

Daniel J. Silver, "Who Denounced the Moreh?", Fred Rosner et.all., Abraham Maimonides' Wars of the Lord and the Maimonidean Controversy, Haifa, 2012

WHO DENOUNCED THE MOREH? Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver

Early in the 1230's, possibly in December of 1232,¹ probably at Montpellier,² folios of the *Moreh Nebuchim* were put to the flame. This censorship by fire was one of the first, if not the first, ecclesiastically encouraged book burning of the Middle Ages.³

1. The exact date of the burning is uncertain. Abraham Maimonides was informed of these events in January of 1235, and presumed the burning to have taken place three years before (Abraham Maimonides, *Milhamot Adonai*, ed. R. Margoliot, Jerusalem, 1933, p. 54). The only other clearly dated document is the Saragossa counterban of July-August 1232 (*Kobetz Teshubot ha-Rambam*, ed. A. E. Lichtenberg, Leipzig 1859 [hereafter KTR] III: 5b), which on internal evidence must be dated before the burning and hence provides us a *terminus a quo*. We know also that the David Kimhi-Judah b. Joseph Alfakhar exchange of letters took place after the promulgation of the Saragossa ban (KTR III:1a). It is only in his third letter that Kimhi "proves" his estimate of Solomon by citing the news of the burning. The burning, therefore, can not be placed earlier than December 1232 or January 1233.
2. The contemporary but not eye witness account of David Kimhi placed the denunciation of the *Moreh* in Montpellier (KTR III: 4b). There is no reason to doubt this detail. Hillel of Verona, whose testimony is dated sixty years after the fact, placed it in Paris (KTR III:14a), but this is to be doubted and resulted, probably, from a confusion of the Talmud burning of 1240 at Paris with the *Moreh* affair eight or so years before.
3. Late in the century, the Jewish community of Rome received a certification as to the broad acceptability of the *Moreh* from Pope Nicholas III, who was particularly happy with Maimonides' arguments against the Aristotelian doctrine of the eternity of matter. The history of scholastic citation from the *Moreh* is well known. What, then, did the Church find objectionable at this time and in this place? It is hard to tell. In the entire thirteenth century there is only one almost offhanded catalogue of errors in the *Moreh* (an anonymous Parisian list, *Tractatus de Erroribus Philosophorum Aristotelis, Averrois, Avicennae, Algazelis, Alkindi, Et Rabbi Moysis*. Cf. I. Husik, "An Anonymous Christian Critic of Maimonides," *JQR*, Vol. II [1911], pp. 159-190). This drama took place in a Provence suffering the inquisitional aftermath of the Albigensian Crusade. Any subtle doctrine might have been momentarily declared a seedbed of heresy. Another explanation centers on the role of the newly commissioned Dominican friars missionary. The revived interest of the Church in the techniques of conversion made the monks sharply aware of rabbinic developments. The stereotype of the Bible dependent and Bible limited Jew was shattered. The *Mishnah Deuterosis* had to be confronted.

This burning climaxed that clash of personalities and philosophies of religious survival which focused on the *Moreh* – a clash which history has come to call the Maimonidean controversy.⁴ Familiar historical account identifies three chief anti-Maimonidean protagonists, paints these in dark colors, and convicts them of complicity in the burning: as senior, Solomon b. Abraham of Montpellier, with his disciples, David b. Saul and Jonah b. Abraham Gerundi. Graetz set the pattern by describing Solomon as "a pious, honorable man, learned in the Talmud, but of perverted notions."⁵ His theology was "gross and anthropomorphic", and he was by nature "bigoted and passionate."⁶ Solomon borrowed the idea of enforced conformity from the Church Militant. "With these murderers (*sic*) Rabbi Solomon, the upholder of the Talmud, and of the literal interpretation of the Holy Writ, associated himself. He and his disciple Jonah said to the Dominicans: 'You burn your heretics, persecute ours also...!' They also read dangerous passages from Maimuni's composition to the inquisitors, at which the infatuated monks must have felt a shudder of holy terror. The Dominicans and the Franciscans did not wait for a second invitation to intervene."⁷ Modern interpretations tone down the adjectives but do not essentially modify the charge. Thus Neuman:

A redoubtable opponent in the person of the revered Talmudist, Solomon b. Abraham of Montpellier, arose to engage the adherents of philosophy in vigorous combat, and he was blindly followed by two fanatical disciples... Standing almost alone, except for the support of two of his disciples, Solomon anathematized the philosophic

The *Moreh*, with its extensive Midrashic element, may have been seen as a justification of a "false" Biblical interpretation which denied truths on which Christian traditions were based. Certainly the burning of the Talmud within the decade grew out of this attitude.

