

Ephraim Kanarfogel

Anthropomorphism and Rationalist Modes of Thought
in Medieval Ashkenaz:
The Case of R. Yosef Bekhor Shor

Introduction

Medieval rabbinic scholarship had to contend with a series of biblical and Talmudic passages which suggest that God appeared in different guises or forms to prophets and other leading religious figures, in ways that allowed them to apprehend Him. Those rabbinic scholars who were philosophically inclined (such as Maimonides) tended to exclude the possibility of any actual physicality in these appearances. A prophet only was allowed to perceive the physical presence of God in his own mind or imagination, even though this did not occur in a physical sense.

At the same time, modern scholarship has tended to assume that those medieval rabbinic scholars who were not trained as philosophers held (hearing back to a recognizable trend within Midrashic and Talmudic literature itself) that it is possible to attribute some kind of anthropomorphic form to the Divine. Indeed, this was the case not only for those medieval talmudists who typically interpreted haggadic portions of the Talmud in a fairly literal sense, but also, on occasion, for those who were associated with the study of mysticism.¹ The goal of this study is to demonstrate that contrary to some of the assumptions just described (and to the impression of Ashkenazic rabbinic scholarship presented by various Provençal allies of Maimonides), a number of Tosafists (and related rabbinic figures) in northern Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries plainly assert that the Divine presence cannot be characterized or defined accurately through anthropomorphic terms of physical dimensions.

¹ See, e.g., Marc Saperstein, *Decoding the Rabbis. A Thirteenth-century Commentary on the Aggadah*, Cambridge, Mass., 1980, 1–20; Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition. The Career and Controversies of Ramah*, Cambridge, Mass., 1982, 75–103; and see now Yair Lorberbaum, *Zelem Elohim. Halakha and Haggada*, Tel Aviv 2004, 27–78, 83–89, 105–113 (Heb.).

The Approach of R. Yosef Bekhor Shor

R. Joseph b. Isaac of Orleans was an accomplished northern French Tosafist and halakhist, who studied with Rashi's grandson Rabbenu Jacob Tam (d. 1171), and is cited with some frequency in the standard *Tosafot* to the Babylonian Talmud (and in other *Tosafot* collections).² R. Joseph also composed a number of liturgical poems (*piyyutim*), almost all of which were *selihot* or elegies,³ as well as a series of calendric computations for reckoning the occurrences of the solar *tequfot* (seasons) within the course of the Jewish (lunar) year.⁴ Moreover, R. Joseph was one of the leading *peshat* exegetes in the second half of the twelfth century in northern France, authoring an influential commentary to the Torah under the name of R. Yosef Bekhor Shor.⁵

- 2 See Ephraim E. Urbach, *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot* [The Tosafists. Their History, Works and Method], Jerusalem 1980, vol. 1, 132–140. For a responsum by R. Yosef of Orleans (on the proper content of the Sabbath meals), see Israel Ta-Shma, *Minhag Ashkenaz ha-Qadmon* [Early Franco-German Ritual and Custom], Jerusalem 1992, 210f. (based on MS Bodleian 672, fol. 41r). For a ruling on dissolving the betrothal of a (previously married) nursing woman, see *Sefer Mordekhai 'al Massekhet Yevamot*, sec. 19; *Tosafot ha-Rosh le-Massekhet Sotah*, ed. Ya'akov Lifshitz, Jerusalem 2000, 67f. (to Sotah 26a, and the sources cited there in fn. 33); and see *Tosafot ha-Rosh le-Massekhet Hullin*, ed. Eliyahu Lichtenstein, Jerusalem 2002, 486. On R. Yosef's activities as a rabbinic judge (*daiyan*), see Ephraim Kanarfogel, *Religious Leadership During the Tosafist Period. Between the Academy and the Rabbinic Court*, in: Jack Wertheimer (ed.), *Jewish Religious Leadership*, New York 2004, vol. 1, 265–305, here 282f., 293–295; and Rami Reiner, *Battei Din be-Zarefat ba-Me'ah ha-Shteim 'Esreh. Bein Rikkuz le-Pizzur* [Rabbinic Courts in Northern France during the Twelfth Century], in: Uri Ehrlich et al. (eds.), *By the Well. Studies in Jewish Philosophy and Halakhic Thought Presented to Gerald J. Blidstein*, Beer Sheva 2008, 580–584.
- 3 See Abraham Meir Habermann, *Piyyutei R. Yosef b. Yizqaq me-Orleans*, in: *Tarbiz* 9 (1937–1938), 323–342; *Leqet Piyyutei Selihot*, ed. Daniel Goldschmidt and Abraham Fraenkel, Jerusalem 1993, vol. 1, 265–274, vol. 2, 780–782; *Seder ha-Selihat ke-Minhag Lita*, ed. Daniel Goldschmidt, Jerusalem 1965, 69–71 (secs. 25–26); *Mahzor le-Yamim Nora'im*, ed. Daniel Goldschmidt, Jerusalem 1970, vol. 2, 761; Susan Einbinder, *Beautiful Death*, Princeton, N. J., 2002, 30, 52, 63, 69, fnn. 58 and 59; Leopold Zunz, *Literaturgeschichte der synagogalen Poesie*, Berlin 1865, 282f.; and Urbach, *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot* 1:140. For R. Yosef's *hoshanah*, *E-l na'araz be-sod qedoshim rabbah barekh'om meyu-hedet be-ruah nedivah* (with a single repeating rhyme, a *haruz mavriah*, throughout), see *Mahzor le-Sukkot*, ed. Daniel Goldschmidt, Jerusalem 1981, 207. Note also the poetic conclusions to many of the portions of Bekhor Shor's Torah commentary; see now, e.g., Jonathan Jacobs, *Tosafot she-Hosif Rashbam le-Perusho la-Torah* [Addenda Added by Rashbam to his Torah Commentary], in: *Tarbiz* 66 (2007), 445–469, here 468f.
- 4 See, e.g., MS Cambridge Add. 561/6 (Ashkenaz, fourteenth century; Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts at the Jewish National Library in Jerusalem, no. 16849), fol. 225; MS JTS 4460/5 (Ashkenaz, fourteenth century; no. 25362, fols. 253r–254r; MS Lund L. O. 2 (Ashkenaz, 1407; no. 34100); fol. 2v; and MS Zurich Heid. 51/34 (Ashkenaz, 1439; no. 02613), fol. 104r.
- 5 As Urbach notes (*Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*, vol. 1, 134), the identification of the biblical exegete R. Yosef Bekhor Shor with the Tosafist R. Yosef b. Isaac of Orleans is no longer in

In an effort to reconcile the disparate conceptions of God noted above, Yosef Bekhor Shor offers the following as the first of his interpretations to Gen. 1:26, 'Let us make man in our image' (*na'aseh 'adam be-zalmenu ki-demutenu*):

"Let us create man in a such a way that [through intimidation] he will rule and dominate all [on earth], just as the Almighty and other heavenly beings dominate in their realms. This [verse] does not mean that these [God and man] actually have a comparable physical image, for no physical conception or image can be attributed to the One above."

Bekhor Shor then cites several biblical verses which suggest that God cannot be described in physical terms or compared with physical beings. The biblical phrases that refer to the eyes or hands of God and so on are merely a convention devised to convey Divine actions to man (*le-sabber 'et ha-'ozen*), who can comprehend the existence and functioning of an intelligent being only when it is expressed in human terms. The vision reported by Ezekiel in which God appears to the prophet in human form occurred, in actuality, only in the prophet's mind's eye. "For God and the Heavenly entourage can make themselves appear in any form that they would like man to see." The same holds true for the various rabbinic figures (as reported by the Talmud) and other prophets to whom the Almighty or other heavenly figures appeared. Thus, the comparison of forms in Gen. 1:26 is made (only) with respect to the ability to intimidate other beings, even though in this case as well, the comparison is imprecise.⁶

One is tempted to suggest that Joseph of Orleans was acquainted with Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*. In *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* (Laws of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Torah) 1:8, Maimonides writes that Scripture

doubt. See also the (*'alfa-beta*) introduction to R. Isaac b. Moses of Vienna, *Sefer Or Zarua'*, Zhitomir 1862, pt. 1, sec. 20 (fol. 4a), which records R. Yosef Bekhor's grammatical (and polemical) interpretation of Deut. 6:4 (*Shema Yisra'el*; see Perushei R. Yosef Bekhor Shor 'al ha-Torah, ed. Yehoshafat Nevo, Jerusalem 1994, 316f.) as *u-piresh ha-R. Yosef me-Orleans be-Perushei Humash shelo*, as well as *Sefer Or Zarua'*, pt. 2, sec. 31 (*hilkhot 'erev Shabbat*, fol. 8a), which presents R. Joseph of Orleans's definition (or description) of lice precisely as it is found in the commentary of Bekhor Shor to Exod. 8:12 (ed. Nevo, 108). These passages from *Sefer Or Zarua'* are cited by S. A. Poznanski, *Mavo 'al Hakhmei Zarefat Mefarshei ha-Miqra* [Introduction to Northern French Biblical Exegesis], Warsaw 1913, LVI–LVII. See also Perushei R. Yosef Bekhor Shor, ed. Nevo, editor's introduction, 1 f.; *Tosafot Makkot* 6a, s. v. *nirva*, and 8a, s. v. *haynu*.

