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MOSES MENDELSSOHN IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY RABBINICAL LITERATURE

BY MEIR HILDESHEIMER

I

Moses Mendelssohn's (1729–1786)¹ translation of the Pentateuch, together with his commentary known as the *Bi'ur*, was first published in Berlin, in 1783, under the title *Netivot ha-Shalom*. Mendelssohn claimed that this translation was originally intended for his children. He had agreed to its publication at the insistence of Solomon Dubno, then a private tutor in Mendelssohn's home.² A different reason for this translation emerges from Mendelssohn's correspondence after 1784, in which the translation and *Bi'ur* are termed the first step in the direction of *Haskalah*.³

¹ There is an abundant literature on Mendelssohn. Here is a number of selected studies: Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn* (Alabama, 1973). Isaac Eisenstein-Barzilay, "Moses Mendelssohn," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, LII (1961), 69–92, 175–186; "Smolenskin's Polemic Against Mendelssohn in Historical Perspective," *PAAJR*, LIII (1986), 11–48. Mordecai Eliav, *Ha-Hinukh ha-Yehudi be-Germania bimei ha-Haskala ve-ha-Emanzipazia* (Jerusalem, 1961), pp. 29–36, 44–47. Jacob Katz, in the index of names under the entry "Mendelssohn," in: *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* (New York, 1962); *Out of the Ghetto* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973); *Tradition and Crisis* (New York, 1961). M.S. Samet, "Moshe Mendelssohn, N.H. Weisel ve-Rabbanei Doram," *Mehkarim be-Toldot Am Israel ve Erez Israel*, I (Haifa, 1970), 233–257. Perez Sandler, *Ha-Bi'ur la-Torah shel Moshe Mendelssohn ve-Si'ato Hithavuto ve-Hashpa'ato* (Jerusalem, 1941). Azriel Shochat, *Im Hilufei Tekufot* (Jerusalem, 1961), pp. 242–246. I would like to thank Prof. Mordecai Breuer and Rabbi Benjamin S. Hamburger for the information I derived from them.

² See Mendelssohn's preface "Or li-Netiva" (Offenbach, 1821), p. 12a. He states that he would not even have affixed his name to this project had Dubno not asked him to.

³ See Altmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 368–372.

In 1770 Mendelssohn's commentary on Ecclesiastes was published in Berlin, and its title page informed the reader that it was "a short commentary, adequate for the understanding of the literal meaning of the text for the benefit of the student."⁴ In his introduction, Mendelssohn stated that previous commentators had been negligent in explaining the literal meaning of the Bible.

Mendelssohn's book received *haskamot* (approbations) from the members of the *bet din* (religious Jewish court) of Berlin: Rabbi Aaron ben Rabbi Moses, formerly *Av bet din* (presiding judge) of Dessau and later rabbi of Schwabach and district rabbi of Ansbach, and Rabbi Joel ben Rabbi Yekutiel Sachs of Glogau, formerly rabbi of Austerlitz. In granting their approbations in 1769, they cited Mendelssohn's thoroughness, his command of grammar and fluency of expression. Another member of the *bet din*, Rabbi Aaron Horowitz, also served as *Av bet din* of Hasenpot, testified in a separate approbation, of the same year, that Mendelssohn had originally been reluctant to publish the commentary, but that he himself had persuaded him to do so.⁵

Mendelssohn's approach to the interpretation of Biblical texts and the dissemination of knowledge in general becomes clear from two of the approbations he himself had granted. In 1777, *Pesher Davar*, a book by Ze'ev Wolf ben Abraham Nathan of Dessau on Job, was published in Berlin. The author

⁴ This commentary is thoroughly traditional. Mordecai Gumpel ben Judah Leib Schnaber, one of the early *maskilim* prepared a highly-polemical commentary on Ecclesiastes, *Tokhaḥat Megila* (Hamburg, 1784), that was critical of Mendelssohn's commentary. See Israel Zinberg, *Toldot Sifrut Israel*, V (Tel-Aviv-Merhavia, 1959), 30-31.

⁵ Mendelssohn made a similar statement regarding his translation of the Pentateuch. In 1762 Rambam's *Millot ha-Higgayon* was published in Frankfurt a.d. Oder with an anonymous commentary. The Roman title page bore the name of Samson Kalir, who was an emissary of the Jerusalem rabbinate. Mendelssohn had given Kalir this manuscript as a gift. See Moses Mendelssohn of Hamburg, *Pnei Tevel* (Amsterdam, 1872), p. 228.

