

- [70] in || Castile. This king, Don Alfonso son of Raimund, was a king of kings, and a righteous king. He prevailed over all the Ishmaelites living in Spain and compelled them to pay tribute. His kingdom grew mighty, "and the Lord gave him rest from all his enemies round about." Now the time that he reigned over 70 Edom was thirty-eight years. Inasmuch as the kingdom grew strong under his hand, he succeeded in taking from the Ishmaelites Calatrava, which lies on the main road from the Ishmaelite to the Christian part of the country. [At about that time] the rebels against the Berber kingdom had crossed the sea to Spain, after having wiped out every remnant of Jews from Tangiers to 75 al-Mahdiya. "Turn again thy hand as a grape-gatherer upon the shoots." They tried to do the same thing in all of the cities of the Ishmaelite kingdom in

circumstances leading to the suppression of Karaism. For this method of exposition, cf. II. 50-62 and note to II.51.

- 67 *Righteous king*: Cf. Ps. 110.4. The phrase is probably used to explain Alfonso's successful reign; cf. R. Moses Gikatilla *apud* Ibn Ezra *ad loc.* On the other hand, I cannot help but wonder whether Ibn Daud was not playing at the same time on the classical Christian interpretation of the phrase (Melchizedek). In any event, Ibn Daud's evaluation is hardly to be swallowed without a grain of salt; cf. Baer, *History*, I, 51 f. *He prevailed etc.*: Cf. A. Aguado Bleye, *Manual de Historia de España* (7th ed. 3 vols. Madrid, 1954), I, 636 f.
- 68-69 *And the Lord etc.*: II Sam. 7.1, quoted inexactly in the Hebrew.
- 70 *Edom*: Christian Spain; cf. VI.217. (I have retained the Hebrew form here in an effort to convey the biblical annalistic style which Ibn Daud imitates.) *Thirty-eight years*: Ibn Daud reckons from the point of view of a Toletanian, inasmuch as Alfonso entered the capital victoriously on Nov. 16, 1118; Menendez Pidal, *El Imperio Hispanico*, p. 140. (The figure "forty-eight" of *ed. pr.* may be a learned correction, reckoning Alfonso's accession from 1109; cf. P.E. Schramm, "Das Kastilische Koenigtum und Kaisertum wachrend der Reconquista," *Festschrift fuer Gerhard Ritter* (Tuebingen, 1950), pp. 97 f.) Although Alfonso VII died on August 21, 1157, Ibn Daud probably arrived at his figure of thirty-eight by reckoning from Jewish chronology: entrance into Toledo as *imperator* in 4879, death in 4917.
- 71 *Calatrava*: Fell to Alfonso VII in Jan., 1147.
- 72 *The main road*: For this translation cf. Ibn Janah, *Book of Hebrew Roots*, p. 55 (Heb. trans., p. 37).
- 73 [At about that time]: Ca. 1148. *The rebels against the Berber kingdom*: i.e., the Almohades. For the same way of referring to the Almohades, cf. al-Harizi, *op. cit.*, ch. 18 in Schirmann, *Ha-Shirah ha-Ibrit*, II, 142.220.
- 74 *After having wiped out etc.*: Cf. VII.453 f. *From Tangiers to al-Mahdiya*: Cf. VII.463.
- 75 *Turn again etc.*: Jer. 6.9. Ibn Daud represents the Almohade forces as speaking to themselves thus: Now that we have wiped out every remnant of the Jews in North Africa, let us now turn our hand to pluck the shoots, i.e., wipe out the remainder in Spain. For modern discussions of the event described herein, cf. Baer, *History*, I, 60 f.; Baron, *SRH*, IV, 31 f.

Spain, "if it had not been the Lord who was for us," let Israel now say." When the Jews had heard the report that the rebels were advancing upon them to drive them away from the Lord, God of Israel, those who feared 80 the Lord's word fled for their lives, and "fathers" almost "failed to look back to their children for feebleness of hands." Some were taken captive by the Christians, to whom they willingly indentured themselves on condition that they be rescued from Muslim territory. Others fled on foot, naked and barefoot, their feet stumbling upon the mountains of twilight, with "the young 85 children asking bread, and none to break it to them."