⁶ See Perushei R. Yosef Bekhor 'al ha-Torah, ed. Nevo, 6. Note R. Yosef's use in this passage of the phrase *le-sabber 'et ha-'ozen* (that the Torah employs seemingly anthropomorphic terms only in order to 'soothe the ears' of its readers, so that they might have a context in which to understand the Divine), and the similar usages of *le-sabber 'et ha-'ozen* in Rashi's commentary to the Torah as cited below, fn. 22. See also Bekhor Shor's commentary to Num. 23:22, ed. Nevo, 286).

explicitly indicates that God has no body or bodily form. Two of the three verses that Rambam cites to prove his contention are Deut. 4:15 and Isa. 40:25, the key biblical proof texts adduced by Bekhor Shor as well. In *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 1:9, Maimonides goes on to explain (just as Bekhor Shor does) that the Torah's phrases which describe the various limbs and parts of God are meant only as illustrations, expressed in human terms that are the only ones which man can appreciate and understand (*ha-kol lefi da'atan shel bnei 'adam she-'einan makkirin 'ela ha-gufot*), and are not meant to be taken literally. On the other hand, since Joseph of Orleans apparently died before Maimonides did (in 1204), and the earliest citation of *Mishneh Torah* by French Tosafists does not occur before the turn of the twelfth century,⁷ it is unlikely that Joseph derived his formulation from this work.⁸

To be sure, there are also some similarities with regard to the search for *ta'amei ha-mizvot* (the reasons for the commandments) between R. Yosef Bekhor Shor and Maimonides. Bekhor Shor espouses the broader Maimonidean approach toward sacrifices (that the sacrificial order was meant as an elevation of the sacrifices that were offered by idolaters, and as a means of improving the religious behavior of the Jewish people),⁹ and he also anticipates the Maimonidean view regarding the goal or purpose of the ritual of *'eglah 'arufah* (the calf whose neck was broken in the case of an unsolved murder) as a possible means for solving the murder in question,¹⁰ as well as

7 See Ephraim Kanarfogel/Moshe Sokolow, Rashi ve-Rambam Nifgashim ba-Genizah he-Qahirit. Hafnayah 'el Sefer 'Mishneh Torah' be-Mikhtav Ehad mi-Ba'alei ha-Tosafot [Rashi and Maimonides Meet in a Geniza Fragment. A Reference to Mishneh Torah in a Letter from a Tosafist], in: *Tarbiz* 67 (1998), 411–416.

8 The Tosafist exegetical comment to Gen. 1:26 (Tosafot ha-Shalem, ed. Jacob Gellis, vol. 1, Jerusalem 1982, 65 f., sec. 26), which Israel Ta-Shma claimed (in his *Ha-Sifrut ha-Parshanit la-Talmud* [Talmudic Commentary in Europe and North Africa], vol. 2, Jerusalem 2000, 106 fn. 22) demonstrates Bekhor Shor's use of *Mishneh Torah* is, in fact, an addendum or interpolation made by *Sefer ha-Gan* (in MS Nuremberg 5) to Bekhor Shor's core comment on this verse; see below, fn. 35. *Sefer ha-Gan*, written by Aaron b. Yosef ha-Kohen, was completed ca. 1240, when *Mishneh Torah* was certainly available in northern France. For the heavy influence of Bekhor Shor's commentary on *Sefer ha-Gan*, see J. Mitchell Orlan, *Sefer ha-Gan* by R. Aaron b. Yosef ha-Kohen, Jerusalem 2009, 42–48. The text of *Sefer ha-Gan* found in MS Vienna Heb. 28 (19/5) also cites *Mishneh Torah* in a comment to Lev. 21:4 (*be-Sefer R. Mosheh b. Maimon she-'amar mi-pi ha-qabbalah be-met mizvah*).

9 See Perushei R. Yosef Bekhor Shor, ed. Nevo, 166 (Exod. 30:1), 186 (Lev. 2:13), and esp. 207 (Lev. 17:7), and see Maimonides' *Moreh Nevukhim* (Guide for the Perplexed), 3:46, and Poznanski, *Mavo 'al Hakhmei Zarefat Mefarshei ha-Miqra*, LXVIII.

10 See Perushei R. Yosef Bekhor Shor, ed. Nevo, 352 (Deut. 21:8), and see Maimonides' *Moreh Nevukhim* 3:40. In both of these instances, Bekhor Shor is against the (anti-Maimonidean) approach of Nahmanides, even as Nahmanides was strongly influenced by the commentary of Bekhor Shor in his own Torah commentary. See Hillel Novetzky, *The Influence of Rabbi Joseph Bekhor Shor and Radak on Ramban's Commentary on the Torah*

the (hygienic) reasons for the requirements of *kashrut*.¹¹ Moreover, Yosef apparently had access to a number of works of Sephardic biblical exegesis and thought, including those of Bahya ibn Paquda, Judah ibn Hayyuj, Abraham bar Hiyya, if not to the commentaries of Abraham ibn Ezra.¹²

Nonetheless, Bekhor Shor's anti-anthropomorphic approach to Gen. 1:26 (and to others verses as well) is not expressed in authentic philosophical terms,¹³ and he cannot be characterized as anything other than a clear-thinking rabbinic scholar who had to confront the vexing but obvious dilemma outlined earlier: How can God, who is essentially non-corporeal, appear to man in seemingly human form?¹⁴ It should also be noted that Bekhor Shor's lengthy comment to Gen. 1:26 has a fully developed second section, in which he further utilizes the dimension of intimidation that was a common point between man and the angels and the Almighty Himself (as opposed to any commonality with respect to physical image), along with a series of grammatical observations, to defuse the possible claim of multiplicity (and trinitarianism) that Christians polemicists put forward on the basis of an unusual plural verb form found in this verse (*va-yomer E-lohim na'aseh 'a-*

(unpublished MA thesis, Yeshiva University, 1992), 6–33. Earlier in the Torah portion of *Shofetim* (Deut. 18:22, ed. Nevo, 348), Bekhor Shor's formulation, which limits the ability of a prophet to emend the practices or precepts of the Torah (only in temporary situations, but not permanently) is once again quite similar to Maimonides' formulation in *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 9:3–4 (and see Kesef Mishneh, ad loc.).

- 11 See Perushei R. Yosef Bekhor Shor, ed. Nevo, 124 (Exod. 15:26). See Moreh Nevukhim 3:48; and Poznanski, Mavo, LXVII (who notes the possible influence of Rashbam to Lev. 11:3 in this regard).
- 12 See, e.g., Perushei R. Yosef Bekhor Shor, ed. Nevo, editor's introduction, 3; Moshe Idel, *Perush Mizmor Yod Tet bi-Tehillim le-Rav Yosef Bekhor Shor* [R. Yosef Bekhor Shor's Commentary to Psalm 19], in: 'AleI Sefer 9 (1981), 63–69; Avraham Grossman, *Ha-Qesharim bein Yahadut Sefarad le-Yahadut Ashkenaz Bimeit ha-Benayim* [The Connections Between Sephardic Jewry and Ashkenazic Jewry in the Middle Ages], in: Haim Beinart (ed.), *Moresheet Sefarad* [The Sephardic Legacy], Jerusalem 1992, 174–189, here 176f.; idem, *Hakhmei Zarefat ha-Rishonim* [The Early Sages of France], Jerusalem 1995, 472f.; and see Abraham Lifshitz, *R. Avraham ibn Ezra be-Perushei Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*, in: *Hadarom* 28 (1968), 202–221, here 219–221; Eleazar Touitou, *Exegesis in Perpetual Motion*, Ramat Gan 2003, 46f. (Heb.); Meir Miyara, *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot* [The Tosafists], Jerusalem 1998, 242–248; and below, fn. 16. For possible Spanish influences on the *piyyuṭim* of R. Joseph of Orleans, see above, fn. 3, and Ephraim Kanarfogel, *The Intellectual History of Medieval Ashkenazic Jewry. New Perspectives*, chap. 5 (forthcoming).
- 13 See Urbach, *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*, 134f.; Poznanski, Mavo, LXVI; and see Judah Galinsky, *Ve-Lihyot Lefanekha 'Eved Ne'eman kol ha-Yamim*: *Pereq be-Haguto ha-Datit shel R. Mosheh mi-Coucy* [A Chapter in the Religious Thought of R. Moses of Coucy], in: *Da'at* 42 (1999), 13–31, here 20–22.
- 14 On Bekhor Shor's rationality, see Ephraim Kanarfogel, 'Peering through the Lattices.' *Mystical, Magical and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period*, Detroit 2000, 160f., fn. 69; 166f., fn. 86; and the literature cited.

