1 Commentaries on the *Guide of the Perplexed*: A Brief History

1.1 Preface

Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* was written in Judaeo-Arabic near the end of the 12th century, and soon thereafter translated into Hebrew by Samuel ibn Tibbon. It immediately became a source of controversy, reviled by some segments of medieval Jewry, but actively championed by others.[1] Philosophers, kabbalists, and rabbis studied and defended the work within their communities, though not necessarily uncritically. For some philosophical defenders of the *Guide*, the book had a "salvific" character. In their eyes, it charted the path towards the eudaemonia of the soul – the ultimate happiness and true purpose of a human being in general, and of a Jew in particular.[2] For these Maimonidean writers, the *Guide* represented a form of philosophical Scripture, second only to the Torah. Maimonides was second only to the biblical Moses.[3] The *Guide* became the founding text in the formation of a Jewish philosophical-religious culture.[4] A key component of this culture, which has been dubbed the Maimonidean-Tibbonian school, revolved around the interpretation of that text.[5]

In the first centuries following its writing, the *Guide* stimulated the production of a vast collection of exegetical works: works dedicated to its interpretation, transmission, and dissemination. These exegetical works spawned a number of genres, or literary vehicles. Among such works we count: poetry in praise of the *Guide*; sermons that explicated the weekly Scriptural portion in light of the *Guide*; biblical commentaries that interpreted Scripture following the methods laid out in the *Guide*; epistles

1 There is a vast literature on the so-called Maimonidean controversies. See *inter alia* Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition: The Career and Controversies of Ramah* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); Gregg Stern, *Philosophy and Rabbinic Culture: Jewish Interpretation and Controversy in Medieval Languedoc* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Steven Harvey, "Falaquera's *Epistle of the Debate* and the Maimonidean Controversy of the 1230s," in Ruth Link-Salinger ed., *Torah and Wisdom: Studies in Jewish Philosophy, Kabbalah, and Halachah: Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman* (New York: Shengold, 1992), 75–86.

2 See Giuseppe Sermoneta, "La dottrina dell'intelletto e la 'fede filosofica' di Jehudah e Immanuel Romano," *Studi Medievali* 6:2 (1965), 1–78.

3 On the "heroic" image of Maimonides, see Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture*.

4 On this phenomenon, see Carlos Fraenkel, *Philosophical Religions from Plato to Spinoza: Reason, Religion, and Authonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

5 Among Maimonidean philosophers, interpretation of the *Guide* flourished alongside biblical commentaries in the Maimonidean mold, and interpretation of Maimonides' works other than the *Guide*. See Aviezer Ravitzky, "The Thought of R. Zeraḥiah b. Isaac b. Shealtiel Ḥen & the Maimonidean-Tibbonian Philosophy in the 13th Century," Ph.D. diss. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1977 [Hebrew]. See also James T. Robinson, "We Drink Only from the Master's Water: Maimonides and Maimonideanism in Southern France, 1200–1306," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 40 (2007–2008), 27–60.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110557657-001

in which scholars sent queries about the *Guide* to one another.[6] To facilitate its study, Maimonidean scholars authored summaries, glossaries, indexes, dictionaries, and propaedeutic manuals.[7] In more direct interface with the text, we find marginal glosses as well as a large number of formal running commentaries.[8] In terms of literary diversity, the *Guide* has engendered a library vaster than that of any other text of Jewish philosophy.

The present study focuses on one shelf of the Maimonideanist library: running commentary.[9] The earliest commentaries on the *Guide* date from the mid to late 13th century, just a few decades removed from the composition of the book itself. They continued to be produced until the early modern period, when the last commentary was penned by Solomon Maimon (1753–1800). The vast majority of commentaries was written in Hebrew, with a few extant works in Judaeo-Arabic. Most commentaries were written on European soil, in both Sephardic and Ashkenazi contexts. Nearly every commentary was written not on the original Judaeo-Arabic but on ibn Tibbon's Hebrew translation. Few commentators could actually read or had physical access to the original version. Properly speaking, commentators on the *Guide* re-interpreted both Maimonides and Samuel ibn Tibbon, who acquired a measure of authority for several of the earliest interpreters.[10]

The phenomenon of commentary on the *Guide* is multi-faceted, extending over many centuries and cultural contexts. The first facet is historical. This study centers

6 Poetry: Moritz Steinschneider, "Moreh Maqom Ha-Moreh: A Collection of Poems Relevant to Maimonides and His Famous Works, Both Printed and Unprinted," *Qovetz 'al yad* 1 (1885), 1–32; sermons: Jacob Anatoli, *Malmad ha-talmidim*, Hebrew-Italian edition, *Il pungolo dei discepoli = Malmad ha-talmidim: il sapere di un ebreo e Federico II*, trans. Luciana Pepi (Palermo: Officina di Studi Medievali, 2004); biblical commentary: Samuel ibn Tibbon, *Samuel Ibn Tibbon's Commentary on Ecclesiastes: the Book of the Soul of Man*, trans. James T. Robinson (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007); epistles: Isaac Abarbanel, *Teshuvot le-she'elot le-he-ḥakham Sha'ul ha-Kohen*, in *Ketavim 'al maḥshevet Israel* (Venice, 1574).

7 Most of this literature has not been properly studied nor catalogued. The most influential glossary was penned by Samuel ibn Tibbon and appended to his translation of the *Guide*: *Perush ha-millot ha-zarot*, "The Interpretation of Strange Terms" (reproduced in most editions of the ibn Tibbon translation).

8 See Moritz Steinschneider, "Die hebräischen Commentare zum 'Führer' des Maimonides," in *Festschrift zum siebzigsten Geburtstage A. Berliner's*, eds A. Freimann and M. Hildesheimer (Frankfurt a.M.: J. Kauffmann, 1903), 345–363, and Jacob Dienstag, "Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*: A Bibliography of Commentaries and Glosses," in Ze'ev Falk, ed., *Gevurot ha-romaḥ*, (Jerusalem: Mesharim, 1987), 207–237 [Hebrew].

9 By "running commentary," I mean a commentary that follows the order of the text, covers its entirety or the greater part thereof, and is the work of one single author. Almost invariably, medieval Jewish philosophical commentaries feature a formal preface as well.

