## Rabbi Meyuhas ben Elijah: His Geographical Provenance, Works, and Chronology

We know very little about the history of the Jews of the Byzantine Empire in the Middle Ages, and even less about the rabbinic literature composed by them in this period. For many years this Jewish community and its literature have been described as a “black hole,” the conventional wisdom being that most of the works produced in early medieval Byzantium have not survived. In recent years there has been recognizable growth in scholarly interest in Byzantine Jews in general and in their Biblical interpretations in particular.[[1]](#footnote-1) This study will address Rabbi Meyuhas ben Elijah, a biblical exegete who lived in the Byzantine Empire in the first half of the previous millennium. Very little is known about his life, and few studies have explored him and his exegetical works.[[2]](#footnote-2) A major debate in scholarship pertains to the era in which he was active. The present article offers a new discussion of his geographical provenance, his works, and his biographical chronology - offering both a reconsideration of previously discussed facts as well as a consideration of new information.

## **Geography**

Scholars agree that Rabbi Meyuhas hailed from a Greek-speaking country, i.e., from one of the territories of the Byzantine Empire. [[3]](#footnote-3) This assumption is supported by the following considerations:

1. Rabbi Meyuhas uses Greek words throughout his commentary. For example: “‘He was a mighty [גבור] hunter’ [...] every [use of the word] גבור is an expression of virility, for a man is strong [...] and in Greek אנדריאה (ἀνδρεία)” (Gen 10:9);[[4]](#footnote-4) “and it is an adornment [תכשיט] that resembles a cloak [חלוק] [...] that which is called in Greek איפילוריקין (ἐπιλώρικον)” (Ex 28:31);[[5]](#footnote-5) “נטף is the resin that drips from the קטף trees, and in Greek it is called בלסמון (βάλσαμον)” (Ex 30:34);[[6]](#footnote-6) “כסיל is the Zodiac sign Gemini, and in Greek it is called שקיפרנאה (σχαπερνεα)” (Job 9:9).[[7]](#footnote-7)
2. Rabbi Meyuhas demonstrates his familiarity with Middle Eastern geography: “*Kitim and Dudanim*—these are all islands. And I say that they are the Greek-speaking islands like Cyprus, Crete, Rhodes, and the like” (Gen 10:3).
3. Rabbi Meyuhas discusses Greek clothing: “and similar [clothes] are worn by the priests of Greece” (Ex 28:6); “and similar [clothes] are worn by the priests of Greece, except that they do not wear a belt” (Ex 39:8).
4. Rabbi Meyuhas often references the Greek character χ in order to illustrate various points in his commentary: “*When they are mixed with oil* [...] *anointed*—one bakes them first and afterwards anoints them, like this—χ—and it is a Greek Chi” (Ex 29:2); “*And you shall pour the anointing oil on his head*. Oil is poured on his head between his eyelids [ריסי עיניו] and he spreads it [ממשיכו] in two directions in the shape of a Greek Chi.” (Ex 29:7); “the anointing of the tabernacle, the vessels, Aaron, and his children was done with a finger in the shape of a Greek Chi” (Ex 40:5); “but one bakes the wafers [הרקיקין] first and afterwards one anoints them in the shape of a Chi” (Lev 2:4). [[8]](#footnote-8)
5. Menahem Kahana has pointed to a number of unique textual variants from the Sifrei on Numbers which are cited by Rabbi Meyuhas and two other Byzantine exegetes: Rabbenu Hillel and Rabbi Tobiah ben Eliezer.[[9]](#footnote-9) It follows that a unique version of the midrashic text circulated in Byzantium which was known only to the sages living within the empire’s borders.

In addition to evidence drawn from Rabbi Meyuhas’ works, we can further support his association with the Byzantine Empire from the following lines of evidence:

1. The copyist of the only extant manuscript of Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentary on the Pentateuch—Elijah bar Rabbi Elkana—was a resident of Nikopolis.[[10]](#footnote-10) Likewise, the copyist of Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentary on Job—Abraham ben Moses Qalomiti—was also a resident of the Byzantine Empire.
2. All the late quotations of Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentary appear in works of Byzantine provenance: Rabbi Elijah Mizrahi (c 1450–1525), one of the prominent Jewish sages in Turkey at the time, mentions Rabbi Meyuhas three times;[[11]](#footnote-11) a Byzantine midrashic anthology dated to the fifteenth century mentions him twice;[[12]](#footnote-12) an anonymous commentary on Genesis and Exodus, which also includes translations of biblical words into Greek, mentions a number of Byzantine sages, Rabbi Meyuhas among them.[[13]](#footnote-13)
3. Leopold Zunz asserted that the name ‘Meyuhas’ is characteristically Byzantine. Until the fifteenth century, it was apparently used as a first name. Besides Rabbi Meyuhas ben Elijah, Zunz also mentions Meyuhas ben Judah from Candia who lived circa 1400. Later Meyuhas began to be used as a surname: in the sixteenth century, we know of a Samuel ben Joshua Meyuhas and a Phineas ben Sabbatai Meyuhas. Other figures bearing the name are known from the eighteenth century; all were residents of former Byzantine lands.[[14]](#footnote-14) Meyuhas seems to be a translation of the Greek name ευγενες.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Given the consensus regarding Rabbi Meyuhas’ Byzantine provenance, it is strange that he seemed to be versed not only in Greek but also in Arabic. In his commentaries, he makes recourse of Arabic several times;[[16]](#footnote-16) he quotes the Arabic commentary of Rabbi Isaac ben Samuel five times;[[17]](#footnote-17) and his linguistic approach to Hebrew is clearly indebted to Arabic grammar. For example, he uses terminology which reflects Arabic grammar: מצדר (the verbal noun) and עתיד מקוצץ which correspond to the equivalent concept in Arabic (אלמג'זום).[[18]](#footnote-18)

The problem is that, as a rule, Jews in the Byzantine Empire—both Rabbinites and Karaites—did not speak Arabic. The language spoken among Byzantine Jews was Greek.[[19]](#footnote-19) The Jews of Byzantium also employed Hebrew, principally for prayer and in the writing of religious works.[[20]](#footnote-20) Very little has been written about the knowledge of Arabic among Jews across the Byzantine Empire. It appears that, during many periods, there was very little knowledge of the Arabic language.[[21]](#footnote-21) For example, the work done by Tobias ben Moses in translating Karaite works from Arabic to Hebrew in the mid-eleventh century indicates that the community of learners was not proficient in the Arabic language.[[22]](#footnote-22)

How can this trend be reconciled with the information suggesting that Rabbi Meyuhas lived in the Byzantine Empire yet was also versed in Arabic? Those scholars who identified Rabbi Meyuhas as Byzantine in origin did not address this issue.

One possible way of resolving the difficulty is to propose that Rabbi Meyuhas grew up in an Arabic speaking country and later immigrated to the Byzantine Empire. One can cite as a precedent the biography of the twelfth century exegete, Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra. The latter was born in Toledo in the southern Iberian Peninsula. At age 50, he left Spain and travelled to Christian lands, where he used his knowledge of Arabic in instruction and exegesis. Jacoby has written extensively about the migration of Jews in the Middle East, noting, *inter alia*, that during certain periods Jews migrated from Arabic-speaking lands to Byzantium.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Another possibility is that Rabbi Meyuhas spent several years in an Arabic speaking country and there acquainted himself with the language and its grammatical principles. This has its precedent in the biography of the French sage Elazar ben Mattityah who learned Arabic after spending several decades in Egypt. Afterwards he moved to the Byzantine Empire and continued to use his knowledge of Arabic there.[[24]](#footnote-24)

## **His Works**

Prior to his commentaries on Scripture, Rabbi Meyuhas wrote a grammatical work called ספר המידות, which is no longer extant. The work is mentioned in his commentary on the Pentateuch twelve times, in his commentary on Job once, and in his commentary on Chronicles once.[[25]](#footnote-25) Based on his citations of the book, we can conclude that it contained a systematic treatment of the rules of Hebrew vowelization and grammar, as well as the “דרכי המקראות” which he revealed in Scripture.

Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentary on the Pentateuch is extant in only one manuscript.[[26]](#footnote-26)According to the colophon, the copyist was Elijah ben Rabbi Elkana from Nicopolis. The manuscript was completed on 9 Nisan 5229 (1469).[[27]](#footnote-27) All printed editions of Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentary on the Pentateuch are based on this manuscript,[[28]](#footnote-28) though the different editions are not identical in quality, and a comparison shows that not all scholars were careful to copy the text of the manuscript word-for-word. I have personally found many cases in which the readings in the printed editions deviate from those appearing in the original manuscript.

Rabbi Meyuhas wrote commentaries on Job and Chronicles. They were preserved in a manuscript held by the Great Synagogue in Warsaw. The original manuscript did not survive the Second World War, but Greenup’s facsimiles of the commentary on Job are still available. Furthermore, the entire manuscript was copied by hand by Samuel Poznanski. An edition of the commentary on Job, based on Greenup’s facsimiles, was published by Charles Ber Chavel in New York in 1970.[[29]](#footnote-29) The commentary on Chronicles was first printed, based on Poznanski’s transcription, in 2013. [[30]](#footnote-30)

From various other sources, one can conclude that Rabbi Meyuhas wrote additional commentaries on other books of Scripture.

In his commentary on Deuteronomy, Rabbi Meyuhas mentions a commentary on Joshua: “And we have already provided a thorough elucidation of the [tribal] borders and divisions in the Book of Joshua” (Deut 33:7, appearing alongside a large map of the division of the Land of Israel between the various tribes).

