**Abraham Ibn Ezra’s commentary to Job 2:11:**

**The time and place of Job and his friends and the composition of the book of Job**

In the early 1140s, while living in Rome, Abraham Ibn Ezra wrote a commentary on the book of Job.[[1]](#footnote-1) In his remarks on Job 2:11, Ibn Ezra situates Eliphaz the Temanite chronologically, notes that the rabbis ascribed authorship of the book of Job to Moses, and suggests that the book was translated into Hebrew from another language. These assertions are known well to scholars and interpreters of Ibn Ezra, and his suggestion that Job is a translated book has been widely cited.[[2]](#footnote-2) Nevertheless, Ibn Ezra’s position has not been elucidated in depth. In what follows, I hope to fill this lacuna. In the first section, I will analyze Ibn Ezra’s commentary on this verse in detail. As I will explain, Ibn Ezra’s position, that Job is a translated work, is unique. In the second section, I will point out the considerations that led him to this conclusion. In the final section, I will discuss the place of this assertion in the history of the book’s interpretation.

**[A] Ibn Ezra’s Commentary to Job 2:11: Analysis**

In his commentary to Job 2:11, Ibn Ezra writes as follows: …[[3]](#footnote-3)

Ibn Ezra deals here with two distinct issues—the period of Eliphaz the Temanite, and the question of the composition of the book of Job. Ibn Ezra’s determination of the period of Eliphaz is connected to his determination of the period of Job and his friends, and it necessitates a comparison to other commentaries that he wrote. His position on the question of the composition of the book of Job also becomes clearer through comparison with additional statements in his commentaries and books. I will discuss these two issues in two separate sections. As will become clear, Ibn Ezra’s opinion that the book of Job is a translated work is connected to the question of the period and location of Job and his friends.

1. **“Eliphaz the Temanite […] who was close to the days of Moses”: The Period of Job and his Friends**

Ibn Ezra identifies Eliphaz the Temanite with the family of Teman, the grandson of Esau, mentioned in the book of Genesis.[[4]](#footnote-4) In his view, the descriptor *ha-Temani* (“the Temanite”) – ‘Teman’ + the relational suffix *yud*[[5]](#footnote-5) – is plausible only “after generations [have passed].” In Ibn Ezra’s terminology, the word ‘generation’ does not refer to a fixed number of years (in his commentary to Joel 1:3 he writes that “a generation is not a known number”); rather, an individual’s death is what constitutes the passing of a generation.[[6]](#footnote-6) It seems that according to Ibn Ezra this kind of ascription of relation to Teman is possible only after Teman has come to be perceived as the progenitor of a known dynasty, more than a single generation (“generations”, *dorot*) after his death.[[7]](#footnote-7) Several commentators who preceded Ibn Ezra placed Eliphaz the Temanite earlier in time.[[8]](#footnote-8) It is possible that Ibn Ezra’s assertion that Eliphaz lived more than a single generation later than the generation of Teman is intended to refute the suggestions made by his predecessors.

Ibn Ezra asserts that the historical period of Eliphaz the Temanite was “close to the days of Moses.”[[9]](#footnote-9) The Hebrew expression he employs, *qarov mi-* (“close *from*”) is equivalent to the modern Hebrew *qarov le-* (“close to”); that is, Ibn Ezra is asserting that Eliphaz the Temanite lived close to the days of Moses—either before him or after him.[[10]](#footnote-10) Indeed, this usage appears frequently in Ibn Ezra’s writings, for example in his long commentary to Exodus 2:2, which is quite similar to his commentary to Job 2:11.[[11]](#footnote-11)

For a proper understanding of Ibn Ezra’s statements and his determination of the historical period of Eliphaz, Ibn Ezra’s short commentary on Exodus 9:20 is of some importance… Ibn Ezra refers here to a midrash which identifies Job as one of Pharaoh’s slaves,[[12]](#footnote-12) and in his view, Job was active *before* “those days,” that is, before Moses’ activities in Egypt. This chronological description is consistent with Ibn Ezra’s discussion in the *Book of the Name* (*Sefer ha-Shem*)…[[13]](#footnote-13) On this account, the events of the book of Job transpired before Moses’ activities in Egypt and the disclosureof the Tetragrammaton.[[14]](#footnote-14) This being the case, Ibn Ezra’s assertion, in his commentary to Job 2:11, that Eliphaz the Temanite “was close to the days of Moses” should be taken to mean *near* the time of Moses, but *not later than* the time of Moses.

Also important for determining the precise period of the events in the book of Job is a remark in Ibn Ezra’s commentary to Genesis 36:32-33, in which he rejects the identification of Job with Jobab…[[15]](#footnote-15) Ibn Ezra rejects this identification once again in his commentary to Job 1:1: “One who says that he [=Job] is Jobab, son of Zerah from Bozrah, might have seen this in a dream.” Nevertheless, he asserts there that Job, like Jobab, was a descendant of Esau: “It seems most likely to me that he was among the descendants of Esau.”[[16]](#footnote-16) From Genesis 36:17, one can conclude that Jobab the son of Zerah was Esau’s great-grandson, and that he lived only one generation after Teman. This piece of genealogical information is not consistent with Ibn Ezra’s assertion, in his commentary to Job 2:11, that Eliphaz the Temanite “would only be described as part of the line of Teman after generations.” In this context, it is worth noting that the possibility that an individual might be known by two different names—typically similar names like Job and Jobab—is well attested in rabbinic midrash and in medieval commentaries.[[17]](#footnote-17) Ibn Ezra himself also posited instances in which an individual might be known by two, or even three, different names,[[18]](#footnote-18) and in principle he did not categorically deny the phenomenon of various kinds of ‘letter variations.’[[19]](#footnote-19) though he seldom made use of this interpretative avenue.[[20]](#footnote-20) It thus seems that Ibn Ezra rejected the identification of Job with Jobab in light of his view of the chronological order of events.

Together, these statements by Ibn Ezra enable us to determine his precise view on the historical period of Job and his friends. There are five generations from Jacob to Moses: Jacob – Levi – Kohath – Amram – Moses. Esau lived at the same time as Jacob. Eliphaz the son of Esau is of the same generation as Levi. Teman the son of Eliphaz, and Zerah the father of Jobab are both of the generation of Kohath. Jobab and the sons of Teman are of the generation of Amram. As noted, Ibn Ezra thought it possible for Eliphaz to be called “the Temanite” only “after generations.” The generation of Jobab the son of Teman is not sufficiently far from Teman—this is the lower limit in determining the historical period of Eliphaz the Temanite. The upper limit is the time of the activities of Moses in Egypt and the disclosure of the Tetragrammaton. It follows from all of this that Eliphaz the Temanite should be identified as Teman’s grandson, a contemporary of Moses who probably flourished slightly before Moses’ actions and the four-letter name of God were made known to the people. Eliphaz the Temanite is thus named after his great-grandfather, Eliphaz the son of Esau, and called “the Temanite” after his grandfather, Teman the son of Eliphaz.

This assertion regarding the chronological placement of the events described in Job receives additional confirmation from another angle. In his commentary to Job 32:2, Ibn Ezra discusses the origins of “Elihu son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram”:

**The Buzite** – among the children of Nahor, brother of Abraham: “and Buz his brother” [Genesis 22:21]. It is possible he was a son through his mother’s family, like Jair son of Manasseh [Numbers 32:41] who was among the sons of Judah, as explained in Chronicles [I Chronicles 2:21-22]. **Of the family of Ram** – it is likely that this is the father of Amminadab, among the children of Israel.

As I will explain in the next section, Ibn Ezra also identified Job as being a descendant of Nahor. As noted, however, he saw Job as belonging to the descendants of Esau, while he identified Elihu as an Israelite.[[21]](#footnote-21) Ibn Ezra identifies the “family of Ram” with the figure of Ram the father of Amminadab, among the ancestors of King David (Ruth 4:19-22).[[22]](#footnote-22) The daughter of Amminadab, Elisheba, “mother of the priesthood,”[[23]](#footnote-23) is Aaron’s wife and the sister of Nahshon, leader of the tribe of Judah.[[24]](#footnote-24) It follows that Ibn Ezra located Elihu in the generation of Aaron and Elisheba, as well as Moses—and in the same period as Job and Eliphaz the Temanite.[[25]](#footnote-25)

1. **“It seems most likely to me that [Job] is a translated book”**

Ibn Ezra saw fit to locate the historical period of Eliphaz the Temanite in relation to Moses, rather than any other biblical character, on account of a tradition appearing in BT Bava Batra which ascribes the writing of Job to Moses: “Moses wrote his book, and the portion of Balaam and Job.” (BT Bava Batra 14b) Having alluded to this tradition, Ibn Ezra saw fit to say something regarding the composition of the book.

The expression, “*ve-ha-qarov elay*” (lit. “and what is closest to me”) means “it seems to me”, or “in my opinion.”[[26]](#footnote-26) This expression is taken by many to suggest extra cautiousness, and even a degree of hesitation—perhaps due to the influence of the expression, “*qarov be-eynay*”, known from modern Hebrew. However, this expression appears frequently in Ibn Ezra’s writings (dozens of times), and it is quite often accompanied by a decisive textual proof, indicating Ibn Ezra’s confidence in his position.[[27]](#footnote-27) Ibn Ezra’s statement, “it seems most likely to me (*ve-ha-qarov elay*)that [the book of Job] is a translated book,” should thus be taken as expressing a firmly-held position, and his words should not be understood as conveying deliberation.[[28]](#footnote-28)

According to Ibn Ezra, Job was translated into Hebrew from another language, and this process left its mark: Job is “a translated book; for this reason it is difficult to interpret, in the manner of every translated book.” The expression, “difficult to interpret” (“*qasheh be-ferush*”)is also used by Ibn Ezra in his (long) commentary to Exodus 6:3: “the word ‘*Shadday*’ – is difficult to interpret.” Ibn Ezra notes there that Sa’adia Gaon derived the divine name *Shadday* from the word ‘*day*’ (‘sufficient’) and the letter “*shin* was added,”[[29]](#footnote-29) and he rejects this suggestion on logical-theological grounds … Further on, Ibn Ezra explains that the root of the word ‘*Shadday*’ is *shin-dalet-resh* …, and he provides two examples of this grammatical phenomenon.[[30]](#footnote-30) He mentions the suggestion by Samuel the Nagid that ‘*Shadday*’ be equated with the Arabic term ‘*al-qāhir*’, that is, “victorious and resolute,”[[31]](#footnote-31) and asserts that he “explained well.”[[32]](#footnote-32) It thus seems that, in Ibn Ezra’s writings, the expression “difficult to interpret” means that a text is not clear and simple, and that there is an unusual difficulty involved in explaining it from an etymological and grammatical perspective. However, this does not imply that a reasonable and convincing interpretation of the text is impossible, nor that it is a ‘sealed book’ that cannot be understood at all. In other places, Ibn Ezra uses similar expressions: “difficult to explain grammatically” (“*qasheh be-diqduq*”), and “difficult in context” (“*qasheh be-maqom*”).[[33]](#footnote-33) These instances also show that the descriptor “difficult” serves, in Ibn Ezra’s language, to indicate the presence of phenomena that are distinct and unusual from a grammatical or literary perspective, and which thus necessitate special interpretative efforts. However, this does not negate the possibility of overcoming the difficulties and proffering a convincing resolution.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Ibn Ezra was not the first to characterize the book of Job as “difficult to interpret.” Such a characterization is found in the introduction to Sa’adia Gaon’s commentary on Job: …[[35]](#footnote-35) Sa’adia enumerates five points of difficulty in the book of Job, four of which (points 1-3 and 5) are related to the content of the book and the theological and religious questions that it raises.[[36]](#footnote-36) An additional point of difficulty (point 4) relates to the style and language of the book. According to Sa’adia, the linguistic form and poetic style of the book of Job render the contents of the speeches less clear, and thus make it more difficult for the reader to ascertain the essence of the claims being made.[[37]](#footnote-37) It is certainly possible that Ibn Ezra’s characterization of the book of Job as “difficult to interpret” was influenced directly by this comment of Sa’adia’s. Unlike Sa’adia, however, Ibn Ezra does not explain or specify what features of the book make it ‘difficult.’ Since he connects the ‘difficulty’ of the book with the act of translation, it seems that he did not have in mind the book’s ‘difficult’ contents—such as the theological-philosophical questions entailed by the speeches, in particular the problem of evil (in rabbinic terminology, “*ṣadiq ve-ra‘ lo*”, “a good person to whom bad thing occur”: BT Berakhot 7a). Rather, he seems to have had in mind some kind of linguistic consideration, as in the fourth point of difficulty raised by Sa’adia.[[38]](#footnote-38) We see that Ibn Ezra repeatedly points out rare and unique words (*hapax legomena*) that appear in the book. In a number of these places he employs the expressions, “this has no ‘brother’ in the Bible”; “this has no ‘friend’ [in the Bible]”; “this has no companion or fellow in the bible”; “it has no companion”; or “there is none similar.”[[39]](#footnote-39) These expressions are not unique to Ibn Ezra’s commentary on the book of Job, but in comparison with his other writings, they appear frequently in this commentary.[[40]](#footnote-40) Rare or unique words are not necessarily difficult to understand or interpret. Nevertheless, it is clear that the more frequently a word appears, the easier it is to determine its precise meaning. In addition to the assortment of rare and unique words in the book of Job, it might also be worth noting Ibn Ezra’s use of Aramaic and Arabic to interpret difficult words. In his commentary on Job, there are 28 explicit comparisons made to these sister languages. This, too, is not a unique phenomenon, as Ibn Ezra uses Aramaic and Arabic in his commentaries to other books as well.[[41]](#footnote-41) Nevertheless, it seems that this phenomenon is especially prominent in his commentary on Job.[[42]](#footnote-42) It is thus possible that Ibn Ezra’s characterization of Job as a book that is “difficult to interpret” is connected, at least primarily, to the book’s unique vocabulary.