10 On the role played by Samuel ibn Tibbon in the formation of Maimonideanism, see James T. Robinson, "Maimonides, Samuel ibn Tibbon, and the Construction of a Jewish Tradition of Philosophy," in Jay M. Harris, ed., *Maimonides After 800 Years: Essays on Maimonides and His Influence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 291–306.

on the earliest layer of commentary in Italy, Spain, and the South of France, where study of the *Guide* went hand in hand with the study of philosophy. I begin it from Moses of Salerno's commentary, left unfinished upon his death in Italy in 1279. Moses of Salerno's commentary is the first full commentary on the *Guide*, that is, a commentary meant to cover the entire text. I close the early period with the commentary by Moses of Narbonne, written in 1362. Between these two figures, I turn to the commentaries by Shem Tov ibn Falaquera (d.1295), Zeraḥiah Ḥen (d. after 1291) and Joseph ibn Kaspi (c.1270–c.1340). These commentators are significant in that they form a core group of philosophical defenders of Maimonides during the text's rocky reception. Apologetics aside, they were central figures within in a wide-ranging effort to buttress the authority of the *Guide* as a theological source as well as the key text of the Jewish philosophical canon. The works of these commentators construct the *Guide* as a book of philosophy as well as a manual of biblical exegesis.

A second facet of commentary on the *Guide* concerns the inherent tension between Maimonides' aims in the *Guide*, and the aims of Maimonidean philosophical culture. The early commentators faced a difficult task. As loyal Maimonideans, they were pulled in opposite directions. From one side, these interpreters saw it as their responsibility to defend and disseminate the text. They saw it as their mission to guide other individuals towards the path of the *Guide*, even if few turn out to be qualified to follow it all the way through. They implicitly accepted ibn Tibbon's periodization of Jewish philosophy as a process of gradual uncovering of theological and philosophical truths. This process begins with the biblical Moses, who revealed a little in the Hebrew Bible while concealing much. It continues with the rabbinical sages, and extends into the second Moses, i.e. Moses Maimonides, who "widened the openings" – that is, he revealed yet a little more – but along with concealment.[11] In ibn Tibbon's characterization, the process assumes that the Jewish community as a whole evolves intellectually such as to reach a point when more truths, or deeper truths, can be exposed to all. After the *Guide*, it has reached such a new point. The early commentators saw themselves as active participants in this process of uncovering.[12]

On the other hand, the *Guide* is not a work meant for mass dissemination. Maimonides placed a number of restrictions upon its circulation. He meant the *Guide* to be read by a specific kind of reader, one who has an intellectual background in both Torah and in philosophy and is perplexed by the dissonance between the two. He believed that such readers were exceedingly few, one among "ten thousand ignoramuses," and those ignoramuses would be "displeased" with the *Guide*. Maimonides employs an elliptical style: "my purpose is that truths be glimpsed and then again be concealed," just as he maintains that Scripture has likewise concealed basic truths

11 The "openings" are those of a filigree of silver that encases an apple of gold – a parable developed in the *Guide* for the concealment of truths. See Pines, 11–12.

12 See Samuel ibn Tibbon, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, trans. Robinson, 30–31, 160–166.

from casual readers, "the vulgar among the people." Thus, he promises to offer in the *Guide* only incomplete explanations and "chapter headings," leaving the reader to work out the unsaid meaning of the text on their own.[13]

Complicating the project of the commentators, Maimonides explicitly forbids his readers from explaining anything about the text to one another, orally or in writing. Whatever one learns from the *Guide*, Maimonides writes, must be kept to oneself. Readers are asked not be quick to refute the text, lest they have misunderstood it. Furthermore, these requests are presented in peculiar language: I "adjure," that is, I impose an oath. In the preface to his commentary, Hillel of Verona points out that the language of this prohibition is in the form of a religious oath, presumably subject to Jewish legal strictures regarding oaths.

Following the positions taken by Samuel ibn Tibbon and Moses Maimonides, early commentators on the *Guide* were thus torn between two opposing tendencies: dissemination vs. restriction; revelation vs. concealment. For later interpreters, the fence had already been breached, so to speak, and this tension becomes attenuated. But with respect to commentators in the early period, who write without a long pre-existent tradition of commentary, the tension is palpable in ways great and small. It bears directly on the ways in which the commentators reinterpret and rewrite the *Guide*.[14]

This study traces the development of the philosophical commentary tradition through focus on one section of the *Guide*: the General Preface, which includes an introduction specifically to Part I of the book. The Preface to the *Guide* stands on its own as a theoretical expression of Maimonides' aims, methods, and audience. It touches on a number of subjects that will receive more detailed exploration in the course of the text, such as the relationship between Jewish religious texts and Greek philosophical sources, Maimonides' methods of biblical interpretation, and the nature of prophetic apprehension. It describes Maimonides' anxieties regarding the disclosure of certain notions through the written medium, and the shortcomings of writing vis-à-vis oral teaching. Although individual commentators emphasize them to varying degrees, these themes all gain prominence the tradition of *Guide* exegesis as a whole.[15]

---

13 Pines, 6–7.

14 While both ibn Kaspi and Moses of Narbonne drew from earlier commentaries, they are explicit regarding the dilemma of revelation vs. concealment. See the prologue to their commentaries, Chs. 6 and 7.

15 There are in fact several documents included within the Preface to the *Guide*. They are, in order: a brief poem ("my knowledge goes forth"); the inscription "in the name of the Lord, God of the World," cited by Maimonides at the beginning of several of his other works; the "Epistle Dedicatory," where Maimonides explains what led him to compose the *Guide*. This is followed by another brief poem ("Cause me to know the way"), and the Preface proper. Within the Preface, there are three or four sections: the first section begins with the explanation of equivocality (Pines 5). In a number of manuscripts of the commentaries – but not all – another section is formally marked with the

Much of Jewish philosophy produced between Maimonides and Spinoza draws upon concepts brought forward in the Preface to the *Guide*. It is a central text in the history of Jewish textual interpretation. This study is therefore situated in part within the history of Jewish philosophy, and in part within the history of Jewish exegesis. It concerns the contents of transmission: the philosophical notions, themes, or terms that each commentator emphasizes. Likewise, this study is concerned with the modes of transmission: genres, literary structures, and exegetical methods.[16]

1.2 Categorizing the Tradition

One dominant stream of early commentaries reads the *Guide* through the lenses of philosophical sources. I shall call this stream the philosophical tradition. My study focuses on five key thinkers in the philosophical tradition: Moses of Salerno, Joseph ibn Falaquera, Zeraḥiah Ḥen, Joseph ibn Kaspi, and Moses of Narbonne. Although there are significant differences among them, they all accept the authority of Jewish and non-Jewish philosophical sources in the investigation of the *Guide*. These commentaries inform the reader how Jewish philosophy, Latin Scholastic philosophy, or Greco-Arabic philosophy might clarify, confirm, or dispute Maimonides' words.