In a manuscript from the Cairo Genizah (F64143) dated to the fifteenth century, I have found the following quotation: “פי' רבינו מיוחס כי לא לקלים המרוץ (קה' ט 11) - אין המריצה מתנה לקלים שכל זמן שירצה יהא רץ. וכן לא המלחמה לגבורים שכל זמן שירצה יהא נלחם. וכן הלחם לחכמים. וכן העושר לנבונים. וכן החן ליודעים. כי עת ופגע - אלא עת קשה ופגע רע יארע לכולם ויכשלו ויפולו ולא ישכילו. הקל בריצתו נכשל ואינו יכול לרוץ. וכן הגבור נכשל במלחמה ונופל. וכן החכם נסרחה חכמתו ואין לו לחם. וכן לנבונים עושר. וכן ליודעים חן. כשיבוא

עתם ופגע שלהם, להודיעך שהכל ברשות המקום. כשירצה מרים את האדם. ומתי שירצה משפילו ” (p. 31a-b). We can adduce from this excerpt that Rabbi Meyuhas composed a commentary on Ecclesiastes.

To summarize: Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentaries on the Pentateuch, Job, and Chronicles are extant. Evidence suggests that he also wrote commentaries on Joshua and Ecclesiastes. It is possible, of course, that he wrote additional commentaries on Scripture that have not survived.

## **Chronology**

Scholars have debated when Rabbi Meyuhas lived, some positing an early twelfth-century dating, others preferring to postdate him as late as the fifteenth century. I will begin by reviewing the various scholarly views on this issue.

Margoliouth assumed that Rabbi Meyuhas lived in the twelfth century.[[31]](#footnote-31) He pointed to the fact that the latest exegete whom Rabbi Meyuhas references in his commentary is Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1164). The manner in which Rabbi Meyuhas cites Ibn Ezra—“I have heard in the name of Abram [sic] ben Ezra” (Gen 11:3)—suggests that Rabbi Meyuhas did not have Ibn Ezra’s commentary in writing.[[32]](#footnote-32) Margoliouth therefore concluded that Rabbi Meyuhas was Ibn Ezra’s contemporary.[[33]](#footnote-33) Guzik reached a similar conclusion (without quoting Margoliouth) based on a comparison between Rabbi Meyuhas and Tobiah ben Eliezer, author of *Leqah-Tov*, who lived at the turn of the twelfth century. [[34]](#footnote-34)

Chavel posited that Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentary was written between the mid-thirteenth century and the mid-fourteenth century.[[35]](#footnote-35) He based this on the fact that Rabbi Meyuhas’ writings leave “no allusion to any poverty or oppression in [the author’s] lifetime,” making an earlier dating difficult since, until the mid-thirteenth century, “the world treated the Jewish people with a heavy hand, truly devastating them with debasement and slavery.” This is a reasonable, albeit inconclusive claim: a commentary on the Pentateuch need not necessarily reflect the circumstances of world Jewry during an exegete’s lifetime. Chavel further pointed to the fact that Rabbi Meyuhas seems to not have been influenced by the commentaries of Ibn Ezra, Nachmanides, and Radak, exegetes who, according to Chavel, were already known in Byzantium during the fifteenth century.

Ta-Shma maintained that Rabbi Meyuhas lived in the first half of the fourteenth century. He bases this on certain passages in Rabbi Meyuhas’ introduction to his commentary on the Pentateuch which, in Ta-Shma’s view, indicate the exegete’s acquaintance with the Zohar and the writings of Nachmanides.[[36]](#footnote-36) I will address this claim below.

Steinschneider maintained that Rabbi Meyuhas lived in the fifteenth century.[[37]](#footnote-37) He based this on the claim that the only author to mention him is Rabbi Elijah Mizrahi— who, as mentioned, lived at the turn of the sixteenth century[[38]](#footnote-38)—as well as the fact that the only extant manuscript of Rabbi Meyuhas’ works dates to 1469.[[39]](#footnote-39) Neither of Steinschneider’s claims constitutes definitive evidence for postdating Rabbi Meyuhas to the fifteenth century. The existence of only late citations and copies may certainly indicate a work’s lack of popularity, but not necessarily its date of its composition.[[40]](#footnote-40)

As can be seen, scholarly discussions of Rabbi Meyuhas’ biographical chronology are partial and limited. In order to approach a solution to this riddle, I propose considering the following factors: Rabbi Meyuhas’ sources; his grammatical system; the references (or lack thereof) to philosophical and kabbalistic issues in his commentaries; and his exegetical style and method.

The principal method that I propose to employ is grounded in Rabbi Meyuhas’ familiarity (or lack thereof) with rabbinic sources from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries: Rashi, Judah he-Hasid, Abraham Ibn Ezra, and Maimonides; as well as his engagement with linguistic, Kabbalistic, and philosophical texts. I am aware of the problem inherent in this approach: The fact that a commentator does not refer to a particular source does not necessarily indicate he was not familiar with it. The commentator may have known of the text but not referred to it for a variety of reasons, such as lack of interest or being focused on other subjects. Nevertheless, the methods scholars have employed to date have not provided a satisfactory answer to this question. In my view, despite the shortcomings of the method I have employed, the accumulation of data presented in what follows is significant and is indeed likely to assist in the attempt to determine the period in which Rabbi Meyuhas lived.

As I will show, when these factors are taken into account, it is most plausible to date his commentary to the second half of the thirteenth century.

**Sources: Rashi**

Rashi lived from 1040 to 1105. In his commentary on the Pentateuch, Rabbi Meyuhas mentions Rashi’s commentary nine times.[[41]](#footnote-41) However, in all cases, he cites Rashi in paraphrase, and the references themselves are inaccurate and incomplete.[[42]](#footnote-42) It can thus be concluded that Rabbi Meyuhas was not properly acquainted with Rashi’s commentary. Presumably, Rashi’s commentary was, at some point, available to Rabbi Meyuhas and he presumably studied it, but when Rabbi Meyuhas wrote his own commentary it seems that Rashi’s text was not in front of him and that he relied on memory, integrating and citing whatever he could recall.[[43]](#footnote-43)

With these considerations in mind, we must inquire as to when Rashi’s commentaries arrived in Byzantium. The spread and reception of Rashi’s commentaries in Europe and the Middle East have yet to be treated in an exhaustive or comprehensive study. Nevertheless, in recent years, a number of studies have begun to broach the issue, most of them focusing on the reception of Rashi’s commentaries in Spain and Germany.[[44]](#footnote-44)Very little has been written about the arrival of Rashi’s commentary in the Byzantine Empire and scholarly opinions remain divided over the issue. Sonne argued that Rashi’s commentaries arrived in Byzantium shortly after their composition—i.e., at the beginning of the twelfth century. He did not, however, provide any evidence to support this claim.[[45]](#footnote-45) Lawee has examined the reception of Rashi’s commentary in the Byzantine Empire.[[46]](#footnote-46) Following studies that preceded him, he points to a number of thirteenth and fourteenth century exegetes who reference Rashi’s commentaries on the Pentateuch, including the Karaite authors Aaron ben Joseph (1250–1320) and Aaron ben Elijah (1320–1369)[[47]](#footnote-47) and the Rabbinite authors Shemarya ben Elijah Ha-Ikriti (late thirteenth century) and Abraham Qarimi (mid-fourteenth century).[[48]](#footnote-48) Lawee concludes that Rashi’s commentary on the Pentateuch did arrive in the Byzantine Empire before the thirteenth century.

There are several lines of evidence that support an earlier dating of the arrival of Rashi’s commentary in Byzantium: *Sefer rossina* by Rabbi Samuel Rossano, written in the first half of the twelfth century, either in southern Italy or Greece, includes several references to Rashi’s commentary on the Pentateuch.[[49]](#footnote-49) Ta-Shma even suggested that the author wrote a supercommentary on Rashi;[[50]](#footnote-50) some have argued that Rabbi Menahem ben Solomon, twelfth-century author of *Sekhel-Tov*, was familiar with Rashi’s commentary;[[51]](#footnote-51) at the beginning of the thirteenth century, Rashi’s commentary found its way into the hands of Rabbi Abraham Maimonides (1186–1237) in the Land of Israel and he quotes it at least twice;[[52]](#footnote-52) Mann published a Genizah fragment, which he dated to the thirteenth century, and which includes a mixture of interpretations from the commentaries of Rashi and Rabbi Tobiah ben Eliezer (*Leqah-Tov*). [[53]](#footnote-53) This information—when added to the list of thirteenth-century Karaite sages who, as discussed by Lawee, availed themselves of Rashi’s commentary—suggests that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Rashi’s commentary was not unknown in Byzantium even if its distribution was somewhat limited. It thus follows that while Rashi’s commentary was not extant in dozens of manuscripts in Byzantium as it was in Western Europe, it is likely that some individual copies did indeed make their way to Byzantium in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, one of which reached Rabbi Meyuhas. It is this which he refers to when he mentions Rashi’s commentary on the Pentateuch.

In summary, during the twelfth century we find few references to Rashi’s commentary on the Pentateuch in Byzantium. In the fourteenth century, however, Rashi’s commentary had already become well known in Byzantium, having achieved wide circulation and being the subject of many, extensive citations and references. Therefore, it can be presumed that Rabbi Meyuhas wrote his commentary after the twelfth century but before the fourteenth.

