

Greek (and Christian?) Sources in Ibn Ezra's Commentary on Psalms

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In his commentary on *Psalms* Abraham ibn Ezra interprets Psalm 19 in a manner reminiscent of Plato's simile of the sun in the 6th book of the *Republic*.¹ There the highest Form, the most "real" of all realities, the Form of the Good, is represented as having the same relation to the objects of knowledge and to knowledge itself as the sun has to the objects of sight and to seeing; and, precisely as the sun is responsible not only for the visibility of physical objects but also for their very existence, so the Form of the Good is responsible both for the intelligibility and for the being of objects in the intelligible world.² The same analogy is drawn by Ibn Ezra in his commentary. He substitutes, of course, the Law (or concepts that stand with it) for the Form of the Good; and, with such a substitution, the transference of the analogy is very easy indeed, since it is hardly possible for a reader acquainted with the Greek philosophical tradition and its continuation in Islamic and Jewish philosophy to read the Psalm without being reminded of the Platonic simile. However that may be, the fact is that Ibn Ezra was so reminded. Thus in his remarks on verse 8 (תורת ה' תמימה משיבת נפש) he writes that the word תמימה (applied by the Psalmist to the Torah) has also application to the sun: וטעם לאמור 'תמימה' כנגד השמש, בעבור היות השמש ואיננה כמו הלבנה and similarly with the words משיבת נפש, used

1 Plato, *Republic* VI. 508 a 4 ff.

2 *ibid.* 509 b 1 ff.: τὸν ἥλιον τοῖς ὄρωμένοις οὐ μόνον, οἶμαι, τὴν τοῦ ὄρασθαι δύναμιν παρέχειν φήσεις, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν γένεσιν καὶ αὐξὴν καὶ τροφήν... καὶ τοῖς γιγνώσκομένοις τοῖσιν μὴ μόνον τὸ γιγνώσκεισθαι φάναι ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ παρεῖναι ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ εἶναί τε καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ὑπ' ἐκείνου αὐτοῖς προσεῖναι.

in the Psalm of the Torah can according to Ibn Ezra, also be understood of the sun, with, incidentally, an interesting medico-astronomical application.³

Again, he develops the analogy in his comment on ישרים⁴ in verse 9; and also on משמחי לב⁵. On ברה מאירת עינים in the same verse he writes: וכנגד השמש אמר ברה, כי אין בה כדמות שחרות בתוכה כמו ללבנה... ומאירת עינים, כי i.e. he היא אור העולם ביום גם בלילה כי אור הלבנה מורה על כך בראיות גמורות applies מאירת עינים both to the Law and to the sun which is the “light of the world by day and by night”, since, as can be shown by ראיות גמורות, the light of the moon really has its origin in the sun.⁶

Again, on the next verse טהורה עומדת לעד he writes (after giving the literal application of טהורה to יראת ה'): וכנגד השמש אמר טהורה בעבור שיש: (יראת ה' טהורה) והשמש פעמים שיקדר השמש אף-על-פי שגופה טהור הוא, רק הדבר כנגד אחרים. והשמש עומדת לעד כי איננה מורכבת כמו הנכראים מהארבעה יסודות אף-על-פי שתשתנה עמידת השמש כפי הרוחות.

In fact, as in these examples, Ibn Ezra in this commentary constantly applies to the sun expressions used by the Psalmist for the Law, the Torah, the commandments, the fear of the Lord *vel sim.* (יראת ה', מצוה, פקודים).⁷

As he develops this analogy it is quite clear to him, as it is to Plato, that in the physical world everything depends on the sun. On verse 5 he writes: כי הוא גדול מכל גוף והתנועות העליונות כולן קשורות בו והוא מוליד הזמן השווה והשונה והיום והלילה המתכות והצמחים וכל החיים תלויים בשמש.

