body], for they think that whatever has no body has no existence. It is only when they are admonished [by citations from Scripture] that they come to believe in accordance with what has been transmitted by the teachings of the forbears and the rabbis. But still, if they are not guided [by philosophy], there will always stir in their minds doubts and confusing thoughts, and it is concerning such as these that Scripture says, “Forasmuch this people draw near, and with their mouth honor me, but have removed their heart from Me” (Isa. 29: 13).⁴⁴ Here, again, the implication is that the ordinary Jew would not openly profess the corporeality of God, even though, not being a philosopher, he cannot conceive of God as incorporeal.

Twelve years later, in the *Mishneh Torah* composed in 1180, Maimonides tries to establish two points with regard to the incorporeality of God. First, applying the scriptural rejection of any likeness between God and other beings (Isa. 40: 25) to the scriptural doctrine of the unity of God (Deut. 6: 4), he shows that the mandatory belief that there

⁴³ *Hobot* I, 10, p. 74, l. 17-p. 75, l. 5.

⁴⁴ *Emunah Ramah* II, 1, p. 47: אמונת ההמון היא, שלוקחים הידיעה: באל ית' מקובלת, כי הם יחשבו שמה שאין לו גשם אין לו מציאות. אמנם כאשר העירום, האמינו בקבלת האבות והמלמדים, ואם לא ייושרו יתגלגלו בלבותם ספקות ושבושים, ועליהם אמר הכתוב: יען בי גשם העם הזה בפיו ובשפתיו כבדוני ולבו רחוק ממני (ישעיה כט' יג').

is only one God must include also the belief that the one God is not a body.⁴⁵ Second, having in mind the Talmudic statement that an idolater is a heretic⁴⁶ and taking the term idolater to include also a polytheist and following his own view that the belief in one God must include also the belief that the one God is not a body, he declares that "anyone who says that the Lord is one but that He is a body and possesses a figure" is a heretic.⁴⁷

But it will be noticed that, whereas in his discussion of free will he makes a reference to ignorant Jews who believed in predestination, here, in his discussion of the incorporeality of God, no reference is made by him to ignorant Jews who believed in God's corporeality. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that no Jew, however ignorant and however unable to conceive of the existence of anything incorporeal, ever dared openly to assert that God was corporeal.

From all this we may gather that by the time of the composition of the *Mishneh Torah* in 1180, there was none among Arabic-speaking Jews who openly advocated the corporeality of God and that even the common people, who may not have been able to conceive of the subtlety of an incorporeal existence and may not also have been able to explain, or even to understand, the figurative interpretations of the scriptural anthropomorphisms, did not dare openly to profess a belief in the corporeality of God.

A few years later, in his *Moreh Nebukim*, composed sometime between 1185 and 1190,⁴⁸ Maimonides refers to "people" who, because they "thought" that the term "form" in the verse (Gen. 1:26), "Let us make man in our form (*selem*), after our likeness (*demut*),"⁴⁹ is to be taken literally, "came

⁴⁵ *Mishneh Torah, Madda', Yesode ha-Torah*, I, 7-8.

⁴⁶ *Abodah Zarah* 26b; cf. *op. cit.*, *Yesode ha-Torah*, I, 6.

⁴⁷ *Op. cit.*, *Teshubah*, III, 7.

⁴⁸ See D. H. Baneth's comment in his edition of *Iggerot ha-Rambam* I, p. 2, on the date 1185 given by Z. Diesendruck.

⁴⁹ We may assume that, in the Arabic translation of the Pentateuch used by the people referred to here by Maimonides, the Hebrew *selem*,

to believe that God has the form (*ṣūrah*) of man, that is to say, man's figure and shape, . . . maintaining that, if they did not conceive of God as a body possessed of a face and a hand similar to their own figure and shape, they would reduce Him to nonexistence. However, He is, in their opinion, the greatest and most splendid [of bodies] and also His matter is not flesh and blood."⁵⁰ After explaining how the term "form" (*ṣelem*: *ṣūrah*) is not to be taken anthropomorphically, Maimonides goes on to explain how also the term "likeness" (*demut*: *shibh*) is not to be taken anthropomorphically.

Who were these "people"?

Here are some texts which will help us to answer this question.