dam).¹⁵ Irrespective of the overall weight of anti-Christian polemics in the development of the search for *peshat* in northern France during the twelfth century, this crucial consideration for Bekhor Shor would be of little significance or consequence for Maimonides or other rationalists *per se*.¹⁶ Moreover, the commonality between the human and Divine realms suggested by Bekhor Shor (which focused on their powers of intimidation) was a far cry from the common denominator maintained by Maimonides (in terms of intellectual form), a further indication that Bekhor Shor in all likelihood was not acquainted with Maimonides' writings.

Although Bekhor Shor's anti-anthropomorphic interpretation of Gen. 1:26 is similar, in any case, to that of Rambam in *Mishneh Torah* (as noted, and in Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* as well),¹⁷ R. Yosef, good Tosafist that he was, is also concerned with identifying and explaining all relevant Talmudic passages. He marshals these to support his claim that God appears to man in physical form only via some type of mental imagery (*medammeh/idmei*). The notion of a para-normal or psychologistic revelation, directed by God, through which a vision appears in the mind of the prophet without anything actually happening in the external world was also held in the early eleventh century by rabbinic scholars such as R. Hai Gaon, R. Hanan'el b. Hushi'el of Kairwan and R. Nathan b. Yehi'el of Rome, author of the '*Arukh*'.¹⁸ In any case, the Tosafist R. Yosef (Bekhor Shor) of

15 See, e. g., David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, Philadelphia 1979, 235.

16 For Bekhor Shor as polemicist, see, e. g., Sefer Yosef ha-Meqanne, ed. Judah Rosenthal, Jerusalem 1970, 79, 100, 104, 113; Pozanski, Mavo, LXIX–LXX; and Shaye Cohen, Does Rashi's Torah Commentary Respond to Christianity? A Comparison of Rashi with Rashbam and Bekhor Shor, in: Hindy Najman/James Newman (eds.), *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation [Essays in Honor of James Kugel]*, Leiden 2004, 449–472. Similarly, as I have recently demonstrated, Bekhor Shor's lengthy *hishuv ha-qez* [eschatological calculation] (in his commentary to Deut. 28:63, ed. Nevo, 373–375) includes a reference to R. Abraham bar Hiyya (from his *Megillat ha-Megalleh*), but it represents a distinctly (different) Ashkenazic approach overall. See Ephraim Kanarfogel, Ashkenazic Messianic Calculations from Rashi and his Generation through the Tosafist Period, in: Avraham Grossman/Sara Japhet (eds.), *Rashi. The Man and his Work*, Jerusalem 2009, vol. 2, 381–401, here 391–393.

17 See Moreh Nevukhim 1:46, 2:44–45.

18 See, e. g., Elliot Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, Princeton, N. J., 1994, 144–148; and Joseph Dan, Sefer 'Sha'arei ha-Sod, ha-Yihud v'ha-Emunah' le-R. Eleazar mi-Worms, in: Temirin 1 (1972), 141–156, here 146f., 151. Wolfson characterizes what the prophets saw, according to this theory, as a mental image (*dimyon*). A text of R. Judah he-Hasid defines this conception of a prophetic vision as an illusion ('*ahizat 'enayim*'). See Joseph Dan, Ashkenazic Hasidism and the Maimonidean Controversy, in: Arthur Hyman (ed.), *Maimonidean Studies 3* (1992/93), 29–47, here 38f.; idem, 'Iyyunim be-Sifrut Hasidut Ashkenaz [Studies in the Literature of Ashkenazic Hasidism]', Ramat Gan 1975, 165.

Orleans clearly cannot be included among those rabbis of northern France who wished to attribute forms of corporeality or anthropomorphism to God, a view (of these rabbis) that was sorely criticized during the Maimonidean controversy.¹⁹

Antecedents in Northern France

Samuel b. Mordekhai of Marseilles, a little-known Provençal scholar writing in defense of Maimonides and against his detractors (in conjunction with the Maimonidean controversy of the 1230s), records in a letter that “the majority of the rabbinic scholars in northern France [accept] anthropomorphism.”²⁰ Nahmanides, in his better known epistle of 1232 to the rabbis of northern France, notes that Ashkenazic scholars leveled the charge that Maimonides was mistaken in insisting (in his *Sefer ha-Madda* [The Book of Knowledge]) that God has no form or shape. These rabbinic scholars apparently believed that God did have some kind of physical form.²¹ Rashi is singled out by a Provençal rationalist, Asher b. Gershom (perhaps of Beziers), as holding, in consonance with the view of Maimonides but against the general tenor within the rabbinic circles of northern France, that the phy-

- 19 Since Nahmanides was certainly aware of the Torah commentary of Bekhor Shor (above, fn. 10), perhaps Bekhor Shor is to be counted as one of those who espoused the ‘minority position’ among northern French rabbis to which Ramban refers, in the lengthy epistle that he penned in connection with the Maimonidean controversy. See below, fn. 21.
- 20 MS Neofiti 11, fol. 210v. See Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, Princeton, N. J., 1987, 406f. On R. Samuel b. Mordekhai and his epistle, see *ibid.*, 224–226; and Moshe Idel, *Qeta 'Iyyuni le-R. Asher b. Meshullam mi-Lunel*, in: *Qiryat Sefer* 50 (1975), 148–153.
- 21 See the text of Nahmanides’ letter published in *Kitvei ha-Ramban* [The Writings of Nahmanides], ed. Charles Chavel, Jerusalem 1968, vol. 1, 345f. [= *Qovez Teshuvot ha-Ramban* (A Collection of Maimonidean Responsa), Leipzig 1859, sec. 3, fols. 9d–10b]. Just prior to his discussion of anthropomorphism, Nahmanides notes the approbation for *Mishneh Torah* implicit in the writings of the important Tosafist, R. Isaac b. Abraham (Rizba) of Dampierre (d. 1210). See also Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition*, 79: “Not only rationalist polemicists but even an anti-rationalist like Nahmanides indicates that anthropomorphism played an important role in the condemnation of Maimonides’ works [in Ashkenaz].” Shortly thereafter, Nahmanides cites extensively from a treatise of R. Eleazar of Worms to show that Eleazar did not subscribe to the anthropomorphic view. Ramban also indicates that there were some right-minded (but unnamed) *Hakhmei Zarefat* [rabbinic scholars of northern France] who agreed with (and wrote about) this (non-anthropomorphic) view. *Sefer 'Arugat ha-Bosem*, ed. Ephraim E. Urbach, vol. 4, Jerusalem 1963, 74–81, suggests that the goal of Eleazar in composing this treatise and, indeed, the broader purpose of the German Pietists in developing their *torat ha-kavod* [doctrine of the Divine glory], was to counter those around them who insisted on radical anthropomorphism.

sical or anthropomorphic descriptions of God reported by the prophets were products of their (prophetic) imagination rather than actual images.²²

As I have demonstrated elsewhere,²³ the range of beliefs found in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Ashkenaz with respect to anthropomorphism was broader than these particular (polemical) letters from Provence and Spain suggest, and was more varied and nuanced than we have become accustomed to thinking. At the same time, however, Rashi's approach was not entirely consistent,²⁴ and at least one of his students, R. Jacob b. Samson, put forward a decidedly anthropomorphic view.²⁵