There are further reminiscences of Plato in this commentary. Thus it seems that the comment on ישרים in verse 9 is inspired by an important

- 3 וטעם משיבת נפש כשמש כי מעת היות השמש בחצי גלגל העולה תשיב נפש רבים See also, on the medical aspects, Philo, *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesin*, IV, (translated from the Armenian by Ralph Marcus [London 1953] 265 ff., especially 267–8.)
- 4 וכנגד השמש הזכיר ישרים בעבור כי מהלך השמש על סדני גלגל המזלות והוא הדרך הישר ועוד יתרון) לפקודים כי השמש פעמים נוטה מגלגל המישור. See also below, n. 6. (The editions have יתרו; but I think it is clear that יתרון must be read).
- 5 ושמתח לב כנגד השמש כי ככה הוא רק ביום תשמח לא בלילה והפיקודים משמחים תמיד. See also below, n. 6.
- 6 It is interesting to note that Ibn Ezra does not blindly impose the analogy in all its aspects; he mentions its limitations, too — see above, notes 4 and 5.
- 7 The allegorical application is, of course, always in step with the literal understanding.

element in the Platonic theory of knowledge: מגזרת פקדון והמה הנמצאות בכוח מנזרת פקדון והמה הנמצאות בכוח. What he seems to be paraphrasing, or rather adapting, here is the Platonic theory according to which knowledge of the Forms (here analogous to knowledge of the מצוות) is present in our souls since before birth, a doctrine developed by Plato in the *Phaedo*. Ibn Ezra connects, etymologically, the word פקודים (here=commandments) with פקדון and הפקיד=deposit: God deposited (knowledge of) the commandments in the human soul.

On אמר על התורה תמימה כי אין צריך לעדות עד אחר: in verse 8 he writes: ואמר על התורה תמימה כי אין צריך לעדות עד אחר: i.e. the Torah does not depend on other testimony, it does not need to be derived from other, more certain premises or arguments; it is, in other words, like the Form of the Good in Plato's *Republic* an ἀρχὴ ἢ ἀνυπόθετος.⁸

There may also be an oblique reminiscence of another Platonic simile, that of the Cave, in Ibn Ezra's comment on verse 9 מאירת עינים: He writes: מאירת עינים. The parable of the cave follows soon after the simile of the sun, at the beginning of book VII of Plato's *Republic*.⁹ There the progress of the human mind from a state of total ignorance to one of the vision of the Good is compared to the passage of a man from a dark cave to the bright sunlight outside.¹⁰

There would be nothing surprising in Ibn Ezra's acquaintance with the *Republic*. The full text of this work was well known from translations in

8 Plato, *Republic*, VI. 510 b 7.

9 Plato, *Republic* VII, 514 b ff. The simile of the cave was known to Muslim philosophers, e.g. to Ibn Ezra's younger contemporary Averroes: see *Averroes' Commentary on Plato's Republic* ed. E.I.J. Rosenthal (Cambridge 1956) 74, on *Republic* VII, 514 a–516 b. Averroes may, of course, have used older material, e.g. such as he found in al-Fārābī. See *Encyclopedia of Islam*², s.v. Ibn Rushd. Arabic translations of the *Republic*, with commentaries, are known to have existed as early as the time of Ḥunain ibn Ishāq; see R. Walzer, in *EP*², s.v. Aflātūn p. 235. See also G. Bergsträsser, *Hunain ibn Ishāq über die syrischen und arabischen Galenübersetzungen*, (Leipzig 1925) 50 of Arabic text; E.I.J. Rosenthal, op. cit. p. 9. On possible echoes of Plato's *Republic* in Saadyah Gaon see E.I.J. Rosenthal, *Griechisches Erbe in der jüdischen Religionsphilosophie des Mittelalters* (Stuttgart 1960) 35.

10 Maimonides too seems to allude to the simile of the Cave in the *Guide* I, Praef. and in III, 51; see L. Strauss, *Philosophie und Gesetz* (Berlin 1975) 94 f. and p. 116. For a reminiscence in Shemtob b. Yosef ibn Falaquera see M. Steinschneider, *Alfarabi* (St. Petersburg 1869) 176–177.