Ibn Ḥazm, in his attempt to show that the Hebrew Bible has an anthropomorphic conception of God, quotes Genesis 1:26, which, in the Arabic version used by him, reads: "Let me make sons of Adam after our form (*ṣūrah* = *ṣelem*), after our likeness (*shibh* = *demut*)." Commenting upon it, he says that, if only the phrase "after our form" were used, there would be justification for interpreting it figuratively. But the phrase "after our likeness," which immediately follows it, "shuts out interpretations, blocks up loopholes, cuts off roads, and of necessity and inevitably must the phrase be taken to attribute the likeness of Adam to God. The absurdity of this, however, is immediately perceived by the understanding, for *shibh* and *mithl* mean the same thing [namely, likeness], and far be it from God that He should have a *mithl* or *shibh* [that is, a likeness]."⁵¹ The conclusion he wants us to draw here is that, inasmuch as the term "likeness" cannot be taken figuratively, the term "form" is also not to be taken figuratively. The reason why, in the

"image," in Genesis 1:26 was translated *ṣūrah*, "form," for so it is also translated by Saadia.

⁵⁰ *Moreh* I, 1, p. 14, 11. 5-11.

⁵¹ Ibn Ḥazm, *Fīṣal*, I, p. 117, l. 21-p. 118, l. 4.

midst of his trying to prove the anthropomorphism of the Bible, he goes out of his way to concede that the phrase "after our form" by itself could be interpreted figuratively, is to be found in the fact that two Jewish authors of works in Arabic, Saadia and Kīrķisānī, the former in his comment on the term *selem* in Genesis 1: 27, which is only a repetition of Genesis 1: 26, and the latter in his comment on the term *selem* both in Genesis 1: 26 and in Genesis 1: 27, interpret that term figuratively.⁵² His certainty that the term *shibh*, "likeness," in Genesis 1: 26, on account of its being synonymous with the term *mithl*, cannot be taken figuratively but must be taken literally, is undoubtedly due to his belief that the Koranic verse (42: 9), "Nought is there like Him (*ka-mithlihi*)," was aimed at Genesis 1: 26.

Here then we have a Muslim who dismisses the attempt of two Jewish authors to interpret the term "form" (*selem*: *ṣūrah*) in Genesis 1: 26 and 1: 27 and, in opposition to them, insists that, like the term "likeness" (*demut*: *shibh*) in Genesis 1: 26, the term "form" in the same verse, must be taken literally.

Then there are passages from which it can be shown that the term *selem* in Genesis 1: 27, which, as remarked before, is only a repetition of Genesis 1: 26, was taken by certain Muslims in an anthropomorphic sense.

Shahrastānī in his *Nihāyat* reports that several subjects of the Shi'ites, among them the Hishāmiyyah, as well as "the

⁵² Saadia, *Emunot* II, 9, p. 94, 11. 14-18: "by way of conferring honor (*‘alā ṭarīq al-tashrīf*)," which he goes on to explain as meaning that, although all forms are created by God, "He honored one of them by saying 'This is My form,' by way of conferring distinction (*‘alā sabīl al-taḥṣīṣ*)." Kīrķisānī, *Anwār* II, 28, 12, p. 176, 11. 7-8 (ed. Leon Nemoy): "by way of conferring distinction and honor (*‘alā sabīl al-taḥṣīṣ wa'l-tashrīf*)." Ibn Ḥazm, *op. cit.*, p. 117, l. 24-p. 118, l. 1: "as one might say about a monkey and about something ugly as well as about something beautiful, 'This is the form of God,' that is to say, this is a formation by God and a peculiarity of existence which is due to the power of God alone, He being solely responsible for its creation."

anthropomorphists among the Attributists," by which is meant a certain group of Sunnites, believed that "God has a form like the form of men," adding that this belief of theirs was based upon a statement attributed to Muhammad, of which there were two readings: (1) "God created Adam in His form (*ṣūrah*);" (2) "God created Adam in the form of the Merciful."⁵³ One of these unnamed "anthropomorphists among the Attributists" can be identified with Dā'ūd al-Jawārī, who is quoted by Shahrastānī in his *Milāl* as saying (1) that "God is a body and flesh and blood, who has limbs and organs," and (2) that the statement, "God created Adam in the form of the Merciful," which tradition attributes to Muhammad, is to be taken in a literal sense.⁵⁴ Now the statement attributed to Muhammad, in either of its readings, is not to be found in the Koran. It can be traced, however, in both its readings, to Genesis 1:27. In English, this verse in Genesis reads: "And God created man (*ha-adam*) in His image (*selem*), in the image of God created He him." Among the early Muslims, we may imagine, this verse, minus the last three words, which in Arabic would have been one word, was circulated orally in an Arabic version which read: "And God created Adam in His form (*ṣūrah*), in the form of the Merciful." Thus also in Saadia's Arabic translation of the Pentateuch, the first part of the verse reads: "And God created Adam in His form." As for the substitution of "the Merciful" for "God" in the second part, it was quite natural for Muslims used to the language of the Koran. Then, we may further imagine, the verse, in its oral circulation, was broken up into two parts, (1) "God created Adam in His form;" (2) "God created Adam in the form of the Merciful," and both these parts were attributed to Muhammad.

