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SOME NOTES ON "AVICENNA AMONG MEDIEVAL JEWS"

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Abstract. In an article published in *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 22 (2012), pp. 217–87, by Gad Freudenthal and Mauro Zonta, "Avicenna among Medieval Jews: the reception of Avicenna's philosophical, scientific and medical writings in Jewish cultures, East and West," the authors promise to present "a preliminary but comprehensive picture of Avicenna's reception by medieval Jewish cultures." As such, it seemed to offer the "comprehensive study" referred to as a desideratum by Zonta at the conclusion of his groundbreaking and very important survey, "Avicenna in medieval Jewish philosophy" (2002). Zonta explained that such a future "comprehensive study of the many and different interpretations given to his doctrines by Jewish thinkers would allow us to evaluate the real role played by [Avicenna] in medieval thought." Surprisingly, the recent article adds little that is new to the previous studies of Zonta and others on the subject, and omits useful information found in them. The main point of the present notes is to try to correct several oversimplifications, questionable assumptions, and misleading statements in the article under consideration. Its purpose is to help readers of the article to attain a fuller and more accurate – although certainly not comprehensive – picture of the reception of Avicenna among medieval Jews.

Résumé. Dans un article publié dans *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 22 (2012), p. 217–87 par Gad Freudenthal et Mauro Zonta ("Avicenna among Medieval Jews: the reception of Avicenna's philosophical, scientific and medical writings in Jewish cultures, East and West"), les auteurs annoncent "un tableau préliminaire mais complet ("preliminary but comprehensive picture") de la réception d'Avicenne, en arabe et en hébreu, dans les cultures juives médiévales", et fournissent en effet, semble-t-il, cet "examen complet" ("comprehensive study") que Zonta appelait de ses vœux en conclusion de son étude fondamentale et incontournable, "Avicenna in medieval Jewish philosophy" (2002). Zonta expliquait qu'un "examen complet des diverses interprétations consacrées par les penseurs juifs à ses doctrines nous permettrait d'évaluer le rôle véritable qu'[Avicenne] a joué dans l'histoire de la pensée médiévale". Curieusement, cet article n'apporte que peu de nouveauté aux études qui ont été précédemment offertes par Zonta et d'autres auteurs sur le sujet, et omet d'importantes informations contenues dans ces mêmes études. La présente contribution se propose de corriger plusieurs affirmations réductrices, des présupposés discutables et des observations erronées que renferme l'article en question. Elle souhaiterait ainsi aider le lecteur à se faire une idée meilleure et plus précise – mais certainement pas "complète" – de la réception d'Avicenne dans le monde Juif médiéval.

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One could reasonably assume that a study written by two scholars in a field of medieval philosophy would be better and more valuable than had it been written by one of them alone. As the old adage has it, "two are better than one" (Eccl. 4:9), and each scholar may be expected to complement and correct the contributions of the other. This would seem to be particularly the case with regard to the recent article by Gad Freudenthal and Mauro Zonta, "Avicenna among medieval Jews: the reception of Avicenna's philosophical, scientific and medical writings in Jewish cultures, East and West" (*Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 22 [2012]: 217–87). Zonta is one of a handful of experts on Avicenna's impact on medieval Jewish thought, and Freudenthal is a well-known historian of science, who has done more than anyone to promote the historical study of science in the pre-modern Jewish world. Their article promises to present "a preliminary but comprehensive picture of Avicenna's reception by medieval Jewish cultures." As such, it would seem to offer the "comprehensive study" referred to as a desideratum by Zonta at the conclusion of his groundbreaking and very important survey, "Avicenna in medieval Jewish philosophy."[1] Zonta explained that such a future "comprehensive study of the many and different interpretations given to his doctrines by Jewish thinkers would allow us to evaluate the real role played by [Avicenna] in medieval thought." Surprisingly, the present article adds little that is new to Zonta's several studies on the subject, and oddly may even be read as a critique of them. For example, as mentioned, the present article presents itself as "a preliminary . . . picture of Avicenna's reception by medieval Jewish cultures," but this is precisely how Zonta accurately saw his previous studies on the subject, *e.g.* "to highlight the main lines and motivations of this influence [of Avicenna on Jewish thought]."[2] In what sense then is the present article "preliminary"? Again the present article begins by stating that the "reception of Avicenna by medieval Jewish readers . . . presents an underappreciated enigma," but thanks to the many studies by Zonta and others in the past decade or so, this is no longer the case. The authors next put forward "an important methodological point [that] should be stated from the outset" when "discussing the reception of a philosopher like Avicenna." "Three things [or levels] need to be clearly distinguished": (1) the "simple acquaintance with that philosopher's works"; (2) the "author's commitment to at least some of his ideas," accepting them as true and integrating them; and (3) "his reading of Avicenna may have stimulated a thinker to ponder certain ideas or inquiries and to react to Avicenna's positions, without necessarily

[1] Mauro Zonta, "Avicenna in medieval Jewish philosophy," in Jules Janssens and Daniel De Smet (eds.), *Avicenna and his Heritage* (Leuven, 2002), pp. 267–79, on p. 279.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 267.

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accepting any of them" (pp. 218–19). Yet Zonta did not state this methodological point in any of his earlier pioneering studies on the reception of Avicenna. His studies – like most other such studies – simply distinguish between an author's acquaintance with another author's work and his "commitment" to the ideas expressed therein. Is the emphasis on this "methodological point" a criticism of Zonta's repeated failure to state it?[3] Again, the present article pedantically states that it will "advisedly avoid using the popular term 'influence'" (p. 219), but Zonta – as most other scholars – repeatedly uses this term in his many works, including his writings on Avicenna and Jewish thought, and indeed his recently updated entry on the subject in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* is entitled "The Influence of Arabic and Islamic Philosophy on Judaic Thought."[4]

The main point of the present notes is to try to correct several oversimplifications, questionable assumptions, and misleading statements in the article under discussion by Freudenthal and Zonta (henceforth, F-Z), that are, for the most part, curiously not found in Zonta's prior studies on the subject. While F-Z's lengthy article contains little of importance that is not found in the shorter studies of Zonta and others, and omits useful information found in them, it is still of use for readers not familiar with these previous studies. It is

[3] Are the authors literally suggesting that this methodological point should be stressed at the outset of every such study? In the present paper, it allows the authors to explain that their intention in their comprehensive study is to "focus mainly on the historical questions of the dissemination of and acquaintance with Avicennian texts and ideas," that is level one (p. 219). However, the methodological point is arbitrary and imprecisely worded. For example, can one really detect a thinker's direct acquaintance with Avicenna's works, as the authors claim, "more subtly, by the presence of distinctively Avicennian ideas" (p. 219). The authors themselves in effect argue no when they speak of Maimonides' "appropriation of significant Avicennian doctrinal items," but argue that Maimonides "was probably not acquainted with Avicenna's own works" (see, *e.g.*, pp. 224–7).

[4] Mauro Zonta, "The influence of Arabic and Islamic philosophy on Judaic thought," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2011 Edition), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/arabic-islamic-judaic/>. Actually, the authors seemingly ignore their own advice on several occasions in this article and use the term "influence" in speaking of Maimonides' "momentous influence on Jewish philosophy" (p. 222), the "little influence" of the Hebrew translation of al-Ġazālī's *Incoherence of the Philosophers* (p. 248), and Avicenna's substantial influence (p. 276). In fairness to Zonta, the critique is not of him alone, but apparently also applied to others. The term is used in the study repeatedly also in quotations from scholars most relied upon therein (H. Davidson, P. Fenton, S. Harvey, J. Janssens, C. Manekin, and S. Pines). The reason given for avoiding "influence" is "in line with its origin in astrology [where] the term construes thinkers of the past as passive, their minds having been affected by 'influences' emanating from other thinkers" (p. 219). Avicenna and Maimonides, who dealt at length with equivocal terms, would not have been persuaded by this reasoning. Perhaps Freudenthal who has written much on these celestial influences may have become overly sensitive to the possibility of confusion regarding the term. Indeed one example where an unwary reader may be confused by the term occurs in Freudenthal's recent entry, "Cosmology: the heavenly bodies," in Steven Nadler and Tamar M. Rudavsky (eds), *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 302–61, on p. 333, where he writes: "Other Jewish authors too subscribed to this influential astrological theory of history."

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hoped that these notes will contribute toward the clarification of the place of Avicenna in medieval Jewish thought.

AVICENNA AMONG ARABOPHONE JEWS: THE EAST

F-Z begin their study with a discussion of the reception of Avicenna among arabophone Jews in the East, which they state "essentially boils down to that by four arabophone Jewish thinkers:" Abū al-Barakāt al-Baġdādī, Maimonides, David II Maimonides, and Ibn Kammūna (p. 220). Although the phrase "essentially boils down to" in this context is not at all clear, the statement seems misleading. For example, F-Z in their discussion of the first of these thinkers, al-Baġdādī, mention the controversy in Baghdad over Maimonides' position on resurrection and the references to al-Baġdādī by Samuel ben ʿEli and Joseph ben Judah ibn Shimʿon, but both these thinkers also quote Avicenna, and the latter was particularly familiar with his teachings, esp. if he indeed was the author, as it seems, of the *Treatise on the Necessary Existence*.[5] Why are these two thinkers not listed here? As another example, the third thinker mentioned is David II Maimonides, the last known member of the Maimonidean dynasty. Do F-Z wish to exclude two centuries of Maimonides' descendants from their list? And what about Yemenite Jewish thinkers, such as Ḥoṭer ben Solomon, who as David Blumenthal has shown, knew and referred to Avicenna's writings?[6] Are they too to be excluded? Previously little studied or unknown thinkers continue to come to light.[7] We still do not know enough about the reception of the *falāsifa* among Jews in the East – philosophers, theologians, and mystics – to be able to assess their reception in these lands. What we do know about the reception of Avicenna is that it does not "boil down" to four thinkers. F-Z's list should be viewed only as four major illustrations of this reception.

(i) The discussion by F-Z of the intriguing thinker, Abū al-Barakāt al-Baġdādī, reads like a brief biographical entry on him in a Jewish

[5] On the former, see below, n. 16. For a translation of Joseph ben Judah's treatise, see *A Treatise as to the Necessary Existence, the Procedure of Things from the Necessary Existence, and the Creation of the World, by Joseph ibn Aknin*, ed. and trans. Judah L. Magnes (Berlin, 1904). Magnes, like others of the time, confused Joseph ben Judah ibn Shim'on, the author of this treatise, with Joseph ben Judah ibn 'Aqnin.

