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Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed***

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## *Perspicue et fideliter conversus: Johannes Buxtorf the Younger's Translation of the *Guide of the Perplexed**

*Perspicue et fideliter conversus : la traduction du Guide des égarés par  
Johannes Buxtorf le Jeune*

התרגום הלטיני של מורה נבוכים - יוהנס בוקסטורף הצעיר

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**of the *Guide of the Perplexed***

Perspicue et fideliter conversus : *la traduction du*  
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התרגום הלטיני של מורה נבוכים – יוהנס בוקסטורף הצעיר

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חפצתי להדפיס ס' מורה נבוכים בשלש לשונות  
בשלש קולונאס או עמודים עברי וערבי ולטין

J. Roman<sup>1</sup>

Since there are many ways to study a translation, it seems appropriate to state beforehand what the reader will not find in this contribution. I am not going to study Johannes Buxtorf the Younger's translation of the *Guide of the Perplexed* from a strictly linguistic point of view. Such an undertaking would be certainly worthwhile, but I have preferred to focus not so much on the text, whose status is, both from a linguistic and an ideological viewpoint, very much debatable, but rather on its paratextual dimension. Paratexts are not only essential in orienting the reception of a given work, but affect significantly its very contents, as I have had

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1. Cf. KAYSERLING, 1884. See also *id.*, 1886, and BURNETT, 2012, p. 148.

the opportunity to show in the quite similar case of the Latin translation of Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore*. On that occasion, I could show that a rather marginal dimension of the Italian "original," a short Kabbalistic *excursus*, became the main focus of the paratextual elements of the 1569 edition. This in turn influenced profoundly its perception as a major component of an ideal canon of Jewish philosophical and Kabbalistical literature of the Renaissance, bestowing a peculiar bent to the subsequent translations and adaptations of the *Dialoghi*, particularly the three Spanish translations, twice or three times removed from the original. Thus, the perception of that dialogic work as utterly "Kabbalistic" in nature was determined even before its characters (Filone and Sophia) could utter a single word.<sup>2</sup> One could even go as far to say, in a generalizing vein, that the paratextual genre of the introduction, or *haqdamah*, in the case of Maimonides, affects subtly the text itself and deserves to be qualified as equally important as the long chain of translations it underwent, transposing the book and its growing prefaces from a given cultural environment to completely different ones. Although the modality of the commentary *ex post* is largely prevalent in Jewish culture, in the specific textual features of philosophy one witnesses the remarkable development of a different type of paratext, be it called "introduction," "preface" or "preliminary remark." The *locus classicus* of Rabbinical creativity is usually placed after any given statement, whereas philosophical texts are commented also *a priori*, before their own textuality can assess itself. As a consequence, the very text of the *Guide* fades in the distance both linguistically, since we are facing the translation of a translation, and from the perspective of its contents. From the very beginning, that is to say starting with the text authorized by Maimonides himself, the reader is engaged on a steeplechase, having to overcome a series of hurdles before the text, in itself a *haqdamah* to the reading of the Bible as a philosophical allegory, could display its meaning. The "authentic" meaning intended by the author cannot, therefore, claim to any possible form of directness, which in turn paves the way to all sorts of suspicious, indirect or Straussian hermeneutics. The present contribution will not be exempt, all awareness of its historical determination notwithstanding, from the inherent logic of pre-emptive commentary. It will amount, at the utmost, to a further premise, comparing prefaces, delving into the inter-paratextual (if the neologism<sup>3</sup> should be allowed) dimensions of successive

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2. CAMPANINI, 2013.

3. Or rather paraneologism, since the term is already attested; cf. BREDEHOFT, 2014, p. 143.

thresholds—to recur to the expression introduced by Gérard Genette<sup>4</sup>—towards a future study of Buxtorf's Latin Maimonides in strictly linguistic terms.

The Hebraist Johannes Buxtorf the Younger (1599-1664), son of the famous homonymous father (1564-1629), had been a *Wunderkind*, according to his panegyric biographers, going to school at the age of four, with complete fluency in Greek, Latin and Hebrew but, as long as his father lived, did not emerge as an autonomous personality, turning down offers for teaching chairs at several universities, in order to help his father in his ever-growing publishing activity. He authored, before 1629, a remarkable Aramaic and Syriac dictionary, rather an erudite compilation, which appeared in print, with a recommendation of Buxtorf Sr., in 1622.<sup>5</sup> In the following years, Buxtorf Jr. took care of the voluminous production of his father and was involved in the celebrated dispute with Louis Cappel on the antiquity of the Biblical vowel points. Since Cappel, against his advice, had dared to challenge Buxtorf Sr.'s idea according to which the vowel points of the Bible were as ancient as Esdra, the son felt compelled to attack him, convinced as he was that the question was not a merely philological one, but that it endangered the very foundation of the protestant reformation, conceiving the Bible as the infallible and unshakable basis against the Papists, also known as the Catholics. This brief *résumé* of the importance of this noteworthy Hebraists does not do justice to his contributions to Jewish studies, but it will be sufficient, hopefully, for illustrating the principal characteristics of the introduction to his new Latin translation of the *Guide of the Perplexed* (*Doctor Perplexorum*).<sup>6</sup> Started, as he writes, in the year 1622, it was completed for publication in 1629, shortly before the death of his illustrious father, in September of that year, and it legitimized academically his inheritance of the chair of Hebrew at the University of Basel. Earlier in that same year, Buxtorf Jr. prepared for print an appendix to the new edition of his father's theoretical and practical introduction to Hebrew letter-writing,<sup>7</sup> which had been so praised and encouraged by scholars of such prestige as Johannes Drusius and Joseph Justus Scaliger<sup>8</sup> since the publication of the *Sylvula epistolarum hebraicarum*, appeared for the first time in Basel (1603)<sup>9</sup>

