Apropos of this, I am convinced that there is an "in-joke" in his comment on Esther 9. 19 on the words ***mišloaḥ manot***. Surprisingly A. Ibn Ezra tells us that the first word is of the ***binyan*** (verbal form) which we would call "hiph'il". This is strange because the only instances of this root in that ***binyan*** mean, not to send, but to incite or instigate trouble upon someone. Cf. ***wĕ-hišlaḥti***, Lev. 26. 22. The one occurrence of ***mišlaḥat*** (followed by ***mal'ăke ra'im***) appears to bear this out. But A. Ibn Ezra certainly did not think that every verbal noun with a preformative ***mem*** is of the ***binyan hiph'il*** - as witnessed by his comment on ***miqṭar*** (Ex. 30. 1). I think that, to understand his message here (on Esther), we have to place ourselves in his position and think how he felt on Purim. Being a respected person, he would receive ***mišloaḥ manot*** from all sundry, and on a sumptuous scale, but being so chronically poor, he would suffer acute embarrassment when it came to returning the compliment and so, like many harrassed housewife today, he regarded the whole institution as a horrendously distressful imposition.

Another comment on the Pentateuch has an autobigraphical ring but we would never imagine so had we not known of the sad history of his son Isaac. The point is made in more than one place, but one instance is on Ex. 6. 23 where he explains the mention of the wives of Aaron and Eleazear and their respective pedigrees as being the reason why their progeny was chosen to be the hereditary priesthood, in contrast to Moses who had married a Midianitess disqualifying his children from inheriting his excellence. Surely autobiographical?.

And to end, one poingnant comment which could not possibly have had any further significance than to explain a word in the text used in an unusual sense - were it not that: (1) it is a highly emotional passage, and (2) we happen to have knowledge of historical facts that could have loaded this comment. It is not really an instance of a biographical clue of the kind that we have been seeking hitherto, but rather the reverse, a single word into which we may read a wealth of feeling. On Genesis 50. 23, on the word ***yullĕdu***, he says just ***guddĕlu***, that is, that Joseph's great-grandsons were ***raised***, or ***brought up***, "on Joseph's kness". He ***could*** have been thinking of Joseph Kimhi (***Qimḥi***). Or just of the biblical Joseph. But was he not thinking of his own lost posterity?.

IBN EZRA'S HARSH LENGUAGE AND BITING HUMOR: REAL DENUNCIATION OR HISPANIC MANNERISM?

URIEL SIMON
Bar-Ilan University

Abraham Ibn Ezra is well known for his caustic language, biting sarcasm, and merciless polemic style. So long as these are aimed at heretics who are quite outside the pale - such as the ninth-century freethinker and Bible critic Ḥiwi al-Balḫi, of whom he says, "***May the bones of Ḥiwi the dog*** [al-Kalbi] ***be ground to dust***" (long comm. on Ex. 14: 27), or Anan the Karaite, on whose name he plays derisively: "***Anan, may his name be blotted out like a cloud*** ["***anan***"]" (ibid. 34: 21) - he remains firmly within the contemporary conventions of polemic and debate[1]. But should he be taken literally when the objects of such unrestrained condemnation are his fellow grammarians and exegetes? The answer is important in and of itself for a proper understanding of Ibn Ezra's meaning; but it can also be of aid in the identification of those whom he attacked anonymously, because scholars who assume that Ibn Ezra did mean what he wrote tend not to associate the rejected views with those at whom Ibn Ezra would not have directed such scathing criticism.

A classic example of this is the fierce denunciation of the Spanish grammarian whom Ibn Ezra described as "***a great scholar who wrote an important book***" (comm. on Ps. 77: 3). This scholar sought to explain certain Scriptural cruxes by the daring hypothesis of substitution: e.g., where 2 Sam. 21: 8 reads Michal it really means her sister Merab, and where Judges 14: 15 reads "on the seventh day" it really means "the third day". According to the grammarian in question, readers who are familiar with the flexibility of Scriptural rhetoric and take the context into account can understand the true intention by virtue of the fact that the substituted words belong to the same semantic category (proper nouns, numbers). It seems that Ibn Ezra was desirous of shielding the reputation of the advocate of substitution: he avoids