4. For a complete story of the controversy, see my forthcoming *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy, 1180-1240*.
5. Graetz, H., *A History of the Jews*, Vol. III Philadelphia, 1894, p. 528.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 528
7. *Ibid.*, p. 542.

writings of Maimonides, interdicted the sciences and pronounced the sentence of excommunication against those who engaged in the study of profane literature or who treated the Bible allegorically and dealt too freely with the aggadic portions of the Talmud... Realizing his failing strength and blinded by fanatic zeal, Solomon finally resorted to the execrable measure of denouncing the philosophic works of Maimonides to the Inquisition in Montpellier as heretical and dangerous.⁸

It is our contention that these three men have been unfairly drawn and unfairly convicted. Had they denounced the *Moreh*, they would have become guilty of informing. The *malshin* or the *moser*, i.e., the informer, was guilty of a capital crime. The Jewish community retained effective criminal jurisdiction in the area of *malshinut*.⁹ At the very least anathema would have been pronounced against them. It goes without saying that no subsequent authority would have presumed to cite the opinion of a *malshin* in *halachic* matters. It is a matter of moment, then, that each "informer" was subsequently defended and cited as an *halachic* authority and, at least in the case of Jonah Gerundi, given high communal position.

Moreover, this is more than a matter of overdue character rehabilitation. Any understanding of the issues of the Maimonidean controversy presumes an appreciation of the major protagonists. If, as is the case, Solomon *et al* were neither

8. Neuman, A., *The Jews in Spain*, vol. II, Philadelphia, 1949, p. 119 f. Cf. Saracheck, J., *Faith and Reason: The Conflict over the Rationalism of Maimonides*, Williamsport, 1935, p. 77 ff., "Thus occurred the shameful public burning of the *Guide* and the *Book of Knowledge*. It was done at the instigation of the strict traditionalists, with the approval of the Cardinal Romanus, the Judge of the heresy court." Cf. also Zinberg, I., *Toldot Safriot Yisrael*, Vol. I, Tel Aviv, 1959, p. 277 f.
9. Cf. Kaufmann, "Jewish Informers in the Middle Ages," *JQR*, Vol. VIII (1898), pp. 217-238 for specific citations of excommunications pronounced and for evidence of the actual execution of the culprit. Maimonides himself provides us the information that these laws were still enforced (*Mishneh Torah, Hobe' u-Mazik* 8: 10-11).

benighted nor fanatic, it becomes doubtful that the *causus belli* was, as it has so often been painted, a clash of the open minded against the narrow and the blindly traditional.

The facts need briefly to be reconstructed. Solomon b. Abraham and his disciples some time before 1232, possibly as early as two decades before, became concerned that certain Jews denigrated traditional teaching, openly flaunted certain religious requirements, interpreted Biblical and Talmudic statements as mere pedagogic example or allegorical fancy, and justified all such activity on the authority of Maimonides.¹⁰ Solomon did not accuse Maimonides or his books of being heretic. Translators had abused the text. Maimonides had intended the *Moreh* to be a "reserved" doctrine taught individually to thoroughly qualified students. The translators had misled some by inaccurate paraphrase. The translators were the villains of the piece for they had published without authority, and many who were intellectually and spiritually unprepared had sampled the *Moreh's* ideas to their confusion and to the weakening of their faith.¹¹

Apparently Solomon *et al* debated these speculatives and circulated pamphlets against their theses through the Provence. They were met for their pains with contumely. Wanting to buttress their position, Jonah b. Abraham Gerundi was sent north to gain support for a proposed ban against the public study of philosophic works, generally, and of these Maimonidean translations particularly. The *Sarfatim* did in fact publish such a ban whose only immediate effect was to bring forth a Provencal counterban against any who interfered in such study.¹²