4. GENETTE, 1987; English translation: *id.*, 1997.

5. JOHANNES BUXTORF JR., 1622.

6. RABBI MOSES MAJEMONIDES, 1629.

7. JOHANNES BUXTORF, 1629. Cf. now DUNKELGRÜN, 2016.

8. Cf. BURNETT, 1996, p. 139.

9. JOHANNES BUXTORF, 1603.

and culminated with the publication of the *Institutio epistolaris* of 1610.<sup>10</sup> The appendix to the new edition contains a selection of Hebrew letters, some of them by Maimonides, strictly related to the *Moreh nevukhim*: it is more than reasonable to assume that it was a by-product of Buxtorf Jr.'s commitment to the translation of the *Guide*. In our context, a passage of the second letter is particularly interesting, as it was among the reasons for its inclusion in this appendix; since Buxtorf quotes from it also in the Preface to his edition of the *Guide*, one could imagine that this passage was not unrelated to the decision of translating that very book anew into Latin. It is a sentence from the letter written by Maimonides to his pupil Yosef ben Yehudah Ibn Aknin, to whom also the *Guide* is dedicated, concerning a dispute which aroused among the sages of Baghdad. Speaking of legal discussions, Maimonides writes:<sup>11</sup>

ולא תכלה ותאבד זמנך בפירוש ובמשא ובמתן של גמרא ואותם הדברים שכבר הנחת  
 מהם אבוד הזמן ומעט התועלת.

*Cave ne tempus tuum teras in expositione et operosa consideratione  
 Gemarae, ego enim in illis multum temporis perdididi, et parum  
 utilitatis hausi.*<sup>12</sup>

Do not waste your time with commentary and controversies of the Gemara, since what I have gained [from this activity] was waste of time and small profit.

It is somehow surprising that Buxtorf Jr. should emphasize this passage, being well known among his contemporaries, also due to the boasting of his proud father, as a young scholar, who, in his early years, had read from beginning to end not only the Mishnah, but the entire Babylonian Talmud. He also distinguished himself so far for having compiled an Aramaic dictionary intended at providing help to students of the Talmudim and the Targumim. Now, one can object that, in the tradition of Guillaume Postel's pupil Guy Lefèvre de la Boderie, Buxtorf intended to provide a linguistic context for the Syriac Christian version

10. JOHANNES BUXTORF, 1610.

11. At least according to the traditional Hebrew version of the text, as found, for example, in MOSHE BEN MAIMON, 1545, f. 27v. As it will be shown further on, this Venetian edition is most likely the source used by Buxtorf Jr. The Arabic original, as published by D. Baneth, (cf. BANETH, 1946, p. 69) has a slightly different text.

12. The translation is found in JOHANNES BUXTORF, 1629, f. \*3v.

of the Bible and to the language spoken by Jesus. Lefèvre de la Boderie, who contributed to the Antwerp Polyglot Bible, had underlined the importance of Syriac and Aramaic, including even the Zohar, which was left out by Buxtorf, for understanding Jesus' original speech and thought.<sup>13</sup> However, Buxtorf's depiction of Maimonides as a champion of anti-Talmudism, as paradoxical as it might seem,<sup>14</sup> should be valued as a key for understanding his introduction to the *Guide*. I will contend, in fact—anticipating here my conclusion—that the purpose of his effort to re-translate the *Guide* into Latin was, mainly if not exclusively, to shape an acceptable alternative to Talmudic Judaism for his Protestant readership.

Buxtorf opens his introduction by announcing that it will entail two main chapters: a brief description of the author's biography and character, and a justification for his own endeavor, that is to say what motivated him to translate the *Guide* anew. With an elegant and quite aristocratic attitude, Buxtorf underlines that this information is all the more useful, since the readers of this sort of literature are few, and, as a confirmation, he quotes the proverbial expression of Biblical origin:<sup>15</sup> ושנים ממשפחה אחד מעיר, "One of a city and two of a family." The first section of the introduction is a rather classical biography of Maimonides, based on the available literature, in particular Buxtorf quotes the *Sefer Yuhasin* by Abraham Zacuto,<sup>16</sup> the book *Yesod 'olam* by R. Isaac<sup>17</sup> and the *Shalsholet ha-qabbalah*<sup>18</sup> by Gedaliah Ibn Yahya. As to his genealogy, he remarks that it is only quoted in secondary Hebrew literature, since in the printed editions of his commentary on the Mishnah, the text is not found. Buxtorf proceeds and refers one of the legends which soon formed the aura of miracle surrounding Maimonides'

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13. CAMPANINI, 2018.