[6] See, *e.g.*, David R. Blumenthal, *The Commentary of R. Ḥōṭer ben Shelōmō to the Thirteen Principles of Maimonides* (Leiden, 1974), pp. 13 and 134, n. 2.

[7] See most recently, Y. Tzvi Langermann, review of Dag Nikolaus Hasse and Amos Bertolacci (eds.), *The Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin Reception of Avicenna's Metaphysics*, in *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition*, 7 (2013): 99–107, on p. 103. Langermann refers to a certain early fourteenth-century Jew in Iraq, Jekutiel ben Uzziel, who wrote *Kitāb al-ʿIlmayn*, which is for the most part copied from al-Ṭūsī's commentary on Avicenna's *Išārāt*.

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encyclopedia – with half the discussion focusing inexplicably on his *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, which we are told "seems quite unrelated … to Avicenna"; on his student to whom the commentary was dictated and that student's panegyric on al-Baġdādī; on al-Baġdādī's apostasy; and on Jewish attitudes toward him (p. 221). The concluding statement that he left his mark on the Jewish intellectual world is vague and perhaps overstated. On al-Baġdādī's attitude toward Avicenna and his "distancing from the Avicennan tradition," see now the article on him by Frank Griffel.[8]

(ii) Maimonides, the second thinker on the list, is assigned to the East because this is "where he wrote the great majority of his works," even though we are reminded that "he was educated in Andalusia, whose intellectual climate reverberated in his thought throughout his life" (pp. 221–2 and esp. 226, n. 31). The case of Maimonides begs us to consider not only where he should be placed – East or West – but also the value of this distinction for the present discussion. Regardless, F-Z state at the outset that the topic of "whether or not Maimonides drew on Avicenna's philosophy" has been "repeatedly debated by scholars." The relatively lengthy discussion of Maimonides that follows (pp. 221–8) is described as "a summary account of the state of the art." But it is difficult to name any informed scholar today who would disagree that Maimonides "drew on Avicenna's philosophy," nor is any mentioned in the account of the state of the art that follows. In fact, this discussion is in no way a summary account of the state of the art of the question (although relevant studies by H. A. Davidson, S. Harvey,[9] W. Z. Harvey, S. Pines, D. Schwartz, and S. Stroumsa are mentioned on p. 223), but rather an extended and forced argument, based on some provocative statements by H. Davidson (but more nuanced in Davidson) and on Zonta's 2005 article, "Maimonides' Knowledge of Avicenna," that Maimonides did not have direct access to the writings of Avicenna.[10] We are presented with a Maimonides who "was not

[8] Frank Griffel, "Between al-Ghazālī and Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī: the dialectical turn in the philosophy of Iraq and Iran during the sixth/twelfth century," in Peter Adamson (ed.), *The Age of Averroes: Arabic Philosophy in the Sixth/Twelfth Century* (London, 2011), pp. 45–75, esp. 64–74.

[9] The study by S. Harvey on '*išq* is referred to in n. 20 as forthcoming, but it appeared in *Judaeo-Arabic Studies*, ed. Norman Golb (Amsterdam, 1997), pp. 175–96.

[10] See Mauro Zonta, "Maimonides' knowledge of Avicenna: some tentative conclusions about a debated question," in Georges Tamer (ed.), *The Trias of Maimonides/Die Trias des Maimonides* (Berlin and New York, 2005), pp. 211–22. F-Z state this thesis is confirmed in Zonta's study, but Zonta explicitly writes in the article that he does "not claim to give a definitive answer to this question … [but rather] to arrive at some tentative conclusions about Maimonides' direct knowledge (if any) of Avicenna's writings" (pp. 212–13). Thus he writes: "Of course, Maimonides might have found them [*i.e.*, Avicennian doctrines] by perusing Avicenna's" *Šifāʾ* and *Naǧāt*, but no one has yet "to give proof of this fact" (p. 215). His main point is that Maimonides' knowledge of Avicenna's philosophical

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directly acquainted with any of Avicenna's philosophical works," who thus could not distinguish Avicenna's teachings from those of Aristotle, and who "obtained his knowledge of Avicenna from al-Ghazālī's *Maqāṣid* [*al-falāsifa*]," while thinking he was learning Aristotle's opinions. Thus without any direct knowledge of Avicenna's writings[11] and without realizing that he knew anything about Avicenna, he relied on the "*mashhūrāt* – generally accepted ideas – current and accepted in his basically Andalusian cultural milieu" (p. 226) when he recommended Avicenna in his famous letter to Samuel ibn Tibbon. To help us understand this phenomenon of adopting Avicennian ideas without direct knowledge of Avicenna and without knowing the ideas were from Avicenna, F-Z tell us they dub it *Avicennian knowledge without Avicenna* (their italics). They then wonder why Maimonides ascribed to Aristotle the "doctrines he apparently appropriated from al-Ghazālī's *Maqāṣid*."

Maimonides' attitude toward Avicenna that emerges from this discussion is for F-Z understandably a "complex riddle": "Although his philosophy certainly incorporates essential Avicennian ideas, Maimonides apparently did not read any work by him."[12] They also find it a mystery that Maimonides did not read the *Šifāʾ*. The suggested solution is that perhaps it was the result of his "Andalusian disdain for Avicenna" (p. 228). But this suggestion flies in the face of what we know about Maimonides' intellectual curiosity and his professed vast reading in seemingly all areas, including *kalām* and idolatry, his disdain for both of which is legendary.[13] Again, the twelfth-century "Andalusian disdain" for Avicenna's philosophy was quite limited and is most evident in the writings of Averroes, who was familiar with Avicenna's writings, and according to Tzvi Langermann may have written his Aristotelian commentaries "as the Andalusian response to [Avicenna's] *al-Shifāʾ*."[14] Andalusian disdain did not stop philosophers of the stature of Averroes and

doctrines does not mean he actually read Avicenna's books, and no one has been able to prove definitively that he has. Zonta adds here (but not in the F-Z paper) that "more probably, he might have read some isolated passages of Avicenna's minor works (p. 221). Zonta does not claim here that he has provided proof that Maimonides did not study even Avicenna's major works directly."

[11] F-Z do add (p. 225): "Nonetheless, the possibility – maintained by some recent authors – that Maimonides read Avicenna's own *al-Najāt* (The Salvation) cannot be completely ruled out" (see also, p. 227). They add without explanation: "In any event, Maimonides does not seem to have known Avicenna's major philosophical work, *al-Shifāʾ*." See similarly, pp. 236–7.

[12] F-Z qualify this phrase, adding in parentheses "or at least no major work." This qualification is not clear. Earlier (see the previous note), the only exception suggested was *al-Naǧāt*.

[13] On Maimonides' reading in the books of idolatry, see his "Letter on Astrology"; and for his reading in *kalām, see Guide of the Perplexed* I, 71.

[14] See Langermann, "Another Andalusian Revolt?" p. 367; this article is cited by F-Z on p. 226, n. 31, in support of the negative attitude toward Avicenna in al-Andalus.

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Maimonides from reading the authors they disdained. But why must F-Z assume these complex riddles and mysteries, especially in the course of presenting a state-of-the art view of recent scholarship? While it seems likely Maimonides knew al-Ġazālī's *Maqāṣid*, even though he does not mention the book or al-Ġazālī, why assume he did not also read Avicenna? Much more reasonable and persuasive is the approach of Sarah Stroumsa in her book on Maimonides, cited twice by F-Z in the present discussion, that "Maimonides, who only rarely cited his sources, read all he could find."[15] In fact, in the studies on Avicenna and Maimonides, mentioned in passing by F-Z on p. 223 (and referred to above), evidence is brought forward that Maimonides likely read not only some of Avicenna's main works, but also smaller works such as his *Treatise on Love, Epistle on the Quiddity of Prayer*, books on the afterlife, and we might add one of his treatises entitled *Maʿād*.[16] Yet F-Z do not refer to this evidence. Their position is apparently that Maimonides could not have read Avicenna directly or even known his doctrines because if so, he would not have confused his positions with those of Aristotle, and ascribed Avicennian views to Aristotle. In fact, it seems far easier to explain why Maimonides would attribute certain Avicennian positions to Aristotle than to imagine that he did not read Avicenna's philosophical works, was unaware of Avicenna's teachings and mistakenly assumed that they were those of Aristotle.

F-Z conclude this discussion on Maimonides by pointing to "momentous historical repercussions" of their conclusions. Because Maimonides called Avicennian doctrines Aristotelian, not only he, but also his readers were unable to distinguish Avicenna from Aristotle when they encountered them in works such as al-Ġazālī's *Maqāṣid*. Now while this may be true for Maimonides' non-philosophical readers of his legal works, it could hardly be true for

[15] Stroumsa, p. xii; this article is cited by F-Z on pp. 223, n. 19, and 227, n. 35. Stroumsa adds: "A priori, therefore, and until proven otherwise, my assumption is that he was generally familiar with major books of his period, both those that circulated in the West, and those he could read in Egypt." Zonta, in his article referred to above, "Maimonides' Knowledge of Avicenna," p. 212, rejected as "far-fetched or at least not supported by irrefutable proofs" a similar view of Idit Dobbs-Weinstein that "we can be reasonably certain" that Maimonides "would have read all those Arabic works of [Avicenna] available in al-Andalus, Fez, and Cairo."

[16] As F-Z mention (p. 227), Maimonides states that some of Samuel ben 'Eli's ideas "derive from Avicenna's *al-Maʿād*," which Samuel mistakenly thought was a philosophic treatise. But they add, based in part on Davidson, that "it has proved impossible to trace the ideas in question in any of Avicenna's works whose title includes the word *maʿād*." Davidson wrote that "It is impossible to tell whether Maimonides was referring to either of the two books that have been published [with this word]," and that there may have been a third such treatise. Davidson shows that actually both published works by Avicenna contain elements with which Maimonides disagreed philosophically, and thus he could have had either one of these treatises in mind (Herbert A. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides: The Man and his Works* [New York, 2004], pp. 528–9, n. 194).

