

The Haqdama

(in the Hebrew literature of the Middle Ages)

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Haqdama (=introduction, but similar items are also called: prologue, foreword, preface or préambula; and in Hebrew also *pətiḥāʿ*, *maḇō*): a separate text preceding a (main) text, indicating to the reader some of the attributes of the rest of the (main)text¹.

The introduction belongs to the more general category of *paratext*, i.e. all text connected in some way to a main text without being part of it. This *paratext* functions as a mediator between text and the reader. Within this group the introduction belongs to the subcategory of the *peritext*, which - though distinguishably separate - is still attached to the main text². Other parts of peritext may e.g. be the title page or the colophon.

The *haqdama* usually is written by the author of the text, but in some cases it is *allographic* (=written by someone else than the author) (e.g. prefaces by the translator of a text, or the introductory texts to the Pentateuch/comments on the Pentateuch, see below).

From the presence or absence and the content of such an introduction, frequently conclusions can be drawn regarding the attitude and intentions of the author and the meaning of the main text. Some authors always wrote a *haqdama* (e.g. Maimonides), others did not or incidentally. Presence may also have depended on the intended audience: some potential reader circles (e.g. professionals, students of the author, the person who commissioned a book) might know about the book from 'hear-say' and would not need an introduction, other audiences might learn from the introduction if the book was intended for them.

In modern books often a distinction is being made between the introduction, which is related to the content of the book and the intentions of the author, – and thus, has a permanent value – and the preface, which is related to more temporary issues: e.g. the process of genesis of the book, people involved such as co-operators, editors, lay-out persons, partners of the author; thanks to these persons; or specification of differences between various editions of the same book.

Forms of information to the potential reader, which are now transferred through promotion, advertising, or are being written on the cover, could be part of the older introductions as well.

Tradition

The *haqdama* in Hebrew texts of the Middle Ages³ (to which we will focus our attention here) owes tribute to much older traditions:

- **Greek:**

Allready in classical Greek times the *prologue*, *proemium*, *praefatio*, *praeambula*, *introductio*, *introitus*, *isagoge* were expressions for similar introductory texts or parts of an opus.

According to the rhetoric any oration should start with an introduction, in first instance meant to attract the attention, but also to create some measure of common understanding with and sympathy from the audience (*captatio benevolentiae*) and this would then in turn lead to credibility (*credulis*) .

According tot Aristotelian literature the introduction should carry some 8 items any reader should know (see below).

- **Hebrew/Arameic:**

- in a certain sense the *incipits*^o to the *Psalms*^o – though usually not called *haqdama*, and much shorter than a full-fledged introduction – show some of the same introductory functions we shall encounter in the *haqdama*: origin, addressee, purpose, how to use (melody, music instrument), so they can be seen as

¹ In some texts [11] the word has also the connotation of premises one should know before reading.

² G.Genette – Paratexts, thresholds of interpretation – Cambridge University Press 2001 [1997; French: Paris: Ed. du Seuil 1987]

³ A list of the texts on which this lemma is based, is given at the end.

introductions in a primordial stage. The same holds for e.g. the versus 1-4 of Proverbia

- also in the homiletic midrash, the sermon would start – as in the Greek rhetoric tradition – with an introductory part (proem), the *pətiḥa*, (Arameic *pətiḥta* ⁹), though here the distinction between the introductory part and the main sermon is not too clear and often the whole sermon was called *pətiḥa* or *pətiḥta* ⁴

- **Arabic**

In the Arabic literature the introduction as a formally separate part was present from the 9th century on. ⁵. Specific topics including the Aristotelian ‘must know’s’ and a number of rhetoric devices (see below) were commonly present. The Jewish authors living in the Middle Ages, especially in the world of Islam, used the same devices

Allographic introductions

Most haqdamot were supposedly written by the authors of the works under consideration. Translations frequently show a separate introduction by a translator, often starting with a sentence like “אמר המתרגם | Amar ha-metargem”.

The character of an allographic introduction may vary between procedural remarks like the modern preface and a full fledged essay about the text.

The introductory texts to the Pentateuch are a special case. They can both be considered as an introduction to the commentary – and thus would be the authors’ introductions to their way of interpreting the text – and as introductions on how to read the bible text, and then, must be considered as allographic.

- **Bible comments**

Colette Sirat (2001) ⁶ distinguished two types of Bible comments: with or without introduction. In her reasoning the introduction is an indicator of the use by the philosophers in the middle ages of the human ratio as an alternative source of knowledge besides God.

Indeed the comments confront the Biblical text with the questions raised by the mind. A major example of this confrontation is the discussion of Nachmanides [4] on the position of Moses as scribe of the Tora. Did he write the Tora or did he take notes? And if so, what about the passages referring to his own birth or especially his own death. Was this written down already on mount Sinai? Notwithstanding the possible doubts, and at least –as he expresses it “to give his students peace of mind” in difficult times, Nachmanides decided to interpret the texts “as usual by the old generations” ⁷

Another point of discussion in the comments is the way of interpretation according to the literal sense (pshat - פשט) or according to more hidden meanings.