- 22 See MS Cambridge Add. 507.1, fols. 75r–v, transcribed in Joseph Shatzmiller, *Les Tosafists et la première controverse maimonidienne*, in: Gerard Nahon/Charles Touati (eds.), *Rashi et la culture juive en France du Nord au moyen âge*, Paris 1997, 55–82, here 75. Shatzmiller (fn. 167) identifies the specific reference as Rashi's commentary to Exod. 19:18. In describing the fiery environment at Mount Sinai, the Torah compares the smoke that rose to the smoke that a furnace generates. Rashi, paraphrasing the *Mekhilta*, comments that a commonplace natural phenomenon is employed to illustrate this unique and unusual situation because that is a mode of description which people can comprehend. Rashi then extends this notion to explain the voice of God heard by the prophet Ezekiel. Later in his letter (fol. 78r–v; Shatzmiller, 79 f.), Asher claims that the rabbis of northern France decreed that the Bible and the Talmud must be studied only according to the commentaries of Rashi, ostensibly because Rashi tends to interpret according to the literal sense and in accordance with rabbinic teachings. (This claim is also found in the letter to the rabbis of northern France sent by Samuel b. Abraham Saporta; see Septimus, *Hispano Jewish Culture in Transition*, 78.) And yet, Asher notes, there are instances in which Rashi interprets a biblical verse according to its context, differently than Onkelos does, and without any support from Talmudic literature. Moreover, Rashi maintains 'in many instances' that Scripture is phrased in a manner that 'appeases the ear' (*le-sakkekhet ha'ozen*) so that it can be understood, "which comports with the words of our teacher (Maimonides)." Shatzmiller (fn. 229) suggests that an example of this last point can be found in Rashi's commentary to Exod. 15:8, "And with a blast of Thy nostrils the waters [of the Red Sea] were piled up." Rashi's comment is that "Scripture speaks as if this [the blast that goes forth from the nostrils of the nose] were possible for the Divine Presence in the way of a king of flesh and blood only in order to allow the ears of people to hear in accordance with what usually happens, in order that they will be able to understand the matter."
- 23 See Ephraim Kanarfogel, *Varieties of Belief in Medieval Ashkenaz. The Case of Anthropomorphism*, in: Daniel Frank/Matt Goldish (eds.), *Rabbinic Culture and its Critics*, Detroit, Mich., 2008, 117–159.
- 24 See, e. g., Rashi's commentary to Exod. 7:4 (*'et yadi-yad mamash le-hakkot bahem*); *Tosafot ha-Rosh 'al Masskehet Hagigah*, ed. Abraham Shoshana, Jerusalem 2002, 10 (to *Hagigah* 2a), s. v. *yir'eh* [= *Sanhedrei Gedolah le-Massekhet Sanhedrin*, vol. 3 (*Tosafot ha-Rosh*), ed. Benjamin Lipkin, Jerusalem 1970, 38 (to *Sanhedrin* 4b), s. v. *ke-derekh she-ba lir'ot*]; and Israel Ta-Shma, *Ha-Suma be-'Ayin 'Ahat Patur min ha-Re'iyah – Derashah Tanna'it Setumah u-Be'urehah [An Unclear Tannaitic Homily and its Explanation]*, in: *Bar Ilan* 30–31 (2006), 591–596.
- 25 On R. Jacob b. Solomon (1070–1140) and his corpus, see Avraham Grossman, *Hakhmei Zarefat ha-Rishonim*, Jerusalem 1995, 411–428 (Heb.). Most unusual among R. Jacob's works is his (lost) *Sefer Alqoshi*, which deals with rabbinic approaches to astronomy and astrology (as well as aspects of creation science). As Grossman notes (419f.), it appears

Indeed, the German Tosafist R. Moses b. Hisdai Taku (d. ca. 1235),²⁶ who stands as one of the strongest expositors of anthropomorphism in medieval Ashkenaz, cites R. Jacob b. Samson as an important source for his approach. In his rather idiosyncratic treatise of Jewish thought entitled *Ketav Tamim*, R. Moses Taku maintains that when God decides to show himself in a particular form to angels or to prophets, He actually adopts this form, even as Taku begins this same passage by asserting that God cannot be accurately characterized by or compared to any particular physical form (*lo yidmeh lo shum demut*).²⁷ This distinction, which allows for the physical appearance of God at a particular moment in human history even though He has no fixed form, is also found in Taku's interpretation of Gen. 1:26–27, where Taku presents additional examples of God's ability to appear in different forms and cites approvingly the view of R. Jacob b. Samson.²⁸

Although R. Moses Taku was not totally atypical in his view, he does not represent a monolithic position within medieval Ashkenaz, as we have seen already (from both Rashi and Bekhor Shor) and shall continue to see.²⁹

that R. Jacob made use of R. Abraham bar Hiyya's *Sod 'Ibbur* [Secrets of Intercalation] in his work.

26 On R. Moses Taku's career as a Tosafist, see Urbach, *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*, 420–425; and see Simcha Emanuel, *Lost Works of the Tosafists*, Jerusalem 2006, 315, fn. 34 (Heb.). On R. Moses' legal rulings and their impact, see, e.g., my "The Development and Diffusion of Unanimous Agreement in Medieval Ashkenaz," in: Isadore Twersky (ed.), *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, vol. 3, Cambridge, Mass., 2000, 28–32.

27 *Ketav Tamim* [facsimile edition of MS Paris H71 1, with an introduction by Joseph Dan], Jerusalem 1984, 53–55 (fols. 27a–28a).

28 See *Ketav Tamim*, 7–11 (fols. 4a–6a).

29 See Joseph M. Davis, *Philosophy, Dogma and Exegesis in Medieval Ashkenazic Judaism*, in: *Association for Jewish Studies (AJS) 18* (1993), 195–222, here 212, 213, fn. 65, citing Saperstein, *Decoding the Rabbis*, 7–9, who describes Taku as "anachronistic and isolated," and Joseph Dan (see below), who argues that Taku was unexceptional (with which Davis fundamentally agrees) as does Ta-Shma, *Ha-Sifrut ha-Parshanit la-Talmud*, vol. 2, 194, fn. 8. Septimus (above, fn. 21) writes that "it would perhaps be rash to assert that R. Moses was fully representative of mainstream Franco-German tradition." David Berger, *Jewish and General Culture in Medieval and Early Modern Times*, in: Jacob J. Schacter (ed.), *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures. Rejection or Integration?*, Montvale 1997, 57–141, here 93, characterizes Taku as "not entirely a marginal figure" (although on page 118, he calls *Ketav Tamim* an unusual work). Dan (in the introduction to the facsimile edition of *Ketav Tamim*, 8–11, and in "Ashkenazic Hasidism and the Maimonidean Controversy," 40–47) also stresses that Taku's *Ketav Tamim* predates the Maimonidean controversy and reflects none of its actual struggles (even as Taku does argue strongly against the "heretical" views of Sa'adyah, Maimonides, Ibn Ezra and the German Pietists), and that *Ketav Tamim* does not seem to have caused any stir within Ashkenaz. Urbach maintains (*Arugat ha-Bosem* 4:80), specifically with regard to anthropomorphism, that Taku saw himself as fighting against a "new heresy" within Ashkenaz that wished to label those who supported the "incumbent" position of anthropomorphism as heretics. Urbach bases his formulation on a passage in *Ketav Tamim* (facsimile ed., 61 [= fol. 31a]: *ki zu ha-dat he-hadash ve-hakhmatam hadashah mi-qarov ba'u va-yomru*

Moreover, Moses is not arguing for absolute Divine corporealism, nor does he believe that God can be fairly and accurately characterized in crude anthropomorphic terms. Indeed, if we look purely from the standpoint of methodology, the distance between Taku and Bekhor Shor is not so great.³⁰

R. Yosef Bekhor Shor of Orlean's northern French predecessor (as both Tosafist and biblical exegete), R. Samuel b. Meir (Rashbam), also clearly held a non-anthropomorphic view of the Divine. Rashbam comments on Gen. 1:26, that "in our image [means] in the image of the angels." Similarly, Rashbam interprets that the Divine image in which man was created (Gen. 1:27) refers to (the image of) the angels.³¹ Rashbam makes these comments from the standpoint of rational *peshat* exegesis, without any recourse to formal philosophical (or mystical) concepts or terms, and he is fully consistent in his exegetical approach,³² if not systematic.³³ Although R. Joseph Bekhor

mah she-ra'u nevi'im hem zurot ha-beru'im). For further discussion and contextualization of Taku's view, see Ephraim Kanarfogel, *Varieties of Belief in Medieval Ashkenaz*, esp. 122–124.