14. One should, nevertheless, consider that Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, a systematic code of the Jewish law, could be perceived as an attempt to abbreviate the discussions found in the Gemara, or even to make it obsolete.

15. Jer. 3, 14.

16. Buxtorf used the second edition (Cracow, 1580-81) and not the first one (Constantinople, 1566), as it can be deduced from the fact that only the Cracow edition is mentioned in his *Bibliotheca rabbinica* invariably from 1613 (see JOHANNES BUXTORF, 1613, p. 295) down to 1708 (see JOHANNES BUXTORF, 1708, p. 89).

17. Isaac Israeli the Younger, cited indirectly through Zacuto.

18. Quoted according to the second edition, Cracow, 1596 (the only one quoted in the *Bibliotheca rabbinica* of 1613, JOHANNES BUXTORF, p. 327). Later editions of the *Bibliotheca* mention also the *princeps*, printed by Giovanni di Gara, Venezia, 1587. See also BURNETT, 1996, p. 279.

life (his version is found in the *Shalshelet ha-qabbalah*),<sup>19</sup> but he introduces it with skepticism (*sive historia sive fabula*). The legend, which is in itself a wide-spread *topos*, concerns Maimonides' tardiness in learning. His father, we are told, beat him and called him scornfully "butcher's son," because of the profession of his maternal grandfather, although he was later to become the most remarkable intellectual personality of medieval Judaism and one of the most eminent in the entire Jewish history. Even the name of his master, Ibn Migash (pupil of Alfasi), has been contested, since Ibn Yahya related that he had to flee his father's home, but the fact that Maimonides studied under Ibn Migash seems to be confirmed according to the *Tsemaḥ David* by David Gans.<sup>20</sup> Yet, Buxtorf continues with reference to Zacuto, this could not be the case for chronological reasons, since Ibn Migash died when Maimonides was only ten years old, therefore Gans must have meant that he studied Ibn Migash's books. From this relatively marginal detail, one can observe the prevailing taste for chronologies, which is characteristic of the age of Scaliger. After having referred another legend, particularly awkward, since it relates about Maimonides studying 12 years in a cave, fleeing the Romans, a clear case of confusion with legendary material usually related to Rabbi Shim'on ben Yoḥay, Buxtorf mentions Maimonides' son Abraham and his letter to Joseph ben Gershon. From his words, it is quite clear that, in order to compile his appendix to the *Institutio Epistolaris* of his father, Buxtorf used the 1545 Giustiniani edition of the Letters of Maimonides. Then he proceeds to quote the *Shevet Yehudah* by Solomon Ibn Verga concerning Maimonides' escape to Egypt and his being appointed as physician of the Sultan. As it is well known from the correspondent annotation of the *Bibliotheca rabbinica*,<sup>21</sup> Buxtorf did not own a Hebrew edition of that work, but only its Yiddish translation, appeared in Cracow in 1591.<sup>22</sup> The *Shalshelet ha-qabbalah* reports moreover that, besides being fluent in Hebrew and Arabic, Maimonides learned Aramaic, Turkish and Persian, but also that he wrote extensively in Greek. Buxtorf seems to believe it, but prudently, he adds that the quotations from Greek authors might derive also from Arabic translations. Praising his learning in the field of mathematics,

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19. Ed. 1596, f. 44.

20. Published in Prague in 1592.

21. See JOHANNES BUXTORF, 1708, pp. 188-189: "*Hebraicum exemplar excusum in Italia, Germanicum, quod habeo, Cracoviae, anno ח"ט CCCLI, Christi MDXLI [sic for MDXCI].*"

22. Cf. STANISLAWSKI, 1998, pp. 134-149; see also BURNETT, 1994, p. 281; *id.*, 1996, p. 120; 284.

Buxtorf recalls also his *Epistle on Astrology*, and refers to its Latin translation, by the convert Isaac Levita, which appeared in Cologne in 1555.<sup>23</sup> He does not miss the opportunity to praise, once more, Maimonides for being very close, in his refusal of astrology, to “our religion” (*relligioni nostrae*). The praise for his author reaches a climax, introducing the sentence quoted above from the letter to Rabbi Yosef ibn Aknin, in Buxtorf’s description of Maimonides as “a master of theology in his religion and faith truly excellent and (something that earns him a rightful praise) absolutely not inclined to the fables and the traditions of the Talmud.”<sup>24</sup> The *Mishneh Torah* is seen, immediately afterwards, as the practical realization of his theoretical stance against Talmudic casuistry and linguistic chaos: a code of the Law overcoming the intricacies and confusion of legal discussions, in favour of synthetic aphorisms of crystalline clarity and expressed in a transparent Hebrew of classical purity.