By way of context, I shall offer a few remarks on the philosophical stream of commentary and give a brief periodization of the tradition. I will then turn to the significance of the individual early commentators.

Philosophical commentaries on the *Guide* employ a number of exegetical methodologies that also appear in non-philosophical commentaries. What sets this stream apart is the method of clarifying the *Guide* by reference to specific philosophical sources, philosophical readings of Scripture, or a pre-existent philosophical system such as Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism. In the view of many philosophical commentators, the animating questions are: how can this source shed light on the obscurities of the text? Can it reveal anything we had not noticed or learned before? Where Maimonides and a given philosophical authority disagree, whom should we follow? Yet another philosophical approach to the *Guide* is to search for clarification among the

---

subheading "Introduction" at the passage that begins "As I have mentioned parables, we shall make the following introductory remarks" (Pines, 10). A third section is "Instruction with Respect to this Treatise," often but not always marked as such in the manuscripts (Pines 15). The fourth section describes the causes of textual contradictions, also not always marked as such (Pines 17). For a global view of Maimonidean introductions, see Steven Harvey, "Maimonides and the Art of Writing Introductions," *Maimonidean Studies* 5 (2008), 85–105.

16 On the larger history of the reception of Maimonides, see James A. Diamond, *Maimonides and the Shaping of the Jewish Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Carlos Fraenkel, ed., *Traditions of Maimonideanism* (Boston: Brill, 2009); James T. Robinson, ed., *The Cultures of Maimonideanism: New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought* (Boston: Brill, 2009).

sources that Maimonides himself may have consulted, or among sources contemporaneous with him. This method has become current in modern scholarship, and it is foreshadowed by ibn Falaquera's commentary *Moreh ha-moreh*.

There are a number of commentaries that are not philosophical, but interpret the *Guide* through other lenses. Those commentaries may include some discussion of the philosophical background of the text, but their methodology and purpose is not related to philosophical canons, either Jewish or non-Jewish. The commentaries by Abraham Abulafia, for example, aim to give a kabbalistic reading of the *Guide*, while the commentary by Mordechai Jaffe reads the *Guide* in light of the rabbinical tradition. Since the *Guide* contains a strong philosophical layer, some discussion of philosophical issues may be unavoidable in any commentary. But there remains a distinction between the methodologies and sources employed in philosophical tradition against those in other streams.

I begin with a brief history of the tradition, with attention to the ideological goals and the discourse of the commentaries.

1.3 Historical Overview

The vast majority of commentaries on the *Guide* are in Hebrew and rely on the Hebrew translation of the *Guide* by Samuel ibn Tibbon (1204, revised 1213). Ibn Tibbon's text, though generally faithful to the Arabic original, is far more difficult to read than Judah al-Ḥarizi's translation (produced shortly after Ibn Tibbon's first translation). Shem Tov ibn Falaquera (13th century) is the only commentator who makes extensive use of the Judaeo-Arabic text. His commentary retranslates lemmata into Hebrew, and appends a critique of Ibn Tibbon's translation to the commentary as a whole. Finally, there are a small number of commentaries in Arabic; the most notable example is that by Abu Abd-Allah Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Tabrizi. However, even in Arabic-speaking communities scholars tended to read and interpret the *Guide* in the translation of Samuel ibn Tibbon.[17]

The legacy of Ibn Tibbon is prominent among commentaries on the *Guide*, and particularly so for the earliest period (13th–14th century). What is known as Maimonideanism is in many respects a Maimonideanism-Tibbonism, which owes much to the impact of Ibn Tibbon, and is not a "pure" Maimonideanism. I spoke earlier of how Maimonides and Ibn Tibbon diverge. Let me briefly note here two aspects of Ibn

17 Tzvi Langermann, "Study and Commentary on 'The Guide of the Perplexed' in Arabic-Speaking Jewish Communities," in Sara Klein-Braslavy et al, eds., *Tribute to Michael: Studies in Jewish and Muslim Thought Presented to Professor Michael Schwarz* (Tel-Aviv: The Lester and Sally Entin Faculty of Humanities; Chaim Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies, 2009), 67–90.

Tibbon's legacy that have a direct impact on commentaries on the *Guide*: the exegetical technique of "re-writing," and Ibn Tibbon's view of esotericism.

The difficulty of Ibn Tibbon's translation provides an initial impetus for the technique of rewriting. While he is not responsible for its appearance, it builds upon his contribution as translator of the text. This technique appears in several of the commentaries in this study. It consists of the commentator's interpolation of his own words with those of the *Guide*, resulting in a re-written passage that is a hybrid of both commentary and text. This is an attempt to render clarity to Ibn Tibbon's words while maintaining a close connection with the text (rather than simply rewriting the entire passage with only the commentator's own words). However, commentators most often do not signal to readers that the passage has been rewritten, and sometimes conclude rewritten passages with the marker "etc.", leading incautious readers to conclude that what the commentator has just offered is a verbatim lemma from the *Guide*. The technique amounts to an implicit means of controlling the reader's interpretation of the text.

The commentators also inherit from him the idea of Maimonides as an esoteric writer, one who addresses distinct audiences through a multi-layered text.[18] But Maimonides' esotericism is not identical to Tibbonian esotericism. Ibn Tibbon contributes the notion of "widening" the holes in the filigree of the "apple of gold," a reference to the well-known *mashal* (parable) in the Preface to the *Guide* describing an apple of gold encased by a filigree of silver.[19] By "widening the holes" Ibn Tibbon means that truths that disclosure of truths can become broader with each passing generation. Ibn Tibbon sees himself as one who can communicate theological truths in a more open fashion than Maimonides. Later Maimonideanists, such as the commentators in this study, authorize themselves to reveal truths in an even more expansive fashion than Ibn Tibbon, widening the holes further. They begin to compose works, such as commentaries, that popularize philosophy and the *Guide* to wider audiences. However, the form of commentary – direct contact with the text – brings the interpreters into direct contact with the sharper-drawn esotericism of the *Guide*, which emphasizes limits on disclosure: transmission to a single individual at a time, through "chapter headings," and strict controls on dissemination of the text. The tension between Maimonidean and Tibbonian esotericism can be felt throughout the early commentaries, and each commentator resolves it in his own way.

For my periodization below, I rely on extant primary sources and on scholarly listings of commentaries, along with secondary sources.[20] Our present knowledge of

18 Aviezer Ravitzky, "Samuel ibn Tibbon and the Esoteric Character of the *Guide of the Perplexed*," in *History and Faith: Studies in Jewish Philosophy* (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1996), 205–245, and Aviezer Ravitzky, "The Secrets of Maimonides: Between the Thirteenth and the Twentieth Centuries," in *History and Faith*, 246–303.