Muslim philosophy; so were paraphrases and commentaries;¹¹ and there can be no doubt that Ibn Ezra was familiar with Muslim philosophical thought (and with its Greek inheritance), as were other Jewish thinkers of his acquaintance: his friend Yehuda Halevi refers to the *Republic* in the *Kuzari*.¹² Still it is not certain, and perhaps not very likely, that the analogy between sun and Torah is directly derived from the reading of Plato's *Republic*. It may well have come to Ibn Ezra through different channels.

In the works of Philo we find the sun equated with a complex of concepts directly comparable to what we have here. Thus, the sun is, in one way or another, used in comparison, analogy, allegory, for: *Wisdom* (*de migr.* 40; and see also the platonizing context); αὕτη [scil. ἡ σοφία] θεοῦ τὸ ἀρχέτυπον φέγγος, οὐ μίμημα καὶ εἰκὼν ἥλιος.¹³

Truth (*de decal.* 138)

[ἀληθείας] ἥλιόν τρόπον φῶς τοῖς πράγμασι περιτιθείσης

Logos (*somn.* I.85 and context)

ἥλιον καλεῖ τὸν θεῖον λόγον, τὸ τοῦ καὶ οὐρανὸν περιπολοῦντος... παράδειγμα.

(Philo treats the sun allegorically in many other ways too. Thus he will refer to it as the πατήρ and the ἡγεμὼν τῶν συμπάντων or he will use it as an allegory of, or in comparison with, αἴσθησις, τὸ πρῶτον αἴτιον, θεῖος λόγος, ἀνθρώπινος νοῦς, of God Himself, and in other ways).¹⁴

There are a good number of other passages in the works of Philo of which we are reminded by the comments made here by Ibn Ezra.

11 See R. Walzer, *Greek into Arabic*, pp. 31 and 238, and id. ΕΓ² 1960, s.v. Aflāṭūn. Al-Fārābī used a commentary on the *Republic* apparently known to and used by Ibn Rushd (Averroes), see R. Walzer op. cit. 234. (See above n. 9).

12 III. 19.

13 See also *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesin* (above, n. 3) IV. 158.

14 πατήρ καὶ ἡγεμὼν τῶν συμπάντων; *Somn.* I. 73–7; *ibid.* 87 f. αἴσθησις; *Somn.* I. 79 ff.; 118 f.; (“visible opinion” Q. et S. IV. 140) τὸ πρῶτον αἴτιον; *Somn.* I. 92 ff. θεῖος λόγος; *Somn.* I. 85 ἀνθρώπινος νοῦς; *Somn.* I. 77; 118f. God; *Somn.* I. 72; 87 ff.; *Praem.* 45 Tree of Life: Q. et S. in Gen. 1:10 Life of Enoch (Gen. 5:23): Q. et S. in Gen. 1:84 Abraham’s vision of God (Gen. 18:1 ff.): Q. et S. in Gen. 4:1

*Philo**de fug. et inv. 57:*

ἥλιος γὰρ οὐκ ἀλλαττόμενος ὁ
αὐτός ἐστιν αἰεί.

de somn. I.83

τάναντία καὶ ἀνατέλλων καὶ
δύομενος ἐργάζεται.

de confus. ling. 100

μεθ' ἡμέραν ἡλίου καὶ νύκτωρ
σελήνης φαντασίαν ὡς
ἐστώτων οἱ σώματος ὀφθαλμοὶ
λαμβάνουσι. (A different and
indeed opposite point is made
here. What the two have in common
is the insistence on the difference
between real and apparent movement.)

de somn. 133

τὸ ἀφ' ἡλίου καθαρὸν φέγγος
See also de plant. 27 and de mut.
nom. 199; spec. leg. IV.201.

