BOOK REVIEW

Ma’amar al ha-Derashot ve-ha-Aggadot le-Rabbeinu Avraham ben ha-Rambam, edited with notes, introduction, and a revised translation by Moshe Maimon (Monsey, 5780), 97 pages.

Perush ha-Torah le-Rabbeinu Avraham ben ha-Rambam: Bereishit, corrected edition based on the unicum manuscript and editio princeps, with a revised translation, notes, and introduction by Moshe Maimon (Monsey, 5780), 678 pages.

Perush ha-Torah le-Rabbeinu Avraham ben ha-Rambam: Shemot, corrected edition based on the unicum manuscript and editio princeps, with a revised translation, notes, and introduction by Moshe Maimon (Monsey, 5781), 832 pages.

Reviewed by
Shimon Altshul

In the reading rooms of the National Library, and in many houses in Bnei Brak and Jerusalem, many scholars sit and study the same topics as academics but without academic degrees, without traveling to conferences, without aspirations toward an academic appointment. The history of medieval and modern rabbinic authorities, the stories of their compositions, the manuscripts and their provenances, variant customs, disputes both ancient and alive—all of these preoccupy a non-negligible group of yeshiva graduates, Haredi in dress and behavior, who publish articles in “non-academic” journals of Torah scholarship and produce corrected editions of sacred texts, some of which can even be considered quasi-critical editions.1

One such young man, R. Moshe Maimon, recently produced two such “quasi-critical editions” of the works of his forbear, R. Abraham son of Maimonides, and, in so doing, restored an intellectual and spiritual treasure that has been hidden for 700 years.2 Maimon is a teacher

2 The Harvard University Chaucer website defines a critical edition as follows: “Any edition that attempts to construct a text of a work using all the available evidence is ‘critical,’ whatever its methodology. Critical editions require collation of the different manuscript witnesses, and the construction of a reading text out of the results of that collation . . . [and] encourage readers to think about the work, more than about its specific manuscript presentation, and may well be more informative on such topics as the work’s sources, historical context, form, style, and other literary
and scholar, and a graduate of yeshivot in New York, Jerusalem, and Lakewood. His dedication to this project contains a personal facet: his family immigrated to Seattle from Turkey in 1924, and carries the tradition that they are direct descendants of Maimonides, hence the family name, Maimon. Of the volumes under consideration here, the first is an annotated edition of R. Abraham’s short chapter on rabbinic aggada, titled by the editor Ma’amur ‘al ha-Derashot ve-al ha-Aggadot, which serves as a precursor to the second and third volumes, impressive editions of R. Abraham’s lengthy Torah commentary on Genesis and Exodus, including Maimon’s learned introduction to R. Abraham’s methodology. These three handsomely-produced volumes are valuable contributions to both the academic library and the shelves of the beit midrash.

R. Abraham (1186–1237), the only child of Maimonides, was a theologian, exegete, communal leader, mystical pietist, and physician in Ayyubid Egypt of the thirteenth century. Little was known about him prior to the discovery of the Cairo Geniza, which has preserved some of his writings, in part autographic. Most of his literary works were lost over time. In the mid-nineteenth century, scholars of the Wissenschaft movement published three monographs from manuscripts in European libraries that R. Abraham composed in defense of his father.3 His few surviving works, written in Judeo-Arabic, gradually became available to scholars over the last 100 years, as they were translated into English and Hebrew. The publication of portions of R. Abraham’s Sefer ha-Maspik4 and his responsa5 in the 1920s and 1930s, Wiesenberg’s edition of his biblical commentary to Genesis and Exodus in 1959,6 and S. D. Goitein’s publication of key Geniza fragments pertaining to R. Abraham’s career in the 1950s and 1960s, all paved the way for modern scholarship to “wrest R. Abraham’s legacy matters” (https://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu/types-editions). Maimon’s editions conform to this definition.