Nachmanides [4] is convinced that the text contains many hidden meanings, not just in the plain text, but also in the form of the letters or the numerical values ⁸. The text (without the spaces nowadays usual) contains more than visible *a prima vista*. This includes an esoteric idea of the presence of the divine names ⁹. Yet a search for esoteric meaning should only be done carefully and under good guidance, otherwise its foolishness ¹⁰

⁴ H.L.Strack & G.Stemberger – Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash – Minneapolis: Fortress press 1992 [1982]

⁵ According to P.Freimark (Das Vorwort als literarische Form in der arabischen Literatur – Ph.D.diss Münster 1967): marker of the start was Ibn Qutayba’s Kitāb adab al-kātib

⁶ NB check in N.de Lange –Hebrew scholarship in the medieval world – Cambridge Univ. Press 2001 p.210-223

⁷ כמנהג הראשונים להניח דעת התלמידים יגיעי הגלות והצרות

⁸ הכל הנמסר למשה רבנו בשערי הבינה הכל נכתב בתורה בפירושו או שרמוזים בתיבות, או בגימטריות, או בצורת האותיות הכתובות כהלכתן

⁹ עוד יש בידינו קבלה של אמת כי כל התורה כולה שמותיו של הקב"ה

¹⁰ כי אני מודיעו נאמנה שלא יושגו דבר ולא יודעו כלל בשום שכל ובינה, זולתי מפי מקובל חכם לאוזן מקובל מבין

Ibn Ezra [3] tries to avoid the speculative interpretations, and wants to base himself on sound grammatical analysis. And if this does not give a conclusive answer, one can base himself on the Onkolos Aramaic Targum, which translates “truthfully”, and “was closer to the original sources”¹¹ or on the Oral Law, which is in agreement with the written Torah¹². Anyhow the simple meaning (pshat-פּשֵׁט) based on grammar, in combination with traditional interpretation is in his view to be preferred.

- **Translator’s introductions**

The focus of the translators in their allographic introductions is sometimes procedural, as in current prefaces, but sometimes they have a special own perspective.

Juda Ibn Tibbon [5] discusses the problem of translation. Three conditions must be fulfilled to make an acceptable translation: 1. knowledge of the ‘from’-language, 2. knowledge of the ‘to’-language, 3. knowledge of the domain.

His son Samuel Ibn Tibbon [8] repeats this list and connects the items to the four Aristotelian causes of any change. He adds a hole list of problems when translating from Arabic to Hebrew, which are the result of specific differences between the two languages. Both his being a non-native speaker and the complicated matter of the Moreh Nebukhim create additional difficulty of translation, but – besides relying on the help of God - he could fortunately use the notes and works of his father and furthermore could have a correspondence with Maimonides himself (at the other side of the Mediterranean) and pose remaining questions. For this exchange, he introduced a new system: the numbering of the chapters, which allows to easily locate his questions and it seems also of advantage for teaching purposes.

Leon Joseph of Carcassonne [14] who translated from Latin into Hebrew complains about the quality of the (other) translations as they occurred often in two steps through a first step in ‘Lo`az’, which may be interpreted as vernacular. ‘*The translations that reached us are very poor, a damaged ladder*’¹³ As far as his own translation is concerned he stresses the difference between the opinion of the author and that of the (literal) translator, who only carries the message. Especially he does not want to be blamed or get complaints for literally translating a passage of the holy Trinity by his author.¹⁴

Standard ingredients

From the Greek and Arabic traditions a number of standard items or topoi were inherited, which can be divided into Aristotelian ‘must knows’ and rhetoric and traditional devices:

- **Aristotelean ‘must know’s**

In the Aristotelian tradition (and that of the Alexandrian Jewish philosophers¹⁵) the reader of a book should at least know the following items: authors name, title, subject, aim, benefit, rank, division, method of instruction.

Although most introductions to Hebrew works from the Middle Ages do contain at least some of these ingredients, they are by no means always and all present. In the *haqdama* of Maimonides’ Mishne Torah [12] we find concisely most of the items mentioned in between other items.

- Author’s name: Moshe ben Maimon ha-Sepharadi
- Title: Mishne Torah
- Subject: legislation according to Tora Law as put down in all books on halakha since the date of Moses

¹¹ ידענו כי יותר ממנו ידע השורשים

¹² וזה לנו האות שסמך משה על תורה שבעל פה, שהיא שמחה לעצם ולבב מרפא, כי אין הפרש בין שתי התורות...

