

## MOSES IBN 'EZRA'S «TREATISE OF THE GARDEN» AND MAIMONIDES' «GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED»<sup>1</sup>

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### RESUMEN

El poeta español Moses Ibn 'Ezra es autor de una obra de carácter filosófico y filológico, titulada *Tra-tado del jardín*. En la primera parte de esta obra Moses Ibn 'Ezra desarrolla temas de teología, metafísica, fisiología humana y psicología, todo ello al hilo de su análisis lingüístico y terminológico sobre algunos pasajes de la Biblia Hebrea. En el presente trabajo sostengo que tanto el esquema general de la obra mencionada como el tratamiento que hace Moses Ibn 'Ezra de algunos temas, podrían haber servido a Maimónides de modelo para su *Guía de perplejos*.

**Palabras clave:** Maimónides, Moses Ibn 'Ezra, Guía de perplejos.

### SUMMARY

The Spanish poet Moses Ibn 'Ezra (1055-1138 ca.) is also known for a Judaeo-Arabic book dealing with philosophical and philological questions, the «Treatise of the Garden». In the first part of the «Treatise of the Garden» Ibn 'Ezra deals with some key-themes of theology, metaphysics, human physiology and psychology, through the linguistic and terminological examination of some passages of the Hebrew Bible. I try to argue that the general scheme of the work and the treatment of some themes suggest that Moses Ibn 'Ezra's work might be, at least, one of the models employed by Moses Maimonides while writing his «Guide of the Perplexed».

**Key words:** Moses Maimonides, Moses Ibn 'Ezra, Guide of the Perplexed.

One of the most interesting questions concerning the sources of Maimonides' «Guide of the Perplexed» is: what inspired Maimonides with the general scheme of his «Guide»? Did he create it by referring to some literary model, or was it invented by him totally anew? As known, the «Guide», although it is regarded as the most important and famous product of Medieval Jewish philosophy, is not a systematical treatise of philosophy. The general scheme of the «Guide» is not comparable to that of such works of Medieval Jewish philosophical thought as, e.g., Abraham Ibn Daud's «The Exalted Faith», Levi ben Gershom's «The Wars of the Lord» or Hasdai Crescas's «The Light of the Lord», which are structured as well-ordered and well-

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1 This is a revised form of the paper I read in the occasion of the 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the American Association for Jewish Studies (Chicago, December 19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>th</sup>, 2004), in a session devoted to «Medieval Sources of Maimonides' *Guide*». A summary of its contents, by Steven Harvey (Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel), has very recently appeared in «Bulletin de philosophie médiévale» 46 (2004), p. 286. Moreover, some observations of mine about the possible relationship between Maimonides' «Guide» and Moses Ibn 'Ezra's «Treatise of the Garden» can be found in Mosè Maimonide, *La Guida dei Perplexi*, transl. M. Zonta, «Classici della filosofia», Turin 2003, p. 12.

divided treatments of philosophical and theological themes, not too different from the Medieval *summae theologicae* found in Latin-Christian and Arabo-Islamic literatures. Surely, it appears impossible to identify a unique literary source for the whole structure of the «Guide»: probably, such a source does not exist. However, what appears to be noticeable in the scheme of the «Guide» (and of part 1 of the «Guide» in particular) is the mixture of a philological analysis of some Biblical Hebrew terms, and of a philosophical analysis of some questions which Maimonides relates to those terms, in the light of Maimonides' own interpretation of what he regards to be the two senses of the *Torah* (the literal one, and the metaphoric-allegorical one). Moreover, it is remarkable the fact that, especially in part 1 of the «Guide», some crucial philosophical, theological and scientific questions are explicitly discussed by Maimonides in form of excursuses or digressions of one or more chapters, some of which are inserted into his philological discussions of the Biblical terms; and these discussions, in turn, are usually made in view of the general treatment of theological questions (in particular, the incorporeity and unity of God). For example, in part 1 of the «Guide» one should consider chapter 17 (a philosophical digression about the esoteric character of Aristotelian physics), chapters 31-35 (a philosophical digression about the limits of human intellect, and about the due limitation of the study of metaphysics), chapter 49 (on the nature of angels), and chapters 68-69 (on God as intellect *in actu* and as First Cause); in part 2, one should consider chapter 12 (on the concept of divine emanation), and chapter 24 (on the irreconcilability of some aspects of Ptolemaic astronomy and Aristotelian physics); in part 3, one should consider chapters 14 (an astronomical digression about the smallness of Earth with respect to the other planets) and 15 (about the nature of impossibility). Which work pertaining to 12<sup>th</sup>-century Judaeo-Arabic philosophical literature had a similar structure, and might have been one of the sources of inspiration of the literary approach to certain themes found in Maimonides' «Guide»?