3 The three are: Milhamot Hashem (Vilnius, 1821) on the Maimonidean controversy; Birkat Avraham (Lyck, 1865), on the Mishneh Torah; and Ma’ase Nissim (Paris, 1867) on the Sefer ha-Mitzvot. All have been republished and the last two have become regular fixtures of Talmudic study. The first is required reading for the study of the Maimonidean controversy.


from the brink of obscurity.”

Today one can find books, dissertations, and dozens of scholarly articles about R. Abraham and his milieu. Avraham Grossman attributes R. Abraham’s current popularity in academia to three factors: his relationship to his father, one of the greatest figures in Jewish history; the fact that his pietism reflects spiritual independence and diverges from his father’s philosophical worldview; and the unmistakable influence of Islamic mysticism—Sufism—on his thought. R. Abraham’s popularity, however, extends far beyond the academic domain, as we will demonstrate below.

Ma’amor ‘al ha-Derashot ve-al ha-Aggadot

The Ma’amor concerning aggada was not composed as a separate essay, but is a chapter from R. Abraham’s long-lost magnum opus, The Compendium for the Servants of the Lord (in Arabic: Kifayat al-Abidin; in Hebrew: Ha-Maspik le-Ovedei Hashem), completed around 1232, a sum of theology, halakha, and ethics. It reads like a flowing, concise reformulation of the halakhic way of life within a spiritual, pietistic framework. “This halachic guide served to remind the common traveler on life’s way of his halakhic obligations, as it encouraged him to strive for spiritual perfection.” It was originally an immense work of ten volumes, but only two have survived, and those only partially. The portion that constitutes the Ma’amor was anonymously translated from Judeo-Arabic into Hebrew before the sixteenth century, but was not published until 1836, in the periodical Kerem Hemed. It appeared again in 1861 in Kovetz Teshuvot Ha-Rambam, and then again in 1877 in the Vilna edition of Ein Yaakov, which gave it wide circulation. It has since been included in subsequent editions of Ein Yaakov, and has been translated into English.

Maimon divides the text into six chapters, then subdivides the chapters into smaller units, and provides descriptive headings to each unit.

7 Elisha Russ-Fishbane, Judaism, Sufism, and the Pietists of Medieval Egypt: A Study of Abraham Maimonides and His Times (Oxford, 2015), 25. A definitive, remarkable study, this comprehensive work was the winner of the 2015 American Academy for Jewish Research’s Salo Wittmayer Baron Book Prize.


9 This succinct formulation is taken from the dissertation of Rabbi Dr. Ezra Labaton z”l, titled A Comprehensive Analysis of Rabenu Abraham Maimuni’s Biblical Commentary (Brandeis University, 2012), v.

10 S. H. Glick, En Jacob: Legends of the Talmud (New York, 1922), I, vi–xvi; Abraham Y. Finkel, Ein Yaakov: The Ethical and Inspirational Teachings of the Talmud (Jason Aaronson, 1999), xxvi–xxxi.
In the introduction, he provides a complete history of all the earlier printed editions, and describes the discovery and publication of a large Geniza fragment of the Judeo-Arabic original by Professor Elazar Hurvitz,11 which covers about one-third of the *Ma'amor*. The Hebrew text produced by R. Moshe Meiselman in his book *Torah, Chazal & Science*, serves as the basis for this edition.12 Since the extant manuscripts of the Hebrew translation were apparently copied from the same original, Maimon dispensed with a textual apparatus and prepared an eclectic text, choosing the clearest readings on a case-by-case basis, and, noting the variants in the footnotes, creating a much more user-friendly edition of the *Ma'amor*. The explanatory notes are intended to make the somewhat awkward translation from Judeo-Arabic to Hebrew more readable and help readers understand the context and follow the flow of ideas and argument. In addition, Maimon provides continuous references to similar passages from both R. Abraham's and Maimonides' writings, and shows how the son's ideas reflect or differ from those of his father. Some of his discussions go well beyond the text and expand upon the issues it raises.