- 30 See Menahem Mendel Kasher, *Torah Shelema*, vol. 16, 315–319. Owing to a series of similarities in terminology between Bekhor Shor and Taku, Kasher goes so far as to posit that they shared the same basic view that God, despite the fact that He has no physical form *per se*, can choose different guises to adopt including physical ones, against the view of Maimonides that God cannot adopt any physical characteristics whatsoever. See Ta-Shma, in the above footnote. The extent to which Provençal anti-Maimonists (such as those in the circle of R. Solomon Montpellier) held from a crude or simplistic form of anthropomorphism is also a matter of conjecture and dispute. See, e.g., Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 204–216, 404–408; Isadore Twersky, *Rabad of Posquieres, Philadelphia* 21980, 282–286 (and the addendum on page 358); Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition*, 80f. and esp. fn. 45; Berger, *Jewish and General Culture*, 94f.; Daniel J. Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy 1180–1240*, Leiden 1965, 156–163; and Moshe Halbertal, *Bein Torah le-Hokhmah [Between Torah and Wisdom]*, Jerusalem 2000, 25–29, 183–189. Scholem and Urbach (see the above footnote) attempt to correlate the events and positions in Ashkenaz during the Maimonidean controversy with the oft-cited gloss of Rabad on anthropomorphism (Maimonides, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 3:7).
- 31 See Martin Lockshin, *Rabbi Samuel Meir's Commentary on Genesis*, Lewison 1989, 52–54. A similar comment (to 1:26) is recorded anonymously, in a manuscript variant (MS Paris 260) of the Tosafist Torah commentary, *Moshav Zeqenim* (published by Isaac Samson Lange in *Ha-Ma'ayan* 12 [1972], 81, and also in *Tosafot ha-Shalem*, ed. Gellis, 1:65, sec. 25): *ki-demtenu, rozeh lomar ki-demut mal'akhim de-'ein lomar demut ha-bore yit-barakh*.
- 32 See, e.g., Rashbam's comments to the appearance of God at Mount Sinai, in *Exod.* 19:9, 11, 23, and *Exod.* 33:18, 23.
- 33 On Rashbam's rational exegesis (including his awareness of aspects of Spanish biblical interpretation and his playing down of mystical or esoteric teachings), see my 'Peering through the Lattices,' 159–161, and see Davis, *Philosophy, Dogma, and Exegesis in Medieval Ashkenazic Judaism*, 213, fn. 67. Sara Japhet has noted (in the introduction to her edition of *Perush Rashbam le-Sefer Iyyov* [Jerusalem 2000], 127–135), that in his commentary to Job as well, Rashbam attempts to eliminate or re-interpret anthropomorphic

Shor takes a different approach than Rashbam regarding the specifics of his interpretation to Gen. 1:26, Rashbam's interpretive strategy likely served as an exegetical (and conceptual) model for his younger colleague.³⁴

Non-Anthropomorphic Approaches in Tosafist Torah Commentaries

The views of Rashbam and Maimonides, as well as that of Bekhor Shor, are brought together in the interpretation to Gen. 1:26 found in the northern French Tosafist Torah commentary *Sefer ha-Gan* (the Hebrew word *Gan* represents in *gematria* the 53 weekly portions that comprise the Torah), compiled by Aaron b. Joseph ha-Kohen, ca. 1240).³⁵ *Sefer ha-Gan* begins by presenting (without attribution) the essence of Bekhor Shor's interpretation of this verse. It is inappropriate to refer to the form of the Creator, as various biblical verses indicate. The references to Divine eyes or speech is a *mashal* to convey the notion that God can communicate, just as Scripture compares the voice of God to the sound of deep, rushing water. The claim that man is made in God's image refers only to the ability to intimidate, that man's fear

depictions of God. She notes, however, that Rashbam does not pursue this agenda in every possible context or direction. To my mind, however, this is because Rashbam does not have the rigorously philosophical outlook that Maimonides had, which requires that every possible anthropomorphic reference be explained away or eliminated. See Mordechai Cohen's review of Japhet's book in *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 27 (2008), 128–132; Lockshin, *Rabbi Samuel b. Meir's Commentary*, 338, fn. 3; Tuitou, *Exegesis in Perpetual Motion*, 29–33; and Grossman, *Hakhmei Zarefat ha-Rishonim*, 582–585. A good example of the similarities (and differences) between the exegetical/philosophical approaches of Rashbam and Rambam can be seen in their interpretations of Gen. 18, and the story of the three angels who came to visit Abraham. Coming mostly from the exegetical (*peshat*) perspective, but reflecting a degree of rationalism as well, Rashbam puts forward (in his commentary to Gen. 18:1, against the view of Rashi) the fairly radical interpretation that the appearance of the three angels (in physical form, as the Torah describes) constitutes the appearance of God mentioned by the Torah at the beginning of this episode. In *Moreh Nevukhim* 2:42, Maimonides maintains, like Rashbam, that God appeared to Abraham in the guise of the angels. A philosophical issue, however, rather than an exegetical one was at the core of Rambam's interpretation. In Maimonides' rigorous philosophical model, angels (which he identifies with the separate intellects), like God, do not have a corporeal form. Thus, they appeared to Abraham, as representatives of God, in a prophetic dream. See also *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah*, 2:7 (the tenth level of angels is referred to as *'ishim*; these are the angelic forms who speak with the prophets and appear to them in prophetic visions). See below, fn. 37.

34 Overall, however, Bekhor Shor's presentation (and integration) of *peshat* and midrashic interpretation is closer to that of Rashi than to the method of Rashbam. See my *The Intellectual History of Medieval Ashkenazic Jewry*, chap. 2.

35 MS Nuremberg 5, cited in *Tosafot ha-Shalem*, ed. Gellis 1:65–66, sec. 26. See above, fn. 8, for another citation of Maimonides by the author of *Sefer ha-Gan*.

(like God's) will be placed over other creatures.³⁶ *Sefer ha-Gan* describes the punishment for one who believes that God has a physical image according to Rambam in what appears to be an overt paraphrase of *Hilkhot Teshuvah* (Laws of Repentance) 3:6–7.

Sefer ha-Gan then links Rashbam's interpretation of Gen. 1:26 (that the form attributed to man is the unique form of the angels) to Rambam's description of the category of angels in *Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:7 (which he refers to as 'ishim), who appear in prophetic visions.³⁷ This is the sense of the verse that God created man in the image of the Divine (*be-zelem E-lohim*), meaning in the image of the angels (*be-zelem mal'akim*), since in many (biblical) contexts, angels are referred to as 'elohim. These passages from Maimonides are also cited in several subsequent Torah commentaries from the mid- and late thirteenth century.³⁸

R. Isaac b. Judah ha-Levi, the northern French compiler of the Tosafist biblical commentary entitled *Pa'aneah Raza* that appeared in the late thirteenth century, was strongly influenced by the Torah commentary of R. Yosef Bekhor Shor. R. Isaac ha-Levi also included much exegetical (and pietistic)

36 See above, fn. 6.

37 The examples that are given in *Sefer ha-Gan*, from the angels that appeared to Hagar, Joshua and Manoah, are not specifically mentioned in this passage in *Mishneh Torah*. They are mentioned, however, in *Moreh Nevukhim* 2:42. This suggests that the author of *Sefer ha-Gan* had access to *Moreh Nevukhim* as well. See below, fn. 49.

38 *Tosafot ha-Shalem*, ed. Gellis, 1:65, sec. 21, records two other Tosafist Torah commentaries, MS Bodleian 271 (fol. 121r) and MS Paris 48 (see Isaac Samson Lange, *Perush Ba'alei ha-Tosafot 'al ha-Torah – Ketav Yad Paris 48*, in: 'Alei Sefer 5 [1978], 77), which cite the first reference to Rambam found in *Sefer ha-Gan* (on the punishment for believing that God is corporeal), together with Rashbam's comment. Both these collections were compiled after *Sefer ha-Gan*, and one of them cites material directly from *Sefer ha-Gan*. See *Tosafot ha-Shalem*, ed. Gellis, vol. 1, editor's introduction, 22f., 34. The second Rambam passage found in *Sefer ha-Gan*, on the angels who appear in human form in prophetic visions, is cited in *Perushei ha-Torah le-R. Hayyim Palti'el*, ed. Lange, Jerusalem 1981, 4. Lange notes in his introduction (10f.) that this commentary contains a significant amount of material from both Yosef Bekhor Shor and *Pa'aneah Raza*. Hayyim Palti'el was a student of R. Meir of Rothenburg, who ultimately settled in eastern Germany. His collection of *minhagim* followed those of R. Judah he-Hasid, including a number that reflect earlier practices in northern France rather than those of Rhineland Germany. R. Hayyim Palti'el appears to have spent some time in northern France himself, and is also referred to as R. Hayyim of Falaise. See Lange in 'Alei Sefer 8 (1980), 142–145; Eric Zimmer, 'Olam ke-Minhago Noheg, Jerusalem 1996, 271, 277, 283, 286, 296f.; and my 'Peering through the Lattices,' 113. Rambam's statement of the principle of Divine incorporeality (based on *Mishneh Torah*) is quoted by Jacob b. Judah Hazzan of London in his *Ez Hayyim*, ed. Israel Brodie, Jerusalem 1962, vol. 1, 5f. ('eino guf u-geviyyah). See Davis, Philosophy, Dogma and Exegesis in Medieval Ashkenazic Judaism, 217f. On the increased use of *Mishneh Torah* in Ashkenaz in the mid- and late thirteenth century, see, e.g., Ephraim Kanarfogel, Preservation, Creativity, and Courage. The Life and Works of R. Meir of Rothenburg, in: *Jewish Book Annual* 50 (1992–93), 250–252.