¹³ אמנם הגיע לנו בהעתקה מאד חלושה, סולם רעוע

¹⁴ כאשר תקראו...מהחבר...מתפלל במלכו ובאלוהיו ולמעלה ימנה מאחד משלושונה, ואני העתקתי מלה במלה, אל תדברו עלי חרה ואל תלינו עלי תלונה... כי דעתי רצויה יגיע לכם הספר בלי השמטה והסרון יפול בו

¹⁵ S.Harvey (2008)

- Aim: to collect the whole Oral Law (with other legislation) ordered clear, effortless and undeviated
- Benefit: bring the halakha of what is allowed or forbidden or obligatory or not closer to those who have no opportunity to enter in depth into the Gemara**
- Rank: second only to Tora
- Division: systematic according to subject
- Method of instruction: learn by heart

Wide variety does exist in the way these items are expressed. Here we will make only a few remarks.

○ **Aim:**

Usually a first aim may be relatively concrete and nearby, giving direct information or knowledge. But frequently a more distant aim exists too. For example to Ibn Gabirol in his *Improvement of the moral qualities (Tiqun midot ha-nefesh)* the aim is not only to give a systematic of the relations between the senses, the elements and the ethics, a more distant aim is to reach enduring happiness in the intellectual world (which fits well into a Platonean/Aristotelean priority of the idea over the matter)

Ibn Aldabi [16] wants to supply his readers as a first step with information about the state of the sciences and by this knowledge to lead the reader from darkness to light, from bad to good. And where the nearby aim is to make a concise encyclopaedia the ultimate aim is to provide his readers with fulfillment (*de'a shlema*) which may allow him to see the appearance of the Godly presence (*lir'ot pnei shkina*) and so reach the life in the next world. A supplementary benefit may be that this knowledge may provide a safe heaven in times of worry.

Ibn Sahula [17] has an apologetic aim. He wants to fight the heretics (minim), the philosophers (chokhmat yevvanim), and to counter the arabisation 9. He also wants to educate (lehawien oelehorot) 92 and to show the Jewish heritage to the people of the world. But his deeper aim is to preserve what is hidden and ultimately to find rest for our souls

As part of the aims of the author frequently also the intended audience may be mentioned.

○ **Content:**

The reader should know what he gets if he takes the effort to read. Thus, a general idea of the content is frequently described, but also the way of presenting the content. Regularly a listing is given similar to the current table of content, e.g.:

Sa`adya [1] indicates that he will give in his dictionary both the root and the derivatives. Ibn Aldabi [16] lists the ways (to belief and to God) and their built-up in smaller paths which coincides with the chapters. Ibn Gabirol [18] also gives in his introduction a full list of all chapters

○ **Title:**

Frequently together with the title, the reason is given why this title was chosen, e.g.: Ibn Aldabi [16] states that the title "Pathes of faith" (*Shvilei emuna*) was chosen as the knowledge he provides will lead the reader into the true faith. Maimonides [14] in his Mishne Tora suggests, that his review of the whole Oral Law can serve as a companion on halakha, second only to the Tora.

- **Rhetoric and traditional devices**

In the Arabic literature of the time a number of rhetorical and traditional topics, which is often similarly present in the Hebrew literature¹⁶

¹⁶ cref. Freimark, op. cit.

○ **Basmalla**

The standard Arabic introduction starts with the '*Basmala*', which is usually rendered as "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful" If a writer might have forgotten to start with it the copyist was supposed to add it. The form is standard. A similar invocation of God's help may be present in Hebrew introductions, but neither the placement, nor the text are standard. E.g.

Nachmanides [4] used: "in the name of the great, mighty and revered God"¹⁷, whereas for Maimonides the standard expression 'In the name of G'd, the eternal God'¹⁸ (Gen 21:33) was used.

○ **Prayer**

Frequently the introduction is ended with a prayer for support in finishing the operation of writing or translating. But a similar prayer may also appear somewhere in the middle. Also more general guidance may be requested or praise and gratitude to God may be expressed, e.g.:

Samuel Ibn Tibbon [8] asks God to teach him what to do¹⁹

Leon Joseph [14] prays, that God may help him to complete his translations, that he will show the marvels of His Torah, and that he may send the Messiah²⁰.

Ibn Aldabi [16] hopes in his prayer (tfilla), that God may judge us favorably²¹.

Ibn Gabirol [18] utters his praise: "This all does not withhold me from thanking my Creator and to praise Him for the good he blessed us with en for the light He gave our eyes to let us find the way to understanding a little of the wisdom"²²

○ **Shortness**

A common rhetoric utterance is about the shortness of texts. The practice is sometimes not in agreement with the statement, but the intention is apparently to assure the reader, that the text will not take too much of his time. For example Ibn Aldabi [16] stresses the shortness of his concise representation. He prefers quality over quantity, length may discourage the reader²³

An exception to the normal stress on shortness is Maimonides' introduction to the '8 chapters' [11] where he warns, that "*notwithstanding the shortness of the tractate and its apparent simplicity, it is not simple to everybody and some of the matter in it will not be understandable without an extensive explication*"²⁴.