1. This distortion of the name of Ḥiwi's city into a derogatory epithet antedated Ibn Ezra by at least a generation. See JUDAH BAR BARZILAI of Barcelona, ***Peruš Sefer ha-Yĕṣirah***, ed. S. Z. H HALBERSTAM (Berlin 1885), p. 21.

naming him in the 11 passages in his writings where he attacks him. Nevertheless he refers to him as "the prater" (short comm. on Ex. 19: 12), "the madman" (long comm. ad loc.), and "the dreamer" (comm. on Gen. 20: 2), and attacks both the theoretical validity and theological legitimacy of the method of substitution in the most vehement terms: "Heaven forbid! [*ḥalilah wĕ-ḥalilah*]" (*Sefer Saḥot*, ed. G. H. Lippmann [Fürth 1827], p. 72a); "*his book ought to be burnt*" (short comm. on Ex. 21: 8; *Sefer Saḥot*, loc. cit.). Evidently the grammarian in question is R. Jonah Ibn Janāḥ, who devotes chapter 28 of *Sefer ha-Riqmah* to "what is said in one way but means something else"; this identification is spelled out by R. David Qimḥi, Ibn Caspi, and Profiat Duran[2]. Whereas these scholars were not at all astonished that Ibn Ezra could refer to the greatest of the Spanish grammarians as a prater and a madman, recent generations have preferred to ascribe the method of substitution to someone else, chiefly because they cannot imagine that Ibn Ezra would say that the supreme achievement of Hebrew philology on the Iberian Peninsula "ought to be burnt"[3].

We now have direct testimony, in Ibn Ezra's own words, as to the identity of the proponent of substitution. The evidence was concealed from previous students of this question by a slight textual corruption. According to the reading of the printed edition and a number of manuscripts of the long commentary on Dan. 1: 1, Ibn Ezra launches his attack on the advocate of substitution as follows: "*There was a great commentator in Spain who wrote books on grammar*". Four manuscripts, however, add one more word, and read "ten books" Not only is this version more idiomatic and plausible in and of itself, its correctness can be confirmed from the first chapter of *Yĕsod Mora'*), where Ibn Ezra speaks of "the ten books by Rabbi Marinus" (his usual name for Ibn Janāḥ in the works of his French and English period). Thus, even while preserving the anonymity of the proponent of substitution, Ibn Ezra stresses in his commentary on Dan. 1: 1 that one must not be misled by the latter's eminence as a

2. R. David Qimḥi mentions Ibn Janāḥ as an advocate of the method of substitution in at least eight places; in all of them his dependence on Ibn Ezra is manifest: comm. on Jer. 33: 26 and 1 Chron. 2: 15; *Šorašim*, s.vv. G.W.Y, N.Ṭ.H, M.Y, '.M, Š.B.', Ḥ.Š.K. R. JOSEPH IBN CASPI, *'Adne Kesef* (commentary on the Prophets), ed. ISAAC LAST, 2 vol. (London 1911-1915), gloss on 1 Kings 2: 28, demurs from Ibn Janāḥ's opinion (cited directly from *Sefer ha-Riqmah*), using the expression "Heaven forbid!" with regard to the substitution Absalom-Solomon. PROFIAT DURAN, *Ma'ăśeh 'Efod*, ed. FRIEDLAENDER-COHEN (Vienna 1865), p. 150, refers directly to chapter 28 of *Sefer ha-Riqmah* while investigating the validity of 13 cases of substitution.

3. This is the opinion of the following: W. BACHER, *Aus der Schrifterklärung des Abulwalid Merwan ibn Ganah* (Leipzig, 1889), pp. 28-29; D. HERZOG, "Die 'Wortvertauschungen' im Kitab al-Luma des Abulvalid Merwan Ibn Ganah und in den Schriften A. Ibn Esra's", *MGWJ* 53 (1909) 709-719, 54 (1910) 82-102; W. BACHER, "Die Wortvertauschung im Kitab al-Luma des Abulvalid", *MGWJ* 55 (1911) 233-240; EZRA FLEISCHER, "The Literary Status of *Šĕ'elot 'ătiqot* and the Identity of its Author", *HUCA* 38 (1967), Hebrew section pp. 17-22; M. PEREZ, "Substitution of One Word for Another as an Exegetical Method used by Medieval Scholars", *Studies in Bible and Exegesis* 2, ed. U. SIMON (Ramat Gan, Israel, 1986), pp. 221-226.