The well-known Spanish poet, Moses Ibn 'Ezra (born in Granada around 1055, and dead around 1138), was one of the most important figures of 12<sup>th</sup>-century Jewish culture and literature in al-Andalus. As a rule, his name is not found in works dealing with the history of Jewish philosophy, since he is known as a man of letters, rather than as a philosopher. Actually, he appears to have been the Medieval Jewish author who mostly absorbed and reproduced the customs and literary genres of Medieval Arabic literature; he knew very well the doctrines of Arabic theory of literature, and applied them to Hebrew literature. Moreover, it is remarkable that he also wrote a Judaeo-Arabic book dealing with philosophical and philological questions, the «Treatise of the Garden about the metaphorical and the true (i.e. literal) meanings (of the Bible)» (*Maqāla al-ḥadiqa fi ma'nā al-maḡāz wa-l-ḥaqīqa*). Strangely enough, the original text of this work is still unpublished. It is found in eight manuscripts, the most complete of which is the manuscript of Jerusalem, Jewish National and University Library, 8° 570 (once found in the Sassoon collection, no. 412).<sup>2</sup> Up to now the «Treatise of the Garden» as a whole has passed almost unnoticed among the historians of Medieval Hebrew and Judaeo-Arabic literature. Only some abstracts of a partial Medieval Hebrew translation of it (a version of the philosophical part of the work, probably made by Judah al-Ḥarizi around 1170) have been published in 1842 by Leopold Dukes (Lipót Dukesz),<sup>3</sup> and some isolated passages of the Arabic original text (including unknown quotations of Isaac Israeli and Solomon Ibn Gabirol) were published and studied by Samuel Miklos Stern and Shlomo Pines.<sup>4</sup> As a matter of fact, the widest and most

2 For a description of the contents of this manuscript, see D.S. Sassoon, *Ohel David. A descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the Sassoon Library*, 2 vols., London 1932, vol. I, pp. 410-417.

3 See L. Dukes, *Liqqūm mi-sefer 'Arugat ha-bosem le-rabbi Mošeh ben 'Ezra*, in «Šiyon» 2 (1842), pp. 117-123, 134-137, 157-160, 175.

4 See in particular S.M. Stern, *Some Fragments of Galen's On Dispositions in Arabic*, in «Classical Quarterly» 4 (1956), pp. 91-101; Id., *Isaac Israeli and Moses Ibn Ezra*, in «Journal of Jewish Studies» 8 (1957), pp. 83-89; S. Pines, *Sefer 'Arugat ha-bosem: ha-qeṭa'im mi-tok sefer Meqor Ḥayyim*, in «Tarbiz» 27 (1957), pp. 218-233 (reprinted in Id., *Bein maḥševet Isra'el le-maḥševet ha-'ammim*, Yerušalayim 1977, pp. 44-60).

accurate study of the «Treatise of the Garden» has been published only very recently, in a book appeared in 1997, by Paul Fenton.<sup>5</sup> Fenton has given a very useful contribution to the knowledge of the philosophical contents of this work, as well as of Moses Ibn 'Ezra's dependence on Arabic literary theory and styles; unfortunately, he has not provided his book with a complete translation of the «Treatise of the Garden», although he has inserted into it French paraphrases of a number of selected passages of philosophical importance.