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his philosophical ones. If we consider, for example, the reception of al-Ġazālī's *Maqāṣid* in Hebrew translation, we recall that by the fourth decade of the fourteenth century it circulated in two – and possibly three – translations: one by Isaac Albalag (completed by Isaac Pulgar), one by Judah ben Solomon Nathan, and an anonymous one, which may be a revision of the second translation. Albalag in his introduction to his translation distinguishes the method of its author, al-Ġazālī, from the demonstrative method of Aristotle. At the outset of his comments on the book, he explains that al-Ġazālī, like Maimonides, followed al-Fārābī and Avicenna, both of whom strayed from the path of Aristotle. Differences between the teachings of al-Ġazālī and Avicenna and those of Aristotle and Averroes are noted in his comments. Judah ben Solomon had a more positive attitude to the book, but in the introduction to his translation he warned that al-Ġazālī's book contains some non-Aristotelian teachings of Avicenna, "who deviates a little from the path of Aristotle in a few places."[17] In addition, Moses Narboni, in the most popular Hebrew commentary on the *Maqāṣid*, repeatedly uses Averroes to correct al-Ġazālī/Avicenna.[18] Hebrew readers of the *Maqāṣid* knew it was by al-Ġazālī, and while some may not have known that it contained Avicennian teachings, it was clear that it was not pure Aristotle. Of course, there were other ways for Hebrew readers of the time to distinguish Avicenna's teachings from those of Aristotle. For example, the most popular Hebrew texts of Aristotelian philosophy and science were the translations of Averroes' commentaries, and in them could be found Averroes' critique of Avicennian positions. Also in 1328 Qalonimos ben David translated Averroes' *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, and here Avicenna's teachings are cited in his name. Incidentally, according to Zonta, Maimonides "very probably" knew al-Ġazālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, and this could have informed him that Avicenna was the source of certain Avicennian teachings found in the *Maqāṣid*.[19]

(iii) The third thinker in the list is David II Maimonides. In this ten-line account of him, F-Z indicate that they indeed have in mind not only David II Maimonides, but also "some" other of Maimonides' descendants. Maimonides' son Abraham is mentioned as a second example. Why is he then not included in the reception of Avicenna among Jews in the East? The discussion here is based on a fascinating

[17] Judah ben Solomon Nathan's introduction to his translation of al-Ġazālī's *Maqāṣid* is printed in Moritz Steinschneider, *Die Handschriften-Verzeichnisse der Koeniglichen Bibliothek zu Berlin* (Berlin, 1878), vol. I, pp. 130–2.

[18] On these three approaches to the *Maqāṣid*, see Steven Harvey, "Authors' introductions as a gauge for monitoring philosophic influence: the case of Alghazali," in Sara Klein-Braslavy, Binyamin Abrahamov and Joseph Sadan (eds.), *Studies in Jewish and Muslim Thought Presented to Professor Michael Schwarz* (Tel Aviv, 2009), pp. 53–66.

[19] See, *e.g.*, Zonta, "Maimonides' Knowledge of Avicenna," p. 216.

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recent article by Paul Fenton on the influence of Avicenna's *Naǧāt* on Maimonidean refutations of metempsychosis, with a passing footnote to a 1984 article by Fenton. What is omitted is a picture of the extent of this influence. According to Fenton in the 1984 article, "only too often the doctrines of the more important sources, such as Maimonides and [Avicenna], are so inextricably bound up with our author's thought as to be impossible to isolate."[20]

(iv) The fourth and last figure F-Z mention is Ibn Kammūna, whom they explain "wrote exclusively as a philosopher for philosophers, never as a Jew on Jewish philosophy" and hence "has no direct bearing on our overview" (p. 229). They then mention as a sign of his Jewish interests, his *Examination of the Inquiries into the Three Faiths*, which draws on Ha-Levi and Maimonides. Returning to Ibn Kammūna as a philosopher, they mention a learned study in *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* (2005) by Tzvi Langermann that "has pointed out the importance of Avicenna's concept of *ḥads* for Ibn Kammūna" in his encyclopedia of science and philosophy, *al-Ǧadīd fī al-ḥikma*. But the *Examination*, despite its often impartial stand, was certainly written by a Jew as a Jew, and it does contain philosophy, especially in its first chapter on prophecy. In fact, one need look no further than the *Examination* to appreciate the importance of Avicenna's concept of *ḥads* for Ibn Kammūna, for he cites from Avicenna's discussion. Indeed, his citation is so literal that the editor of the *Examination* takes Avicenna's text as a testimonium for his edition of this passage. Ibn Kammūna also borrows here literally from the famous section at the end of the Metaphysics of the *Šifāʾ* on the need of human beings for an association, a legislator, and, in particular, a prophet.[21]

AVICENNA AMONG ARABOPHONE JEWS: THE WEST

Here again we find a list of "no fewer than" four arabophone Jewish authors who "were familiar with and drew on Avicenna's works: Judah Hallevi, Abraham ibn Daʾud, Moses ha-Levi, and Joseph ibn

[20] Paul Fenton, "The literary legacy of David ben Joshua, last of the Maimonidean *Negidim*," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 75 (1984–1985): 1–56; citation on p. 20 (cf. pp. 3 and 23). F-Z claim, without explanation, that the recent study by Fenton "supersedes the author's conclusions in the earlier [1984 study]." This claim is puzzling, but it may explain the misleading comment in their conclusion to the discussion of arabophone Jews that "Maimonides' descendants appropriated only Avicenna's refutation of metempsychosis" (p. 238).

[21] Ibn Kammūna, *Examination of the Inquiries into the Three Faiths*, ed. Moshe Perlmann (Berkeley, 1967), esp. 12–13. It may be added that Perlmann, in his translation of this work that appeared several years after the edition, emended a word in the edition on the basis of the passage from the Metaphysics of the *Šifāʾ* ([Berkeley, 1971], p. 28, n. 21). F-Z cite this note (p. 229, n. 42), but do not seem to be aware of its importance or, more significantly, of Ibn Kammūna's earlier citation from Avicenna's discussion of *ḥads*.

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Waqār"[22] (p. 230). This list contains four of the most important such thinkers, as previous research has shown, but this list too may be easily expanded. To give but another four names, scholars have pointed to the likely – in some cases, certain – familiarity with Avicenna of the anonymous author of the *Kitāb Maʿānī al-nafs*, Isaac ibn Ġiyāt, Joseph ibn Ṣaddiq, and Joseph ibn ʿAqnin.[23] F-Z's list here, like the prior list, must not be viewed as comprehensive, but rather as providing four of the best known illustrations of this reception.

Ibn Daʾud was not only acquainted with and borrowed from Avicenna, as we read in F-Z, but he was the first Jewish Aristotelian. His theological-philosophical treatise, the *Exalted Faith*, is based, more than any other such work by a Jewish author, on Avicennian science and philosophy. Indeed he sought to harmonize this "true [Avicennian] philosophy" with the principles of Judaism. F-Z rightly point to the two monographs that appeared in the 1990s on Ibn Daʾud, one by Amira Eran and one by Resianne Fontaine for evidence of his borrowing from Avicenna. It may be added that in the past few years, Fontaine has published two papers that further clarify this influence.[24] F-Z focus most of their attention in the brief discussion of Ibn Daʾud on the claim that he is to be identified with Avendauth, the co-translator with Dominicus Gundissalinus of philosophical works by al-Ġazālī and Avicenna. It may be noted that new evidence will soon be published that strengthens this claim.[25]

One additional comment on this section: In the discussion on Ibn Waqār, F-Z write that "[a]ccording to [Georges] Vajda, Ibn Waqār, unlike other arabophone Spanish philosophers (notably Ibn Ṭufayl and Averroes), did not have first-hand knowledge of all of Avicenna's oeuvre" (p. 233). It is difficult to imagine that Vajda

[22] Curiously F-Z do not employ a consistent transliteration for the name ha-Levi. We find Judah Hallevi, but Moses ha-Levi. Although not specified here, this list includes only those arabophone Jewish authors in the West who wrote in Arabic.

[23] F-Z conclude this section by noting that the "study of other texts in Arabic composed by Jews is apt to discover additional authors who drew on works by Avicenna" (p. 233; cf. p. 230, n. 48). This is unquestionably true, but some of this research has already been done. For another example of such research, see Nahem Ilan, "Fragments of al-Ġazālī's theory related to speech in the commentary on *Avot* by Rabbi Israel Israeli of Toledo" (Hebrew), in Nehemia Levtzion *et al.* (ed.), *The Intertwined Worlds of Islam: Essays in Memory of Hava Lazarus-Yafeh* (Jerusalem, 2002), pp. 20–58, where Israeli's knowledge of Avicenna is mentioned.

[24] See Resianne Fontaine, "'Happy is he whose children are boys': Abraham Ibn Daud and Avicenna on Evil," in Dag Nikolaus Hasse and Amos Bertolacci (eds.), *The Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin Reception of Avicenna's Metaphysics* (Berlin, 2012), pp. 159–75; Resianne Fontaine and Steven Harvey, "Jewish philosophy on the eve of the age of Averroism: Ibn Daud's necessary existent and his use of Avicennian science," in Adamson (ed.), *The Age of Averroes*, pp. 215–27.

[25] See Yossi Esudri, "R. Abraham Ibn Daʾud and his philosophical Book, *The Exalted Faith*: Miscellanea" (Hebrew), in Ari Ackerman, Esti Eisenmann, Aviram Ravitsky, and Shmuel Wygoda (eds.), *Adam le-Adam: Studies Presented to Warren Zev Harvey* (forthcoming).

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could have made such a statement, even fifty years ago, but it is not at all true that arabophone Spanish philosophers, other than Ibn Waqār, had "first-hand knowledge of all of Avicenna's oeuvre." This is not true for the other Jewish arabophone Spanish philosophers, including the other three in F-Z's list, and it is not even true for Ibn Ṭufayl and Averroes. In truth, we are just now beginning to understand – in part through citations of the Hispano-Jewish philosophers – which texts of Avicenna were available in the West and when they may have arrived.