19 Pines, 11–12;

20 Steinschneider, "Die hebräischen Commentare;" Dienstag, "A Bibliography of Commentaries;" *HÜB* 423–426, 433–434.

the commentaries still contains many lacunae. My account of the tradition is tentative, based on commentaries whose authorship has been identified; there still remain a large number of anonymous commentaries, many of which survive in manuscript fragments.

1.3.1 Chronological Distribution: Five Stages of Commentary

I classify the tradition of commentaries on the *Guide* into five major periods or stages. For the purposes of study, each stage can be identified with a distinct geographic/cultural zone.

First Stage: Spain, South of France, and Italy, 13th–14th centuries. The earliest reception of the *Guide of the Perplexed* was accompanied by much dispute. Some of the earliest commentaries emerge against this background. Certain authorities tended to hold the study of philosophy in high esteem, which was in turn opposed by others. Both the *Guide* and the study of philosophy were bitterly divisive in Spain and France.[21] In this case, the paradigm of commentary as a text that is written on a foundational or canonical text does not seem to apply.[22]

We can point to the commentaries by Moses ben Solomon of Salerno (d.1279), Zeraḥiah ben Isaac ben She'alti'el Ḥen (d. after 1291, originally from Spain), and Hillel ben Samuel of Verona (c.1220–c.1295) as among the earliest to be written in Italy. Outside of Italy, the major philosophical commentary of the 13th century is by Shem Tov ben Joseph ibn Falaquera (probably Spain, c.1225–c.1295), alongside the Kabbalistic commentaries by Abraham Abulafia (Spain and the Mediterranean, 1240–after 1291) and the glosses by Joseph ben Abraham Giqatilla (Spain, 1248–c.1305).[23] In the South of France, the most representative commentaries of this period are those of Joseph ibn Kaspi (c.1279–1340) and Moses of Narbonne (1300–1362). There are also two commentaries (or sets of glosses) that are not extant but which are mentioned in other sources: one is by Jacob ben Eliyahu of Lattes (13th century) and the other by

21 See Moshe Halbertal, *Between Torah and Wisdom: Rabbi Menaḥem ha-Meiri and the Maimonidean Halakhists of Provence* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2000) [Hebrew], and Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition*.

22 Jan Assmann, "Introduction," in *Text und Kommentar: Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation IV*, eds Jan Assmann and Burkhard Gladigow (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1995), 1–33.

23 On Hillel of Verona, see the introduction to the German translation of his main work (*Tagmulei ha-nefesh*), *Über die Vollendung der Seele*, trans. Yossef Schwartz (Freiburg: Herder, 2009), 9–45; on Ibn Falaquera, see Yair Shiffman, "Shem Tob Ibn Falqerah as Interpreter of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* – Outlines of His Thought," *Maimonidean Studies* 3 (1992–1993), 1–29 [Hebrew section]; on Abulafia and Giqatilla, see Moshe Idel, "Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and the Kabbalah," *Jewish History* 18 (2004), 197–226.

Yedayah Bedersi (c.1270–1340), both from the South of France.[24] Moses of Narbonne's commentary (1362) provides a convenient *terminus ad quem* for this stage; his commentary left an outsize mark on later commentaries on the *Guide*.

In my view, this period is the most fluid and creative in the history of commentary on the *Guide*. In some ways, it charted the future course of the tradition. Interpreters in the second and third stages freely absorbed and critiqued the commentators of this period. In the commentaries of the first stage we see a number of motifs that would recur in later interpretation of the *Guide*, such as the notion that the text contains "secrets" (Ibn Kaspi), and the view that the *Guide* should be explained against the background of philosophical sources from the Greco-Arabic canon (Zeraḥiah Ḥen, Ibn Falaquera, Ibn Kaspi, Moses of Narbonne). With the exception of Ibn Falaquera, commentators in this stage tend to emphasize the close connection between the *Guide* and Scripture, sometimes viewing Maimonides' *Guide* as a key to unlock the deeper meaning of the Bible. These first commentaries on the *Guide* are therefore also indispensable for the study of Jewish biblical commentary after Maimonides.

Second Stage: Spain, late 14th–15th centuries. The most representative commentaries of this stage are those by Efodi (Profiat Duran; c.1350–c.1415), Asher Crescas (possibly from Provence, 1st half of 15th c.), and Shem Tov ben Joseph ben Shem Tov ibn Shem Tov (fl.1461–1489). These commentaries do not presuppose extensive philosophical knowledge on the part of the reader, and tend to explain the letter of the text rather than the implications of problematic passages. These commentators borrow from Ibn Falaquera, Ibn Kaspi, and Moses of Narbonne, often without attribution. Also worthy of note at this stage is the earliest known commentary written in Ashkenaz, by Solomon ben Judah ha-Nasi, who hailed from Provence and wrote the commentary for an Ashkenazi patron. It is the only identified commentary on the *Guide* produced in an Ashkenazi milieu written before the 16th century.[25]

---

24 According to his descendant Isaac ben Jacob Lattes (2nd half of 14th c.), Jacob of Lattes interpreted the *Guide* either as a running commentary or in the form of glosses. Moshe Halbertal interprets Isaac's remarks to mean that Jacob of Lattes did write a formal commentary, which would constitute the earliest commentary on the *Guide*. See Halbertal, *Rabbi Menachem ha-Meiri*, 145, and Yechiel Tseitkin, "R. Isaac de Lattes – A Maimonidean Provençal Author and His Commentary on the Torah (In Manuscript)," *Shenaton: an Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 22 (2013), 223–224 n7 [Hebrew]. Yedayah Bedersi mentions a commentary in his *Treatise Upon Personal or Individual Forms* under the title *Midbar qedemot* (Deut 2:26). See Salomon Munk, *Manuscrits orientaux: catalogues des manuscrits hébreux et samaritains de la Bibliothèque Impériale* (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1866), 175. The *Treatise* is in ms Paris 984, ff. 66r-93r.

25 Michael Z. Nehorai, "Rabbi Solomon ben Judah Hanasi and His Commentary on the *Guide of the Perplexed*," Ph.D. diss. The Hebrew University, 1978 [Hebrew]. Nehorai describes Hanasi as one who tends to accept the tenets of Aristotelianism as developed by Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina in an original and independent manner, which prevents identifying his thought entirely within any one Jewish philosophical school, be it the Sephardic-Provençal or Italian. Nonetheless, Nehorai also notes the incisive influence of Samuel ibn Tibbon and Jacob Anatoli on the commentary, which quotes both by name. Nehorai, "Rabbi Solomon," 10–11.