The *Shalshelet ha-qabbalah* is a vast reservoir of legendary material on Maimonides’ biography: Buxtorf diligently summarizes it, especially concerning his miraculous ability as a physician, only to conclude, on a rather skeptical note: *de quibus judicium Lectori relinquimus*.<sup>25</sup> [on these things we leave the judgement to the reader]

Buxtorf’s introduction to the *Guide* is a singular mixture of credulity and a growing critical attitude, as it can be seen from the following legend, reported from Azariah de Rossi’s *Me’or ‘enayim*:<sup>26</sup> among the books of Salomon Sasson in Ferrara, Azariah had found a notice concerning a travel made by Maimonides to Chalon-sur-Saône in Burgundy in order to collate his manuscript of the Bible with the scroll allegedly written by Ezra the scribe. Already Azariah was quite incredulous about this legend,<sup>27</sup> but he admitted as possible that Maimonides, after having compiled his *Mishneh Torah*, could have visited France to correct his *Sefer Torah*. If the highly critical De Rossi was not inclined to totally refute this allegedly autobiographical notice, Buxtorf followed suite, but noticed that no other chronicle recorded this sensational claim.

23. RABBI MOSES FILIUS MEIMON, 1555.

24. “*Theologiae in sua Relligione et fide Doctor fuit insignis, ac (quae laus ipsi tribuenda) Fabulis et Traditionibus Talmudicis minime addictus*”: JOHANNES BUXTORF, 1629, f. \*3v.

25. JOHANNES BUXTORF, 1629, f. \*4v.

26. Ed. Mantua, 1574. Buxtorf possessed this edition and he praised the book and the author in later editions of his *Bibliotheca rabbinica*.

27. See AZARIAH DE’ ROSSI, 2001, pp. 195-196.



Concerning the literary production of Maimonides, Buxtorf relies on Zacuto and Ibn Yahya, adding only a reference to the *Bibliotheca rabbinica* of his father, gratified with the eulogy, in Hebrew, יצ'ו צורו וגואלו (יחייו צורו וגואלו), "may his Rock and his Redeemer let him live."<sup>28</sup> He recalls the polemical reaction of some rabbinical authorities against Maimonides' suppression of the names of the Rabbis proposing different solutions to halakhic problems, and the latter's apologetical letter to Rabbi Pinhas, published also in Buxtorf's appendix to the *Institutio Epistolaris*.<sup>29</sup> He refers that Maimonides wrote the *Guide* at age 50, and five years later, the *Iggeret tehiyyat ha-metim*.

Faithful to his source, that is Ibn Yahya's *Shalshelet ha-qabbalah*, Buxtorf relates about the legend of the late conversion of Maimonides to the doctrine of Kabbalah, and quotes an allegedly autobiographic document by Maimonides himself, a letter written from Jerusalem in which the philosopher would have stated: "If I had known what I know now I would have written very different things." The sources given for this (quite sensational) claim are Eliyyah Hayyim (that is Eliyyah Hayyim of Gennazano's *Iggeret hamudot*)<sup>30</sup> and the *Migdal 'oz* by Yom Tov ben Abraham ibn Ga'on, both quoted indirectly, as he found them in the *Shalshelet ha-qabbalah*.<sup>31</sup> In any event, Buxtorf Jr. refrains from any comment, since it is clear that the "conversion" could not affect the works written beforehand, such as the *Guide*.

The same sources are quoted also to depict the variant testimonies about his place of death and of his tomb (Jerusalem, Egypt, Tiberias), and the controversies about his works found even here their expression since, as Ibn Yahya reports, some of his enemies desecrated his tomb and wrote on it the derogatory epitaph מן מוחס (Excommunicatus, anathematizatus et ereticus).

It is far from surprising to find, in Buxtorf's preface, a mention of the celebrated proverbial expression משה עד משה לא קם כמשה ("from Moses to Moses there was none like Moses"), as a common saying about Maimonides (*tritum inter Judaeos*). Nevertheless, it is quite interesting that Buxtorf quotes, as one attestation

28. JOHANNES BUXTORF, 1629, f. \*\*2v; cf. JOHANNES BUXTORF, 1613, p. 308: Buxtorf Father admitted that, at the time, he had not seen the Latin translation published by Giustiniani.

29. JOHANNES BUXTORF, 1629, p. 381 and ff.

30. Published first as ELIYAH HAYYIM BEN BINYAMIN DA GENAZZANO, 1912; 2002

31. It is interesting to note that in the *Bibliotheca rabbinica*, under אמרת חמדות, Buxtorf the Younger is wrong in saying that the work is quoted in the preface to his translation of the *Kuzari* (recte: *Moreh nevukhim*).

of this saying, the preface of the *Tishby*<sup>32</sup> by Elijah Levita: on that occasion, the formula is playfully adapted to praise the Christian Hebraist Paulus Fagius: מפאולוס עד פאולוס לא קם כפאולוס ("from Paulus to Paulus there was none like Paulus").