The «Treatise of the Garden» is divided into two parts. Part 2 is a merely lexicographical study of some terms of Biblical Hebrew, concerning the anatomical parts and details of human body. In part 1 Moses Ibn 'Ezra also deals with some key-themes of theology, metaphysics, human physiology and psychology (God's unity, attributes and names; the creation of the world; movement, nature, intellect and soul, and the structure of human body). As it appears from the very title of this work, in it he discusses these themes in a rather free, non-systematical way, through the linguistical and terminological examination of some passages of the Hebrew Bible. Of course, he gives to these passages different interpretations, by comparing their literal meanings and their metaphoric-allegorical significances. It is remarkable that Moses Ibn 'Ezra's work is a sort of «patchwork of digressions» on various philological, philosophical, theological and scientific subjects, inside a general structure echoing that of the Arabo-Islamic works on Mu'tazilite theology. The general scheme of this work and its treatment of some themes suggest that Moses Ibn 'Ezra's «Treatise of the Garden» might be one of the hitherto neglected models which Moses Maimonides could have had in mind while writing the «Guide».

Of course, it should be stressed that the «Treatise of the Garden» can be hardly considered as a literal source of the «Guide of the Perplexed». Apparently, there is no long passage identical in both works, which would lead to think of Moses Ibn 'Ezra's work as a direct source of Maimonides' masterpiece. Truly, there are some short Biblical passages which are found both in the «Treatise» and in the «Guide» according to the same interpretation, or in very similar contexts at least;<sup>6</sup> however, very often these interpretations are the same found in the Medieval Jewish exegetical tradition, from Saadia Gaon to Abraham Ibn 'Ezra, so that there is no evidence that Maimonides directly took them from Moses Ibn 'Ezra's work.

In my opinion, the «Treatise of the Garden» should be better regarded as one of the possible literary models of the «Guide», in particular as far as the typical Medieval Arabic literary genre of *adab* is concerned. According to Fenton,<sup>7</sup> the «Treatise of the Garden», together with Moses Ibn 'Ezra's work on Hebrew poetics, the «Book on Conversations and Recollections» (*Kitāb al-muḥāḍara wa-l-muḍākara*),<sup>8</sup> is the only one representative of the Arabic literary genre of *adab* in Jewish milieu. As pointed out by Fenton, in Medieval Arabic literature *adab* was a literary prose reproducing a sort of drawing-room conversation between some men of letters, where the participants tried to display their literary, philosophical and scientific notions through long digressions; therefore, *adab* became synonymous of a certain dilettantism, in which elements of poetry, literature and philosophy were mixed together, without any sys-

5 P.B. Fenton, *Philosophie et exégèse dans Le Jardin de la métaphore de Moïse Ibn 'Ezra, philosophe et poète andalou du XIIe siècle*, «Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 19», Leiden – New York – Köln 1997.

6 See the table here below, especially as far as chapters 10 and 11 of part 1 of the «Treatise of the Garden» are concerned.

7 See Fenton, *Philosophie et exégèse*, p. 30, in particular the following statement: «Il importe de souligner le caractère littéraire unique de ces deux compositions non seulement dans la littérature judéo-arabe d'Espagne, mais aussi dans la littérature juive médiévale tout court».

8 See Mošeh Ibn 'Ezra, *Kitāb al-muḥāḍara wa-l-muḍākara, Liber Discussionis et Commemorationis (Poetica Hebraica)*, *Sefer ha-'iyyunim we-ha-dyyunim ('al ha-širah ha-'ivrit)*, ed. A.S. Halkin, Yerušalayim 1975 (critical edition of the Judaeo-Arabic text, accompanied by a translation into modern Hebrew); Id., *Kitāb al-muḥāḍara wa-l-muḍākara*, ed. M. Abumalham Mas, Madrid 1985-1986, 2 vols. (another critical edition of the Judaeo-Arabic text, accompanied by a translation into Castilian).