grammarian; his multifaceted scholarly enterprise must not deter us from criticizing the method of substitution. Ibn Ezra concludes vehemently (the words that allude to the title of chapter 28 of *Sefer ha-Riqmah* are emphasized): "*How is it linguistically possible that a man says one word when he means another? One who says something of this nature [all MSS except one: like this] should be considered insane. . . . It would have been better for him to say "I don't know" rather than interchanging the words of the living God*".

The harsh words that Ibn Ezra hurls against the advocate of substitution are also employed by him against other scholars, including the greatest authors on whose works he drew. Thus he applies the epithet "prater" (*mahbil* - after Jer. 23: 16) not only to an anonymous scholar who interchanged letters with a similar written form (here too he means Ibn Janāḥ, who did this in *Sefer ha-Riqmah*, p. 107 - see *Saḥot*, p. 31a), but also to those who raised the silly question: how did Adam and Eve sew their girdles without a needle? (comm. on Gen. 3: 6). The rejection expressed by "heaven forbid" is also directed against the opinion "that the prophet uses numerological terms or allusions" (short comm. on Ex. 1: 1); the sarcastic "maybe he saw it in a dream" is applied more than once to Saadiah Gaon (comm. on Gen. 2: 11; short and long comm. on Ex. 34: 1). The statement that seems to represent the zenith of condemnation - "his book ought to be burnt" - is also made about Yiṣḥaqi (a Spanish exegete known to us only from the eight references to him in Ibn Ezra's work) in reaction to the latter's dating the list of Edomite kings in Genesis 36 to the time of King Jehoshaphat (see comm. on Gen. 36: 31). R. Joseph Bonfils (*Tob 'Elem*) the Spaniard expressed his astonishment at this in his supercommentary on Ibn Ezra: "*Did not R. Abraham himself hint, at the beginning of Deuteronomy (1: 2), that later prophets added words and even [variant reading: and also] verses to the Torah!*"[4] Bonfils' answer to his own question is not persuasive; a better way to resolve the contradiction between what Ibn Ezra permitted to himself but forbade to another rests on two assumptions: first, what is permissible in the total absence of an alternative is utterly forbidden when a reasonable exegetical solution does exist[5], second, Ibn Ezra's "it ought to be burnt" is not quite so severe as it sounds.

In fact this caustic remark is repeated in a context where we would never expect to find it: in the *Defense of Saadiah* (§52)[6], where Ibn Ezra disagrees with

4. D. HERZOG, ed., *Josef Bonfils (Tobh Elem) und sein Werk Ṣophnath Pan'eah*, 1-2 (Heidelberg 1911-1930), vol. 1, p. 149.

5. For substantiation of the restriction of radical exegetical measures to cases of absolute necessity see U. SIMON, *Four Approaches to the Books of Psalms: From Saadya Gaon to Abraham Ibn-Ezra* (Ramat Gan 1982), pp. 160-162, 175-176, 223, 226 (Heb.).

6. G. H. LIPPMANN, ed., ABRAHAM IBN-ESRA, *Sephat Jether* (Frankfurt a.M., 1843), p. 17a.

what Dunash ben Labrat wrote in his Criticism of Saadiah (§55)[7]. Unlike Yiṣḥaqi, Dunash did not claim that a section of the Pentateuch was composed at a later date, nor, like Ibn Janāḥ, did he replace one word with another. His crime was to gloss the word *re'eka* in Ps. 139: 17 ("How weighty are *re'eka*, O God") in the sense of "your friends", whereas Saadiah and Ibn Ezra explained it as meaning "your thoughts", basing themselves on *ra'yon libbo* in Eccles. 2: 22. For this Ibn Ezra attacked him in the following terms: "*I say that his book ought to be burnt, because he says that God, who is One, has comrades and associates. Only homiletically [i.e., only in homiletic exegesis (dĕraš) can this be said without erring and misleading] but not as the plain meaning [pĕšaṭ], Heaven forbid! Heaven forbid! He has spoken falsehood of the Lord*"[8]. Later he offers proofs that Saadiah's interpretation is correct, rebuts Dunash from the next verse ("I count them – they exceed the grains of sand"), and winds up by rejecting the legitimacy of Dunash's gloss: "*He compounded the evil by saying that the friends of the Lord are numberless*".