Two very important quotations follow here, and I propose to consider them the immediate reason for Buxtorf's decision to translate anew the *Guide* into Latin. Upon evoking Christian praise for Maimonides, Buxtorf does not quote, as one could have expected, neither Albertus Magnus nor Thomas Aquinas, not even Johannes Reuchlin: he prefers to quote authors belonging to his own generation, the most prestigious intellectuals of his time. The first one is the already mentioned Joseph Justus Scaliger, who, in a letter to his friend Isaac Casaubon dated of the 27<sup>th</sup> October 1601,<sup>33</sup> had written:

*Ego non solum illum librum (More Nevochim), sed etiam omnia illius Magistri opera tanti facio, ut solum illum inter Iudaeos desiisse nugari dicam.*<sup>34</sup>

My esteem for not only that book (the *Guide*) but for all the works of that Master is so great, that I would say that he is the only Jew that can be taken seriously.<sup>35</sup>

The second quotation is taken from the *Exercitationes contra Baronium* of the addressee of Scaliger's letter, Isaac Casaubon, and is very much in keeping with the first judgment:

*Moses Majemonides (qui et Moses Aegyptius dicitur) solidae atque ingentis doctrinae vir, de quo videor mihi posse dicere, quod Plinius olim de Diodoro Siculo, primum inter suos desiisse nugari.*<sup>36</sup>

Moses Maimonides (also called Moses the Aegyptian) [was] a man of solid and great erudition, about whom I can say what

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32. Published in Isny in 1541.

33. The date corresponds to November the 6<sup>th</sup> according to the Gregorian Calendar.

34. JOSEPH JUSTUS SCALIGER, 1627, p. 195 (n. 62).

35. The passage was noted, as not very flattering, by GUTTMANN, 1908, p. LXXXVIII.

36. ISAAC CASAUBON, 1614, p. 611. For Casaubon and Maimonides, see GRAFTON & WEINBERG, 2011.

Pliny<sup>37</sup> once said of Diodorus Siculus, that he was namely the first among his pairs who ceased to utter nonsense.

With this resonant sentence, Buxtorf ends the first part of his introduction, dedicated to the life and personality of his author. In summing up what he has drawn from Jewish sources, he begs the readers' pardon since some of the events narrated seem fabulous or fictitious (*fabulosa aut fictitia*), but he has preferred to preserve them, since not everybody has access to such rare sources in Hebrew.

The second and last part of the Preface concentrates on the book itself, defined as Introduction and Key (*Manuductio et clavis*) to the correct understanding of metaphors and allegories of the Holy Scripture. The *Guide* contains a biblical theology, it offers reasons for the precepts and explains many passages that might perplex the reader, guiding him like Moses guided the Israelites through the desert. Buxtorf emphasizes that Maimonides, in doing so, refused to recur to two specifically Jewish methods, the Talmudic discussion and the Kabbalistic interpretation. This is, according to Buxtorf, the reason why the *Guide* stirred the bitter opposition of some Jews, especially in France. The philosophical bent of the *Guide* had already triggered a malevolent reaction during Maimonides' life, but worse was to come. Buxtorf mentions Shelomoh ben Avraham of Montpellier and his stern battle against the *Guide*, his partial success in Southern France, the pro-Maimonidean reaction and the fact that the anti-Maimonideans did not shy away from denouncing the supporters of Maimonides to the Christian authorities, endangering the survival of Jewish culture as such.

Concerning this point, Buxtorf cites the Preface by the bishop Agostino Giustiniani, who published the medieval Latin translation of the *Guide* in Paris, in 1520.<sup>38</sup> In his short introduction, Giustiniani mentioned the anti-Maimonideans and their embittered activities in order to recommend Maimonides and the *Guide* to his Christian readership. Already Giustiniani had praised Maimonides as honest (*candidus*) and not at all superstitious (*minime superstitiosus*).

Buxtorf was well aware that the *Guide* had been originally written in Arabic and knew that the first Hebrew translation was the one made by Samuel Ibn Tibbon, who consulted the author on specific difficult points, and obtained his approbation. From some passages of his annotations to the *Guide*, Buxtorf shows to be aware of the existence of a second translation, made by Yehuda Al-Ḥarizi,

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37. PLINY, *Naturalis historia*, pref. 25.

38. See RABÍ MOSES AEGYPTIUS, 1520.

which was not approved (*non fuit approbata*) or, as Zacuto writes, אינה ראיה (*non est congrua*). Buxtorf never saw that second Hebrew translation, and therefore he could not ascertain (as it was done, much later, by Joseph Perles)<sup>39</sup> that the Latin translation published by Giustiniani was based upon Al-Ḥarizi's Hebrew rendition of the *Guide*. He only knew that the Latin translation was older than the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, commenting the information found in Ibn Yaḥya—namely that Jacob Mantino translated the *Guide* into Latin—he casts a serious doubt, with good reasons, on the idea that Mantino should be responsible for the translation published by Giustiniani, which he considered, correctly, to be older.