**Sources: Rabbi Judah He-Hasid**

Rabbi Judah he-Hasid (c 1150–1217), one of the most prominent figures of medieval German Jewry, [[54]](#footnote-54) is mentioned explicitly in Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentary on Exodus 32:16: “*Now [the tablets] were the work of God*—from the six days of Creation. And our rabbis said that they were [hewn] from the sapphire of the Throne of Glory. And Rabbi Judah he-Hasid rendered לוחות [tablets], using Atbash, as כסא [throne].”[[55]](#footnote-55) No systematic commentary on the Pentateuch penned by Rabbi Judah has reached us.[[56]](#footnote-56) The aforementioned numerological derivation does not appear in the collection of interpretations on the Pentateuch compiled and written by one of Rabbi Judah’s sons, Rabbi Moses Zaltman.[[57]](#footnote-57) It does, however, appear in the Rabbi Judah’s treatise *Taamei Masoret Ha-mikra* as well as *Sefer Gematriot*, an anthology of interpretations originating from Rabbi Judah’s school.[[58]](#footnote-58) There is no reason to question the authenticity of the citation brought by Rabbi Meyuhas. That being said, the fact that only a single reference to Rabbi Judah he-Hasid appears throughout Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentaries suggests that this particular interpretation was conveyed to him orally. When and how did the interpretations of Rabbi Judah reach Byzantium? We have no clear answer to this question. We do, however, know that about thirty years before his death, Rabbi Judah travelled from his hometown of Speyer to Regensburg in eastern Germany.[[59]](#footnote-59) Likewise, one of Rabbi Judah’s students, who was responsible for the dissemination of his teachings was Rabbi Isaac from Russia.[[60]](#footnote-60)The movement eastward and the tutelage of students in Eastern Europe may have facilitated the spread of Rabbi Judah’s interpretations to Byzantium through hear-say. Regardless of the particular route the interpretation took, its appearance in Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentary provides a clear terminus post quem for its composition: the second quarter of the thirteenth century.

**Sources: Ibn Ezra**

As mentioned above, Margoliouth drew attention to the one reference to Ibn Ezra in Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentary: “I have heard in the name of Abram ben Ezra” (Gen 11:3). Margoliouth concluded from this wording that Rabbi Meyuhas did not actually see Ibn Ezra’s commentary. It should be further emphasized that Rabbi Meyuhas does not refer to Ibn Ezra with the title “Rabbi” or “our rabbi,” implying that at the time the commentary was written, Ibn Ezra’s reputation had yet to be established.

As in our discussion of Rashi, we must inquire as to when Ibn Ezra’s commentaries arrived in Byzantium. De Lange maintained that Ibn Ezra’s commentaries reached the Middle East as early as the twelfth century. He cites three arguments to support this assertion: first, Ibn Ezra is cited by Rabbi Meyuhas.[[61]](#footnote-61) This proof, of course, depends on the biographical chronology of Rabbi Meyuhas, the question at hand, and it falls apart if we are to postdate Rabbi Meyuhas to a later era. De Lange’s second proof is based on the familiarity of Karaite exegete Judah Hadassi (who wrote אשכול הכופרin 1148) with Ibn Ezra’s writings. De Lange does not, however, cite any evidence to demonstrate that Hadassi was familiar with Ibn Ezra’s commentaries on the Pentateuch, some of which were written very close to the time of אשכול הכופר, others shortly afterwards, and thus could not have reached Hadassi when he wrote his book.[[62]](#footnote-62) The third proof offered by De Lange is the testimony of Rabbi Judah Mosconi regarding a lost supercommentary on Ibn Ezra composed by Rabbi Abishai of Bulgaria who, it was claimed, was a contemporary of Ibn Ezra. This proof collapses in light of the fact that recently Rabbi Abishai has been shown to be a fourteenth century exegete.[[63]](#footnote-63) Thus, there remains no basis for De Lange’s assertion that Ibn Ezra’s commentaries were extant in Byzantium during the twelfth century.

It is clear, however, that from the mid-thirteenth century and throughout the fourteenth century and onwards, Ibn Ezra’s commentary became one of the most popular, widely-distributed, and influential works in the Eastern Mediterranean. For many, Ibn Ezra was the ultimate commentator and his views were tantamount to canon.[[64]](#footnote-64)

There are a number of lines of evidence supporting this assertion: in the last quarter of the thirteenth century, Elazar ben Matittyah Ha-Yitzhari, a resident of Byzantium, composed a comprehensive supercommentary on Ibn Ezra;[[65]](#footnote-65) anonymous thirteenth century commentaries on the Pentateuch and Proverbs mention Ibn Ezra’s commentaries;[[66]](#footnote-66) Ibn Ezra had a heavy influence on the thirteenth century Karaite, Aaron ben Joseph and the fourteenth century Karaite, Aaron ben Elijah;[[67]](#footnote-67) a manuscript that contains Ibn Ezra’s commentary on the Pentateuch was copied in Byzantium by Elijah ben Joseph in 1308;[[68]](#footnote-68) other manuscripts which include Ibn Ezra’s commentary on the Pentateuch were copied in Byzantium and are dated to 1367 and 1387;[[69]](#footnote-69) Rabbi Judah ibn Mosconi lists the Supercommentaries on Ibn Ezra that were written in Byzantium during the fourteenth century—these include that of Rabbi Abishai of Bulgaria;[[70]](#footnote-70) Rabbi Shemarya Ha-Ikriti; Rabbi Caleb of Constantinople and Rabbi David of Constantinople.[[71]](#footnote-71) To these should be added the supercommentary of Mosconi himself which was written in Mallorca from 1361;[[72]](#footnote-72) other commentaries on the Pentateuch written during these periods reference Ibn Ezra’s commentaries, some showing the exegete great veneration, such as that of Rabbi Abraham Karimi which was written in 1358,[[73]](#footnote-73) and the commentary on the Pentateuch written by the anonymousאבש”י , [[74]](#footnote-74) and some with a more critical attitude, such as that of Rabbi Shemarya Ha-Ikriti;[[75]](#footnote-75) Ibn Ezra was also greatly respected in contemporaneous works belonging to other genres such as the kabbalistic-philosophical work *Even Sapir* of Elnathan ben Moses Kalkish which was written in 1367;[[76]](#footnote-76) as well as works written at the beginning of the fifteenth century such as the supercommentary on Rashi written by Rabbi Dosa.[[77]](#footnote-77) the polemical work *Minhat Qenaot* penned by Rabbi Zacharia ben Moses was mostly dedicated to defending Ibn Ezra from the criticisms of Nachmanides;[[78]](#footnote-78) as well as an anonymous-allegorical commentary on the Pentateuch. [[79]](#footnote-79) Towards the end of the fifteenth century, a group of sages with a shared ideological orientation united around the study of Ibn Ezra’s commentaries and esoteric teachings. It included Rabbi Mordecai ben Elazar Comtino, Rabbi Ephraim ben Gershon; Rabbi Sabbatai ben Malkiel ha-Kohen and Rabbi Menahem ben Moses Tamar.[[80]](#footnote-80)

If we contrast the wide distribution and heavy influence of Ibn Ezra described above, to its almost complete omission from Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentaries, the possibility that Rabbi Meyuhas was active in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries appears untenable. Had Rabbi Meyuhas been active during these centuries, it would be inconceivable for him to so thoroughly ignore Ibn Ezra’s writings in the way he does. Thus, theories that propose pushing back Rabbi Meyuhas’ activity to an era before the spread of Ibn Ezra’s commentaries in Byzantium, should be accepted.

**Grammatical System**[[81]](#footnote-81)

Rabbi Meyuhas dealt with all aspects of biblical Hebrew and his commentary incorporates grammatical discussions pertaining to various linguistic subjects including pronunciation, word formation, and syntax. The scope of these discussions is broad and the discussions are extremely varied. In this regard, Rabbi Meyuhas was different from most commentators who devoted little attention to grammatical issues and were usually more focused on lexicography. Rabbi Meyuhas’ grammatical approach draws inspiration from Spanish grammarian Rabbi Judah Hayyuj and his disciples. Rabbi Meyuhas’ verbal analysis is based on Hayyuj’s triconsonantal root system as is his analysis of noun forms. His terminology also reflects this system: he distinguishes between different גזרות הפועל (root systems) in the Spanish style.

The names given to verb forms are generally ascribed to Rabbi Joseph Kimhi (1105– c. 1170).[[82]](#footnote-82) The main disseminator of this system was his son, Rabbi David Kimhi (Radak 1160–c. 1235), whose literary influence was extensive and whose grammatical works, composed circa 1205, quickly spread throughout Europe.[[83]](#footnote-83)All the verbal forms appear in Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentary with their full names dozens of times. This being the case, we can adduce that Rabbi Meyuhas was not active prior to the period of the Kimhis, and therefore we can establish the terminus post quem of his commentary to the twelfth century. It is likely that he derived the verbal forms from the grammatical treatises of Radak which arrived in Byzantium during the thirteenth century.