In his opening remarks to the volume, Maimon identifies his intended audience as the learned reader who is not familiar with the Andalusian rationalist approach to the writings of Hazal, and thus is likely to suspect its legitimacy. His goal is to educate “those that are unfamiliar with the methods of study based on the principles established by our ancestors, the Babylonian Geonim and their successors, the great scholars of Spain, [and] have difficulty comprehending their approach” (5). He then summarizes the history of the conflict between rationalist and anti-rationalist approaches to understanding aggada and how this gave rise to the Maimonidean controversies. He claims emphatically that understanding the approach of Maimonides and his son and recognizing its legitimacy is a worthy endeavor for his Haredi readers, even if they choose not to accept it (11).

11 Elazar Hurvitz, “*Ma'amor al Odot Derashot Hazal*” in S. Hoenig & L. Stitskin, eds., *Joshua Finkel Festschrift*, Hebrew section, 139–168 (Yeshiva University Press, 1974). Another small fragment was found in the library of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, and both are included in Moshe Meiselman, *Torah, Chazal & Science* (Israel Bookshop, 2013), 722–768.

12 While Maimon recognizes the contribution made by R. Meiselman's carefully prepared edition, he rejects the latter's contention that R. Abraham may not have written the first part of the essay. For more on the “controversial” passage, see my Appendix to this review.
Commentary on the Torah

In 1232, R. Abraham wrote to R. Isaac b. Israel Ibn Shuwaykh, head of the Baghdad Academy:

True enough I have begun the Torah commentary of which thou hast heard, and which I would have completed within a year or so were I to find relief from the sultan’s service and other tasks... I have covered only close to half the book of Genesis of the Torah commentary I am composing. When I shall have concluded the revision of [my other] composition [referring to Sefer ha-Maspik], of which the greater part is [already] finished, I shall endeavor with all my might to complete the Torah commentary and subsequently also a commentary on the Prophets and the Hagiographa, Heaven willing (Rosenblatt, vol. 1, 124–125).

He did complete Sefer ha-Maspik and circulated copies of it, but was only able to begin his second project, finishing a first draft of his Genesis and Exodus commentaries before his death in 1237 at the age of 51. This preliminary version lacks the polish and editing the author gave to Sefer ha-Maspik, and it apparently never circulated, with conceivably the only copy remaining in the possession of his family. The one and only surviving manuscript was commissioned in Aleppo by R. Abraham’s great-great-grandson, R. David b. Joshua, the last nagid (“prince,” leader) of the Maimonidean line, and contains R. David’s marginal notes. It was completed in 1375, and may have been copied from R. Abraham’s autograph. It found its way to the Bodleian Library in Oxford in the seventeenth century, and was discovered there in the nineteenth century. It was published in 1959, over 700 years after it was composed. A truncated edition containing the Hebrew translation alone was published in 1984. Both editions are long out of print.

Maimon decided to issue a new edition of the commentary with a revised translation, utilizing the new Judeo-Arabic dictionaries of Joshua Blau and Mordechai Akiva Friedman, and the online resources of the

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13 On comparing the style of Sefer ha-Maspik with that of the commentary, it becomes clear that the latter is by no means a finished product, and Maimon echoes Weisenberg’s view that it should be regarded as a draft document. It never circulated among readers of Judeo-Arabic, and is not quoted by later scholars, unlike Sefer ha-Maspik.