As to the quality of the translation published by Giustiniani, instead of criticizing it himself, which could have appeared a distasteful self-praise, he prefers to quote Scaliger's judgment. Scaliger possessed a manuscript of the *Guide* in Arabic written with Hebrew characters, and, by comparing it with the Hebrew translation (of Ibn Tibbon), he had found out that the Latin translator utilized the Hebrew translation as his basis. One may add that Scaliger was only partially right, since, as it is now known, the medieval Latin translation was not based, as he thought, on Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew version, but on Al-Ḥarizi's. The final judgment of Scaliger, resulting from a comparison between the Arabic original, Ibn Tibbon's version and the Latin rendition published by Giustiniani, is humbling: "*Magna seges mendorum est in Latino*" [In Latin there is a great harvest of mistakes]; and to the mistakes of the translator, he remarks, one has to add also the ones made by the copyists and the printer.<sup>40</sup> As a matter of fact, in the already mentioned letter to Casaubon, Scaliger lists only banal reading mistakes, without entering in a comparison with the Arabic text or even with its Hebrew translation. Nevertheless, Buxtorf subscribes entirely to Scaliger's opinion and calls him "incomparable hero" and charges even more his judgment: the ancient Latin version published by Giustiniani is defaced by infinite errors and mistakes, some of them due to the copyists, but an equal number was also caused by the translator's ignorance. He could list hundreds of places where the translator obscured the meaning of the "original," which is for him the Hebrew version of Ibn Tibbon, or where the Latin translator made one sentence of two or *vice versa*. Buxtorf criticizes also the fact that Biblical quotations are not recognized as such, wrongly translated and, as it is obvious, without any marginal reference. Moreover,

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39. PERLES, 1875.

40. Scaliger gives some examples of the latter type: instead of "spirituale" the Paris 1520 version reads "speciale"; instead of "Philosophia" it reads "Prophetia"; furthermore, it has "Bonitatem" for "Brevitatem"; "altitudo" for "aptitudo."

he observes that the style is heavy and obscure, attributing that shortcoming to the epoch of the translation, suggesting thus that it was a product of Scholastic mentality and rhetoric, or rather its painful lack. In addition, he quotes other passages from Scaliger epistles which are of special interest for us. He cites, for example, Scaliger's letter to Stéphane Hubert (Stephanus Ubertus), in which the *Guide* is praised as "a book full of good fruits, of lofty erudition and absolutely necessary for Christian Theologians" [*Liber plenus bonae frugis, abstrusae eruditionis, et Theologis Christianis apprime necessaries*].<sup>41</sup> And again, in writing to Richard "the Dutch" Thomson, the Orientalist who had sent him the Arabic manuscript of the *Guide*, Scaliger had written: "The book is more precious to me than the equivalent in gold" [*pluris mihi esse librum, quam si ἰσόμετρον χρυσοῦν misisses*].<sup>42</sup>

Among the other attestations of praise for the book listed by Buxtorf quoting Isaac Casaubon and Agostino Giustiniani, it will suffice here to remark that all of them lauded the *Guide* not so much as a philosophical book, but rather as a masterpiece in rational exegesis of the Biblical text. Buxtorf concludes this section with yet another Jewish proverb, in Aramaic (פוק תהי ליה בקנקניה, "go yourself, smell his jar")<sup>43</sup> as an exhortation for the reader to verify personally the qualities of the book.

In order to further justify his own translation, Buxtorf refers how, six years earlier, he got hold of the Paris 1520 edition and, hoping to use it in order to improve his Hebrew, he found out that, not only he could not understand it, but he had serious difficulties in retrieving the Hebrew original for any given sentence. He affirms that he loved languages above anything and wanted to follow the steps of his father. In order to enhance his fidelity, Buxtorf quotes yet another Aramaic saying expressing his pride in replicating his father's interests and passions: רחילא בתר רחילא אולא וברא עובדיה דאבוהי [*ovis post ovem et filius sequitur opera patris sui*].<sup>44</sup> Therefore, he decided to translate the book anew for the common utility. He soon found out that it was easier said than done: the difficulty of the subject, for one, and the intricacy of the style (*stylus perplexus*), which Buxtorf explains, with good reasons, as a consequence of the fidelity of the Hebrew translator to

41. JOSEPH JUSTUS SCALIGER, 1627, p. 704.

42. *Ibid.* p. 507.

43. TB *Bava batra* 22a.

44. TB *Ketubbot* 10a.

the Arabic original. With the help of all the tools he could dispose of and of the erudition of his father and his friends, and with God's assistance, he made it.

For his enterprise, he used a manuscript as well as a printed edition, clearly identified as the Sabbioneta 1553 edition, containing some commentaries, in particular the ones by Efodi (that is Profiat Duran or Isaac ben Moshe ha-Levi), the one by Shem Tov (which Buxtorf clearly did not recognize as Shem Tov ben Yosef Falaquera, since he proposed, albeit hesitatingly, to identify him with the translator of Averroes' commentary on the *Metaphysics*, that is to say Kalonymos ben David, whom he mixed up with the much later translator Calo Calonimo, on the sole basis of the fact that "Calonymos" in Greek is like "Shem Tov" in Hebrew), and the one by Asher (Bonan) Crescas, which proved very helpful. The Hebrew manuscript at his disposal was instrumental in integrating some words and a whole passage<sup>45</sup> missing in the printed edition.