tematical and specializing attempt. As far as we know, there is no proof that Maimonides ever took part in such drawing-room literary conversations, nor there is proof that he had a direct knowledge of the Arabic *adab* literature. Notwithstanding this, it seems that some of the characteristics of *adab* can be traced in the structure of the «Guide of the Perplexed»: in particular, the non-systematical structure of the work (which have been sometimes seen as the result of an apparent confusion, but was allegedly due to a precise choice by Maimonides himself); the «digression»-technique I have already hinted at; the fusion of literature, philosophy and science. If this is true, this should not be due to a direct relationship between Maimonides and Arabo-Islamic *adab* (the «Guide» has not the literary form of a dialogue, as found in some *adab* works); as a matter of fact, the «Treatise of the Garden», the only one Judaeo-Arabic case of *adab*, might have well acted as go-between. The fusion of philosophy and Biblical philology, the long digressions about particular philosophical and scientific themes, the detailed discussions on the literal and allegorical meanings of some particular Biblical terms and expressions, which are found in both works, might lead to think that the «Treatise of the Garden» was read by Maimonides and employed by him as a general model of inspiration. In particular, it appears that the «Treatise» might have acted as a model for part 1, chapters 1-70 of the «Guide» at least.

Some chapters of part 1 of the «Treatise of the Garden» appear to reflect an Arabo-Islamic theological treatise pertaining to the Mu'tazilite *kalām*, as far as two major questions (the unity and the justice of God) are concerned.<sup>9</sup> However, Fenton has stressed that the prevailing structure of Moses Ibn 'Ezra's work is lexicographical, and that its chapters are clearly heterogeneous – just like it happens in the general structure of a substantial part of the «Guide», in particular in part 1, chapters 1-70. This is due, according to Fenton, to the fact that the «Treatise of the Garden» is an *adab* work. It is not limited to a single theme, nor it is the result of a systematical reasoning, but it includes a growing series of philological and philosophical discussions around some beginning themes.<sup>10</sup>

One can compare the general contents of the «Treatise of the Garden» and those of the «Guide of the Perplexed», in order to see the possible literary relationship between them, as they appear in the following table.

Moses Ibn 'Ezra, «Treatise of the Garden», part 1 (according to the manuscript of Jerusalem, Jewish National and University Library, 8° 570)	Maimonides, «Guide of the Perplexed»
Introduction (in rhymed prose)	
Chapter 1. On the metaphorical (= allegorical) and proper (= literal) sense (of the <i>Torah</i> )	Introduction to part 1 (on the different kinds of metaphore)
Chapter 2. On God's unity	God's unity is specifically discussed in part 1, chapter 50, but it is the general subject of chapters 50-70, where it is connected with the question of God's attributes and names
Chapter 3. On the negation of God's attributes	God's «negative» attributes are discussed in part 1, chapters 51-60

<sup>9</sup> See Fenton, *Philosophie et exégèse*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>10</sup> See Fenton, *Philosophie et exégèse*, p. 58, in particular the following statement: «N'oublions pas qu'il s'agit d'un ouvrage d'*adab* et que ce genre, animé d'un esprit didactique, ne s'astreint pas à un sujet délimité, mais cherche à embrasser un ensemble de connaissances plus large et susceptible d'éclairer ou même d'agrémenter le traitement du problème central».

Chapter 4. On the negation of God's names (at the end of this chapter, there is a digression [see Jerusalem ms., pp. 44-45] against God's corporeity, including an allegorical interpretation of the anthropomorphic Biblical terms and expressions about God)	God's names and their «negation»: part 1, chapters 61-63. God's incorporeity: part 1, chapters 1-49 (with reference to many Biblical anthropomorphic terms and expressions, which are interpreted in allegorical sense)
Chapter 5. On motion (digression)	In part 1, chapter 26, there is a digression on the concept of motion, connected with the question of God's incorporeity
Chapter 6. On world's creation	The theme of world's creation is widely discussed in part 2, chapters 1-31
Chapter 7. On the religious laws which can be understood by reason and those which should be observed by tradition	A discussion of Jewish religious laws (and of their rational explanations, if any) is given in part 3, chapters 25-50
Chapter 8. On the composition of man	
Chapter 9. On nature	
Chapter 10. On intellect (at the end, there is a digression [see Jerusalem ms., pp. 78-81] on the Biblical Hebrew terms signifying «intellect» and their philosophical meanings: <i>de'ah</i> , <i>lev</i> , <i>šekel</i> , <i>hokmah</i> and <i>tevunah</i> )	On <i>lev</i> and its philosophical meanings (among which there are «intellect» and «thought») in Biblical Hebrew, see part 1, chapter 39; cp. also the philosophical senses of <i>hokmah</i> (among which there is «perception of truth») in part 3, chapter 54
Chapter 11. On the three souls <sup>11</sup> (at the end, there is a digression [see Jerusalem ms., pp. 89-93] on the Biblical Hebrew terms signifying «soul» or connected with «soul» —among which there are <i>nefeš</i> , <i>ruah</i> , <i>ḥay</i> [«life, living»]— and on their philosophical meanings)	On <i>ruah</i> , <i>nefeš</i> , <i>ḥay</i> in Biblical Hebrew and their philosophical meanings, see part 1, chapters 40-42