Third Stage: Spain, Italy, and Levant, 15th–16th centuries. The most representative commentary of this period is that of Isaac Abarbanel (Spain/Italy, 1437–1508). The commentary is erudite, often citing Ibn Kaspi and Moses of Narbonne, but also disputational. Unlike previous commentators on the *Guide*, Abarbanel was a sharp critic of Maimonides and frequently disagreed with him.[26] However, another noted commentator, David ben Judah Messer Leon (c.1470–c.1535), often defends Maimonides against critics. Despite these differences, both commentators seek to defend religion as a repository of certain revealed truths not accessible through philosophical study. The two hold that philosophical study has some value, although it is inferior to the truths of Torah.[27] They were open to alternatives to Maimonidean Aristotelianism such as Platonism and Kabbalah at a time when the authority of Aristotle was challenged both in Christian and Jewish philosophy. Thus it emerges that in this period commentary on the *Guide* was often put in the service of theological goals. The partial commentary by Moses ben Avraham Provençal (Italy, 1503–1575) further illustrates this trend. It focuses entirely on a portion of the *Guide* dealing with Aristotelian physics (the Preface to Part II). However, Provençal defends Aristotelianism as a *sine qua non* for the elaborate theological edifice built during the preceding centuries.[28]

Fourth Stage: Ashkenaz, 16th–17th centuries. Study of science and philosophy in Ashkenaz never developed to the same extent as it did in Sepharad, but two key figures of the 16th century provided an opening for a modest flourishing of philosophical study in general and the *Guide* in particular. Maharal of Prague (R. Judah Loew ben Bezalel, 1512?–1609) was not open to the disinterested pursuit of philosophy, but acknowledged the authority of Maimonides and cited the *Guide* when it suited his larger purposes. Rama (R. Moses Isserles, Poland, 1520–1572) permitted the study of philosophy. He justified it by claiming to study only what was contained in the *Guide*, and that any rate philosophy is preferable to Kabbalah.[29]

---

26 There are differing views of Abarbanel's attitude towards the *Guide* and the commentaries. Cf. Leo Strauss, "On Abravanel's Philosophical Tendency and Political Teaching," in Kenneth Hart Green, ed., *Leo Strauss on Maimonides: The Complete Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 579–613, who argues that Abarbanel rejected earlier philosophical interpretation of the text, and Eric Lawee, "'The Good We Accept and the Bad We Do Not': Aspects of Isaac Abarbanel's Stance Towards Maimonides," in Jay M. Harris, ed., *Be'erot Yitzhak: Studies in Memory of Isadore Twersky* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 119–160, who argues that Abarbanel selectively accepted such interpretations.

27 Hava Tirosh-Rotschild, *Between Worlds: The Life and Thought of Rabbi David ben Judah Messer Leon* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 90–98; Eric Lawee, *Isaac Abarbanel's Stance Toward Tradition: Defense, Dissent, and Dialogue* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 33–34, 55–57, 207–210.

28 Reuven Bonfil, "The Commentary of R. Moses Provençalo on Rambam's Twenty-Five Premises," *Qiryat sefer* 50 (1974/1975), 157 [Hebrew].

29 Leonard Levin, *Seeing With Both Eyes: Ephraim Luntshitz and the Polish-Jewish Renaissance* (Boston: Brill, 2008), 28–29.

These attitudes coalesce in the thought of R. Mordekhai Jaffe (Prague, c.1535–1612) who studied under Rama, and later replaced Maharal as rabbi of Prague. Jaffe authored a monumental ten-volume code of Jewish law for rabbinical students; one of the volumes was a commentary on the *Guide* (*Levush pinnat yiqrat*). By doing so, he effectively placed study of the *Guide* in his rabbinical curriculum. The commentary represented an important stage in the controlled absorption of rationalist philosophy into Eastern European rabbinical culture.[30] Perhaps not surprisingly, the commentary tends to harmonize Maimonides' positions with rabbinical Judaism, in an approach reminiscent of Isaac Abarbanel. Two other commentators of distinction are Joseph ben Isaac Ha-Levi (c.1580–?) and Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller (1579–1654). Ha-Levi penned a topical commentary on three particular issues (divine existence, incorporeality, and unity), entitled *Giv'at ha-Moreh*. He taught philosophy in Prague, with the *Guide* as a textbook, and also wrote a commentary on al-Ghazali's *Intentions of the Philosophers*. Heller, a student of Ha-Levi, wrote a collection of glosses on his teacher's *Giv'at ha-Moreh*, which may be thus considered a supercommentary on the *Guide*.

Central to our purposes is the fact that both Jaffe and Ha-Levi cite several earlier commentators on the *Guide*. Jaffe relied heavily on Moses of Narbonne, and he cites as well Efodi, Shem Tov and Asher Crescas, which by his time were available in a printed edition of the *Guide* (1553). Ha-Levi was proficient in post-Maimonidean Jewish philosophy, and he too cites the commentaries of Moses of Narbonne, Efodi, Asher Crescas, Shem Tov, and Moses Provençal.

Although the commentary by Moses of Narbonne was not available in print at this time, it circulated indirectly through the critical glosses of R. Menaḥem Shalem (early 1400s).[31] Moses of Narbonne's commentary had also been cited by another Ashkenazi authority of early 1400s Prague, Yom Tov Lipmann Mühlhausen, who writes in his *Ha-'eshkol* that he relied on Maimonides and on two commentators on the *Guide*, Moses of Narbonne and "Solomon the Foreigner"[32] (likely Solomon ha-Nasi). Commentaries on the *Guide*, in particular that by Moses of Narbonne, constituted an important bridge between Sepharad and Ashkenaz with respect to the acceptance and dissemination of philosophical study.

---

30 Lawrence J. Kaplan, "Rationalism and Rabbinic Culture in Sixteenth-Century Eastern Europe: Rabbi Mordecai Jaffe's 'Levush Pinat Yikrat'," Ph.D. diss. Harvard University, 1975, 348.

31 Kaplan, "Rationalism," 143. R. Menaḥem Shalem may have penned a commentary on the *Guide* (only a fragment of uncertain authorship survives). Cf. Daniel Lasker, "Jewish Philosophical Polemics in Ashkenaz," in *Contra Iudaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics Between Christians and Jews*, eds Ora Limor and Guy G. Stroumsa (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1996), 202, 205–206. See also Frank Talmage in "An Anti-Christian Polemic in Eastern Europe in the Style of Sephardi Polemics – a Unique Manuscript," *Qiryat Sefer* 56 (1980–1981), 369–372 [Hebrew].