Buxtorf is well aware of the fact that not everybody will be praising his work and the book he has decided to print, especially since the present war (an episode of the Thirty Years' war) has brought culture to a deep crisis, which he chooses to express with another Jewish proverb: *אם ספרא לא סייפא ואם סייפא לא ספרא* [*Si litterae non arma, si arma non litterae*].<sup>46</sup> For a strange destiny (*singulari fato*), at the point in which intellectual development almost reached the top, it fell to the deepest. He decided not to suppress the work done, hoping that, if not immediately, there will be in the future a readership for his book. As a matter of fact, writing thirty years later the preface to his Latin Translation of the *Sefer ha-Kuzari*, Buxtorf will regret to have omitted from his edition of the *Guide* the Hebrew text of Ibn Tibbon's translation, and he will recall that he was prevented by the war to fulfill this most necessary task.<sup>47</sup>

As to the dangers of reading a Jewish book, he reassures his potential readership by quoting yet another Jewish proverbial expression: *רימון מצא תוכו אכל קליפתו זרק* [*Qui malogranatum invenit, comedat meditullium, et corticem abjiciat*; if one finds a pomegranate, he should eat the interior and throw away the peel].<sup>48</sup> There are, admittedly, a few passages which are openly heterodox from the point of view of Christian religion, but Buxtorf has provided warning notes on the margins

45. On p. 146v of the Sabbioneta edition.

46. TB *'Avodah zarah* 17b.

47. JUDAH HALEVI, 1660.

48. TB *Hagiga* 15b.

(*virgulae censoriae*)<sup>49</sup> and states already in the Preface that these passages are rare and not very venomous (*non sunt multa nec amarulenta*). He has preferred not to castrate the author, as he did not want to cut these passages, alluding implicitly to the practice of Catholic censors. Nobody, he is persuaded, will be induced to believe some untruth, nor anybody will accuse the translator to have approved these passages.

Short before reaching his conclusion, Buxtorf does not omit to recommend the book for yet another of its merits: the *Guide* will help the reader to improve enormously his knowledge of Hebrew, if he will have the opportunity to compare it with the original, that is Ibn Tibbon's translation. The "original" somehow lingers about any translation and it is inevitable, if one wants to make the translation, as it were, reversible, for study purposes. To the service of the reader, but also for his relief (*maioris jucunditatis gratia*), Buxtorf added also marginal notes and an index. Moreover, he has translated and adapted the index of Biblical references found in the printed edition, the already mentioned Sabbioneta 1553 edition with commentaries. The preface is dated of the 20<sup>th</sup> February 1629.

The candid preface by Johannes Buxtorf the Younger offers the opportunity to raise two final questions: beside the curious idea of using a Latin translation of the *Guide* in order to learn Hebrew, it is quite clear that Buxtorf saw in this seminal book a positive aspect of Judaism, deserving to be supported and promoted. But when did the project of using Maimonides for fostering a new Christian apprehension of Judaism and, at the same time, for suggesting or imposing an alternative history of Jewish exegesis, which could have brought, in turn, a re-definition of the intellectual and theological priorities of Judaism itself, actually come about? Moreover: how, albeit in a symbolic fashion, did this movement intended at putting Maimonides' *Guide* at the center of a revised, rationalized, universalized Judaism, of which Buxtorf was rather part and parcel and not the exclusive initiator, influence later developments?

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49. To name a couple of examples: on p. 380 (*Guide* III, 17), concerning "free will," Buxtorf censors Maimonides on a specific point of Calvinist theology, i.e. the predestination and the absolute sovereignty of God. On p. 296 (II, 36) he warns the reader that Maimonides speaks of the Messiah *more judaico* (saying: *utinam cito reveletur*) which sounds less than appropriate in Christian ears. On p. 48 (I, 48) Buxtorf comments: "*Non pauca qua hic habet, videntur Pelagianismum sapere, ideoque cum iudicio legenda.*" In other words, Maimonides denies the original sin, implicitly, by saying that the human nature is capable of choosing good and refusing evil. He thus deserves, in Buxtorf's view, the accusation of being semi-Pelagian or wholly Pelagian.



It does not escape me that these are complex and far-reaching questions, deserving a monographic treatment rather than an occasional *obiter dictum*, nevertheless I deem it preferable to run the risk of being too generic than to miss completely the perspective into which Buxtorf's translation can only be properly understood. As surprising as it might seem, the real starting point of Buxtorf's new appreciation of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and of its novel translation into Latin remount to an epoch which precedes by far his own birth-date and even that of his father. I am speaking of the fateful year 1553, which saw the public burning of the Talmud in Italy, by decree of the Pope Julius III, but also the prohibition, strictly related to the burning of the Talmud, of any activity of Hebrew printing in Venice, which in turn lead to the dissemination of printers and correctors to other towns in northern Italy, most prominently to Mantua and Cremona, but also to other smaller centers, such as Sabbioneta. There, in the very same year 1553, the printer Tobia Foa, aided by the corrector and editor Cornelio Adelkind, produced a splendid commented edition of the *Guide*, the one used almost 80 years later by Buxtorf, who, at the end of his Preface, printed a poem in praise of the work, by Rafael Treves, taken from the aforementioned Sabbioneta edition. To that edition he resorted not only to establish the text serving as a basis for his own version, but also in search for help among the vast commentaries adorning it.