- However, He who prepares the remedy before afflictions, exalted be His name, (as it is, indeed, written: "When I would heal Israel, then is the iniquity of Ephraim uncovered") anticipated [the calamity] by putting it into the heart of [71] King Alfonso the *Emperador* to appoint || our master and rabbi, R. Judah the 90 Nasi b. Ezra, over Calatrava and to place all the royal provisions in his charge. The latter's forefathers had been among the leaders of Granada, holders of high office and men of influence in every generation [as far back as] the reign of Badis b. Habbus, the king of the Berbers, and that of the latter's father, King Habbus. There is a tradition current among the members of the community of Granada 95 that they are descended from the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the holy city, from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, not from [the inhabitants of] the villages
- 77 *If it had not been etc.*: Ps. 124.1. i.e., but for the Lord, the Almohades would have succeeded.
- 79 *To drive them away etc.*: Cf. Deut. 13.11, and above, VII.458.
- 79-80 *Those who feared etc.*: Cf. Ex. 9.20.
- 80 "Fathers" almost "failed etc.": Jer. 47.3.
- 83 *Fled on foot*: See S.N.
- 84 *Their feet stumbling etc.*: Almost a verbatim quotation of Jer. 13.16.
- 84-85 *The young children etc.*: Lam. 4.4.
- 86 *He who prepares the remedy etc.*: For the source of this expression, cf. *B. Meg.* 13b; for this particular form, cf. Ben Iehuda, *Thesaurus*, XII, 5752a n. 2. For the same thought, with the quotation of the verse which follows, by Ibn Aknin, cf. Halkin, "Le-Toledot ha-Shemad," p. 109.
- 87 *When I would heal etc.*: Hos. 7.1. i.e., only after the Lord had provided healing did He uncover the iniquity of Israel, i.e., permitted its sin to be requited through the travails of persecution.
- 89-90 *Judah the Nasi b. Ezra*: On his position cf. Baer, *History*, I, 77. See S.N.
- 91 *Leaders of Granada*: For the known history of the family, cf. Baer, *History*, I, 60 f.; Baron, *SRH*, IV, 31 f., 248; cf. also the bibliographies in Schirmann, *Ha-Shirah ha-Ibrit*, II, 683, 686 f. *Holders of high office*: Lit. heirs to royal authority; cf. Jud. 18.7, and Ibn Janah, *Book of Hebrew Roots*, p. 542 (Heb. trans., p. 381).
- 92 [Men] of influence: Lit., [royal] authority; cf. Isa. 9.5, 6.
- 92-93 *Badis... and... Habbus*: Cf. VII.193, 224 f.
- 93-97 *There is a tradition etc.*: For the identical tradition, and the same invidious distinction

or of the unwallied towns. However, this R. Judah the Nasi, his father and uncles, all four of whom were officers, R. Isaac, the first-born, and next to him R. Moses, the third R. Judah and the fourth R. Joseph, all of them are of royal blood and descended of the nobility, as evidenced by their personal traits. Now when this great Nasi, R. Judah, was appointed over Calatrava, the city of refuge for the exiles, he supervised the passage of the refugees, released those bound in chains and let the oppressed go free by breaking their yoke and undoing their bonds. At his home and at his very table, where the refugees found rest, he fed the hungry, provided drink for the thirsty and clothed the naked. Then, providing animals for all the feeble, he had them brought as far as Toledo in great dignity. [This he was able to do] by virtue of the awe and respect which he commanded among the Christians, who conveyed them. Although but a youth, he had already been exalted above the people, and lorded it over a company of spearmen. Since he had no regard for silver, nor did he delight in gold, he did not keep for himself any of his share of the King's pay. All of his deeds were patterned after the son of Agrippa, who had said: "Whereas my

between the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the villagers, cf. Moses ibn Ezra, *Shirat Israel*, p. 62. The implication is that as descendants of the citizens of Jerusalem they were of the nobility and lineal descendants of those who built the Second Temple; cf. Ezra 1.5, as well as the rabbinic distinctions between urbanites and villagers in *B. Hag.* 13b and *Pesikta* R. 20 (ed. Friedmann), f. 95a. On the Jews of Andalus as members of the nobility of Jerusalem, cf. VII.296.