stated that he based his commentary on the literal meaning of the text, and attempted to demonstrate that it was in agreement with the moral teachings of our sages. In his approbation Mendelssohn praised the commentary as based on “the Law and true wisdom.” The language, he wrote, was clear and lucid, and readily comprehensible to the student.⁶ In 1789, Mendel Lewin (Menachem Mendel Satanower) published *Moda' la-Bina* in Berlin, a Hebrew translation of the first chapters of *Refu'ot ha-'Am* (Popular Medicine) by the Swiss doctor Tissot. In the approbation, written in 1785, Mendelssohn noted that this portion of the book had been translated into a number of European languages; he endorsed the translation as beneficial to those Jews who knew no foreign languages.⁷

Mendelssohn's translation of the Pentateuch, a partial realization of his desire to translate the entire Bible,⁸ was viewed as an incomplete piece of work. Avigdor of Glogau (*ALeM*) noted, in 1794, that the language of the translation was difficult, since Mendelssohn had originally intended it for his son, and had therefore not been overly rigorous in the vocalization of the text. When the translation was prepared for publication, at the insistence of Dubno, it was done hastily and Mendelssohn did not take as much care with it as he should have. This was a mistake. *ALeM* felt that this shortcoming should be corrected in a revised edition.⁹ At a later date *ALeM* offered an alternative explanation for the imperfections: they were the result of Mendelssohn's poor health and fear that he might die before he could finish the work.¹⁰

⁶ This approbation also appears in *Moses Mendelssohn, Gesammelte Schriften, Jubiläumsausgabe*, xvi (Berlin, 1929–1932), 214. See also Sandler (above, note 1), p. 100, n. 5.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

⁸ *Ibid.*, xix, p. 296, also p. 292.

⁹ *Igrot ... Moshe Dessau*, published by Avigdor of Glogau, I (Vienna, 1794), p. 7a, note.

¹⁰ In Avigdor of Glogau's preface to *Netivot ha-Shalom*, Genesis (Prague, 1807). He also noted that in his own preface, Mendelssohn had asked to be informed of any errors found in the text (Offenbach, 1821, p. 19a). Twenty

Mendelssohn's philosophy in general, and his translation of the Biblical texts and *Bi'ur* in particular, aroused mixed reactions. Some were full of praise, others were outraged. The rabbinical world was generally portrayed as having taken an opposing stance.¹¹

The reasons for this opposition,¹² can be gathered from the writings of Rabbi Solomon Kluger (*HaHarshak*), "the Maggid

years had passed, and no critical remarks had appeared in print. In later years, debates followed and objections to certain points in the translation and *Bi'ur* were raised. See, for example, the comments of Rabbi S.Y. Rappaport in regard to the translation (*Bikurei ha-'Ittim*, 1829, p. 32), and his esteem of Mendelssohn (Isaac Barzilay, *Shlomo Yehuda Rappaport [Shir] and his Contemporaries*, Ramat Gan, 1969, pp. 42, 66). For Judah Jeiteles' comments on the *Bi'ur* and translation, see *Bikurei ha-'Ittim*, 1831, pp. 35–36, 41–42; For Judah Leib Gross of Zolishtchik on the translation, see *Ha-Maggid*, vol. I, 25, 20 Sivan 1857, p. 99. His comments were endorsed by the editor of the journal, Eliezer Lipman Silberman. See also below notes 51, 56, 144 and 151.

¹¹ For the opposition of the ḥasidim, see Sandler (above, note 1), pp. 213–215, and below, note 103. See also Shmuel Yosef Agnon, *Takhrikh shel Sippurim* (Jerusalem–Tel-Aviv, 1985), pp. 158–159 and p. 153. An interesting view with regard to Ḥassidism and Haskalah was expressed in the closing decades of the previous century. The Jewish people, it holds, had two saviors: the Ba'al Shem Tov and his "second," Mendelssohn. Both strove to improve the status of the nation, each in his own way and in accordance with the time and place in which he lived. Both, however, failed. The followers of the Ba'al Shem Tov were left devoid of Torah and wisdom, while Mendelssohn's disciples sloughed off the Law and the commandments. Had these two groups remained faithful to the original intentions of their leaders, they would undoubtedly have united in time (Meir Rabinowitz, *Ha-Maḥanaim* [New York, 1888], pp. 254–255). A Ḥassidic tradition has it that the Gaon of Vilna, albeit unintentionally, was responsible for the spread of the Berlin *Haskalah* among the Jews of Lithuania by means of Mendelssohn's translation, a true offense to the stance of the leaders of the Ḥassidic movement. See Emanuel Etkes, "Ha-Gera ve ha-Haskalah — Tadmit u-Mezi'ut," *Perakim be-Toldot ha-Hevra ha-Yehudit* (Jerusalem, 1980), pp. 197–198.