On the ground of the above considerations, it seems to me that, although there is no literal correspondence between Moses Ibn 'Ezra's «Treatise of the Garden» and Maimonides' «Guide», the former might have inspired in some way Maimonides in creating the specific, peculiar literary genre of the latter. Moreover, the reading of the «Treatise of the Garden» might have led Maimonides to insert into his «Guide» the philologic-philosophical treatment of some key-terms of Hebrew Bible, like *lev*, *ruah*, *nefeš*. It might have even suggested to Maimonides his discussions about the different meanings of the Bible, and the doctrine of the so-called «negative theology» — although, of course, he might have been taken these themes from other sources too.<sup>12</sup> In any case, all this, if proved true, does not prevent the «Guide» from being an

11 See the partial Italian translation in M. Zonta, *La filosofia ebraica medievale. Storia e testi*, «Biblioteca di cultura moderna 1158», Roma-Bari 2002, pp. 86-89.

12 I think, in particular, of Abraham Ibn Daud's «The Exalted Faith», where —as known— some of these doctrines are discussed: as recently affirmed by Amira 'Eran, «there are sufficient proofs of the fact that (Maimonides) knew Ibn Daud's book and even employed it for (developing) his own system» (see A. 'Eran, *Me-emunah tammah le-emunah ramah. Haguto ha-qdam-Maymonit šel ha-Rabad*, Ha-qibbuš ha-me'uḥad 1998, p. 21). Moreover, in her very recent paper on «Maimonides and His Andalusian Aristotelian Predecessors», read in the occasion of the 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the American Association for Jewish Studies (see here below, note 1; cp. also Steven Har-

original work even in its general structure. The case of the relationship between the «Guide» and the «Treatise of the Garden» might be compared to that of the relationship between another important author of Medieval Jewish philosophy, Levi ben Gershom, and the Scholastic philosophy: according to recent hypotheses by Colette Sirat and Sarah Klein-Braslavy,<sup>13</sup> Levi ben Gershom might have been inspired by the knowledge of Scholastic methods in creating his own original philosophical methods, although till to now nobody has been able to indicate any sure case of a literal, direct dependence of a passage of Levi's work on a passage of an author of Latin Scholasticism. I hope that my hypothesis might contribute to current research about the possible relationship between Maimonides and Judaeo-Arabic philosophical and scientific literature, especially in al-Andalus.

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vey in «Bulletin de philosophie médiévale» 46 [2004], pp. 286-287), Resianne Smidt van Gelder-Fontaine (University of Amsterdam) has pointed out that in «The Exalted Faith» are found more precise connections between Abraham Ibn Daud and Maimonides' «Guide of the Perplexed», some of which are very similar to, if not totally identical to, those I have tried to find between the «Guide» and the «Treatise of the Garden»: for example, the interpretation of Biblical verses concerning the various names of God, and the philosophical significances of some Biblical Hebrew terms (in the case of Abraham Ibn Daud, these terms are *selem* and *damut*, which Maimonides studies in part 1, chapter 1, of the «Guide»).

<sup>13</sup> See in particular C. Sirat and S. Klein-Braslavy, *Réponses aux objections: Gersonide, homme de son temps*, in Colette Sirat, Sara Klein-Braslavy and Olga Weijers (eds.), *Les méthodes de travail de Gersonide et le maniement du savoir chez les scolastiques*, «Études de philosophie médiévale» 86, Paris 2003, pp. 317-324.