Those who opposed Solomon then sent the aged and respected translator-grammarian-Talmudist David Kimhi south into Aragon and Castille to state their case, while the anti-Maimonists

10. Kobak, Joseph Isaac, *Sefer Ginze Nistarot*, Bamberg, 1868-1878 (hereafter GN) IV:11.

11. GN IV:12

12. KTR III:2b.

circulated Nachmanides in Gerona and others whom they had reason to believe sympathetic. In Aragon most of the leading Aljamans (Saragossa, Huesca, Monzon, Calatayud, and Lerida) joined in the counterban under the influence of the powerful Alconstantini family and especially its leader, the physician-politician Bahya b. Moses. In Castille, however, the counterban met with little approval - the unsympathetic position taken by the well born and influential physician Judah ibn Alfakhar largely being responsible.

This entire brouhaha was aborted within a matter of months by the unexpected burning of the *Moreh* in Montpellier.¹³ The

13. No satisfactory explanation has been found to explain Montpellier's central role in the controversy; indeed, to our knowledge none has been attempted. Montpellier "was a center of orthodoxy in Albigenian country." (Little, R. G., *Medieval France*, Cambridge, 1922, p. 244). The preaching fathers had early in the century established a house there and the Dominicans had a *Studium Generale*. A council there in 1215 reaffirmed the mandate of the Episcopal inquisition established already in 1184. It was to Montpellier that Raymond VII came in 1224 to make his submission. Montpellier was a steadfast Catholic island in a seething Catharist sea. Perhaps this militant orthodoxy put the Jewish community under some duress to control its own speculatives. There is no proof, however, of this. Interestingly, the ban was not a decision of the Montpellier *Kahal*. Abraham Maimonides insisted on this (op. cit., p. 55). In further corroboration the names of the rabbinic authorities of Montpellier are known from their signatures on a legal brief in an entirely unrelated matter and of these none excepting Solomon figure here (Gross, H., *Gallia Judaica*, Paris, 1899, p. 329.). Solomon acted on his own. The possibility is not ruled out that he felt that the Church would not disapprove, but as far as is known no bargain was struck. It is far more plausible that living in a Provençal commune which from the first felt Catholic power and sensed the direction and success of Church energies, Solomon had a better idea than contemporaries who still lived within religiously free walls that the Church Militant was challenging on an entirely new basis the integrity of Jewish life.

Technically under the crown of Aragon, lieged to the Count of Toulouse who controlled the citadel, seat of the Bishop of Maguelone who shared the market with the commune - the Jewish community's relations with each of these various authorities is beyond reconstruction. The lords of Montpellier "owned" the Jews and licensed the Jewish physicians. The Bishop wielded ecclesiastic control of the university, which then included faculties in law and medicine and perhaps already one in the arts.

Any attempt to explain the issue in terms of a town-gown controversy is unpromising. The gown in this case was rigidly orthodox. Jews were rarely

issue had gotten out of hand and Israel fell to the elemental business of healing the breach.

Of the burning itself there is little that is certain except that it occurred. David Kimhi, who was sick miles away in Avila at the time, accused Solomon of being the informer and claimed that Solomon had peddled his baggage of lies first to the Franciscans, then to the Dominicans (who, surprisingly, did nothing about it), finally to "the Cardinal" who ordered an investigation and finally confiscation.¹⁴ The Cardinal referred to was probably the Papal legate Romanus, whom we know to have been in Montpellier circa 1233 directing an inquisitional attack on Catharist heresiarchs.¹⁵ Kimhi's information has served as the basis for most reconstructions.

The Toledoans, Judah Alfakhar¹⁶ and Joseph b. Todros ha-Levi,¹⁷ presumed Solomon's guilt even as they pleaded in mitigation on the basis of extreme provocation, but they had only Kimhi's information to go on.