98 *The first-born etc.*: The style is patterned after II Sam. 3.3, where the sons of David are enumerated.

99 *R. Joseph*: Sc., the father of the Judah who was appointed by Alfonso VII.

99-100 *Of royal blood and descended etc.*: Cf. Dan. 1.3. See S.N. *As evidenced etc.*: See S.N.

102 *Released those bound in chains*: For this translation of Ps. 68.7, cf. Ibn Janah, *Book of Hebrew Roots*, p. 334 (Heb. trans., p. 232); Ibn Ezra to Ps. 68.7; Ibn Gabirol *apud* Ben Iehuda, *Thesaurus*, V, 2309.

103 *Let the oppressed go free*: Isa. 58.6 and Ibn Ezra *ad loc.* *By breaking their yoke etc.*: Cf. Jer. 2.20; 5.5.

106 *Providing animals for all the feeble*: Cf. II Chr. 28.15.

108-109 *Although but a youth etc.*: Cf. Ps. 89.20 and Ibn Ezra's second interpretation there.

109-110 *Lorded it over a company of spearmen*: For this translation of Ps. 68.31 ("Rebuke the wild beast of the reeds"), cf. Ibn Ezra *ad loc.* Cf. also the similar praise of Joseph ibn Ferrizuel Cidellus by Judah ha-Levi, *Diwan* (ed. Brody), I, 158 line 19 (= ed. Zamora, I, 325). (For the addressee of that poem, cf. Baer, *History*, I, 392 n. 51.) Despite the opaqueness of the cliché, it is a reasonable conjecture that Ibn Daud here alludes to Judah ibn Ezra's influence with the Knights Templar at Calatrava; cf. A. Castro, *The Structure of Spanish History* (Princeton, 1954), pp. 208 f.

110 *He had no regard for silver, nor etc.*: Cf. Isa. 13.17.

112 *The son of Agrippa*: I.e., Monobaz; cf. I.202 and variants here. *Who said etc.*: *Tosef.* Peah 4.18 (ed. Lieberman), p. 60. *Below*: On earth. *Above*: In Heaven. On the diffusion of this motif, cf. Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah*, I, 191; H. Schwarzbaum,

father stored up his treasures below, I shall store up my treasures above."

[72] Nevertheless, || he conducted a huge business. Indeed, if he had performed but these works of charity, his merit would have been more than enough, "for it was to save life that God had sent him ahead" of the refugees.

When all the nation had finished passing over [the border] by means of his help, the King sent for him and appointed him lord of all his household and ruler over all his possessions. He [then] requested of the King to forbid the heretics to open their mouths throughout the land of Castile, and the King commanded that this be done. Accordingly, the heretics were suppressed and have not been able to raise their heads any longer. Indeed, they are dwindling steadily.

Moreover, there is a third characteristic [of the heretics] which you ought to bear in mind. That is that they never did anything of benefit for Israel, nor produced a book demonstrating the cogency of the Torah or work of general

"International Folklore Motifs in Petrus Alphonsi's 'Disciplina Clericalis,'" *Sefarad* XXII (1962), 332 f.

114 *He conducted a huge business*: Cf. II Chr. 17.13.

114-115 *If he had performed etc.*: For the style, cf. C. J. Kasowski, *Thesaurus Talmudis*, VII, 232 f. דייס, דיינו. The genre is also employed in the related sense of gratitude, rather than that of merit, in the poem found in the *seder* ritual for Passover; cf. *The Passover Haggadah*, ed. and trans. by N. Glatzer (New York, 1953), pp. 42 f.

116 *For it was to save life etc.*: Gen. 45.5.

117 *When all the nation etc.*: Josh. 4.1.

118-119 *Appointed him lord etc.*: Cf. Gen. 44.8.

120 *To open their mouths*: I.e., to assert themselves; cf. Ezek. 29.21.

120-121 *And the King commanded etc.*: Est. 9.14.

121-122 *The heretics were suppressed etc.*: Cf. Jud. 8.28.

124 *A third characteristic*: The first two are a fabricated law unattested by any chain of transmission (above, lines 16 f.) and an inability to point to majority of number anywhere in the world (above, lines 22 f.)