**References to Philosophy and Maimonides**

The conquest of Constantinople by the Latin crusaders in 1204 led to a growing interest in Western philosophy and theology among Byzantine scholars. This holds true for Christian[[84]](#footnote-84) and Jewish scholars alike.[[85]](#footnote-85) While at first the interest was relatively limited, by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries philosophy had won the hearts of Byzantine scholars, and philosophical writing among Byzantine Jewry became common and widely accepted. Subjects addressed included logic, philosophy, and the sciences.[[86]](#footnote-86) In many cases, these Byzantine works were in dialogue with the writings of Maimonides.[[87]](#footnote-87)

No indication of this process appears in Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentaries. He neither references philosophy and the sciences nor the writings of Maimonides. It is difficult to assume that, were Rabbi Meyuhas alive in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, he would have completely ignored the flourishing philosophical literature of his contemporary Byzantine coreligionists. This reinforces the argument that Rabbi Meyuhas composed his commentary before the spread of philosophical literature in Byzantium, i.e., prior to the fourteenth century.

**References to Jewish Mysticism**

Parallel to the inroads made by philosophy into Byzantine Jewish literature was the reception of Kabbalah. This was due in part to the arrival of Rabbi Abraham Abulafia in Byzantium.[[88]](#footnote-88) In his commentary, Rabbi Meyuhas makes almost no reference to esoteric teachings, further supporting the conclusions proposed above.[[89]](#footnote-89)

In the introduction to his commentary, Rabbi Meyuhas does, however, make three statements related to Jewish mysticism.[[90]](#footnote-90) He opens his introduction with a list of midrashic statements about the exegetical methodologies adopted by the Sages in the Midrash. He mentions, and exemplifies, the midrashic exegetical techniques of מקרא מסורס, מקרא קצר, and מקרא מקוצץ, as well as extra or missing letters, “redundant” verses, קרי וכתיב, and inverted chronological order. The presentation of these principles underlies Rabbi Meyuhas’ emphatic claim that the way the Pentateuch expresses itself is so problematic that “if one of us would speak such words, he would be mocked and derided among us!” In other words: how could God give his prophets such a poorly-written book? Rabbi Meyuhas offers two answers. The first is based on the simple sense of Scripture and does not concern us at present. The second, however, is based on mystical teachings. Rabbi Meyuhas cites three notions mentioned by his exegetical predecessors: the idea that “the entire Torah is a combination of the Holy One Blessed is He’s names”; the idea that there is no distinction in importance between “I am the Lord your God” (Ex 20:2) and “Timna was a concubine” (Gen 36:12); and the esoteric teachings associated with the passage “These are the kings who reigned in the Land of Edom” (Gen 36:31). Based on these ideas, Rabbi Meyuhas argued that the ostensibly “problematic” wording of the Pentateuch not only allows for the midrashic readings predicated on the simple sense of the text, but also the reading of the Pentateuch’s esoteric layers.[[91]](#footnote-91)

From whom did Rabbi Meyuhas derive these ideas? As mentioned, Ta-Shma argued that the first notion is drawn from Nahmanides and the third from the Zohar. Since the writings of Nahmanides and the Zohar were composed in the thirteenth century, Ta-Shma suggested dating Rabbi Meyuhas’ activity to the fourteenth century.[[92]](#footnote-92) I think, however, that this argument need not necessarily be accepted.

The first notion does indeed appear in the writings of Nahmanides: “but we have a tradition that the entire Pentateuch, from *In the beginning* until *before the eyes of all of Israel* is all [divine] names”;[[93]](#footnote-93) “we further have a true tradition that the entire Pentateuch is names of the Holy One Blessed is He.”[[94]](#footnote-94) Ta-Shma, thus concluded that “there is no doubt that [Rabbi Meyuhas] is making clear and unambiguous usage of Nahmanides.”[[95]](#footnote-95) However, if we accept Nahmanides’ own explicit claim that he was relying on an earlier tradition, the idea can be said to originate in earlier sources, which may very well have been used by Rabbi Meyuhas without Nahmanides intercession.[[96]](#footnote-96)

The second notion is best known from its use in the writings of Maimonides: “And there is no difference between *And the sons of Cham were Kush and Mitsrayim* (Gen 10:6), *and his wife’s name was Meheitabel*” (Gen 36:39) (Gen 36:12) [on the one hand] and *I am the Lord, your God* (Ex 20:2) and *Hear O Israel* (Deut 6:4) [on the other]; since they are all from the mouth of the Almighty and it is all the Torah of God—complete, pure, and holy truth.”[[97]](#footnote-97)Above we noted that Maimonides’ writings began to arrive in Byzantium in the thirteenth century. Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentary, however, evinces no trace of Maimonidean influence. Rabbi Meyuhas notably compares the verse “I am the Lord your God” (Ex 20:2) to the verse “And Timnah was his concubine” (Gen 36:12). The first verse indeed appears in Maimonides’ writings, though the second does not. Thus, Rabbi Meyuhas’ articulation of this idea does not represent a direct citation of Maimonides and it is, therefore, possible that certain interpretations of Maimonides were conveyed to Rabbi Meyuhas orally, these serving as the basis of these particular references. It should be further borne in mind, however, that this notion was also common among the Spanish kabbalists.[[98]](#footnote-98) Indeed, the verses cited by Rabbi Meyuhas are more similar to those quoted by the Spanish kabbalists, and it is, therefore, quite likely that this notion too was conveyed to Rabbi Meyuhas through some Spanish channel.

The third notion has parallels in the Zohar. For this reason, Ta-Shma assumed that Rabbi Meyuhas “studied the Zohar and alluded to it in the introduction to his commentary.” The assumption that Rabbi Meyuhas was familiar with the Zohar is problematic. Ta-Shma himself admitted that there are no further indications in the commentary that Rabbi Meyuhas used the Zohar. In my opinion, this fact seriously undermines his claim—had Rabbi Meyuhas been exposed to the Zohar, we would expect some reference to it within the body of his commentary. Here as well, there are earlier sources that mention this idea, and it may be that Rabbi Meyuhas and the Zohar simply shared a common source.[[99]](#footnote-99)

The conclusion drawn from the references in Rabbi Meyuhas’ introduction to his commentary on the Pentateuch is that the commentary’s terminus post quem is the second half of the thirteenth century. There is, however, no need to postdate its composition to the fourteenth century.

**Style and Exegetical Method**

The considerations I will discuss presently are, when taken by themselves, incapable of providing definitive answers as to the chronology of Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentaries. They are brought here only to further reinforce the chronological considerations offered above.

A. Rabbi Meyuhas’ Style: Short and Concise. This is most prominent in his interpretations of the simple sense of Scripture, but also in his interpretations that revolve around the statements of the classical sages and their halakhic rulings. There are no needless repetitions, and the writing is terse and laconic. This is very different from the more verbose Jewish-Byzantine style that prevailed at the end of the Middle Ages, and which has been characterized as being comprised of “wordy and verbose explanations […] often predisposed to tiring elaboration and reiteration.” [[100]](#footnote-100)

B. The first exegetes in Western Europe – Rashi, Rabbi Joseph Kimhi (Rik), and Rashbam–wrote their commentaries verse by verse, using a short lemma (דיבור המתחיל) to introduce each interpretation. Seldomly delving into extensive or comprehensive discussions of a single topic, their primary objective was to bridge the gap between the ancient biblical text and its later readers who had trouble understanding it due to the distance in time and place. After these earlier commentators had laid the preliminary, exegetical groundwork, their successors could free themselves from the necessity of interpreting each verse in turn and could choose specific verses and subjects upon which to expand their discussion. This trend can already be detected in the commentaries of Ibn Ezra, Bekhor-Shor (Ribash), and Radak, who often expanded their discussions beyond the narrow confines of the biblical text. It is most prominent in the commentaries of the thirteenth-century exegetes such as Nachmanides and Rabbi Bahya ben Asher in Spain, and the commentaries of the Tosafists in France and Germany such as those of Hizquni, Rabbi Haim Paltiel, and Riva (*Mincht-Yehuda*) and their associates.

It is abundantly clear that Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentary is stylistically most akin to the works of the earlier exegetes: he interprets individual verses one after another, employing the convention of the דיבור המתחיל. It appears that his exegetical goal—primarily in his simple-sense interpretations—was to bridge the gap between the biblical text and its readers in his own day and age. He was not yet ready to allow himself to delve into more comprehensive or broad discussions.

C. Most medieval exegetes adopted the principle of Scripture’s polysemy when it came to describing the relationship between the literary sense (Peshat) and homiletical-midrashic sense of Scripture.[[101]](#footnote-101) However, when it came to discussions pertaining only to the literary sense of Scripture, earlier exegetes (such as Rashi, Rashbam, and Ibn Ezra) consistently offered a single interpretation and did not entertain the possibility of multiple valid interpretations of Scripture’s simple meaning. The publication of Ribash’s commentary on the Pentateuch at the beginning of the thirteenth century sparked a revolution among biblical exegetes who began to apply the principle of polysemy to the literary sense of Scripture as well, offering more than one possible interpretation for any given verse.[[102]](#footnote-102) Rabbi Meyuhas adopts the principle of polysemy insofar as the relationship between the simple sense and homiletical sense is concerned. However, on the level of the literary sense of Scripture (Peshat), he consistently offers only one interpretation. In this respect as well, Rabbi Meyuhas commentary is more similar to those of the earlier exegetes than the later ones.