*Ibn Ezra**on verse 10:*

והשמש עומדת לעד, כי איננה מורכבת
כמו הנכראים מהארבעה יסודות
בעבור היותם עומדים: and
cf. on verse 2: על מתכונת אחת
(about uniformity
of heavenly movement). and on
verse 5: כי השמש קבוע בגלגל: cf.
also on Ps. 148:6, where Ibn Ezra
writes about heavenly bodies: לא
ישתנו לעולם כי אינם מורכבים
מארבעה יסודות

on verse 8

וטעם משיבת נפש כשמש, כי מעת
היות השמש בחצי גלגל העולה תשיב
נפש רבים מהחולים הפך מה שיקרה
בהיותו בחצי גלגל היורד

on verse 2

תנועת הגלגלים שהן שוות בדרך אחת
ושונות בדרך אחרת והולכות על דרך
ישרה בעצמם ואיננה ישרה כנגד יושבי
הארץ. ומידת התנועה לא תוסיף ולא
תגרע בראיות גמורות והיא תוסיף
ותגרע במראית העין

on verse 10

וכנגד השמש אמר טהורה בעבור שיש
פעמים שיקדר השמש אף-על-פי
שגופה טהור הוא רק הדבר כנגד
אחרים

opific. 29

πρῶτον οὖν ὁ ποιῶν ἐποίησεν
οὐρανὸν ἀσώματον καὶ γῆν
ἀόρατον καὶ ἀέρος ἰδέαν καὶ
κενοῦ.

*Leg.All. III.97 ff (cf. also
Spec.Leg. I.32 ff.):*

Philo argues that the universe and its order are proof of the existence of a creator; and he then goes on to argue that a more perfect mind lifting its eyes above creation obtains knowledge of God without appeal to the testimony of God's handiwork. See also praem. 41 ff. (and note there the platonizing language; and in 45 note analogy between God and sun.). Also: *Spec.Leg. III. 187–189; Plato, Laws, XII. 966 et al.* In Christian writers, e.g. Athanasius, *contra gentes*, 37 (PG. 25, 73 B).

on verse 1

השמים בה"א הידיעה להורות כי על
אלה הנראים ידבר

on verse 2

כי לא דבר משה על העולם הבא שהוא
עולם המלאכים כי אם על עולם ההויה

(It is true that perhaps Ibn Ezra seems here to be arguing rather differently from, and possibly against, Philo's notion of an invisible ideal heaven etc. prior to the visible heaven etc.; but what is important is that he seems to be familiar with the notion.)

on verse 8

לפי דעתי הזכיר עד כה איך יוכל
המשכיל למצוא עדות על האלוהות
ולהכיר מעשיו ואמר דוד יש עד אחר
נכבד ממנו ויותר נאמן והיא תורת ה'
ועדותיו ופיקודיו ומצוותיו ויראתו
ומשפטיו... ואמר על התורה תמימה כי
אין צריך לעדות עד אחר עמה

In other places, too, there is a coincidence of Philonic interpretation with what we find in Ibn Ezra's commentary:

Leg. All. I. 5

παύεται γὰρ οὐδέποτε ποιῶν ὁ θεός.

cf. also Cherub. 87

Leg. All. I. 44

[θεός] εἷς καὶ τὸ πᾶν αὐτὸς ὢν.

cf. also Leg. All. III. 205

Eternity of matter is implied or asserted in passages such as the following:

de aetern. mundi 5:

ὡσπερ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος οὐδὲν γίνεται, οὐδὲ εἷς τὸ μὴ ὄν φθείρεται.

de aetern. mundi 109:

... τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου... θνήσκουσιν δοκοῦντα

on Exod. 3:2

ואיננו כן עושה שמים וארץ... כי השם הוא עושה תמיד ומעמיד כהגה היוצא מפי אדם

and also Yes. Mor. I: השם ברא העולם בחפץ מתחדש

on Gen. 1:26

הוא יוצר הכל והוא הכל, adding cautiously: ולא אוכל לפרש on כי הוא הכל ומאתו Exodus 23.21 הכל הכל

on Isaiah 65:18

יוכיח כי אין הבריאה להוציא יש מאין On Gen. 1.1 he argues against those who think that ברא refers to creatio ex nihilo; and he defines ברא as follows: וטעמו לגזור ולשום גבול והמשכיל יבין

