



---

Between Haskalah and Orthodoxy: The Writings of R. Jacob Zvi Meklenburg

Author(s): Edward Breuer

Source: *Hebrew Union College Annual*, Vol. 66 (1995), pp. 259-287

Published by: [Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion](http://www.huc.edu/)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23508522>

Accessed: 23-02-2016 09:08 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



*Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Hebrew Union College Annual*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# Between Haskalah and Orthodoxy: The Writings of R. Jacob Zvi Meklenburg

EDWARD BREUER

*University of Pennsylvania*

The relationship between the eighteenth-century German Haskalah and the rise of German Orthodoxy in the nineteenth century has been little appreciated. This study examines the writings of R. Jacob Zvi Meklenburg (1785–1865), the chief rabbi of Kōnigsberg, in order to shed some light on this historical connection. R. Meklenburg's primary scholarly work was a Bible commentary titled *Ha-Ketav ve-ha-Kabbalah*, first published in 1839 but then revised and expanded in 1852. A careful consideration of this commentary and its introductions underscores the degree to which R. Meklenburg's interest in the study of Scripture drew substantially upon Maskilic writings and, to a lesser degree, the scholarship of R. Elijah b. Solomon, the Gaon of Vilna. The Maskilic sources were utilized in R. Meklenburg's defense of rabbinic Judaism, especially in his attempt to articulate the relationship between the biblical text and its rabbinic interpretations. As such, it becomes necessary to consider the impact of Maskilic exegetical sensibilities on the historical shift from pre-modern traditionalism to the advent of nineteenth-century German Jewish Orthodoxy.

It is a commonplace of modern European Jewish history that one refers to late eighteenth-century Germany as the period of Enlightenment, followed, in the first decades of the next century, by the development of *Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, Reform, and the beginnings of Orthodoxy. The German-Jewish Enlightenment, which as a distinct historical phenomenon cannot be dated much before the 1770's, had effectively faded by 1810. In rapid and almost simultaneous succession, the next two decades gave rise to a scholarly-academic study of Judaism and its literatures, and, in its wake, a determination to reshape this ancient tradition in light of new social, cultural, and religious realities. In response to these developments, traditionalists wishing to maintain Judaism in its inherited form began to articulate an orthodoxy centered around its defense of rabbinic authority and ritual praxis.

For numerous reasons, the relationship between the Berlin Enlightenment, the Haskalah, and the Orthodox Judaism that coalesced a half-century later has been accorded only the most cursory treatment. Given the swiftness with which the Haskalah appeared and then dissipated as an historical force,

its impact beyond this early period has been assumed to be far more schematic than substantive. As the first stage of what would become the complex cultural and religious history of modern German Jewry, the Haskalah has been regarded as a transitional movement whose most important bequest to nineteenth-century German-Jewry was its embrace of European languages and learning and its desire to foster social and economic ties between Jews and Germans. The fact that proponents of *Wissenschaft*, Reform, and Orthodoxy would equally embrace these broad ideals only underscored the sense in which the Haskalah's lasting significance was limited to its very establishment of new socio-economic and cultural patterns for European Jewry.

If the substantive impact of the Haskalah has been given any consideration at all, it is in terms of the shifting patterns of religious life and thought. Although it exhibited many traditionalist tendencies, the Haskalah's cultural predilections, including its stress on Bible and language study, have been interpreted as a careful but distinct move away from the centrality of rabbinic traditions. Assuming a kind of causal inevitability, students of modern Jewish history have implicitly drawn a line from this slight but unmistakable breach of existing norms to the wholesale questioning of rabbinic authority. The Haskalah might not have been a proximate cause for the emergence of Reform Judaism, but it helped set in motion the crucial dynamics from which this religious movement eventually grew. Conversely, early proponents of Orthodoxy, although strongly supportive of the reprioritization of Jewish education and of the introduction of European learning, were assumed to be far more committed to the preservation of normative rabbinic Judaism than even the most traditionalist Maskilim.<sup>1</sup>

As this paper hopes to demonstrate, the relationship between the German-Jewish Haskalah and early German Orthodoxy bears some careful consideration. A number of key contributors to the Berlin Haskalah, among them Moses Mendelssohn, Solomon Dubno, and Naftali Hirz Wessely, appear to have devoted substantial attention to rabbinic literature, with a particular interest in defending these traditions against a groundswell of contemporary scholarly criticism emanating largely from European universities.<sup>2</sup> As such, while this early defense of rabbinic Judaism was not occasioned by the same internal challenges around which a new Orthodoxy coalesced, it is nonetheless important to consider the ways in which Maskilic literature both anticipated and influenced the later response to *Wissenschaft* and Reform. Early

(1) Various aspects of this picture have implicitly and explicitly informed the most important books on this period; see e.g., Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation*, 1770–1870 (New York, 1978); and Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity* (New York, 1988).

(2) I have discussed this aspect of the Haskalah in my forthcoming book, *The Limits of Enlightenment: Jews, Germans, and the Eighteenth-Century Study of Scripture* (Cambridge, 1995).

Orthodox scholars, for their part, were in a position to shape a distinct vision of Judaism by drawing upon the different cultural traditions of European Jewry, including that of the Haskalah. However pronounced or subtle the impact of this movement on early Orthodoxy, its effect would have to be appreciated as one of many traditionalist cultures of nineteenth-century Jewry.

The particular focus of this investigation will be the writings of R. Jacob Zvi Meklenburg (1785–1865), a scholar and communal rabbi known primarily for his commentary to the Pentateuch, *Ha-Ketav ve-ha-Ḳabbalah*.<sup>3</sup> R. Meklenburg was of the same generation of a group of important Central European traditionalists – Hakham Isaac Bernays (1792–1849) and R. Jacob Ettlinger (1798–1871) in northern Germany, R. Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (1795–1874) in the Posen district, and R. Nahman Krochmal (1785–1840) and R. Shelomoh Yehudah Rappoport (1790–1867) in Galicia – who were among the first scholars to confront the social and religious fragmentation of the traditional *kehillot*. For all their differences, these individuals represented something of a transition between an unchallenged traditionalism and a self-conscious Orthodoxy. Unlike the next generation of thinkers and leaders, this group was less directly responsible for establishing the institutional and ideological foundation of German Orthodoxy than for helping to delineate the cultural bearing of its variegated responses to modernity. These individuals also represented a generation that came to maturity at a time when the Haskalah as a movement had effectively disappeared but whose call for acculturation had begun to be broadly realized. No less significant was the fact that they, perhaps alone among Central European Jews, continued to read certain Maskilic writings with serious interest and profit.

From his position as chief rabbi of Königsberg, R. Meklenburg was also uniquely positioned between two of the most important centers of Jewish culture, Berlin and Vilna. Although Königsberg was the easternmost urban center of the Prussian domain, it was also significantly Germanicized, a cultural reality evident in the early appearance of the Haskalah in this city. R. Meklenburg, as we shall see, was thoroughly familiar with this legacy, and drew upon some of its most salient scholarly contributions. The geographical location of this city, on the other hand, made possible some regular connections with the scholars and scholarship emanating from Lithuania, especially Vilna. R. Meklenburg's appreciation for this eastern center of Jewish scholarship was given expression in his own writing, and his citations of the Gaon Eliyahu b. Shelomoh Zalman's Bible commentary served to spread this sage's

(3) Leipzig, 1839. This edition, which has never been reproduced, was much leaner than the subsequent edition that appeared in his lifetime, but it also contained some material later omitted. This will be discussed towards the end of the paper. Except where indicated, all references to *Ha-Ketav ve-ha-Ḳabbalah* below will be to this first edition.

profound learning beyond Lithuanian circles to a broader central European readership.

Virtually nothing is known of the first four decades of R. Meklenburg's life, including his education or his formative teachers.<sup>4</sup> Of the rabbis who had contact with the young Ya'akov Tzevi in Inowroclaw, two who are known to us probably represented the cultural parameters of the world in which he was raised.<sup>5</sup> The first of these, R. Judah Leib Margoliot (1747–1811), was a Galician-born scholar who spent much of his life as a rootless preacher/rabbi, and who appears to have spent a few years at the turn of the nineteenth century as the chief rabbi of Inowroclaw.<sup>6</sup> R. Margoliot represented a relatively distinct type of eighteenth-century scholar, one widely known for his combination of traditional learning, an enthusiastic appreciation for the natural sciences, and an expressed hostility towards certain aspects of the Haskalah.<sup>7</sup> The other rabbi of his youth, R. Zechariah Mendel b. David Tevele, had served in Inowroclaw from 1805 until his death four years later. Very little is known about him, but his father, the chief rabbi of Lissa from 1774–92, had issued one of the first and most vehement denunciations of proposed Maskilic reforms in his public attack against Naftali Hirz Wessely's *Divrei Shalom ve-ʿEmet*.<sup>8</sup>

Whatever his early education, it is evident that by the time R. Meklenburg published *Ha-Ketav* in 1839, he had not only acquired a solid command of

(4) The standard biographical essay on R. Meklenburg is David Druck, "Ha-Gaon R. Ya'akov Tzevi Meklenburg," *Horev* 4 (1937) 171–79; other information, sometimes at variance with this essay, is included in Joseph Rosenthal, *Die gottesdienstlichen Einrichtungen in der jüdischen Gemeinde zu Königsberg in Preussen* (Königsberg, 1921), pp. 47–48. R. Meklenburg's *Ha-Ketav ve-ha-Ḳabbalah* was recently examined in light of some of the broad exegetical and historical issues raised here in Jay M. Harris, *How Do We Know This? Midrash and the Modern Fragmentation of Judaism* (Albany, 1995), pp. 212–20.

(5) R. Meklenburg appears to have spent a good part of his youth in Inowroclaw, although there is some question as to whether he was born there or in a neighboring town of the Posen district, Gnesen; see Rosenthal, *Gottesdienstlichen Einrichtungen*, p. 47.

(6) R. Margoliot's stay in Inowroclaw was reported by R. Meklenburg himself in Joshua Heschel Levin, *ʿAliyot ʿEliyahu* (Vilna, 1855), p. 76 n. 77.

(7) See his *ʾOr ʿOlam ʿal Hokmat ha-Teʾav* (Frankfurt, 1777); *Beit Middot* (Shklov, 1786); and *ʿAtzei ʿEden* (Frankfurt, 1802). See also Israel Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature*, trans. Bernard Martin (12 vols.; Cincinnati and New York, 1974) vol. 6, pp. 256–60, and vol. 8, pp. 215–18; Gerald J. Blidstein, "HaRav Yehudah Leib Margoliot ke-Baʿal Halakhah," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 44 (1973) 19–25 [Hebrew section]; and recently, David E. Fishman, *Russia's First Modern Jews: The Jews of Shklov* (New York, 1995), pp. 112–15.