Ghazālī, commenting upon one of the readings of the statement traditionally attributed to Muhammad, says:

⁵³ *Nihāyat*, p. 103, l. 11-p. 104, l. 1.

⁵⁴ *Milāl*, p. 77, ll. 5-18.

“If [by the term form in] the Prophet’s saying that ‘God created Adam in His form’ you understand the external form which is perceived by eye-sight, you will be an absolute anthropomorphist, as the one addressed in the saying, ‘Be an out-and-out Jew, or else play not with the Torah;’ but, if you understand by it the inner form, which is perceived by mental insight (*baṣā’ir*) and not by eye-sight (*aḥsār*), you will be one who keeps himself free from anthropomorphism in every respect and declares God to be holy—a perfect man, walking the straight way, for you are in the holy valley of Tuwwa [Surah 20:12].”⁵⁵ Ghazālī’s quotation here of the saying with its warning not to play with the Torah means, I take it, that those who take the statement of Muhammad anthropomorphically are like the Jews who take the corresponding statement in Genesis 1:27 anthropomorphically, thus reflecting a contention like that of Ibn Ḥazm, or perhaps Ibn Ḥazm’s very contention, that the “form of God” in the story of the creation of Adam as told in Genesis was meant to be taken by Jews in an anthropomorphic sense.

Finally, the Hishāmiyyah, of whom Shahrastānī in his *Nihāyat* has reported that they took the “form of God” in the creation of Adam anthropomorphically, reports in his *Milāl* of their founder Hishām b. al-Ḥakam that he said that “God is a body possessing parts and is of a certain size, but He is unlike any created thing and no created thing is like Him,”⁵⁷ which means, as the same view is quoted by Ash’arī, again, in the name of the founder of the Hishāmiyyah, Hishām b. al-Ḥakam, that “God is a body unlike other bodies.”⁵⁷ Similarly al-Jawārī, of whom Shahrastānī has also reported that he took the “form of God” in the creation of Adam anthropomorphically, reports of him that he also said

⁵⁵ *Iḥyāi*, XXXV: *Kitāb al-Tauḥīd wa’l-Tawakkul*, IV, p. 245, ll. 26-29 (ed. Cairo, 1358/1939).

⁵⁶ *Milāl*, p. 141, ll. 7-8.

⁵⁷ *Maḥālāt*, p. 33, ll. 10-11; p. 208, l. 1.

that "God is a body unlike other bodies, flesh unlike other flesh, blood unlike other blood." ⁵⁸

From these passages we gather that Ibn Ḥazm directly and Ghazālī indirectly contended that the term *ṣelem* = *ṣūrah* "form," in Genesis 1: 26 and 1: 27 is to be taken in an anthropomorphic sense, and so does Ibn Ḥazm also contend with regard to the term *demut* = *shibh*, "likeness," in Genesis 1: 26. Moreover, when a statement based upon Genesis 1: 27 was attributed to Muhammad, some Muslims took the term "form" in it, which is the Hebrew *ṣelem*, in an anthropomorphic sense. Finally, those of them who took the term "form" anthropomorphically qualified their anthropomorphic conception of God by saying, in the words of one of them, that "God is a body unlike other bodies, flesh unlike other flesh, blood unlike other blood."

In the light of all this, when Maimonides refers to "people who "thought" that the term "form" in the story of the creation of Adam in Genesis 1: 26 is to be taken anthropomorphically, the people referred to are Muslims; when he also says that these people conceded that God is "the greatest and most splendid [of bodies] and also His matter is not flesh and blood," the reference is to the concession made by those Muslims who took the term "form" in the story of the creation of Adam anthropomorphically; and when he continues to argue that even the term *demut* = *shibh*, "likeness," is not to be taken anthropomorphically, the argument is aimed at Ibn Ḥazm. No "people" who interpreted Genesis 1: 26 anthropomorphically can be traced to Jewish sources. Nor are we to assume that such an interpretation of Genesis 1: 26 was communicated to him orally by some Jews or were reported to him orally in the name of some Jews, for, whenever Maimonides deals with something that has been communicated to him orally, he usually says so. ⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *Milal*, p. 77, l. 9.

⁵⁹ See *Moreh* I, 2 beginning, and quotation at the next note below.