On the other hand, the brothers Judah and Abraham ibn Hisdai of Barcelona (in a circular letter to the Spanish Aljamans) did not nominate the guilty and spoke only of "people wayward and perverse who had banded together..." They added a detail – the

admitted; indeed, of all the protagonists only Jonah Gerundi was associated as a student of the medical faculty and he was, of course, on the side of the traditionalists. All in all, Montpellier was not an easy city in which to keep one's balance and it most certainly was a city in which Jews were constantly subject to sophisticated Church arguments and bald Church attacks. This can be substantiated by the contemporaneous but anonymous Pentateuchal commentary, *Leket Katzer*, which contrived into the familiar exegesis numerous apologetic passages seeking to answer various Christian attacks (*Ibid.*, p. 327, No. 8)

Montpellier's Hebrew name, *Har Ga'ash*, the mountain of trembling, was singularly appropriate to Jewish life there. Solomon's controversy was his program for stability.

14. *KTR* III:4b.

15. Lea, H., *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, New York, 1955, Vol. I, p. 316

16. *KTR* III:4b.

17. *GN* III:172 f.: "They sinned and rebelled, but he (Solomon) also is not forgiven".

tongues of the informers had been cut out¹⁸ – a fate we are certain did not befall Jonah Gerundi, who lived out his days as a public preacher, and one which probably did not befall the others.

The Hisdai post eventum account is probably the more exact. There is every reason to doubt that Solomon, David, and Jonah were the actual agents of denunciation.

Why so?

By way of answer let us ask what manner of men were these?

Nachmanides,¹⁹ Judah Alfakhar,²⁰ Meshullam b. Solomon,²¹ and Joseph b. Todros ha-Levi²² (contemporaries all) spoke warmly of Solomon, considered him a fine scholar, and acted on the presumption of his Talmudic and religious soundness. Abraham Maimonides referred to Solomon and David as masters of *halacha* – as familiars of the intricate byways of Talmudic logic.²³ It is clear that he did not consider either Solomon or David as simple men or queer duck fanatics. Abraham faulted them only for being philosophically naive.²⁴ He meant by this that they were unaware of the systematic requirements of his own and his father's heavily Aristotelian cosmology. From Abraham's account we can reconstruct tentatively some of Solomon's premises. Reason must be subservient to revelation as the law (Torah) predated Creation,²⁵ hence study of the Torah rather than the activation of the intellect (i.e., philosophy) is the prime

18. *GN* III:176 ff.

19. *KTR* III:5a.

20. *KTR* III:2a.

21. Brody, H., "Poems of Meshullam b. Solomon da Pierra" (Heb.), *Yedeot ha-Mahon Le-Heker ha-Shira ha-Ivrit*, vol. IV (1938), p. 104, vv. 79-81, "Had it not been for Solomon, the exceptional man, who insisted on the covenant..."

22. *KTR* III:6b, "A faithful branch, a fountain of wisdom and understanding, mighty in his efforts to restore the beaten paths and to repair the breach."

23. Abraham Maimonides, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

concern of religious devotion. Solomon took to heart the Talmudic injunction against drinking from the wells of the Greeks - believing, probably from actual observation, that philosophic study often led to a denial of faith or to a sense of superiority towards its ritual regulations.²⁶

We control only one relevant document from Solomon's pen - an undated support seeking letter to a Castillian friend of his school days, Samuel b. Isaac.²⁷

There is a determined group who are publicizing ideas of faith which are unique and novel. They destroy the force of tradition by opposing to it the untrammelled conclusions of their reason.²⁸ Their *modus operandi* is to spin allegories out of the text of the Torah - contradictory, unrelated, and vague.²⁹ For their purpose they use the epic of creation, the history of Cain and Abel and all manner of other stories found in the Torah.³⁰ They validate this allegorical dispensation by quoting an assertion of the *Moreh's* translators to the effect that Maimonides had taught that all the stories of the Torah were allegories and that the *Mitzvot* were only culturally conditioned practices.³¹

The traditional fabric of faith had, in Solomon's mind, been ruptured. He had heard scoffing against the teaching of the rabbis.³²

Solomon saw this new attitude towards the Biblical text as posing a threat to the viability of faith. When he heard such

26. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

27. *GN IV:10 ff.* By internal evidence this letter can be dated after the French ban, i.e., circa 1231-32.