D. Scholars have drawn attention to the fact that the fourteenth century represented a nadir for talmudic learning in Byzantium. We have no Byzantine exegesis on the halakhic segments of the Talmud from this century; most preferred to study Rabbi Alfasi’s *Halahot Gedolot*, Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*, mitzvot compendiums, and *She'iltot De-Rav Ahay* [[103]](#footnote-103). For example, Rabbi Shemarya ben Elijah Ha-Ikriti wrote only commentaries on the aggadic sections of the Talmud. Likewise, Rabbi Johanan ben Reuven of Ochrida wrote in the introduction to his commentary on *Sheiltot* “due to the toil of these days and the oppression of these times, the men of our generation are not capable of studying the books of the Talmud and the words of the earlier authorities, and they yearn to study the *Sheiltot* of Rabbi Ahai Gaon of Shabha and thus to fulfill their obligation [of Torah study].”[[104]](#footnote-104) By contrast, Rabbi Meyuhas dedicates no small amount of attention to the classical literature of the Sages, and his commentary is filled with excerpts and citations of materials from the Mishnah and Talmud.

These four considerations further reinforce our assertion that Rabbi Meyuhas wrote his commentary prior to the fourteenth century.

## **Summary**

While Rabbi Meyuhas hailed from the Byzantine Empire, his knowledge of Arabic seems to indicate close ties—at some stage in his life—with an Arabic-speaking country. His oeuvre was comprised of grammatical treatises and commentaries on Scripture.

In terms of his life-chronology—a mid-thirteenth century terminus post quem can be established based on the following considerations: a single citation of Rabbi Judah he-Hasid; his grammatical system which is based on the writings of Rabbi Joseph Kimhi and Radak; and three notions in the introduction to his commentary that are associated with Kabbalah. On the other hand, it seems that he could not have been active in the fourteenth century due to the following considerations: his limited familiarity with Rashi’s commentaries on Scripture; his lack of familiarity with the commentaries of Ibn Ezra; the lack of references to philosophy, the writings of Maimonides, and Kabbalah—all of which were widely disseminated in Byzantium during the fourteenth century. It follows that Rabbi Meyuhas composed his commentaries on the Pentateuch during the latter half of the thirteenth century.

1. The most up-to-date surveys of Byzantine Jewry are by R. Bonfil, “Introduction”, *Jews in Byzantium: Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures*, R. Bonfil, O. Irshai, G. Stroumsa and R. Talgam (eds), Leiden, 2012, pp. 1–13; N. de Lange, “Byzantium”, *The Cambridge History of Judaism, Vol. VI The Middle Ages: The Christian World*, R. Chazan (ed), Cambridge, 2018, pp. 76–97. It should be noted that Jews throughout the empire had a shaped ethnic consciousness: “The Romaniote Jewish communities, exclusively or overwhelmingly composed of Greek speakers sharing a distinctive religious culture”, see D. Jacoby, “The Jewish Communities of the Byzantine World from the Tenth to the Mid-Fifteenth Century: Some Aspects of Their Evolution”, *Jewish Reception of Greek Bible Versions*, N. de Lange, et. Al (ed), Tübingen, 2009, p. 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The main studies that discuss Rabbi Meyuhas will be cited in the footnotes of this article. The research was made possible by the generous funding of the Beth Shalom Foundation of Kyoto, Japan, for which I am very grateful. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Of the earlier studies, the following bear mentioning: L. Zunz, *Literaturgeschichte der synagogalen Poesie*, Berlin, 1865, p. 386; G. Margoliouth, *Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts In the British Museum* vol. 1, London, 1965, p. 152; M. Steinschneider, “Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts In the British Museum by G. Margoliouth,”, *OLZ* 3 (1900), p. 429; S. Poznanski, “Meyouhas,” *REJ* 41 (1900), p. 303; S. Poznanski, “The Commentary of Rabbi Meyuhas b Elijah on the Pentateuch,” *REJ* 60 (1910), p. 155; S. Krauss, *Studien zur Byzantinisch-Jüdischen Geschichte*, Leipzig, 1914, p. 137; A. W. Greenup, introduction to *The Commentary of Rabbi Meyuhas B. Elijah on the Pentateuch (Exodus)* (Hebrew), A. W. Greenup (ed), Budapest, 1929, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. I.e., virility. See E. A. Sophocles, Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods (from B.C. 146 to A.D. 1100), New York, 1900, p. 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. A garment worn over a cuirass. See Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 505. This is a common Byzantine military term that is attested beginning in the tenth century. For a discussion of this word and its meaning, see M. Parani, “Intercultural Exchange in the Field of Material Culture in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Evidence of Byzantine Legal Documents (11th to 15th Centuries),” in A. D. Beihammer, M. G. Parani, C. D. Schabel (eds), *Diplomatics in the Eastern Mediterranean, 1000-1500: Aspects of Cross-Cultural Communication*, Leiden and Boston, 2008, p. 360-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Meaning: the grove of a balsam tree. See Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 296. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. It is unclear to which constellation Rabbi Meyuhas refers. He may be referring to either Scorpio or Orion. For attempts to identify the constellation, see S. Poznanski, “שקיפרנא und דרמודנא,” *ZfHB* 17 (1914), p. 18-19.