○ **Humility**

Most of the authors include some formula in which they admit their limited knowledge, both relative to the men of wisdom in previous or their own generations and certainly relative to God. Nachmanides [4] starts his bible introduction by praying in fear and trembling to God and asking for excuse His knowledge, when compared to the hidden knowledge in the Torah, is small as the egg of an ant in comparison to the wheels of heaven.²⁵ Ibn Aldabi [16] stresses his smallness relative to the task asked from him.²⁶ He also weaves in the epitheton small in the acrostichon in adds to his introduction: Meir Ibn Aldabi haqatan.(quite a normal way of expression when signing a document) Others stress their smallness relative to the men of wisdom.

¹⁷ בשם האל הגדול הגבור והנורא

¹⁸ Beshem yy el °olam

¹⁹ וזה אחר שאלי מאלהי להיות עם פי להורות אותי את אשר אעשה

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²¹ hamakom jadinnu lizkut

²² אבל עם כל זה אינני נמנע להודות לבוראי ולשבחו על מה שחננו מן הטובה ועל מה שהאיר עינינו להמציאנו הדרך להבין מעט מן

החכמה

²³ xxx

²⁴ ואפ-על-פי שתראה מבארת וקלה להבין ולעשות מה-שכוללת, אינה קלה על-כל-בני אדם, ואין כל-עניניה גם-כן מובנים מבלי פרוש

אריך

²⁵ ein beytsa ha nemala keneged hagalgal haelyon tseira etc

²⁶ xx

Samuel Ibn Tibbon [8] recognizes his limited knowledge of the Arabic language as he did not grow up in an area where Arabic was being spoken²⁷.

Ibn Gabirol states that [18] *“we will bring only a very small part of what the men of wisdom brought .. I do not want to exploit in this book those who are larger in wisdom in our generation [than me] ...I know that the great fruit I picked of the wisdom is the recognition that I am not wise and I will not refrain from asking [or borrowing from?] colleagues and I will recognize to them that I am coming short”*²⁸

Stressing the own humility may be a rhetoric device to get the sympathy of the reader, but it may es well be a way to circumvent criticism.

Also the excuses about possible mistakes and the request to the audience to correct them may be seen in this perspective, e.g.

Ibn Sahula [17] nederigheid 102+: eigen fouten svp corrigeren¹⁰¹

○ **Being requested**

A common rhetoric device similar to the expression of humility is the commemoration that somebody asked for the work. In the case the work was commissioned and paid for it, some form of gratitude may be expected. But especially when no specific names are being mentioned, one may suspect a rhetoric device. And when names are mentioned it may still be the expression of humility, or even it may be a device to raise the rank by referring to the (then) important name.

Samuel ibn Tibbon refers to a specific person who asked him to translate Aristotle's Physics, which resulted ultimately in Sefer Otot ha-Shamayim [7].

Samuel Ibn Tibbon [8] mentions a specific scholar from Lunel (Provence) as the person who requested his translation of the Moreh Nebukhim, but Solomon Al-Harizi [[9] who translates the same work in the wake of Ibn Tibbon refers to rather vague 'nobles of the Provence' which raises doubt about the real backgrounds of this second translation.

Maimonides wrote his Moreh Nebukhim for a best student whose name is mentioned but may as well have been imaginary and Meir Ibn Aldabi even heard a divine voice ordering and obliging²⁹ him to write his book Shwilei Emuna [16]. In both cases a rhetoric device may be suspected.

Contrary to all this, Sa`adya does not say he was asked, but he indicates it came up in his mind³⁰ to make his knowledge available for those who choose to use the holy language

○ **Citation**

Most authors include biblical citations and other rabbinic literature plentifully, which serves as a discursive element to support the argument and as a rhetoric item to convince the reader of the biblical backing. Some of the authors state explicitly that their way of reasoning is not completely new. It may have been lost but in the times of Mishna or Talmud the same ideas existed.

Maimonides in the *haqdama* to the Mishne Tora [11], thus leaves the honor to the sages *“and know, that the things I say in these chapters and further explanation, are not matters that I invented. However, these are matters that I collected from the sayings of the wise, from their works like Midrash and Talmud etc.”*³¹

Such an argument obviously adds authority and may ward off nasty comments.

Also the reference of Maimonides to the unbroken chain of transmission from Sinai until his days – does not only have similarity with the isnad of the Islamic Traditions

²⁷ ויודע אני ומכיר במיעוט שלימותי בשתי הלשונות

²⁸ וראינו שנביא אחר כן מעט מזער מדברי החכמים ומיליהם... כי לא כוונתי בחיבור זה להועיל מי שהוא גדול ממני בחכמה בדורנו זה

אבל אני יודא כי הסרי הגדול אשר אריתי מן החכמה הוא הכרתי שאיני חכם ושלא אמנע מלשאול חברי