AVICENNA IN HEBREW TRANSLATIONS

After outlining the titles of the medieval translations into Hebrew of Avicenna's writings, F-Z rightly point to the Hebrew translations of al-Ġazālī and Averroes as major sources for the knowledge of Avicenna in Hebrew. Yet it is naïve to believe with F-Z that "[i]t is important to realize," that since al-Ġazālī's *Maqāṣid* "did not reveal its Avicennian pedigree, readers could know this only if they had access to external sources of information, notably in Arabic, as the translators did" (p. 244). As we have seen, the translators did not keep this information to themselves. Judah ben Solomon, the author of the most popular translation of the text, stated explicitly that it contains teachings of Avicenna, "who deviates a little from the path of Aristotle in a few places";[26] and Albalag, the other known translator, noted that al-Ġazālī follows al-Fārābī and Avicenna. What is true is that Hebrew readers not familiar with Avicenna's teachings through other sources such as Hebrew translations of Averroes' commentaries and of al-Ġazālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (or Averroes' *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, translated earlier in the 1320s) would be unable to discern which particular teachings were indeed those of Avicenna.

The only major philosophical text of Avicenna translated in the medieval period into Hebrew was Avicenna's *al-Naǧāt*. This point is aptly emphasized by F-Z, but some details of their account should be clarified. Indeed our knowledge of this translation by Ṭodros Ṭodrosi is much improved as a result of the 2010 Harvard dissertation by Gabriella Berzin, cited by F-Z on p. 240, n. 88. F-Z state that *al-Naǧāt* "was translated into Hebrew, albeit partially and late" (pp. 239 and 242). It is certainly true that the translation was "late," but this is a relative term. It was made between 1330–1340 at the end of the bulk of the Arabic-to-Hebrew translation movement (although, as F-Z noted a page earlier, this translation movement

[26] See above, n. 17. F-Z, in fact, refer to this passage a few pages later when they write (p. 246): "Judah's introduction made it clear to users of his translation that al-Ghazālī's work was Avicennian in its tendencies."

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continued till the end of the fifteenth century), but the immensely popular translation of the *Maqāṣid* by Judah ben Solomon Nathan was made only a few years earlier. Its seeming lack of influence cannot thus be blamed on its date. As for the text being only partial, this seems true based on the two surviving Hebrew manuscripts. F-Z explain that the section on logic was "probably deliberately skipped," while the sections on physics and metaphysics were translated (p. 240). Actually, if we rely on the manuscripts, less than a third of the section on metaphysics (the first third) was translated. But Berzin has shown that one of the manuscripts is a poor copy of the other, and so we rely only on a single manuscript, which begins without any mention of the title of the book. She concludes that it is "difficult to determine whether Ṭodros translated the logic of *al-Najāt*."[27]

In this section on Avicenna in Hebrew translation, F-Z repeatedly cite the studies of Moritz Steinschneider. This is only natural as, even after over a century, his detailed and comprehensive works are still indispensable. However, even Steinschneider's works need to be updated, and F-Z are not always careful to do so. Thus on p. 247, F-Z, relying on Steinschneider, state that Moses Narboni's commentary on the *Maqāṣid* is extant in over 30 copies, but Gitit Holzman in her 1996 study of Narboni lists 50 manuscripts, and the online catalogue of Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem (IMHM, referred to on p. 234) yields a few additions from 1996.[28] Also on p. 247, F-Z refer to Abraham Avigdor's versified Hebrew version of the *Maqāṣid*, and mention that Steinschneider published the author's introduction. It may be added that in 2006 this fascinating introduction was edited critically and translated into English, along with a preliminary investigation of Avigdor's book, which includes not only a versified version of the *Maqāṣid*, but a prose commentary, apparently written later.[29] F-Z close their section on al-Ġazālī with mention of the Hebrew translation of his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, also based on Steinschneider, which they say was "late (first decade of the fifteenth century) and had little influence" and "seems to have played only a minor role in the reception of Avicenna in Hebrew" (p. 248). Indeed, Steinschneider said

[27] Gabriella Berzin, "The medieval Hebrew version of psychology in Avicenna's *Salvation* (*Al-Najāt*)," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2010, p. 6, n. 19.

[28] Gitit Holzman, "The theory of the intellect and soul in the thought of Rabbi Moshe Narboni, based on his commentaries on the writings of Ibn Rushd, Ibn Tufayl, Ibn Bajja, and al-Ghazali" (Hebrew), Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1996, pp. 20–1. This very large number of manuscripts suggests it was even more popular than Narboni's oft-cited commentary on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* (for which Holzman lists 35 manuscripts [pp. 23–4]).

[29] Steven Harvey and Charles H. Manekin, "The curious *Segullat Melakhim* by Abraham Avigdor," in J. Hamesse and O. Weijers (eds.), *Écriture et réécriture des textes philosophiques médiévaux: Volume d'hommage offert à Colette Sirat* (Turnhout, Belgium, 2006), pp. 215–52.

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this text was "very rare" and could list only four manuscripts. A quick glimpse at the IMHM shows twice that number of manuscripts, and this takes the work out of the rare category. Again, it must be remembered that the book was known in Hebrew from the earlier translation of Averroes' *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, which Steinschneider said was "not rare" (he listed about ten manuscripts, and IHMH adds several more). But apart from the number of manuscripts, al-Ġazālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* was well known in the circle of Ḥasdai Crescas and is cited throughout the fifteenth century by scholars as diverse as Abraham Bibago and Isaac 'Arama. 'Arama, a well-known preacher, is a particularly good example as al-Ġazālī's *Tahāfut* had a major impact upon him and he cites it at length many times in his *'Aqedat Yiṣḥaq*.[30]

The following section on Hebrew translations of Averroes as a source for knowledge of Avicenna's teaching is short (less than a page), but to the point. Two generalizations, however, need to be qualified. First, F-Z write that in Averroes' "earlier works, notably the epitomes of Aristotle's works, his positions on many subjects were not far removed from Avicenna's: readers of these works, most of which were translated into Hebrew, encountered in them positions fairly close to Avicenna's, though not labeled as such" (p. 249). This statement, based on a remark by Herbert Davidson, is true only in a limited sense, and, in fact, Davidson spoke only of the early commentaries espousing a "cosmology similar to Avicenna's."[31] The statement is hardly valid, for example, for the popular Hebrew translation of the *Epitome of the Physics*. At the outset Averroes tells us that "What moves us to [write] this [treatise] is that many people undertake to reject the teachings of Aristotle without [first] comprehending the reality of his teachings," to which Gersonides, the most learned of the supercommentators, adds, "such as Avicenna and al-Ghazālī."[32]

[30] On the impact of the book on 'Arama, see Sarah Heller Wilensky, *The Philosophy of Isaac Arama in the Framework of Philonic Philosophy* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv, 1956), p. 40; for the list of citations of al-Ġazālī's *Tahāfut* in the *'Aqedat Yiṣḥaq*, see *ibid*., n. 93.

[31] See Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, & Averroes on Intellect* (Oxford, 1992), p. 181. For a good overview of Averroes' attitude toward Avicenna (and other *falāsifa*) in his epitomes (and their later revisions), see Thérèse-Anne Druart, "Averroes: The commentator and the commentators," in Lawrence P. Schrenk (ed.), *Aristotle in Late Antiquity* (Washington, D.C., 1994), pp. 184–202. Druart concludes that "from the very beginning Averroes distrusted Avicenna as un-Aristotelian" (p. 202).

[32] Averroes, *Epitome of the Physics*, Hebrew trans. Moses ibn Tibbon, trans. Steven Harvey in "Averroes on the principles of nature: The *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* I-II," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1977, p. 401; cf. *Al-Ġawāmiʿ fī al-falsafa: Kitāb al-samāʿ al-ṭabīʿī*, ed. Josep Puig (Madrid, 1983), p. 8. For the comment by Gersonides, see Harvey, "Averroes on the principles of nature," p. 426, n. 2. Gersonides continues that it is only proper that these men and whoever wishes to criticize Aristotle first understand what he is saying.

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Near the end of book two – in a rare citation by name of Avicenna in the *Epitome* – Averroes writes: "Avicenna's statement that the student of this science must accept the existence of prime matter from first philosophy is astonishing. … When you consider carefully most of this man's doubts against the Peripatetics, you will find [them] of the same class as his statement on nature which was previously mentioned [and rejected several pages earlier]."[33] F-Z's second generalization is that in his *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* "Averroes reported only those of Avicenna's ideas he took to task" (p. 249). It is true that Averroes in this book is again and again willing to sacrifice Avicenna (and, at times, al-Fārābī) for the sake of philosophy and often makes comments such as Avicenna is the only philosopher who says such a thing. But F-Z's statement is not quite accurate, for Averroes also cites Avicenna with qualified approval and, in some cases, to show that al-Ġazālī misrepresented his argument. In any case, F-Z conclude that "readers of this work could become aware only of these – Avicenna's more controversial views." Controversial or not, through al-Ġazālī's presentation and critique of Avicenna's views and through Averroes' responses, readers could become aware of many of his most characteristic philosophical teachings.

In this sub-section on Hebrew translations of Muslim authors as sources for knowledge of Avicenna, F-Z discuss in addition to translations of al-Ġazālī and Averroes, two short Hebrew passages from Faḫr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *al-Mabāḥiṯ al-mašriqiyya* – translated by Ṭodros Ṭodrosi as annotations to his translation of *ʿUyūn al-masāʾil* – which have been brought to light by Zonta in previous studies.[34] F-Z conclude this sub-section: "It is quite likely that additional Arabic texts containing Avicennian materials were translated into Hebrew. They await identification by scholars" (p. 250). In a footnote, they add a fourth Muslim author, al-Tabrīzī, whom Tzvi Langermann has shown "draws heavily on Avicenna," although as Langermann states, no one seems to have been influenced by the Avicennian science in the Hebrew translations of this text. But what is surprising about F-Z's statement that other Hebrew translations of "Arabic texts containing Avicennian materials … await identification by scholars" is the omission of the already-identified quite popular Hebrew translation of Ibn Ṭufayl in this list. Also conspicuous by its absence is one of the most popular works of Islamic philosophy among the Jews in the Middle Ages, in Arabic as well as in several Hebrew translations, al-Baṭalyawsī's *Kitāb al-Dawāʾir al-wahmiyya*. As Ayala Eliyahu has noted, al-Baṭalyawsī cites Avicenna by name. Eliyahu

[33] Averroes, *Epitome of the Physics*, p. 421; cf. *Kitāb al-samāʿ al-ṭabīʿī*, p. 26.
[34] F-Z discuss this again on p. 258, where only one of the passages from Faḫr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's book is mentioned.