(8) See Louis Lewin, *Geschichte der Juden in Lissa* (Pinne, 1904), pp. 192–98; and *idem*, "Aus dem jüdischen Kulturkampfe," *Jahrbuch der jüdisch-literarischen Gesellschaft* 12 (1918) 182–94; Moshe Samet, "M. Mendelson, N.H. Veisel, ve-Rabbanei Doram," *Mehḳarim be-Toldot ʿAm Yisraʾel ve-ʿEretz Yisraʾel* 1 (1970) 250ff.

German, but a rudimentary knowledge of Greek, Latin, and Arabic as well.<sup>9</sup> More importantly, above and beyond the broad range of medieval and early modern texts utilized in this commentary, it was also clear that he was an attentive student of some non-traditional or Maskilic writings, from Solomon Maimon's *Givat ha-Moreh* to the early scholarly writings of Julius Fürst to various essays in Maskilic journals such as *Bikkurei Ha-ʿIttim* and *Kerem Hemed*.<sup>10</sup>

In spite of what can be incidentally gleaned from R. Meklenburg's writings, the fact remains that his formative cultural and intellectual experiences are obscured from us. His first major scholarly work did not appear until he was well into his fifties, and even the smattering of minor writings that are extant — approbations, notes, and letters — do not predate his accession to the rabbinate of Königsberg in 1831, at the age of forty-six.<sup>11</sup> This complete lack of early scholarly and authorial presence might not have been particularly noteworthy were it not for his own conspicuous self-consciousness regarding his eventual foray into the world of scholarship. The very first approbation composed by the newly-installed rabbi of Königsberg began with a curious apology to his fellow scholars for his presumptuousness in supplying this commendation.<sup>12</sup> The introduction to *Ha-Ketav*, similarly, contained a long demurral aimed at excusing the deficiencies of his work, an expression of self-doubt that went well beyond conventional demonstrations of humility.<sup>13</sup> Both here and in a letter written two decades later, he appeared particularly sensitive about how his commentary would be regarded by learned contemporaries, insisting that it be judged as a popular work and not — in what he suggested would be an act of unacceptable temerity — as a scholarly offering.<sup>14</sup> R. Meklenburg, it seems, did not initially feel comfortable presenting himself as a scholar among equals, an uneasiness that may have been buttressed by the

(9) See e.g., *Ha-Ketav* to Gen 7:23; Exod 4:14, 31:17, Lev 13:3, 13:39, 19:4, 24:16. With the exception of the frequent appearance of German, these citations of words and phrases from foreign languages were omitted from later editions.

(10) Maimon's work was cited in Exod 33:18; Fürst was cited over a dozen times in *Ha-Ketav*, including Gen 1:26, 41:17; Exod 20:13, 21:8, 21:12; Lev 13:18, 24:16; and Deut 16:10, 31:19. *Bikkurei Ha-ʿIttim* and *Kerem Hemed* were cited in Gen 37:25; and Lev 13:18, 16:10, 24:16.

(11) Judging by his comments in *Ha-Ketav* and elsewhere, it does not appear that this work was written much earlier than its publication. R. Meklenburg's only other full-length work was a commentary to the prayerbook, *ʿIyyun Tefillah*, first published along with a liturgical-halakhic commentary of R. Jacob Lorbeerbaum, *Derekh ha-Ḥayyim*, in Königsberg 1846. Rosenthal, *Gottesdienstlichen Einrichtungen*, p. 42, wrote that R. Meklenburg had begun this commentary in 1817, although it is unclear on what basis he made this comment.

(12) This approbation to Jeremiah Heinemann's *Ḥumash Meḳor Ḥayyim* is discussed below.

(13) See p. xvii.

(14) *Ibid.*; and see Naftali Ben-Menahem, "Shtei ʾIggrot R. Yaʿakov Zvi Meklenburg," *Sinai* 65 (1969) 327–28.



fact that unlike his peers, he did not claim any of the reigning rabbinic masters as his teacher.<sup>15</sup> Even with regard to Maskilic interests, such as the grammar and language study he so strongly emphasized in *Ha-Ketav*, he appeared apologetic and isolated. Self-consciously lamenting the fact that he had “neither guide nor teacher in the ways of the language,” he indicated a need to fortify his own comments by citing the linguistic writings of other ‘greater’ contemporaries.<sup>16</sup>

These various insecurities, of course, did not prevent R. Meklenburg from putting pen to paper, and even his earliest extant writing, appearing a year after his accession to the rabbinate of Königsberg, points us to the salient cultural-religious dynamics which shaped his work. This rather curious seven-page essay was actually an extended approbation to *Humash Mekor Hayyim*, an edition of Moses Mendelssohn’s Bible published by Jeremiah Heinemann (1778–1855).<sup>17</sup> Heinemann was born and raised in Germany and lived a good part of his adult years in Berlin, where he devoted much of his energies to education and the publication of various edited works, commentaries, and journals.<sup>18</sup> In the context of Berlin Jewry, Heinemann’s Maskilic proclivities appeared to be somewhat of an anachronism among his urbane co-religionists. Locally, at least, his efforts to bring a new edition of Mendelssohn’s Bible to press were greeted with general indifference.<sup>19</sup>

In order to fully understand R. Meklenburg’s letter of commendation to

(15) Many of his rabbinic contemporaries of east-central Europe — R. Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, R. Eliyahu Guttmacher, and R. Solomon Plessner — were students or associates of well-known scholars such as R. Akiva Eger or R. Jacob Lorbeerbaum. Although a popular slim monograph by Yehudah Cooperman, *Pirkei Mavo<sup>2</sup> le-Feirush Ha-Ketav ve-ha-Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1990), states on the title page that R. Meklenburg was a student of R. Akiva Eger, I have not been able to locate any sources to support this claim.

(16) *Ha-Ketav*, introduction, pp. xvi–xvii. R. Meklenburg also made it a point to excuse himself for not writing in refined Maskilic style.

(17) (5 vols.; Berlin, 1831–33). The dating of various approbations and introductions included in this work indicate that it was really published between 1832 and 1834.

Mendelssohn’s German translation and Hebrew commentary to the Pentateuch was originally published as *Sefer Netivot Ha-Shalom* (Berlin, 1780–1783), now reproduced in *Moses Mendelssohn Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe*, (ed.) F. Bamberger, A. Altmann, et al. (Stuttgart, 1971–) [henceforth *GSJ*], vols. 15 (1)–18.

(18) Details of Heinemann’s life are rather sketchy. The best bibliography of his writings appears in Julius Fürst, *Bibliotheca Judaica* (Leipzig, 1849), Part 1, pp. 373–75. Heinemann had apparently also tried to publish an edition of *Sefer Netivot Ha-Shalom* in 1815; see *Moses Mendelssohn’s Gesammelte Schriften*, G. B. Mendelssohn (ed.) (Leipzig, 1843–45) vol. 7, pp. xlix.

(19) While Mendelssohn managed to sell almost 250 copies of the first edition of his Bible in Berlin alone, a half-century later Heinemann could barely muster two dozen subscribers from a Jewish community that had grown considerably. Cf. *GSJ*, vol. 15 (1), pp. 56–64, to *Humash Mekor Hayyim*, pp. 26a ff.; and see Steven M. Lowenstein, “The Readership of Mendelssohn’s Bible Translation,” in *HUCA* 53 (1982) 186–92.

Heinemann, one must appreciate the context and character of this publication. By the 1830's, German-speaking lands had been saturated with eighteen editions of Mendelssohn's Bible, many of them with a press run exceeding a thousand copies. But while earlier editions of this German Bible were being bought first in the large Jewish communities of northern Germany and then in more rural *kehillot* of Southern and Western Germany, Heinemann's edition sold mainly in the areas east of the Oder River.<sup>20</sup> Less westernized and more traditional, these territories were nevertheless beginning to be affected by the cultural and socio-economic dynamics to which all German Jewry was subject.

Heinemann, for his part, nowhere indicated his interest in specifically targeting these lands of West Prussia, so it is hardly evident that this publication was aimed at spreading Maskilic ideas eastward. His introduction, rather, seemed to have assumed a readership wholly traditional and at the same time thoroughly appreciative of a Mendelssohnian Bible. His stated aim was simply the production of a traditional Hebrew Bible — Masoretic text, Targum Onkelos, and Rashi — accompanied by Mendelssohn's German translation and the latter's edited Hebrew commentary (*Biʿur*), all of which were to be carefully checked for various printing errors which apparently marred other contemporary editions. Heinemann also added his own *Biʿur la-Talmid*, a supercommentary to Mendelssohn's work. Whoever his imagined readers may have been, it was clear that he did not deem it necessary to explain the importance or relevance of this work. Moreover, when he spoke of great scholars who "explicated Scripture and joined together the *peshat* and the *derash*," he mentioned Rashi and Mendelssohn in the same breadth as if this was a most natural twinning.<sup>21</sup> It was only in an essay written towards the end of the project, in which Heinemann underscored the centrality of the Oral Law for Judaism and the need to subject the frailties of human reason to its imperatives, that he expressed even the slightest interest in justifying his publication. Speaking here of the need to defend rabbinic traditions against various detractors, Heinemann listed a long line of medieval Jewish savants whose writings offered precisely this kind of defense, a group to which he unhesitatingly added Mendelssohn. At this juncture, however, Heinemann noted that there were those who "delivered evil reports about [Mendelssohn], saying that he had another spirit with him," but roundly rejected this as an unfounded defamation.<sup>22</sup>

(20) See Lowenstein, *ibid.*, 188.

(21) *Humash Meḳor Hayyim*, vol. 1, introduction, p. 24a.

(22) This essay appeared as an introduction to Deuteronomy, although it had nothing to do with this particular book of Scripture; see *Humash Meḳor Hayyim*, vol. 5, introduction [unpaginated].