²⁹ ninnení...huyavti we'eshma' et qol hakore

³⁰ ויהי בעלות על-לבי לכתוב את-הספר... 1H68

³¹ ודע, שהדברים אשר אמר בפרקים אלו ובמה-שיבא מן-הפרוש, אינם דברים שבדיתים מעצמי, ולא פרושים שחדשתים. אמנם הם ענינים לקטים מדברי חכמים במדרשות ותלמוד וזולתם מחבוריהם

(hadith)³², and may have been felt as bringing the Jews at par with them in this respect, it forms an evocation of the authority of the tradition as well.³³

- **Merit of sharing knowledge**

Sa`adyah [1, Arabic haqdama] expresses the common topic of the value of sharing knowledge. In view of his fear, that ultimately the Hebrew knowledge may be lost, he says that “therefore he who collected knowledge must teach it and distribute it.”³⁴

- **Book makes all other superfluous**

The sufficiency of the presented book to make all other books superfluous, is a common rhetoric to increase the interest in the book by the reader, and it is also present in Arabic literature of the time.

Maimonides [12] in the introduction to the Mishne Torah claims that all other books between Moses and his time will become superfluous³⁵. Although he did not succeed completely, this strategy was quite successful in retrospect.

Yehuda b. Salomon ha-Cohen [15] similarly claims that readers who want to know all (those) other books will find in this book the same usefulness as comes from those books, so there is no need to lose time on all those other books; spare your time for our “Holy and perfect Torah”³⁶ [15 sub20]. Yet, it give the reader hints (remazim) from the divine knowledge

Leon Joseph [14] on a much more limited level indicates that - because of the surveys he gives - ‘*their will be no need of other book of the names of medicines*’³⁷, at least under the condition that they know the treatments by heart.

My impression is, that the aim of making all other books superfluous, is more frequently found in compilations or encyclopaedias. Probably it is also related to the idea that completeness (shlemoet) could still be reached, mystically to meet God, or technically in one book (the Bible also contains all knowledge).

Author

- **Procedural issues**

Sometimes issues we would expect nowadays in a preface are also present in the introduction. Sa`adya tells that after entering the beginning of words for alphabetic order and the end for rhymed order, he finally needs to supply his students even with the middle for making Hebrew songs³⁸

Samuel Ibn Tibbon tells, that he was first asked to translate the whole physics of Aristotle, but did not have the time and had to deny the request [7]. Ultimately he agreed to translate only the Meteorology, probably because that fitted his own interests too.

- **Personal history**

Many authors give their personal history as part of their position while writing the book. In some cases much time went on in which the ideas supposedly could reach full ripeness, but such statements might as well be rhetoric to support the soundness of the ideas.

Others explain their personal history in times of crisis as the reason for writing the book. One may suppose this is not always rhetorical gaining of the sympathy of the reader (*‘captatio benevolentio’*), but yet care must be taking when interpreting such notices for dating a manuscript or determining the age of the author when writing. E.g.

³² Some authors seem to claim that Pirkei Awot in which this transmission is described, may be of later date than the Mishna, and actually from later than the rise of Islam (had no time to check!)

³³ see on the issue of the authority of tradition Gershon Scholem – Revelation and Tradition as Religious Categories in Judaism Eranos Jahrbuch XXXI (1962) 19-48

³⁴ 1A9: ולכן צריך מי שאסף מדע לעצמו שילמדנו עם חבריו

³⁵

³⁶

³⁷ ולא יצטרכו לעיין בספר שמות הסמים

³⁸ 1A52

Sa`adya [1] states in his Arabic introduction³⁹, that 20 years went by since he composed his book. This could be an indication of the age of writing or of the time span between two editions/introductions, but this far from sure.

Leon Joseph [14] indicates how his search for medical knowledge led him to learn Latin and follow lessons with the great men of the universities of the Provence, where at that time, in his view, is more advanced knowledge than in the traditional Jewish medical circuit.

Ibn Aldabi [16] also tells his personal story in which he says, that he found back the faith of his youth after being expelled from his native town (Toledo) and after a long time of being displaced and feeling sad. Similarly to Ibn Aldabi, Ibn Sahula [17] remarks that the fate and his own mistakes brought him in to a life of wandering which removed him from all his friends⁴⁰ He hopes to find friendship in stead of loneliness by writing his book. This is likely to be a case of '*captatio benevolentiae*'. In more general term he reminds that similarity of minds is joyful.⁴¹

- **place or polemic**

Several fights are being fought and found their expression in the *haqdamot* of the books. e.g.:

A.Ibn Ezra [3] in his *haqdama* mentions five ways of reading the bible, of which only one is his own. The other views, those of the earlier Gaonim, the Karaites, the Mystics and Christians, and even of the European rabbis are subject to his sharp comments: they did not know the earlier knowledge or did not use it and lost their way, they did not use the grammar or included too many speculative forms of reasoning, including mysticism and gematria.

These comments were still quite general and fits in a general discussion. More personal is the polemic between Samuel Ibn Tibbon and Juda Ibn al-Harizi.