My thanks to Dr. Alexei Yuditsky and Dr. Saskia Donitz for their assistance in understanding the Greek words cited. Greek (לשון יון) is also mentioned in Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentary on Gen 9:27: “*and let him live in the tents of Shem*—this is the Holy Temple. And [according to] the midrash of our Sages (b. Megilla 9b) some of the beauty [יפיות] of Japheth shall be in the tents of Shem, and this refers to Greek, and based on this [verse, the Sages] permitted writing a Torah [scroll] in Greek.” For a discussion of the use of Greek to interpret biblical words among the sages of the Byzantine Empire, see I. M. Ta-Shma, *Studies in Medieval Rabbinic Literature, Part 3: Italy and Byzantium* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 2005, p. 203; *Elef Ha-Magen: The Commentary of Rabbi Shemariah Ben Eliahu Ha-Ikriti on the Aggadoth of Tractate Megilla* (Hebrew), A. Ahrend (ed), Jerusalem, 2002, p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 8 The Chi is also mentioned in the Mishnah – the wafers [are] anointed. How did he anoint them? In the form of a ‘Chi’” (m. Menahot 6:3); “A mat whose reeds stretched lengthwise is insusceptible to uncleanness; But the Sages rule: only if they lay in the shape of a Chi”—as well as in other tannaitic sources. The impression from these references is that the Sages of the Mishnah, who lived in the Land of Israel and spoke Greek, knew full well what a Chi was. By contrast, the sages of the Babylonian Talmud, who did not speak Greek, were forced to raise various ideas as to the word’s precise implication: “What does ‘in the shape of a chi’ mean? Rav Menashya bar Gada said: in the shape of a Greek *Kaf*” (b. Horayot 12a); “what does ‘in the shape of a chi’ mean? Rav Kahana said, in the shape of a Greek Chi.” (b. Menahot 75a). Medieval exegetes who lived outside of the Byzantine Empire were completely unacquainted with the implication of the word. See for example: “The קונטרס [Rashi] drew the shape of a *Tet*. And in [his] commentaries on the Pentateuch, he explained that it was a *Gimel*. And some interpret that it is like the shape of a *Nun* or the shape of a *Kaf*. And Arukh interprets [...].” (b. Menahot 75a, Tosafot, s.v. כמין כי)*.* See S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-fshutah - A Comprehensive Commentary on the Tosefta, Part I Order Zeraim* (Hebrew), New York, 1955, p. 345-46 and nn. 39, 41. Unlike these commentators, Rabbi Meyuhas was very much familiar with the Greek letter. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. M. Kahana, “Prolegomena to a New Edition of the Sifre on Numbers” (Hebrew), PhD. Diss., Hebrew University, 1982, p. 254-61. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For the location of Nikopolis see the website: N. de Lange and A. Panayotov and G. Rees. (2013). *Mapping the Jewish Communities of the Byzantine Empire*,[www.byzantinejewry.net](http://www.byzantinejewry.net/). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Lev 11:38; Num 7:16; Deut 1:46. The contents of these three citations appear ad verbatim in the extant version of Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentary. It therefore may very well be that the one surviving manuscript of Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentary is the same one that was used by Rabbi Elijah Mizrahi. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The manuscript is part of the Cairo Genizah collection (F64143). It is written in Byzantine-Sephardic script and includes a collection of homilies, traditions, and ethical discussions. The first citation on folios 23r-23v appears (with some small changes) in the printed edition of Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentary on Leviticus 19:14. The second citation, on folios 31r-31v, seems to be taken from Rabbi Meyuhas’ lost commentary on Ecclesiastes. See below. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The manuscript is part of the Cairo Genizah collection (F19583). Other Byzantine sages mentioned in this manuscript include: Rabbi Jacob ben Reuben and Rabbi Tobiah ben Eliezer. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Zunz, *Literaturgeschichte*, p. 386-87. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Like the Hebrew, it means “good family.” My thanks to Professor Aaron Demsky for bringing this to my attention. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For example: “כביר. In Arabic this means large and strong” (Job 8:2). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Gen 18:6; Lev 18:23; 20:16; Num 22:31; 1 Chr 21:7. In all five instances, Rabbi Isaac proposes an interpretation of a difficult word by making recourse to Aramaic. Based on these citations, we can cautiously propose that, besides his famous commentaries on the Former Prophets, Rabbi Isaac also wrote a commentary on the Pentateuch—a possibility that has yet to be considered in scholarship. For a discussion of Rabbi Isaac ben Samuel, see U. Simon, “The Contribution of R. Isaac b. Samuel Al-Kansi to the Spanish School of Biblical Interpretation,” *JJS* 34 (1983), p. 171-78. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. My thanks to Dr. Hanokh Gamliel who brought this issue to my attention. For a discussion of מקוצץ and מוצדר in Arabic, see Poznanski, “Meyouhas”, p. 303. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. J. Star, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire 641–1204*, New York, 1939, pp. 180–181; S.B. Bowman, *The Jews of Byzantium 1204-1453*, Alabama, 1985, pp. 164–168; N. de Lange, “Hebraism and Hellenism: The Case of Byzantine Jewry,” *Poetics Today* 19 (1998), pp. 129–45; N. de Lange, “Jewish use of Greek in the Middle Ages: evidence from Passover *Haggadoth* from the Cairo Genizah”, *JQR* 96 (2006), pp. 490–497; D. Jacoby, “The Jewish Communities of the Byzantine World from the Tenth to the Mid-Fifteenth Century: Some Aspects of Their Evolution”, *Jewish Reception of Greek Bible Versions*, N. de Lange, et. Al (ed), Tübingen, 2009, p. 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. N. de Lange, "A Thousand Years of Hebrew in Byzantium", *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda*, W. Horbury (ed), Edinburg, 1999, pp. 147–161; N. de Lange, “Hebrews, Greeks or Romans? Jewish Culture and identity in Byzantium”, *Strangers to themselves: the Byzantine outsiders,* D. C. Smythe (ed), Aldershot, 2000, pp. 111–113; Jacoby, “The Jewish Communities”, p. 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ankori assumed that in the eleventh century “the Byzantine Karaites' knowledge of *both* Hebrew and Arabic was poor”, See Z. Ankori, *Karaites in Byzantium*: *The Formative Years 970-1100*, New York, 1959, p. 191. See also D. Jacoby, "The Jews of Constantinople and their demographic hinterland", *Constantinople and its Hinterland*, C. Mango and G. Dagron (eds), Cambridge, 1995, pp. 225; Jacoby, “The Jewish Communities”, p. 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ankori, *Karaites in Byzantium*, pp. 46–51, 415–452; N. Shur, *The History of the Karaites* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 2003, p. 77. On Tobias ben Moses see: N. de Lange, “Byzantium in the Cairo Genizah,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 16 (1992), pp. 34–47. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Jacoby, "The Jews of Constantinople”, pp. 224–226; 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. A. David, “On the Life of R. Elazar ben he-Hasid R. Mattityah - a Sage of Eretz Israel(?) in the 13th Century,” *Kiryat Sefer* 63 (1990-1991), p. 997–98 (Hebrew); O. Shoshan, “introduction to the Commentary of Elazar ben Mattityah”, *Five Early Commentators on R. Abraham Ibn Ezra - The Earliest Supercommentaries on Ibn Ezra’s Commentary* (Hebrew), H. Kreisel (ed), Beer Sheva, 2017, pp. 40–42. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Gen 1:1; 2:4; 5:2; 6:9 (twice); 23:20; 24:21; 21:25; 43:11; Num 14:14; Deut 32:2; 32:8; Job 4:7; 2 Chr 34:24. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ms. London, British Library, Add. 19970 (F5015). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. It appears that the manuscript was, in fact, copied by three different scribes, a point I hope to discuss elsewhere. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The commentary on Genesis was published by A.W. Greenup and C.H. Titterton in London 1909. The commentary on Exodus was printed by A.W. Greenup in Budapest in 1929. The commentary on Leviticus was printed twice, once by Y.M. Katz in New York in 1997 and again by Y. Har-Shoshanim in Bnei Brak in 2005. The second printer was unaware of existence of the earlier edition. See *The Commentary of Rabbi Meyuhas on Leviticus* (Hebrew), Y. Har-Shoshanim (ed), Bnei Brak, 2005, p. 3, 5. Brin, who wrote a critique of the second edition, was also unaware of the first. See G. Brin, “Commentary on Leviticus by Rabbi Meyuhas ben Elijah”, *Sinai* 140 (2007), p. 125 (Hebrew). The commentary on Numbers was printed by S. Fryleich in Jerusalem in 1977. The commentary on Deuteronomy was printed by Y.M. Katz in Jerusalem in 1968. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See C.B. Chavel, introduction to *A Commentary on the Book of Job by Rabbenu Meyuchos ben Eliyahu* (Hebrew), C.B. Chavel (ed), New York, 1969, p. 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. A Commentary on Chronicles by Rabbenu Meyuchos ben Eliyahu (Hebrew), A. Tabib (ed), Petah-Tikva, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Margoliouth, *Catalogue*, p. 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Margoliouth claimed that the interpretation cited in the name of Ibn Ezra does not appear in his extant commentaries. Freis suggested a minor emendation of the text which would indeed make a reference to a passage in Ibn Ezra’s commentary on the Pentateuch. See A. Freis, “An Explanation of Two Difficult Passages in Rabbi Meyuhas’ Commentary on the Pentateuch”, *Moriah* 199-200 (1991), p. 115-16 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Poznanski and Greenup accepted his view. See Poznanski, “The Commentary of Rabbi Meyuhas,” p. 303; Greenup, *Meyuhas on Exodus*, p. 2-3. Katz concurred and added that “[Rabbi Meyuhas’] exegetical method and his writing style constitute evidence, in and of themselves, that our sage lived in the twelfth century.” See M. Katz, introduction to *Commentary on Deuteronomy, Rabbenu Meyuhas ben Elijah* (Hebrew), ed. M. Katz, Jerusalem, 1968, p. 10-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See J. Guzik, “The Commentary of R. Meyuchas ben Eliyahu on the Pentateuch,” in. S Balkin (ed), *The Abraham Weiss Jubilee Volume* (Hebrew), New York, 1964, p. 249. It should be noted that all of these scholars seem to have missed a reference to a sage living after Ibn Ezra, namely Rabbi Judah he-Hasid. (c. 1150-1217), who is mentioned by Rabbi Meyuhas in Ex 32:16. See below. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Chavel, *Meyuhas on Job*, p. 3-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. I.M. Ta-Shma, *Ha-Nigle She-Banistar - The Halachic Residue in the Zohar, A Contribution to the Study of the Zohar* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 2001, p. 100-101. This dating has been adopted by E. Lawee, “Maimonides in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Case of Rashi's ‘Resisting Readers’,” in A Ravitzky (ed), *Maimonides - Conservatism, Originality, Revolution* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 2008, p. 599; D. Schwartz, *Jewish Thought in Byzantium in the Late Middle Ages* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 2016, p. 264, 272. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Steinschneider, “Catalogue”, P. 429. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. As mentioned above, several citations of Rabbi Meyuhas exist, unknown to Steinschneider, also hailing from the territories of the Byzantine Empire. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Greenup quotes another argument from Steinschneider in favor of post-dating the work: Rabbi Meyuhas’ use of the grammatical terms בנין הופעלand בנין פועל*,* which, he argued, only became widespread due to the grammatical works of the Kimhi family. See Greenup, *Commentary on Exoudus* , p. 3. I have not found any such claim in the writings of Steinschneider himself. Regardless, the argument must be addressed, as I will do below. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. For the criteria for determining the extent and influence of biblical commentaries composed between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, see: J. Jacobs, *Bekhor Shoro Hadar Lo - R. Joseph Bekhor Shor between Continuity and Innovation* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 2017, p. 286. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Gen 1:22; 4:18; 6:14; 23:16; 25:25; 30:23; Ex 8:5; 28:6; Deut 28:37. Furthermore, in his commentary on Job, Rabbi Meyuhas references Rashi’s commentaries on Job three times. See Job 3:5; 33:7; 39:21. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. I have dedicated a separate study to Rabbi Meyuhas’ attitude towards Rashi which is forthcoming. Here I will present my conclusions in brief. In one instance (Gen 36:22), Rabbi Meyuhas quotes Rashi ad verbatim. He concludes this excerpt with the words “the language of Rashi, his memory for a blessing.” The passage cited appears in the margins of the manuscript (written by an identical hand but with different ink). It is, therefore, likely a late addition. That the unique formula “the language of Rashi” (לשון רש"י) is unattested elsewhere in the commentary, reinforces the hypothesis that the passage was not penned by Rabbi Meyuhas himself. If we nevertheless wish to uphold the passage’s authenticity, it can be surmised that when Rashi’s commentary was available to Rabbi Meyuhas, he or one of his students may have copied this particular interpretation, and he was, therefore, able to cite it with precision. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Chavel has pointed to a similar phenomenon in Rabbi Meyuhas’ commentary on Job. See Chavel, *Commentary on Job*, p. 5. Citation from memory was a common practice in medieval exegesis. See E. Touitou, *Exegesis in Perpetual Motion - Studies in the Pentateuchal Commentary of Rabbi Samuel Ben Meir* (Hebrew), Ramat Gan, 2003), p. 92-97; E. Viezel, *The Commentary on Chronicles Attributed to Rashi* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 2010, p. 43, 144-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. . See J.S. Penkower, “The Canonization of Rashi's Commentary on the Pentateuch,” in H. Kreisel (ed), *Study and Knowledge in Jewish Thought* (Hebrew), Beer-Sheva, 2006, p. 123-146. ; A. Gross, “Spanish Jewry and Rashi's Commentary on the Pentateuch,” in Z.A. Steinfeld (ed), *Rashi* *Studies* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1993, p. 27-55. ; E. Lawee, “The Reception of Rashi's *Commentary on the Torah* in Spain: The Case of Adam's Mating with the Animals,” *JQR* 97 (2007), p. 36-44; E. Lawee, “Biblical Scholarship in Late Medieval Ashkenaz: The Turn to Rashi supercommentary,” *HUCA* 86 (2015), p. 265-303. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. I. Sonne, “On the Textual Criticism of Rashi’s Commentary on the Pentateuch,” *HUCA* 15 (1940), p. 37-56 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Lawee, “Maimonides”; E. Lawee, *Rashi’s Commentary on the Torah: Canonization and Resistance in the Reception of a Jewish Classic*, New York, 2019, pp. 125–130. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. For a discussion of Aaron ben Joseph’s acquaintance with Rashi’s commentary, see E. Bilik, “Rashi in Sefer Hamibhar” *Beit Mikra* 1 (1956), p. 9-13; P. Fenton, “De quelques attitudes qaraites enver la Qabbale,” *REJ* 142 (1983), p. 7 and n. 10. For a discussion of Aaron ben Elijah’s familiarity with Rashi’s commentary, see Lawee, “Maimonides”, 602. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. On Shemarya ben Elijah and Abraham Qarimi’s acquaintance with Rashi, see Lawee, “Maimonides”, 599–601. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Weiss believed that Rashi’s commentary exerted a profound influence on the author: “the number of times that he uses Rashi’s commentary are beyond count.” See M. Weiss, introduction to *Sefer Rushino of Rabbi Samuel of Roshano – Genesis* (Hebrew), M. Weiss (ed), Jerusalem, 1976, p. 15-16. By contrast, Ta-Shma claimed that Rashi’s commentary reached Rabbi Rossano only late in the latter’s exegetical career and that even then, Rossano only made minor use of it. See Ta-Shma, *Italy*, p. 298. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Ta-Shma, *Italy*, p. 311-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. J. Elbaum, “The Anthology Sekhel Tov: Derash, Peshat and the Issue of the Redactor (the sadran),” in M. Bar-Asher et. al. (ed), *A Word Fitly Spoken: Studies in Medieval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'ān Presented to Haggai ben-Shammai* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 2007, p. 74 n. 8. According to Buber and Lokshin, Rabbi Menahem was not familiar with Rashi’s commentary at all. See S. Buber, introduction to Menahem ben Solomon, *Midrash Sekhel Tov*, S. Buber (ed), Berlin, 1900-1901) p. 14; M.I. Lockshin, “The Connection between R. Samuel ben Meir's Torah Commentary and Midrash Sekhel Tov,” in *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies, the Bible and its World*, Jerusalem, 1994, p. 140 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Lawee, “Maimonides”, p. 598 n. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. See J. Mann, “A Commentary to the Pentateuch a la Rashi’s,” *HUCA* 15 (1940), p. 497-527. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. On his life and works, see J. Dan, *R. Judah He-Hasid*, Jerusalem, 2006, p. 11-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. The reference to Judah He-Hasid was mentioned already by Chavel, *Commentary on Job*, p. 4, n. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Freimann and Marcus have argued that Rabbi Judah wrote his own commentary on the Pentateuch. It is, however, difficult to substantiate this hypothesis. See J. Wistinetzki, introduction to *Sefer Hasidim*, ed. J. Wistinetzki, Frankfurt, 1924, p. 7; I.G. Marcus, “Exegesis for the Few and for the Many: Judah He-hasid's Biblical Commentaries,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 8 (1989), p. 9-10 (Hebrew). According to Abrams, Rabbi Judah he-Hasid did not write a commentary on the Pentateuch, see D. Abrams and I. Ta-Shma, introduction to *Sefer Gematriot of R. Judah the Pious - Facsimile edition of a Unique Manuscript* (Hebrew), Los Angeles, 1998, p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Commentary on Pentateuch by Rabbi Judah he-Hasid, Y.S. Lange (ed), Jerusalem, 1975. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. See *Masora of the Bible* *by Rabbi Judah he-Hasid*, Y.S. Lange (ed), Jerusalem, 1981, p. 68 (on Deut 4:13); *The Gematriot Book* *by Rabbi Judah he-Hasid*, J.I Setel (ed), Jerusalem, 2005, p. 158. This teaching appears in several other books associated with Rabbi Judah and his circle. See *Gematriot Book*, p. 59. Many thanks to Rabbi Jacob Israel Stel who assisted me in finding the references to write this note. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. See I.M. Ta-Shma, *Studies in Medieval Rabbinic Literature, Part 1 :Germany* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 2004, p. 251-52 and n. 82. According to Shoham-Steiner the account of Rabbi Judah’s migration to Eastern Europe is actually referring to the journey of his father, Rabbi Samuel. See E. Shoham-Steiner, “From Speyer to Regensburg: Reexamining the Migration of the Pietistic Kalonymides from the Rhineland to the Danube,” *Zion* 81 (2016), p. 149-176 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. For a discussion of the group of sages headed by Rabbi Isaac of Russia, and which included among its member Rabbi Mordechai of Poland and Rabbi Isaac of Poland, see Ta-Shma, *Germany*, p. 245-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. N. De Lange, “Abraham Ibn Ezra and Byzantium,” in F.D. Esteban (ed), *Abraham Ibn Ezra and his Age*, Madrid, 1990, p. 183. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. This is what Professor Daniel Lasker informed me in response to my question (December 2018). Some maintain that Hadassi was familiar with Ibn Ezra’s books ערוגות הבושםand פרדס החכמהwhich were written earlier. See D.J. Lasker, *From Judah Hadassi to Elijah Bashyatchi: Studies in Late Medieval Karaite Philosophy*, Leiden-Boston, 2008, p. 48 n. 39. For the date of the composition of Ibn Ezra’s commentaries on the Pentateuch, see I. Kislev, “The Relationship between the Torah Commentaries Composed by R. Abraham Ibn Ezra in France and the Significance of his Relationship for the Biographical Chronology of the Commentator,” *JJS* 60 (2009), p. 282-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Friedländer already questioned the authenticity of Mosconi’s testimony. See M. Friedländer, *Essays on the Writings of Abraham Ibn Ezra*, London, 1877, p. 214-15. For a discussion of the chronology of Rabbi Abishai, see Ta-Shma, *Italy*, 17; U. Simon, *The Ear Discerns Words - Studies in Ibn Ezra's Exegetical Methodology* (Hebrew), Ramat Gan, 2013, p. 377-78; H. Kreisel, introduction to *Five Early Commentators on R. Abraham Ibn Ezra - The Earliest Supercommentaries on Ibn Ezra’s Commentary* (Hebrew), H. Kreisel (ed), Beer Sheva, 2017, p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. D. Frank, “Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Karaite Exegetes Aharon ben Joseph and Aharon ben Elijah,” in F.D. Esteban (ed), *Abraham Ibn Ezra and his Age*, Madrid, 1990, p. 99; D. Schwartz, *Amulets, Properties and Rationalism in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 2004, p. 148-49; Lawee, *Rashi’s Commentary*, pp. 122-23, 125, 128-30, 239-241, 257-58. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Simon, *The Ear*, 388-95; O. Shoshan, “Elazar ben Matittyah”, in *Five Early Commentators*, p. 39-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Mann, “A Commentary”, p. 499; A. Avini, “An Anonymous Commentary on Proverbs (Apparently from the Medieval Byzantine Sages),” *Hitzei Giborim* 10 (2017), p. 155-56 (Hebrew). The commentary on Proverbs is dated according to two manuscript copied in 1285. See *Commentary on proverbs*, p. 152. It should be noted that Rabbi Isaiah di Trani also availed himself of Ibn Ezra’s commentaries. While he mentions Ibn Ezra explicitly only on a few occasions (e.g., 1 Samuel 4:19; Psalms 5:1; Ecclesiastes 1:14), he relied on him many times without citing him by name. See, for example, I. Eldar, *Hebrew Language Study in the Middle Ages - Texts and Studies* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 2016, p. 175-76. However, because di Trani lived in Rome, where Ibn Ezra wrote some of his commentaries, and was educated in Germany, where Ibn Ezra’s commentaries were widely circulated, this usage cannot be adduced as evidence to support the notion that Ibn Ezra’s commentaries were, at that time, circulating in the eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire. The same can be said about the references to Ibn Ezra in the writings of Emanuel of Rome (1261-c. 1321). [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Frank, “Ibn Ezra”. The importance of Ibn Ezra in Karaite exegesis led some Karaite sages in the fifteenth century to claim that he was the student of Yefet ben Ali, the greatest of the Karaite Scriptural exegetes. See Z. Ankori, “Elijah Bashyachi: An Inquiry into his Traditions Concerning the Beginnings of Karaism in Byzantium,” *Tarbiz* 25 (1955), p. 60-61 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. De Lange, “Ibn Ezra”, p. 