¹² This issue is discussed at length in the literature cited in note 1, above. Additional sources appear below.

of Brody.”¹³ The heads of one community, not mentioned by name, wrote that some members of the community formed a group “to study *Talmud Lashon Ivri*,¹⁴ and the writings of Rabbi Moses Dessau [Mendelssohn].” This activity had enraged other members of the community. They excommunicated the group and set fire to their books. Rabbi Kluger was asked for his opinion on the matter. In his response he expressed the following views:

- a. The burning of the books was unnecessary according to the Law.¹⁵ However, he added, those responsible could not be blamed for their action.

¹³ *She'elot u-Teshuvot ha-Elef Lekha Shlomo*, vol. II (Bilgoraj, 1931), *Yoreh De'ah*, para. 257. The date of the response is not given, but it is clear that it was written after the polemic about the temple in Hamburg in 1818, which is mentioned in it.

¹⁴ Judah Leib Ben-Ze'ev, *Talmud Lashon Ivri* (Vienna, 1806). Hebrew grammar. Rabbi Kluger was opposed at the time to the study of grammar because of the would-be philosophers and licentious individuals who were in favor of it. He claimed that in his childhood he had known the author of the book as a “very evil man” who derided the liturgical hymns, and penitential prayers and even composed such prayers for Purim. He thus scoffed at our Sages. It should be noted, however, that there were rabbis who made use of this book, including Rabbi Seckel Leib Wormser. See my paper “Torah ve-Ḥokhma: Demuto ha-Historit shel Rabbi Seckel Leib Wormser (‘Ba’al Shem mi-Michelsstadt’),” *PAJR*, LIII (1986), 23; Rabbi Eliyahu Guttmacher of Grätz in his essays *Yeri'ot Shlomo*, vol. II, p. 451b (in the manuscript dept. of the National University Library, Jerusalem no. 4°1120,2); *Bet Ya'acov*, vol. II, p. 331a (in the collection of Rabbi Erling Cohen, Ramat Gan). I am grateful for having been allowed to examine these manuscripts, as well as those cited below. Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, *Emuna Yeshara*, I (Krotoschin, 1843), 122. Rabbi Jacob Zvi Mecklenburg, rabbi of Königsberg, wrote notes to *Otzar ha-Shorashim* of Ben-Ze'ev. They were published from his hand-written manuscript in *Ha-Ivri*, XXII, 34, (16 Iyar 1886), p. 271. He also relied on *Otzar Ha-Shorashim* in his commentary on the Pentateuch, *Ha-Ktav ve ha-Kabbala*, Exodus 5.4. See also note 41 below.

¹⁵ Cf. Rabbi Hayyim Halberstam, *She'elot u-Teshuvot Divrei Hayyim*, vol. II (Lemberg, 1875), *Yoreh-De'ah*, para. 60; Rabbi Moses Schick, *She'elot u-Teshuvot MaHaRaM Schick*, *Orah Hayyim* (Mukashevo, 1880), para. 61.

- b. As Mendelssohn is almost universally frowned upon, there must be some good reason for it.
- c. The fact that Mendelssohn was a student of Rabbi David Frankel, rabbi of Dessau, and of Rabbi Jacob Emden (*Ya'VeZ*)¹⁶ could not be held in his favor. There were many students of great rabbis who had gone astray.
- d. Mendelssohn's students had transgressed. Those who studied his writings were "the meanest individuals who violated the entire Law, and I have never seen a truly observant man who displayed an interest in Mendelssohn's writings and teachings, and anyone with the fear of the Lord in his heart runs away from it as from a snake or scorpion."
- e. Rabbi Kluger himself, had never read Mendelssohn's work, and knew "nothing improper in his words." But he did know that the translation of the Bible into German had encouraged the tendency to pray in German, and this had already been the bone of contention in the polemic regarding the first temple in Hamburg (1818). The very act of translating the Pentateuch was forbidden, to say nothing of the fact that it led to heresy.

The objections raised by Rabbi Kluger to Mendelssohn's work, with which he himself was not familiar, were thus essentially his opposition to the translation itself, and to its consequences, the spread of heretical views. It would thus seem that his attitude toward Mendelssohn's work cannot be disassociated from his attitude toward the *Haskalah*.

¹⁶ The framers of the question had been inaccurate in stating that Mendelssohn was a student of Rabbi Jacob Emden. The two had merely exchanged some letters. See Altmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 290-295, 806, n. 29.

On various occasions, Rabbi Kluger bluntly expressed his opposition to this movement. In a homily of 1816, he stated:¹⁷

The evils of our time: all sorts of heretics who have abandoned the fear of the Lord and His holy Law, and are only interested in Greek philosophy and natural sciences. Every one seeks to be enlightened and educated, not one of them seeks to be G-d-fearing. And it is this that prolongs our exile.