According to Ibn Ezra, the fact that the book of Job is “difficult to interpret” is a natural by-product of the act of translation – “in the manner of every translated book.” This assertion is articulated as a rule, implying that *every* translated book can be identified by its difficult language. It is worth noting here, however, that the medieval commentators often articulated themselves in an exaggerated fashion, employing generalizations and sweeping language even in cases in which they were aware of diversity and complexity within the relevant material.[[43]](#footnote-43) Ibn Ezra’s comment may be understood in this light: On one hand, his assertion expresses a recognition of the fundamental challenges facing translators, and the concomitant tendency for translated works to be difficult to be interpret. On the other hand, he did not presume that *every* translated work is necessarily difficult.

Ibn Ezra’s remarks regarding translation and translated works strengthen this assessment. Ibn Ezra’s commentaries on the books of the Bible include more than a hundred direct or indirect references to the Aramaic translations of the Bible, in particular *Targum Onqelos*, and he also made extensive use of Sa’adia Gaon’s Arabic translation of the Bible.[[44]](#footnote-44) Several of these instances are instructive of Ibn Ezra’s position that translators often choose not to translate literally,[[45]](#footnote-45) and it is clear that he was aware of this longstanding tradition.[[46]](#footnote-46) He evidently also thought that various grammatical features of a given language may not be present in another. In such cases, it is not possible to ‘transfer’ what is written in the source language into the target language in a ‘technical’ manner. Rather, it becomes necessary to depart from literal translation.[[47]](#footnote-47) On the other hand, I did not find any hint in these dozens of comments suggesting that Ibn Ezra presumed translated literature must *necessarily* always be difficult to understand.[[48]](#footnote-48) On the contrary: With respect to *Targum Onqelos*, Ibn Ezra clearly assumed that the translator could have adhered to a literal translation, yet sometimes chose not to do so.[[49]](#footnote-49) This being the case, Ibn Ezra did not assume that *every* translated book raises interpretative difficulties. However, he was very aware of the fundamental challenges facing translators, and the *possibility* that these books might be more difficult to interpret.[[50]](#footnote-50) According to Ibn Ezra, the book of Job is an example of this phenomenon.

The placement of Job in the period of Moses, before the disclosure of the Divine Name – that is, in the early part of Moses’ life – does not completely contradict the view that Moses wrote the book. Ibn Ezra’s remark in the *Book of the Name*, cited above, is relevant to this point. As noted, Ibn Ezra claims that the Tetragrammaton does not appear in the speeches included in the book of Job (“You will not find it in any response of Job and his friends,”), and he goes on to explain more precisely …[[51]](#footnote-51) This suggests that it was the translator of the book into Hebrew who added these ‘headings.’[[52]](#footnote-52)Ibn Ezra was apparently of the opinion that this same translator added the framework story to the book of Job (Job 1-2, 42:7-17), since the Tetragrammaton appears in these verses seventeen times. The translator was aware of the Divine Name, and the possibility that this was Moses himself is not necessarily ruled out.

It seems to me that the structure of Ibn Ezra’s comments indicates he did not accept the tradition in BT Bava Batra which ascribes authorship of the book of Job to Moses. However, the question remains whether he rejected it altogether, or only partially. The letter *vav* which begins the phrase, “*ve-ha-qarov elay*” (“it seems most likely to me”) is an oppositional *vav*, so that the sentence should be understood: “Our sages, peace be upon them, said that Moses wrote the book of Job. *However*, it seems most likely to me that it is a translated book.” This sentence can be understood in two ways. The first possibility is that Ibn Ezra is rejecting the ascription of authorship in BT Bava Batra completely. At this point, it should be noted that Ibn Ezra, unlike other medieval rabbis and commentators, saw no problem in denying the traditional attribution of a text to a known author and instead assuming that it was written by another, anonymous figure, or at least by a figure whom Ibn Ezra did not identify explicitly.[[53]](#footnote-53) An another possibility is that Ibn Ezra did not reject the attribution in BT Bava Batra completely, but rather sought to offer a more precise account of Moses’ literary activity. , According to his account, Moses wrote the frame narrative and some of the ‘headings,’but *translated* the remainder of the book, rather than writing it himself. Of relevance to this hypothesis is the fact that Ibn Ezra did not reject the possibility that Moses might have written books other than the Torah, such that it is at least conceivable that he might also attribute Job to him.[[54]](#footnote-54) In this context it is worth noting that the anonymous designation, ‘*ha-ma‘atiq*’ (‘the translator’), which Ibn Ezra employs in the *Book of the Name*, does not necessarily preclude Mosaic authorship. Medieval commentators tended to refer to authors of biblical books using anonymous designations (‘*sofer*,’ ‘*kotev*,’ ‘*mudawwin*,’ etc.) without citing their names explicitly, even though they identified these authors with the figures to whom the books were traditionally attributed in rabbinic tradition.[[55]](#footnote-55) It is therefore possible that the anonymous designation ‘*ha-ma‘atiq*’ is an instance of this phenomenon.

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Analysis of Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Job 2:11 and a comparison of his remarks there with other statements by Ibn Ezra elsewhere lead to the following conclusions: In his view, the events described in Job transpired close to the time of Moses; moreover, it appears that Job and his friends lived in as the same generation as Moses. According to Ibn Ezra, Job is “difficult to interpret,” and it seems that this difficulty is connected, at least primarily, to the book’s unique vocabulary. The difficulties which characterize the book are common in translated works, and in light of this, Ibn Ezra concluded that the book was translated into Hebrew from another language. It is difficult to determine with any certainty whether Ibn Ezra rejected the talmudic attribution of Job to Moses entirely. It is, however, clear that he presumed his own view to be different from the traditional view as presented in BT Bava Batra. Ibn Ezra identified a number of ‘headings’ throughout the book, and he ascribed them to the translator himself. It seems that he also attributed the narrative framework of the book to the translator, although he does not say this explicitly.

**[B] Why did Ibn Ezra believe Job was translated into Hebrew from another language?**

As has been explained above, Ibn Ezra justifies his dating of the events described in Job in the period of Moses on the basis of philological considerations and rational suppositions. Ibn Ezra considers a complex of passages in the Torah and in Job, and examines genealogical lists closely. These considerations and suppositions fit in well with the spirit of the medieval *peshat* commentaries in general, and the interpretative and analytical methodology of Ibn Ezra in particular – interpretation of Scripture through Scripture itself,[[56]](#footnote-56) a method based on the assumption that biblical texts cohere with each other harmoniously. On the other hand, Ibn Ezra’s conclusion that Job is difficult and unique because it was translated into Hebrew from another language is neither a necessary philological conclusion nor a straightforward logical supposition. For our current purposes, it is sufficient to note that other medieval commentators and rabbis also observed linguistic or literary uniqueness in various biblical books, though not always as methodically or with as much subtlety as Ibn Ezra. Some of them even proposed comprehensive explanations for the unique linguistic or literary qualities they identified in these books, including some highly original explanations.[[57]](#footnote-57) However, none of these commentators reached conclusions akin to Ibn Ezra’s claim that the book is a product of translation. As such, it is reasonable to presume that Ibn Ezra’s conclusion was based on several additional considerations.

1. **Ibn Ezra’s views on language**

Ibn Ezra did not present his views regarding language in a devoted work. However, one can assemble a picture of his views by carefully gathering statements scattered throughout his writings.[[58]](#footnote-58) Ibn Ezra assumed that every linguistic act is fundamentally communicative…[[59]](#footnote-59) Even the language of the Torah is no different in this respect…[[60]](#footnote-60) This is a fundamental principle in Ibn Ezra’s thinking, and it is evident in his interpretative methodology. It follows from this principle that the language of the Torah obeys the same rules seen in ordinary language—and, in fact, in *all* language. The role of language is the transmission of content from a ‘sender’ to a ‘recipient,’ and the role of the language of the Torah is no different. This being the case, it would not stand to reason for the Torah to include words with multiple, contradictory meanings, as this would encumber readers.[[61]](#footnote-61) Accordingly, the Torah also does not contain meanings based on *Gematria,* *Notariqon*, complete and deficient Hebrew spellings, or other creative forms of expression which do not provide clear, unambiguous meaning as is customary in communication between people.[[62]](#footnote-62)

It should be emphasized that Ibn Ezra accepted as self-evident the divine nature of the Torah, as well as the divine revelation upon which the Torah and the books of the Bible are based. Moreover, in his view, the prophets – and Moses in particular – are distinguished by their unique intellectual capability and their spiritual virtue.[[63]](#footnote-63) Nevertheless, this does not mean that the Torah or the books of the prophets are ‘sealed’—incomprehensible to anyone who is not a prophet and did not merit divine revelation. The Torah and all of the books of the Bible reflect a process of adaptation and adjustment which enable even a simple person to understand what is written in them.[[64]](#footnote-64) This obviously does not mean that all people are capable of understanding Scripture to the same degree of depth. On the contrary, Ibn Ezra assumed that some parts of the Torah contain an additional layer of meaning which is revealed only to the educated reader. The typical reader, meanwhile, is likely not to realize that he is missing secrets and is only exposed to the ‘open’ dimension of the text.[[65]](#footnote-65) Nevertheless, Ibn Ezra’s starting presumption is that there is no fundamental obstacle preventing a person – any person! – from training himself intellectually and spiritually in order to reach a deep understanding of Scripture…

The divine nature of Scripture, on one hand, and its communicative nature, on the other, are products of a fascinating division of labor between God and man. According to Ibn Ezra, God transmitted certain ‘messages’ to the prophets.[[66]](#footnote-66) These messages, ‘*ṭe‘amim*’ (‘meanings’) in Ibn Ezra’s terminology, are not made up of words. It is the prophets themselves who turn these ‘meanings’ into words in accordance with their intellectual and spiritual capabilities, as well as their respective individual styles and approaches...,[[67]](#footnote-67) …[[68]](#footnote-68) …[[69]](#footnote-69) The conversion of ‘meanings’ into ‘words’ – that is, the verbal representation of a divine vision – is an independent literary act performed by the prophet.[[70]](#footnote-70) As noted, the prophets were endowed with unique intellectual and spiritual qualities, but this additional inspiration and wisdom do not guide them regarding how to turn the divine vision into words. In the end, the prophet must rely upon his human creative capabilities – the vitality with which he was endowed at birth (…[[71]](#footnote-71)), his nature (…[[72]](#footnote-72)), and his personal style and approach (…[[73]](#footnote-73)).

