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**Medieval and Early Modern Translations of
Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed***

Introduction

Alessandro Guetta and Diana Di Segni



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Introduction

Alessandro GUETTA
Inalco

Diana DI SEGNI
Universität zu Köln

Moses Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* (Arabic: *Dalālat al-ḥā'irīm*; Hebrew: *Moreh nevukhim*) has certainly been the most influential Jewish philosophical and theological work—from the time of its composition until today. The *Guide*, conceived in a Jewish-Arabic *milieu*, deeply rooted in Arabic Aristotelianism, was influenced, among others, by thinkers such as Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sina; moreover, it virtually inspired the entire medieval Jewish philosophy and was important for medieval Christian theology as well. In the Renaissance and Early Modern Age, it was still read and commented on, although in different ways, by both Jews and Christians.

Its reception is strictly associated with the history of its translations: written around 1190 in Judaeo-Arabic (Arabic in Hebrew script), the *Guide* was soon translated into Hebrew twice, once by Samuel Ibn Tibbon (who could take advantage of the author's remarks) and once by Yehuda Al-Ḥarizi. The history of the *Guide*'s translations begins with Maimonides expressing his own theory of translation in a famous epistle to Ibn Tibbon. There, he articulates his wish not to be translated literally, but rather in a way that generally grasps the meaning of his words.¹ Both Hebrew versions, especially the former, were widely diffused among Jews living in Christian lands who could not understand Arabic.

1. *Iggerot ha-Rambam*, 1988, pp. 530-554: "Whoever wishes to translate, and purposes to render each word literally, and at the same time to adhere slavishly to the order of the

The two Hebrew translations have been thoroughly studied, even very recently.² Furthermore, from the beginning of the 19th century onwards, a series of new translations has been published, in the main European languages as well as in Hebrew; these are not dealt with in this volume, which partially reflects the lectures of the conference “Medieval and Early Modern Translations of Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*,” held in Paris in March 2016, co-organized by the Inalco and the University of Cologne. Our volume deals with other, much less known versions of the *Guide*: these are complete or partial, medieval and early modern translations, and they are composed by Christian and Jewish authors, often not from the original, but from the Hebrew versions. According to a well-established medieval system, the texts analyzed in this volume are mostly translations of a translation, the languages involved being Latin (twice), Spanish, Italian, and, in the form of long quotations, Hebrew and, again, Latin. Each translation treated in this volume answers to a different and very specific need. Translating Maimonides does not only imply a transfer from one language to another, but also means conveying a philosophical knowledge restricted to a very limited public that was able to read and study Arabic philosophy. In this sense, some of these translations could be defined as vulgarizations, since they enable access to an, until then, unavailable knowledge aiming at another kind of readership, which was less versed in philosophy.

An early Latin version, entitled *Dux neutrorum*, made Maimonides’ work available to a Christian readership: outstanding figures of Christian theology such as Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, and Meister Eckhart made extensive use of it in their works. The exact date of composition of this version, its author (or authors), even the place of its production, are unknown. Diana Di Segni and Yossef Schwartz try to provide an answer to these and other questions, contributing to a deep understanding of the intended readership of the *Dux neutrorum* and of its cultural context. This Latin translation is part of the well-known and well-documented 12th and 13th century translation movement that made the works of Arabic philosophers—among them Averroes, to mention

words and sentences in the original, will meet with much difficulty; his rendering will be faulty and untrustworthy. This is not the right method. The translator should first try to grasp the sense of the subject thoroughly, and then state the theme with perfect clearness in the other language. This, however, cannot be done without changing the order of the words, putting many words for one word, or *vice versa*, and adding or taking away words, so that the subject be perfectly intelligible in the language into which he translates.”

2. See, among others, FRAENKEL, 2009.

but one representative example—available to a Latin-reading public. The project of translating Maimonides is therefore coherent with this cultural movement, which, through the appropriation of “foreign” wisdom, sought a mediation between Aristotelian philosophy and theological reflection. Furthermore, the early Latin translation appeared at a time in which a specific philosophical and theological Latin terminology was developing—an example for this is the term “anitas,” literally translating the Arabic *anniyya*, also present in the *Dux neutrorum*.³ Moreover, the theological terminology of medieval philosophers was highly influenced by the “Latin Maimonides.” When discussing the argument pertaining to Aristotle’s theory of the world’s eternity, for instance, authors such as Thomas Aquinas and Thomas of York use the terms “novitas” and “antiquitas” (and not “creatio” and “eternitas”), which are the very words employed in the *Dux neutrorum*, literally translating the Hebrew *hiddush* and *qadmūt*. Studying this translation implies analyzing its impact on Latin philosophy, not only from a doctrinal point of view, but also within the framework of a history of terminology.

The *Guide* was subsequently translated into Spanish (as *Mostrador e enseñador de los turbados*) between 1419 and 1432 by Pedro de Toledo, within a general humanistic project prompted by Christian noblemen and intellectuals aimed at rendering some of the most important works of the past—mainly written in Greek and Latin, but also in Arabic—into vernacular language. José Antonio Fernández López examines this version, its qualities and its shortcomings, and he concentrates on the interesting glosses added by an unknown hand, which make this manuscript a kind of philosophical dialogue. The *Guide*’s Spanish translation responded to a peculiar cultural program encouraging the development of vernacular languages. In this sense, this translation can be seen as an instrument to vulgarize a knowledge that, in the past, was accessible only to a specific and restricted group, and which responded to the logic and rules of traditional scholastic learning. At the same time, there is also a cultural project aiming at elevating vernacular languages to the level of scientific languages: not only literature and poetry, but also works of philosophy and the natural sciences could be composed in vernacular.