R. Meklenburg's approbation, written in the summer of 1832 and included in the Leviticus volume of *Mekor Hayyim*, shared some of Heinemann's presumptions and sensitivities. The very epistolic quality of this approbation, coupled with the fact that he personally supported this publication with his own subscription, made it clear that this was no perfunctory commendation. In it, interestingly, he had relatively little to say about Heinemann's supercommentary to Mendelssohn's *Bi'ur*, and nothing at all about the latter.<sup>23</sup> By this time, as we have already noted, Hebrew Bibles with Mendelssohn's translation and commentary were ubiquitous and wholly unremarkable, and one may fairly compare their popularity at that time with the classical commentary of Rashi, with which they were most often printed. As such, R. Meklenburg focused the bulk of his letter upon what he clearly considered to be the most pressing issue of the day, namely the deterioration in Jewish learning and religious life. As Jews were becoming more proficient in German and other European languages, their facility with the Hebrew Bible was declining steadily; and even when some individuals did devote their attention to this text, their readings were no longer based on the traditions of the sages.

Sensitive to the growing hostility towards the very notion of rabbinic authority, R. Meklenburg addressed himself to the crux of the problem: why, he asked, was it imperative for a Jew to rely on the wisdom of earlier sages? Why couldn't Jews as individuals rely on their own intellectual acumen to navigate the paths of the Torah? The issue, of course, was whether contemporary Jews had the license to independently determine the meaning of biblical texts, especially its ritual obligations. Were it not for the fact of an oral revelation, he argued, such a stance would be acceptable; but R. Meklenburg took the notion of *torah she-be-ʿal peh* as an incontrovertible pillar of faith which, in his mind at least, precluded any such independence. Sensing that this might not prove to be an effective response, he quickly added that even without invoking this notion, one could rely upon the fact that the Written Law itself pointed to the existence of such a tradition. The examples immediately proffered – an excursus on the distinction between *dibbur* and *ʿamirah* and explications of Exod 19:19 and 24:12 – made it plain that R. Meklenburg was not here claiming that the substantive detail of rabbinic traditions could be derived from their Scriptural roots. Rather, like many medieval predecessors, he seemed to be suggesting little more than that the Bible itself could be shown to be the source of the notion that Revelation was accompanied by an oral explication,

(23) The fact that R. Meklenburg directed his approbation to Heinemann's new commentary was natural, given that it was the only original work being published here. R. Meklenburg was certainly aware that Heinemann was writing a supercommentary to Mendelssohn's *Bi'ur*, for his approbation referred explicitly to Heinemann's own introduction, in which this fact was made abundantly clear.

a set of interpretations which were naturally identified with the traditions of the rabbinic sages.

R. Meklenburg's commendation of Heinemann's work, then, was predicated upon the latter's desire to "strengthen the words [of the sages] with nails such that they not be moved, and to impede foolish men, who fabricate matters against the word of God that are not right,"<sup>24</sup> from deceptiveness.<sup>25</sup> In the cover letter accompanying this approbation, R. Meklenburg spoke of this writer's efforts to "identify the *peshat* of Scripture with the knowledge of the sages, the masters of the authoritative Talmud." In describing the exegetical approach of his own commentary, Heinemann indeed stated that he would occasionally seek to "justify Rashi if he appeared to be going against the *peshat*," and would endeavor to "establish law and *halakhah* on clearly-explained Scripture." Although he nowhere grounded such an approach in a broadly-applied hermeneutic method, and inasmuch as he was often content to do little more than note rabbinic readings, Heinemann did occasionally pause to demonstrate the substantive proximity between these two modes of interpretation.<sup>26</sup> R. Meklenburg clearly appreciated Heinemann's determination to buttress rabbinic interpretations of Scripture, though given the vague and medieval-sounding quality of his own extended approbation, it was not at all evident where his own exegetical inclinations lay.

It was furthermore interesting that in contrast with Heinemann, R. Meklenburg did not directly identify this exegetical defense of rabbinic literature with the work of Mendelssohn. But R. Meklenburg did not entirely ignore the scholarly legacy of the Haskalah, for he drew more generally – if critically – upon other Maskilic writings in support of his central claims. For example, in citing the distinction between *dibbur* and *ʿamirah*, wherein the latter was identified with the discerning expansiveness of the Oral Law, R. Meklenburg first noted that this distinction also appeared in the writings of R. Eliyahu, the Vilna Gaon.<sup>27</sup> Then, in the very next lines, he went on to add that the distinction was also to be found in *Sefer Yeriʿot Shelomoh* of Solomon Pappenheim, but was contrary to the view of Naftali Hirz Wessely.<sup>28</sup> Somewhat further ahead, when R. Meklenburg turned to an explication of Exod 19:19, he went out of

(24) Cf. II Kgs 17:9.

(25) See the end of R. Meklenburg's approbation [unpaginated in the text].

(26) See e.g., the *Biʿur la-Talmid* and added notes to Gen 9:4–5, 24:63; Lev 4:13, 5:5, 19:15; and Deut 20:19.

(27) See the Vilna Gaon's *ʿAderet ʿEliyahu* (Halberstadt, 1859), commentary to Deut 5:24.

(28) For the reference to Pappenheim, see the posthumously published second volume of *Sefer Yeriʿot Shelomoh* (Rödelheim, 1831), pp. 9a–11 b. Wessely addressed this distinction in his commentary to Lev 1:1, included as part of Mendelssohn's *Sefer Netivot Ha-Shalom*; see *GSJ*, vol. 17, p. 8. R. Meklenburg also pointed to R. Eliyahu and Wessely in this regard in his commentary to Lev 1:1 in the 1852 edition of *Ha-Ketav* (of which more below).

his way to point out that Wessely had discussed the first half of this verse in terms that were “thoroughly veracious,” but added that he found this Maskil’s reading of the second half of the verse to be far less compelling.<sup>29</sup> What is notable here is not only the apparent ease with which he moved between Lithuanian and Maskilic sources, but the fact that his world of learning was so infused with the writings of certain Maskilim that even interpretative divergences were to be duly noted, as if registered against some widely recognized discourse.

The appearance of the first edition of *Ha-Ketav* seven years later reflected some development in R. Meklenburg’s exegetical thinking, but it also gave further expression to some of the salient features already evident in the epistolary approbation. Unlike some later editions, the version published in 1839 contained two introductions, the first of which was a highly stylized poetic essay that addressed a number of broad issues, while the second was written in simple prose and concerned itself with substantive questions of sources and methods. R. Meklenburg opened the first of these introductions by asking an old question regarding the relationship of the Written and Oral Laws: Why was the text of the Hebrew Bible not more forthcoming about the details of its myriad ritual obligations? Why was so much left to oral traditions? In response, R. Meklenburg began by suggesting that a certain economy of speech was a virtuous and ennobling attribute, a truth as applicable to a divine text as to individuals.<sup>30</sup> More importantly, drawing again on an old Jewish trope, he went on to argue for the superiority of oral transmission. While the written word was in itself lifeless and stiff, the very medium of oral instruction – with its natural reliance on vocal tonality, expressive gesture, and body language – rendered it far more supple and rich.<sup>31</sup> The primacy of oral traditions was thus predicated on a number of qualitative determinations.

As the prophetic recipient of both written and oral revelations, Moses was uniquely privy not only to their profound wisdom, but to the organically seamless relationship that bound them together. What Moses transmitted to oth-

(29) The reference given here was to Wessely’s *Gan Na’ul* (2 vols.; Amsterdam, 1765–66); I have been unable to locate the precise location of the citation. It is not a little curious that when R. Meklenburg came to interpret this verse in *Ha-Ketav* to Exod 19:19, he cited Wessely’s comments to the latter part of the verse approvingly, saying only that he would fill out his ideas.

(30) *Ha-Ketav*, Introduction, pp. v–vi.

(31) *Ibid.*, pp. vi–vii. In a brief footnote, R. Meklenburg pointed only to R. Jacob Emden’s *‘Aliyyat ha-Ketivah*, which appeared in the latter’s *Birat Migdal ‘Oz* (Zhitomir, 1874), pp. 150b–153b; see also the section called *‘Aliyyat ha-Lashon*, pp. 155b–156a. For some of the earlier classical discussions of this issue, see Judah ha-Levi, *Sefer ha-Kuzari*, II:72; Maimonides, and *Moreh Nebukhim*, intro and I:71. In the eighteenth century, these arguments had been utilized by Mendelssohn in his *Jerusalem*; see *GSJ*, vol. 8, pp. 184–85, 193.

ers and to future generations, however, was not so much the substantive content of the Oral Law, but the hermeneutic keys by which to explicate Scripture. Although R. Meklenburg alluded here to the formal rabbinic principles (*middot*), his subsequent discussion made it clear that the keys to which he referred were really synonymous with a broad and sophisticated mastery of biblical Hebrew. A refined grasp of the biblical language and idiom, he suggested, would demonstrate that “the Written Torah and the Oral Torah are twins, stuck one to the other such that they could not be sundered.”<sup>32</sup> The apparent tension between the plain sense of Scripture and rabbinic *derashot* would dissipate in the realization that “the only difference between the *derash* and the *peshat* is that which distinguishes the outside of a vessel from its contents.” To view either Scripture or rabbinic teachings in isolation was to misapprehend their true meaning.

As it appeared here, this first introduction ultimately had little that was new.<sup>33</sup> Beyond indicating a general determination to show that rabbinic readings stood in perfect harmony with Scripture, R. Meklenburg did not articulate the methods by which this could be done, nor did he introduce any conceptual language that shed new light on this problem.<sup>34</sup> Although, in the end, the second introduction did not entirely overcome this particular problem, it was, historically and substantially, of greater import. Despite the vast literature devoted to the narrative and halakhic portions of Scripture, our author began this second introduction by expressing his dissatisfaction with the traditional handling of a range of biblical problems, including such things as the plethora of moral failings attributed to biblical characters and the use of anthropomorphism to explain descriptions of divine activity. More importantly, R. Meklenburg complained that earlier scholars had not done enough to conjoin the Written and Oral Laws, allowing the latter to appear as if it was either expanding or restricting the purview of the former. Couching this problem in pedagogic terms, he expressed his concern for the perceived authenticity of Jewish oral traditions; children, unable to see the connections between Scripture and various rabbinic pronouncements, would surely view the latter as a foreign graft. Bemoaning the contemporary manifestation of this problem, he knowingly pointed to Jewish youths who thus rejected rabbinic learning and all its traditions.<sup>35</sup>

R. Meklenburg’s perspective here was plainly calibrated to justify his own

(32) *Ha-Ketav*, Introduction, p. x; and cf. Job 41:9.

(33) The second edition of *Ha-Ketav* (1852) contained an expanded version of this first introductory essay with a series of very lengthy notes. These will be discussed below.