32 Judah Kaufman, "Rabbi Yom Tov Lipmann Mühlhausen, the Apologete, Cabbalist and Philosophical Writer and His books *Haeshkol* and *Kawwanath hatefilah*," Ph.D. diss. Dropsie College, 1919, 127, 145 [Hebrew].

Fifth Stage: Ashkenaz, 18th–19th centuries. The last stage in the tradition of commentary on the *Guide* stands on the threshold between the pre-modern and modern worlds. Within Jewish letters the genre of commentary, characteristic of medieval scholarship, gives way to other scholarly genres such as *inter alia* journal articles, monographs, and encyclopedia entries, in the context of the academization of Jewish Studies in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement.[33]

This is not to say that modern Jewish scholarship put aside either Maimonides or the *Guide* – quite the contrary. Rather, it means that contents and functions fulfilled by medieval commentaries are transferred towards new formats and ways of organizing scholarly discourse.[34] After Solomon Maimon, commentary on the *Guide* ceases to become the expected instrument with which to study and write about the text. The process was virtually inevitable – it had occurred centuries earlier in relation to Aristotelian and other such canonical texts.[35] Nonetheless, the migration of knowledge from one genre into disparate others brought with it a certain loss, a "sort of forgetfulness." In the case of the *Guide*, this sense of "loss" set the stage for Leo Strauss' later re-reading of Maimonides, although Straus did not write a commentary.[36] The practice of commentary on the *Guide* has been revived in much more recent times, although it is uncertain which directions it will take in the future.

The last formal commentary on the *Guide* stands on its own in originality and significance. Entitled *Giv'at ha-Moreh,* it was composed by the neo-Kantian philosopher Solomon Maimon (1753–1800). It relies heavily on Moses of Narbonne's commentary, and both commentaries were printed together. This edition marked the first printing of Moses of Narbonne's commentary more than four centuries after it was written.[37]

Maimon's commentary decisively brings together the medieval and the nascent modern in Jewish philosophy through a radically rational understanding of religion, and exalts the *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment) in identifying it with the Maimonidean notion of *shlemut* (perfection). It provides a medieval, "traditional" basis to legitimize pursuit of science and philosophy under markedly different social conditions.

---

33 On the reception of the *Guide* in modernity, see George Y. Kohler, *Reading Maimonides' Philosophy in 19th Century Germany: the Guide to Religious Reform* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012). On the death of commentary, see John B. Henderson, *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary: A Comparison of Confucian and Western Exegesis* (Princeton University Press, 1991), 200–224.

34 "It should be apparent that the central fact was not the epuisement and, eventually, the extinction of the commentary genre, but a sort of migration: contents, methods and open questions, bred within the commentary tradition, moved to other ways of organizing scientific discourse." Stefano Perfetti, "How and When the Medieval Commentary Died Out: the Case of Aristotle's Zoological Writings," in *Il commento filosofico nell'Occidente Latino (secoli XIII–XV)*, eds Gianfranco Fioravanti et al (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 440. Perfetti's observation seems to apply to the history of the *Guide* as well.

35 Ibid.

36 Green, *Leo Strauss on Maimonides*, 44.

37 Shmuel Hugo Bergman and Nathan Rotenstreich, eds., *Giv'at ha-moreh* (Jerusalem: National Academy of Sciences, 1965, reprint 2000).

Moreover, the commentary develops a notion of the *Haskalah* that is ideologically continuous with medieval precedent rather than as a Jewish form of German *Bildung*.[38]

It is significant that Maimon's *Giv'at ha-Moreh* was openly modeled after Moses of Narbonne's commentary. As early as Isaac Abarbanel the radical nature of Moses of Narbonne's interpretation had been singled out for condemnation, since Moses of Narbonne identifies Maimonides with a naturalistic view of religion. According to this view, religion is a necessary though not a sufficient instrument for human perfection, and perfection is ultimately achieved through the intellect.[39] Through the mediation of Maimon's commentary, this view found expression in the *Haskalah* ideal of the "sovereignty of universal reason over religion" and "mirrored the social promise of the Enlightenment [that Jews] might meet with their Christian counterparts as equals within the public sphere of discourse."[40] Moses of Narbonne's commentary was viewed as radical in terms of its method as well. The early modern scholar Joseph Delmedigo (Crete, born 1591) states having seen eighteen commentaries on the *Guide*, "both large and small."[41] He compares four commentaries to the four sons depicted in the Passover *Haggadah*: Shem Tov is the wise son, who ably clarifies difficulties; Asher Crescas is the simple son, whose commentary is "like rabbinical commentaries;" Efodi is the one who does not know how to ask; and Moses of Narbonne is the *rasha'*, the evil son.[42] In Delmedigo's view Moses of Narbonne grasped the full extent of the *Guide* more than any other commentator, but revealed the secrets of the text indiscriminately, exposing them to the eyes of all readers. Under this perspective, the sin of Moses of Narbonne is not to hold radical Averroistic positions, but to communicate them openly and exoterically. Although it is at odds with Maimonidean esotericism, such an ideal of open, exoteric communication correlates with the Enlightenment ideal of elevating the intellectual level of the masses through universal

38 Abraham Socher, *The Radical Enlightenment of Solomon Maimon: Judaism, Heresy, and Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 83.

39 For Moses of Narbonne the value of the Torah is predominantly ethical and political: "its true intended aim" is for "us to be perfected and the state of our societies to be improved by our Torah regarding actions." Jakob Goldenthal, ed., *Be'ur le-sefer Moreh Nevukhim* (Vienna: K.K. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei,1852), 2. For an account of Abarbanel's treatment of Moses of Narbonne, see Maurice-Ruben Hayoun, *Moshe Narboni* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1986), 98–108.

40 Socher, *Radical Enlightenment*, 82. Cf. the remarks by Maimon's editor, Isaac Euchel, in ibid 81.

41 Delmedigo names the commentaries by Shem Tov Provençal (perhaps Moses Provençal), Ibn Kaspi, Ibn Falaquera, al-Tabrizi, David Yahya, and Isaac Abarbanel, which he encountered in the library of a Karaite scholar in Constantinople. "Mikhtav ʾaḥuz," in Abraham Geiger, ed., *Melo Chofnajim* (Berlin: L. Fernbach, 1840), 18 [Hebrew], 23–24 [German].