Reference however, to certain individuals among Jews who either doubted or denied the incorporeality of God is to be found in his *Maʿamar Tehiyyat ha-Metim*, composed at about 1190, in answer to certain critics of his *Mishneh Torah*. The passage in question reads as follows: "We have met some one who was looked upon as a learned Jewish scholar and, by the eternal God! he was familiar with the way of the traditional law and from his youth had participated, as he claimed, in disputes about the Law, and still he was in doubt whether God is a body, possessing eye, hand, foot, and entrails, as mentioned in some scriptural verses, or whether He is not a body. Moreover, others from among the people of some countries whom I have met definitely decided that God is a body and declared anyone who disagreed with this to be an unbeliever, applying to him the various Hebrew terms for heretic, and took the anthropomorphic passages of the rabbis in their literal sense. Similar things I have heard about men whom I have not met." ⁶⁰

In this passage, the hesitant opponent of the incorporeality of God, with whom are contrasted those "others from among the people of some countries," was undoubtedly a countryman of Maimonides, visiting him in Fostat from some other city in Egypt. The fact that Maimonides shows himself surprised that such a view should be held by one reputed to be versed in Jewish traditional law indicates that he suspected him to have fallen victim to some outside influence. We may similarly assume that the other opponents of incorporeality in this passage were also Jews from Muslim countries, though there is nothing to support this assumption except the fact that up to that time all opposition to Maimonides came from Jews in Muslim countries. That Jews in Muslim countries were not altogether impervious to the influence of Islam in religious matters may be inferred from a responsum

⁶⁰ *Maʿamar Tehiyyat ha-Metim* in *Kobes* II, p. 8a (ed. J. Finkel, §§ 3-4).

by Maimonides himself addressed to Rabbi Phinehas b. Meshullam of Alexandria.⁶¹

But it will be noticed that while opposition to Maimonides' omission of dealing with bodily resurrection in his *Mishneh Torah*, as well as opposition to his description of the eternal life in the world to come as being incorporeal, appeared openly in writing,⁶² the opposition to his denial of the corporeality of God was bruited about only orally. Maimonides refers to it only by saying "some people thought" or "we have already met some one who . . . was in doubt" or "others . . . whom I have met have definitely decided." Evidently no one, and certainly no man of stature dared, openly in writing, to oppose the belief in the incorporeality of God, and still less to advocate or even to condone the belief in God's corporeality.

The first man of stature who dared, openly in writing, to oppose the belief in the incorporeality of God and to condone, if not directly to advocate, the belief in His corporeality was Rabbi Abraham ben David of Posquières. In his splenetic attacks upon Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, the composition of which attacks is placed after 1193,⁶³ commenting upon Maimonides' inclusion in his list of heretics "anyone who says that God is one but is a body and possesses a figure," he ejaculates: "Why does he call such a person a heretic, when many people, greater and better than he, followed such a conception (*mahashabah*) of God on the ground of its being in accordance with what they had seen in the verses of Scripture and even more by reason of what they had seen in the words of those Agadot which set minds awondering?"⁶⁴

⁶¹ *Teshubot ha-Rambam* 140 (*Kobes* I, p. 25b).

⁶² *M. Tehiyyat ha-Metim*, p. 8d (§§ 16, 17 ff.) and p. 8b (§§ 10 ff.).

⁶³ Date established by H. Gross in *MGWJ*, 23 (1874), p. 20.

⁶⁴ *Hassagot on Mishneh Torah, Madda'*, *Teshubah*, III, 7: **ולמה קרא לזה מין וכמה גדולים וטובים ממנו הלכו בזה המחשבה לפי מה שראו במקראות ויותר ממה שראו בדברי האגדות המשבשות את הדעות.** The principle **המשבשות**, I take it, is used here by Rabad after the analogy of the use of the noun **שבושים** in Judah Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew translation of Saadia, that is, in the sense of confusing the mind and causing doubt

I imagine that, if the rabbi of Posquières were challenged to name anyone who openly professed a belief in the corporeality of God, he would be hard put to it to make good his statement. And should we assume that the expression which I have translated "followed such a conception of God" was used by him advisedly in order to indicate that, while nobody in Judaism ever openly said that God is a body, still there were many who, not being philosophers like Maimonides, could not but conceive of God, in their mind, as a corporeal being, then what reason had he for assuming that Maimonides would attach heresy to one's mere conception of God as a body without his actually saying that God is a body? Did not Maimonides use the expression "anyone who *says*?"⁶⁵ In fact, as I have shown elsewhere, the mere conception of God as corporeal by one who is, as described by Maimonides, incapable of conceiving of the existence of anything incorporeal is not regarded by him as heresy.⁶⁶