(34) A certain tentativeness can even be detected on the rambling title-page, which read: *Ha-Ketav ve-ha-Ḳabbalah: Behinah ve Nissayon le-Ba’er ‘al derekh ha-peshat ‘o ḳarov ‘elav*. . .

(35) *Ha-Ketav*, Introduction, p. xi–xiii.

exegetical contribution in the form of *Ha-Ketav*. The direct relationship between the youthful drift from traditional observance and the qualitative failings of earlier scholarship was questionable, but it was hardly new. A half-century earlier, this very complaint had been used by the early Maskilim to justify their educational reforms, and it was one with which our author readily identified.<sup>36</sup> Despite the fact that he could well have blamed the Maskilic emphasis on the study of *peshat* for contributing to the rejection of rabbinic teachings, he refrained from doing so. Instead, he insisted that the problem lay with traditional exegetes and their failure to demonstrate that the plain sense of Scripture was in full agreement with Talmudic and Midrashic pronouncements. The only exception to this rule, according to R. Meklenburg, was Wessely's commentary to Leviticus in *Sefer Netivot Ha-Shalom*.<sup>37</sup>

Having set out the broad aims of this work, the introduction then turned to a number of substantive problems. If, as R. Meklenburg had insisted, the readings of the sages could be shown to correspond with *peshuto shel mikra*,<sup>2</sup> why then did these ancient scholars formulate and selectively apply a circumscribed set of hermeneutical principles? Would the existence of these principles not appear to preclude the kind of broad exegetical approach suggested by *Ha-Ketav*? In classical fashion, our author responded by pointing to both early and late Midrashic texts that encouraged and seemingly legitimated the broad linguistic approach adopted of his work.<sup>38</sup> He further added that the Tannaitic hermeneutic principles, although preserved by tradition, were themselves based on a fundamental appreciation of biblical language and idiom. For the modern student, then, the road from biblical text to rabbinic interpretation had already been well-paved. All that remained was the everpresent obligation to lay bare these sources and foundation-stones of tradition, although even this limited challenge was largely neglected.

Given that *Ha-Ketav* took the biblical text as the essential key to understanding rabbinic exegesis, R. Meklenburg then turned his attention to the linguistic modalities of such an inquiry. Along these lines, he asserted that his handling of biblical Hebrew would not remain slavishly tied to the linguistic-grammatical strictures of medieval scholarship. Citing a lengthy letter of the Italian Maskil Samuel David Luzzatto critical of earlier philological scholarship, our author expressed his intention to abandon some entrenched

(36) See e.g., Wessely's *Divrei Shalom ve-<sup>2</sup>Emet* (Berlin, 1782); and *idem*, *Mehalel Re<sup>c</sup>a*, originally published with Mendelssohn's *Sefer Netivot Ha-Shalom*. See now *GSJ*, vol. 15 (1), pp. 8–14, especially pp. 8–9.

(37) *Ha-Ketav*, Introduction, p. xii.

(38) Aside from citing *Sifra* to Lev 22:3 and the *Talmud Yerushalmi*, Shekalim ch. 5, he also referred to Menahem b. Shelomoh's exegetical-midrashic *Šekhel Tov*, then extant only in manuscript.

linguistic notions – as for example the three-consonant root system – in favor of a more pliable understanding of Hebrew words, roots, and declensions.<sup>39</sup> Towards this end, he pointed to a number of other Maskilically-inspired scholars – Pappenheim, Mordechai Gumpel Levisohn, Wolf Heidenheim, and Julius Fürst – whose works were also invested in the development of fresh approaches to the Hebrew language.<sup>40</sup> Taken together, these writings would amply support the exegetical agenda of *Ha-Ketav*.

Here again, as R. Meklenburg articulated the function and scholarly contribution of this work, it became evident that the various cultural spheres that comprised early nineteenth-century European Jewry were perceived as a continuum. He suggested that *Ha-Ketav* would serve as a vehicle in which to present biblical scholarship that was otherwise inaccessible to the average reader. The treatises of many of the scholars mentioned earlier – he expressly referred to Wessely, Pappenheim, Fürst, and Luzzatto – were relatively specialized and dense publications, and were neither fully indexed nor organized as commentaries. As such, illuminating insights into this or that biblical verse could not be broadly appreciated unless they were cited in the form of a commentary. R. Meklenburg also deemed it useful to draw upon works which had appeared as commentaries but not generally available to many readers. His list again unflinchingly lumped together a most interesting group of names, including Baḥya b. Asher, Obadiah Sforno, the Gaon R. Eliyahu, Wolf Heidenheim, and Judah Leib Spira.

The late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century scholars repeatedly mentioned in the second introduction of *Ha-Ketav* had much in common, and it was not particularly surprising that R. Meklenburg drew so heavily on their work. Most of these writers shared a common trait: they combined an appreciation for a textually-oriented study of Scripture with an unyielding devotion to traditional rabbinics. Wessely's *Gan Na'ul*, for example, viewed the sages as masters of Hebrew and the Bible whose teachings “agree with the perfect *peshat*” such that Scripture could be shown to include all oral traditions within its words and phrases.<sup>41</sup> Solomon Pappenheim (1740–1814), a rabbinic court judge in Breslau, devoted his major Hebrew work to a study of Hebrew synonyms with the aim of broadening the expressive scope and literary suppleness of Hebrew. Although displaying a strong independent streak, Pappenheim argued that among other benefits, a thorough under-

(39) I have been thus far unsuccessful in pinpointing the letter in question.

(40) See Mordechai Gumpel ha-Levi [Levisohn], *Tokhahat Megillah* (Hamburg, 1784), pp. 7a–8b. The other scholars mentioned here will be discussed below.

(41) See *Gan Na'ul*, vol. 1, pp. 3b, 8b, 20a, 55b; and see my forthcoming “Naftali Hirz Wessely and the Cultural Dislocations of an Eighteenth-Century Maskil,” in David Sorkin and Shmuel Feiner (eds.), *New Perspectives on the Haskalah*.



standing of Hebrew etymology and philology would demonstrate the extraordinary perspicacity of rabbinic interpretations of Scripture.<sup>42</sup> Like Pappenheim, Judah Leib Spira (1743–1836) and Wolf Heidenheim (1757–1832) were not as directly involved as Wessely in pressing the Maskilic program, but their writings were wholly committed to the textual and linguistic sensibilities promoted by the early German Haskalah. While eschewing the homiletic excesses of many biblical commentators, these exegetes were determined to bring an interpretative sophistication to both the biblical text and its Mid-rashic recasting.<sup>43</sup>

The scholars listed here were one generation older than R. Meklenburg and were witness to the early crystallization of the Haskalah. Two other writers singled out by our author in his introduction, both younger contemporaries of his, broke somewhat with the patterns described here. Julius Fürst (1805–73), whose writings of the 1830s clearly impressed our author, had published an Aramaic grammar and poetic reader as well as a biblical concordance, *ʔotzar Leshon ha-Ḳodesh*.<sup>44</sup> Of greater importance was Samuel David Luzzatto (1800–65), with whom R. Meklenburg had direct communication and whose writings were being published just as *Ha-Ketav* was being written.<sup>45</sup> Unlike the other writers listed above, both Fürst and Luzzatto appeared to articulate their biblical and linguistic scholarship in terms that had little to do with classical rabbinical scholarship.<sup>46</sup> R. Meklenburg's interest in their work was thus centered upon their insight into the Scriptural text; their adapta-

(42) See *Sefer Yeriʿot Shelomoh* (Dyhernfurth, 1784), p. 12a. On Pappenheim, see Joseph Klausner, *Historiyah shel ha-Sifrut ha-ʿIvrit ha-Ḥadashah* (Jerusalem, 1930), vol. 1, pp. 226–31; and Israel Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature*, trans. Bernard Martin (New York, 1976), vol. 8, pp. 178–82.

(43) See Spira's *Ha-Rekhasim le-Bikʿah* (Altona, 1815). R. Meklenburg's extensive citations of Heidenheim came from two sources; in the commentary to Genesis, he drew mainly on Heidenheim's *Sefer Torat Ha-ʿElohim* (Offenbach, 1798), a projected five-volume Bible with commentaries, of which only the uncompleted Genesis section was published. The commentary to the other books of the Pentateuch appeared to use Heidenheim's *Havanat ha-Mikra*,<sup>2</sup> published in an edition of the Pentateuch titled *Modaʿ la-Binah* (1818–20). See also Heidenheim's own description of this project in his introduction to *Humash ʿEin ha-Sofer* (Rodelheim, 1818) p. iv.

(44) (Leipzig, 1837–40). That R. Meklenburg was particularly appreciative of Fürst's work was evident in the fact that the only footnote in this second introduction was a bibliographical one pointing out the latter's other major writings to date, *Formenlehre der Chaldäischen Grammatik* (Leipzig, 1835) and *Ḥaruzei Peninim: Perlenschnüre aramäischer Gnomon und Lieder* (Leipzig, 1836). Despite his applause for Fürst's *ʔotzar Leshon ha-Ḳodesh*, it was only cited a dozen times throughout the entire *Ha-Ketav*, far less than the others discussed here.

(45) See Luzzatto's letter, published in *ʔiggerot Shadal* (Przemysl, 1882) Part V, pp. 647–48. The writings that R. Meklenburg had access to were his study of Targum Onkelos, *ʔOhev Ger* (Vienna, 1830); and various articles on Hebrew synonyms published in *Bikkurei ha-ʿIttim* (1836–38).

(46) This is evident, for example, if one compares Luzzatto's *Sefer ha-Mavdil* (*Sinonimia Ebraica*),

tion towards any kind of defense of Talmudic or Midrashic literature was an endeavor of *Ha-Ketav* alone.

The name that truly stood apart from all these scholars, however, was that of R. Eliyahu, the Vilna Gaon (1720–97). R. Eliyahu, of course, was the outstanding Lithuanian scholar whose teachings and image came to occupy a venerated status unparalleled in Orthodox Jewish culture. Although his fame had spread considerably far in his lifetime, his teachings and writings were not initially known beyond a small circle of disciples, and much of his oeuvre remained unpublished well into the nineteenth century.<sup>47</sup> R. Eliyahu's commentary to the Pentateuch, *ʿAderet ʿEliyahu*, and his other Scriptural books were among his first posthumously published writings, but they did not appear to have made much of an impact outside the schools of Lithuanian scholarship that thrived in the decades after the Gaon's death.<sup>48</sup> *Ha-Ketav's* extensive use of Pappenheim, Spira, and Heidenheim, certainly eclipsed its reliance on *ʿAderet ʿEliyahu*, but R. Meklenburg's many citations from R. Eliyahu's commentary appear to have represented the first serious engagement of the Gaon's scholarship in German lands. R. Meklenburg's commentary, in fact, may well have served as an important vehicle by which these Lithuanian writings were first disseminated westward.