This division of labor between God and man explains why, on one hand, the books of the Bible are divine in nature – or divine in content – and, on the other hand, their language is the language of human beings.[[74]](#footnote-74) The aim of the reader is to reach as deep an understanding as possible of these divine messages (‘meanings’) which are, in Ibn Ezra’s words, the ‘souls,’ ‘essences,’ and ‘spirits’ of the prophets’ words. Conversely, the words themselves do not have any inherent importance – their purpose is to lead the reader toward the divine messages, and as such, Ibn Ezra refers to them as ‘bodies,’ ‘corpses,’ and ‘vessels.’[[75]](#footnote-75)

Ibn Ezra thought that at least some of the books of the Bible were written by sages: “Every author of a book was a prophet or a sage.”[[76]](#footnote-76) In a number of places, Ibn Ezra implies that the books written by sages are also based on a division of labor between man and God. For example, Ibn Ezra notes repeatedly that the hymns in the book of Psalms were ‘said’ by means of the Holy Spirit; similarly, he claims that Solomon ‘said’ or ‘spoke’ Song of Songs by means of the Holy Spirit.[[77]](#footnote-77) It seems that Ibn Ezra included other books from the Writings—perhaps even all of the Writings—in the category of books written by means of the Holy Spirit: “If we knew every secret of the book of Psalms, which is all hymns and prayers, even though it was said by means of the Holy Spirit, it contains no prophecy about the future. Such is also the case with Job, the books of Solomon, the Five Scrolls, and Ezra. And such is also the case with […] the book of Daniel.”[[78]](#footnote-78) Ibn Ezra certainly may have differentiated between books that were written by sages inspired by the Holy Spirit, and the Torah and books of the Prophets, whose authors received divine messages in a vision or dream. However, even if he differentiated *in principle* between these two types of books, this distinction is not manifested *methodologically* in his commentaries. The methods that Ibn Ezra uses in his commentaries on the books of the Writings are no different from those employed in his commentaries on the Torah and the books of the Prophets; and his assumptions regarding the fundamentally communicative nature of language, and the concomitant possibility of deciphering its meaning, remain intact consistently.[[79]](#footnote-79) Perhaps, then, it is not a coincidence that the descriptor ‘prophet’ and the verb‘prophesy’ are employed by Ibn Ezra to describe *any* divine revelation to man,[[80]](#footnote-80) and the terms ‘prophecy’ and ‘Holy Spirit’ are not as sharply distinguished from one another as they are in the writings of other commentators.[[81]](#footnote-81)

Ibn Ezra’s views on language—especially biblical language—comes to the fore in his commentaries. It is sometimes necessary to take these views into account in order to fully grasp the interpretative considerations motivating Ibn Ezra. His well-known and widely-cited remarks concerning verses in the Torah written after Moses’ time are an example of this. At the beginning of his commentary on the book of Deuteronomy, Ibn Ezra enumerates several of these verses …[[82]](#footnote-82) Over the centuries, commentators and scholars linked this remark and other similar comments by Ibn Ezra to what is popularly called ‘anachronism,’ that is, Ibn Ezra was understood as denying Mosaic authorship of these verses because they contain information from after Moses’ time.[[83]](#footnote-83) This way of understanding Ibn Ezra is problematic from two perspectives: First, it is clear that Ibn Ezra did not doubt Moses’ prophecy or the divine revelation that he received. This being the case, why would he deny the possibility that Moses might have known, by prophetic means, what would happen after his death? Indeed, there are verses in the Torah which describe events that would take place many generations after Moses’ death, and Ibn Ezra saw them simply as prophetic verses.[[84]](#footnote-84) Second, if Ibn Ezra did struggle with the fact that the Torah contains information from after Moses’ time, why did he not do so consistently? Why, for example, did he vociferously reject the suggestion that the verse, “these are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites,” (Genesis 36:31) was not written by Moses? And why did he reject the suggestion that it was Joshua who mentioned the establishment of the city of Hormah (Numbers 21:3)?[[85]](#footnote-85) It seems that Ibn Ezra does not deny that verses in the Torah were written by Moses because they contain information from after Moses’ time, but rather because of the way in which the wording of these verses is formulated. It is perfectly plausible that Moses knew through prophecy that, in the future, the Canaanites would disappear from the promised land (…), the Temple would be built on Mount Moriah (…) he would die on the mountain (…), and so on. However, if Moses himself was to articulate these messages in words, the natural way for him to do so would be to articulate future events in the future tense, not in the past or present tense. Similarly, it does not make sense to assume that Moses would stand on the Eastern side of the Jordan and simply call it “the other side of the Jordan.” (…) And if the word ‘Azazel’ is indeed an Aramaic word—‘*ez*’ (‘goat’) and the Aramaic verb *a-z-l* (‘to go’)—it does not make sense to assume that Moses wrote this, since he certainly did not know Aramaic.[[86]](#footnote-86) It is thus Ibn Ezra’s presumption that Moses wrote the Torah “in the language of human beings,” and that the standard rules and laws of language apply to the Torah as well, which led him to the conclusion that certain verses were added to the Torah after the death of Moses.[[87]](#footnote-87)

A similar approach can help us explain Ibn Ezra’s claim that chapters 40 and onward of the book of Isaiah contain the prophecies of an anonymous prophet from the Second Temple period, and not the prophecies of Isaiah the son of Amoz.[[88]](#footnote-88) Ibn Ezra explains that at least some of the prophecies of consolation contained in these chapters describe a future return to the land of Israel (as Ibn Ezra puts it in his commentary on Isaiah 40:1: ‘our exile’), and not the ancient return to Zion and construction of the Second Temple. His conclusion that the prophet is an anonymous one is based on several verses in which, according to Ibn Ezra, a biographical picture of the prophet emerges which does not match what is known about the life story of Isaiah the son of Amoz. It seems that the decisive verse relating to this matter is Isaiah 49:7… as well as the following verse … Ibn Ezra cites Isaiah 49:7 in his commentary to Isaiah 40:1 as evidence for the fact that, from this point on, the prophet in the book is an anonymous one… In his commentary to Isaiah 49:7 he emphasizes this as follows:

**Thus –** these are also words of the prophet [i.e. this verse describes the fate of the prophet himself, and not the fate of the people as commonly understood in traditional commentaries], and they are thus: **Thus said the Lord** *to me* [my emphasis], that I am a **despised one** among evil people […] **Kings shall see and stand up** – I have already alluded to this secret halfway through the book [i.e. that this part of the book of Isaiah does not contain prophecies by Isaiah the son of Amoz].[[89]](#footnote-89) […] The letter *kaf* of ***vayivḥareka*** [i.e. the fact that the object of ‘**he** **chose you’** is articulated in the singular] is testimony to the integrity of this interpretation.

It seems that, in Ibn Ezra’s opinion, this verse presents a brief summary of the turnaround in fortune expected for the prophet who had been in exile in Babylonia, …, and who would be honored by kings and nobles who would arise and prostrate themselves before him.[[90]](#footnote-90) According to Ibn Ezra, the letter *kaf* in the verb ‘*vayivḥareka*’ (“he chose you [sing.]”), as well as the letter *khaf* in the verb ‘*‘anitikha*’ (“I answer you [sing.]”) in the following verse,[[91]](#footnote-91) are ‘testimony’ that the prophecy is concerned with the prophet himself. It follows necessarily from this that Isaiah the son of Amoz is not the prophet under discussion, since he was not exiled to Babylonia, nor was he honored in this way. Rather, these verses relate to a different, anonymous prophet. In other words, it is a supposedly tangential consideration—the articulation of the direct object in second-person-singular (‘*vayivḥare****ka***’ and ‘*aniti****kha***’)—which led Ibn Ezra to the far-reaching conclusion that the ‘Isaiah’ of chapters 40 and onward should be distinguished from the prophecies of Isaiah the son of Amoz—anticipating the conclusions of modern scholarship by many centuries.[[92]](#footnote-92) It would seem that the prophecies regarding ‘our exile’—that is, the late Second Temple period—played some role in leading Ibn Ezra to this conclusion. Even so, it seems that this was, in the end, just an additional piece of supportive evidence. In other words, if the prophecy in Isaiah 49:7-8 had not contained verbs with a direct object articulated in second-person-singular—that is, verbs directed at the prophet himself—Ibn Ezra would not have attributed the second half of the book to an anonymous prophet.[[93]](#footnote-93)

Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Job 2:11, the text of primary concern to us here, should be understood in a similar fashion. If language is fundamentally communicative in nature, and if the language of the Bible is not different in this respect from human language, then biblical language should be expected to obey the same rules and norms that are typical of everyday language. Just as human beings communicate with one another in a clear fashion, avoid irregular and ambiguous expressions, do not describe future events in the past or present tense, and do not employ words from languages they do not know, so too it is hard to accept the possibility that they would employ language of exceptional lexical strangeness like that which one finds in the book of Job. It is true that a reasonable linguistic and grammatical interpretation of Job is possible, since it is, after all, “difficult to interpret”—not impossible. Nevertheless, the book’s unique linguistic character, its many difficulties, and its abundance of challenging words are not consistent with the communicative nature of human language.

It was thus Ibn Ezra’s presumption that the books of the Bible speak the language of human beings, leading him to conclude that he needed to explain the irregular linguistic character of Job, just as he saw fit to explain irregular language in a number of verses in the Torah and the book of Isaiah. As we have seen, Ibn Ezra dealt with linguistic irregularity in several verses of the Torah in a localized fashion, suggesting that they were written at a later stage, after the death of Moses. Likewise, he dealt with the linguistic irregularity of several verses in the book of Isaiah by suggesting a division of the book into two distinct parts, attributing each to a different prophet living in a different historical period. Unlike these cases, the linguistic irregularity of Job is not reducible to specific verses or defined sections. The unique language of the book is evident throughout the speeches that constitute its better part. In this case, Ibn Ezra had to find a much more general explanation—one which could be applied to the entire book. His suggestion that Job was translated into Hebrew from another language provides such a comprehensive explanation. This solution shows, more than anything else, how committed Ibn Ezra was to the assumption that the language of the Bible is no different from the language of human beings—for if the difficult language of the speeches in Job is a result of translation, then what seemed like a deviation from the characteristic features of human language is, in fact, the product of a very familiar, human literary practice.

1. **The origins of Job and his friends**

Along with Ibn Ezra’s presumptions regarding the language of the Bible and language in general, another consideration should be noted which also informs Ibn Ezra’s conclusion that Job is a translated book: the non-Jewish origins of Job and some of his friends. In his commentary on Job 1:1, part of which I cited above, Ibn Ezra addresses Job’s own identity: “Job was among the children of the children of Nahor, the brother of Abraham. It seems most likely to me that he was among the descendants of Esau. This proves it: ‘in the land of Uz’ – like in, ‘rejoice and exalt, daughter of Edom, who dwells in the land of Uz.’ (Lamentations 4:21) It is impossible to say that he never existed.” Ibn Ezra learned of the connection between Job and Nahor the brother of Abraham from the enumeration of Nahor’s children, including “Uz his first born,” in Genesis 22:20-21.[[94]](#footnote-94) However, in his view, Job’s ancestors blended back in with the line of Abraham, as Job was among the descendants of Esau. It seems that the link in the chain connecting Nahor with Esau is Rebecca, granddaughter of Nahor (Genesis 22:23) and mother of Esau (Genesis 25:25).