And should it occur to us to assume that by "many people greater and better than he" he referred to some post-Talmudic authors and liturgists known to him who, following the example of Scripture and the Agadot of the Talmud, did not hesitate to use anthropomorphic descriptions of God, then what reason had he for assuming that such descriptions are an indication of a belief in the corporeality of God? Why did he not assume that those authors and liturgists, because they interpreted the anthropomorphisms of Scripture and the Agadot of the Talmud figuratively, did themselves also describe God anthropomorphically in a figurative sense? Did not Saadia say, as quoted in a work undoubtedly known to him, that the anthropomorphisms in the Talmud as well

and wonder. Cf. the following expression in *Emunot ve-De'ot*: טבעו בימי הספקות וכבר כסו אותם מימי השבושים (*Hakdamah*); שהבורא ית' שם אלה השבושים והספקות בין הברואים (*Ibid.*, 3); כל הפסוקים אשר יש בדהם ספקות ושבושים בענין ההכרח (IV, 6).

⁶⁵ Cf. above at n. 47.

⁶⁶ Cf. my paper "Maimonides on the Unity and Incorporeality of God," *JQR*, N.S., 56 (1965), pp. 112-136.

as in the *Shi'ur Komah* are to be taken figuratively, even as are those in Scripture? ⁶⁷

If, again, the rabbi of Posquières were challenged to tell whether he himself believed that God is a body, then perhaps, even without the prompting of the Christian Tertullian ⁶⁸ or of Muslim Mutakallimun, ⁶⁹ he could by his own wit hit upon the subtlety that on the mere showing of scriptural teaching the scriptural unlikeness of God only means that God is a body unlike other bodies. ⁷⁰ But here, again, what reason had he for assuming that Maimonides, who derived the incorporeality of God from the scriptural teaching of his unlikeness, would include among his five classes of heretics one who said that God is a body unlike other bodies? In fact, as I have shown elsewhere, no heresy is attached by Maimonides to the assertion that God is a body unlike other bodies; he only requires that the term "body" be used in an equivocal sense. ⁷¹ It is more reasonable to assume, therefore, that, if he were so challenged, he would honestly and frankly admit that he did not believe that God is a body. Later, during the controversy over the *Moreh Nebukim*, none of the authoritative spokesmen of Judaism advocated a belief in the corporeality of God—not even those who were opposed to Maimonides's philosophical interpretation of anthropomorphisms in scriptural verses and talmudic lore. ⁷² When rumors reached Nahmanides of French rabbis who objected to a certain anti-anthropomorphic statement of Maimonides, he gently reasoned with them, politely showing that they were wrong, and thereafter nothing was heard of their objection. And there is no reason to assume that Moses Taku's assertion

⁶⁷ *Perush Sefer Yeşirah* by Judah Barzillai, pp. 20-21 and 34. Cf. above at n. 42.

⁶⁸ *Adversus Praxeum* 7 (PL 2, 162 C).

⁶⁹ Cf. above at nn. 56-58.

⁷⁰ Various attempts have been made to explain Rabbi Abraham b. David's statement, a collection of which is to be found in Twersky, *Rabad of Posquières*, pp. 282-286.

⁷¹ See reference above in n. 66.

⁷² *Iggeret ha-Ramban in Kobeş* III, pp. 9d-10a.

of his belief in the literalness of Agadic anthropomorphism found followers among German rabbis, though in their innocence of philosophy they may have tacitly assented to his arraignment of the interpretation of anthropomorphisms by Maimonides and others,⁷³ since the interpretations used by Maimonides and the others mentioned by Moses Taku are all based on philosophy. Solomon of Montpellier and his pupil David ben Saul, two philosophic innocents, who in the first flush of their opposition to Maimonides proclaimed their wholesale belief in the literalness of the Agadot of the Talmud, including the literalness of the corporeal terms used in the Agadic description of God,⁷⁴ later recanted and openly protested that "far be it from them to conceive of God as having a likeness or form or a hand or a foot or any of the other limbs which happen to be mentioned in the text of Scripture; never had they uttered such a view nor had such a thought ever entered their mind."⁷⁵ And perhaps more loftily than they, but at the same time also more uprightly than they, would the rabbi of Posquières have declared: "Many people, even as great and good as I, had oftentimes spoken hastily and said things which they later withdrew."

⁷³ *Milḥamot ha-Shem* by Abraham Maimonides in *Kobes* III, pp. 17d-18a.

⁷⁴ *Ketab Tamim* in *Oṣar Neḥmad* III, 1860, pp. 58 ff.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19c.