28. *GN IV:13.*

29. *Ibid.*, p.11.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 12. The "superiority complex" of those possessed of the new learning must not be discounted as a precipitating factor of controversy. Solomon tells that "He was in their eyes a fool" (*Ibid.*). One thinks of the unspoken contempt and counterbalancing angry if silent frustration existing between modern urban religionists and country revivalists. Solomon, for all his erudition, must have seemed old hat and a bit incongruous to those who lived in the "new" century of European Judeo-Arabic Aristotelianism and they in turn dangerous and immoral to him.

scoffing he flushed and became fearful.³³ His concern was not of recent origin. Solomon recognized that he had made himself broadly disliked, but the quarrel had become exacerbated only when some men of the Béziers community became involved. These went so far as to accuse Solomon of failing to abide communal restrictions and of shaming publicly the memory of Maimonides.³⁴

33. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 12. Béziers played a crucial role in the denouement of l'affaire Solomon, but precise details cannot be documented. Solomon's narrative presumed this chronology:

1) Solomon's concern for the intellectual novelties prevalent.

2) his being informed that a translator of the *Moreh* insisted that Maimonides had held all Biblical stories allegorical and all Biblical commandments supportable by human reason.

3) A protracted debate between Solomon and spinners of novelties which seems to have followed a fairly familiar course until...

4) the men of Béziers entered the picture. They are accused of bringing personalities and vindictiveness into the debate and of charging Solomon with slandering Maimonides. The men of Béziers pursued this policy for some time, finally precipitating...

5) the appeal by Solomon to the rabbis of France for support.

Béziers' involvement thus must be placed fairly early. It was this same Béziers' community which later charged Jonah Gerundi with being of impure descent (Brüll, N., "Die Polemik Für und Gegen Maimuni in Dreizehnten Jahrhundert," *Jahrbücher für Jüdische Geschichte Literatur*, Vol. IV [1879], p. 23; GN IV: 9-10). It was this charge which precipitated Jonah's cousin Nachmanides from his role as peacemaker into the fray (GN IV:15-36) and which moved Meshullam b. Solomon to this evocation of God's wrath: "On Béziers pour out Thine anger. Yet grant safety to a few." (Brody, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 34, No. 12, v. 25)

Who were these irascible men of Béziers? We do not know. That no official *Kahal* program was involved is clear from Meshullam's language and from the friendly letter of Nachmanides to the venerable jurist and scholar Meshullam b. Moses of Béziers seeking his help in silencing those of that city who had libeled Jonah's legitimacy.

The original Jewish settlement was wiped out in the massacre of 1209 when Béziers fell to the forces of Simon de Montfort. Of those who resettled we are biographically unaware except for the names of Meshullam b. Moses and of another Talmudist, Solomon b. Asher (Gross, *op. cit.*, p. 101). We do know that circa 1240 Solomon b. Joseph ibn Ayyub, a Granada scholar emigré, settled here and found a welcome and eager support for his translation of Maimonides' *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* and Averroes' paraphrase of *De Caelo*. Surely, those who rated Solomon b. Abraham and Jonah Gerundi were of the circle that patronized Solomon b. Joseph ibn Ayyub,

Solomon, to defend himself and to win support, perforce, had turned to the rabbis of France. These worthies had responded with the assurances he had requested, and with more: a representation to gather information on the specific nature of the quarrel and an immediate reproof to those who busy themselves with vain speculation. Solomon had forwarded to France a translation of the *Moreh* and on the basis of this text and of the report of their observer the final ban was pronounced because the open teaching of such doctrine was blasphemous.³⁵ Solomon characterized Kimhi's mission as deliberately provocative. Solomon accused Kimhi of distorting facts and of displaying doctored copies of his letters to France in which it was inferred that he had excommunicated on his own anyone who followed Maimonides' philosophic regimen.³⁶

The figure of Solomon which begins to emerge is that of a competent *halachist* and sturdy moralist who was rendered heartsick by the novelties and religious laxity of those who preferred to argue faith than to abide it. Had he provocation? Undoubtedly, although we can name no names. Was there reason for his urgency? Undoubtedly, his was not a quiet age in a quiet province. His was the Provence of the Albigensian Crusade. His Jewish community was under the Church Militant. Such a community, if it were to survive, needed sturdy faith and faithful unity. Basically we have here the opposition of two *Weltanschauungs* rather than of any dialectic between obscurantism and enlightenment. Even Abraham Maimonides sensed as much.