Given R. Meklenburg's exegetical sensibilities, his attraction to the commentaries of R. Eliyahu were not surprising. This sage, too, demonstrated an abiding interest in the precise language and idiomatic nuances of the biblical text, extending this appreciation also to the way in which the sages themselves read Scripture.<sup>49</sup> Although, as Jay Harris has pointed out, the Vilna Gaon's writing was informed by a very different set of challenges than those

---

National and University Library of the Hebrew University, Zunz Archiv A 13, to Wessely's *Gan Naʿul*. While Wessely repeatedly argued that a careful analysis of Hebrew synonyms would lead to a better appreciation of rabbinic interpretations of Scripture (see above n. 41), Luzzatto's writing on synonyms remained focused purely on the intrinsic philological-linguistic merit of such study. Luzzatto, though, was a passionate defender of the authority and integrity of rabbinic Judaism, even though some of his positions regarding the biblical text would not be perceived as normative.

Fürst's work of the 1830s certainly had little rabbinic content, but it also had no appreciable criticism or hostility towards traditional elements of Judaism. This appeared to change, at least in the eyes of R. Meklenburg, in the years after 1838; see below n. 74.

(47) See Jacob I. Dienstag, *Elijah Gaon: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York, 1949), pp. 9–16. In fact, R. Meklenburg played an active role in the dissemination of the Vilna Gaon's writings; see his preface to the Gaon's *Sefer Heikhalot ha-Zohar* (Königsberg, 1857).

(48) Jeremiah Heinemann, who was familiar with the first edition of *ʿAderet ʿEliyahu* (he had referred to the 1804 Bible edition in which it was printed), only drew on this commentary once; see *Mekor Hayyim* to Deut 18:2.

(49) See the general description of R. Eliyahu's exegetical method supplied by his sons to-

bearing upon the exegetes writing in Germany,<sup>50</sup> it was apparent that R. Meklenburg's view of R. Eliyahu was somewhat western and Germanic in its sensibility.<sup>51</sup> This became evident some years after the publication of *Ha-Ketav* with our author's contribution to *ʿAliyot ʿEliyahu*, a classical hagiographical treatment of the Gaon's life published in 1855. The author of this work, Joshua Heschel Levin (1818–83), was both an accomplished Lithuanian Talmudist and an individual of some openness to Maskilic ideas and reforms. Levin's business travels to Königsberg brought him into contact with R. Meklenburg, and an abiding friendship ensued. In 1846, when Levin published a prayerbook with the halakhic glosses of R. Yaʿaḳov Lorbeerbaum, he also included R. Meklenburg's own commentary.<sup>52</sup> A decade later, when Levin's work on the Vilna sage appeared, a number of R. Meklenburg's notes were incorporated into the work, and the title page listed him as one of three contributors.<sup>53</sup>

It is clear from the notes contributed by R. Meklenburg that his familiarity with R. Eliyahu was third-hand and anecdotal, and had substantively little to do with the rabbinic learning – not to mention exegesis – which served as the crux of the Gaon's legacy. One of the notes, for example, relayed a clichéd story concerning the visit of the youthful R. Eliyahu to Berlin and his encounter with a German professor, whose vexing scientific quandary he immediately solved with apparent ease and sophistication.<sup>54</sup> Such a story, clearly, meant to underscore the importance of such knowledge for R. Eliyahu, but R. Meklenburg's contribution here also subtly introduced a distinctly western standard by which to measure the greatness of this acclaimed savant.

Another lengthy note attributed to R. Meklenburg intended to convey

---

wards the end of their introduction to R. Eliyahu's *ʿAderet ʿEliyahu*, *Ḥamishah Ḥumshei Torah* (Dubrovna, 1804).

(50) Harris, *How Do We Know This?*, p. 236.

(51) The casting of R. Eliyahu's image in western and even Maskilic tones may have informed an 1840 approbation for a multi-volume Hebrew work on the natural sciences, in which R. Meklenburg went out of his way to extol the importance of such books for all Jews, and praised this particular author for also applying his scientific mastery towards the understanding of certain aggadic statements in rabbinic literature. In his attempt to underscore the inherent value of such scientific texts, R. Meklenburg invoked the authority of none other than R. Eliyahu of Vilna, noting the Gaon's view regarding the interrelatedness of Torah and scientific knowledge, and citing the charge to R. Barukh Schick of Shklov [noted in the latter's *ʿUklidus* (The Hague, 1780)] to translate more scientific and mathematical books into Hebrew. See Joseph b. Benjamin Dov Schönhack, *Sefer Toldot ha-ʿAretz* (Warsaw, 1841–59). R. Meklenburg's three-page approbation appeared in the first volume of this work, which also carried the name *Toldot ha-Ḥayyim*.

(52) See above, n. 11.

(53) The other contributors mentioned by name were R. David Luria and R. Abraham Simha. R. Meklenburg also contributed an approbation.

(54) *ʿAliyot ʿEliyahu*, pp. 30b–31a, note 31.

R. Eliyahu's easy mastery of philosophical discourse, but it also captured R. Meklenburg's unself-conscious and concurrent embrace of German and Lithuanian Jewish cultures. The note concerned a letter purportedly written by Solomon Maimon to Mendelssohn, in which the former related his attempt to put some philosophical queries to R. Eliyahu, and the latter's impressive response. The letter went on to describe how, as Maimon was about to depart, R. Eliyahu turned to the subject of Hebrew philology, and the amiable tenor of the encounter quickly dissipated; Maimon had made the mistake of suggesting that the rabbinic sages of antiquity did not correctly grasp the *peshat* of a biblical word, and as a result, was hauled before a Jewish court, severely reprimanded, and publicly humiliated. R. Meklenburg's telling of this story, interestingly, conveyed a curious non-judgmental quality, for the reader was never made to feel that Maimon's 'heresy' was so horrific.<sup>55</sup> More important, however, was the denouement of R. Meklenburg's story, which revolved around the wariness of the Berlin rabbinate towards Mendelssohn. The note went on to relate that a rabbinic decision was made to intercept this letter from Maimon in order to see if it indirectly implicated Mendelssohn in any kind of heresy. Although the letter was eventually allowed to reach Mendelssohn, the chief rabbi nevertheless conspired to be present when Mendelssohn received it. "And when [Mendelssohn] opened the letter and saw that its signator was Maimon," the story concluded, "he did not read it. And he said in front of others 'what does this man want from me?'"<sup>56</sup> This part of the story did not properly belong here, and could well have been omitted, but its inclusion had the dual effect of distancing Mendelssohn from Maimon and — on this issue at least — casting Mendelssohn and R. Eliyahu in a similar traditionalist posture. The portrayal of Mendelssohn was meant to be positive, and its inclusion in the midst of a discussion of the Vilna Gaon's philosophic acumen seemed to aptly reflect the fact that from R. Meklenburg's perspective, the cultures of Berlin and Lithuania were not wholly estranged.

R. Meklenburg's unself-conscious attraction to the biblical scholarship of both Maskilim and the Vilna Gaon and his interest in the relationship of rabbinic interpretations to Scripture were evident in the body of *Ha-Ketav*. In this edition, there were few comments not drawn from the writings of some medieval or modern exegete, and of these, the scholars cited most often were those identified in the introduction, especially Pappenheim, Heidenheim, and Spira. Collectively, the writings of Mendelssohn and Wessely were accorded the same attention as the work of R. Eliyahu, and although R. Mek-

(55) The story, similarly, was utterly silent regarding the appropriateness — or excessiveness — of the severe punishment that was allegedly meted out.

(56) *Ibid.*, pp. 31a–32b, note 34.

lenburg was occasionally critical of some particular interpretation offered by the early Maskilim, such criticisms were never systemic and always predicated on a general appreciation of their scholarship.<sup>57</sup>

In light of these exegetical affinities, it was evident that much of the commentary in this edition of *Ha-Ketav* did not address itself to Talmudic or Midrashic materials, but focused on various kinds of linguistic and textual issues that yielded a better understanding of *peshuto shel mikra*.<sup>58</sup> But while the issue of rabbinic exegesis was not the primary concern of R. Meklenburg's writing here, it did serve as an important leitmotif that cut its way through this work. In his comment to Gen 18:1, "And the Lord appeared to him . . .," our author began by citing the comment of Rashi, based on a Talmudic passage, suggesting that the Lord came to visit Abraham, who was recuperating from his circumcision.<sup>58</sup> R. Meklenburg then went on to add the following comment.

We have found a number of instances where the language of appearing [*re'iyah*] indicates visiting and inquiring after the infirm (*Krankenbesuch*). As in ". . . to see Yoram . . . (II Kings 8:29)," ". . . to see David . . . (I Samuel 19:15)," and both are translated [in the Aramaic] as 'to support [*le-mis'ad*]'! It was in this sense that the Psalmist said, "And if one comes to see . . . (Psalms 41:7)," for the substantive theme of that Psalm concerns an infirm individual in need of attention. Exegetes have gone to great lengths to find a basis for this rabbinic reading, but according to that which was explained, it is the meaning of the language itself.

Our author made a similar attempt to demonstrate the textual veracity of a rabbinic reading with regard to the verse in Lev 21:9, "And the daughter of any priest (*u-bat 'ish kohen*), if she profane herself by playing the harlot, she profanes her father: she shall be burnt with fire." Although the sages disagreed whether this verse applied to a woman only betrothed or married, it was universally understood that it was not to be applied to an unattached woman; and yet the plain sense of the verse nowhere suggested such a dis-

(57) For reasons that are not at all clear, Solomon Dubno's contribution to *Sefer Netivot Ha-Shalom* — his masoretic *Tikkun Soferim* and his commentary to Genesis — came in for some unusually critical treatment. In the Genesis portion of *Ha-Ketav*, for example, Dubno's writings are cited seventeen times, and dismissed all but twice. Dubno's exegesis, however, has no obvious schematic differences with that of Mendelssohn, and it is no small irony that of all the early Maskilim, Dubno was the only one to have cultivated ties with Lithuanian scholars. Perhaps the most salient observation to be made of R. Meklenburg's handling of Dubno is the underlying assumption that readers would have had occasion to have studied Dubno's comments elsewhere, and hence the need to cite them with no aim other than their rejection.