The following passages too illustrate that Philo believed like Plato and like Ibn Ezra that God's creative activity consisted in ordering pre-existing matter:

de plant. 3:

ἐπειδὴ γὰρ τὴν οὐσίαν ἄτακτον καὶ συγκεχυμένην οὖσαν ἐξ αὐτῆς εἰς τάξιν ἐξ ἀταξίας καὶ ἐκ συγχύσεως εἰς διάκρισιν ἄγων ὁ κοσμοπλάστης μορφοῦν ἤρξατο...¹⁵ (Note the platonizing terminology).

15 See E. Bréhier, *Les idées philosophiques et religieuses de Philon d'Alexandrie* (Paris 1925²) 79 ff. and especially p. 81. For a somewhat different view on the question of the pre-existence of the matter out of which Philo's God created the universe see H.A. Wolfson, *Philo I* (Cambridge, Mass. 1962) 302 ff.

Spec. Leg. IV 187:

τὰ γὰρ μὴ ὄντα ἐκάλεσεν εἰς τὸ εἶναι τάξιν ἐξ ἀταξίας καὶ ἐξ ἀποίων ποιότητος καὶ ἐξ ἀνομοίων ὁμοιότητος καὶ ἐξ ἑτεροιοτήτων ταυτότητος καὶ ἐξ ἀκοινωνήτων καὶ ἀναρμόστων κοινωνίας καὶ ἁρμονίας. (Note platonizing terminology)...

In all these cases there are clear similarities between what Philo writes and what we find in Ibn Ezra; and, of course, we must not forget the platonic Demiurge, in the *Timaeus*, who creates the universe by imposing order on pre-existing, unordered, chaotic, matter.

There are other parallels between Philo and Ibn Ezra:

- 1) It is hardly necessary to point to the strong similarity between the interest in number symbolism in both writers.¹⁶
- 2) Ibn Ezra seems to deprecate allegory when it is pushed too far; nevertheless he himself often succumbs to the temptation of this method of interpretation which was of course the most typical exegetical method of Philo.¹⁷
- 3) Both Philo and Ibn Ezra explain the prohibition in Exodus 23.19 *לא תבשל אדם בבעור שאין מנהג אדם לאכול בשר חי אסור לבשל הגדי*: (cf. also Ex. 34:26) as an injunction against inhumanity and cruelty: see Ibn Ezra ad loc.: *גדי בחלב אמו*. Compare with this Philo, *de virt.* 142–144.

It is true that there are other, rabbinic, sources more likely to have been known to Ibn Ezra for justifying this sort of prohibition on the ground of humanity.¹⁸ But it is curious that Ibn Ezra, like Philo, here mentions *three* laws relating to humane treatment of animals together (though not quite the same three) as illustrations of his thesis.¹⁹

16 See I. Heinemann, *Philons griechische und jüdische Bildung*, (Breslau 1932) 141 ff.

17 See on this e.g. I. Husik, *A History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (New York 1966) 187 ff.; and on the allegorical method in Philo generally Wolfson, op. cit. I. pp. 87 ff. and pp. 115 ff.

18 See Targ. Yer. Lev. 22. 28; Lev. R. 27.11; and, perhaps, Mishna Berakhoth V. 3 (all quoted by Heinemann op. cit. 164).