tic) material from the German Pietists.³⁹ According to a comment to Gen. 1:26 found in two manuscript versions of *Pa'aneah Raza*, God's intention to create man in 'our image' refers to the image of the angels (who have a human form or shape, *zelem*). God appears to the prophets via this (angelic human) form, so that the prophets will not become disoriented or terrified.

The *Pa'aneah Raza* passage emphasizes that all intelligent people must understand that the Creator Himself has no structure or shape (as the verses in Isa. 40 indicate). He sees but is not seen, just as the human soul, which is infused with His spirit but has no form, allows a person to see but is itself not seen, even as it fills the entire human body. Similarly, there is no finitude to the greatness of God. He is unlimited and has no limbs, but He fills everything. All references to the hands and ears and heart and mouth (of God) are merely representations (*mashal*, as many verses indicate) of His ability to hear, think and speak in order that the (human) ear hear what it is capable to understand. The prophets saw only the splendor of (the lower) part of the *Kavod* (Divine Glory). Moses saw this through a clear speculum (as Rabbenu Hanan'el explains in tractate *Yevamot*), but no one ever saw the (upper) *Kavod*. Furthermore, Rabbenu Hanan'el and Rabbenu Nissim, among others, wrote that the Creator has no shape, and they castigated anyone who claims that He does. One who believes that the Creator has no form is fortunate and one who does not believe thusly will be afflicted and is close to being a heretic. In the work of Rambam, it is stated that whoever posits a shape for the Creator is among those who will be severely punished. The comparable forms (*zelem*, of God and man) alluded to in Gen. 1:26 support the comparison only with respect to the ability to intimidate others, so that their fear will extend to created beings.⁴⁰

This passage in *Pa'aneah Raza* includes virtually every one of the approaches that we have encountered in medieval Ashkenaz to address the problem of anthropomorphism. It begins with the interpretation of R. Elea-

39 See my 'Peering through the Lattices,' 248–249, fn. 79, and the literature cited; Israel Ta-Shma, *Knesset Mehqarim* [Collected Studies], vol. 1, Jerusalem 2004, 236f.; and Joy Rochwarger, *Sefer Pa'aneah Raza and Biblical Exegesis in Medieval Ashkenaz* (unpublished MA thesis, Touro College Jerusalem, 2000), chap. 4. On the compilatory nature of this and other related works, see Sara Japhet, *The Nature and Distribution of Medieval Compilatory Commentaries in Light of Rabbi Joseph Kara's Commentary on the Book of Job*, in: Michael Fishbane (ed.), *The Midrashic Imagination*, Albany, N. Y., 1993, 98–122; and idem, *Perush ha-Hizquni la-Torah. Li-Demuto shel ha-Hibbur ule-Matrato* [Hizquni's Commentary on the Pentateuch, Its Genre and Purpose], in: Moshe Bar-Asher (ed.), *The Rabbi Mordekhai Breuer Festschrift*, Jerusalem 1992, 91–111.

40 This passage is included in *Tosafot ha-Shalem*, ed. Gellis, 1:61–62, sec. 13, from MS Warsaw 260 and MS Bodleian 2344. See Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 211. A transcription of this passage is also found in Rochwarger, *Sefer Pa'aneah Raza and Biblical Exegesis in Medieval Ashkenaz*, 79, from MS Bodleian 2344, fol. 8r.

zar of Worms, that the human image adopted by those angels who are sent by God to appear to the prophets constitutes the 'common image' between the Divine and the human realms. The passage refers to the Sa'adyanic theory of the *Kavod*, and mentions by name the early medieval talmudists who subscribed to a form of this view. Maimonides' position is cited directly, and the verses and principles gathered to explain the references to anthropomorphic characteristics in the Torah follow both the specifics in *Mishneh Torah* and in the commentary of R. Joseph Bekhor Shor. The exegetical approach that locates the common ground between the God and human beings in their ability to intimidate and control other creatures also comes from the commentary of Bekhor Shor.⁴¹ Interestingly, *Pa'aneah Raza* found no need or opportunity to include the approach of R. Moses Taku. In a comment to Exod. 20:3 (You shall have no other god before me), *Pa'aneah Raza* completely rejects the possibility that God possesses an actual physical form.⁴²

To be sure, *Pa'aneah Raza* was composed half a century after the Maimonidean controversy of the 1230s, and may have been influenced in its interpretation of Gen. 1:26 by that complex of events as well. Nonetheless, as we have seen, there are other, earlier Ashkenazic interpretations of Gen. 1:26 (aside from that of R. Eleazar of Worms) that expressed their rejection of anthropomorphism in this verse by invoking a comparison to the images of the angels, using even simpler terms. Indeed, writing no later than 1235, R. Eleazar of Worms' Pietist student, R. Abraham b. Azri'el of Bohemia, includes a lengthy passage in his major work of *piyyut* commentary, *'Arugat ha-Bosem*, that presents the same wide range of approaches in medieval Ashkenaz to the problem of anthropomorphism as *Pa'aneah Raza*. Moreover, as *Pa'aneah Raza* did later, R. Abraham b. Azri'el omits the position of R. Moses Taku, even as *'Arugat ha-Bosem* typically cites R. Moses' *Ketav Tamim* with some frequency.⁴³

41 See Rochwarger, *Sefer Pa'aneah Raza and Biblical Exegesis in Medieval Ashkenaz*, 80.

42 See *Tosafot ha-Shalem*, ed. Gellis, vol. 8, Jerusalem 1990, 84, sec. 2 (and see also *Moshav Zeqenim*, ad loc. 165): *perush lo tehashvu shum demut la-Qadosh Barukh Hu. Ve-ha dikhtiv be-zelem* (Gen. 9:6) *rozeh lomar be-zelem hashuv she-hayah lo, ve-laken yesh etmahta tahat be-zelem*.

43 See *'Arugat ha-Bosem*, ed. Urbach, vol. 1, Jerusalem 1939, 197–201. On this passage and its implications, see my "Varieties of Belief in Medieval Ashkenaz," 129f.

R. Isaiah di Trani

R. Isaiah di Trani (RiD; ca.1170–1240) was an Italian halakhist who studied in his youth with the German Tosafist, R. Simhah of Speyer. Israel Ta-Shma has reviewed R. Isaiah's large corpus, and sketched the contours of his scholarship.⁴⁴ RiD was quite familiar with the Talmudic commentary of Rashi (whom he refers to as *ha-moreh*), with Rabbenu Tam's *Sefer ha-Yashar*, and with the *Tosafot* of at least one of Rabbenu Tam's leading students, R. Isaac b. Mordekhai of Regensburg. He also cites leading authorities from the Sephardic world such as *Halakhot Gedolot*, Rabbenu Hanan'el and Rif, as well as several important rabbinic figures from his homeland in southern Italy. In terms of overall methodology, however, RiD behaves for the most part like an Ashkenazic scholar, as indicated not only by his extensive *Tosafot*, but also in his *pesaqim* (brief halakhic rulings) and other halakhic compositions as well.⁴⁵

One of RiD's first compositions, written according to Ta-Shma before any of his *Tosafot* and Talmudic novellae (and in all probability shortly after he returned to Italy from his studies in Germany, somewhere in the early years of the thirteenth century), was his commentary to the Pentateuch entitled *Nimmuqei Humash*.⁴⁶ Not surprisingly, this work betrays a heavy dose of Ashkenazic influence. Virtually all of the rabbinic figures whom RiD cites in this work (which pursues *peshuto shel miqra* [the simple meaning of scripture] to a significant degree, but also includes halakhic and Talmudic material, as well as *gematria*, and interacts quite frequently with Rashi's commentary) are from either northern France or Germany,⁴⁷ with one nota-

44 See Israel Ta-Shma, Ha-Rav Yeshayah di Trani ha-Zaqen u-Qesharav 'im Byzantiyyon ve-Erez Yisra'el [R. Isaish di Trani the Elder and his Connections with Byzantium and the Land of Israel], in: *Shalem* 4 (1984), 409–416; idem, *Sefer Shibbolei ha-Leqet u-Ke-felav*, in: *Italia* 11 (1994), 39–51; idem, R. Yeshayah di Trani ve-Sifro Tosafot Rid [R. Isaiah di Trani and Tosafot Rid], in: *Mehqerei Talmud* 3, ed. Yaacov Sussmann, Jerusalem 2005, vol. 2, 916–943. The synopsis presented here follows primarily Ta-Shma's treatment of R. Isaiah in his *Ha-Sifrut ha-Parshanit la-Talmud*, vol. 2, 174–187. See also my 'Peering through the Lattices,' 223, and my "Progress and Tradition in Medieval Ashkenaz," in: *Jewish History* 14 (2001), 287–292.