14 Joshua Blau, A Dictionary of Medieval Judeo-Arabic Texts (Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2006).

15 Mordechai Akiva Friedman, A Dictionary of Medieval Judeo-Arabic in the India Book Letters from the Geniza and Other Texts (Ben-Zvi Institute, 2016).
Friedberg Judeo-Arabic Project. He scrutinized every line of text, and introduced punctuation, paragraphing, the complete text of the biblical verses, and reworked the elements of syntax and wording that made the original translation clumsy to use and difficult to understand. The lengthy footnotes evaluate the textual and substantive comments of R. Dr. Ephraim Weisenberg’s commentary, Nehor Shraga, trace etymologies, clarify problematic sections of the text, and provide comparisons to R. Abraham’s other works and those of his father. Maimon uncovers the Geonic underpinnings of R. Abraham’s parshanut in the biblical commentaries of R. Sa’adya, R. Samuel b. Hofni, and others, all of which are readily available today in new editions but were only partially available to Weisenberg. He scour the whole range of biblical exegesis and Talmudic literature—particularly Maimonides’ writings—in order to situate R. Abraham’s interpretations and place them in context. His knowledge of the literature is impressive, and often his own comments and suggestions are astute and insightful. In all, he makes use of a wide range of resources, from Wissenschaft texts to the most current academic articles, including the works of academics whose credentials may seem “inappropriate” to some of his readers.

Reading his introduction and notes is not always a straightforward task. Maimon comes from the traditional beit midrash, not academia, and he writes in the standard rabbinic idiom of the current yeshiva world, at times employing biblical grammar as well as inserting the occasional modern Hebrew term. Thus, his sentences include frequent use of standard abbreviations which are familiar to the average yeshiva student, but he provides no list explaining those abbreviations for those readers who may benefit from it. At times, he tends towards flowery, poetic language, alliteration, and antiquated terminology, which is superfluous to the average reader and can be confusing. Maimon writes that he would have liked to discuss R. Abraham’s sources and other aspects of his methodology, including the role of linguistics in the commentary, but will have to leave that for a later edition. Most regrettably, he also did not provide us with an index of texts and authorities cited, nor a topic index, which would have been a boon for further research. Hopefully, they can also be provided in a future edition. The only utility with which we are provided is a selection of “significant” commentaries of R. Abraham, parasha by parasha, compiled by R. Sholom Spitz.

17 See, e.g., his remarks on p. 18, fn. 42.
18 Spitz is Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Shaar HaTorah, of Queens, NY.
**Evaluations of the Commentary**

In reviewing these new editions, one needs to know something of the personality of R. Abraham and the nature of his commentary. The commentary is original and thought-provoking, and covers issues such as the analysis of rabbinic *midrashim* and their relationship to the *peshat*; the order of the biblical text; etymological, linguistic, and stylistic observations; and an assessment of psychological, philosophical, and theological problems. His discussions include the symbolism of the struggles of Jacob and Esau in the light of Jewish-Christian polemics, and focus on drawing practical ethical lessons from the behavior of biblical personalities.

The publisher of the first edition, renowned British rabbi, scholar, and philanthropist Solomon David Sassoon, was enchanted with R. Abraham’s commentary. He wrote in his introduction to his edition:

> The praises of this commentary cannot be overstated, as every reader will recognize the special grace attached to it, the beauty and sweetness of its new explanations through which the author shines light on many verses. One can actually feel how the sainted author, with the sensitivity in his soul, uncovered many, many gentle and refined intentions hidden in the simple language of our holy Torah.19

R. Abraham’s unique personality gave him the ability to “include under one rubric strict *peshat* interpretation, sensitive literary reading, and an undisguised mystical tendency, albeit measured and controlled.”20 The commentary is further described as

> still imbued with the spirit of the Golden Age of Andalusian scholars. Though his overall orientation is directed towards the literal meaning of the biblical text, like them he admits philosophical speculation in scriptural interpretation, and adopts an independent attitude towards aggadah. However, he does not altogether disregard the traditional, homiletic approach and his attitude towards midrashic interpretation displays a certain originality.21

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19 Sassoon writes that he had encountered the commentary in the Bodleian Library seven years before publishing his edition, and rejoiced when he realized that it had survived, but was saddened when he realized no one could read it. He undertook the cost of the entire project, from the translation and editing of the text to the printing and publishing.