19 אולי היה כי אכזריות לב הוא לבשל הגדי עם חלב אמו כדרך ושוור או שה אותו ואת בנו לא תבשל אדם בבעור שאין מנהג אדם לאכול בשר חי אסור לבשל הגדי: (cf. also Ex. 34:26) as an injunction against inhumanity and cruelty: see Ibn Ezra ad loc.: *גדי בחלב אמו*. Compare with this Philo, *de virt.* 142–144.
 a) seething a kid in his mother's milk (Ex. 23:19)
 b) slaughtering an ox or a sheep on the same day as their young (Lev. 22:28)
 c) taking the mother bird out of the nest together with the young (Deut. 22:6).
 Philo, like Ibn Ezra, cites Ex. 23: 19 and Lev. 22:28 (the latter in a version very different from our text of the LXX); but instead of Deut. 22:6 Philo has (*de virt.*

Is it conceivable that Ibn Ezra was acquainted in one way or another with Philo? It is sometimes said²⁰ that Philo's works were completely unknown until the Renaissance amongst Jewish writers, who are supposed to have been unacquainted, throughout the middle ages, not only with Philo but also with the Christian literature of their period and of earlier times. We are perhaps too much given to taking it as axiomatic that the scholarly life of the medieval Jew was closed to intellectual exchange with the Christian world. Ibn Ezra, at any rate, like some others of his time, was the inheritor of the thought both of Muslim and of Christian Spain. Like his friend Yehuda Halevi he came from Tudela²¹ which passed from Muslim to Christian rule when Ibn Ezra was still comparatively young. He travelled widely in the Muslim Orient and in Christian countries.²² It does not seem altogether absurd to admit the possibility that Ibn Ezra who was certainly acquainted with Muslim literature

142)... πρὶν ἀπότιθον γενέσθαι, μὴ ἀποσπᾶν τῆς τεκούσης μήτε ἄρνα μήτε ἔριφον μήτε ἄλλο τι τῶν ἐν ταῖς ἀγέλαις... He seems to know Deut 22:6; at any rate, what he writes in Hypoth. 7.9 is reminiscent of it: μὴ νεοττιάν φησι κατοικίδιον ἔρημοῦν.

- 20 e.g. Hans Levy, *Philo, Selections in Three Jewish Philosophers*, (New York/Philadelphia 1960) 8. About possible influences of philonic thought on medieval Jewish philosophy see S. Posnanski, "Philon dans l'ancienne littérature judéo-arabe", *REJ*, 50 (1905) 10 ff.; E.I.J. Rosenthal, *Avicenna's Influence on Jewish Thought*, in *Avicenna: Scientist and Philosopher*, ed. G.M. Wickens (London 1952) 69 and n. 6; pp. 79 f. and notes 35–6; idem, *Griechisches Erbe in der jüdischen Religions-Philosophie des Mittelalters* (Stuttgart 1960) 16.
- 21 According to M. Friedländer, *The Commentary of Ibn Ezra on Isaiah* (London 1873) IX ff., Ibn Ezra was born in Toledo; so also W. Bacher, in *JE*. VI. 521, who cites Moses ibn Ezra for this information as well as an acrostic in which Abraham himself is said to have named Toledo as his birthplace. The editors of *EJ* (VIII. 1163) say that Abraham ibn Ezra's birthplace (and that of Yehuda Halevi) was Tudela (apparently depending on Ch. Schirmann in *Tarbiz* X[1939] 237 ff.) For our purposes it does not much matter whether Abraham was born in Toledo or in Tudela. For if it is true of Toledo that it passed from Muslim to Christian rule in 1085 when it was taken by Alfonso VI of Castile, not long before Abraham ibn Ezra was born (he lived from 1092/3 to 1167/8 according to *JE*, or from 1089 to 1164 according to *EJ*), it is equally true of Tudela that Muslim rule there ended when Abraham ibn Ezra was still comparatively young (Tudela was conquered by Alfonso I of Aragon in 1114/5).
- 22 He even visited England. It was in London that he wrote two of his works: the סוד מורא and the אגרת השבת. See Friedländer, *op. cit.* XXV.