42 *Melo Chofnajim*, ibid. Delmedigo qualifies his assessment of Efodi as one who provides not questions but answers, comparing him favorably to Rashi; knowledgeable in geometry and astronomy; and the "chief among the commentators" (*rosh ha-parshanim*).

education. This view may help explain why early Maskilim found much to appreciate in Moses of Narbonne and Solomon Maimon's commentaries.[43]

1.4 Early Philosophical Commentators of the *Guide*

Moses of Salerno, Ibn Falaquera, Zeraḥiah Ḥen, Joseph ibn Kaspi, and Moses of Narbonne (or Moshe Narboni) belong to what I date as the early stage of philosophical commentary, roughly from the mid-13th through the late 14th centuries.

There are a few reasons to establish Moses of Salerno's commentary as the *terminus a quem*, and the commentary by Moses of Narbonne as the *terminus ad quem*. In terms of formal criteria, Moses of Salerno's commentary is the first to write a commentary covering the *Guide* from beginning to end, even though he was prevented from finishing it by his death. While not the earliest commentary on the text – that distinction might belong to Al-Tabrizi's commentary on the Preface to Part II – Moses of Salerno's commentary is indirectly connected to Samuel ibn Tibbon himself, the founding figure in what would become the "Maimonidean-Tibbonian" school of thought. Moses of Salerno's commentary constitutes the earliest sustained reception not only of Maimonides, but also of Ibn Tibbon, into the Italian cultural space. As for Moses of Narbonne, his commentary left an outsize mark on much of the later tradition even as other early commentaries become forgotten. It acquired wide dissemination from the Levant to Ashkenaz, and earned a canonical status of sorts among the commentaries (as evidenced circumstantially by its circulation in manuscript form long after the advent of the printing press). To refine the period under question, then, our early stage of commentary begins in the 1250s or 1260s (Moses of Salerno) and lasts through 1362 (Moses of Narbonne).

The commentaries by these authors constitute sustained attempts to understand the *Guide* philosophically during a period of competing agendas in the reception (or rejection) of the text. As a whole, the significance of their project lies in rewriting the *Guide* as the foundation of Judaism writ large, encompassing both philosophy and theology. Taken as a whole, the commentaries reflect some of the enduring themes of early exegesis of Maimonides. Individually, each commentator represents a strand of the Maimonidean exegetical tradition, showing the multiple philosophical receptions of the *Guide* into three varied contexts: Spain, Italy, and Southern France. It is to these multiple receptions that I now turn.

---

43 Socher, *Radical Enlightenment*, 81, poses that Delmedigo's assessment of Moses of Narbonne as *rasha'* was "probably meant as a compliment." While Delmedigo praises Moses of Narbonne's knowledge of the *Guide*, he blames him as the "talebearer who revealeth secrets" (Prov 11:13) without regard for who might read him. It is this supposed disregard for the esoteric method that makes Moses of Narbonne the evil son.

Two of our earliest commentators, Moses of Salerno and Zeraḥiah Ḥen, were active in Italy. Unlike Spain or France, the reception of the *Guide* was not controversial there. However, a number of readings of the text flourished alongside each other. Abraham Abulafia, who can be considered the most significant kabbalist exegete of the *Guide*, travelled around the peninsula teaching the text to groups of students. Zeraḥiah vehemently rejected magical interpretations of the *Guide* such as those proposed by Abulafia, and he also publically disagreed with Hillel of Verona on the interpretation of the text.[44] Zeraḥiah lived in Rome, having moved there from Spain at the invitation of the local Jewish community, and expressly in order to teach the *Guide*.[45]

Along with Ibn Falaquera, Zeraḥiah represents a Spanish tradition of *Guide* exegesis that reads the *Guide* nearly exclusively through Arabic philosophy, particularly through Ibn Rushd. In this, his commentary resembles that of Ibn Falaquera, who invokes Ibn Rushd frequently as "the aforementioned scholar" (*he-ḥakham ha-nizkar*). Zeraḥiah's reading of the *Guide* is independent of his immediate surroundings in Italy, and he mentions no Jewish philosopher apart from Samuel ibn Tibbon. Like ibn Falaquera, Zeraḥiah's commentary inscribes the *Guide* into the canon of Greco-Arabic philosophy. Zeraḥiah was a prolific translator of Arabic philosophical works into Hebrew. His entire intellectual background, like that of Ibn Falaquera, was formed by the same Greco-Arabic philosophical culture in which the *Guide* takes shape.

Moses of Salerno's commentary, on the other hand, embodies the interplay between the *Guide* and the native Italian context. Unlike Zeraḥiah, Moses of Salerno was intellectually open to his immediate environment. The commentary is born of his joint study of the *Guide* with a certain Niccolà da Giovinazzo, a Christian prelate often called simply "the Christian scholar" (*he-ḥakham ha-noẓri*) in the commentary. Moses of Salerno reproduces the comments offered by the Christian scholar throughout the commentary, and he cites a number of other Christians. Moses of Salerno also includes a number of translations of difficult terms into Italian, using the Hebrew alphabet.

Moses of Salerno was intellectually removed from the Greco-Arabic background of the *Guide*. He evinces no knowledge of Arabic or Arabic philosophers. Instead, he reads the *Guide* through the lenses of Jewish philosophers, in particular Samuel ibn Tibbon and Jacob Anatoli. The commentary also reflects some knowledge of Scholastic thought, gained indirectly, it seems, through the Christian scholar. Moses of Salerno's commentary failed to gain many readers, and became virtually forgotten in the later commentary tradition. Nonetheless, his commentary foreshadows a trend of Jewish-Christian collaboration in Italy. The Italian translations within the commentary were gathered into a separate glossary by his son, who also edited the

44 On Zeraḥiah's dismissal of magical approaches to the *Guide*, see Moshe Idel, "Abulafia's Secrets of the *Guide*: A Linguistic Turn," in *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, eds. Alfred L. Ivry et al (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1998), 313–315.

45 On Abulafia's activity in Italy, see Idel, "*Guide of the Perplexed* and the Kabbalah."

commentary. As a stand-alone glossary, the translations found much wider circulation than the commentary as a whole.

The commentaries by Joseph ibn Kaspi and Moses of Narbonne represent the Southern French tradition of philosophical *Guide* exegesis. They are characterized by relative intellectual isolation from their immediate surroundings, and greater reliance on Greco-Arabic sources, especially on Ibn Rushd. To a modest degree, these commentaries occasionally reflect the influence of Kabbalah in the reading of the *Guide*.