Just as it is inconceivable that Ibn Ezra really meant that Dunash's book should be burnt on account of a mistaken gloss, it is equally clear that he did not mean it about so important a work as *Sefer ha-Riqmah*, nor even about Yiṣḥaqi's book. An additional proof that such aggressive statements should not be understood literally comes from Ibn Ezra's blistering attack on Saadiah Gaon's assertion that the second set of tablets were superior to the first: "*There is no need to answer the Gaon on this point, for <I have seen them> [all MSS: his proofs] are like a dream, neither adding nor subtracting; his mouth spouts arrogance, and anyone who says this should be flogged*" (short comm. on Ex. 34: 1). True, some have questioned the reliability of the text here[9], but an examination of the 14 extant complete manuscripts of the short commentary reveals that all of them contain the reading "anyone who says this should be flogged". Thus there is no textual basis for doubt concerning the possibility that Ibn Ezra would indeed use such language with

7. DUNAŠ BEN LABRAṬ, *Sefer Tĕšubot 'al Rabbi Sa'adiah Ga'on*, ed. R. SCHROETER (Breslau 1886; repr. Israel 1971).

8. The expression "his book ought to be burnt" is evidently derived from a Talmudic passage: "The blank spaces and the Books of the Minnim (heretics), we may not save them from a fire [on the Sabbath]. R. José said: On weekdays one must cut out the Divine Names which they contain, hide them, and burn the rest. R. Tarfon said: May I bury my sons if I would not burn them together with their Divine Names if they came to my hand" (BT *Shabbat* 116a); or perhaps from the words of Resh Lakish: "R. Simeon b. Lakish said: There are many verses which to all appearances ought to be burnt [like the books of Homer or like the books of heretics], but are really essential elements in the Torah. [E. g.,] it is written, 'And the Avvim that dwelt in villages as far as Gaza' (Deut. 2: 23)" (BT *Ḥullin* 60b, tr. EPSTEIN) – on which RASHI comments: "There are [texts] that readers may think merit burning, ought not to have been written, that are not required in the Torah, and it is a disgrace for them to be linked with the sacred".

9. N. BEN-MENACHEM, *Ibn Ezra Studies* (Jerusalem 1978), p. 54 (Heb.); A. LIPSHITZ, *Ibn Ezra Studies* (Jerusalem 1982), p. 197, n. 209 (Heb.).

reference to the man whom he described as the "foremost spokesman in every field"[10].

This means that when he uses harsh language against an author or a work Ibn Ezra means no more than to give vehement expression to his genuine anxiety over the damage liable to be caused by a fallacious exegetical method or erroneous gloss. In almost all of the 161 sections of the *Defense of Saadiah* Ibn Ezra refutes Dunash with perfect equanimity; but when it comes to *re'eka* he goes wild and furiously trumpets a warning against the danger to the belief in God's unity latent in the philological error. Ibn Ezra's anxiety on this point follows directly from the fundamental principle of the Spanish scholars that philology and theology are interrelated disciplines, each protecting the other: philology worthy of the name protects against errors of doctrine, while pure belief shields against philological errors. Hebrew linguistics and Scriptural exegesis are both holy labors, because the scientific endeavor has far-reaching results in the realm of doctrine – just as it can illuminate the texts it can also befog them. Ibn Janāḥ gives a classic expression of this attitude at the beginning of the introduction to his dictionary, *Sefer ha-Šorašim*: "We shall attain the goal that we can reach if we are careful about it according to our capacity and guard according to our strength, as we are obliged to do when interpreting the words of God, His name be blessed" (p. 1). In the body of the introduction he accordingly states that he will be extremely cautious in presenting the biliteral roots, because of "alacrity and sympathy for the language and caution in matters of faith" (p. 5). It is because of this idea that Ibn Ezra sharply attacks not only the negative doctrinal implications of the erroneous gloss on a single word in Psalms, but also the corruption caused by Dunash's own faulty terminology: "*If I did not know that he was a savant in his generation [MS: the savant of his generation], I would say, "His talk begins as silliness" (Eccles. 10: 13), because he starts out by saying that "the Gaon erred in his interpretation [*pittaron*]", and in this vein he always says: "he also interpreted [*wĕ-'od patar*]". Where in Scripture can we find this verb used, except for interpreting a dream? Thus he would turn the words of the prophets, whose words are true, into a dream that needs to be interpreted! It would have been more correct to say: "He also "explained" [peraš] or "glossed" [be'er]*" (introduction to the *Defense of Saadiah Gaon*). Against the background of this union of philological and theological argumentation it is not surprising that when Ibn Ezra entreats the reader not to be seduced by the erroneous semantic method of substitution he prefaces his logical argument with a clearly doctrinal warning: "*Guard yourself well and do not believe in the words of the grammarian. . . . Heaven forbid! Heaven forbid! For this is not true in secular texts, and how much less in the words of the living God. His book ought to be burnt*" (*Ṣaḥot*, p. 72a).

10. Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Mozne Lĕšon ha-Qodeš* (Hebrew Grammar), ed. W. HEIDENHEIM (Offenbach 1791), p. 1b.

The caustic tone and extreme exaggeration in linguistic and exegetical debate were nourished not only by a sincere anxiety about negative doctrinal implications, but also by the Iberian love of biting sarcasm and elegant polemics. To the theological dimension is superadded the esthetic and humoristic one - witty sarcasm in the service of the quest for truth. R. Abraham ben David of Posquières described this aspect of the Spanish culture of debate in order to explain and justify his harsh attack against Rabbi Zeraḥiah ha-Levi on a matter of halakhah:

"The Lord God knows and Israel knew, whether I have spoken thus far in anger or in fury, in quarrel or war. May [God] not save me today, if it is not because I saw that you chose to follow the customs of the Spaniards, who, although they love one another, seem to be enemies when they dispute a point of Torah, that I said that I too will examine whether he is following their teaching? Thus I have written you a love letter and a billet-doux and witticisms for our delight. But Heaven forbid if there was any scorn in it"[11].

In fact, Ibn Ezra did not invent the acerbic expressions with which he attacks his opponents, but inherited from his predecessors the old and well-worn coinages that should not be taken too seriously. Dunash, for example, in his refutation of Menaḥem, instructed his adversary to "learn to pass your words through the fire" (p. 77), hardly expecting Menaḥem to destroy his own works. Similarly, Dunash's pupil Yehudi Ibn Sheshet made fun of Menaḥem's disciples - *"Consider well that you will always be crying about the words of the living God that you turn upside down"*[12] - referred to them by the insulting terms "imbeciles" (p. 24), "madmen" (p. 35), and "congregation of fools" (p. 37), and even concluded his work with the following condescending words: *"Finished are these refutations / that blot out the Menaḥem's vapidities like clouds; / were not for the precept of the One perfect in knowledge / that "there is no peace* (šalom) *for the wicked" / I would have said to his bad students: / "Farewell* (šalom)*, O assembly of miscreants"* (p. 44).

Just as this style did not originate with Ibn Ezra, neither did it end with him. Among the testimonials to this are Nahmanides' attacks on him: *"Here R. Abraham abandoned his own path of plain meaning and began to prophesy falsely"* (comm. on Gen. 9:18); *"boiling gold should be poured in the mouth of this scholar because of his refutation of the Sages regarding Phineas and others in many places"* (comm. on Gen. 46: 15); *"his mouth spouts nonsense [hebel]"* (comm. on Ex. 22: 19); *"let us not be seduced by the nonsense of R. Abraham . . . these are empty words"*

11. R. ABRAHAM BEN DAVID, *Tĕšubot u-Pĕsaqim*, ed. JOSEPH KAFAH (Jerusalem, 1964), p. 114.

12. YEHUDI IBN ŠEŠET, *Tĕšubot Talmid Dunaš Ha-Levi ben Labrat*, ed. Z. STERN (Vienna 1870; repr. Jerusalem 1968), p. 22.

(comm. on Lev. 27: 29)[13].

