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Abstracts

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Abstracts

Haggai Ben-Shammai

Saadia's Introduction to Daniel: Prophetic Calculation of the End of Days vs. Astrological and Magical Speculation

An almost complete text of Saadia's introduction to his Judeo-Arabic commentary on Daniel is here published for the first time, along with an annotated English translation. The text is based on two long fragments (St. Petersburg, Russian National Library, Antonin 476; Cambridge University Library, T-S Ar. 33.33), and two short ones (Oxford, Bodl. 2486, fol. 1 [previously published in J. Qāfiḥ's edition]; Cambridge University Library, T-S Ar. 26.54 [previously published by Y. Ratzaby]).

A central theme of the introduction is Saadia's discussion of astrology, focusing on the ability of human beings to know the future. According to Saadia, the future cannot be known by human means, since all human knowledge is based on sense perception. Astrologers' pretense to know the future through scientific methods is flawed, because astrology has no scientific validity. It is based on historical experience, not on sound theoretical principles. In this fundamental characteristic it is quite similar to magical techniques that have no scientific pretensions. The only legitimate means to know the future is prophecy, which is revealed by the omniscient God. The book of Daniel is the prophecy that is particularly aimed at conveying the pattern of the future redemption to the Jewish people.

Like others of Saadia's introductions to biblical books, this one too has a distinct polemic aspect. In the Geonic period, many Jews in the East were attracted to astrology; some made major contributions to its development. Many astrological works in Arabic were associated with Daniel's name, thus confusing a legendary magician with the biblical personality whom Saadia considered to be a true prophet. Deeming this trend to be dangerous to basic

Jewish beliefs, Saadia set out to refute what had been presented as a pure science, with its own means and terms. His goal was to draw a clear line between his version of rabbinic Judaism, rephrased in Judeo-Arabic in accordance with contemporary scientific achievements, on the one hand, and complete assimilation of Jews in the cultural environment, on the other hand. In order to do so he learned the basic terminology and theories of astrology. Saadia's seems to be the earliest systematic refutation of astrology by a medieval Jewish thinker and one of the earliest such statements in Arabic literature in general.

Shlomo Sela

Queries on Astrology Sent from Southern France to Maimonides: Critical Edition of the Hebrew Text, Translation, and Commentary

In the closing years of the twelfth century, a group of scholars in southern France sent a letter to Maimonides in Egypt, requesting his advice on some troubling issues related to astrology. A new scientific edition of the Hebrew text is offered, accompanied by the first translation into a European language, plus a study of its historical context. The most important finding is that the authors of the queries incorporated verbatim quotations and paraphrases of passages from several astrological treatises by Abraham Ibn Ezra and that the questions addressed to Maimonides are based on them. The annotations document these borrowings from Ibn Ezra, identified in manuscripts of his astrological works. Hence the queries from southern France and Maimonides' *Letter on Astrology* constitute a sort of indirect dialogue between Abraham Ibn Ezra and Maimonides, the two towering figures of the twelfth century.

Giorgio Israel

Science and the Jewish Question in the Twentieth Century: The Case of Italy and What It Shows

The anti-Jewish racial policy introduced by the Fascist regime in Italy in the 1930s is often considered to be marginal in the European context of that period. This paper shows that this thesis is groundless: Fascist racism had a strong impact on the Italian Jewish community and led to a serious crisis in Italian science. Furthermore, Italian "spiritualistic" racism had a peculiar development quite autonomous from German racism and was linked to some basic aspects of the Fascist ideology. This racism included original and even modern elements: it gravitated around the concept of *ethnic group*, which still has wide currency even today, more than around the concept of race in a strictly biological sense. This paper describes the contribution of the Italian scientific community to the elaboration of this racism, the attitude of Jewish scientists, and the consequences of the anti-Jewish policies for Italian science. It also provides arguments for the rejection of Veblen's thesis about the causes of the Jews' pre-eminence modern science and culture.