S. D. Goitein, the renowned Geniza scholar, writes of R. Abraham: “His explanations of the Bible and Talmud are so graceful, so lucid, so persuasive that one is almost convinced that his derash is peshat, that his moralistic and pietistic interpretation constitutes the literal meaning of the text. . . . I have developed a quite personal affection for him. . . [he] was possessed with a most lovable personality. He combined the humility and meekness to be expected in an ascetic with the firmness and determination required in a communal leader.”

Maimon’s Introduction: Part I

In his 35-page introduction to R. Abraham’s method in volume 1, Maimon describes the three primary foci of the commentary: the translation of words and expressions, the peshat explanation of the text and context, and the development of the text’s inner meaning and ethical import. He suggests that the commentary reminds him of that of Radak, inasmuch as they both drew upon the same Andalusian tradition and rely on Maimonides’ œuvre. While the Geonic biblical commentaries of R. Sa’adya and R. Samuel ben Hofni form the basis of R. Abraham’s approach, unlike them, he intentionally omits criticism of Karaite interpretations and ideas. Maimon then goes on to explain R. Sa’adya’s approach to peshat and derash at some length, and shows how R. Sa’adya’s methods impacted upon all subsequent Andalusian exegesis. He reviews the Geonic approaches to understanding midrash, and traces the subsequent developments of their approach in Maimonides and R. Abraham.

In the last section of his introduction, Maimon presents us with a significant principle of R. Abraham’s commentary, one that follows in his father’s footsteps—his approach to peshuto shel mikra, the literal, straightforward reading of the text. In keeping with Maimonides’ understanding of the Talmudic dictum “a biblical verse does not leave the realm of its peshat,” R. Abraham contends that even when halakhic derash restricts the meaning of a term to a specific set of circumstances, it does not supersede the peshat, which still retains its authority as a prescriptive ethical norm. This is what Mordechai Z. Cohen calls the primacy of peshat.

Familiarity with R. Abraham’s essay on aggada helps put this originality into context.


23 Rambam’s understanding of “the primacy of peshat” is developed by Mordechai Z. Cohen in “A Talmudist’s Halakhic Hermeneutics: A New Understanding Of Maimonides’ Principle of Peshat Primacy,” JSIJ 10 (2012) 257–359; and in his
Maimon illustrates this principle with an illuminating example from a fragment of *Sefer ha-Maspik* (III:6), which deals with the laws of *ona’a*, fraud and overcharging, published by Alexander Harkavy in 1896.24 The chapter is entitled “Commerce and Gifts.”

[Regarding] the saying of the Exalted [One], “When you sell property to your neighbor, or buy any from your neighbor, you shall not overcharge one another” (Lev. 25:14); according to its literal meaning one may not deviate from the limits the Torah establishes for the sale of fields in Israel, as is plainly stated in the next verse: “In buying from your neighbor, you shall deduct only for the number of years since the jubilee; and in selling to you, he shall charge you only for the remaining crop years.” However, tradition interprets this prohibition of overcharging from seller to buyer or vice versa as being limited to movable property alone. The Sages circumscribed the prohibition to movable property and excluded immovable property in their statement “landed property is not subject to overcharging” (Mishna *Bava Metzia* 4:9). You are aware that we stand [together] with tradition, as they, of blessed memory, said “if it is the halakha, we will accept it.”25

Nevertheless, even though this ruling is accepted tradition, [it has] limits and conditions…. You need to know that their well-known statement … “a biblical verse does not leave the realm of its *peshat,*” leads us to a respected and important tenet. *The meaning of a verse does not lose its original sense and its obligation is not lessened even if it is altered by traditional interpretations or by logical proofs* [emphasis added]. Therefore, we maintain that we must understand the verse “When you sell property to your neighbor, or buy any from your neighbor, you shall not overcharge one another” in both a *general and specific sense*, wherein some of the details are explained by the text and others by tradition.