But the fundamentals of our faith which are the unity of God and His holiness and the holiness of His great and awesome name, most of the dispersed do not concern themselves with, since the mass do not burden

but of their biographies and motivations we are ignorant.

35. *GN* IV:12. The text of this ban is not known. Nachmanides tells us that it was peremptory and made no mention of specifics (*KTR* III: 8a).

36. *GN* III: 13.

themselves except under the pressure of routine circumstance and routine vanities. They depend on obedience to the Law following the teaching of the sages of the Torah. The schools do not bestir themselves except in the sophistications of Abaye and Raba and of Talmudic debate, elucidation, and sophistry. Those who concern themselves in the fundamentals of the Torah and her establishment to know the truth, and to understand it, and to teach it to intellectuals who wish to know the faith of their Creator, these are great sages, and they are but few.³⁷

Compare also the charge implicit in an unsigned letter to the rabbis of France from Spain:

If the books have not reached you how did the vagrant thought occur to you to speak angrily and to shame a sage (Maimonides) whose universal reverence you must recognize... Behold your control is great in matters of permission and prohibition (*halacha* - Talmud), that is your priority. It is consecrated work, but how can you prohibit in an area with which you are not familiar...³⁸

Abraham Maimonides permits us to glimpse David b. Saul's God idea. David denied all anthropomorphic attributes.³⁹ What he had not known was the "full light"⁴⁰ that is the philosophical truth that God cannot be conceived even as a radiance or effulgence without positing of Him some quality of form. David apparently based his theosophy on the mystical doctrine *Aharei ha-Purged*⁴¹ currently popular among German Hasidim. Briefly put, this doctrine held that God exists as a divine effulgence

37. Abraham Maimonides, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

38. *GN IV*: 42.

39. Abraham Maimonides, *op. cit.*, p. 69. David b. Saul appears to have been Provençal, probably of Narbonne (Lévi, I., "Un recueil de Consultations Inédits de Rabbins de la France Méridionale" [Part 8-9], *REJ*, Vol. XXXIX [1899], p. 241.

40. Abraham Maimonides, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

behind a wall of darkness, which masks His brilliance from men. Into this curtain are woven the archetypes or ideals of the forms of worldly existence. The curtain concept was an ancient doctrine already alluded to in the Talmud and in 3 Enoch.⁴² It was designed to solve the problem of God's otherness - His perfection - and still admit the religious necessity of presuming certain ties between heaven and man. Briefly put, the world runs according to divinely predetermined law. That law is woven into this celestial veil. Those, like the prophets, who can penetrate to the veil can see there the truth of the messianic prophecy and hence forecast it for all.⁴³ Abraham Maimonides made great fun of this belief. Since the earth is round, the veil must be round, and God formed like a doughnut with a hole through the middle. More seriously, he argued that for God to be even a radiance was to posit form; to ascribe form was to ascribe place. Form and place are qualities of matter, hence David was a corporealist and hence a *min* according to his father's formula in *Mishneh Torah* 5:7.

It may not be inappropriate to ask why Abraham Maimonides and the Maimonids generally made so much of God's otherness. In part the answer, of course, is systematic. The technique of Maimonidean piety required the fully activated intellect. Man's intellect comes alive in measure as it knows truth. Blemished ideas prevent its activation. Hence quite pragmatically the God idea must be pristine. Biblical anthropomorphisms are misleading; hence the uncompromising insistence that they be understood as allegories. We suggest that another part of the answer lies in the field of interreligious relations. In his *Milhamot Adonai*, Abraham Maimonides developed this interesting argument:

On all this [the discussion of *Yihud*] no one has doubts from the farthest East to West in all Arab lands, for the Ishmaelites got their faith from the Jew and they based

42. *T. B. Hagigah* 15a; 3 Enoch 45.