125 *Never did anything of benefit for Israel*: Cf. note to VI. 151-152. On this virtue and the sin of its absence, cf. Ezek. 13.5; 22.30, and especially Ps. 106.23. On the curses invoked upon those who detach themselves from the community, especially in its hour of stress, cf. *B. Ta'an.* 11a. See S.N.

126 *A book demonstrating the cogency of the Torah*: Lit., a book adding strength to the Torah. For the force of the phrase, cf. talmudic dictionaries s.v. חזק. For similar charges by earlier Rabbanites, cf. Zucker, "Against Whom Did Se'adya Gaon Write etc.," p. 70; Ankori, "Aspects of Karaite-Rabbanite Relations," *PAAJR*, XXV (1956), 176; *idem*, *Karaites in Byzantium*, pp. 358 f. It need hardly be added that Ibn Daud either did not know, or did not choose to recognize, the vast literary productivity of the Karaites toward this very end; cf., however, Ankori, *ibid.*, p. 359 n. 9. *General knowledge*: I.e., secular wisdom; cf. note to VII. 350-352.

F. Kobler, ed.,  
Letters of Jews through the Ages  
38 Vol. 1

*Faith versus Reason*  
*Letters from the Struggle between the Maimunists and*  
*Anti-Maimunists*

THE dispute between the followers and opponents of Maimonides which broke out with the first appearance of the Hebrew translation of 'The Guide of the Perplexed', engaged the participation of the most famous names in Jewish learning, both in Spain and in France. The last stage of the centennial struggle was reached at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Devotion to secular studies, greatly stimulated by the example of Maimonides, had produced in many Jews an attitude of scepticism even towards some statements of the Bible itself, and made them lax in religious observance. To counteract this tendency, many Rabbis were in favour of placing a general, or at least partial, ban on secular study, especially philosophy and natural science. The leadership of these traditionalists in their conflict with the modernists was assumed by Solomon, son of Abraham ibn Adret, of Barcelona, the outstanding rabbinic authority of the age after the passing of Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg. He was at that time a man of about seventy and was recognized as the spiritual head of the Jewish world on account of his wisdom, his learning and his saintly life. The number of his extant Responsa exceeds three thousand, perhaps the largest number penned by a single respondent. In one of them, his views on the rationalistic approach to the Bible are expressed with great force and precision. This letter can, therefore, well serve to illustrate the spirit of those who fought for the traditional values of Judaism.

SOLOMON IBN ADRET TO AN INQUIRER

*'What has been founded on tradition or prophetic inspiration  
cannot be overthrown by any science in the world'*

[Barcelona, second half of the 13th century]

You ask about my attitude to that Agadah according to which the world will come to an end after a certain time; you have found in the writings of R. Moses ben Maimon statements which are opposed to this.

FAITH VERSUS REASON

Know that in all these and similar matters, when we try to examine them with the help of pure science, the latter view must prevail; we are then indeed forced to conclude that the world will never cease to exist, since science rests upon perceptions and observations of nature, and we see that all planets as well as the earth move continually without change. He who believes, however, in the end of the world does this not on the ground of any perception but on the ground of the traditions of the sages, his belief in which cannot be shattered. What has been founded on tradition or prophetic inspiration cannot be overthrown by any science in the world, for science ranks far below prophetic inspiration. This is a principle agreed upon by the confessors of all positive religions and most of all by the confessors of our own true faith. We believe in the whole tradition as we believe in the supernatural miracles which have been done to the patriarchs, as we believe in the passing through the Red Sea and the Jordan, in the sun's standing still, etc. To be sure, all this is denied by the philosophers, and Moses as well as the prophets are for them of no avail, but we are not concerned with those who deny the value of tradition on principle. This can, of course, be done only by those who take it as proved that all that is against nature cannot exist and is impossible – as if there were not higher verities than those which can be perceived by them.