may also have been acquainted with Philo either directly or indirectly through Christian literature in which the allegorical method of Philo was used very extensively. It is hardly necessary to point to the fact that the sun motif in biblical interpretation and speculation is very frequent not only in the works of Philo but also in those of early and later Christian writers. In fact, it is a motif probably as frequent as any and more frequent than most in patristic literature. Thus, to mention only a few examples, chosen practically at random from a dictionary entry,²³ the sun in early Christian writers is used figuratively for God, for justice, for the trinity, for unity, for trinity and unity together, for consubstantiality, coeternity, coequality, for the Father, for the Son, for the Holy Ghost, for the Messiah, for the Church, for the passion, for the resurrection, for the spiritual life; it is described as enduring forever; it is compared to Jesus as giving spiritual light: ὁμοίως ἤλιω ταῖς ἀυγαῖς τῆς αὐτοῦ διδασκαλίας τὸν σύμπαντα καταλάμπων κόσμον. (Eus. *Ps.* 71:5 [Migne 23, 800 A]).

It is used in allegory, in comparison, in analogy, in metaphor. For some Christian writers it represents in the regularity of its motions an argument for a creator; or again the sun is a paradigm of eternity.²⁴ It is used allegorically, for example, as a sign for eternity because it is the source of night and day. (Thdt. *Ps.* 88:37[I. 1243]). We find it used in heretical writings or in the reports about heretics in the writings of the Fathers; see, for instance, Hipp. *Haer.* 6.28 (p. 154. 16; M. 16, 3234 D): φησὶν ὁ Πυθαγόρειος λόγος δημιουργόν... εἶναι τῶν γενομένων πάντων... τὸν μέγαν γεωμέτρην καὶ ἀριθμητὴν ἥλιον καὶ ἐστηρίχθαι τοῦτον ἐν ὄλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ, καθάπερ ἐν τοῖς σώμασιν ψυχῆν. Compare Ibn Ezra on verse 7 of our psalm: כִּי חַמַּשׁ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בְּעוֹלָם כְּדַמּוֹת חוּם הַלֵּב בְּגוֹב הָאֵדָם וְהֵנָּה הוּא יִי כֹל הַגּוֹפּוֹת

For identification of the sun with Jesus see Thdt. *Haer.* I. 26 (4. 320): τούτου τεκμήριον ἱκανὸν παρέχουσι τὸ τὸν ἥλιον ἐκλείπειν ἐν τῷ τοῦ σταυροῦ καιρῷ (an allusion to the well known story of the eclipse at the time of the crucifixion).

There are, of course, many other ways in which such motifs or such explanations or methods as we have noted here could have become familiar to

23 G.W.H.Lampe, *A Patristic Lexicon* (Oxford 1961–8) s.v. ἥλιος.

24 It is interesting to note that the pagan Simplicius quotes Psalm 19 (= 18 of the LXX) in support of the argument (against the Christian Philoponus) that the universe is eternal: see Simplicius, in *Arist. de caelo*, 141 f (Heiberg); and cf. *ibid.* 90.

Ibn Ezra. It is not necessary on such slight evidence as has been presented in this paper to say that Ibn Ezra must have been acquainted with some of the Christian Fathers. Still, the material examined gives some reason to think that it might be helpful to investigate the possibility that he may have known some patristic and thus also some Philonic exegesis. We must not forget that even if we find more evidence of the kind adduced here, there are other possibilities of explaining this. We might, for example, think that Ibn Ezra may have been acquainted with such material not through direct contact with Christian literature but through traces of it in other Jewish writers of the middle ages whose work he knows, for instance Ibn Gabirol, or the *Sepher Yetsira*.²⁵ There may indeed be some reason for suspecting that Ibn Gabirol was acquainted with some philonic traditions.²⁶ In any case it is a matter worth investigating. For it would be most interesting to see whether in fact the conjecture that some Jewish writers in the middle ages may have known something of Philo and possibly of Christian writers can be substantiated.