Against this background we should hardly be astonished that Ibn Ezra describes the progress of a grammatical dispute as if it were a personal confrontation: *"He was succeeded by Rabbi Marinus - he too was a great grammarian - who heaped scorn on those who say that the word is derived from . . . and I heap scorn on him"* (*Šaḥot*, p. 13b; and, in the same vein, p. 49a). Nor should we be surprised that he phrases a reference to an exegetical argument in supercilious terms of personal rivalry: *"In the section* These are the records *you will laugh at the words of the Gaon"* (short comm. on Ex. 25:39). But as fond as he was of ridicule, he was even fonder of sarcasm and witty jests, which he uses to attack those both near and far - and to a certain extent even himself. Thus he flogs the Karaite scholars when he catches them in gross errors: *"Break its neck [*wĕ-ʿarafto*] - some say: write [the word] "holy" on the back of its neck; whoever says that, I say he is a stiff-necked donkey"* (long comm. on Ex. 13:13); or, more sarcastically: *"Ben Zuta said that* reʿehu *is an adjective modifying 'ox,' and did not see that "a man's ox" is a construct form, just like "his neighbor's ox [*šor reʿehu*]"; the ox has no fellow* (reaʿ) *except for Ben Zuta himself"* (long comm. on Ex. 21:35); or, adding rhyme to the witty sarcasm: *"Ben Zuta thought he would climb the ladder of wisdom with his follies / but his privy parts were exposed upon it; / this will befall every heretic*[14] */ who does not believe in the words of our Sages"* (long comm. on Ex. 20:23)[15]. Nor does he refrain from ridiculing Ibn Janāḥ when the latter exceeded his scope and grounded a philological hypothesis on faulty astronomy:

*"Rabbi Marinus said that there was only one "ivory palace," that constructed by Ahab [as related in 1 Kings 22: 39], but [Amos] associated [other] mansions with it [i.e., Amos calls the ivory palace and the mansions alongside it "the ivory palaces"], like "their constellations [*kĕsilĕhem*]" (Isa. 13: 10), even though there is only one [constellation called]* kĕsil *in the sky* [see "Sefer ha-Riqmah", pp. 294-295] *But I say that if there is only one* kĕsil *in heaven there are many on*

13. For more of the same see "Nachmanides' criticism of Ibn Ezra's Commentaries" in LIPSHITZ, *Ibn Ezra Studies*, pp. 22-92. Don Isaac Abarbanel, too, used such expressions with regard to Ibn Ezra; these were collected by LIPSHITZ under the heading, "Terms of Criticism and Rejection" in the same volume, pp. 212-215.

14. In later printings the reading here is *'apiqoros*, which spoils the rhyme, but appeased the Christian censors who thought that the derogatory term *min* always referred to Christians.

15. This witty sarcasm, too, is merely a conventional dismissal of vain pretensions. Thus Ibn Gabirol attacked one who had plagiarized a poem of his: "Acquire discernment, gain morality and intelligence / and do not ascend the steps of the altar of poetry; // For if you do ascend its steps, you will soon / expose your privy parts and nakedness!" (H. SCHIRMANN, *Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence* [Jerusalem-Tel Aviv 19612], vol. 1a, p. 227 [#86b]). Similarly, LEVI IBN ALTABBAN was modest in his answer to the criticism of Moses Ibn Ezra: *"If in rhymed prose / my soul trembles / how can I have any hope / in verse? // And if on stairs / I ascend to / poetry my / nakedness will be exposed"* (ibid., vol. 1b, p. 339 [#137]).

earth [playing on "kĕsil" = fool], *and he is one of them. I will explain this [in my commentary] on the verse "Who made the Pleiades and Orion [*kimah u-kĕsil*]" (Amos 5:8)*[16]. (comm. on Amos 3:15).