Ibn Ezra’s interpretation of Job 1:1 is based on two complementary assumptions: that in many instances, identical names in the Bible indicate a family connection; and that when a person and a place share an identical name, this indicates that the descendants of that person settled in that place, which was named after him. Accordingly, Ibn Ezra presumed that Uz, the name of the place in which Job lived, was connected with Uz the first-born son of Nahor, and that Job was thus a descendant of this family. The identification of the land of Uz with Edom in Lamentations (“daughter of Edom, who dwells in the land of Uz”) led Ibn Ezra to the conclusion that the inhabitants of this land are connected to the line of Esau.[[95]](#footnote-95) From Ibn Ezra’s commentary to Lamentations 4:21 it becomes clear that these inhabitants were Arameans – “they are Arameans.” Informing this ethnic identification are several verses which connect the line of Esau with Aram and with characters by the name of Uz.[[96]](#footnote-96)

In Ibn Ezra’s commentary to Job 1:3 (“That man was greater than all the people of the East [*beney qedem*]”), we see that he locates Uz in proximity to Haran: “The location of Job is next to Haran, on the basis of [the verse,] ‘he [Jacob] came to the land of the people of the East [*beney qedem*].’ (Genesis 29:1)” In other places, Ibn Ezra identifies the ‘people of the East’ (‘*beney qedem*’) with the Arameans;[[97]](#footnote-97) he identifies Haran with Aram-Naharaim,[[98]](#footnote-98) and he claims that Haram and Edom bordered one another.[[99]](#footnote-99) These claims, as well as the geographical location of Haran, fit with the land of Uz’s connection with Edom and the line of Esau; Job’s connection with the line of Nahor in Haran; and the identification of the descendants of Nahor with the Arameans.[[100]](#footnote-100)

In light of all of these statements, it is clear that Ibn Ezra presumed Job to be a historical figure, and not just a parable (one of the opinions presented in rabbinic literature). As he writes in his commentary to Job 1:1: “It is impossible to say that he never existed.” Job was among the descendants of Nahor and the descendants of Esau, and he lived in the land of Uz, which was associated with the Arameans and located on the border of Edom and Haran. Both Job’s origins and the location of Uz are subjects of differing opinions in the Jewish tradition. It seems that the view that Job was not Jewish was far more common than the view that he was; while the suggestion that Arameans inhabited Uz is known from sources earlier than Ibn Ezra.[[101]](#footnote-101) If these sources influenced Ibn Ezra as he formulated his own conclusions, he makes no mention of this.

The origins and locations of Job’s friends were also subjects of discussion in rabbinic tradition.[[102]](#footnote-102) As noted above, Ibn Ezra identifies Elihu with “the children of Nahor, brother of Abraham” in his commentary to Job 32:2. This identification is based on Genesis 22:21, which mentions Buz, the son of Nahor and brother of Uz. As I noted above, Ibn Ezra assumed that the family tree of Job, who was also among the “children of the children of Nahor, the brother of Abraham,” (commentary to Job 1:1) eventually blended in with the descendants of Abraham, as Job was also among the descendants of Esau. It seems that he also assumed that Elihu’s ancestors blended in with Abraham’s line of descendants. However, unlike Job, this family line remained part of Israel, as Ibn Ezra notes that Elihu was named after Ram, “the father of Amminadab, among the children of Israel,” who was an ancestor of King David.

As I noted above, in his commentary to Job 2:11, Ibn Ezra places Eliphaz the Temanite in the generation of Teman’s grandchildren. Thus Eliphaz, like Job but unlike Elihu, is among the descendants of Esau but not counted as an Israelite.

In his commentary to Job 2:11, Ibn Ezra identifies Bildad the Shuhite with Shuah, the son of Abraham and Keturah: “‘The Shuhite’ – among the sons of Keturah, wife of Abraham: ‘… Ishbak and Shuah’ (Genesis 25:2).” Ibn Ezra does not say anything about the descendants of Shuah or their location, but it is reasonable to assume that he saw them as non-Jews. This is implied indirectly by remarks in his long commentary on Exodus 21:1… Further on, he emphasizes the uniqueness of the Edomites… From all of this it seems clear that Ibn Ezra assumed that the descendants of Abraham and Keturah were not Israelites.[[103]](#footnote-103) The descendants of Shuah are presumably not exceptions to this rule, even though the Bible contains no information about them.

Regarding Zophar the Naamathite, Ibn Ezra writes the following in his commentary to Job 2:11: “‘the Naamathite’ – we do not know what city or family he belongs to.” Ibn Ezra presumably tried to find clues as to Zophar’s origins, just as he did for Job, Elihu, Eliphaz, and Bildad. One can assume that he examined the two biblical figures with whom the descriptor “the Naamathite” might be connected. The first is Naamah the daughter of Lamech (Genesis 4:22), whom the midrash identifies as the wife of Noah.[[104]](#footnote-104) The second is Naamah the Amonite, who was one of the wives of Solomon, and the mother of Rehoboam (I Kings 14:21, 14:31). Neither of these possibilities could have served as a chronological anchor for placing Zophar the Naamathite near the time of Moses, which is the period during which the events in Job took place on Ibn Ezra’s account. Another possibility is the *city* of Naamah, which appears in the list of cites of the lowland in the inheritance of Judah (Joshua 15:41). However, it is not possible to say anything about the inhabitants of that city before the conquering of the land.[[105]](#footnote-105)

According to Ibn Ezra, then, Elihu was an Israelite; Zophar’s origins are unknown; and Job, Eliphaz, and Bildad were not Israelites. If we connect this view of Ibn Ezra’s with his opinion, discussed above, that Uz is located in Edom, on the border of Haran, and its name associated with Arameans, then we can draw the conclusion that the encounter between Job and his friends did not take place in Hebrew. Moreover, it is reasonable to suppose that Ibn Ezra assumed that they spoke with each other in Aramaic, like the other inhabitants of the land of Uz.[[106]](#footnote-106) This is an important point. As noted above, it is difficult to determine with any certainty whether Ibn Ezra rejected the attribution of Job to Moses – one could argue that he thought Moses translated the speeches of the book into Hebrew. However, if Ibn Ezra presumed that the speeches of Job and his friends were given in Aramaic, this would be a decisive consideration in favor of the view that Moses was *not* the one who translated the book, since, as can be learned from Ibn Ezra’s commentary to Leviticus 16:8 regarding the word ‘Azazel,’ Moses did not know the Aramaic language.[[107]](#footnote-107)

The mere fact of an encounter between non-Israelite figures on territory outside of the land of Israel is not itself a rarity in the Bible. In such cases, the commentators did not tend to discuss what language the characters spoke, how they understood each other, or how their words eventually found their way into the Hebrew language and the books of the Bible.[[108]](#footnote-108) These linguistic dimensions received attention only if the particular language spoken by the characters played some role in the story itself,[[109]](#footnote-109) or if the story mentions an act of translation.[[110]](#footnote-110) Ibn Ezra is no different from other medieval commentators on this point. As such, it seems that the fact that the encounter between Job and his friends took place in the land of Uz is not what led him to wonder about the language in which the speeches were made. However, once he had already found himself considering the possibility that Job was translated into Hebrew, it was only natural for him to ask himself why it was not written in Hebrew in the first place. The non-Israelite origins of Job and some of his friends, as well as the location of Uz in Edom, among the Arameans, may provide a likely answer to this question. In fact, these details about ethnicity and geography fill in necessary details pertaining to Ibn Ezra’s opinion that Job was translated into Hebrew from another language.

1. **Supporting traditions: The Septuagint and the *Testament of Job***

An ancient tradition has survived which may provide support for the view that Job was translated into Hebrew from another language. At the end of the version of Job found in the Septuagint, we find the following colophon: …[[111]](#footnote-111) …[[112]](#footnote-112)

The identification of Job with Jobab son of Zerah is also known from the verse that opens the *Testament of Job*: “Book of Job, called Jobab.”[[113]](#footnote-113) Further on, as in the colophon, it is emphasized that Job was a descendant of Esau: “For I am of the sons of Esau. My brother is Nahor, and your mother is Dinah” (*Testament of Job* 1:5).[[114]](#footnote-114) The identification of Job with Jobab son of Zerah also appears in Jewish sources later than Ibn Ezra, and it seems this view was well known.[[115]](#footnote-115)

As noted above, Ibn Ezra places Job a generation later than Jobab, and on this point he differs from the colophon and the opening of the *Testament of Job*. In his commentaries to Genesis 36:32-33 and Job 1:1, Ibn Ezra rejects the identification of Job with Jobab explicitly. Nevertheless, like the colophon, Ibn Ezra emphasizes that Job was a descendant of Esau.

Another point of similarity can be found in the geographical placement of the land of Uz. The colophon states that Uz was located on the border of Edom and Arabia. This is similar, though not identical, to Ibn Ezra’s assertion that the land of Uz is located on the border of Edom and Haran.

The colophon does not state that Job was translated into Hebrew from another language. However, the claim that the book came from Syria, or that the story of Job was written in a book located in Syria,[[116]](#footnote-116) fits quite well with the idea that the book was not written in Hebrew originally.

As is well known, traditions and their reverberations unfold orally and in writing, and tend to develop and evolve over time. When points of similarity or affinity between different sources are found, one must ask how pronounced these are, and whether the texts are products of a single tradition, or if they might rather have developed independently of one another. It seems to me that the points of similarity between Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Job and the colophon at the end of the Septuagint version of Job are, in the final analysis, quite pronounced. Nevertheless, as we have made clear, Ibn Ezra’s conclusion that Job was translated into Hebrew from another language is based on philological considerations, and on his approach to language. It is thus not *necessary* to claim that Ibn Ezra formulated his opinion (also) under the influence of sources which developed out of the tradition in the colophon. One certainly cannot argue that his position *relies* on unknown sources such as these. Nevertheless, one should not reject the possibility that a tradition regarding the foreignness of Job and of his book might have somehow made its way to Ibn Ezra and influenced him, even slightly, as he formulated his conclusions.

**[C] Reception of Ibn Ezra’s position**

Ibn Ezra’s opinion that Job was translated into Hebrew from another language did not have a significant impact on the history of Jewish commentary on the book. It was presumably the fact that his approach does not fit comfortably with the traditional view that Moses wrote the book of Job, as well as the suggestion that the Hebrew Bible might contain a book whose origins are non-Jewish, which made it difficult for commentators to accept his position. To this, we can add that Ibn Ezra’s position, as I have tried to show, is based on a combination of philological considerations and presuppositions relating to the nature of language. In order to see the suggestion that Job was translated into Hebrew from another language as a reasonable one, it is necessary to accept all of Ibn Ezra’s presuppositions and guiding considerations. This, too, may have made it difficult for commentators to agree with his claims.

As far as I know, Rabbi Simeon ben Ṣemaḥ Duran (1361-1444; also known as *Rashbaṣ*) was the only medieval biblical commentator to engage explicitly with Ibn Ezra’s opinion that Job is a translated book:

The sage, Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (may his memory be a blessing), wrote that it seems to him that [the book of Job] was transcribed from another language, and that this is the reason that it is deeply poetic in style, as is typicalof books transcribed from language to language. However, this need not be the case. Rather, since these people did not speak the Holy Language, when Moses transcribed their words, letter for letter, into the Holy Language by divine force, the language became ‘deep’ as is typical of transcribed books.[[117]](#footnote-117)

Duran accepts the view of Ibn Ezra that the discussion between Job and his friends did not take place in Hebrew. Moreover, he accepts Ibn Ezra’s claim that the book is distinguished by its unique language, like translated books are. Duran even articulated his own claims in language influenced directly by Ibn Ezra – “as is typical of transcribed books” (Duran); “in the manner of every translated book.” (Ibn Ezra) However, Duran emphasizes that it was Moses himself who translated (‘transcribed’) the words of the book’s characters into Hebrew. As mentioned, Ibn Ezra thought that the act of translation left an imprint on the book, and this view implies that Job is the product of human literary activity of a finite quality. This might be the reason that Duran emphasized that Moses translated, by divine word, what the characters said *word for word* (“letter for letter”).