... What seems to us to be the most curious thing about the adversaries of faith is this, that they themselves are bound to admit that they cannot explain many phenomena and that they are unable to penetrate to the essence of nature. Thus, for example, they cannot say why and how the magnet sets the iron in motion and attracts it to itself; ... David says rightly against these men, who want to deny miraculous events in nature according to their experience and perceptions, in a Psalm<sup>1</sup>: 'The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple'; that is: their reason in its foolish doubts perceives through the miraculous facts which reveal themselves before their eyes – the miracles at the Red Sea and on Sinai among



them – that there exists an omnipotent God, who is master of nature and alone preserves, or moves, or changes it.

If Jewish scholars accept the point of view maintained by science in general, they are bound to interpret many passages of Scripture in a forced way in order to bring them into agreement with science and to explain many things allegorically because philosophy does not care for any prophets or commandments. If we want, therefore, as true Jewish scholars, to remain in agreement with tradition, we have to explain the words of the Bible without regard to whether they are in agreement with the conclusions of science or not. Thus, for example, one can conceive all passages of the Bible which refer to resurrection allegorically, particularly the narrative of the dry bones<sup>2</sup>; there is no necessity to apply any verse to a real general resurrection, but tradition obliges us to do so, and this is enough to oblige us to interpret the respective verses in a corresponding way, as the divine wisdom is of greater value to us than human wisdom and as we must give unconditional preference to a tradition preserved by our forefathers, which is deeply rooted and takes its origin from the prophets, rather than to the results of our limited human knowledge. . . .

I. *Abba Mari of Montpellier appeals to Solomon ibn Adret to assume the leadership in the struggle against modernism*

In this fight against modernism, Solomon ibn Adret was not at first inclined to go beyond argument and remonstrance. There were others, however, who demanded more positive action. Foremost among them was Abba Mari, son of Moses, of Lunel, a distinguished and cultured resident of Montpellier, known also as Don Astruc de Lunel. Though well trained in philosophical thinking and an admirer of Maimonides, Abba Mari was deeply disturbed by a wave of modernism which seemed to him to threaten religion with complete dissolution, and he felt the urgent need of bringing the assailants of traditional Judaism to a halt. Mistrusting his own powers of leadership, he turned to the one man in his generation who seemed to be marked out for a task of such magnitude: the Sage and Saint of Barcelona. To him he addressed a stirring call full of apostolic fervour.

ABBA MARI OF LUNEL TO SOLOMON IBN ADRET

*'And now, our lord and master, how canst thou look on when the sanctuary is being consumed by rotten books?*

[Montpellier, 1304]

. . . To whom should belong the distinction . . . of pouring out his wrath according to the ordinances of the Torah? . . . Is there among us a man greater than thou, a man in whom dwelleth the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of counsel and insight, who spreads the fear of God around him daily? Thou art, indeed, a man whose name is distinguished for knowledge of Torah! The sceptre is in thy hands and who would dare to oppose thy majesty with words? Thou who sittest on the bench art bound to pronounce just judgement when people commit sins. And if a man sins against God, thou shalt spread seven ointments over his wounds,<sup>3</sup> to extinguish the sin, and thou art bound to destroy everybody who deviates and detracts from the law. . . . The hour calls for this. For the end is drawing near, the appointed days preceding the coming of the Messiah have come. How proud is the face of this generation which tries her judges and elders, while the lovers of the Torah are without a defender. . . . They have broken the covenant, and debased the Torah to an ordinance of only temporary validity, they please themselves in the children of strangers, waste the riches of the Torah, concoct slanderous legends, and produce many books about them, with their own logic. . . .

And now, our lord and master, prince and great deliverer and lord, to whom there has been no equal since the days of the Judges, since Jerubbaal and Bedan,<sup>4</sup> thou champion and peerless man of these days! How canst thou look on, when the sanctuary is being consumed by rotten books? Gird thy sword round thy loins, lift thy stick and strike at their heads! Give counsel, and say that fences should be built through which the foxes will not be able to break. May the sword of thy wit be swung over the sages of this country. And may thy words fly against the mighty men.