He even attacks himself indirectly, after realizing that he had formerly subscribed to an erroneous opinion: in his commentary on Deut. 28: 32, referring to the verse "And King David was pining away for Absalom" (2 Sam. 13: 39), he writes: *"The [verse] is not lacking [the word]* nefeš *[soul], as was held by that one lacking knowledge; for* wa-tĕkal *is a transitive verb, and the subject is [implicit], like "whom [she] bore [to Levi in Egypt]" (Num. 26: 59)"*[17]. From the fragmentary commentary on Gen. 2: 2 we learn that there was more than one who lacked knowledge: *"All the grammarians agree unanimously that [in 2 Sam. 13: 39] the word* nefeš *is missing; but this is wrong, because in that case [i.e., as an intransitive verb] it should have [been vocalized]* wa-tékel *in the* qal" (ed. Weiser, p. 165)[18]. And he had once been among their number, as is attested by his first essay at a grammar book: *"Know that there are places in Scripture where a word is missing; I cannot count them because they are as multitudinous as locusts, but these are a few of them: "King David was pining away" means David's soul"* (*Moznayyim*, p. 5a; cf. p. 34b). When Ibn Ezra recanted[19] he wanted to underscore the erroneous nature of this opinion by means of a statement whose vehemence is reinforced by its wit[20]. It is clear that when he says that all who are ignorant of the fact that *wa-tĕkal* is a transitive verb lack knowledge he is far from implying that all the grammarians — and even he himself before he had seen the light — should be viewed

16. In his commentary on Amos 5: 8 Ibn Ezra deals with the astronomical issue, and concludes as follows: "Thus *kĕsil* is opposite *kimah* and is not one, but many, and the heart of Scorpio is [one] of them". For an explanation see URIEL SIMON, *A Critical Annotated Edition of Abraham Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, vol. 1 (Ramat Gan 1989), ad loc.

17. R. David Qimḥi, in his commentary on 2 Sam. 13: 39, is another who believes that the word *nefeš* is missing; but he also explains Ibn Ezra's rather difficult gloss as follows: the implicit subject is David's wife - Absalom's mother - who pestered David until he wanted to have one of his servants go out (hence *la-set*) after Absalom.

18. He returns to this in *Śafah Bĕrurah* (BEN-MENACHEM, *Ibn Ezra Studies*, pp. 84-86); there too he presents his position as opposed to that of "all the commentators". BEN MENACHEM, in note 80, enumerates the following who held the opposite opinion: Targum Jonathan, the Midrash of the 32 Methodological Principles, David ben Abraham al-Fasi, Judah Ḥayyuj, and Jonah Ibn Janāḥ.

19. This sequence was made clear by JOSEPH BONFILS: "At first, when he wrote *Moznayyim* (Rome 1140) he borrowed what they had said because he had not found a better interpretation; but later, when he wrote his commentary on the Pentateuch (Lucca 1145) he had discovered the truth and recanted and rejected what the grammarians had said" (*Ṣafenat Pa'ne'aḥ* on Deut. 28: 32).

20. Another example of the unequivocal recantation of a previously held opinion, but not phrased so sharply, can be found in the long commentary on the Pentateuch (Rouen 1153): "He who said that [Moses] had forgotten the Egyptian language is wrong, for he says two things - "slow of speech and slow of tongue" (comm. on Ex. 4:10). The reference is to what he himself had written in his short commentary ad loc. (Lucca 1145).

as illiterates boors; rather, he means no more than that the conventional and universally accepted interpretation is without foundation. By the same token, it is equally clear that when he refers to Ibn Janāḥ as a prater and says that his book ought to be burnt he does not mean to denigrate the greatest Hebrew grammarian and ban use of his book, but merely to say that on the matter of substitutions he wrote nonsense liable to cause serious harm.

By contrast, when Ibn Ezra really did want to block the dissemination of an erroneous and dangerous interpretation he did not condemn the book to the fire with extravagant rhetorical flourishes but had recourse to severe denunciations that cannot be misunderstood. In the preface to the *Letter of the Sabbath* Ibn Ezra describes his reaction when he discovered, one Sabbath night, that his students had brought to his house "commentaries on the Torah" that quoted an interpretation holding that the plain meaning of the verse "there was evening and there was morning, one day" (Gen. 1: 5) is that for the Pentateuch the day begins in the morning rather than in the evening[21]:

"In a flash I almost rent my clothes and I also almost rent this commentary, for I said: It is better to desecrate one Sabbath that Israel not desecrate many Sabbaths, if they see this wicked interpretation, and we shall also all be held up to scorn and derision in the eyes of the Gentiles. But I restrained myself out of respect for the Sabbath . . . until I could write a long epistle to explain when the day begins according to the Torah, to dislodge an obstacle and remove a snare and trap. . . . He who accepts this interpretation - may God wreak the vengeance of the Sabbath on him; he who reads it aloud - may his tongue stick to the roof of his mouth; and the scribe who transcribes it in a commentary on the Torah - may his arm wither and his right eye go dim[22].