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also argues that Avicenna's influence upon him is deeper than previous scholarship has shown.[35] The Hebrew translations of the works by Ibn Ṭufayl and al-Baṭalyawsī are two important sources for the transmission of Avicennian teachings in Hebrew.

In the following sub-section on Avicenna in Hebrew translations of Judaeo-Arabic works, F-Z return to Ha-Levi, Ibn Daʾud, and Maimonides, and explain that through the Hebrew translations of their works, "[t]hey introduced Avicennian doctrines … into the Jewish philosophical discourse" (p. 252). They emphasize correctly that Avicenna is not mentioned by name in the three works under discussion, but they conclude that "[o]nly learned arabophone readers who were acquainted with Avicenna through their readings in Arabic could identify the Avicennian doctrinal items encountered in these works." This is very misleading, and indeed in the following sentence F-Z even mention the identification of certain Avicennian teachings in Maimonides' *Guide* by early commentators on the book. And this, as we have seen, is but one avenue that Jewish thinkers had that enabled those who could not read Arabic to identify Avicennian teachings in these works. This is particularly true with regard to Ibn Daʾud, whose *Exalted Faith*, was not translated into Hebrew until around 1370, at the earliest, when many of Avicenna's main teachings were already known as Avicennian to learned Jewish thinkers who could not read Arabic.

AVICENNA IN PHILOSOPHICAL WORKS BY ARABOPHONE JEWISH SCHOLARS WRITING IN HEBREW

The opening sentence of this sub-section is puzzling: "The first major composition to expound philosophical matters in Hebrew was *Sefer ha-Maddaʿ* (Book of Knowledge), the opening part of Maimonides' great code of Jewish Law, the *Mishneh Torah*" (p. 253). For one earlier example from the eleventh century, one might mention the writings of Abraham bar Ḥiyya (who was not an Avicennian), especially his *Yesodei ha-Tevunah u-Migdal ha-Emunah*, the first major Hebrew encyclopedia of science. But perhaps F-Z mean the first to expound *Avicennian* philosophical matters. Then what about Abraham ibn ʿEzra, whose Hebrew biblical commentary, as we are told on the following page, shows that he "adhered to and expressed" Avicennian views? Do F-Z not consider his biblical commentary a major work?

A bit later in this sub-section, F-Z turn again to Ṭodros Ṭodrosi's translations. Here F-Z refer to Ṭodros's fascinating collection of

[35] Ayala Eliyahu, "Ibn al-Sid al-Batalyawsi and his place in Medieval Muslim and Jewish thought" (Hebrew), Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2010. On Avicenna's influence, see esp. pp. 71–2.

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Hebrew translations of a wide variety of texts, as found in a unique 321-folio British Museum manuscript, including sections of texts by Avicenna. This manuscript begs a comprehensive study, and Zonta has for some time been interested in it and pointed to its importance. Here F-Z observe that the section on logic in the manuscript contains translations of sections from Avicenna's logical writings. What were Ṭodros's motives in preparing this collection? F-Z turn to his friend, Judah ben Solomon Nathan, to help understand them. They conjecture: "The two scholars in fact acted in tandem. We know something of Judah Nathan's motives for appropriating Avicennian bodies of knowledge into Hebrew; perhaps he shared them with Ṭodros." F-Z conclude that both seem "to have had a clear philosophical agenda, namely, to promote Avicenna and al-Ghazālī as a philosophical alternative to radical Averroism" (p. 259). This claim is not without merit, but Ṭodros happens to have stated explicitly his motives in including Avicenna's logic in his collection, and F-Z have ignored his own explanation. This is what he wrote in his introduction to this section: "Our intention in this science, that is the science of logic, is to collect in a book … from the treatises of the compilations of some of those who followed the philosophy of Aristotle, be it Themistius or Alexander or al-Fārābī or Avicenna or al-Ġazālī. My intention is that readers of the commentaries of Averroes on the books of Aristotle on this science will read and understand the books of the above mentioned philosophers on this science, and [so I] compile what is new and most useful in their lengthy books in this book." Ṭodros adds that these selections from these lengthy important works can help us understand Averroes' explanations which are expressed concisely.[36] In other words, Ṭodros had no intention of replacing Averroes' logic with that of Avicenna or anyone else, but rather very much respected Averroes as a guide to truth, and used Avicenna and others in part to understand Averroes. It may be added that Ṭodros completed the project of translating Averroes' commentaries into Hebrew by translating his middle commentaries on the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*. He explained his motives in translating these works in an introduction that extols their great importance and utility.

For this section on Jews who read Avicenna in Arabic and cite or refer to his teachings in their Hebrew books, F-Z cite fourteen authors including one from the East. This time, to their credit, F-Z clearly state that this list "has no pretensions to be exhaustive." However, they then add that "texts that have been little studied may add new and valuable information" (p. 267). This goes without saying,[37] but

[36] See British Museum MS Add 27559, fol. 1^{r}.

[37] Tzvi Langermann has most recently mentioned two more such figures. See his above-mentioned review (above, n. 7), p. 103.

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the addition implies that texts that have been carefully studied are all included in the list, which is not correct. For example, one important name, missing from the list, and referred to earlier by F-Z is Isaac Albalag (see pp. 244–5). Another well-known name is Isaac ibn Laṭif. The thirteenth-century encyclopedist Levi ben Abraham of Villefranche also cites Avicenna, but is he an "arabophone Jewish scholar writing in Hebrew"? He certainly knew some Arabic, enough to compare Ibn Tibbon's translation of Maimonides' *Guide* with the Arabic original and to discuss textual problems in that translation, but could he really read an entire philosophical text in Arabic? We do not know.[38] The same may be asked, for example, about the fourteenth-century poet and philosopher, Jedaiah ben Abraham ha-Penini, and the fifteenth-century scholar, Abraham Bibago, who also cite Avicenna. Hagar Kahana-Smilansky is currently studying the extent of ha-Penini's knowledge of Arabic. As for Bibago, he too relied on Hebrew translations of Arabic texts, but knew enough Arabic to make some corrections to Qalonimos's Hebrew translation of Averroes' *Middle Commentary on the Metaphysics*.[39] In such cases, what seems most important is not whether a scholar knew some Arabic, but whether he could read entire texts of Avicenna in Arabic and, in fact, referred to passages of Avicenna's texts that were not available in Hebrew or at least that he read in Arabic. This does not seem to be the case for Levi, ha-Penini, and Bibago, but neither am I sure that it is the case for Moses Narboni and Simeon Duran, both of whom are part of F-Z's list, and both of whom seem to have read the Arabic texts of Avicenna they cite in Hebrew translation. F-Z say that Simeon Duran "must have read [Avicenna] in Arabic" (p. 266), but this is not clear from his writings, and Langermann writes elsewhere that "it remains to be seen whether [Duran] read Avicenna in the original Arabic."[40] With regard

[38] On Levi's consulting the *Guide* in the Arabic original, see Warren Zev Harvey, "Levi ben Abraham of Villefranche's controversial encyclopedia," in *The Medieval Hebrew Encyclopedias of Science and Philosophy*, ed. Steven Harvey (Dordrecht, 2000), pp. 171–88, on pp. 184–5. Howard Kreisel provides different evidence for Levi's knowledge of Arabic, but questions the extent of this knowledge on the basis of Levi's discussions and citations and, in particular, his reliance on the Hebrew translations of Arabic works (see Kreisel's edition of *Livyat Ḥen: The Quality of Prophecy and the Secrets of the Torah* [Beer-Sheva, 2007], intro. [Hebrew], pp. 17–18).

[39] On Bibago's knowledge of Arabic, see now Yehuda Halper's entry on Abraham Bibago in Springer's forthcoming *Encyclopedia of Renaissance Philosophy*. Halper has informed me that he has recently found additional passages where Bibago corrects Qalonimos' translation of Averroes' *Middle Commentary on the Metaphysics*, yet Halper does not see sufficient evidence to conclude that Bibago had a good reading knowledge of Arabic. He suggests that it is also possible that one of the Christian scholars with whom he studied had a good knowledge of Arabic.

[40] Langermann (above, n. 7), p. 103. Duran may have achieved competence in Arabic only after he moved to Algeria in the wake of the 1391 riots. Seth Kadish has examined this matter and concluded that it "thus appears that Duran preferred to use Hebrew translations

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to Narboni, most modern scholars who study his commentaries on Arabic texts conclude that he knew some Arabic, but that he relied on the Hebrew translations of the Arabic texts he studied. Holzman, who studied several of these commentaries, writes that they "reveal [Narboni's] absolute dependence on the Hebrew version."[41] Thinkers like Narboni and Duran may have known Avicenna's philosophical teachings well, but it seems that this knowledge was from Hebrew texts and had little to do with the level of knowledge of Arabic that they may have attained.

F-Z'S CONCLUSION: AVICENNA AMONG THE JEWS

F-Z sum up their conclusions concerning the interest in Avicenna's philosophical writings among arabophone Jewish authors by stating that in the East it "was nearly nil," and thus Avicenna was "absent from the overt, public agenda of Arabophone Jewish intellectuals in both East and West." "This absence," we are then told "is prolonged

when they were available, but was also able to read Arabic when needed." For Kadish, the strongest evidence is his finding that Duran in his *Magen Avot* II, 3, consults the Arabic of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and suggests corrections to the translation of Samuel ibn Tibbon. See Seth (Avi) Kadish, *The Book of Abraham: Rabbi Shimon ben Ẓemaḥ Duran and the School of Rabbenu Nissim Gerondi*, revised online publication, 2011, of Ph.D. diss., University of Haifa, 2006: https://sites.google.com/site/kadish67/avraham-avinu, p. 12, n. 20, and the references thereto. Further evidence for Duran's reading competence in philosophical Arabic while he was writing the *Magen Avot* was brought to my attention by David Wirmer in a personal correspondence dated 23.10.14, where he writes: "In the parts of *Magen Avot* dealing with the intellect … Duran is certainly working closely with Arabic texts. He also on occasion mentions precise points from Arabic texts that had not been translated into Hebrew, e.g. Alfarabi's *Kitāb al-burhān*." In his book *Averroes, Über den Intellekt* (Freiburg, 2008), p. 31, Wirmer suggests that Duran translated sections of Averroes' *Epitome of the De anima* directly from the original Arabic, and did not rely on Moses ibn Tibbon's Hebrew translation. Wirmer is correct that Duran's text parts from Ibn Tibbon's translation, but his conclusion that Duran must have translated from an Arabic manuscript of the text is not correct. Actually, Duran cited word-for-word from Shem-Ṭov Falaquera's Hebrew translation of Averroes' *Epitome* in his *De'ot ha-Filosofim*, at least in the passages I have examined (cf., e.g., Duran, *Magen Avot* [Leghorn, 1785], fol. 80$^{r\text{-}v}$; Falaquera, *De'ot ha-Filosofim*, Parma, Biblioteca Palatina MS Hebr. 3156 [De Rossi 164], fol. 179$^{r\text{-}v}$; and Averroes, *Epitome of the De anima*, Hebrew trans. Moses ibn Tibbon, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS Héb. 918, fols. 108^{v}–109^{r}; cf. also Wirmer, *Über den Intellekt*, p. 100, n. 138, and p. 106, n. 153). In other words, Duran did not translate these passages from the Arabic, but rather cited from the lesser known partial translation by Falaquera.