Rabbinic exegesis excluded real estate from the formal prohibition of overcharging in Leviticus 25:14. Nevertheless, this exegesis in no way

*Opening the Gates of Interpretation: Maimonides’ Biblical Hermeneutics in Light of His Geonic-Andalusian Heritage and Muslim Milieu* (Brill, 2011); and in *The Rule of Peshat: Jewish Constructions of the Plain Sense of Scripture and Their Christian and Muslim Contexts*, 900-1270 (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

24 *Hadashim Gam Yeshanim* 10 (Warsaw, 1896), 201–204 (reprint: Jerusalem, 1970). It is part of a larger fragment in the library in St. Petersburg (translation is mine).

25 This principle appears in a somewhat different context in R. Abraham’s responsum no. 63: “The primary principle which differentiates us, the community of Rabbanites, from the approach of the Karaites, is that we do not rely on the teaching derived from the literal meaning of the Biblical text, but rather on what *the text and the tradition teach together*….”
negates the original sense of the text, or limits its scope. The Bible enjoins one from overcharging in any form, and even while the letter of the law applies the strict prohibition only to movable property, it does not affect the ethical mandate not to exploit one’s neighbor under any circumstances. R. Abraham applies this interpretive rule throughout his Torah commentary. For example, in Exodus 20:12, he interprets the prohibition lo tinaf as applying to all forbidden sexual relationships, and does not interpret it as solely pertaining to adultery with a married woman, as does rabbinic tradition. The plain meaning of the text and the traditional interpretation together possess normative authority.

Maimon’s Introduction: Part II

The second part of Maimon’s introduction, in volume two, which is 50 pages long, is divided into three sections. It begins with a description of the nature of the commentary, and identifies R. Abraham’s purpose in composing it “to teach the interpretation of His Torah to those who seek Hashem.” This section covers the relationship between the intention of the text and its peshat, and the ethical lessons to be learned from biblical personalities and mitzvot. The second section assesses the influence of the father on his son in general. It deals with similarities between R. Abraham and his father in matters of style, rules of interpretation, and theology, and centers on the differences between father and son with regard to the role of philosophy. While R. Abraham uses philosophical terms and concepts, he does not make use of philosophical interpretations in the same manner as his father and questions the philosophical path to religious perfection, which his father held as essential:

There are two paths leading to this exalted perfection. One of them is long and arduous, filled with numerous and highly perilous pitfalls, while the other is more accessible, less arduous, and free from peril. . . . The long, arduous, and perilous path is the path of philosophy. This is the path of inquiry, investigation, and logical demonstration, and there is no doubt that this path leads to attainment.26 Yet the reason for it being long, difficult, and perilous, as we have explained, is that one must delve into their views and maybe get caught in their errors concerning the most important doctrines, [such as] the creation of the world and [divine] knowledge of particulars. Whoever gets caught in this is like someone who went for a stroll and fell into a deep pit leading to his demise. This is similar to what happened to Elisha [b. Abuya], the “other,” and his ilk.27

26 Attainment refers to spiritual and intellectual perfection, which can lead to prophecy. See Russ-Fishbane (footnote 7, supra), 191ff.
27 Translated by Russ-Fishbane, 210; translation following this note is my own.
The path that is more accessible, simple, and secure from danger is the way of the Torah, on the condition that one maintains his integrity along the way, not deviating to the right or the left. This was the way of the prophets and the pietists (*hasidim*), who possessed perfect faith, generosity, and an upright character.28

The third and last section of the introduction describes interpretations that refer to *hasidut*, pietistic mysticism, and concludes with a discussion of R. Abraham’s relationship to Sufi mysticism and its practices. This section’s title, “The Pride of Israel Given to the Nations of the World,” refers to a Talmudic passage quoted by R. Abraham to describe the Sufi religious practices that he admired and emulated:

The verse states: “But if you will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret for your pride” (Jeremiah 13:17). . . . What is the meaning of “for your pride”? R. Shmuel bar Yitzhak said: God cries due to the pride of the Jewish people, which was taken from them and given to the gentile nations (*Hagiga* 5b).