The two commentaries by Ibn Kaspi and that by Moses of Narbonne reflect a preoccupation with the philosophical reading of Scripture that is unmatched in earlier commentaries. Both commentators regard the *Guide* not only as a philosophical text in its own right, but also as a manual of biblical exegesis. As a result, these two commentators are wont to point out the theological implications of Maimonides' philosophical reading of Scripture. This attitude represents a new phase in the early reception of the *Guide*. Maimonides is no longer one who merely introduces new ideas, which by now have been elucidated by the commentators of the 13th century. In the 14th century, the interest shifts to the larger implications of those new ideas.

Among the early commentators, Ibn Kaspi and Moses of Narbonne had the most determinant influence upon the development of the tradition of commentary on the *Guide*. Commentators of the 15th and 16th centuries often cite Ibn Kaspi or Moses of Narbonne, sometimes in agreement but oftentimes not. For example, the commentary by Isaac Abarbanel abounds with fulminations against both Ibn Kaspi and Moses of Narbonne. Moses of Narbonne is also mentioned by a number of readers in Ashkenaz, while Efodi and Shem Tov, in the 15th century, draw liberally from both French commentators without citing their names. In his turn, Ibn Kaspi's commentaries occasionally draw from an earlier commentator, Ibn Falaquera. Moses of Narbonne's commentary, too, occasionally uses Ibn Kaspi's commentaries as a source. Together, the two commentators reflect earlier readings while meaningfully building upon them.

The five commentators in this study each take on a different shade of significance within the history of commentary on the *Guide*, from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives. As a whole, what they signify is greater than each isolated commentary. In comparison to later periods of commentary on the *Guide*, the early stage is characterized by a fluidity of thought and expression about the text. Since the *Guide* did not yet belong to any one canon, commentators felt unbound to any particular reading of the text. At the same time, they crystallize the notion that the *Guide* is a philosophical text writ large: they all betray the idea that only a philosophical understanding of the Jewish religion can lead one to salvation (in the sense of immortality of the soul), and that philosophical understanding has been put forth in the *Guide*. The task of the commentators is now to act as intermediaries between the closed, elitist Maimonides, and readers of the *Guide* in their own times. They not only rewrite the text but reshape an elitist ideology, acting as interpreters and ambassadors of (in their eyes) the correct version of Maimonideanism.

1.5 Structure and Chapters

This study is divided into an analytical section, an edition of the primary texts, and a synthetic conclusion. Chapter 2 lays out the intellectual background to each commentary. It singles out one dominant theme from each commentary for further discussion. For Moses of Salerno, the theme is his adaptation of *meshalim* (parables), as a heuristic method of teaching and of concealment/disclosure. For Ibn Falaquera, it is the apprehension of metaphysical truths by those who are not prophets, and the difficulties of transmitting such truths. For Zeraḥiah Ḥen, it is his use of the discipline of Logic in the interpretation of the *Guide*. In Ibn Kaspi's commentary *'Ammudei kesef*, I focus on the description of perplexity and the perplexed individual. In his other commentary, *Maskiyot kesef*, I turn to Ibn Kaspi's exemplification of Maimonides' seventh cause and Ibn Kaspi's political interpretation to the problem. Finally, for Moses of Narbonne, the theme on which I focus is elitism, and the relationship of the scholar to the multitude.

Chapter 3 describes the manuscript sources and reception of Moses of Salerno's commentary, followed by the section of his commentary that interprets the Preface to the *Guide*. The edition has an English translation, the original Hebrew text with manuscript variants, and explanatory notes. This structure is used in Chapters 3–7, with the exception of Chapter 4 (ibn Falaquera). For Ibn Falaquera's *Moreh ha-moreh*, I give only the English translation and annotation, based on the critical Hebrew text established by Yair Shiffman. Chapter 5 has Zeraḥiah Ḥen's commentary. Chapter 6 has both of Ibn Kaspi's commentaries, *'Ammudei kesef* (*Pillars of Silver*) and *Maskiyot kesef* (*Settings of Silver*), and in Chapter 7 I turn to Moses of Narbonne. In Chapter 8, "Commentaries on the *Guide*: A Synthetic Conclusion," I take up some issues that concern the tradition as a whole: its "anomalous" character, the ways in which pre-modern readers made use of the commentaries, and a set of questions for further research.

A final note on style and terminology: All punctuation in the Hebrew texts is my own, as well as any material within brackets. Hebrew names and terms that are current in academic discourse are reproduced as popularly known (e.g. "Joseph," and not "Yosef"). I leave a few terms untranslated throughout the text: *mashal*, *ma'aseh bereshit*, and *ma'aseh merkavah*. In the Maimonidean tradition these terms acquired technical meanings distinct from their native rabbinical backgrounds. *Mashal* (pl. *meshalim*) is generally translated as "parable," but in commentaries on the *Guide* it has a number of meanings. Oftentimes it is used in the sense of pedagogical "example," that is, some piece of evidence with which a teacher can illustrate the matter at hand. Biblical prooftexts are frequently denominated as *meshalim*. The pedagogical dimension of *mashal* can be traced to the commentary on Ecclesiastes by Samuel ibn Tibbon, where he described *meshalim* as shortcuts for a teacher to avoid long-winded explanations and difficult language. In Moses of Salerno's commentary *mashal* acquires a sense of indispensability: he claims he cannot interpret

Maimonides' seventh cause of contradictions because he does not have a *mashal* for it. *Mashal* can also indicate an expression or narrative structure with different layers of meaning. A biblical verse can be categorized as *mashal*, whose internal meaning is termed *nimshal*. A biblical narrative, likewise, can be identified as *mashal*. When discussion of *mashal* arises, the commentators tend to find *meshalim* in Scripture or in philosophical works. Only more rarely do they construct original *meshalim* that follow a narrative parabolic structure.

Ma'aseh bereshit is usually translated as the "Account of Creation" and *ma'aseh merkavah* as the "Account of the Chariot." The latter refers to a body of rabbinical speculation concerning the vision of the divine chariot as described in the books of Ezekiel and Isaiah, and which were accompanied by strict restrictions on dissemination. In the *Guide*, Maimonides identified *ma'aseh bereshit* with Aristotelian physics and *ma'aseh merkavah* with Aristotelian metaphysics. All of the commentators in this study accept that identification. Furthermore, commentators often employ *ma'aseh bereshit* as a shorthand for a philosophical discussion on Creation, and *ma'aseh merkavah* to indicate what we would understand by "theology," or in Hebrew "divine science."

The commentators often indicate Maimonides by the titles *Moreh* or *Rav* rather than by name. I have rendered these terms as "Teacher" and "Rabbi," respectively. The term *moreh* is occasionally ambiguous as it can also indicate the book of the *Guide* itself (*Moreh ha-nevukhim*). Thus some phrases, for example, could read either as "according to the *Guide*" or "according to the Teacher.