45 Indeed, as noted by Ta-Shma, *Ha-Sifrut ha-Parshanit la-Talmud*, vol. 2, 185, Ritva and other Spanish scholars refer to him as R. Yeshayah ha-Ashkenazi.

46 See Israel Ta-Shma, *Sefer 'Nimmuqei Humash' le-R. Yeshayah di Trani*, in: *Qiryat Sefer* 64 (1992–93), 751–753. The most complete version of this work is preserved in MS Moscow 303.

47 *Ibid.*, 752. See also idem, *The Acceptance of Maimonides' Mishneh Torah in Italy*, in: *Italia* 13–15 (2001), 79–90, here 82. Among the Ashkenazic rabbinic scholars cited by RiD are R. Yoseph Qara (fol. 77r), R. Yosef Bekhor Shor, R. Judah he-Hasid and R. Eleazar of Worms, Rabbenu Tam, Ri, R. Eliezer of Metz' *Sefer Yere'im*, R. Samson of Coucy, RiD's long-standing correspondent R. Isaac *Or Zarua'* (and R. Isaac's teacher R.

ble exception. In three places, R. Isaiah reproduces passages from Maimonides' *Moreh Nevukhim*.⁴⁸ Indeed, Ta-Shma notes (and explains) the rather curious phenomenon that RiD barely mentions Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* in his vast halakhic corpus (and this is true for RiD's successors in Italy for quite a while), but RiD does quote *Moreh Nevukhim* at length on these three occasions. Those Ashkenazic halakhists and rabbinic figures in the thirteenth century who cite from Maimonides' writings typically refer to *Mishneh Torah*, and tend to ignore *Moreh Nevukhim*. RiD's unusual pattern of citation shows that Rambam's philosophy was not what kept RiD away from Rambam's halakhic writings (as was the case for some others). Rather, Ta-Shma argues, the rejection or displacement of Maimonidean *halakhah* in Italy was due to the dominance of the Franco-German halakhic tradition in Italy during this time. In any case, RiD's use of *Moreh Nevukhim* stands out, and is suggestive.⁴⁹

Assessing the availability of *Moreh Nevukhim* (in one of its Hebrew translations) in thirteenth-century Ashkenaz is difficult at best. It seems from the various letters mentioned earlier in connection with the Maimonidean controversy that parts (if not all) of *Moreh Nevukhim* were shown to groups of *rabbanei Zarefat* (some of whom voiced specific criticisms) and were therefore available in some form to Ashkenazic rabbinic scholars who wished to use it.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, Tosafists in northern France and Germany, including those who were supportive of *Mishneh Torah*, do not cite the *Guide*.⁵¹ Included in this pattern are figures such as R. Moses of Coucy, and R. Isaac Or Zarua',⁵² and even the more philosophically inclined R. Eleazar of

Jonathan b. Isaac of Wurzburg), as well eastern European scholars such as R. Moses Fuller. In addition, one or two Italian scholars are mentioned. On RiD's exegetical methodologies and emphases, see my *The Intellectual History of Medieval Ashkenazic Jewry*, chap. 3.

48 MS Moscow 303, fols. 59v, 64r, and 80r.

49 Ta-Shma, The Acceptance of Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* in Italy, 79–90. See Jacob Dienstag, *Yahasam shel Ba'a'lei ha-Tosafot leha-Rambam* [The Relationship Between the Tosafists and Maimonides], in: Simon Bernstein/Gershon Churgin (eds.), *Sefer ha-Yovel le-S. K. Mirsky* [The Samuel Kalman Mirsky Festschrift] New York 1955, 350–379, here 365.

50 See above, fnn. 17 and 37.

51 See Davis, *Philosophy, Dogma and Exegesis in Medieval Ashkenazic Judaism*, 210, fn. 58; and Dienstag, *Yahasam shel Ba'a'lei ha-Tosafot leha-Rambam*, 350–379.

52 On the citation of *Mishneh Torah* by Tosafists in the mid-thirteenth century, see Ta-Shma, The Acceptance of Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* in Italy, 79–90; and see above, fnn. 7f. (On R. Moses of Coucy's possible awareness of the existence of *Moreh Nevukhim*, see Jeffrey Woolf, *Maimonides Revised. The Case of Sefer Miswot Gadol*, in: *Harvard Theological Review* 90 (1997), 175–205, here 186.) The so-called *perushei Ba'a'lei ha-Tosafot 'al ha-Torah* (with the exception of the passage in *Sefer ha-Gan*, above, fn. 35, which betrays an awareness of *Moreh Nevukhim*) also follow this pattern for the most part. Indeed, these commentaries do not even cite *Mishneh Torah* with much frequency.

Worms⁵³ and R. Abraham b. Azri'el of Bohemia (author of *Arugat ha-Bosem*),⁵⁴ as well as the eclectic *Sefer ha-Maskil* (Book of the Enlightened).⁵⁵ Although it is possible that R. Isaiah di Trani received a copy of the *Moreh* through Italian channels,⁵⁶ it would appear that he is (given the point in his career when he wrote *Nimmuqei Humash*) the first Tosafist and rabbinic scholar trained in Ashkenaz to cite the *Moreh* with authority and consistency.

- See, e.g., *Tosafot ha-Shalem*, ed. Gellis, 1:61–62, 65–66 (the pieces from *Mishneh Torah* cited in connection with Gen. 1:26); 121 (a possible parallel to *Moreh Nevukhim* on the angelic powers of the primordial snake); 183 (a possible parallel to *Moreh Nevukhim* from a passage in Bekhor Shor; see above, fn. 17); vol. 6 (1986), 42 (*Mishneh Torah* on the laws of inheritance); vol. 9 (1993), 101 (a citation from *MT Hilkhot 'Avodah Zarah*); 172 (the making of the *hoshen*, based on *MT Hilkhot Kelei ha-Mikdash*). The fact that the standard *Tosafot* to the Babylonian Talmud cite Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* (and Maimonides) by name only twice and the fact that a significant Ashkenazic halakhic work such as R. Isaac of Corbeil's *Sefer Mizvot Qatan* barely cites *Mishneh Torah* (while this work is cited with frequency not only by R. Moses of Coucy but also by R. Isaac b. Moses *Or Zarua'* of Vienna, with certain clear caveats or limitations) suggests that Ashkenazic rabbinic scholars in the thirteenth century had methodological concerns with *Mishneh Torah*, rather than ideological concerns. I hope to return to this theme in a separate study.
- 53 R. Eleazar of Worm's pietistic introductory section to his halakhic work *Sefer Roqeah (Hilkhot Hasidut)* was patterned, to some extent, after Rambam's *Sefer ha-Madda*; see Urbach, *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot* 1:393. Maimonides' *Hilkhot Teshuvah* is also cited extensively in the so-called *Sefer Hasidim* I (ed. Bologna, secs. 1–152); see, e.g., Ivan Marcus, 'The Recensions and Structure of "Sefer Hasidim"', in: *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 45 (1978), 131–153. See Joseph Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Hasidut Ashkenaz [The Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazic Hasidism]*, Jerusalem 1968, 31. And yet, the German Pietists do not cite *Moreh Nevukhim* as far as I can tell.
- 54 '*Arugat ha-Bosem* cites liberally from *Mishneh Torah*, including the theological portions of *Sefer ha-Madda*'; see Ta-Shma, 'The Acceptance of Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* in Italy, 79–90, and '*Arugat ha-Bosem*', ed. Urbach, 4:166, 177. Moses Taku, somewhat surprisingly, does not refer to *Moreh Nevukhim* in his attack on Maimonides' philosophy, but works only with material found in *Mishneh Torah*. See Dan, *Ashkenazic Hasidism and the Maimonidean Controversy*, 31–34, 40f., and Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy* 1180–1240, 138. Reference is made to a passage in *Moreh Nevukhim* in a gloss found in the Paris manuscript of *Ketav Tamim* (see the facsimile edition, 43f. [= fol. 22a–b]). Although the identity of the author of this gloss is unclear, it does not appear to have been R. Moses himself.
- 55 See Gad Freudenthal, *Ha-Avir Barukh Hu u-Barukh Shemo be-Sefer ha-Maskil le-R. Shelomoh b. Simhah mi-Troyes [The Divine Ether in Sefer ha-Maskil]*, in: *Da'at* 32–33 (1994), 187–234, here 193.
- 56 To be sure, however, there are no Italian halakhists prior to R. Isaiah who can be positively identified as a conduit. Note that the kabbalist Abraham Abulafia apparently taught or explained pieces of *Moreh Nevukhim* in Rome to RiD's grandson (and namesake), R. Isaiah the younger (Ri'az), and to the Italian halakhist R. Zedekiah b. Abraham ha-Rofe (author of *Shibbolei ha-Leqet*; d. ca. 1260) who had a strong literary connection with RiD (although he did not actually study with him). See Ta-Shma, *Ha-Rav Yeshaya di Trani*, 411; Moshe Idel, *R. Menahem Reqanati ha-Mekubbal*, Tel Aviv 1998, 36; and my '*Peer-ing through the Lattices*,' 228, fn. 21.