[41] See Holzman, "The theory of the intellect and soul in the thought of Moshe Narboni" (above, n. 28), pp. 4–5. Most recently, Holzman writes that "it is almost certain that Narboni did not have a command of Arabic" (see Gitit Holzman, "R. Moshe Narboni's Commentary to Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*" [Hebrew], *Daat*, 74–75 [2013]: 197–236, on p. 197, n. 2). The strongest argument that Narboni had a good knowledge of Arabic is provided by Gerrit Bos, "R. Moshe Narboni, philosopher and physician: a critical analysis of *Sefer Orah Ḥayyim*," *Medieval Encounters*, 1 (1995): 219–51. Bos suggests on the basis of the medical material in *Sefer Oraḥ Ḥayyim* that "Narboni had a certain command of Arabic" (p. 222) and may have "consulted Arabic medical works" (p. 251).

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in Hebrew-writing cultures" (p. 273). On the other hand, Avicenna left "his imprint on Jewish philosophical thought," primarily through "works containing accounts of Avicenna's thought." This leads F-Z to a two-page discussion of Avicenna's presence in Hebrew philosophical texts, half of which is devoted to a distinction between "committed Avicennians" and "eclectic Avicennians." Committed Avicennians "saw Avicenna's writings as a source of philosophical truth and accepted the essentials of Avicenna's thought, or explicitly sided with Avicenna against other philosophers (notably al-Ġhazālī and Averroes)"; eclectic Avicennians "chose to appropriate one or more Avicennian doctrinal items, that is, isolated views on some subject, which they integrated in their works … [and they] characteristically did not have direct access to Avicenna's works and did not adhere to an overall Avicennian scheme or defend Avicenna's positions" (p. 274). As an illustration of the former they list Samuel ibn Tibbon, whom they say "overtly endorsed Avicenna against Averroes," and as an illustration of the latter they count Ibn Daʾud, whom they state cannot "be said to be an Avicennian" and is "not committed to Avicenna's philosophy." However, these two examples are surprising and by no means clear. With regard to Ibn Tibbon, Georges Vajda, in a pioneering study on the influence of Avicenna on Ibn Tibbon, described him as "a *venerabilis inceptor* of a composite ideology," who "seems to show already clear indications of the influence of Ibn Roshd, even though in certain respects he still adheres to an Avicennism already out of date." As Vajda showed, Ibn Tibbon made significant use of Avicenna and adopted Avicennian positions on certain topics – and Freudenthal has provided further evidence for this in recent studies – but Ibn Tibbon was not a committed Avicennian as F-Z describe it.[42] In his 2007 book on Ibn Tibbon's philosophical *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, James Robinson makes this perfectly clear. He shows that in three of the main themes in the *Guide of the Perplexed* where Maimonides inclines toward Avicenna, Ibn Tibbon inclines toward Averroes.[43] In another book on Ibn Tibbon, published in the same

[42] Georges Vajda, "An analysis of the *Maʾamar Yiqqawu ha-Mayim* by Samuel b. Judah Ibn Tibbon," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 10 (1959): 137–49; quote on p. 149. For further illustration of the Avicennian positions in Ibn Tibbon and the influence of Averroes upon him, see Rebecca Kneller-Rowe, "Samuel Ibn Tibbon's *Maʾamar Yiqqavu ha-Mayim*, a philosophical and exegetical treatise" (Hebrew), Ph.D. diss., Tel Aviv University, 2012, esp. pp. 23–6, 139–52, and 305–14. Kneller characterizes Ibn Tibbon as "an eclectic Aristotelian … whose principle teachings are based on Avicennian positions." Yet Kneller points out that Ibn Tibbon does not mention Avicenna's metaphysical proof for the existence of God and that the concepts "Necessary Existent" and "possible existent" are virtually completely absent in his writings. She concludes that "this almost complete disregard of fundamental concepts of Avicenna's teaching along with the adoption of an Averroean position on a number of issues and statements … reflect a certain degree of inconsistency" (p. 26).

[43] James T. Robinson, *Samuel Ibn Tibbon's Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Tübingen, 2007), esp. pp. 99–104.

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year, Carlos Fraenkel, makes a similar point.[44] In contrast, like a committed Avicennian, Ibn Da'ud viewed Avicenna's "writings as a source of philosophical truth and accepted the essentials of Avicenna's thought." While he did not follow Avicenna blindly and sided with al-Fārābī regarding some matters, he was significantly the first Jewish Avicennian, and a more committed one than Ibn Tibbon.[45]

Having made their distinction between Avicennians, F-Z next consider the question of Avicenna's presence in Hebrew. Here they count translations of the above-mentioned Judaeo-Arabic works that incorporate Avicenna's "doctrinal items," certain Hebrew commentaries on Maimonides' *Guide* by arabophone scholars, Hebrew works by arabophone scholars that discuss Avicennian theories and attribute them to Avicenna, and Hebrew translations of writings by the Muslim authors al-Ġazālī and Averroes. This list is a partial summary of the lists of books and translations by arabophone Jews discussed earlier. Conspicuously missing are those books and translations by Jews who knew Avicenna from the Latin, a topic mentioned briefly by F-Z on pages 267–8. This is currently a hot topic in scholarship, and ironically Zonta himself has been a major factor in arousing interest in it through his book on *Hebrew Scholasticism in the Fifteenth Century*. I would only add that it is not just the translations of the Latin Avicenna that are relevant, but also the translations of those Scholastics who cite Avicenna by name and directly from Arabic-to-Latin translations, particularly of works, unavailable in Hebrew, such as the Metaphysics of the *Šifā'*.

Inexplicably, after their repetition of the main ways in which Avicenna's teachings were known to Jews who did not read Arabic (or Latin), F-Z tell us they cannot consider the reception of Avicenna among these Jewish scholars, for "[t]his task is far beyond what we can endeavor to do here at present" (p. 276). In other words, the whole history of the impact of Avicenna on Jewish thinkers who did not know Arabic, that is, of most of the post-Maimonidean Jewish thinkers, is omitted from this "comprehensive" study. In its stead, F-Z content themselves with a note or rather part of a note (p. 276, n. 235), which mentions primarily Dov Schwartz's study of a fourteenth-century Neoplatonic circle of Jewish thinkers influenced by Avicenna.[46] It does not take much effort to fill in this huge hiatus

[44] Fraenkel also provides instances where Ibn Tibbon sides with Averroes against Avicenna. See Carlos Fraenkel, *From Maimonides to Samuel ibn Tibbon* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 2007), esp. pp. 26–7, 188–94, 214–17.

[45] The extent of Avicenna's influence on Ibn Da'ud has been clearly delineated by the two leading scholars of Ibn Da'ud today, Amira Eran and Resianne Fontaine, in their monographs (cited by F-Z on p. 231, n. 54) and in separate studies on Ibn Da'ud (see, *e.g.*, above, n. 24).

[46] Zonta refers to Schwartz's book in his two shorter studies mentioned above, but also mentions other Jewish thinkers who did not read Arabic.

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in F-Z's study. New scholarly research effectively documents the presence of Avicenna among late medieval Jewish philosophers, and indices to recent editions of their works record the various references to him. It is hoped that a future comprehensive study of Avicenna's impact on Jewish thought would benefit from this research. A list of these thinkers would include most of the late medieval Jewish ones and many of the best known among them. Such a list would include among many others: Gershom ben Solomon, Nissim ben Moses of Marseilles, Moses ben Judah Nogah, Ḥasdai Crescas, Profiat Duran, Joseph Albo, Abraham Shalom, Isaac Abravanel, Leone Ebreo, Isaac ʿArama, Joseph ibn Shem-Ṭov, Moses Almosnino, David ben Judah Messer Leon, Eli Ḥabillo, Judah Moscato, Johanan Alemanno, and those thinkers mentioned above who knew some Arabic, but seem to have relied, for the most part, on the Hebrew translations of Avicenna's writings. While scholarship has shown the use of Avicenna by such scholars, a study comparing their sources for knowledge of Avicenna and the extent of his influence would be most welcome. Also of interest would be a study of those Jewish Aristotelians who mention Avicenna, but not very kindly, and had little use for him, such as Gersonides, Qalonimos ben Qalonimos, and Joseph ibn Kaspi.

WHY SO LITTLE OF AVICENNA IN HEBREW?