(58) See BT Soṭah 14a; Baba Metzia 86b.

tion.<sup>59</sup> R. Meklenburg addressed this problem by first demonstrating philologically that the word *bat*, which simply referred to a daughter, was also a term that could specifically refer to a married woman. As such, the biblical passage here used the word in both senses: *bat kohen* referred to her status as a priest's daughter, but *bat ʿish* referred to her as a wife. Hence, the unidiomatic language of *u-bat ʿish kohen*, with *ʿish* being entirely superfluous, specifically excluded the single woman from the law at hand.<sup>60</sup> For R. Meklenburg, this was another case where the rabbinic literary tradition was predicated upon a thorough grasp of biblical philology and idiom.<sup>61</sup>

For the most part, R. Meklenburg's attempt to address the relationship of rabbinic exegesis to Scripture represented his own writing; that is, despite the fact that most of the entries in *Ha-Ketav* drew explicitly on the sources enumerated above, the issue of Talmudic and Midrashic interpretation was approached in an independent manner. The writings of Pappenheim, R. Eliyahu, or the others were valued for a wide variety of linguistic and textual insights, but, despite their own appreciation for rabbinic literature, they were for the most part not deemed to be useful for these purposes. It is also apparent, along these lines, that like the introductions discussed above, there is no truly systematic attempt to deal with the question of rabbinic exegesis in the body of the work itself. Aside from vague statements that "the *peshat* and tradition correspond" or that "there is no discrepancy here between tradition and Scripture," R. Meklenburg's attempt to show the fundamental consonance between the Written and Oral Laws was neither given a theoretical basis nor consistent hermeneutic treatment.<sup>62</sup> His sensitivity to the issue of rabbinic interpretation was expressed only locally, and there was little sustained development of the point from one comment to another.

With this in mind, it is not insignificant that the very few instances where he actually articulated an exegetical approach drew simultaneously on Mask-

(59) See BT Sanhedrin 51a.

(60) R. Meklenburg, like Mendelssohn before him, was concerned in instances like this to have the German translation contain both a sense of the *peshat* as well as the rabbinic reading. In this instance, he suggested a reading of "Eine verhelichte Priestertochter . . ."

(61) For other examples, see also *Ha-Ketav* to Gen 24:63, 35:22; Exod 32:16; Lev 21:9, 22:7; Num 6:18; and Deut 6:5, 21:13, 24:16, 25:2–3. Some of these examples reflect a certain defensiveness in that R. Meklenburg appears primarily interested in demonstrating that the rabbinic interpretation does not contradict *peshuto shel mikra*?. For other discussions of the relationship of the Written and Oral laws, see his commentary to Exod 19:19, 24:12.

(62) See e.g., his comments to Deut 21:3, 25:2 and 25:3. One senses from the dearth of such comments in the earlier books of the Pentateuch and their frequency in Deuteronomy that he may have written *Ha-Ketav* following its canonical order. If this surmise is correct, then it would appear that his willingness to make even such modest claims emerged only towards the end of the project.



ilic and Lithuanian sources. With regard to Deut 24:16, “Fathers shall not be put to death for children . . .”, our author struggled to reconcile the straightforward meaning – which he took to be a warning against politically-motivated familial murder – with their rabbinic interpretation circumscribing familial testimony in court.<sup>63</sup> After noting an important weakness in the textual evidence put forth by *peshat*-oriented exegetes,<sup>64</sup> R. Meklenburg suggested that

there is a difference between *derashot* that contradict the *peshat* and those that complement it. For complementary [readings] are in the realm of possibility such that both can be correct. Therefore, anywhere that the *peshat* is distinct but complementary to the *derash*, it does not oppose it, and we say that the Scriptural verse does not lose its plain meaning, and the *derashah* [sic] is maintained. For then the plain sense of Scripture is the primary meaning, and the *derashah* is a second meaning.

This hermeneutical explication, so infrequent in this work, was doubly unusual here, for it also represented a rare instance in which the source of his words was not properly registered. It was, then, no small irony that this passage was lifted verbatim from the *Toldot ʿAdam* of R. Yehezkel Feivel,<sup>65</sup> maggid of Vilna, which were themselves an unattributed and slightly altered citation from Mendelssohn’s *ʿOr Lintivah*, the latter’s general introduction to his *Sefer Netivot Ha-Shalom*.<sup>66</sup> The unattributed use of this passage here was some-

(63) R. Meklenburg’s reading of the *peshat* relied explicitly on Obadiah Sforno’s commentary to this verse, which he buttressed by also citing R. Menahem Azariah Fano’s *ʿAsarah Maʿamarot*. The rabbinic reading, which he cited via Rashi, appeared in BT Sanhedrin 27b.

(64) Sforno and Fano relied on II Chron 25:3–4 to substantiate their interpretation of this first clause of Deut 24:16, but both here and in another Talmudic citation it was unclear whether it was the first clause or the last clause (“ . . . every man shall be put to death for his own sin”) that was being invoked.

(65) R. Yehezkel Feivel b. Zeʿev Wolf, *Toldot ʿAdam* (Dyhernfurth, 1801), p. 25b. On this work and its uses of Maskilic literature, see my forthcoming “The Haskalah in Vilna: R. Yehezkel Feivel’s *Toldot ʿAdam*.”

(66) See *GSJ*, vol. 15 (1), pp. 40–41. I have reproduced here the relevant lines of the three texts under question:

Mendelssohn, *ʿOr Lintivah*:

והיה בזה כלל מונח אצלינו להבדיל בין סותר למתחליף: כי הדברים המתחלפים אפשר שיהיו שניהם כאחד צודקים ואמתיים. ולכן בכל מקום שדרך הפשט אינו אלה נוטה ומתחלף מעל הדרש, לא מתנגד לו, אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו, והדרשה תדרש. כי אז יהיה פשוטו של מקרא הכונה הראשונה והעקרית, והדרשה היא כונה שנייה, כוון האומר גם אליה כדרך בעל הלשון לכוון לפעמים אל כונת שונת במאמר אחד.

R. Yehezkel Feivel, *Toldot ʿAdam*:

הנה כלל גדול הוא . . . צריכין אנו להבדיל בין הדרשות הסותרות את הפשט ובין הדרשות המתחלפות מהפשט כי הדברים המתחלפים הם בכח האפשרי להיות שניהם צודקים. לכן בכל מקום שדרך הפשט

what curious. R. Meklenburg, who cited both writings elsewhere in *Ha-Ketav*,<sup>67</sup> might simply not have noticed Mendelssohn's formulation, and thus, might not have recognized *Toldot Adam's* source; the fact that this later Lithuanian text was not credited may itself have been inadvertent. Whether or not R. Meklenburg realized what he was citing, the fact was that his very use of this passage underscored the exegetical affinities that linked him to both Berlin and Vilna.

A little further on in his commentary, in a lengthy note to Deut 30:14 ("But the word is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it"), R. Meklenburg again melded his Maskilic and Lithuanian sources in a telling fashion. Focusing on the phrase "... in your heart," our author read it as a reference to the oral traditions that explicated Scripture; by means of the Oral Law, one could wholly comprehend its refined expressions, its meanings, and its exhortations, such that one could precisely fulfill its precepts. R. Meklenburg immediately buttressed his point by citing a number of scholars who spoke to the relationship of Written and Oral Law. He began by citing Wessely and the latter's fundamental conviction that the words and phrases of Scripture contained within them the entire corpus of rabbinic law; anyone with the requisite textual and linguistic skills could quite literally extract the Jewish oral traditions from Hebrew roots and biblical expressions.<sup>68</sup> Immediately following the citations from Wessely, R. Meklenburg proceeded to quote from R. Eliyahu's commentary to Prov 2:2–3, again suggesting (albeit in more ethereal and less concrete terms) that proper discernment can yield an understanding as to why a subtle textual superfluity could yield

אינו אלא נוסה ומתחלף מעל הדרש לא מתנגד לו אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו והדרשה תדרש. כי אז יהיה פשוטו של מקרא כונה א' והדרשה כונה שניה והאומר המקרא כוון אל שתי הכוונות כדרך בעל לשון לכוון פעמים אל כוונות שונות במאמר אחד.

R. Meklenburg, *Ha-Ketav*:

... יש הבדל בין הדרשות הסותרות את הפשט ובין הדרשות המתחלפות מהפשט. כי הדברים המתחלפים הם בכח האפשרי להיות שניהם צודקים. לכן בכל מקום שדרך הפשט אינו אלא נוסה ומתחלף מעל הדרש לא מתנגד אליו: אמרין אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו והדרשה תדרש. כי אז יהיה פשוטו של מקרא כונה אחת והדרשה כונה שניה.

(67) R. Meklenburg's copy of Mendelssohn's *Sefer Netivot Ha-Shalom* (Heinemann's edition) included the *Or Lintivah*; although *Ha-Ketav* contains dozens of references to the body of the work, I have not found any other references to the introduction itself. R. Meklenburg's references to R. Zalman Vilna, the subject of R. Yehezkel Feivel's *Toldot Adam*, are clearly taken from the later work; see the commentary to Exod 12:46 and 21:6 (mistakenly identified as 21:1 in the first edition); see also his reference to *Toldot Adam* in the introduction to the 1852 edition of *Ha-Ketav*, n. 4, p. xxiii. It should also be noted that there are some sentences in the *ma'amar ha-torah*, the first introduction to *Ha-Ketav*, that sound suspiciously like phrases from the writings of Mendelssohn and R. Yehezkel Feivel; see above n. 32.

(68) Although Wessely made this point time and again in his *Gan Na'ul* as well as his later writings, I have not located the precise quote cited here.

some rabbinic pronouncement. Over the course of another two pages, R. Meklenburg also quoted (in this random order) Nahmanides, Samuel Luzzatto, and the Zohar, all of which were elicited to affirm the basic identification of rabbinic readings with *peshuto shel mikra*.<sup>69</sup> After this succession of quotes, finally, R. Meklenburg offered a summation:

From these words an enlightened and truth-loving individual will understand and know what is truly meant by *peshat* . . . [and] that the *peshat* and *remez* and *derush* and *sod* fit together, [such that they] “converge and cannot be sundered [Job 41:9].” There is no difference between the veracity of *peshat* and the veracity of *derush* for an individual who plumbs the depth of the sea of Torah in order to raise its pearls of wisdom. Such an individual who understands the second meaning of our holy Torah [will know that it] can be sought by means of the principles (*middot*) that we have from the sages of the Mishnah and Talmud, who scrutinize each and every word, letter, and even tittle, and who, for all that, teach us to harmonize these [words] with the flow of the [biblical] passage and its connection to what went before and after it . . .

