

Interpreting Scriptures in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Overlapping Inquiries
ed. Mordechai Z. Cohen and Adele Berlin (Cambridge University Press, 2016)

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MEDIEVAL RABBANITE SCHOOLS OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION

<i>GEONIC-ANDALUSIAN</i>	<i>NORTHERN FRENCH</i>
<p>SAADIA GAON Bible exegete, philosopher; Egypt, Iraq; 882-942</p>	<p><i>Midrashic interpretation and compilations</i></p>
SAMUEL BEN HOFNI GAON (Bible exegete, philosopher; Iraq; d. 1013)	
JUDAH HAYYUJ (seminal Hebrew linguist; al-Andalus, late 10 th century)	
JONAH IBN JANAH (linguist; al-Andalus, early 11 th cent.)	
<p>MOSES IBN CHIQUITILLA al-Andalus, late 11th century, linguist, Bible exegete</p>	
<p>JUDAH IBN BAL'AM al-Andalus, late 11th century, linguist, Bible exegete</p>	
<p>MOSES IBN EZRA c. 1055-1138; al-Andalus' Literary critic, poet, philosopher</p>	<p>RASHI (Solomon b. Isaac) 1040-1105; Troyes; Bible exegete, talmudist</p>
<p>JUDAH HA-LEVI 1070-1141; Christian Spain, Israel Poet (protégé of Moses Ibn Ezra), philosopher</p>	<p><i>Compare with Rashi: Bruno of Cologne (1030-1101), master at the Rheims Cathedral school (c. 1060-1080), founder of the Carthusian Monastic order (c. 1084)</i></p>
<p>ABRAHAM IBN EZRA 1089-1164; Spain, Italy, France, England Linguist, Bible exegete, translator of scientific texts</p>	<p>RASHBAM (Samuel b. Meir) c. 1080-1160 (Rashi's grandson) Bible exegete, talmudist</p>
<p>MOSES MAIMONIDES 1138-1204; al-Andalus, Egypt Talmudist, philosopher</p>	<p><i>Compare with Rashi, Rashbam: 12th century Latin Bible interpreters, Hugh and Andrew of St. Victor (outside of Paris)</i></p>
Inheritors of the two schools:	
<p>DAVID KIMHI (RADAK) c. 1160-1235; Provence (son of Joseph Kimhi), Linguist, Bible exegete</p>	
<p>MOSES NAHMANIDES (RAMBAN) 1194-270; Christian Spain, Talmudist, Bible exegete, Kabbalist</p>	

Sources in the Commentators

1. Maimonides on Christian interpretation, Mishneh Torah. Jesus of Nazareth and the Ishmaelite [Muhammad] who arose after him... cleared the way for the Messiah-King, to prepare the entire world to worship the Lord together... Because of them, the... the Torah and the 613 commandments are well known in the entire world, and these matters have spread in the distant isles and among many peoples of uncircumcised heart. And people discuss and debate these matters and the commandments of the Torah, some saying: "These commandments were true, but they are void today and were not applicable eternally." And some say: "There is a hidden meaning to them and they are not to be taken according to their literal sense, and the Messiah has come and revealed their hidden meanings."

2. Moses Ibn Ezra, *Poetics*. In my youth, in my hometown, a Muslim scholar... asked me to recite the Ten Commandments in Arabic. I understood his intention, to demonstrate the paucity of its rhetoric. I therefore asked him to recite the opening (*al-fatihah*) of his Qur'an in Latin... but when he set out to translate it into that language its words became ugly and its beauty tarnished. He understood my intention and released me from his request.

