

## Book Reviews

### Schwartz, Dov

*Commentary on the Kuzari: Heshek Shelomo by R. Shelomo Ben Yehuda of Lunel. Annotated Critical Edition with Introduction.* Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2007, 550 pp., Hebrew.

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*Commentary on Yesod Mora: The Commentary of Mordekhai ben Eliezer Komtiyano on R. Abraham Ibn Ezra's Yesod Mora. Annotated Critical Edition with Introduction.* Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2010, 214 pp., Hebrew.

Dov Schwartz, one of today's most prominent scholars of medieval Jewish thought, has produced annotated critical editions of commentaries by two fifteenth century Jewish thinkers. R. Shelomo of Lunel lived in Provence; R. Mordekhai ben Eliezer Komtiyano lived in Adrianople and Constantinople during the period that rule of the area changed from the Byzantines to the Ottomans. To the best of my knowledge, these two thinkers are rarely mentioned in the research literature, a fact that in itself suggests the great contribution Schwartz has made by helping bring to light in critical editions these generally overlooked volumes.

The titles of both books start with the Hebrew words *Peirūsh Qadmōn* (lit. Ancient commentary). The scribe of Heshek Shelomo gave this title to his book, and Schwartz borrowed it for the critical edition of Komtiyano.

Alongside Schwartz's introductions, which I will discuss below, the high quality and scholarly value of these editions is enhanced by his copious and detailed notes, which reflect Schwartz's impressive knowledge in this field. Schwartz discusses all relevant studies, both those that directly touch on these commentaries and those that reflect on the works' cultural and historical framework. At the same time, Schwartz appropriately chose not to delve too deeply into subjects that have already been examined in previous research literature. What we have here thus is exactly what is required for the reader completely to understand these commentaries. In light of Schwartz's clarification of terms that are unclear or little known and his broader explanations of the meaning of the commentaries, any Hebrew reader interested in medieval Jewish thought will be able easily to read and understand these books.

### Heshek Shelomo by R. Shelomo Ben Yehuda of Lunel

Books dealing with ideas seek to explain the mind of the author. To give us an initial entry into the mind of Shelomo ben Yehuda of Lunel, in his introduction, Schwartz details the world into which R. Shelomo's commentary was born. He presents the Provençal and Spanish cultural environment a hundred years before the Jews' expulsion from Spain, and he discusses the doctrines of the circle of this period's commentators on the Kuzari. This includes a review of the individual members of this circle, among whom R. Shelomo is counted.

Ultimately, Schwartz demonstrates how far these thinkers departed from the original doctrine of the Kuzari. He argues that this occurred because they were unwilling to compromise on rationalistic explanations of the commandments, a viewpoint which stands in opposition to the Kuzari, which is anti-philosophical and criticizes rationalism. These thinkers therefore rationalized and "redesigned" its ideas "against its original meaning," as Schwartz defines it. Schwartz ends his introduction by describing the ideological-cultural atmosphere of Provence in the fifteenth century.

The book is well organized and easy to read and understand even though it deals with a complicated subject. It contains lists and sketches to help the reader understand specific ideas (see, e.g., pp. 127, 399, 420, 422). In the second and fourth parts, the commentary of R. Shelomo is partial. Schwartz did well by citing the commentary of R. Nathaniel Kaspi instead (see, e.g., pp. 194–197; 426–429).

### The Commentary of Mordechai ben Eliezer Komtiyano on R. Abraham Ibn Ezra's *Yesod Mora*

R. Mordechai Komtiyano was one of the most important thinkers in Adrianople and Constantinople in the fifteenth century, the period when Byzantine rule was overtaken by Ottoman control. R. Komtiyano stands out for the breadth of his knowledge and the quantity of compositions he wrote in several scientific fields. One of them is his commentary on Ibn Ezra's *Yesod Mora*, on the logic behind the biblical commandments. Along the way, R. Komtiyano brings up and reflects on religious, scientific, linguistic, and exegetical issues.

This is the first time that Komtiyano's composition has been completely printed, a significant contribution by Schwartz to the scholarly literature. The introductory chapters discuss the commentary on Ibn Ezra's books in Byzantium and deal with psychological and astrological issues in R. Komtiyano's commentary. Schwartz opens with an examination of Ibn

Ezra's character and his influence on Jewish thought in Byzantium. Later on, he discusses, *inter alia*, the method according to which Komtiyano interpreted *Yesod Mora* and the way he treats astrology and rationalism, and especially his tendency towards polemical arguments.

Schwarz additionally discusses why Komtiyano interpreted *Yesod Mora* as he did. He claims that Komtiyano's purpose here was educational. Since Komtiyano believed that his commentary would bring mankind closer to completeness, he wished to make it accessible to the public. An example of this may be seen in the fact that Komtiyano—who believed that in order to understand Ibn Ezra, one needs to have knowledge in the sciences—clarified for the reader elementary scientific terms. Schwartz ends his introduction with the point that Komtiyano succeeded in his mission, which is evidenced by the large number of manuscripts in which his commentary has survived.

Overall, these two volumes make an important contribution to the academic literature in this field of Jewish thought. They are indispensable to anyone interested in these two personalities and of great use to anyone who wishes better to understand the Jewish philosophical and exegetical tradition in this period.

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