This passage is again keenly reflective of R. Meklenburg’s cultural and scholarly position in two ways. First, although this passage does not appear to be drawn verbatim from an earlier source, some of its phrases and formulations show some familiarity, if not dependence, on Mendelssohn as well as on *Toldot Adam*.<sup>69</sup> Second, the author’s impressive array of sources had the effect of drawing attention to a certain methodological confusion or equivocation that plagued this edition of the work throughout. Although it was undoubtedly true that all the scholars cited here were generally concerned about the relationship of *peshat* and *derash*, their substantive articulation of this issue was in some instances simply not harmonizable. For example, while Wesley consistently identified rabbinic exegesis as the true depth of *peshat*, R. Eliyahu always maintained *peshat* and *derash* as wholly distinct categories an apparent expression of his desire to underscore the interpretative creativity of the sages.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, the fact that R. Meklenburg also alluded in his

(69) Cf. Mendelssohn’s introduction to *Sefer Megillat Kohelet*, *GSJ* 14, pp. 148, 151 (and see below, n. 78); and *Toldot Adam*, p. 26a. Mendelssohn’s statement, that פשט, דרוש, רמז, סוד . . . כלם and דברי אלהים חיים, צדקו יחדו, ואין זה סותר לדרכי השכל . . . אבל אין הבדל בין אמתות הפשט appear to be combined with R. Yehezkel Feivel’s statement that הפשט והדרש משולבים המה איש אל אחיו יחדיו, יתלכדו ולא יתפרדו לעולם, כי אמת לא יסתור את האמת . . . and are expressed in *Ha-Ketav* as follows: ואין הבדל כלל בין אמתות הפשט לאמתות הדרוש יחדיו, יתלכדו ולא יתפרדו, ואין הבדל כלל בין אמתות הפשט לאמתות הדרוש.

(70) See Harris, *How Do We Know This?*, pp. 236–38.

summary remarks to rabbinic *middot* also clouded the hermeneutical issues being pursued by these modern scholars, for many of them were clearly devoted to exploring rabbinic exegesis far beyond – and independent of – the principles enumerated in Tannaitic literature.

Thirteen years later, in 1852, a second edition of *Ha-Ketav* appeared in Königsberg. Although a thorough examination of the differences between this and other editions of *Ha-Ketav* will have to await a fuller study, there are a number of salient comparisons that should be noted.<sup>71</sup> In contrast to the original free-standing commentary, this later version was effectively a new edition of the Bible: it appeared as a traditional Hebrew Bible – Scriptural text, Onkelos, and Rashi – supplemented by a new German translation and a vastly expanded version of R. Meklenburg's commentary.<sup>72</sup> In substantive terms, this revised commentary occasionally dropped some earlier remarks and re-wrote others, but for the most part it simply added exegetical insights to the many biblical verses not addressed in the first edition. A quick perusal of the body of this new commentary reveals that R. Meklenburg continued to draw upon the same set of exegetical writings that informed the 1839 edition. Among the comments added to *Ha-Ketav*, one finds many passages drawn from the writings of R. Eliyahu, but many were also drawn from the writings of Heidenheim, Pappenheim, Wessely, and other contributors to Maskilic Bible scholarship.<sup>73</sup>

(71) Besides the Königsberg 1852 edition, there was also a second unrevised printing of this version by the same publisher in 1856. Another edition appeared in Berlin, 1880, with a small number of additions, and an identical edition was published in Nuremberg in 1924. All subsequent printings were photo-reproductions of the Berlin edition. On these editions, see Ben-Menahem, "Shteitl grot," pp. 330–32.

(72) The translation was supplied by Yonah Kossmann, apparently a student of R. Meklenburg during his sojourn in Königsberg (1846–48), and was based upon the reading of Scripture put forth in *Ha-Ketav*. In a preface to the 1880 edition, Abraham Berliner reported that R. Meklenburg's revised commentary only appeared in the 1856 edition, implying that the 1852 edition used the same text of *Ha-Ketav* as that which appeared earlier in 1839. An examination of both 1852 and 1856 editions, however, shows that R. Meklenburg's extensive revisions of the commentary were included in the 1852 edition, and that the version that appeared again four years later was simply a second printing of the identical text.

(73) R. Meklenburg's appreciation for the exegesis of R. Eliyahu and the German-Maskilic authors was also tempered by a degree of critical independence from both. This was evident in his decision to omit some material drawn from their writings that had been utilized in the first edition. See, e.g., omissions of passages from R. Eliyahu's *ʿAderet ʿEliyahu* in Gen 4:1, 4:8, Exod 21:6, 2:10. For omitted comments of the other exegetes, see Gen 6:6 (Wessely), Gen 15:6 (Luzzatto), Exod 20:13 (Pappenheim). Interestingly, the 1852 edition of *Ha-Ketav* added dozens of citations from the Zohar to the handful that appeared in the earlier edition, although he clearly used this literature as an exegetical-midrashic tool and not as a means of introducing mystical readings of Scripture.

Of all the revisions incorporated into this 1852 edition, perhaps the most important were the introductions. The second of the two introductions included in the original edition was here placed first and thoroughly rewritten. To a large degree, its themes and tropes were maintained; R. Meklenburg spoke again of the need to demonstrate the fundamental unity of the Written and Oral Laws, and buttressed the importance of his work by invoking the specter of Jewish youth drifting away from rabbinic traditions. Notwithstanding the hyperbolic and affected quality of such claims, our author more soberly offered that such a work was really directed at those Jewish homes that fully accepted the legitimacy of both biblical and rabbinic traditions. For such Jews, the fact that *Ha-Ketav* addressed itself to apparent discrepancies between Written and Oral Laws served to defend their Orthodox affirmation of rabbinic authority.

R. Meklenburg also offered the same apologia for the substance and literary quality of his work, and again offered a list of earlier and contemporary scholars upon whom he relied, including the names of the Gaon R. Eliyahu, Wessely, Heidenheim, Pappenheim, and Spira. The one obvious and purposeful omission from this list – and evidently the reason this introduction was rewritten in the first place – was the name of Julius Fürst. Given that R. Meklenburg had also expunged every last reference to Fürst in the body of the commentary, it was quite plain that such acknowledgement was in any event unnecessary. The reason for this was readily apparent. Shortly after the publication of the first edition of *Ha-Ketav*, Fürst had published a number of things that would have been regarded as non-Orthodox, and R. Meklenburg either disapproved of these writings or began to suspect his allegiance to normative Judaism; and even if our author did not consider these writings problematic, he may have been wary of the objections that might be raised by others.<sup>74</sup> Whatever the impetus for such a move, it is evident that R. Meklenburg's objections to Fürst distinguished him from the other maskilically-

(74) At the end of Fürst's *Otzar Leshon ha-Kodesh*, pp. 1388–95, in a section first published between 1838 and 1840, he included an essay titled *Zikhronot Leshon Kodesh*, in which he argued, among other things, that Hebrew could not rightfully claim to be the mother of all languages; see especially pp. 1390–92. Two years later he participated in the publication of Leone de Modena's anti-kabbalistic *Ari Nohem* (Leipzig, 1840), which was actually its first edition; while R. Meklenburg does not appear to have embraced Jewish mystical traditions in any serious manner, he ascribed to the Zohar the authority of an early rabbinic text, and hence could not have taken too kindly to the publication of Modena's critique of Zoharic authorship and authenticity. In 1838, Fürst also joined Leopold Zunz and Michael Sachs in producing a German translation of the Hebrew Bible. Although our author's estimation of these individuals and this project is not known, their approach to classical texts and to historical questions was profoundly different from the scholars embraced by R. Meklenburg.

oriented exegetes whose writings still formed the bulk of his commentary.<sup>75</sup>

By far the most significant change to the introductory material to *Ha-Ketav* was the addition of two paragraphs and a handful of lengthy and dense notes to the *Maʿamar ha-Torah*, which originally served the first introduction to this work. In a number of instances, these notes were in themselves free-standing essays that had little to do with the text to which they were appended. The rather artificial relationship between the introduction and these appended notes was also mirrored in their substance, for in these essays, R. Meklenburg went much further in articulating his hermeneutical conception in the relationship of Scripture and its rabbinic interpretations.<sup>76</sup>

In the second of these notes, for example, R. Meklenburg again raised the question of why the revealed elucidation of Scripture was originally maintained only orally and was not to be written down. Likening the Torah to all creations – which were sustained by a symbiotic relationship between the manifest actualization of matter and the concealed potential of its form – he offered this construct as a template by which to grasp the nature of the Oral Law. While the concrete exhortations of Scripture represented the revealed substance of God's will, the oral traditions served as the hidden ethereal form which in every sense preserved and defined the Written Law. R. Meklenburg buttressed this answer by drawing upon a number of Zoharic texts and couching his discussion in classical metaphor of body and soul, and he then went on to suggest that the Written Law contained various signifiers which allowed the perspicacious reader to discern its hidden meanings. These signifiers were here identified not only with the thirteen Tannaitic principles of R. Yishmael, but with the distinct linguistic character of the text, especially the Hebrew verb roots. But returning to his question concerning the very need for an oral tradition, R. Meklenburg moved off in a different direction altogether, suggesting that explications of Scriptural Law were intentionally prevented from being fixed in written form in order to heighten the individual's autonomous choice between plausible but discordant readings. Just as the ambiguous divine charge to "take him up there for a burnt-offering" forced Abraham to act on his comprehension of this command, so too the legal imperatives of Scripture: the individual was forced to choose between various interpretations, of which only "one alone agrees with the cognizance of the Exalted Giver of the Torah." The choice, of course, was be-

(75) For reasons that were never explained, this revised introduction was dropped altogether in the Berlin 1880 edition, and hence does not appear in any of the contemporary reprints.