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. De Lange, “Ibn Ezra”, p. 190. Ibn Ezra’s astronomical works were also copied during these years. See S.B. Bowman, *The Jews of Byzantium: 1204-1453*, Alabama, 1985), p. 134 and n. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. For its dating, see above n. 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Simon, *The Ear*, p, 379-381; T. Visi, “Ibn Ezra, A Maimonidean Authority: The Evidence of the Early Ibn Ezra Supercommentaries,” in James Robinson (ed), *The Cultures of Maimonideanism: New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought*, Leiden, 2009), p. 124-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Schwartz, *Jewish Thought*, p. 424-65. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. A. Ahrend, “Rabbi Shemariah Ben-Elijah Ikriti's Commentary to the Book of Esther,” in Dov Rappel (ed), *Professor Moshe Ahrend Festschrift* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1996, p. 39 and n. 20; D. Schwartz, “Remnants of Rabbi Shemariya ha-Ikriti's Commentary on the Torah,” *Alei Sefer* 26-27 (2017), p. 97 (Hebrew). Other contemporaneous exegetes who were influenced by Ibn Ezra’s commentaries include Rabbi “Avishai” author of the commentary *Yore-Deah* on the Pentateuch and Rabbi Elnathan b. Moses Kalkish. See D. Schwartz, *Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1999, p. 200-205. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. See D. Schwartz, “Rabbi Klonimus’ *Mesharet Moshe*,” *Kobez Al Yad* 14 (1998), p. 343-47 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Ibn Ezra’s influence can be detected in the writing of Rabbi Shemarya. Furthermore, Rabbi Judah Mosconi notes that Shemarya encouraged him to study Ibn Ezra’s commentaries. See for example, S. Donitz, “Shemarya ha-Ikriti and the Karaite Exegetical Challenge,” in J. Yeshaya and E. Hollander (ed), *Exegesis and Poetry in Medieval Karaite and Rabbanite Texts*, Leiden-Boston, 2017, p. 234-236. Conversely, one can find in his commentaries criticism of Ibn Ezra. See Ahrend, *Elef Ha-Magen*, 53; Schwartz, “Remnants,” 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. D. Schwartz, introduction to Commentary on Yesod Mora - The Commentary of Mordekhai ben Eliezer Komtiyano on R. Abraham Ibn Ezra's Yesod Mora (Hebrew), ed. D. Schwartz. Jerusalem, 2010, p. 16, 22-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. S. Shpitzer, “Information about Rabbi Dosa the Greek from his Commentary on the Pentateuch,” in M. Benayahu (ed), *Studies in memory of the Rishon Le-Zion R. Yitzhak Nissim* vol. 4 (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1985, p. 183. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. E. Gurfinkel, “Minhat Qenaot by Rabbi Zachariah ben Moses Ha-Kohen of Candia,” *Kobez Al Yad* 20 (2010), p. 125-279 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. R. Kneller, “A Flood of Logic: An Anonymous Allegoric Interpretation of the Flood Story,” in A. Elqayam and A. Malachi (ed), *A Tribute to Hannah - Jubilee Book in Honor of Hannah Kasher* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 2018, p. 375. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. See for example, S. Rozanis, *The History of Turkish Jewry* (Hebrew), vol. 1, Tel Aviv, 1930, p, 26-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. My thanks to Hanokh Gamliel who assisted me in formulating this section. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Eldar, Hebrew Language - texts, p. 261-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Of all the grammatical works penned during the Middle Ages, those of Radak were the most common. See A. Maman, *Otzrot Lashon: The Hebrew Philology Manuscripts and Genizah Fragments in the Library of the JTS of America* (New York and Jerusalem: 2006), p. 18-21; I. Eldar, *Hebrew Language Study in Medieval Spain* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 2014, p. 153-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. E. Fryde, *The Early Palaeologan Renaissance (1261-c. 1360)*, Leiden-Boston, 2000, p.183-212; Donitz, “Shemarya”, p. 231. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. S. Bowman, “Survival in Decline: Romaniote Jewry Post-1204,” *Jews in Byzantium: Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures*, R. Bonfil (ed), Leiden-Boston, 2012), p. 115-123; Donitz, “Shemarya”, p. 231. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. S. Rosenberg, “Logic and Ontology in Jewish Philosophy of the 14th Century”, PhD Diss., Hebrew University, 1974, p. 35–36, 94–101; de Lange, “Byzantium”, pp. 94–95. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Maimonides’ writings reached Byzantium in the mid-thirteenth century (in Hebrew translation). See Frank, “Ibn Ezra” p. 99. For the influence of Maimonides on the Jewish exegetes of Byzantium, see Ahrend, *Elef Ha-Magen*, p. 39–40; Lawee, “Maimonides”. On the influence of Maimonides’ teachings upon the Karaites of Byzantium, see N. Shur, *The History of the Karaites* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 2003, p. 86-88; D.J. Lasker, “Maimonides Influence on the Philosophy of Elijah Bashyazi the Karaite,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (1984), p. 405-25 (Hebrew); D.J. Lasker, “Nature and Science According to Aaron ben Elijah the Karaite,” *Daat* 17 (1986) , p. 33-42 (Hebrew); D.J. Lasker, “Maimonides and the Karaites: From Critic to Cultural Hero,” in Carlos del Valle Rodríguez (ed), *Maimónides y su época*, Madrid, 2007, p. 311–25. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. M. Idel, “Kabbalah in Byzantine,” *Kabbalah* 18 (2008), p. 197-208 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. There is a single reference to *Sefer Yetsira* and the Account of Creation (Gen 1:1) as well as reference to the Account of the Chariot (Gen 5:24). [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. I have written a dedicated study of Rabbi Meyuhas’ introduction to the Pentateuch which is forthcoming. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Ta-Shma wrote about this extensively: Ta-Shma, *Italy*, p. 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Ta-Shma, *Ha-Nigle*, p. 100-101. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. *The* *writings of Nahmanides* (Hebrew), ed. C.B. Chavel. Jerusalem, 1963, p. 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Nahmanides, Introduction to Genesis. For a discussion of the homily “Torat Ha-Shem Temimah” and its composition prior to Nahmanides commentary on the Pentateuch, see O. Israeli, “From 'Torat Ha-Shem Temimah' to the Torah Commentary: Milestones in Nahmanides' Creative Life,” *Tarbiz* 83 (2015), p. 163-95 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Ta-Shma, *Ha-Nigle*, p. 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. At the end of the twelfth century and throughout the thirteenth, this notion was prevalent among Spanish kabbalists such as Rabbi Ezra ben Rabbi Solomon, Rabbi Azriel, Rabbi Jacob ben Sheshet, Rabbi Menahem Recanati, and Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla, and it is possible that they drew the idea from earlier sources. The idea is also mentioned in the Zohar in various contexts. On the early sources of the idea and its later development, see G. Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1976, p. 41-47; M. Idel, “The Concept of the Torah in Heikhalot Literature and Its Metamorphoses in Kabbalah,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981), p. 2-28, 49-58 (Hebrew); H. Pedaya, *Nahmanides - Cyclical Time and Holy Text* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 2003, p. 173-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Moshe ben Maimon, *Introductions to the Mishnah* (Hebrew), Y. Shilat (ed), Jerusalem, 1996, p. 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. For example: “there is no difference between *Timna was the concubine of Elifaz* and *Aluf Migdal and Aluf Iram* [on the one hand] and the Ten Commandments and the Shema [on the other] etc. Therefore, it was necessary to count letters, and to count the words written with full spelling and those with deficient spelling, and [words] read but not written and written but not read, and open passages and closed ones, and large letters and small ones.” R. Ezra, “Commentary on Song of Songs”, in *writings of Nahmanides* (Hebrew), C.B. Chavel, (ed), Jerusalem, 1963, p. 548; Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, p. 174; “and there is no difference between the chiefs of Esau and the Ten Commandments, for all is one matter and one principle,” *Commentary on Talmudic Aggadoth by Rabbi Azriel of Gerona* (Hebrew), I. Tishby (ed), Jerusalem, 1982, p. 99-100. A similar dictum appears in the commentary of Rabbi Bahya ben Asher on the Pentateuch (1255–1340) which was written in 1291. See Gen 36:39. In this book, the influence of Maimonides is patent, especially in its philosophical sections. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. The idea appears in thirteenth- century exegetical works, for example in the commentary of Rabbi Bahya (Gen 36:39) in a passage attributed to Rabbi David ben Judah He-Hasid (See M. Idel, “The Evil Thought of the Deity,” *Tarbiz* 49 [1980], p. 364 [Hebrew]) and Rabbi Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla (Joseph Gikatila, *Shaarey-Orah*, vol. 2, J. Ben Shlomo (ed), Jerusalem, 1970, p. 104). It can be assumed that they all relied on an earlier source. Ta-Shma quotes Liebes, who reviewed the various passages in the Zohar in which the secret of the Kings of Edom are referenced. Liebes concludes that “it seems that the author of the Zohar adapted and integrated an existing midrash into his book, a midrash in which the [theme of] the kings who died and the worlds that were destroyed were already present.” See Y. Liebes, “The Messiah of the Zohar,” in *The Messianic Idea In Jewish Thought - A Study Conference in Honor of the Eightieth Birthday of Gershom Scholem* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1982, p. 221. Har-Shefi has written an extensive monograph on the myth of the death of the Edomite kings. He points to sources that predate the Zohar which reference the myth. See A. Har-Shefi, *The Myth of the Edomite Kings in Zoharic Literature - Creation and Revelation in the Idrot Texts of the Zohar* (Hebrew), Los Angeles, 2014, p. 225-27. My thanks to Prof. Oded Yisraeli and Mr. Joseph Avivi who helped me arrive at the sources mentioned in this note. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Schwartz, “Remnants”, 96, 99; see also: “The rationalistic works are often written in exaggerated, lengthy prose. Stylistically, these works are characterized by numerous repetitions and tiresome, detailed introductions that forcibly exaggerate trivial knowledge” in Schwartz, “*Amulets*”, p. 140-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. See Jacobs, *Bekhor Shoro*, p. 186-193. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. See Jacobs, *Bekhor Shoro*, p. 198-210. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Ahrend, *Elef Ha-Magen*, 38-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Ta-Shma, *Italy*, 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)