Verily, I know that thy word will be fulfilled, and that we shall honour thee therefore. May all unite with thee, and in their midst I shall see the rising glory of the Lord. May the Lord increase thy welfare and the years of thy life, according to thy wish and the wish of thy servant

Abba Mari

## 2. *Solomon ibn Adret in Combat*

After some hesitation and further correspondence with some prominent leaders of Provençal Jewry, Solomon ibn Adret took action. In a letter which he signed together with the other Rabbis and dignitaries of Barcelona he urged the community of Montpellier to forbid men under thirty years to take up philosophical studies. This letter created a storm of controversy, in which the leading scholars of France and Spain took part. The correspondence was later collected and published by Abba Mari under the title 'Minhath Kena'oth' (Offering of Zeal). Two letters exchanged between the mathematician and astronomer Jacob, son of Machir ibn Tibbon, and Solomon ibn Adret are of particular interest.

JACOB SON OF MACHIR TO SOLOMON IBN ADRET

*'There is nobody among our followers who wants to dissolve all biblical stories into allegories'*

[Montpellier, 1304]

... If these studies do damage to faith, why do you allow them at all and ask only that a line should be drawn between youth and maturity? Is a man of advanced years, then, entitled to expose his faith in the verities of religion which he imbibed in his youth to the temptations of philosophical scepticism later on? But I know well your true and secret intention to deny the validity of science altogether, because you have often spoken in a derogatory manner about it and its pioneers, and have even maintained that Maimuni's pronouncements on cosmology are without foundation. Besides, you should not give credit to the accusations of Abba Mari, and attack even that old scholar<sup>5</sup> whose fame and learning are widely known, whose works were already studied with great zeal in Lunel in my youth, and who

has dictated the translation into Hebrew of many works which have been praised even by Nahmanides. If therefore the products of a foreign spirit then entered Judaism, why should we ban them now?

I admit that there are some detestable ideas expressed in the philosophical writings, but this does not justify your refusal to make ourselves acquainted with the good ideas they contain. Our scientific efforts provide evidence to the nations that we have an open mind and understanding for everything beautiful and good. We might even take these as an example in this regard, as they honour the scholars of other denominations who translate their writings into the languages spoken by the members of these denominations even if they contradict the notions of the latter sharply. By such a procedure the convictions of a people are by no means weakened, and their faith is nowhere and never undermined, at least not ours, for the truth of which we possess the best proofs. Besides, there is nobody among our followers who wants to dissolve all biblical stories into allegories; I myself know very well the borderline which philosophy must not cross in its criticism of the Bible, and the most ardent zealot cannot censure me for going too far in this respect. I do not over-estimate the value of philosophy, neither do I underestimate it, and I am thankful to anybody who can give me a satisfactory explanation for one of those wondrous Talmudic legends.

I wonder that you, instead of announcing a decision, try to wash your hands of us with praises which we neither expected nor deserve. As you apparently intend to withdraw from the affair, we have the impression that you wanted to achieve nothing but to make us afraid. But after having kindled the quarrel, it is for you to bring it to an end, and to find a peaceful solution of the conflict.

SOLOMON IBN ADRET TO JACOB BEN MACHIR

*'A complete peace between philosophy and revealed religion is inconceivable'*

[Barcelona, 1304]

... I see that you, my former friend, whom I held in high esteem, do not know any limit to your indignation against me. ... I thought that you were accustomed to weigh your words, and that you therefore would not direct them against anyone heedlessly. Instead, you trumpet forth words without salt and spice into the world. This bitter remark is suggested to me not by any feeling for my own offended honour, but by quite a different reason: I am sorry for your dignity, which you yourself endanger by stooping to practices unworthy of the height to which you have rightly been elevated by your contemporaries on account of your scholarship, and by joining the boys who are hardly able to cry, My father, and my mother,<sup>5a</sup> who throw themselves into the arms of secular science and make a hobby of astrological reveries and over-hasty syllogisms. It is true that such studies may be of profit to experienced men, whose hair has grown grey while they studied Torah, and that they offer to reasonable people a rather deeper insight into the essence of religion, of which no better evidence can be found than Maimuni himself. Besides, mathematics and medicine do not at all belong to the sciences interdicted by me. But a complete peace between philosophy and revealed religion is inconceivable.