Juda Ibn al-Harizi [9] wrote in the introduction to his translation of the Moreh Nebukhim which appeared a few years after a translation by Samuel Ibn Tibbon that – although an "*honest and learned man went before me by translating*"⁴² many questions were left open and remained unanswered. Much clearing and ordering work was still to be done in his opinion. Some of the elite of the Provence had asked him to translate (again) and he felt obliged and put under pressure to do so. As part of his order creating actions he provided a lexicon of foreign words (*milim zarot*) in his translation, such that the reader would be able to look them up.

Samuel Ibn Tibbon then made also a list of foreign words, in which one finds not only translations, but also explication of various philosophical terms. He stressed in the introduction to this book [10] that Ibn al-Harizi was *after* him, and that the lexical part is to his opinion '*full of foolishness, mistakes and failures*'⁴³ Also in the translation '*the mentioned poet erred in his foolish imagination as he did not even understand the simple things in the book*'⁴⁴

Leon Joseph who looked for new medical knowledge in Christian academic circles, complains about the lack of intellectual freedom in the orthodox group: "*added to this is the fear for the Torah scholars who banned the superfluous from our minds by [imposing] their authority on the scientific researcher, not by the force and multitude of their knowledge, but just by their power*"⁴⁵ Also his colleague physicians have no real intention to escape these limitations and search for the ultimate knowledge⁴⁶.

³⁹ 1A48

⁴⁰ "el beit hanedod hewiani" "hirchik mimeni col chawer wekol re`a

⁴¹ nefesj dodim be da`atah tesamack 37

⁴² הקדימני איש גבון ומשכיל להעתיקו

⁴³ מלאהו הבלים וטעויות ומכשולים

⁴⁴ המשורר הנזכר טעה בפירושו בשער ההבלים אשר לו מפני שלא הבין אפילו העניינים הקלים במאמר

⁴⁵ מצורף לזה מיראת התורנים אשר מיתר החרימו מנפשנו אשר ידם תוקפם על המעיינים לא בכחם ורב ידיעתם רק לחזק ידיהם

⁴⁶ והוא שרוב כלל אומתי המתעסק במלאכת הרפואה אין בדעתם להגיע עד תכליתה

- **intellectual property**

Two tendencies are visible with respect to the intellectual property of the text. A first one is that texts may be copied or taken over without problem.

Maimonides [11] acknowledges, that he took whole pieces from other authors, but does not see any negative in such practice, as he does not claim it as his own. He does not refer to the names of the person who said something, for reason of shortness, because one should not get an erroneous impression because of the name. The principle aim is to explain to the reader [not to document].⁴⁷

Samuel Ibn Tibbon [8] notwithstanding correspondence with the author Maimonides, is not sure about the result of his translation, and asks the reader to forgive him any mistakes, and if required to correct these. The corrector will get his reward from God.⁴⁸ Also the author of *Swilei emuna* [16] admits his 'cut and paste'-practice.

On the other hand:

Juda Ibn Tibbon who translated a first chapter of *Hovot ha-Levavot* by Ibn Paquda [5] and in a later stadium also the second chapter [6]. In between Joseph Kimḥi had also translated the book, and Ibn Tibbon is carefull not to translate unless he gets the consent of Kimchi. But finally he does, so there were several versions around, including mixed versions with one chapter from both authors. Therefore, Juda Ibn Tibbon asks potential copyists to indicate which translator did the translation, to avoid that one translator be accused of the mistakes of the other.

And of course we saw that mostly the name of the author is clearly indicated, so apparently it bears importance, though probably more so for specific renewal than for items with the character of an anthology

Form

- **Rhyme and tenakhic style**

Several works are either rhymed completely e.g. Ibn Sahula's *Meshal ha-Qadmoni*. Also the introductions of works which are not in rhyme may be rhymed. And several introduction have a little poem in frond or at the end.

Juda al-Harizi [9] writes his introduction in *maqam* rhyme and ads before his introduction a little poem in praise of Maimonides.

Rhymed forms are also found with Ibn Sahula [17] and ibn Aldabi [16]. The latter also ads a special summarizing poem and a little acrostichon. Also Abraham Ibn Ezra [3] wrote a little introductory poem in which he alludes on his own name.

Sa`adya [1] uses not only a Tenakhic style of writing but even used the traditional melody accents (ta`amim, טעמים) in use for bible reading. Also Ibn Aldabi [16] uses biblical parallels and terminology

- **One or more introductions**

Translators often added an own introduction to the translation (see below)

But also one writer could give more than one introduction. E.g. Ibn Sahula gave one general introduction and introductions for each chapter. Ibn Tibbon added a second introduction when he added a chapter to his translation of Ibn Paquda's *Howot halewawot* Sa`adya Gaon gave two introductions to his `Egron. A Hebrew introduction that apparently aims at the more learned reader, who is able to understand the Hebrew resembling the biblical language. This introduction stresses the holiness of the Hebrew language as part of the historical aims, that God had with the Jewish people. In a second Arabic one, he expresses the need for sharing knowledge and teaching the students pure language . This is in line with his indication of some double target group. On the one hand he wants to assist the poets, so those already more or less versed in the language,

⁴⁷ xx

⁴⁸ והמתקן אחרי יקבל שכרו מאלהיו

by giving them rhyme-words, on the other hand his contribution should be for the wisdom of al Jews (who keep the religion⁴⁹).