43. Scholem, G., *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Jerusalem, 1941, pp. 72-74.

the fundamentals of their faith on it [*Yihud*], and turned from the folly of their fathers and idolatry and began conceiving of the unity of His name and greatness. Because their worship is to a Unity [*Yihud*] Scripture likens it to the ritual of sacrifice which is in His name.⁴⁴

Elementally, i.e., systematically, Islam and Judaism become one devotion. Those "across the sea who make the mistake of following the simplicities of Bible, Midrash, and Aggadah" are fortunately across the sea. Had they been held in Islamic lands, such mistaken beliefs would have posed a threat to the Jew's status as a *dhimmi* for those who worship not God but God's *baboh* - His reflected image - are not true unitarians.⁴⁵

David's views were anything but simplistic. They represent not the absence of philosophy but another philosophic tradition largely Neo-Platonic received through Talmudic reference. Certainly he would have denied vigorously that he believed in a corporeal God. Indeed, David might well have rejoined: the Bible presumes God's otherness, not the negation of all attributes implicit in the philosophic category of pure existence. God is beyond the categories of logic and the logician's insistence on God's unrelatedness does not preclude God's intimacy with man.

A picture of Jonah b. Abraham Gerundi, of whom much more is known, reveals the same breadth and subtlety of mind. Rummaging in his writings we can find "obscurantist" statements. "Let one beware lest he busy himself with far fetched and misleading metaphysics. Let him not join himself to the teachers of these lest they cause him to stumble".⁴⁶ On the other hand, Shrock's comprehensive analysis of Jonah's works found in them reference to Saadya Gaon, Bahya b. Joseph ibn Paqûda, and to

44. Abraham Maimonides, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72. The Scriptural reference is probably Jer. 16: 19-21.

45. Maimonides' Egypt and Abraham's was no longer that of the Shiite Fatamids but of the orthodox Ayyubs where theological correctness was a matter of moment. Cf. Salâh-al-Din's burning and selling off of the library of the Fostat Dâr al-Hikma.

46. Jonah b. Abraham Gerundi, *Perush al-Mishle*, Berlin, 1910, on Prov. 1: 7

Solomon ibn Gabirol's *Mibhar ha-Peninim* and *Tikkun Middot ha-Nefesh*, Judah ha-Levi's *Divan*, Maimonides' (*sic*) *Commentary on Mishnah Abot*, and Judah Hasid's *Sefer Hassidim*.⁴⁷ Jonah's theology had definite ties to the burgeoning *Kabbalist* thinking centered in his natal city of Gerona, and what was early *Kabbalah* but a sophisticated Neo-Platonic mysticism in Hebraic dress?⁴⁸ Nachmanides, in an elegy written on the occasion of Jonah's death, dwelt at length both on his learning and his ascetic piety:

...Rabbi Jonah, paragon of character, Without peer in
purity, Woe to saintliness, Woe to humility, Woe to
ascetism and continence
Woe to Mishnah and Gemarrah, Woe to Scripture and
Tradition, Woe to Talmud and Tosafot, Woe to Legal
Refinements and Legal Opinions.⁴⁹

Shortly after the affair, circa 1240, Jonah became preacher and moral revivalist to the large and proud Toledo community where he lived out his days with honor (d. 1263). No Jewish community would have tolerated the sermonic strictures of a *malshin*.⁵⁰ Of

47. Shrock, A., *Rabbi Jonah ben Abraham of Gerona*, London, 1949, pp. 116-119. Let it be insisted that these references were limited and sketchy. That such material did not intrigue Jonah is obvious - yet equally he was not unaware of it.

48. Meshullam b. Solomon, himself an initiate, mentioned Jonah along with Ezra, Azriel, and Nachmanides as of this circle (Brody, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, pp. 22-24, No. 8. Cf. also Nachmanides, *Torat ha-Adam*, Warsaw, 1841, Responsa II, p. 284).