And now, my friend, tell me what great crime we committed when we drew your attention to the excesses of some hot-heads in your communities? Was this any detriment to your dignity? ... May God forgive you for your veiled allusion to my pride. It is not unknown to you that my name is held in honour in France, Germany and other countries. It is, however, certainly also known to you that I was never puffed up with self-esteem because of this, and never made a show of my

dignity. From the bottom of my heart I forgive all your colleagues who signed together with you. Most of them have probably been misled more by ignorance of the facts than by the wish to oppose. The friendship maintained between us shall not be altered by this. ...

About your accusations with regard to my attitude to Maimuni I do not want to waste many words. The man into whose spirit you are able to penetrate as nobody else needs no special defence. Besides, everybody will tell you how devoted I am to Maimuni and his living grandson [David]. The passage in your letter that you yourself disapprove utterly of a complete allegorization of the Bible offers the best comment on your irresponsible behaviour towards me, because I asked for nothing else but the abolition of this evil. ...

### 3. *The Ban is proclaimed and refuted*

The struggle reached a climax with the proclamation at Barcelona on the Sabbath of Lamentations, Ab 4th (26 July), 1305, of a Herem (ban) declaring that no member of the Jewish community under the age of twenty-five years should be allowed to study the books of the Greeks on natural science or metaphysics, either in the original or in translation. The study of medicine was, however, expressly, and that of Maimonides and other Jewish philosophers by implication, exempted from the interdict. Solomon ibn Adret defended this procedure in three open letters to the communities of Spain, France and Germany, of which the second, considerably abridged, runs as follows:

SOLOMON IBN ADRET TO THE COMMUNITIES IN  
SPAIN, FRANCE AND GERMANY

*'Has such a thing ever been heard that men should reduce everything to chaos?'*

[Barcelona, 1305]

It is now some time since our attention was drawn by people from the land of Provence, the chosen remnant, who were jealous for the faith of Moses and the Jews, to the fact that there are men there who falsify the Law, and that he is regarded wise who sits down to demolish the walls and who destroys the

words of the Law. They hew out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns,<sup>6</sup> and they impute unto the words of the Law and the words of the sages meanings which are not right. Concerning the two Laws<sup>7</sup> they utter in the synagogues and in the houses of study words by which none can live. Regardless of the glory of all Israel they break down all the fences of the Law and against our holy fathers they put forth their tongue, a thing which even the worshippers of idols have not done. For they say that Abraham and Sarah represent matter and form, and that the twelve tribes of Israel are the twelve constellations. Has a nation ever heard such an evil thing since the world was divided into territories? Or has such a thing ever been heard that men should reduce everything to chaos? The blasphemers of God further say that the holy vessels which were sanctified, the Urim and Thumim,<sup>8</sup> are the instrument known as astro-labe, which men make for themselves. . . . A man who does such things reduces the entire Bible to useless allegories; indeed they trifle with and pervert all the commandments in order to make the yoke of their burden lighter unto themselves. Their reports terrify us, and all who arrive here tell us new things. Truth hath stumbled in the street,<sup>9</sup> for some of them say that all that is written from the section of Bereshit [Genesis] as far as the giving of the Law is nothing more than an allegory. May such men become a proverb and a by-word,<sup>10</sup> and may they have no stay and no staff. Indeed they show that they have no faith in the plain meaning of the commandments. . . . They are more estranged than the Gentiles: for the latter fulfil some of the commandments, while they strongly desire to uproot all.

The chief reason of all this is that they are infatuated with alien sciences, Sidonian and Moabitish,<sup>11</sup> and pay homage to the Greek books. . . . The children that are consecrated unto heaven from their birth and from their mother's womb are drawn away from the breasts and are taught the books and the language of Chaldeans, instead of rising early to study the Jewish faith in the house of their teachers. Now a boy born upon the knees of natural science, who sees Aristotle's seven-

fold proofs concerning it, really believes in it, and denies the Chief Cause; if we refute him, he becomes all the more impious. They read the Law with their lips, but their heart is not sound inwardly, and they pervert it in seven ways. . . . They are ashamed when they speak and lecture; they speak with their mouths, but make hints with the finger that it is impossible to change nature, and they thereby declare to all that they do not believe in the creation of the universe, nor in any of the miracles recorded in the Torah.