Maimonides wrote an extensive commentary to the Misjna and added introductions to the separate chapters. The introduction to the commentary on Pirkei Avot (also called the 8 chapters – פרקים 8) was so extensive, that an introduction to the introduction was added [11].

Language

• **Loss of language**

Several authors indicate the need of books in the Hebrew language to save it from being forgotten. Saadya in the introduction to the Egron [1] complains that in the course of history many other languages entered in the speech of the Jewish people, which was not right⁵⁰. In his view, this loss is the result of insufficient diligence⁵¹. For Tanḥum ha-Yerushalmi [2] the reason is more complicated, and he is less of a language purist. The diaspora also played a role, even already in the Mishnaic times⁵² when the Oral Law was written down, hence words from various sources entered. Yet, he is worried by the loss of most of the language. So the aim of his dictionary is, that it allows to understand Maimonides' Mishne Torah, and by consequence, to know the halakha.

Ibn Sahula [17] also complains that the language lost its luster.⁵³

And together with the language also the knowledge of the Tora en [other] knowledge is lost (saying kriyat shma is considered by the people as an antidote) 20ff. Views on language. Yet two types of action make that the Hebrew language keeps at least some momentum: dictionaries and translation of interesting books into Hebrew.

○ **vocabularies**

For Saadya Hebrew is the divine language⁵⁴ As such it must be kept pure and clear which is a precondition if our souls are to be saved⁵⁵

Also for Ibn Sahula the beauty of the Hebrew language⁵⁶ is associated with Gods exaltation⁵⁷.

Tanḥum ha-Yerushalmi has a much more operational view of language. For him understanding of God's knowledge is only possible after (language) expressions convey the understanding (meaning); "*he who does not see the peel will neither see its content*"⁵⁸. For him 'mistakes' in the Mishnaic languages are not too important. He shows that also in the Tenakhic language there is already variation.

○ **translations**

Tanḥum made his dictionary from Mishnaic Hebrew into Arabic and has no problem to find adequate expressions in that language Such a problem does exist, however, for Yehuda Ibn Tibbon [5] who translatews from Arabic to Hebrew. Arabic is a language with an extremely rich vocabulary and many more conjugations (*binyanim*) than Hebrew. Especially for the then modern sciences, the words were simply lacking, so he complains in his introduction extensively about his shortage of language (*kotser halashon*). He asks the readers not to blame him, if he uses loanwords or mixes biblical Hebrew with rabbinical Hebrew or vice versa. Apparently he or his readers do have a sense of purity of language, but practical problems make practical solutions

⁴⁹ 1H50 ויכתב האוגר את-הספר הזה להיות לחכמה לכל-עם יו לכל-יודעי דת ודין

⁵⁰ 1H35: לשונותם למדנו...ולא נכון כן

⁵¹ 1A23 וכמו שתאבד ידיעת היחיד בגלל מיעוט השקידה, כך תישכח ידיעת הציבור בעזבם את השקידה בה

⁵² 2p4/5

⁵³ zahav ha-mlitsa yu`am 8

⁵⁴ 1H1: לשון הקודש אשר בחר-בו אלהינו...מלאכי קדשהו בו יזמרוהו סלה

⁵⁵ 1H65ff

⁵⁶ 17p8/9:5 לשון גדלתה היפהפיה

⁵⁷ 17p8/9:4 מעלת קדש הנקיה

⁵⁸ 2p3: 29/30

necessary. And even if the Hebrew language is the most beautiful, it still lacked adequate words for his translations.

His son Samuel Ibn Tibbon [8] agreed with the problem but realized, that this is not a specific Hebrew problem. There are always new expressions needed for new meanings, so if the matter is complicated, there is a language shortage in any language⁵⁹ But this is not really to worry about in his opinion. Even the Prophets introduced new words.

Content

Apart from standard elements of an introduction, the ego of the author, form, and the carrying language most introductions focus of course on the content. What are as far as the content is concerned what the reader must know right away.

Three main options are used to do this:

1. focusing on how to read, the method
2. summarizing the quintessence or the main concepts
3. sketch the worldview in which the content fits

- **Key to understanding**

Maimonides used some of his introductions to prepare the basic understanding needed for proper reading. In his introduction to the 8 chapters – themselves the *haqdama* to Pirkei Avot [11] he states that “men will learn from them premises and they will also be entrance and key”⁶⁰. In other words understanding of some principles is the key to full understanding.

In a certain sense one can also categorize the introduction of Abraham Ibn Ezra to the Tora [3] in this category: which are the principles, the basic modes of reading.