F-Z conclude their conclusion with an eight-page section on why there is so little Avicenna in Hebrew (pp. 276–83). Here I must confess frustration as this section begins with a three-page rebuttal of my own suggested explanation that Avicenna was little translated into Hebrew as a consequence of Maimonides' relatively weak praise for him in his letter to Samuel ibn Tibbon in which he recommends which philosophers to study and which to avoid. F-Z's argument is ostensibly persuasive and might have convinced me were I not familiar with my own study and realized that their entire argument was specious and misleading. F-Z's account of my argument runs as follows: (1) Maimonides' explicit recommendation of Avicenna's works is "presented as reserved or even negative"; (2) "Based on this (mis-)reading, it has been claimed that the agenda of the Arabic-to-Hebrew translation movement was influenced or even 'determined' by Maimonides' letter"; (3) "Maimonides' allegedly unfavorable remark [is] the reason why translators shunned Avicenna's writings." To this argument, F-Z reply that the recommendation is neither reserved nor negative ("the only reservation being that they are somewhat inferior to al-Fārābī's"). Q.E.D. Quite convincing on the face of it, but this is not my argument. First, I do not call

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the recommendation for Avicenna "reserved" or "negative." I simply point out that according to the letter, his "works are not as good as those of al-Fārābī, but are still useful and worth studying."[47] Moreover, my argument is not based on this praise of Avicenna, but on a series of unusual facts about the philosophical texts actually translated into Hebrew: (1) only three texts of Aristotle were translated directly from the Arabic to Hebrew, while all but one or two of Averroes" commentaries on them were so translated; (2) there is an almost total absence of translations of ancient philosophers other than Aristotle and his commentators, Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius; (3) there appears to have been minimal interest in translating the many Neoplatonic books written in Arabic or translated into Arabic; (4) there is a marked and early interest in translating the logical and propaedeutic writings of al-Fārābī; and yes (5) there is a surprising disinterest in translating the writings of Avicenna, especially *al-Šifā'*. These facts are unique to the Arabic-to-Hebrew translation movement, and differ, to a great extent, from what one might have expected on the basis of Greek-to-Arabic translations and the Latin translations. They correspond only to Maimonides' particular recommendations in his letter to Ibn Tibbon. I thus concluded that Maimonides' letter "very likely determined, either directly or indirectly, with some exceptions, the philosophers that would be translated into Hebrew."[48]

F-Z raise another objection. There were 150–200 Hebrew translators. How could a single sentence in a letter, even by Maimonides, possibly have played a significant role in the decisions taken by so many individual translators in so many locations over such a long period of time? This is an intriguing question, but cleverly misleading. My paper dealt with the translation from Arabic of philosophical works by the Greek and Islamic philosophers, not with the hundreds of translations from Latin to Hebrew. It also, as I explained, dealt only with the subjects treated in Maimonides' letter, and thus did not have anything to do with the translations of works of medicine,

[47] Steven Harvey, "Did Maimonides' Letter to Samuel ibn Tibbon determine which philosophers would be studied by later Jewish thinkers?" *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 83 (1992): 51–70, citation on p. 55; cf. pp. 62 and 65. Actually it is Zonta who used the term "reserved" in this connection. He writes that Maimonides "was rather reserved with regard to Avicenna's books" ("Maimonides' knowledge of Avicenna," [above, n. 10], p. 221). Elsewhere, in his above-mentioned entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "The influence of Arabic and Islamic philosophy on Judaic thought" (above, n. 4), he characterizes the "explicit judgment of Maimonides about Avicenna's thought" as "substantially cool."

[48] Harvey, "Did Maimonides' Letter," p. 68. F-Z thus misrepresent my argument when they note that Harvey "perhaps circularly" considers the lack of interest in translating Avicenna as an indication of the influence of Maimonides' letter on which texts were translated (p. 277, n. 237). It is the combination of these five unexpected features of the texts translated – not any single feature in itself – that led me to my conclusion.

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mathematics, and astronomy, which make up the great bulk of the translated texts. Thus, apart from several anonymous translations, virtually all of the Arabic-to-Hebrew translations of Greek and Islamic philosophical works were made by 12–15 translators, and most of these were made by the Ibn Tibbon family and the Qalonimos circle. At the heart of this movement was a concerted effort, extending a little over a century, to translate all of Averroes' known commentaries on Aristotle. Could a single sentence have determined which philosophical texts would be translated? Very unlikely, but that was not my claim! Is it unreasonable to suppose that a tradition stemming from Maimonides' letter regarding which philosophical texts are worth studying and which not – a letter which is cited by several of the translators – could possibly have determined, with exceptions, which texts would be translated? I don't think so, particularly when the choice of texts translated supports this supposition.[49]

Finally F-Z point to Samuel ibn Tibbon and Shem-Ṭov Falaquera as further indications against my explanation. Ibn Tibbon, they argue, the very addressee of the letter, used and cited from Avicenna and "in all likelihood understood that Maimonides recommended Avicenna." That he had such an understanding is trivially true, since Maimonides did recommend him, just not as much as others.[50]

[49] F-Z, pp. 277–8. F-Z's next argument against my explanation (p. 278) is also sophistical: namely, that if Maimonides' *Epistle on Astrology* failed to persuade Jews not to engage in astrology, how could his letter persuade them which texts to translate? The situations are quite different. Certain Jewish thinkers, following pre-Maimonidean scholars like Ibn Ezra, took astrology seriously and did not see it in conflict with the Aristotelian science propounded by Maimonides. It does not follow that since they did not accept his advice concerning astrology that they would not have accepted it in other areas. In any case, many of the Arabic-to-Hebrew translators of philosophical texts did accept Maimonides' teachings regarding judicial astrology.

[50] F-Z also point out that Ibn Tibbon translated Ibn al-Biṭrīq's translation of Aristotle's *Meteorology*, a translation Maimonides wrote him was problematic. This they argue shows he didn't listen to Maimonides. But Ibn Tibbon did not choose to translate Ibn al-Biṭrīq, he chose to translate the *Meteorology*, and he had no other choice, but to use this unreliable translation, and therefore he turned to the commentaries of Alexander, Averroes, and Avicenna for needed help. Aviezer Ravitzky explains: "Maimonides wrote elsewhere, 'All of Biṭrīq's … commentaries are lost books and anyone who studies them is wasting his time. No one should study them unless he has no alternative.' This warning did not prevent Ibn Tibbon from studying them, having 'no alternative,' there being no other translation of the *Meteorology* available to him" (Aviezer Ravitzky, "Aristotle's *Meteorology* and the Maimonidean Modes of Interpreting the Account of Creation," trans. Lenn J. Schramm, *Aleph*, 8 [2008]: 361–400, citation on p. 364). F-Z cite this statement from Maimonides, but omit the last sentence, "No one should study them unless he has no alternative" (F-Z, p. 278). See further, Resianne Fontaine, Otot ha-Shamayim, *Samuel Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew version of Aristotle's* Meteorology: *A Critical Edition, with Introduction, Translation, & Index* (Leiden, 1995), introduction, pp. IX–XI. Ibn Tibbon indeed listened very carefully to Maimonides and his comments on the *Meteorology* and on the faulty Arabic translation of it. According to Ravitzky's widely-accepted view, he chose to translate this Aristotelian work under the influence of Maimonides, in particular, his comments suggesting its importance in the *Guide of the Perplexed* II, 30 (see Ravitzky, "Aristotle's *Meteorology*").

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As for Falaquera, they argue, he too studied Avicenna and "probably" understood Maimonides as recommending him. Again, this is trivially true. F-Z add that he also "meticulously" shows where Maimonides borrows from Avicenna. Indeed he does. I actually discuss Falaquera at some length in my article, and it is unfortunate that F-Z apparently did not read this part of my article, for they would have found stronger reasons that I provide for challenging my own explanation in light of Falaquera, but I explain Falaquera's approach and put his use of Avicenna in proper perspective.[51] I also challenge my own claim by citing Abraham ibn Ḥisdai, who translated Neoplatonic texts, and suggest that he may be an anomaly among the translators. In any case, I point out in the article that translations were certainly made of texts not recommended by Maimonides, and that he did not exercise totalitarian control over all the translators.

In short, my claim was quite simple. It did not focus on Avicenna, but he was one part of it. A reasonable way to explain the unique features of the Arabic-to-Hebrew translation movement of philosophical texts is Maimonides' letter, whose recommendations just happen to coincide with these features. If the explanation is to some extent true and if the translators of these texts sought, in general, to make available the most important texts first, then it is understandable that Avicenna – who was not praised as highly as others by Maimonides – might have to wait till these other texts were translated first. What is disappointing about F-Z's critique is that it is specious and does not seem to be based on a reading of the entire paper. Yet, this is surprising for Zonta has understood my claims adequately in the past, has referred positively to them in his two papers on Avicenna, and in his recently-updated entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* refers the reader to my article for "the real influence of this letter."[52]

Having dispensed with my suggestion to their satisfaction, F-Z advance their own. They phrase the question as follows:

Why, then, was Avicenna so little translated into Hebrew? The question is paradoxically underscored by the fact that Avicenna was so present in the minds of Hebrew authors. Avicenna was, as we put it, "a household name"

[51] See "Did Maimonides' Letter?," pp. 61–5. F-Z raise a final objection that the translation of al-Fārābī's works had already begun around 1150–1160, so this interest in him has nothing to do with the letter. If the dating is correct, which is not at all certain, then these translations obviously had nothing to do with Maimonides's letter. One could also say that Ibn Da'ud wrote against Neoplatonism before Maimonides, so the paucity of such translation cannot be attributed to Maimonides. Again, my claim concerns five unusual features of this translation movement and the fact that they coincide with Maimonides' particular recommendations. Included in these facts are translations of al-Fārābī's works made after the writing of the letter.

[52] Zonta, "The influence of Arabic and Islamic philosophy on Judaic thought" (above, n. 4).