It is, I would suggest, *prima facie* not at all impossible to imagine that Jewish writers, engaged in both polemics and apologetics, would have actively studied Christian literature,²⁷ and perhaps even, on occasion, Christian Greek literature in the original or in translation or in Latin paraphrase. That Greek literature was not altogether inaccessible to Jews in the Middle Ages cannot be doubted. There were, after all, Jews in Greek-speaking countries. A much travelled man like Ibn Ezra would have more opportunity than most of his contemporaries to meet Greek-speaking Jews²⁸

25 Cf. Ibn Ezra on Gen. 1:2, Eccl. 3:21.

26 See C. Siegfried, *Philo von Alexandria* (Jena 1875) 289 f.; on possible philonic influence on medieval Jewish philosophy see Rosenthal *op. cit.* (above, n. 9) 16.

27 It is impossible to imagine that Yehuda Halevi in his sympathetic treatment of Christianity in the *Kuzari* did not draw on some acquaintance with Christian literature. For an example of rabbinic acquaintance with classical literature in early 15th century Spain see Y. Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain II* (Philadelphia 1978) 252 f. The Rabbi mentioned there even had access to the library of the Franciscans of Toledo.

28 Some of these travelled as far as France. There is a famous story told by one of the French Tossaphists (on B. Shabbat 116 a) of a Greek Jew who explained to them the meaning of the word φιλόσοφος. It is not necessary for Ibn Ezra to have known Greek in order to read Philo or philonic material. It seems that there existed oriental translations of Philo and that these were not unknown to Jewish

and indeed Christians. A writer like Ibn Ezra who, in his poetry, refers to Christendom as Israel's brother²⁹ is not altogether unlikely to have been interested in the literature of the younger sister of the Synagogue.

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scholars in the East in the ninth and tenth centuries. See Posnanski op. cit. (above, n. 20). Posnanski also considers the possible existence of Syriac translations of Philo. We know in any case that Philo was translated into at least one other oriental language, viz. Armenian; and if there was a Syriac translation, as Posnanski suggests, it would have been as easily accessible to Spanish Jews as was the Syriac Bible. Nahmanides, at any rate, quotes something very much like the peshitta version of *Sapientia Salomonis* (chap. VII, 5–8 and 17–21) in the introduction to his commentary on Genesis (see on this J.A. Emerton, *The Peshitta of the Wisdom of Solomon*, [Leiden 1959] XXXIII; A. Marx, *JBL* XL [1921] 57 ff.) He calls the book from which he quotes חוכמתא הנקרא הספר המתורגם הספר המתורגם הנקרא חוכמתא רבתא דשלמה. Nahmanides also quotes a Syriac text of the Book of Judith (which he calls מגילת שושן) in his commentary on Deuteronomy 21, 14 (Marx, *ibid.* 58). Marx may well be right in doubting (*ibid.* 60) whether we are justified in accepting “the sweeping statement that the Syriac version of the Apocrypha, transcribed into Hebrew characters, was known among the Jews in Spain”. But in view of the examples he himself adduces there can be no doubt that some such texts were indeed known in Spain. Marx also points out (*ibid.* 60, n. 9) that there is no foundation to the hypothesis that Nahmanides became acquainted with the Syriac text of *Sapientia Salomonis* in Palestine. (In a lecture dealing with Ecclesiastes, which Nahmanides delivered in Gerona in 1266 or 1267, i.e. before he left Spain to settle in Palestine, he mentions the Christian Syriac version of *Sapientia Salomonis*.) It is clear that Syriac, particularly if transliterated into Hebrew characters, was easily read by medieval Jews, who may in fact have confused it with translations into Jewish Aramaic.

29 See G.D. Cohen, *Esau as Symbol*, in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge Mass. 1967) 45. The reference to the *brother* cannot strictly be derived from the supposed Edomite origin of Rome, which, as Cohen points out, was vehemently denied by Ibn Ezra; though the fact that Rome and the Roman Church were often conventionally referred to by the name Edom in medieval Jewish literature could, one must suppose, easily combine with the reminiscence of Deut. 23:8 הוא אחיך הוא אדומי כי אחיך הוא אדומי. For the literature on the conventional use of Edom, Esau, Se'ir for Rome see Cohen op. cit. *passim* and especially 27 n. 31.