Now when we saw that the generation had become corrupted and ready to treat religion lightly, we made a fence, and strengthened the wall round our flawless Torah. Had we not made a strong hedge round the vineyard of the Lord of hosts, we should have shared in the blame for their deeds. We have therefore interdicted in the most solemn manner, as ye see recorded with writing of truth in the book of the covenant which we made with God, anyone to teach or to learn these sciences, until the student and the teacher are twenty-five years old, and until they appreciate fully the delicacies of the Law, so that they will not depose it from its queenly rank; for he who espouses it in his youth will not turn away from it even when he grows old. . . .

It is about three years now since we endeavoured to carry out our wish in accordance with our aim; we have made many supplications, asking, requesting, and praying, that the crown of the Torah should be restored to its pristine glory in its place. Our words, however, did not enter into their ears; they made their words, which are directed against us, harsher still, thanks to their ability to write and to speak. Nevertheless we did not cease to write to them. But many strict communities of those provinces inscribed their name to God, and decided to ban and excommunicate them, and they acted wisely in following us, as ye see from the copies of their letters.

Ye mountains of Israel, may ye bear your fruit for ever! Ye people of the God of Abraham, set your eyes upon the palace, lest their folly should destroy the fence of the Law. Let us be



one band, for we are all the children of one man. With many covenants we and our fathers received truthful laws, written and oral, at the hands of the master of the prophets. How can we deal falsely against our soul and entice our heart to seek the deceptions of Greek philosophy? Those whose eyes look before them, how can they walk with their faces turned backward and ally themselves with Arabic philosophy? Arise, ye princes, anoint the shield, and the Lord shall defend you and your houses, for the Master of your work is faithful to pay the reward of your labour.

The Ban of Barcelona was by no means the last word of the controversy. The modernists of Montpellier reacted vigorously by a counter-ban against those who debarred their children from the study of philosophy, but out of their midst came also the most brilliant defence of philosophy which the whole hundred years' war between tradition and rationalism produced. It was contained in a long letter addressed to Solomon ibn Adret by the poet and scholar Yedaiah ben Abraham ha-Bedersi (of Béziers). Yedaiah defended the use of the allegorical method in dealing with many of the legends and parables woven by the Talmud round biblical characters. He maintained that philosophy was a strong bulwark of religious thought, pointing out that anthropomorphic notions among the Jews had not been finally abolished until Jewish thinkers, above all Maimonides, well versed in Greek and Arabic philosophy, established methodically the truth of God's incorporeality. At the end of the letter Yedaiah appealed to Solomon ibn Adret to restore peace and amity in Israel, and voiced prophetically the ideals of many yet unborn Jewish fighters for the freedom of thought:

For the heart of this people cannot be turned from the love of science and literature, while their body and soul are kept together. If Joshua himself were to demand it, they would not obey him. For they feel that they wage war in defence of Maimonides and his works; and for his holy teaching they will sacrifice their fortunes, their future generations and their very lives.

Yedaiah's letter turned the scale in favour of liberalism. Solomon ibn Adret himself was so strongly affected by it that he appealed to Abba Mari to desist from his campaign, and though he did not succeed, this peace move itself meant a moral rehabilitation of the banned philosophical party. It is a significant fact that the only extant text of Yedaiah's letter is embodied in one

of Ibn Adret's Responsa and so in a way bears the imprimatur of the great Rabbi, the father of his generation, who soon afterwards, in 1310, passed away. Now the great medieval controversy between faith and reason, which had already been halted by the expulsion of French Jewry (1306), faded away, though only to flare up vigorously again and again in modern times.

NOTES

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| 1. Ps. XIX. 7.   | 5a Is. VIII. 4.                              |
| 2. Ezek. XXXVII.   | 6. Jer. II. 13.                              |
| 3. Lev. XIV. 16.   | 7. The written Torah and the Oral Tradition. |
| 4. I Sam. XII. 11.   | 8. See Note 8 to Chapter 6.                  |
| 5. Moses ibn Tibbon, grandson of Judah ibn Tibbon, known as the translator of numerous philosophical, mathematical and astronomical works written in Greek and Arabic. | 9. Is. LIX. 14.                              |
|  | 10. Ps. XLIV. 14; Job XVII. 6.               |
|  | 11. Judges X. 6.                             |