An Italian translation in Hebrew script (*Erudizione de’ confusi*) was composed by Yedidya Rimini or Recanati in 1581. This was the period in which Jews drafted Italian translations of classical Hebrew texts; and even in a time of declining rationalism, Maimonides’ *Guide* remained a fundamental reading for Jewish students, especially its scientific sections, as Alessandro Guetta argues. The

3. Cf. d’ALVERNY, 1959.

translation is clearly aimed at Jews, since the text is written in Hebrew letters, but it testifies to the development of the knowledge and use of the vernacular as a scholarly language among Italian Jewry. The acculturation process started in the 13th century with Moshe of Salerno and his Hebrew-Italian glossary of the *Guide*'s philosophical terms, and culminated three centuries afterwards with Yedidya's complete Italian translation. If for Moshe of Salerno the vernacular was an instrument to gain access to a better understanding of the philosophical background of Maimonides' text through the exchange with a Christian scholar, Yedidya Recanati's work aims at creating a classical text accessible in Italian.

Christian Hebraism was the cultural context of a second Latin version (*Doctor perplexorum*, 1629), composed by Johannes Buxtorf the Younger. Saverio Campanini shows the *Guide*'s privileged place among Jewish works in the library of Christian Hebraists of that time; he considers Buxtorf's choice of translating this specific text an element of a Christian project to reshape the Jewish canon according to a rational dimension, avoiding Talmudic casuistry. This second Latin translation is the outcome of the renewed interest in Hebrew studies among Protestants, who aimed at reaching, as much as possible, a fidelity to original texts, in particular through the re-appropriation of ancient languages. This explains the reasons that moved scholars like Scaliger and Buxtorf to harshly criticize the *Guide*'s medieval Latin translation, a criticism that eventually led to a new Latin translation. Not only was Buxtorf's attention much more focused on the source language and culture, contrary to the older translation that adapted the text for a Christian readership, but the fact that he used Ibn Tibbon's version also makes the second Latin translation an independent and valuable document to study.

Silvia Di Donato analyzes in detail Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera's (Spain, 13th century) independent Hebrew translation of some passages of the *Guide*. Both in his early and in his late works (particularly the commentary on the *Guide*, the *Moreh ha-Moreh*), Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera sees himself as a disciple of Maimonides, whose work was central, in his eyes, for the philosophical education of Jewish students: hence the necessity of providing some Hebrew excerpts rigorously translated. Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera's new Hebrew translation responded to a pedagogical purpose. In order to deeply, and above all correctly, understand Maimonides' text, Ibn Falaquera furnishes his own translation, which serves as an instrument to teach the doctrines of his master. Already after the completion of Ibn Tibbon's and Al-Ḥarizi's translations, a debate among the two Hebrew translators took place, which probably led Ibn Tibbon to explain his terminological choices through a glossary of philosophical words. Ibn Falaquera's work is situated within the context of this debate over the most appropriate

way of translating the *Guide* into Hebrew. Furthermore, his attitude towards Maimonides' text must be understood from the perspective of the explicitly apologetical intent of his commentary. A new translation is also an instrument to defend his master's doctrines in the face of accusations.

Towards the end of the 13th century, the Catalan Dominican Ramon Martí composed the *Pugio Fidei* (Dagger of Faith), a *summa* of religious controversy, in which Christian, Muslim, and Jewish texts were quoted and translated into Latin. Maimonides' *Guide* is also quoted and commented upon: these Latin excerpts are studied by Philippe Bobichon. The aim of the Latin translations provided by Martí is generally a polemical one; however, this is not true for the *Guide*. His interest in a careful literal translation must not be mistaken for an anachronistic philological viewpoint. On the contrary, the Dominican's strategy aimed at avoiding the contra-arguments brought forth by Jewish scholars during the Disputation of Barcelona, who did not accept the textual proofs provided by the Christian part because of its non-correspondence with the Hebrew version. In order to avoid these accusations, Martí adopted the strategy of newly translating his sources. Whether the translation of the passages taken from the *Guide* is to be placed in this context as well, or whether it is due to the fact that Martí did not have a copy of the *Dux neutrorum* at his disposal, is still not clear; the question should be investigated in the future, especially since in the *Pugio Fidei* quotations from the *Guide* are not used in polemical contexts. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that in such an impressive work like the *Pugio Fidei*, the *Guide* is not quoted much. In Martí's opinion, an author like Maimonides, who fought against prejudices and legends, and even theorized the historical explanation for some precepts, together with his rational and Aristotelian approach, should have been a mine to dig into. The explanation for this surprising absence of quotes might be connected to the polemical aim of Martí's writing; his purpose was to give cogent arguments for religious disputants and, therefore, passages from the Talmud and rabbinical literature would play a more central role than the *Guide*, which was at the time considered controversial among Jewish communities.

The studies provided in this volume are completed by an *Appendix*, containing the two Latin as well as the Spanish and Italian translations of *Guide* I, 31. This sample chapter has been chosen to let the reader compare different lexical choices and styles in the various translations. The chapter has been selected among the philosophical ones from part I, to give a specimen of the philosophical terminology used by the different translators, as well as for its readability in the manuscript tradition.

In conclusion, if an authentic translation should be "transparent," according to Walter Benjamin's well-known theory of translation, it is clear that none of

the versions treated in this volume could be defined as “transparent,” since each of them is characterized by its own specific aim. The richness of these different interests, growing from century to century, from one language to another, is a demonstration of the *Guide*'s long-lasting vitality.

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