- **main concepts**

In other introductions Maimonides took the road of the to the point summary, and some of the main Jewish concepts have been summarized in these introductions. Maimonides summarizes the 613 mitzvot and their division into *does* and *don'ts*, which are the backbone of halakha, in the introduction of his Mishne Torah. Also the 13 ‘principals of faith’ were given in an introduction: the *haqdama* to Mishna chapter *Ḥeleq*.

- **Worldviews**

And finally: Many works in the Hebrew literature are efforts to shape some congruence between Jewish texts and traditions on the one hand and the visions and modes of the outside world on the other hand. Thus, as one may expect, in the introductions where the authors express intent and positioning of their book, one finds in various modalities the potential gap between ‘modern’ science and classical faith being bridged, in those days often Aristotelian scientific views being matched with rabbinical visions.

E.g.

Salomon Ibn Tibbon, found an appealing title for his translation of the *Metereology* of Aristotle in the words of the prophet Jesaia: ‘*Signs of Heaven*’. He wants to apply it out of love for the words of the prophet⁶¹.

However, he realizes that the divine Heaven of which the prophet spoke might not be the same as the physical atmosphere about which the philosopher speaks. He tries to bridge the gap and finally concludes that the prophet may have meant the same signs.

Juda ben Solomon ha-Cohen wrote in his Midrash ha-ḥokhma (Exposition of Wisdom) [15] an encyclopaedia with a review of the then modern sciences in their relation to the Jewish vision. In his introduction he gives a concise review of his worldviews: a tripartite

⁵⁹ ולכל זה יביא קוצר כל לשון בדבר בעניני חכמות עמוקות

⁶⁰ ידע מהם האדם הקדמות ויהי לו גם-כן מבוא ומפתח

⁶¹ refers to Jesaia 10:2 בחרתי לקרוא הספר הזה בשם אותות השמים לחיבת דברי הנביא

division of God's creation finds a parallel in the tripartite division of the knowledge^[15sub1] in a physical - ('*olam ha-havayah / hokhmat ha-teva`*), the astro-mathematical- (*ha-galgali / hokhma ha-limoedim*), and the divine world and sciences (*ha-ruhani / hokhma ha-elohit*)

Although he gives an extensive overview of Aristotle's works, the physical explanations are in his view not sufficiently explicatory. Divine knowledge is superior to the physical knowledge: as the divine world (*'olam ha ruhani*) includes also the other two worlds ^[15 sub 16]⁶² All Aristotelian knowledge actually adds little to what was already known from the Jewish holy books ^[15sub15]. Not all knowledge is attainable through explanation, and humanity must rely on revelation (*qabbalah*) ^[15sub17]

but yet Judah ben Solomon thinks the study of the natural sciences could be a good exercise for "*training the mind gradually in sciences....as there must be many preconditions in a person who want to rise to high level in the exalted studies*"

Ibn Aldabi ^[16] also wrote an encyclopaedia based on a world of Aristotelian physical phenomena, which yet are intensely connected with the divine. Although his encyclopaedia tries to include the then current state of the sciences, the pathways he describe have also strong mystical influences. He does not see a contradiction, in the contrary, one reaches God through the knowledge.

Ibn Gabirol ^[18] set-up a systematic ethical system. In man's behaviour the higher human soul is supposed to control the lower temper. As this process takes place in the interaction between the 5 senses and the 4 elements, he have also here a nice fit between religious ethics and the then recent sciences.

Ibn Sahula ^[17] is similarly ethically inspired and based himself on a view in which the 5 senses are engaged in a struggle with the 5 internal powers in the brain, which have to be kept under control by the mind (*sekhel*). It is interesting to notice that both Ibn Gabirol and Ibn Sahula start their ethics from the senses (compare also with Aristotle's *De Anima*); [*Lijn: further to be studied, not yet fully resolved!*]

Yet, rigid conformity to Aristotelean and Galenian ideas as known in the Arab and Jewish world, becomes gradually too restricting. We saw that Leon Joseph ^[14] resisted the enforcement of these ideas by the rabbinical authorities. The alternative he finds in the emerging universities in the Provence is the scholastical method which results in finding the (improved medical) truth from the discussion in the midst between two opposites as a lily between the⁶³ rocks

Conclusion

The haqdamot in the Hebrew literature of the Middle Ages shows on the one hand a remarkable consistency in types of topics treated, on the other hand a wide variety of approaches and viewpoints.

They sometimes give interesting views of the aims and approaches of the authors, as well as of their personal histories, though care must be taken to distinguish between 'reality' and what may have been rhetoric and traditional topic.

Some of the haqdamot give an interesting view on the match an authors found between the then current scientific visions and the faith.

⁶² Actually this is the Platonic view of the superiority of the world of ideas

⁶³ בשאלותיהם ותשובותיהם על צד הויכוח להוציא האמת ממרכז הפכו בבארם כל דבר בשני הפכים כשושנה בין החוחים