Duran thus combines Ibn Ezra’s position with the opinion in BT Bava Batra, according to which Moses wrote the book of Job. On this point, Joseph ben David Ibn Yaḥya (1534-1494, Portugal and Italy)[[118]](#footnote-118) is similar to Duran, although unlike him, Ibn Yaḥya does not state explicitly that Ibn Ezra’s position informs his own approach. In the introduction to his commentary on the book of Job, Ibn Yaḥya writes as follows:

Moses, who wrote his own book, also wrote the book of Job. That is, he found the questions and answers of Job and his friends written down, mixed with other books from among the nations. He searched within them, and by means of the Holy Spirit he began to separate wheat from chaff, and wrote the book of Job sequentially, in accordance with the truth itself, as it happened, without adding or detracting.[[119]](#footnote-119)

Ibn Yaḥya’s words here suggest that Moses’ literary activity was complex in nature. Moses wrote the book on the basis of different sources which he ‘found.’ These sources included the speeches of Job and his friends, as well as “other books from among the nations” – that is, other compositions written by non-Jews. Ibn Yaḥya does not explicitly specify the language in which these compositions were written, but since he identified them as non-Jewish sources, it seems that he was hinting that they were not written in Hebrew. This being the case, Ibn Yaḥya, like Duran, offered a position consistent with the claim in BT Bava Batra that Moses wrote the book of Job, while simultaneously not rejecting Ibn Ezra’s opinion that Job “is a translated book.” However, he emphasizes that the literary activity of Moses was not merely trivial, human literary activity, but rather, Moses wrote “by means of the Holy Spirit.”[[120]](#footnote-120)

Other medieval commentators ignored Ibn Ezra’s position completely.[[121]](#footnote-121) This is especially noticeable among commentators who were influenced deeply by Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Job, and who often quoted him—explicitly or implicitly—but who nevertheless chose not even to mention the suggestion that Job was translated into Hebrew from another language.[[122]](#footnote-122) Having said that, in a number of places it seems possible that Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Job 2:11 indirectly informed some statements by these commentators. One example of this possibility is the following assertion by Rabbi Moses Kimḥi (c. 1127-1190) in the introduction to his commentary on Job: “Moses wrote his book and the book of Job; we received this from our ancestors, the sages, for they and their words are truth.” Moses Kimḥi did not begin his commentaries on Proverbs or Ezra-Nehemiah with this kind of dogmatic statement. It thus might be the case that these words have a polemical dimension to them: They might have been directed primarily against Ibn Ezra’s suggestion that Job was translated into Hebrew from another language. Indeed, it is of interest to note that this is the only place in Moses Kimḥi’s commentaries in which the expression, “their words are truth,” appears—and in this context it refers to the rabbinic tradition. Variations on this expression are highly characteristic of Ibn Ezra’s writings. In dozens of places, he uses this expression to emphasize the supreme status of the sages and the correctness of a position accepted by the tradition…[[123]](#footnote-123) We are aware of other cases in which a commentator employs the terminology of an earlier commentator in order to contest his interpretation;[[124]](#footnote-124) it is possible that Moses Kimḥi’s words here are an example of this interesting phenomenon.

The introduction to Rabbi Joseph Kaspi’s (1280-1345) commentary to Job is another, somewhat more complicated, example of the possibility that a commentator might be disputing Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Job 2:11 without mentioning it.[[125]](#footnote-125) Joseph Kaspi writes:

Although Job and his friends were not Jews, it was appropriate for one of the scribes among the ancient sages of our religion to write this story as it happened in his time, or slightly before him, since it is an eminent story, equally right for all nations and religions […] Who knows if, perhaps, some or all of Job and his friends were Jews who were exiled for some reason to the land of Uz? […] In the end, what value is there for us in these empty inquiries? The truth is equally right for all of the nations. If Job was an Aramean, one should not argue: How could God have spoken with him? For is this not the case with the evil Balaam? One also should not ask: If Job and his friends were not Jews, how was this book included among the Holy Books? For here is your proclamation that it is equally right for all of the nations: The book of Jonah, which is entirely the story of another nation, is included. So, too, the story of the generation of the flood, and the story of Sodom and Gomorrah are written in the Torah. The general rule is: The ancient scribes of our nation and of the other nations wrote down all of the stories and the events, in order to bequeath true opinions and beliefs to those to come, such as they were. This is enough.

Joseph Kaspi’s remarks center around the ethnic origins of Job and his friends, as well as some related questions: Is the background of non-Jews of any importance? Is God revealed to non-Jews? How did books dealing with non-Jews come to be included in the Hebrew Bible? According to Kaspi, the book of Job is of great importance – in fact, it is of universal importance (“an eminent story, equally right for all nations and religions”) – and this is why it was included in the Hebrew Bible. In his view, this is also the case with respect to other books and stories in the Hebrew Bible which are not about Jews, and even ancient books not included in the Hebrew Bible. All of these books were written by “the ancient scribes of our nation and of the other nations,” and their educational purpose is to “bequeath true opinions and beliefs to those to come.” Joseph Kaspi does not state the identity of “one of the scribes among the ancient sages of our religion” who wrote the book of Job. It should be noted that Kaspi tends to refer to the authors of biblical books using anonymous designations, even when he accepts the traditional rabbinic identification of the author.[[126]](#footnote-126) In these cases, however, he uses terms that were commonly employed in the commentaries of that period – ‘*ha-sofer*’ (‘the scribe’), ‘*ha-meḥabber*’ (‘the author’), or ‘*ha-kotev*’ (‘the writer’). The expression, “one of the scribes among the ancient sages of our religion,” is unique. The possibility should thus be considered that Kaspi chose not to identify the book’s author by name in this case because he did not accept, or at least had doubts about, the traditional view that Moses wrote the book of Job.[[127]](#footnote-127)

As has been mentioned, the question of the origins of Job and his friends – specifically, whether they were Jews or non-Jews – was the subject of disagreement in the rabbinic tradition.[[128]](#footnote-128) Joseph Kaspi’s remarks should thus be understood against the backdrop of this long-standing and well-known discussion. However, the question of the characters’ origins is not tied inherently to the question of how the book was written or the identity of its author. It is certainly possible that Kaspi made this connection under the direct influence of Ibn Ezra’s commentary to Job 2:11. His assertions that the origins of the characters and the attendant related questions are not important, and that “the truth is equally right for all of the nations,”[[129]](#footnote-129) present the rabbinic discussions on these matters as unimportant and pointless – “empty inquiries,” in his words. However, perhaps Kaspi also intended to emphasize that there is nothing of fundamental importance at stake in the suggestion that Job was translated into Hebrew from another language.

Rabbi Zeraḥiah ben Isaac ben Shealtiel Ḥen of Barcelona (13th century) also does not explicitly mention Ibn Ezra’s view that Job was translated into Hebrew. Nevertheless, like Moses Kimḥi and Joseph Kaspi, it seems that he sought to refute it.[[130]](#footnote-130) According to Zeraḥiah, Moses wrote the book of Job, and the events described in it are a moral-theological parable: “The book of Job was written and composed through Moses’ understanding and by his abundant wisdom, and in it he aims to make known beliefs relating to divine providence; and it is possible that he composed it by means of the divine will emanating to him.” He goes on to write:

If you say that Moses our Master found their [i.e. Job’s and his friends’] remarks written, scattered, and dispersed, and then he connected them and wrote them down—then where did he find the words of God? Who composed them from God and wrote them down? If you say: Job and his friends wrote down the words of God, the questioner will further respond: It is an exceptional thing that there should be six speakers, and no difference in their poetical style! Each one speaks just like the other in the poetical style of his remarks.[[131]](#footnote-131)

Zeraḥiah rejected the view that Moses wrote the book on the basis of sources that he found. Since Zeraḥiah knew Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Job well,[[132]](#footnote-132) it is certainly reasonable to presume that Ibn Ezra’s commentary to Job 2:11 was the backdrop against which these remarks were made. Zeraḥiah presents a somewhat naïve, dogmatic-theological justification for his rejection of this view: It is not possible that the words of God could be found “scattered and dispersed.” Divine words are written “from God” – that is, by his prophets, in this case Moses. In his view, it is also not possible that Job and his friends could have been the ones who wrote down God’s words. Zeraḥiah bases this claim on an aesthetic consideration – the characters who speak in the book of Job have a recognizably identical style. This, he says, should lead one to conclude that the book was written in a single turn, and that it does not contain sources that were written in different places and by different authors.[[133]](#footnote-133)

It can thus be asserted that, with one exception (Duran), the medieval rabbis and commentators either ignored Ibn Ezra’s position, or rejected it indirectly.[[134]](#footnote-134) Conversely, modern scholars and thinkers, seeing themselves as liberated from rabbinic tradition, have had a far more positive attitude toward his position.[[135]](#footnote-135) Baruch Spinoza writes that …[[136]](#footnote-136) Spinoza identifies the suggestion that Job was translated into Hebrew with Ibn Ezra, though the way he articulates his remarks suggests the possibility that he might have been aware of additional discussion regarding the original language of the book (…). Further on…[[137]](#footnote-137)

Spinoza does not hide his positive view of Ibn Ezra’s position. However, on his view this position has not been proven at all. Unlike him, Judah Leib Ben-Ze’ev (1764-1811)[[138]](#footnote-138) accepted Ibn Ezra’s position fully:

What seems correct is that the better part of the book was written in Arabic, or in the Aramaic language which is similar to it, and Moses was the translator of this book into the Hebrew language – a work of art! […] Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra also tended toward the opinion that this book is a translation.[[139]](#footnote-139)

Ben-Ze’ev’s remarks here match the spirit of other critical scholars, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, who also held the view that Job was translated into Hebrew from another language.[[140]](#footnote-140) These scholars were divided between those who posited that the book had an Arabic source, those who posited an Aramaic or Idumean source, and those who suggested that the book reflects a combination of languages and dialects.[[141]](#footnote-141) The considerations motivating these scholars are similar in various ways to those that motivated Ibn Ezra. Like Ibn Ezra, these scholars observed the unique difficulties in the book of Job, and saw them as products of the translation process.[[142]](#footnote-142) Their conclusion was based on the seemingly trivial presupposition, characteristic of critical scholarship, that the language of the books of the bible is human language – the books of the bible, including Job, were written by and for human beings capable of understanding what is written in them. This presupposition accords with Ibn Ezra’s assumptions regarding language in general, and the language of the bible in particular. The non-Jewish origins of Job and some of his friends are also emphasized by some of these scholars, and in this, too, they bear similarity to Ibn Ezra.[[143]](#footnote-143) In any event, Ibn Ezra’s remark in his commentary on Job 2:11 is mentioned primarily by Jewish scholars.[[144]](#footnote-144)

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In his commentary on Job 2:11, Abraham Ibn Ezra discusses the historical period of Eliphaz the Temanite, and he suggests that Job was translated into Hebrew from another language. These two issues could each stand alone – it seems that it was the tradition attributing the authorship of Job to Moses which led Ibn Ezra to discuss them together. As I have tried to show, Ibn Ezra’s positions are based on various philological considerations, but also on presuppositions about the nature of language.

Ibn Ezra’s position with respect to the historical period of Eliphaz is unique – no one else discussed the timing of his activity with such precision. However, his views on the historical period and location of Job and the rest of his friends are similar to the opinions of other commentators. His suggestion that Job was translated into Hebrew from another language is different. This suggestion was not accepted by other medieval commentators; only in the modern period did it find supporters. The uniqueness of this suggestion, as well as its points of commonality with modern-critical interpretations of the book, caused it to leave a significant impression among scholars. I do not think I would be mistaken in asserting that we see this suggestion by Ibn Ezra as far-reaching – perhaps even shocking. In light of this, it is interesting to note that Ibn Ezra articulated his position in an offhanded fashion – there is no hint that he thought he was proposing a view carrying any unusual baggage. Moreover, Ibn Ezra presents his suggestion that Job was translated into Hebrew as an incidental remark, in the context of a localized discussion about the identity of Eliphaz the Temanite – and not, as we might have expected, in a more prominent place in the commentary, such as the introduction or his remarks on the first verse of the book.