As it has been remarked in the case of the Kabbalah, which saw a flourishing season of printing its main classics, and in particular the Zoharic literature in the decade following 1553,<sup>50</sup> the perfect coincidence of the date of the burning of the Talmud and the printing of the *Guide* suggests, by the same logic seeing in the *Index librorum prohibitorum* an instrument for shaping by contrast the modern canon of Jewish literature,<sup>51</sup> also a definite program of substitution. Buxtorf the Younger's translation of the *Guide* into Latin continued this implicit program from the Christian side, viewing in it not only, as Giustiniani already suggested, a controversial book certainly useful for the Christians, precisely because some Jews had attacked it, but also a clear manifesto for a renewed Judaism, guided by "reason" and avoiding Talmudic casuistry. It is not by any chance that, to come to the second question I have asked, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a pseudonymous "impartial" Christian theologian, who signed "X. Veridick," in his *Winke und Wohlmeinende Ratschläge für israelitische Schulen*, published in Leipzig in 1834, promoted the reading of Maimonides' *Guide* among the Jews, in order to "ameliorate" their

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50. Cf. CAMPANINI, 2012.

51. As it has been suggested by RAZ-KRAKOTZKIN, 2005; English translation: *id.*, 2007.



cultural standing and to favour their integration into the “enlightened” dominant society.<sup>52</sup> It is still in the continuity of Buxtorf’s project that this “friendly hint and counsel” was given, and one would have expected, in George Kohler’s recent book on Maimonides as the *Guide* to Jewish Reform in 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>53</sup> a reference to Buxtorf as one of the fathers of this apparently inner-Jewish return to Maimonides, which was objectively fulfilling a desideratum and a solicitation of a pious Calvinist Hebraist from the war-ridden 17<sup>th</sup> century.

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52. X VERIDIK (pen name), 1834, p. 48. Cf. also the review of this pamphlet, „Über Judenhass und Judenverfolgung“, *Rheinische Blätter für Erziehung und Unterricht* 15-16 (1835), pp. 299-312.

53. KOHLER, 2012.

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Abstract: Johannes Buxtorf the Younger's Latin translation of the *Guide of the Perplexed* (1629) is studied in its bibliographical, linguistic and paratextual features. The translator's preface is analyzed in detail highlighting the peculiar intentions of Buxtorf in editing this medieval philosophical work. Its main function is identified by the translator as a mean towards learning Hebrew, although he was well aware that the original language of the *Guide* was rather Arabic. A specific ideological bias as to the function of the *Guide* in designing and promoting a "rational" Judaism, compatible with Protestant ideals is detected among the most interesting motives of this translation, one which would be destined to a long fortune among Christian Hebraists of the subsequent epochs.

Keywords: Hebrew-Latin translations, Johannes Buxtorf the Younger, Maimonides' *Guide* in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Résumé : La traduction latine du *Guide des égarés* par Johannes Buxtorf (1629) est étudiée dans ses aspects bibliographiques, linguistiques et paratextuels. La préface du traducteur est analysée en détail pour illustrer les intentions de Buxtorf en éditant cette œuvre philosophique médiévale. Le traducteur déclare que sa fonction principale sera d'aider les lecteurs à apprendre l'hébreu, même s'il savait parfaitement que le *Guide* avait été composé en arabe. L'un des motifs les plus intéressants de cette traduction est le parti pris idéologique quant à la fonction du *Guide* de concevoir et promouvoir un judaïsme « rationnel » compatible avec les idéaux protestants. Cette idée connaîtra une fortune durable auprès des hébraïsants chrétiens des siècles suivants.

Mots-Clefs : Traductions de l'hébreu au latin, Johannes Buxtorf le Jeune, le *Guide de Maïmonide* au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle.

תקציר: המאמר דן בתרגומו הלטיני של מורה נבוכים שנעשה על ידי יוהנס בוקסטורף הצעיר בשנת 1629 ובוחרן היבטים ביבליוגרפיים, בלשניים ופרה-טקסטואליים. הוא כולל ניתוח מפורט של הקדמת המתרגם המבהיר את כוונותיו בפרסום חיבור פילוסופי זה. המתרגם מצהיר כי מטרתו העיקרית היא לסייע בידי הקוראים בלימוד העברית למרות שידע כי החיבור במקורו נכתב בערבית. מעניין לציין כי בוקסטורף ראה במורה נבוכים כלי לעידוד היהדות הראצינאלית, נושא שיידון רבות בין הנוצרים ההבראיסטים בדורות הבאים.

מלות מפתח: תרגומים מעברית ללטינית, יוהנס בוקסטורף הצעיר, מורה נבוכים במאה ה-17