3. Robert Lowth (1710-1787), *On the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*.

I. Synonymous Parallelism:

When Israel went out from Egypt / The house of Jacob from a strange people
Judah was as his sacred heritage / Israel his dominion.
The sea saw, and fled / Jordan turned back
The mountains leaped like rams / The hills like the sons of the flock.
What ailed thee, O Sea, that thou fleddest / Jordan, that thou turnedst back?
Mountains, that ye leaped like rams / And hills, like the sons of the flock?
At the presence of the Lord tremble thou Earth / At the presence of the God of Jacob!
Who turned the rock into a lake of waters / The flint into a water spring. (Psalm 114)

II. Antithetic parallelism ("when a thing is illustrated by its contrary being opposed to it"):

The cloyed will trample upon an honey-comb
 But to the hungry every bitter thing is sweet. (Prov 27:6-7)
There is who maketh himself rich, and wanteth all things
 Who maketh himself poor, yet hath much wealth. (Prov 13:7)
The rich man is wise in his own eyes
 But the poor man that hath discernment to trace him out will despise him. (Prov 28:11)

III. Synthetic parallelism ("the sentences answer to each other... by the form of construction")

The law of The Lord is perfect, restoring the soul;
The testimony of The Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
The precepts of The Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of The Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes (Psalms 19:8-9)

General observation about parallelism: The poetical conformation of the sentences... characteristic of the Hebrew poetry, consists chiefly in a certain equality, resemblance, or parallelism between the members of each period; so that in two lines (or members of the same period) things for the most part shall answer to things, and words to words, as if fitted to each other by a kind of rule or measure.

4. Rashi on Genesis 3:8. There are many midrashic *aggadot* and our Rabbis have already arranged them in their appropriate place in *Genesis Rabbah*. But my aim is to relate only the *peshat* of Scripture and the *aggadah* that settles (*meyashevet*) the words of Scripture... “each word in its proper place” (Prov 25:11).

5. Abraham Ibn Ezra on Rashi’s commentary. Our early Sages... said: “A biblical verse does not leave the realm of its *peshat*,” whereas *derash* is an added idea. But later generations made *derash* fundamental, like Rabbi Solomon of blessed memory, who interpreted Scripture by way of *derash*. He thought that his commentary is *peshat*, but in fact the *peshat* in his work is less than one in a thousand. Yet the sages of our generation celebrate these books.

6. Bruno the Carthusian, Psalms Commentary

On Psalm 77 (MT 78). Narrating the former benefits God bestowed upon their fathers in ancient times, the beginning of this psalm adjures the same less perfect Asaph that he attentively and diligently hear the things which are said to him in “parables” and “propositions,” i.e., that he understand those benefits mystically, not so much according to the letter, as their incredulous fathers did, who neglected them and, understanding only the letter, perished. Therefore he narrates those benefits to teach them history, in so far as these things happened to an earlier people, and to teach them in figures, in so far as these things likewise come to pass in the Church.

Although this psalm, which is to be read continuously for its history (*continuatim juxta historiam*), contains within it an allegory (*allegoriam*), it does not everywhere contain an allegory that can be read continuously (*juxta allegoriam continuatim*)... This psalm, like the rest [of the Psalms], contains prophecy, although not when it is read historically (*ad historiam*).

...thus should all the rest of the benefits, all the way to the end of the psalm, be read according to the letter, and we will expound all of these things continuously (*continue*) according to the letter in their proper place. But since allegories appear to be contained in individual events, it seems best to expound the individual allegorical mysteries one at a time, either to avoid tedium, or because the allegory is difficult, or because it would be impossible to read the psalm continuously according to these allegories.

Regarding the “mystical reading” of Psalm 50 (MT 51): In this history a figure is involved (*continetur*), which, even though it does not appear to pertain to the intention of this psalm, still has something useful to offer to the audience.

Regarding Psalm 141 (MT 142): The allegory of this history, not altogether worth pursuing, is as follows...

Regarding Ps 97:3 (MT 98:3), “All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God” — ...or this can be read allegorically [*allegorice legi*]:... the ends of the earth, that is, all those who restrain their earthly qualities... Yet, according to the letter (*ad litteram*), what follows (*sequentia*) seems to accord better with the earlier meaning (*priori sententiae*).