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among medieval Hebrew-writing Jewish scholars, many of whom integrated Avicennian doctrinal items into their works.[53]

Their answer is grounded in four "facts" (pp. 280–1). First, "[i]n mid-to late 12th-century, two philosophical programs were running in parallel in Andalusia." The first, rooted in the East, "treaded notably in the footsteps of Avicenna (and al-Ghazālī)." We are told that this trend was followed by "notably the Judeo-Arabic philosophers." The other, "consisted in a literal, philologically-grounded reception of Aristotle and his commentators and it culminated in Averroes." The two traditions "gave rise to the two [Latin] translation programs in Toledo as described by Charles Burnett," one favored Avicenna's philosophy, the other "the authentic works of the Greeks and their Arabic commentators." Second, Avicenna was little known among arabophone Jewish scholars, there are few extant Arabic manuscripts in Hebrew letters of his philosophic writings, and those who did use him in the twelfth-century did not attribute the Avicennian teachings to him. Third, "[b]eginning in the third decade of the thirteenth century, Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle began to be systematically translated into Hebrew," and became very popular after that. Fourth, "[s]ome of Avicenna's views were rather controversial." F-Z then explain that the early Andalusian scholars followed the Avicennian trend, but because they did not attribute the teachings to Avicenna, he did not become an authority. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, the translator, Samuel ibn Tibbon, was a "committed Avicennian," but did not translate Avicenna, and his son, "Moses Ibn Tibbon, [also a translator], turned away from his father's Avicennian commitments to become a leader of Jewish Averroism." In short: "[W]hereas the early Judeo-Arabic scholars in Andalusia silently followed the Avicennian tradition, their Hebrew-writing successors in 13th-century Provence switched allegiance to the competing philosophical program." Averroes became more and more popular, and his commentaries seemed to refute Avicenna's positions and make his philosophy "obsolete." Moreover, as Averroes became more popular, they surmise, it must have become harder to find manuscripts of Avicenna's works and, in any case, "access to manuscripts held by

[53] F-Z, p. 279. The description of the fame of medieval Islamic thinkers among medieval Jews as a "household name" is not the novel idea of F-Z. It is found in Isadore Twersky, "Aspects of the social and cultural history of Provençal Jewry," in H. H. Ben-Sasson and S. Ettinger (eds.), *Jewish Society through the Ages* (New York, 1971), pp. 185–207, on p. 202, and adopted by others with acknowledgement. Twersky said that al-Ġazālī and Averroes "became household names for Hebrew writers." F-Z's description of Avicenna, at the beginning of their explanation, as "a household name among medieval Hebrew-writing Jewish scholars, many of whom integrated Avicennian doctrinal items into their works" may be contrasted with their statement at the very end of their explanation that "reticence about Avicenna was specific to Jewish intellectuals" (p. 283, n. 251).

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Muslim scholars [became] more difficult." F-Z's explanation is thus that Avicenna was not translated because by the time the translation movement gained momentum, Averroes had already replaced Avicenna as the representative of true philosophy.

What are the problems with F-Z's explanation? The first fact is intended to establish that the twelfth-century Jewish Andalusian scholars who wrote in Judaeo-Arabic (in particular, Ha-Levi, Ibn Da'ud, and Maimonides), earlier described as "eclectic Avicennians," sided with the Avicennian tradition opposed to the pure Aristotle, represented by his commentators and eventually Averroes. This is relevant for them in order to establish that there had existed an early Avicennian trend among Jews that was not passed on – as the second fact reminds us – because they did not attribute their Avicennian teachings to Avicenna. But while the second fact is indeed a fact, the first is not. The main divide among twelfth-century Jews was not between these two trends, but between a kind of Neoplatonism and a version of Aristotelianism, which was represented by al-Fārābī and Avicenna. Until Ibn Da'ud, writing in 1160, there was little Aristotelianism to speak of among the Jews, apart from Ha-Levi's critique of Aristotelianism, based on Ibn Bāğğa and Avicenna. Although it seems that certain teachings of Avicenna appealed to Ha-Levi (particularly in the final two books of the *Kuzari*), he was not an Avicennian, but a critic of Aristotelian philosophy. As for Ibn Da'ud, he chose to write the first book of Aristotelian science by a Jew. He did not choose between Avicennism and pure Aristotelianism, but chose the Aristotelian tradition of Islamic philosophy, represented by al-Fārābī and Avicenna, over the Neoplatonic tradition of Ibn Gabirol. Nor did Maimonides side with Avicennism over the purer Aristotelianism of the commentators. Although he was influenced by Avicenna's metaphysical teachings, he disapproved of his tendency to part from aspects of Aristotle's natural science. As Resianne Fontaine has explained, "[Maimonides] may have disapproved of Ibn Da'ud's extensive use of Ibn Sina."[54] In addition, as the letter makes clear, Maimonides did not value Avicenna as highly as he did al-Fārābī, Ibn Bāğğa, and Averroes, nor did he wish to give the impression that he did. In any case, facts one and two are not really so relevant to F-Z's explanation. Fact three, however, that Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle began to be translated in the 1230s, is quite important. The question is why did Jacob Anaṭoli, son-in-law and admirer of Samuel ibn Tibbon and the first of the translators of Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle, translate these

[54] Resianne Fontaine, "Was Maimonides an epigone?" *Studia Rosenthaliana*, 40 (2007–2008): 9–26, citation on p. 23. Fontaine adds that Maimonides may have devised his *Guide* in part as a "correction" of Ibn Da'ud's book.

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commentaries and not say the logic of Avicenna? The fourth fact, that some of Avicenna's views were "rather controversial," is true, but does not seem very helpful, as many of Averroes' views were controversial as well. Moreover, Zonta has rather persuasively argued in several studies, including the two on Avicenna and Jewish thought, that the interest in Avicenna and Avicennism that emerged in the 1330s and culminated in Ṭodros' translation of parts of the *Naǧāt* may be viewed from an ideological perspective, namely that his teachings were easier to harmonize with Judaism than those of Averroes. In other words, according to Zonta's studies, it was the impression that Avicenna's views were closer to religion that eventually led to the partial translation of his *Naǧāt*.[55]

There are, as we have seen several problems with F-Z's explanation. For a student of medieval philosophy wishing to understand the paucity of Avicenna's texts translated into Hebrew, several plausible explanations may come to mind. Ultimately the question of which texts to translate is one of image, priority and availability. Which thinkers were most respected? Which texts were most needed? Which texts were available? We know Avicenna's works were available in Arabic to several translators, who chose not to translate his books. The question thus seems to be one of how Avicenna was perceived. I do not see any evidence that there was a conscious effort not to translate him, nor that he was considered "obsolete." It seems it was rather a question of priorities, translating the most needed texts first. I have suggested that the priorities, to a great extent, were set by Maimonides' letter. Thus among the first Greek or Islamic philosophical texts translated were the first four books of the *Organon*, not, as one would expect, of Aristotle's text, but in the form of Averroes' middle commentaries (in accordance with Maimonides' letter). Although F-Z's explanation is flawed, they are correct when they essentially say that the high authority Averroes assumed among the Jews left little desire to prioritize translating

[55] Zonta, "The role of Avicenna and of Islamic 'Avicennism' in the 14th-century Jewish debate around philosophy and religion," *Oriente Moderno*, 19 (2000): 647–60, esp. pp. 651–6; and *ibid.*, "Avicenna in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," esp. pp. 272–8. Zonta speaks of Avicenna's "reconciling attitude with regard to the relationship between *falsafa* and religion" (p. 272) and the view of him as "religious philosopher" (p. 276). This view that Avicenna's teachings were easier to harmonize with Judaism than those of Averroes was expressed clearly by Shlomo Pines in his introduction to his translation of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* (Chicago, 1963), pp. xciii–ciii. At the end of their paper, F-Z ask regarding Avicenna: "What translator would volunteer to be the mouthpiece of a thinker condemned to hell [by a Jewish poet for his unorthodox views]?" (p. 283). The answer, of course, as Zonta makes clear in his studies, is Ṭodros, and precisely for religious reasons. F-Z's fourth fact, in light of Zonta's prior studies, may fuel the impression, expressed at the beginning of this article, that while F-Z borrow extensively from Zonta's important studies on Avicenna and Jewish thought, they seem, at times, to denigrate the approach and overall value of these same studies.

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Avicenna. The prolific translator, Qalonimos ben Qalonimos, distinguished Avicenna and al-Ġazālī from the "important philosophers" (*ḥashuvei ha-filosofim*), Alexander of Aphrodisias, al-Fārābī, Ibn Bāğğa, and Averroes.[56] He did so, not because the former were considered obsolete, but because they occasionally inclined from the path of Aristotle and, in particular, Aristotelian natural science. The "important philosophers" are precisely the main thinkers recommended by Maimonides. Among the philosophical texts translated by Qalonimos are at least eight of Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle and al-Fārābī's *Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿulūm*. Qalonimos never translated Avicenna or al-Ġazālī.

CONCLUSION

Over a decade ago, Mauro Zonta published two informative and suggestive studies on the place of Avicenna in medieval Jewish philosophy. These oft-cited studies at once became the foundation for later researches on any aspect of Avicenna's impact on Jewish thought. In these studies, Zonta only touched upon the use of Avicenna by late medieval Jewish thinkers. This was not so much a shortcoming as a matter of emphasis. Yet Zonta realized the need for a comprehensive study that would, *inter alia*, trace this usage. He concluded his second study as follows:

> Avicenna shows to have been one of the sources of inspiration of Late-Medieval Jewish philosophy: but only a comprehensive study of the many and different interpretations given to his doctrines by Jewish thinkers would allow us to evaluate the real role played by him in Medieval thought.[57]

As we have seen, despite, its length and its pretensions, F-Z's present study is in no way the "comprehensive study" envisioned by Zonta. Their stated goal was to present "a preliminary but comprehensive picture of Avicenna's reception by medieval Jewish cultures and [to try] to explain the Jews' complex attitude to his work in a comparative perspective" (p. 218). Apart from its other shortcomings, F-Z's compilation, as we have seen, does not even try to recount Avicenna's reception by medieval Jewish thinkers who did not know Arabic. "This task," they explain, "is far beyond what we can endeavor to do here at present" (p. 276). But how can a "comprehensive picture of Avicenna's reception by medieval Jewish cultures" fail to trace and discuss this reception? This is perhaps the most disappointing aspect of their study. Although it may be too early to draw a comprehensive

[56] *Kalonymus ben Kalonymus' Sendschreiben an Joseph Kaspi*, ed. Joseph Perles (Munich, 1879), p. 9.
[57] "Avicenna in medieval Jewish philosophy," p. 279.

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picture of this reception, just as it is for certain other aspects of the reception of Avicenna in medieval Jewish thought, recent studies, as we have seen, make it possible to sketch the intriguing story of Avicenna's presence in late medieval Jewish philosophy. I have mentioned the names of several of the late medieval Jewish thinkers, who cite and refer to Avicenna, who should be included in such a study. What must be clarified for each of these thinkers are the Hebrew sources for their citations and references, and the extent and nature of their use of Avicenna. For many of these thinkers, scholars have already provided much of this information.

The present "notes" on F-Z's article have focused on its inadequacies, but the article contains much useful information, particularly for readers not familiar with Zonta's two studies and other recent articles on the subject. My purpose has been to help readers of F-Z's study attain a fuller and more accurate – although certainly not comprehensive – picture of the reception of Avicenna among the Jews in the medieval period.

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