(76) The hermeneutical thrust of this revised introduction has recently been addressed in Harris, *How Do We Know This?*, pp. 214–20. Although the discussion below goes over much of the same ground, I include it here in order to highlight some of the textual and thematic differences with the first edition.



tween the interpretations preserved in rabbinic texts and others which could be derived from the same biblical words or verses. The unstated though clear upshot of this passage was that the purposeful ambiguity of the Hebrew Bible compelled the Jew to willfully affirm his or her acquiescence to the exegetical veracity of the sages.<sup>77</sup>

One of the questions that flowed naturally from such discussions was whether the Scriptural readings cited in Talmudic and Midrashic texts originated as textual interpretations or whether such readings were oral traditions which were effectively cast in literary-exegetical form. In the two notes that followed, R. Meklenburg made clear that he subscribed to the latter view. The entire oral tradition, from its broadest principles to its minutiae, was received as a tradition as an integral part of Revelation.<sup>78</sup> What then of the notion that all rabbinic traditions could be textually derived from Scripture? Far from abandoning this view, R. Meklenburg repeated the Maskilic refrain and underscored the unique linguistic properties of the Hebrew language. Speaking first in terms reminiscent of Wessely and Pappenheim, our author emphasized the rich and nuanced texture of Hebrew verb roots, whereby one word or utterance could yield many meanings. Then, in order to buttress this point, R. Meklenburg included a long passage introduced only by "And the wise one similarly wrote . . ." that was taken from Mendelssohn's introduction to *Sefer Megillat Kohelet*, the latter's commentary to Ecclesiastes.<sup>79</sup> In this passage, Mendelssohn had tried to explain the natural multivalence of texts by using an analogy drawn from the physical world: just as specific parts of the body were designed to serve many different functions, so too divine words. After having earlier identified *peshat* with the primary meaning of Scripture and rabbinic exegesis as a parallel and corresponding second meaning, Mendelssohn underscored the fact that such readings were simultaneously true. More importantly, at this precise juncture of his introduction, Mendelssohn

(77) See *Ha-Ketav* (1852), pp. x–xii, note 2 [1880 edition, pp. viii–x].

(78) *Ibid.*, notes to pp. xii–xv [1880 edition, pp. x–xiv].

(79) *Sefer Megillat Kohelet* was published in Berlin, 1770, and reprinted in many later editions of Mendelssohn's Bible. It was also reprinted in *GSJ*, 14, pp. 145–207. Cf. *Ha-Ketav*, 1852, note 3 of *ma'amar ha-torah*, p. xvi (וכן אמר החכם) all the way to ודקדוקם (פרטי המאמר ודקדוקם) [1880 edition, p. xiv]; to *GSJ*, 14, p. 151, lines 5–26, and p. 148, lines 1–3, which are also inserted here. These paragraphs of Mendelssohn's writing were for the most part copied with only insignificant revisions. One exception will be discussed below.

Although the original edition of this commentary did not have Mendelssohn's name on the title page, it was widely known as Mendelssohn's work, and almost all later editions made this association explicitly. (Heinemann's edition, which printed Mendelssohn's commentary in his own name, did not include this introduction.) Given R. Meklenburg's familiarity with early Maskilic writings, and given the similarity of the language here with Mendelssohn's *Or Lintivah* (which R. Meklenburg had cited in the body of *Ha-Ketav*), it is highly unlikely that he remained unaware of the authorship of *Sefer Megillat Kohelet*.

went out of his way to insist that all the attention the sages gave to the second meaning did not imply that they eschewed or belittled the value of *peshuto shel mikra*<sup>79</sup>; it was, rather, so thoroughly assumed by them as to be taken for granted. R. Meklenburg's wholesale use of this passage reflected his thoroughgoing identification with its hermeneutical thrust. His only significant revision of the Mendelssohn text was telling: he shifted a statement that reiterated the inextricable presence of *peshat* – and hence the exegete's ever-present obligation to deal with it – to restate the veracity of *derush* alongside other exegetical approaches.<sup>80</sup> Using a number of conventional metaphors, R. Meklenburg again emphasized the notion that the language of Scripture itself yields all the meanings attributed to it by the sages of the Talmud and Midrashim.

It was only in the last note to this *ma'amar ha-torah* that R. Meklenburg attempted to pull together the two disparate claims being made here: that the corpus of rabbinic law was substantially known through the oral transmission of legal traditions, and that these rabbinic laws can in all instances be derived from the words of Scripture. At this juncture our author had added a long paragraph to the body of this introduction reiterating a rather pedestrian notion that had already appeared in the original version of the *ma'amar ha-torah*: that the relationship of Scripture to rabbinic tradition could be expressed as the relationship of the body (externally discernible and inherently inert) and the soul (essential but imperceptible).<sup>81</sup> Although the soul, like oral traditions of interpretation, defied direct tangible observation, its existence and particular shape were subtly manifest in the signs (*simanim*) embedded in the body/Scripture. It was at this point that R. Meklenburg's note launched into an extended discussion of the nature of these *simanim*, offering what was by far his clearest and most cohesive view of rabbinic exegesis.<sup>82</sup>

Drawing upon numerous rabbinic sources, R. Meklenburg effectively argued that the sages themselves had debated a fundamental question regarding the thirteen hermeneutical principles set forth in the name of R. Yishmael. The debate revolved around whether these principles could be seen as a *siman moda'i* (*Merkmal* [associative sign]) or whether they were properly a *siman zikhroni* (*Denkmal* [mnemonic sign]), the essential difference between

(80) Mendelssohn wrote that *derush*, *remez*, and *sod*, "could be justified with the *peshat*, which is the most basic of all; but there is no difference between the truth of *peshat* and the truth of *derush* . . ." In *Ha-Ketav*, R. Meklenburg wrote that these other exegetical modes "could be justified with the *peshat* and the truth of *derush* . . ."

(81) This new insertion ran from *Ha-Ketav*, 1852, p. xvii ( . . . **כִּי הַכָּתוּב עִם הַקִּבְלָה** . . . ) through the end of page xviii (**אֵת נֹעֵם ה' סֵלָה** . . . ) [1880 edition, pp. xv–xvii]. R. Meklenburg was also repeating what he had written in the second note to this introduction.

(82) Note 4, pp. xvii–xxiv [1880 edition, pp. xv–xxii].

them being that of substantial correlation and functional memory-aid.<sup>83</sup> Given the rabbinic legitimation of both views, R. Meklenburg was actually quite careful about expressing his preference for an approach that understood R. Yishmael's principles — and all of rabbinic exegesis — as substantive association. Still, his inclination was evident throughout, and based on his conceptual framework, he offered his clearest programmatic statement of his own exegetical sensibilities:

Notwithstanding our deep-seated belief in the truth of the Oral Law, we are enjoined not to remain still or at rest until we come to understand the complete unity of the Oral and Written Law until the point that we will not distinguish at all between the truth of the *peshat* and the truth of the *derash*.<sup>84</sup>

For R. Meklenburg, then, rabbinic traditions did not originate as exegetically-derived readings. But such traditions were not merely pegged to Scriptural verses as a literary-mnemonic device; their correlations were always naturally and systematically calibrated, and it was up to later scholars to explore these connections. R. Meklenburg's conceptual understanding allowed him to simultaneously affirm the genesis of rabbinic law as revealed legal tradition without eschewing the intrinsic substantive value of its formal exegetical transmission.

In the view of this nineteenth century exegete, the study of the relationship of *peshuto shel mikra*<sup>85</sup> to rabbinic texts was no rarified diversion, but a scholarly responsibility that he cast with measured gravity. In a suggestive comment, R. Meklenburg contrasted “a man of belief, who shall satisfy himself to view [these hermeneutical principles] as only a mnemonic sign” to a “man of intelligence, who takes the thirteen hermeneutical principles to be associative signs, such that the Oral Law is explicated in the Written Law itself and the two become one.”<sup>85</sup> Having elsewhere extended the scope of the discussion beyond the principles enumerated in the *baraita* of R. Yishmael to include all rabbinic exegesis, our author left no doubt about the magnitude of the scholarly challenge at hand. But writing now in the late 1840s or early 1850s, R. Meklenburg sensed that the time for ‘men of belief’ had passed; new contemporary needs would have to be met with new textual approaches.

(83) Harris, in *How Do We Know This?*, p. 218, writes that R. Meklenburg had here “introduced a distinction between two types of mnemonic devices.” It appears to me that for this author, the concept of *siman moda'i* was explicitly aimed at something more substantive and broad than mnemonics, and so should be conceptualized differently.

(84) *Ha-Ketav*, 1852, note 4, p. xxi [1880 edition, p. xx].

(85) *Ibid.*, p. xx [1880 edition, p. xvii].

In 1857, still insisting that *Ha-Ketav* was not intended for a scholarly audience, R. Meklenburg wrote that the commentary was intended to stem the tide of heresy that would belittle the relevance and authority of the rabbinic tradition.<sup>86</sup> Although his interest in the relationship of rabbinic exegesis to Scripture informed the original version of this commentary, it was clear that his later revisions were far more attuned to the need to defend rabbinic Judaism against contemporary challenges. It is evident, along these lines, that many remarks expressing hostility to such unorthodox readings were added in 1852 or later.<sup>87</sup>

R. Meklenburg's exegetical opus, then, was very much a work in progress, and the trajectory of this development is not without significance for the study of nineteenth-century European Jewish culture. To the degree to which the 1839 edition of *Ha-Ketav* could be said to have exhibited a hermeneutical sensibility, it was one that was concerned largely with a textually-oriented *peshuto shel mikra*<sup>2</sup> and occasionally with an interest in demonstrating the exegetical acumen of the sages. For these purposes, R. Meklenburg never had to stray far from the Maskilic writings from which he drew much of his material, even to the point of identifying — knowingly or not — with its interpretative modes. With his apparently growing concern for the integrity of rabbinic traditions, however, this community rabbi was propelled towards a more articulate and programmatic position, one that affirmed as a matter of Orthodox creed the Sinaitic origin of the Oral Law. In his delineation of this approach, R. Meklenburg never abandoned the exegetical principle embraced by Mendelssohn, Wessely, and others, that Talmudic and Midrashic passages could always be shown to offer a perspicacious and precise rendering of Scripture. More than any other interpretative sensibility, it was this textual penchant, supplemented liberally with Lithuanian writings, that informed the verse by verse writing of this commentary. The expanded and revised 1852 edition of *Ha-Ketav* continued to embrace this aspect of late eighteenth-century Maskilic culture, but it now encased it in the broader doctrinal demands of this generation. In view of the accelerating cultural transformations besetting European Jewry, R. Meklenburg's biblical commentaries represented one of many traditionalist paths to a new Orthodoxy, but it was one that cast its way through the distinct exegetical predilections of the Haskalah.

(86) See above n. 14.

(87) See e.g., his comments to Lev 15:28, 19:27; Deut 4:1, 12:17, 14:3.