It seems to me that the appropriate conclusion to draw from this is that Ibn Ezra himself did not think the identification of the author of Job was an especially crucial question for readers of his commentary. He was consistent in this respect. Ibn Ezra is well-known for his comments regarding the identification of specific verses in the Torah which were added to it after Moses’ time. However, even those comments appear incidentally, as digressions from discussion of the verses themselves – and not in the introduction to the commentary or at its beginning. Similar observations can be made regarding Ibn Ezra’s assertion that Isaiah 40:1 and onward are not prophecies by Isaiah son of Amoz; and about his remarks in his commentary on Lamentations 3:1 regarding the attribution of that book to Jeremiah the prophet.[[145]](#footnote-145) This evidence leads to a complicated conclusion. On one hand, Ibn Ezra devoted considerable attention to identifying writers of the books of the bible – or, at the very least, he devoted more attention to this subject than did most other medieval commentators. One might even say that his well-developed, refined remarks on this subject are among the most far-reaching expressions of independent thought on the question of biblical authorship in the Middle Ages. On the other hand, it seems that he did not regard this issue either as an especially fundamental one, or as one with significant implications for our understanding of the books themselves or his commentaries on them.

Having said that, there is one feature of Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Job 2:11 which differentiates it from his other remarks about authorship of biblical books. In his comments regarding later additions to the Torah, and regarding the second half of the book of Isaiah, Ibn Ezra made intentional use of allusion and esoteric language.[[146]](#footnote-146) It is almost certain that this stylistic pattern is related to the Muslim polemical assertion that the Jews’ holy books were forged. Acknowledgement that there are verses which were added to the books of the Bible would likely serve as supporting evidence for Muslim adversaries.[[147]](#footnote-147) On the other hand, Ibn Ezra’s suggestion that Job was translated into Hebrew from another language, though it appears only very briefly, is articulated in a clear and direct manner. The conclusion to be drawn is that Ibn Ezra did not think this remark would have that kind of negative influence. As such, he saw no reason not to articulate the point in a clear fashion.