Russ-Fishbane explains: “[R. Abraham’s] ‘restoration’ of Sufi practices was justified on the grounds that they originated as the ancient path of the prophets of Israel before being abandoned by the latter’s descendants to the foreign nations, who proved more faithful in their preservation to the present day.”29 In a frank discussion of this sensitive issue of “borrowing” from another religious tradition,30 Maimon contends that only after he carefully examined Sufi practices, such as facing the ark while sitting, standing in orderly rows, and prostration to the ground, and determined that they were acceptable in the eyes of tradition, did R. Abraham introduce them into Jewish pietism. While this interest in Islamic mysticism was novel and a great source of interest to the academic world, as per Grossman (see above), Maimon is more concerned that R. Abraham reclaim his rightful place among *Gedolei Yisrael*, as the legitimate heir to his father’s legacy. His superb edition of the Torah commentary certainly goes a long way to demonstrate that this is where R. Abraham truly belongs. Maimon’s two-volume work, encompassing over 1,500 pages,


29 Russ-Fishbane, 81.

enables us to uncover the beauty and genius of a priceless work of parsha-nut. In the words of R. Yitzhak Shailat in his approbation to the Exodus volume: “He lifted up a shard and found a pearl beneath it.”

**R. Abraham’s Return to the Beit Midrash**

R. Abraham was not only an interpreter of the Written Torah; he was also a Talmudic giant and posek. Haredi scholars who display such intense interest in the oeuvre of R. Abraham have a different agenda: to recover the lost halakhic works of Maimonides’ only son and leading disciple, who is regarded by later rabbinic tradition as an authoritative “spokesman” for his father’s views. His works can potentially resolve some of the ambiguous formulations and contradictory rulings in Maimonides’ corpus that have bewildered scholars for generations. These scholars comb the Geniza for additional fragments of Sefer ha-Maspik, and have identified and published (in rabbinic journals) chapters dealing with a variety of laws. The search to identify more fragments continues apace, and utilizes the advanced tools of modern Geniza scholarship.

For those of us who have studied the works of Rambam since our early days, making the acquaintance of this “new” member of his family is a welcome event, and we await further discoveries of his writings.

**Appendix: Rabbinic Authority in Matters of Science**

R. Abraham was the center of attention for a short while during the Torah/Science controversy of 2004–2005, in the course of which the books of R. Natan Slifkin were banned. The veracity of the following excerpt of the Ma’amar was called into question:

Despite the superior character and wisdom of the Talmudic sages, their excellent qualifications in the exposition of the Torah and its laws, and the integrity of their statements concerning [the Torah’s] general rules and minute details, we will not necessarily defend and uphold all their statements in matters of medicine, natural science and astronomy and insist on their veracity, whereas, we [do] believe them concerning the

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31 Cf. Bava Metzia 17b.


33 For a complete account of the controversy, see the material at www.zootorah.com/controversy.
R. Abraham distinguishes between the authority of the Rabbis in matters of “medicine, natural science, and astronomy,” which is not necessarily binding, and their authority in matters of Torah, which he categorically accepts. He is clearly following his father’s view, reflecting the tradition they received from the Geonim of Babylon. The assertion that the Rabbis’ opinion on scientific matters need not be accepted troubled R. Moshe Meiselman to the point that he suspected the authenticity of R. Abraham’s authorship of this part of the *Ma’amár*. By and large, Maimon does not relate to the issues raised by R. Meiselman, but rather documents the fact that R. Abraham’s view is in line with Geonic sources and his father’s position, citing a selection of relevant primary and secondary literature. He also explains in detail in his notes how the flow of R. Abraham’s presentation clearly militates against dismissing this piece as an interpolation, as suggested by Meiselman. He posits that this section is integral to the literary and conceptual structure of the *Ma’amár*, and serves to strengthen belief in *Hazal*’s mastery of the Torah and their authority to interpret it: “We believe them concerning the exposition of the Torah, where they have the ultimate wisdom and were entrusted with its transmission to future generations.”

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35 *Torah, Chazal & Science* (see footnote 11), 86–119.