49. Nachmanides, "Haylelu," *Leket Z'vi*, ed. S. Baer, Rödelheim, 1861, p. 68, vv. 5-8. On Jonah's tombstone there is an inscription of similar import. "Here lies buried the Father of Moral Example, Beloved of Israel and Judah The rabbi who spoke the secret parts of wisdom and published its regulations, and enlightened every aspect of its organization
The source of wisdom and understanding
The burning light from which both the rays of wisdom and understanding went out
The great healer, the *hasid*, Jonah - may his memory be for blessing." (Schwab, M., *Rapport Sur Les Inscriptions Hebraïques de L'Espagne*, Paris, 1907, p. 72).

50. On Gerundi in Toledo see the excellent account in Baer, Y., *A History of*

no "informer" would the poets have sung, as did Meshullam b. Solomon of Jonah:

O perfect one in moral quality, put the honey comb in
your mouth and let incense sweeten your heart
Let your expansive spirit spread out lest your censers
cease to give off scent...

O Jonah, respected rabbi, may his footstool be a
sanctuary and his seat a place of offering.

Honor will sing of you, churlishness will be silent - pay
no attention to it

May the *Shekinah* rest on your house and may God's
spirit protect your holiness and testify of you...⁵¹

It can be shown also that David b. Saul continued to enjoy rabbinic stature after the burning. Israel Lévi has published a legal brief edited by David against the views of an anonymous *halachist* who had legislated rather permissively in certain matters touching the fitness of wine which had passed in transit through non-Jewish hands.⁵² The document is cited in Moses of Coucy's *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol*, which was not compiled until the 1250's.⁵³ No scholar who had been smeared with the taint of having denounced a Hebrew work to the Church would have dared write a responsum with the fervor and condemnatory abandon David showed here. Any such writing would not only not have been tolerated, it certainly would not have been cited by subsequent

the Jews in Christian Spain, Philadelphia, 1961, Vol. I. pp. 250-257.

51. Brody, *op. cit.* (Heb.), pp. 45-46, No. 8, vv. 52-54.

52. Lévi, *op. cit.*, pp. 231-241. David wrote of having wondered as a boy at certain practices of Spanish wine merchants who put a bit of honey into their kegs to free these from any charge of unfitness if they were handled by non-Jews. His teacher, who had taught him this legal nicety, followed consciously the *Mishneh Torah*, although no other Provençal or Narbonne sage agreed (*Ibid.*, p. 237). Interestingly, Maimonides is treated throughout as an authority necessarily to be considered, though in this case Maimonides' view was dismissed. The quotations are all from *M. T. Maachelot Assurot* 11: 11, 9: 10 (*Ibid.*, p. 236).

53. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

authorities as effective precedent.⁵⁴

Even the master "conspirator," Solomon b. Abraham, continued to be revered as scholar and rabbi. At the close of the century we find Menahem Meiri, the revered scholar of Perpignan, citing him in his responsa.⁵⁵ We also possess some legal correspondence of Solomon's with Nachmanides, though this is undated.⁵⁶

Someone, possibly some converted Jew aware of the roiling controversy, denounced the *Moreh* and the *Mada* to a heresy sensitive papal mission, or perhaps a heresy sensitive clergy simply heard of the roiling argument and thought to make the most of it. That the informer was any of the three scholar protagonists of the anti-Maimonidean ban is doubtful. Solomon and his disciples inadvertently prepared a witch's brew, but of the crime itself they were innocent.

All history has its unexpected truths. Among them we must place this encomium to the *Moreh* which Judah al Harizi had prefaced to his Hebrew paraphrase of the *Guide* published a quarter century before the burning:

If you desire to rejoice in the garden of wisdom

Here is a garden bed full of bloom

If you would offer your heart to God as a sacrifice

Here is the fire and the kindling.⁵⁷

54. Cf. the further affirmatory references to David's brief in a responsum by Samuel Sulami written circa 1300 (*Ibid.*, p. 231 ff.)

55. Menahem b. Solomon Meiri, *Magen Abot*, ed. Isaac Last, London, 1909, Chapter 6.

56. Baer's conclusion is inescapable, "The memory of R. Solomon of Montpellier and his scholarship were held in reverence during the next generation." (Baer, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 402, note 60).

57. Judah al Harizi, *Tahkemoni*, ed. Y. Toporovsky, Tel Aviv, 1952, No. 50, p. 402.