In addition to the methodological, exegetical, and astronomical refutation of the erroneous interpretation, whose implications are pregnant with disaster not only for the observance of the Sabbath at the appropriate time but also for the status of Israel among the Christians, he sincerely seeks to suppress it. While being careful to preserve the honor and anonymity of the author of the commentary in question, he proclaimed the vengeance of the Sabbath against anyone who accepted that devastating interpretation and pronounced vigorous curses against anyone who read it aloud to others and against any scribe (copyist or author) who might write it down.

21. Graetz identified Rashbam as the author of the commentary, principally on the basis of linguistic affinities between the citation in the *Letter of the Sabbath* and Rashbam's commentary on Gen. 1:5 and in light of the lofty status of the unnamed adversary, reflected in the demand by the legate of the Sabbath that Ibn Ezra respect no man in his fight on behalf of the Sabbath. (See H. GRAETZ, *History of the Jews*, vol. 3 [Philadelphia 1894], pp. 373-374. Graetz was certainly correct; see in further detail U. SIMON, "The Exegetical Method of A. Ibn Ezra, as Revealed in Three Interpretations of a Biblical Passage," *Bar-Ilan Annual* 3 (1965), pp. 130-138 (Heb.).

22. Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Letter of the Sabbath*, ed. by M. FRIEDLAENDER, appendix to "Ibn Ezra in England," *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 2 (1894/5), p. 63.

Ibn Ezra did not tear Yiṣḥaqi's book to shreds and did not utter imprecations against those who disseminated it. Evidently he considered the potential damage from that prater's nonsense to be much less than that liable to ensue from the dangerous commentary of R. Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam), which he saw as undermining the Torah's definition of "day". In order to combat it effectively Ibn Ezra had to make it absolutely clear to his readers that everything he said was meant in earnest and that in this case his condemnation should be taken literally. The only way to do this is by putting aside all clichés and idioms and mannered exaggerations in favor of concrete and particular language. The exception thereby proves the rule.

Translated by LENN J. SCHRAMM

BEHOLDING THE SPLENDOR OF THE CREATOR: PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTIONS OF THE SOUL IN THE POETRY OF ABRAHAM IBN EZRA

ADENA TANENBAUM
Oxford Postgr.Cent.

I

Philosophy and poetry were central to Andalusian Jewish cultural life during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Although distinct in form and content, these two disciplines frequently converged. Philosophy permeated the Jewish intellectual environment in Islamic Spain to the point where it penetrated diverse literary genres. From Solomon Ibn Gabirol on, the most renowned of the Hispano-Jewish poets were conversant with speculative literature. When read against the background of contemporary Islamic and Jewish theoretical writings, the Hebrew poetry which they produced often reveals philosophical considerations.

Psychology, the science pertaining to the soul and its functions, occupied a place of utmost importance in medieval Islamic and Jewish speculative thought. At the same time, as a result of liturgical considerations, the soul figured prominently in Andalusian ***piyyuṭ***. Thus, the soul is a singularly suitable vehicle for examining the impact of philosophy on the Hebrew liturgical poetry of the Spanish school.

Outstanding among Andalusian Hebrew poets, Abraham Ibn Ezra is a prime example of a philosophically informed ***payyeṭan***. Like his biblical exegesis, his poetry reflects a particular interest in psychology. Underlying an extraordinary number of Ibn Ezra's liturgical compositions are notions of the origin, nature and destiny of the soul which derive from the medieval Islamic and Jewish Neoplatonic tradition. In most, if not all of these ***piyyuṭim***, Ibn Ezra fuses technical philosophical ideas with biblical and rabbinic conceptions of the individual soul and its relationship to God.

Ibn Ezra's philosophical views are not to be found in any one systematic or connected work. Rather, as Isaac Husik has remarked, they are "scattered through his