1. … [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See, inter alia, … . The commentary is also mentioned in encyclopedia entries dealing with Ibn Ezra and Job, in several monographs and studies on Job, and in several modern commentaries on the book. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. I have cited the commentary as it appears in the electronic edition of *Miqra’ot Gedolot ha-Keter*. See also the following critical editions… [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. … [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. … “[A *yud*] at the end of the word signals […] attribution of an ancestor or city, like *reuveni* (‘Reubenite’) or *shomroni* (‘Samarian’)” … ; “There is also a relational *yud*, like *yisra’eli* (‘Israelite’), *shomroni* (‘Samarian’), ascribing an ancestor or city” … [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See, inter alia: … (“*midur –* like ‘*lagur*’ [to reside] in the Aramaic language”)… [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Jonah Filwarg suggested that Ibn Ezra sought to emphasize that Eliphaz the Temanite did not live many generations after Teman … It does not seem to me that there is substance to this claim. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Rashi identified Eliphaz the Temanite with Eliphaz the son of Esau, father of Teman; see Rashi’s commentary to Job 4:1. He also alludes to this in his commentary to Genesis 29:11. Conversely, Sa’adia Gaon and Yefet ben Ali suggested that Eliphaz the Temanite was the *son* of Teman and the grandson of Eliphaz the son of Esau… On Ibn Ezra’s familiarity with the commentaries on Job by Rashi, Sa’adia Gaon, and Yefet ben Ali, see: … A series of suggestions regarding the identity of Job, his historical period, and his location is presented in BT Bava Batra 15a-b. Some of these suggestions place him very early, and of course this implies an early placement of Eliphaz the Temanite as well … Alongside this, one also finds the suggestion that “Job did not exist and was not created, but rather was a parable.” A detailed list of suggestions is also found in Genesis Rabbah…, and here, too, the sequence ends with the statement that “Job did not exist and was not created.” (ibid.) For greater detail on the traditional stance regarding the identities and historical period of the characters who take part in the story of Job … [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. “*qarov mi-yemey moshe*”. Another manuscript has “*qarov elav bi-yemey moshe*” (“close to him in the days of Moses”), however this seems to be an error in transcription. This version could be connected to another manuscript, which reads: “*ve-ha-qarov elay she-hayah qarov mi-yemey moshe*” (“it seems most likely to me that he was close to the days of Moses”). Alternatively, perhaps these words were repeated because of what follows in the text: “*ve-ha-qarov elay ki hu sefer meturgam*” (“it seems most likely to me that it is a translated book.”) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. … His translation implies that, in Ibn Ezra’s view, Eliphaz lived precisely at the time of Moses … Conversely, Isaac Sarim suggests that the phrase “*she-haya qarov mi-yemey moshe*” (“that he was close to the days of Moses”) is a defective phrase which ought to be understood as implying a pronoun – “*qarov [lanu] mi-yemey moshe”* (“close[r] to [us than] the days of Moses”); that is, that Ibn Ezra’s view was that Eliphaz the Temanite lived after the time of Moses. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. … sees the expression “*qarov mi-*” (“close *from*”) in the sense of “*qarov le-*” (“close to”) as an example of the influence of the Arabic language on Ibn Ezra’s Hebrew. Indeed, the preposition used in Arabic is always “*min*” (“from”) – as in “*qarīb min*”, or as imperfect verb – *“yaqrab min*.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. … [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. … Ibn Ezra does not say anything about the appearance of the Tetragrammaton in Job 12:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Interestingly, precisely the same evidence with regard to the place of the Tetragrammaton in the book of Job led the editor of Rabbenu Bahya’s commentary on Job to the opposite conclusion: “You will not find Job mentioning the Tetragrammaton but rather such divine names as *El Elo-him*, or *Adonai*, or *Shaday*, and in light of this it would be appropriate for them to attribute the book of Job to Moses our Master, peace be upon him.” … For the formulation of Rabbenu Bahya, see … [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. … for all of Ibn Ezra’s comments condemning Yitzhaki… [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For greater detail on the connections between Job and Esau, see the next section. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The tradition which identifies Job with Jobab apparently also identifies Zophar with Zepho (Genesis 36:11), and Bildad with Bedad (Genesis 36:35). This interpretative tradition is known from the colophon at the end of the version of Job that appears in the Septuagint (see below), and from the opening of the *Testament of Job*: “Book of Job, called Jobab” … “I, Job, before the Lord called me Jobab” … [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. … [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. That is, letter variants due to phonetical or graphical similarity, metathesis, repetition of letters or omission of repeated letters… For examples and discussion of the different approaches of commentators and grammarians to these phenomena, see… On the close connection between the variation of names in the Bible and the phenomenon of letter variations, see: … [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For Ibn Ezra’s position on name changes in the Bible, see… For his position on letter variations, see: … [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The identification of Elihu as an Israelite is found in a number of *midrashim* and medieval commentaries. It is emphasized in Rashi’s commentary to BT Avodah Zarah 3a: There, the Talmud mentions Elihu along with a series of non-Jews, and Rashi notes that this must be a defective edition of the text, since it is not consistent with BT Bava Batra 15b, which states that Elihu was an Israelite: “Our version does not state that he was an Israelite, as is explained in Bava Batra.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. This identification is well known … [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. … [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. … [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibn Ezra’s suggestion that Elihu was named after his “mother’s family” might be intended to explain why we do not have more information about Barachel, and on this point the genealogical tree of Jair son of Manasseh is highly relevant. Jair was the grandson of Hezron father of Ram, and in fact he branches off from the same line as Elihu. However, Jair is referred to as a son of Manasseh, who was the grandfather of his grandmother (daughter of Machir), and not as a descendant of Judah, who was the grandfather of his grandfather. Ibn Ezra provides detail on this lineage in … [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. … [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. … suggests that Ibn Ezra’s use of this expression is also a result of the influence of the Arabic language. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. In this context, it is worth noting MS… which has “*ve-ha-nakhon be-eynay*” (“what is right in my eyes”) instead of “*ve-ha-qarov be-eynay*” … [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Sa’adia Gaon translated the word ‘*Shadday*’ into Arabic as ‘*al-kāfiy*’, the ‘Sufficient One’, that is, the one who provides for the world’s needs sufficiently … This understanding has a long interpretative history … [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. … [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. *al-qāhir bi-llah*, lit. “victorious by God.” [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. The full explanation reads as follows… The examples from Ezekiel 1:24 and Job 22:25 are brought to suggest, on the basis of context, an understanding of ‘*Shadday*’ as strength and resoluteness. It is thus possible that Ibn Ezra read the word ‘*beṣareykha*’(‘your treasure’) as ‘*mivṣareykha*’(‘your fortress’). Such a reading is reflected in the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and the Aramaic translation. The commentary of Rashbam on this verse also seems to reflect a text containing ‘*mivṣareykha*’. In this and a few other cases, it seems that Rashbam had before him a slightly different version of the text of Job. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. … “a word that is difficult to explain grammatically” … “difficult in context”. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. This is also true with respect to content-related difficulties, ‘*she’elot qashot*’ (‘difficult questions’) in Ibn Ezra’s terminology… These also require special interpretative efforts in order to achieve satisfactory resolution. Price has suggested that the word ‘*qasheh*’ (‘difficult’), when used by Ibn Ezra in a grammatical context, is synonymous with the adjective *‘zar*’ (‘irregular’) – for example, in the phrase, *‘milah zarah*’ (‘irregular word’). This seems to suggest that the difficulty, notwithstanding its strangeness or rarity, can be resolved convincingly… On the phrase ‘*milah zarah*’ in Ibn Ezra’s writing, see … [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. … [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. These points relate to the character of the ‘Adversary’ (‘*ha-satan*’), the sufferings of Job, the debate between Job and his friends, and the statements made by God. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. … [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. It should be noted that Ibn Ezra deals with the theological questions in the book of Job collectively, at the end of the running commentary. At the point of transition, he writes: “The explanations of terms in the book of Job are completed; now I will explain the meanings.” This structure suggests that Ibn Ezra’s comments on the difficulty of the book, which appear in the running commentary, are not intended to refer to theological challenges. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. … [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. … divided up Ibn Ezra’s comments on unique terms according to biblical books. At the top of the list was his commentary to Isaiah, which contains comments on 47 unique terms. The commentary to Job comes in second, with comments on 28 unique terms. In his commentary to Deuteronomy, Ibn Ezra comments on 18 unique words; and in his commentary to Psalms, he comments on 12. In the remaining books of the bible, he comments only on isolated cases of unique terms, or on none at all. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. … Ibn Ezra discusses the interpretative logic of these comparisons in his second commentary to Song of Songs 8:11: “One who grasps this composition might wonder why we say, ‘it is thus in the language of Ishmael.’ It is because of our insufficient knowledge. For what we know of the Holy Language is only from what is written in Scripture, from that which the prophets needed to say. We do not know the term for whatever they did not need to say. And it is because the language of Ishmael is very close to the Holy Language […] Therefore, in the case of any word that no other word in Scripture resembles, but that a word in the language of Ishmael resembles, we say, ‘perhaps its meaning is thus,’ even though the matter is in doubt.” On the closeness of Hebrew to Arabic and Aramaic, see below, note XXX. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. In Ibn Ezra’s commentary to Isaiah, in which he commented upon more unique terms than in the book of Job … he only turns to comparisons with Aramaic or Arabic 12 times… [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. This tendency comes to the fore in polemical contexts and around weighty and important comments, but also with respect to subjects about which there is broad agreement … This phenomenon is found in Ibn Ezra’s commentaries, and even in his commentary to Job. See, for example, the introduction to the commentary: “When I resolved to interpret Job, I first needed to interpret all of the words.” He clearly does not intend to claim that he interpreted every single word … [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. On Ibn Ezra’s extensive use of translations in his commentary to Job, see … [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. For example: “The translator knew this better than we do, but added a homiletical explanation” … “the translation, even though it is not entirely in accordance with the simple [literal] meaning, is good” … [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. … [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. For a theoretical articulation of the fundamental challenges involved in relaying a text from one language to another, see Moses Ibn Ezra, … “Each language behaves in its its own way.” Such can also be found in several commentators who came after Abraham Ibn Ezra. For example: “The truth is that the language of the commentary on the Mishna [by Maimonides] is sometimes faltering or defective, because it was translated from the Arabic language into Hebrew.” … Abraham Ibn Ezra himself addresses the great similarity between Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic in several places. For example, he writes: “The Holy Language, the Aramaic language, and the language of Kedar were the same language with the same words” … (‘the language of Kedar’ is one of the phrases that Ibn Ezra employs to refer to the Arabic language … ); … “The language of Ishmael, most of whose features are in the manner of the Holy Language” … However, he was also well aware of the grammatical and syntactical distance between the languages. For example, in his commentary to Ecclesiastes 10:9, he writes: “This phenomenon is not found in the Arabic language in the *qal* form but rather as an intransitive verb.” [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. One should also distinguish between an ambiguous translation lacking meaning, and one that is erroneous… [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. … What Ibn Ezra says here can be understood in two ways: That Onqelos deviated from a literal translation in cases where the meaning of the verse was clear even to the uneducated (‘*peshuto*’ referring to the biblical verse); or, alternatively, that Onqelos deviated from a literal interpretation because he sought to explain the text to the uneducated (*‘peshuto*’ referring to the verse in the Aramaic translation). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. It is certainly relevant here that Ibn Ezra was involved himself in the translation of books into Hebrew. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. … [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. The drawing of a distinction between the individual who wrote the core of the book and another who added headings and framing verses appears in other medieval commentaries, also with respect to other books. This approach is associated in particular with Rashbam and his school. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. I am referring here to Ibn Ezra’s well-known statements that certain passages in the Torah were added to it after Moses’ death. He ascribes some of these additions to Joshua … However, it is clear that he does not intend to ascribe all of them to Joshua, since the considerations which led him to deny that some of these passages were written by Moses apply to Joshua as well … See also Ibn Ezra’s remarks in his commentary to Isaiah 40:1 regarding the genealogical list of the children of Zerubbabel added to I Chronicles 3:19-24… See also his commentary to Lamentations 3:1, and for an analysis of this passage, see: … For further considerations in favor of the thesis that Ibn Ezra rejected the ascription of the book of Job to Moses, see the next section. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. … Ibn Ezra dates the ‘Book of the Wars of the Lord’ very early … If Ibn Ezra assumed that the ‘Book of the Wars of the Lord’ was a single book, then it seems this book must have been the work of many different authors who lived over several generations—including Moses. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. … [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ibn Ezra’s reliance on rabbinic interpretation of some of the laws in the Torah is not relevant to the present discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. I will make do here with two representative examples: (1) The commentary on Chronicles ascribed to Rashi explains the language and composition of the genealogical chapters in the book through the condition of the sources employed by Ezra the Scribe … (2) Abarbanel explains the unique language of the prophet Jeremiah on the basis of the prophet’s young age … [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. I cannot deal at all here with the question of which sources influenced Ibn Ezra as he consolidated his positions on language in general, and biblical language in particular. It seems that Ibn Ezra relied upon a range of sources and statements from different periods, Jewish and non-Jewish. His uniqueness seems to lie primarily in his creation of a comprehensive and consolidated synthesis, and his systematic application of this synthesis in his biblical commentaries. For discussion of some of these sources, see … [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. … Such as the following example, from his commentary to Psalms 4:5, among others: “Language is only an intermediary between the heart [i.e. mind] and the listeners.” [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. … The expression, “the Torah spoke in the language of human beings,” which is repeated (verbatim and with minor variations) in these commentaries, underwent significant changes of meaning over the generations: In early rabbinic literature, this expression was employed by those arguing against deducing laws from the Torah on the basis of linguistic and stylistic phenomena. In the Middle Ages, it began to also be used as a phrase for resolving the problems of corporeal and anthropomorphic depictions of God. Slowly, the expression began to denote a broad methodological position on scriptural texts, according to which they correspond with human beings’ capabilities for attainment… It seems that Ibn Ezra was not yet fully familiar with this expansion of the expression’s meaning, as in most instances of its appearance in his writings, the meaning is limited to the problem of anthropomorphism. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. “Due to poor knowledge of grammar, many people have not taken the correct path, like Menahem ben Saruq, who said that there are dedicated words which designate a meaning and its opposite. This cannot be the case *in any language* [emphasis mine], for words are allusions to what is in the heart [i.e. mind] of the speaker, and if a word is as he said, the hearer will not understand.” … On the implications of this semantic rule in Ibn Ezra’s commentaries … (Ibid. … On the Arabic sources for this rule). On his opposition to the presumption that the Torah incorporates statements with double meanings … On the polemical foundation for these claims … [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. … “Sages of the tradition fabricated meanings in their minds for complete and deficient spellings, and these are good—for completing those of deficient mind” … And many others such as these … [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. On the supremacy of Moses over all other created beings, see the collection of references… [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. … [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. … The ‘secrets’ which turn each precept into two are revealed only to the educated reader—one like Ibn Ezra himself, who possesses expertise not only in sacred subjects, but also in external wisdom, as suggested many times in Ibn Ezra’s writings, and summarized in detail in his book, *Yesod Mora’ ve-Sod ha-Torah*… [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. It is not possible to present a full picture of Ibn Ezra’s conception of prophecy due to the small number of relevant statements he made on the topic. It seems that he saw prophecy as a conscious intellectual act, and presumed that the prophet plays an active role in receiving it… It also seems that Ibn Ezra presumed the existence of various ranks of prophecy, though he rejected the idea of a set number of ranks: “There are many ranks of prophecy, but there is no way to enumerate them, for the power to prophesy of those suitable souls which receive the power of the Holy Spirit is not of one kind,” (Ibn Ezra, *Commentary to Zechariah*, Introduction). These ranks are tied to the intellectual and spiritual qualities of the individual receiving prophecy: “God is one and his speech is one, but the words [sic] change according to the power of each prophet, for they are not equal in rank; there are those whose prophecy occurs in a night vision, like Abraham and Gad the Seer, and also Isaiah,” (Ibn Ezra, *Commentary to Isaiah*, Introduction). [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. … [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Some versions have ‘*le-ṭe‘amim*,’ so that it would read: “he assembles [them] into meanings.” [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. … In the manuscript and in the printed editions that follow it we find a variation which seems to contain a series of scribal errors: “*ha-milim hem nekhoḥot ve-dimyonot yaḥad shem ha-shem bi-shmot ha-navi*.” In this version ‘*nekhoḥot*’ (‘correct things’) are true prophecies… This implies that ‘*dimyonot*’ (‘imaginings’) are the opposite… It is not at all clear why God would give false ‘imaginings’ to his prophets. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Prophecies penetrate the ‘soul of the prophet’ as ‘imaginings’ and are not given to him in a verbal manner as others suggested… These words are directed against the following remarks by Dunash: “[God] commanded his prophets to write it in the books named after them, which are the books of God (may his name be blessed and recollection of him exalted). I am astounded by those who say that the language of Isaiah is clear, and Amos as well, for this is what is right in his eyes. This is an error, because all of the words of Scripture are the words of the Holy One, blessed be he.” Cf., inter alia: “The speech of a prophet at the time when he is enwrapped by the Holy Spirit is in every part directed by the Divine Influence, the prophet himself being powerless to alter one word.” … The quote from Sa’adia Gaon, “*ṣaḥ ve-‘amus*” (“clear and dense”) should therefore be corrected to “*ve-khen ‘amos*” (“and Amos as well”), or alternatively, as Geiger suggested: “*ve-lo khen ‘amos*” (“but not Amos”). [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Some understand the sentence … as relating to the sanctification of the prophet … however, it seems to me that it is more appropriate to compare it … This ‘power’ is thus the living, physical constitution of an individual from the moment of his birth… [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. The word *toledet* has two meanings in Ibn Ezra’s writings: It often denotes the physical constitution of a created being – the ‘power’ given by God to the creature at its birth… However, the word sometimes denotes the nature and character of a created being. For example: “the nature [*toledet*] of a man is likely to do evil, as in ‘the inclination of man’s heart is evil’” … In the statement under discussion, Ibn Ezra notes that the prophet … It thus seems that, in this case, Ibn Ezra distinguishes between the terms ‘*koaḥ*’ (‘power’) and ‘*toledet*’ (‘nature’), and that ‘*toladeto*’ (‘his *toledet*’)should be understood as meaning the nature and character of the prophet. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. The word ‘*mishpat*’ (‘law’) appears many times in Ibn Ezra’s writings as part of the phrase, ‘*mishpat ha-lashon*’ (‘law of language’). The meaning of this expression is ‘manner,’ ‘pattern,’ or ‘style.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. According to Ibn Ezra, the Torah contains only one passage that reflects divine speech in a word-for-word manner – the Ten Commandments in the book of Exodus… Another exceptional passage is the Ten Commandments as they appear in the book of Deuteronomy, in which the words of God in Exodus are integrated with interpretations by Moses… All of the remaining verses in the Torah are the words of Moses himself… In addition, there are some verses added at a stage later than Moses (see below). [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. … [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. … What Ibn Ezra says here fits with the widely-held traditional Jewish opinion, according to which the books of the Bible were written by prophets like Moses, Samuel, and Jeremiah, but also by sages – the book of Psalms is attributed to David and other poets, while Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes are attributed to Solomon. In a *beraita* in BT Bava Batra, the books of Solomon and the book of Isaiah are ascribed to Hezekiah and his faction, and several books are ascribed to the ‘Men of the Great Assembly,’ among whom there were several prophets, but also some well-known sages… It is generally recalled that Ezra was the leader of the ‘Men of the Great Assembly’: “the court of Ezra, known as the ‘Men of the Great Assembly.’” … [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. “This whole book was said my means of the Holy Spirit”…; “The book of Psalms was said by means of the Holy Spirit” … and close to twenty times throughout Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Psalms; “He spoke this book by means of the Holy Spirit” …, and see also, inter alia: “This scroll was written by means of the Holy Spirit” … [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. The context in which this passage appears is not concerned with the question of whether the books of the Writings were written by means of the Holy Spirit, but rather with drawing a fundamental distinction between the Torah, which is the “foundation of all the precepts” and the “source of life” (Ibid., 70); the books of the Prophets, which contain prophecies about the future and also prophecies that were realized in the past; and the books of the Writings, which do not contain prophecies about the future and are ascribed a lower level of importance. See also the introduction to Ibn Ezra’s first commentary on Psalms: “Others say that this book [Psalms] does not contain prophecy regarding the future. It is for this reason that the ancient ones wrote it with Job and the Scrolls [i.e. the rabbis in BT Bava Batra 14b included Psalms among the section of the Hebrew Bible known as the Writings].” For a detailed analysis, see … Nevertheless, it seems that *all* the books in this category have in common that they were written by means of the Holy Spirit. This is certainly not unique to the book of Psalms, since, as noted above, Ibn Ezra claims that the Song of Songs and Esther were also ‘said’ by means of the Holy Spirit.. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. In this respect, Ibn Ezra is different from other commentators whose commentaries on the Torah, when compared with their commentaries on the books of the Prophets and the Writings, show flexibility with respect to methodologies. One can find flexibility of methodologies in the corpus of Ibn Ezra’s writings as well, but in his case the distinction is only between his commentaries on the Bible, on one hand, and the monographs that he wrote with his liturgical poems, on the other. On this last point, see … [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. … [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. … [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. For a summary, see … [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. This is already implied by … Of course, these verses are only perceived as anachronistic if one accepts the traditional assumption that Moses wrote the Torah. On this point, see… [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. One example suffices to demonstrate this point: Jacob’s speech to the tribes in Genesis 49 … [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Most scholars have ignored these questions, and those who have considered them have generally been forced into convoluted explanations. Thus, in addressing the issue of why Ibn Ezra rejected the possibility that Moses might have acquired knowledge about later events through prophecy, it has been proposed that the Holy Spirit does not come to prophets for the sake of unimportant details… Regarding the issue of why Ibn Ezra does not deny Mosaic authorship of other verses which seem anachronistic, it has been proposed that he distinguished between two types of additions: additions of a word or a few words in the Torah “to explain what Moses wrote,” which Ibn Ezra accepted; and longer additions, which he rejected… This proposal clearly does not hold water, since according to Ibn Ezra, the whole of Deuteronomy 34 was added by Joshua.. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. …The suggestion that ‘Azazel’ is composed of two words—‘*ez*’ and *a-z-l*—is adopted by other commentators and grammarians… This is also reflected in the Septuagint and the Vulgate, and there are even some modern supporters of this interpretation… [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Having said that, it should be noted that Ibn Ezra did not rush to employ this interpretative option. When he could find an explanation for an unusual linguistic expression, even a somewhat forced one, he did so… [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. … [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. … [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. … In this context it should be noted that Ibn Ezra understood even the prophecies of the “servant of the Lord” (Isaiah 52:13-53:12) to be speaking about the prophet himself… In this respect, too, his approach differs from what was traditionally accepted… [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. … [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. In modern scholarship, the identification of a second Isaiah is associated with Eichhorn more than anyone else. Though he was not the first to divide the book into parts associated with two different prophets, he was the first to discuss this issue in depth… [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. It should be noted that Ibn Ezra raises the possibility that the turnaround in the prophet fortunes took place after his death… Nevertheless, he does not accept this suggestion, and it seems that the manner in which the prophet is addressed in Isaiah 49:7-8 is the decisive consideration here. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. The connection between Job and Uz the son of Nahor is also mentioned in a midrash, and one of the possibilities raised regarding the identity of Job is that he was in fact Uz the son of Nahor… Other commentators also discussed the connection between Job and Uz the son of Nahor… [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. The connection between Esau and Edom is taken for granted… One should distinguish between the land of Uz and Edom … However, we do not possess any text in which Ibn Ezra addresses this verse. For an explicit rejection of Ibn Ezra’s position that Job was among the descendants of Esau, and his reliance upon Lamentations 4:21, see… [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Genesis 22:21-22 discusses the birth of Uz, first-born of Nahor, and also mentions his brothers, Kemuel “the father of Aram,” and Bethuel, the father of Rebecca, who is called elsewhere “Bethuel the Aramean of Padan-Aram.” (Genesis 25:20) In Genesis 10:23 we see that one of the sons of Aram himself was Uz: “The sons of Aram: Uz…” In Genesis 36:28, the genealogical tree of Seir mentions that “the sons of Dishan were these: Uz and Aran.” It is possible that ‘Aran’ was taken to refer to Aram. This tree, like all the genealogical trees in Genesis 36, was understood as descending from the line of Esau, whose connection with Seir is taken for granted… (Some suggested in the past that Ibn Ezra presumed the phenomenon of substitution between the letters *mem* and *nun* [as in Aram/Aran] only occurred in cases of ‘servant letters’ and nouns in the pattern *pa‘alun*.) [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. In Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Isaiah 2:6 he writes: “What is right in my view is that they were filled with the wisdom of the people of the East [*beney qedem*], as he wrote: ‘Aram from the East, and Philistia from the West’ (Isaiah 9:11).” [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. … [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. … Uriel Simon cites this commentary of Ibn Ezra in a series of examples indicating “Ibn Ezra’s low level of knowledge of the geography of the land of Israel and its neighbors.” … [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. As noted, Kemuel “the father of Aram” and Bethuel “the Aramean” were among the descendants of Nahor, and of course the son of Bethuel was Laban the Aramean. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. … On the connections between Uz and the Arameans, see … [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. For a summary, see: … [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. It seems that the commentators identified the ‘children of Keturah’ primarily with the Midianites, because of their significant place in biblical literature… [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. … [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. On the association of the descriptor ‘the Naamathite’ with the family or city of Naamah, see… [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. The possibility that Ibn Ezra thought the speeches in Job were originally spoken in Aramaic has been expressed before, though without a supporting argument… Conversely, Abraham Kahana presumed that Ibn Ezra though Job was translated from Arabic… [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. … [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. A very interesting discussion about these questions can be found in Jacob Qirqisani’s introduction to the Torah (Way 17). It seems that Qirqisaniconnected the transition from the language in which the characters spoke ‘in reality’ into the Hebrew language of the Bible with the principle that “the Torah speaks the language of human beings.” … [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. … [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. … [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. According to this, the name Job (*Iyyov* / איוב) is derived from the Hebrew word for enemy (*Oyev* / אויב) …, and at the end of the book his name was changed in light of his good fate. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. … Further on in the colophon, Genesis 36:31 is cited… [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. The *Testament of Job* was apparently written around the second century CE, and it may have preceded the version of Job in the Septuagint. Nevertheless, it is impossible to determine whether one of these sources relied upon the other regarding the question of Job’s identity, or whether they share another common source. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. On the identification of Job’s wife with Dina, see: … [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. See, in particular: “It is similarly written in the books of chronicles of the Christians and the Greeks that Moses wrote it, and that Job is Jobab son of Zerah from Bozrah, among the kings of Edom.” … [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. … [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. ... [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. … [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. … [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Further on, Ibn Yaḥya reiterates emphatically that Moses wrote the book of Job. He distinguishes between different levels of divine revelation experienced by Moses: When he wrote the book of Job – this was “writing by means of the Holy Spirit.” When he wrote the Torah – “a spirit of prophecy came over him through a glass that shines, above which there is no higher level.” (Ibid.) [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. One exception is Judah Moscato (Italy, d. 1589). In the introduction to his commentary on the *Kuzari*, Moscato deals with the fundamental challenges involved in translating books (“the nature of transcription,” in his words), and in this context he mentions Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Job 2:11. This does not imply necessarily that Moscato accepted Ibn Ezra’s position; rather, it seems he was interested in the general message contained in Ibn Ezra’s statement—namely, that translated books are difficult to interpret… [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. This is the case in two anonymous commentaries on Job whose authors knew Ibn Ezra’s commentary on the book well… This is also the case of Samuel… [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. … [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. This is manifestly apparent in Rashbam’s commentary and his attitude toward Rashi…. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. It should be noted that Kaspi wrote a super-commentary on Ibn Ezra’s commentary on the Torah, and he methodically ignored Ibn Ezra’s comments regarding verses that were added to the Torah after Moses’ time… In light of this, it is not surprising that Kaspi’s commentary to Job did not explicitly mention Ibn Ezra’s suggestion that the book was translated into Hebrew. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. For example, Joseph Kaspi often refers to the author of the book of Samuel by the anonymous designation, “the book’s writer” (…), even though it is clear that he identified the writer as Samuel himself, as can be seen in his commentary to II Samuel 11:6: “The sage Samuel, this book’s writer, wrote it.” See also his commentary on I Samuel 8:9: “The book’s writer summarized here, for there is no doubt that God set before him at this point all that is written afterwards, and that Samuel did not add of his own volition.” [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Joseph Kaspi noted that the story of the events described in Job took place “in his [the author’s] time, or slightly before him.” He does not comment at all regarding the period of Job and his friends, and it is possible that he accepted the common view among medieval commentators, according to which the events took place in the period of Moses or slightly earlier (see above, note 000). If this is the case, then even if Kaspi did not accept the view that Moses was the author, he still presumed that the book was written approximately during Moses’ period. Having said that, it should be noted that Kaspi’s polemical engagement with the view of Maimonides suggests that the events in the book took place after the giving of the Torah: “Why did God not say to Job: ‘Why did you denigrate me, by being drawn to the distorted view of Aristotle, or by denying the resurrection of the dead? You should have been drawn to the view of Eliphaz, which is the view of the Torah that I gave to Israel, the chosen people, on Mount Sinai!”… [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. … [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. This emphasis is characteristically Maimonidean, as in: “hear the truth from whomever says it” … [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. … [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. … Zeraḥiah apparently wrote his commentary on Job in Rome, in the years 1290/1… [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. For some of Zeraḥiah’s polemical statements against Ibn Ezra on Job, see … [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Zeraḥiah’s dogmatic position did not lead him to deny the fact that Job contains unique language. In his commentary on Job 16:15, in language quite similar to that of Ibn Ezra, he writes: “This book contains many irregular words which have no parallel in the Bible, but rather only in the Arabic language” … In light of this remark, Abraham Kahana wrote that Zeraḥiah thought the book of Job was translated from Arabic… [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Naḥmanides and Gersonides also ignored Ibn Ezra’s opinion. In the introduction to his commentary on Job, Naḥmanides does not take a decisive position regarding the attribution of the book to Moses: “Some of our rabbis said that Moses our Master wrote it, and that the matter of this man and those friends of his was relayed to him by divine force, like the book of Genesis was relayed to him by divine force.” However, elsewhere, he is more decisive on this matter: “Our rabbis said that Moses our Master wrote it, and this is certainly appropriate for him. The book was relayed to him by divine force, like the book of Genesis and the portion of Balaam”; … Baḥya, following Naḥmanides… It seems that Gersonides also attributed the book of Job to Moses. In the introduction to his commentary on Job, he writes: “Moses our Master, peace be upon him, invented this wonderful story for us, in which all of the doubts raised are solved [the question of free will and divine providence is clarified] by way of speculative inquiry.” It should be noted that Gersonides places Job earlier in time, and might have presumed him to have lived at the time of the forefathers. See his commentary to Job 5:12 (‘explanation of terms’): “The Torah had not been given in Job’s time.” [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. On this point there is a difference between scholars with a critical orientation, on one hand, and modern rabbinic scholars who remain attached to the rabbinic tradition, on the other. The latter group, like the medieval commentators before them, tend to ignore Ibn Ezra’s position. Even some rabbinic scholars who did not accept the traditional view ascribing the book of Job to Moses nevertheless chose to ignore Ibn Ezra’s position, which they found to be too far-reaching. Sternberg, for example, devotes many pages to discussion of the author of Job, its contents, and its language, and his conclusion is that the book was written by Ezra, whom he identifies with Malachi (See BT Megilah 15a) – yet he does not say a word about Ibn Ezra’s position; … Similarly, David Solomon Sassoon devotes a long discussion to the authorship of Job, and his conclusion is that the book was written in the time of Jeremiah. He also does not mention Ibn Ezra’s position… [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. … [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. … [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. For more on Ben-Ze’ev and his importance, see… For earlier scholarship on him, see ibid…. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. … [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. In fact, this was proposed much earlier. See Voltaire, in the entry on ‘Job’, who presumes that “the Hebrews translated it from Arabic.” See also Ilgan, who suggested cautiously that there may be an Arabic source for certain expressions in the book of Job… [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Proponents of an Arabic source include… Proponents of an Aramaic source include… For the suggestion of an Idumean source, see: … For proponents of the suggestion that the book combines languages and dialects, see… While the view that Job was translated into Hebrew from another language was accepted only by some scholars, a larger group of scholars posited that the book reflects a different (southern or northern) dialect of Hebrew; for bibliographical details, see: … [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Modern scholars and commentators on Job are unanimous in their view that the book’s language is uniquely difficult. Nevertheless, the vast majority of them do not doubt the book’s Hebrew origins. It should be noted that that scholars typically make do with a general remark about the difficulty of the book’s language, without trying to specify the nature of these difficulties. In this respect, Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Job 2:11 is part of a general trend in the history of the book’s interpretation. Cf.: “‘Difficult text’ is not a scientific term, but rather a subjective-empirical one. What is difficult for one reader might be lucid to another. […] Nevertheless, the definition of the book of Job as a ‘difficult book’ is not subjective, since everyone agrees with this assertion, even if they might disagree regarding the theoretical definition of the term, ‘difficult book.’” … [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. There are some scholars who noted the absence of the Tetragrammaton from the speeches in Job and, like Ibn Ezra in his *Book of the Name*, saw this as an indication of the book’s origins. … Scholars also mentioned the colophon at the end of the Septuagint version of Job, and apparently saw it as additional supportive evidence for the view that the book was translated into Hebrew from another language. As noted, there is no clue suggesting that Ibn Ezra was familiar with a tradition of this kind. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. … [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. … [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. … Even his comments regarding the attribution of the book of Lamentations to Jeremiah are notably ambiguous. (This is deserving of research in its own right.) For discussion of Ibn Ezra’s enigmatic style and his extensive use of secrets and allusions, see… [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. On Ibn Ezra’s familiarity with Muslim polemics against the Bible, see: … It also comes through indirectly in his rejection of the tradition of *tiqquney soferim* (scribal corrections), which would be liable to assist the Muslim claim of *taḥrīf* (‘distortion’ of the holy books by Jews and Christians)… On the substance of Muslim polemics against the Bible, see: … For an example of its reflection in Jewish biblical commentary, see, for example: … [↑](#footnote-ref-147)