RiD's use of *Moreh Nevukhim* must therefore be examined closely. Ta-Shma maintains that RiD, as reflected in his commentary to Gen. 1:26, encountered some radical Ashkenazic *magshimim* (anthropomorphists), who believed that God had a corporeal form in the literal or simplest sense. Given the inability until now to identify and pinpoint such groups, this would be a discovery of great significance. RiD does not espouse this position himself, and he seeks to diffuse it using a lengthy citation from *Moreh Nevukhim*, while not rebuking its adherents too sharply or too directly. Indeed, it would appear that RiD also wished to explain how these *magshimim* (mistakenly) came to embrace their position. Owing to the importance of this passage, which Ta-Shma considers to be the first instance of a leading rabbinic scholar looking from the 'outside' into a group of this type of committed *magshimim*, Ta-Shma reproduces the opening lines of the passage which, in his view, are a record or reflection of this encounter.⁵⁷

In fact, however, this entire passage is a faithful, virtually *verbatim* reproduction of the translation of *Moreh Nevukhim* 1:1 (although RiD does not note this source in his commentary, nor does he indicate that this is a citation). Thus, there is no exchange of any kind taking place here between RiD and Ashkenazic *magshimim*. Rather, RiD is presenting only the words of Maimonides, explaining why some Jews (presumably not from Ashkenaz) incorrectly felt that they must attribute a physical form to God (in order to have certain biblical verses make sense).

To be sure, RiD, in citing this passage may have sought to undercut the view that existed in Ashkenaz as well among those who believed in pronounced anthropomorphism, but their voices are not being heard here. The main point of *Moreh Nevukhim* 1:1 is to distinguish philosophically between *zelem*, which denotes intellect, common to the Divine and human realms without signifying corporeality, and *demut*, a comparative term that does imply a measure of intellectual similarity between God and man in Gen. 1:26. Maimonides' (and RiD's) conclusion is that the similarity is to be found in the intellects of God and man, and not in the physical realm.⁵⁸

Nonetheless, despite the fact that RiD has not helped us to pinpoint an identifiable group of Ashkenazic *magshimim*, we have in RiD another im-

57 Israel Ta-Shma, *Sefer Nimmuqei Humash* (see above, fn. 46), 752; and see also *idem*, *Ha-Sifrut ha-Parshanit la-Talmud*, vol. 2, 194. When citing Ta-Shma's "Sefer Nimmuqei Humash," Yair Lorberbaum, *Al Da'atam shel Hakhmim z"l lo Altah ha-Hagshamah me-Olam*, in: *Madda'ei ha-Yahadut* 40 (2000), 6, fnn. 17–18; 42, fn. 170, notes that the passage in *Nimmuqei Humash* is taken word for word from *Moreh Nevukhim* 1:1, but maintains nonetheless that it helps to demonstrate that "many rabbis" in Ashkenaz took anthropomorphism literally.

58 This kind of distinction between *zelem* and *demut* was taken to a very different conclusion by R. Moses Taku and R. Jacob b. Samson. See above, fnn. 25, 27.

portant figure with roots in the rabbinic culture of Ashkenaz who is supportive of the Maimonidean position on anthropomorphism, citing it for the first time not from *Mishneh Torah*, but from *Moreh Nevukhim*.⁵⁹ The extent to which the position of Bekhor Shor and other Tosafists in northern France impacted Rid is also not easy to assess, but this pattern of influence remains a distinct possibility.⁶⁰

Conclusion

We have seen that the approach to anthropomorphism taken by R. Joseph Bekhor Shor, following Rashbam and perhaps Rashi as well, took root in northern France and was cited in Tosafist literature throughout the thirteenth century in northern France and beyond. Although the direct influence of Maimonides on Bekhor Shor's formulation cannot be demonstrated, Bekhor Shor's (limited) citation of other Spanish philosophical (and exegetical) works perhaps spurred his own inclinations in this matter, which also stemmed from those of his predecessor Rashbam. The significant extent to which this position remained viable in medieval Ashkenaz surely belies the impression created by the Maimonists' letters to northern France during the Maimonidean controversy of the 1230s, that many or most of the *rabbanei Zarefat* believed in Divine anthropomorphism.

Such a claim about the 'rabbis of northern France' as a whole now appears to be exaggerated, certainly with respect to leading northern French Talmudic scholars or the rabbinic elite.⁶¹ Indeed, we have discussed only briefly here the alternative approach of other Tosafists, especially those with connections to the German Pietists. This approach espoused different versions of the doctrine of the (derivative) Divine Glory (*Kavod*), which appeared to the prophets and others in real or imagined form, and was thus

⁵⁹ See Lorberbaum, Zelem E-Iohim, 86, fn. 5.

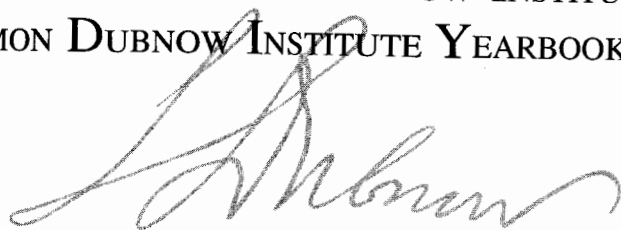
⁶⁰ For the relationship between R. Isaiah's Torah commentary and that of Bekhor Shor, see my forthcoming study (above, fn. 47), chap. 4.

⁶¹ A letter written from Narbonne to Spain in the 1230s severely ridicules the "great men of Israel among the *Zarefatim* and their scholars, their heads and men of understanding," for their magical uses of Divine Names, angels, and demons through conjuration, referring to them as "madmen full of delusions" and the like. See, e.g., Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition*, 86f., and Moshe Halbertal, *Bein Torah le-Hokhmah*, 115 (see above, fn. 30). As I have demonstrated throughout my '*Peering through the Lattices*,' these practices, found among many (but certainly not all) of the Tosafists in Ashkenaz, were undertaken with the same kind of care and precision that typified the Talmudic scholarship of Ashkenaz and were associated with substantive mystical studies and understandings rather than with modes of popular or folk magic.

somewhere in between the positions of R. Yosef Bekhor Shor and R. Moses Taku. In any case, the overall spiritual outlook of the Tosafists appears to be much more variegated than we are accustomed to thinking and the non-anthropomorphism strain has a number of distinguished adherents. These findings also suggest that the role or degree of Sephardic influence in medieval Ashkenaz, which has been expanded in significant ways in recent years with respect to biblical exegesis,⁶² should be considered more carefully for other areas of intellectual and spiritual endeavors as well.

62 For an assessment of recent research trends in northern French biblical exegesis, see Mordechai Cohen's review essay of Touitou, *Exegesis in Perpetual Motion*, in: *Jewish Quarterly Review* 98 (2008), 389–408.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Dubnow', is centered on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'S'.

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