

Maimonides, Moses

Christianity

Moses Maimonides' philosophical and theological thought had a remarkable impact on the Latin-speaking world from the 13th century onwards. Shortly after its two Hebrew translations, three different Latin versions of the *Guide for the Perplexed* started to circulate. The *Liber de parabola* (*Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne*, MS 601), written around 1223–24, is a compendium most probably composed on the basis of Samuel Ibn Tibbon's translation. The *Liber* deals with biblical metaphors and the allegorical interpretation of biblical laws. The second writing originating from Maimonides' *Guide* is the *Liber de uno Deo benedicto* (around 1240), which is a translation of the twenty-five philosophical premises in the introduction to *Guide* 2, and of 2.1. Finally, the complete translation of the *Guide* appeared in Latin around 1235–40 under the title *Dux neutrorum*. The translation was mainly based on Judah Alharizi's Hebrew text.

Most manuscripts present an addition to the *Guide*'s text, which was probably originally translated together with the *Dux neutrorum*, the so-called *Liber preceptorum*. This text is an abbreviated list of the 613 commandments contained in Maimonides' introduction to his legal code, the *Mishneh Torah*. No information on the identity of the translator, nor on the location of *Dux neutrorum*'s composition, is available. Three main hypotheses have been proposed by scholars as to possible places of origin: the court of Frederick II (Steinschneider; Perles); southern France (Kluxen); and Paris (Hasselhoff). In 1520, this medieval translation was published by Agostino Giustiniani.

The *Dux neutrorum* was read mainly by Dominican scholars, such as Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart, but it also circulated among Franciscans, such as Thomas of York. Though more limited than the *Dux neutrorum*, the *Liber de parabola* and the *Liber de uno Deo benedicto* also circulated among Christian thinkers. Some arguments found in William of Auvergne's *De legibus* closely correspond to the *Guide*'s sections that are summarized in the *Liber de parabola*, even if Maimonides' name never appears in William's work, while the *Liber de uno Deo benedicto* was surely quoted by Albert the Great.

Maimonides' authority is considered to be both philosophical and religious. Through him, Latin medieval philosophers and theologians had access to knowledge available only in the Arabic language; moreover, Maimonides was also a source for information on Judaism and for interpreting the Bible. His popularity in the Latin world can be explained precisely by the combination of these two factors. In the *Dux neutrorum*, Christian authors found a nonradical Aristotelianism that could be reconciled with biblical teachings.

In the field of biblical hermeneutics, Maimonides' interpretations are often cited by medieval Latin authors. For instance, Thomas Aquinas used Maimonides as a source for the explanation of biblical commandments. In *II Sent.* (d. 15, q. 3, a. 3,

arg. 3), Aquinas reports Maimonides' opinion that the observance of the Sabbath was introduced to confirm human kind's belief in the creation of the world (*Guide* 2.31). In *IV Sent.* (d. 1, q. 2, a. 3, qc. 1 resp.), Aquinas addresses the reason for circumcision being made on the eighth day (*Guide* 3.49). Moreover, Maimonides' authority is evoked to distinguish between *moralia*, *caerimonialia* and *iudicialia* (*Summa theologia*, I–II, q. 101, a. 1, arg. 4; *Guide* 3.26). Biblical laws concerning sacrifices are also treated by Aquinas following Maimonides: turtle doves and young pigeons are the birds to be sacrificed (*ST*, I–II, q. 102, a. 3 ad 4; *Guide* 3.46); animals have to be killed in a specific way to limit their suffering (*ST*, I–II, q. 102, a. 3 ad 6; *Guide* 3.48); the species of animal to be sacrificed corresponds to the gravity of the sin (*ST*, I–II, q. 102, a. 3 ad 11; *Guide* 3.46).

Maimonides' allegorical interpretation of the Bible had a great influence on Meister Eckhart. In his *Liber parabolarum Genesis* (*LW* 1/1,447,9 seq), Eckhart relates Maimonides' interpretation of Prov 25:11, according to which metaphors are comparable to apples of gold in settings of silver. Following Maimonides (*Guide*, Introd.), Eckhart argues that biblical metaphors have two faces: the external one has to be beautiful like silver, while the internal one has to be more beautiful than silver, that is, like gold. Only those who look carefully beyond the surface understands the real meaning of biblical language.

Meister Eckhart is also much interested in the interpretation of Jacob's dream (Gen 28:12). In the *Liber parabolarum Genesis* (*LW* 1/1,454,11 seq.; *LW* 1/ 1,677 seq.) and in the *Expositio libri Genesis* (*LW* 1/ 1,423,4 seq.), Eckhart reports Maimonides' opinion (*Guide*, Introd.; 2.10) that the ladder is a cosmological metaphor for the entire universe. Furthermore, in the *Liber parabolarum Genesis* (*LW* 1/1,454,11 seq.) and in the *Expositio libri Genesis* (*LW* 1/1,210,15), Eckhart follows Maimonides (*Guide*, Introd.) in interpreting Prov 7 as a metaphor for first matter: the adulterous woman is compared to first matter, since first matter does not have a form but constantly seeks it out. In the *Expositio libri Exodi* (*LW* 2,15,7), Eckhart interprets Moses' vision (Num 12:8) as a prize for having hidden his face (Exod 3:6), in accordance with *Guide* 1.5. Finally, Maimonides' authority is used by Meister Eckhart to address the division between negative and positive precepts (*Expositio libri Exodi*, *LW* 2,190,14).

In the 17th century, a renewed interest in Maimonides arose, especially in the Protestant milieu. In 1629, the Protestant Hebraist Johannes Buxtorf the Younger published a new translation of the *Guide* in Basel under the title *Doctor perplexorum*. In his introduction, Buxtorf criticized the medieval translation published by Giustiniani because of its numerous mistakes; additionally, Buxtorf used Ibn Tibbon's version for his translation. Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* also drew the attention of Protestant scholars, who provided translations of some of its sections: in 1638, Willem Henricus Vorstius (Arminian pastor in Warmond, Holland) published a translation of the *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* (*Mosis Maimonidis Constitutiones de Fundamentis Legis*) in Amsterdam.

Another section was translated into Latin by Louis de Compiègne de Veil, a former Jew who converted to Catholicism under the protection of Louis XIV, and later to Protestantism. He translated the book on sacrifices (*Qorbanot*), and the section *Qiddush ha-hodesh* (sanctification of the New Moon) from the book *Zemanim* (Times), published in London in 1673 (*Mosis Maimonidis De Sacrificiis Liber ... et Tractatus de Consecratione Calendarum et de Ratione Intercalandi*). Some years later, the section on the red heifer (*parah adumah*), from the book *Tohorah*, was translated by Andreas Christoph Zeller, prelate in Anhausen, and was published in Amsterdam in 1711 (*R. Mosis Maimonidis Tractatus de vacca rusa*). Finally, extracts from Maimonides' *Commentary to the Mishnah* were translated from Arabic into Latin by the orientalist Edward Pococke and published in 1655 in Oxford (*Mosis Maimonidis Porta Mosis ... Arabice et Latine*).

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