He held that the adherents of the *Haskalah* rejected the belief in G-d entirely. As a result, the Lord prevented them from succeeding in their scholarship, and they could not see the truth. Not one of them had done anything of value by studying these sciences, although they claimed that their aim was to bring glory to Israel in the eyes of the Gentiles, and thus to be of benefit to their brethren.¹⁸ In fact, what they accomplished by their activities was to increase our affliction by delaying redemption.

In another homily,¹⁹ he declared that the interest in external books and philosophies was a temptation of the devil. He who concerned himself with such things, would soon become convinced that there was no value in studying the Law, but only in learning these foreign ideas. Furthermore, by drawing closer to the Gentiles, one began to use foreign languages and even adopt the names common in the alien culture. This, too, delayed redemption.

In 1828, Rabbi Kluger delivered a sermon relating to the government directives concerning the study of science and

¹⁷ *Hokhmat ha-Torah*, pp. 130b–131a (in the manuscript dept. of the University Library, Jerusalem, no. 4°207).

¹⁸ In 1881 Elazar Schein published a book in Rumanian on Mendelssohn's life. Elazar Rokeach praised the book and expressed the hope that the Rumanians would thereby learn of Mendelssohn's work in German literature and cease their persecution of the Jews, who are highly talented and can bring glory to the Rumanians (*Jezreel*, I, 4, [11 Adar 1886], p. 32).

¹⁹ *Hokhmat ha-Torah*, pp. 154a–155a.

language.²⁰ Basically, he stated, the idea of advancing the Jewish people's education in various fields of knowledge, and in the language of the country was praiseworthy. Were they to confine themselves totally to the *bet midrash* (Jewish studies) they would never be able, should it become necessary, to address themselves to the king or the minister of the army, since their speech would evoke laughter. However, those who embarked on these studies must take care, lest in consequence they should go astray. They must meticulously observe the Torah and its precepts. Any deviation from this path would offend the king, as he desires the minorities in his country to preserve their faith. Furthermore, the transgressors would discourage other Jews from allowing their sons to study, since they would fear its negative effect. And this was not the will of the kings.

Thus, in essence Rabbi Kluger's opposition to Mendelssohn's work seems to have derived from his principled opposition to the adherents of the *Haskalah*, and their ways of life.²¹

Similar arguments against Mendelssohn's *Bi'ur* were raised by Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Horowitz, who succeeded his father, Rabbi Pinhas Horowitz, as rabbi of Frankfurt-am-Main. In a

²⁰ *Kohelet Ya'acov*, pp. 40a-40b (in the manuscript dept., University Library, Jerusalem, no. 4*289).

²¹ See also in his book *She'elot u-Teshuvot Tuv Ta'am va-Da'at*, 3rd edition, pt. 2 (Podgôrze, 1900), para. 87. It should be noted, that he also objected to Hasidism for its neglect of Torah study. In his exposition of the words of Rabbi Hanina ben Hakhina'i: "He who stays awake at night, walks on the road alone, and turns his heart to idle thoughts, makes himself liable for his own soul" (*Pirkei Avot*, chapt. 3, *mishna* 4). Rabbi Kluger wrote that there are precious paths only for very chosen people, and not every one who wished to be called so, can do so (See *Berakhot* 16b). Not as "in our time when there are sects which neglect the study of the Law, and say that they are absorbed with clinging unto the Creator, blessed be His name. Such a practice can be followed only by select individuals. In truth, this is a very fine practice, but not for common people. As a result they stumble and neglect the study of the Law. There is also another sect which purposely set their hearts to neglect [the Law]." (*Magen Avot al Pirkei Avot*, p. 48a, in the manuscript dept., University Library, Jerusalem, no. 4*271.) Cd. R. H. of Volozhin, *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* (Vilna, 1874), 69-70, 92, 93-94.

homily, delivered in 1806,²² he maintained that in former times the weekly portion of the Torah had been studied together with the commentary of *Rashi*, which contains the teachings of our sages. Thus it was clear that the written and oral Law were one and the same thing. However, the publication of the “new interpretation” had led to a situation in which the *Rashi* commentary is totally neglected, and, as a result, the oral Law is denied.

The aim here is to examine whether such objections faithfully represented the attitude of all rabbis of the 19th century toward Mendelssohn and his work on the Biblical texts.²³

²² Printed in his book *Lahmei Toda* (Offenbach, 1816), p. 11b. Cf. the text below, notes 125 and 126. See also below, note 176.

²³ Samet (above, note 1) discusses this issue, particularly in relation to the rabbis contemporaneous with Mendelssohn. A 1796 letter of Naphtali Herz (Hartwig) Wessely in regard to the kabbala was printed, as noted in Samet’s paper, by Rabbi Elazar Fleckeles of Prague — who, in his time, was counted amongst Mendelssohn’s opponents — in *Ahavat David* (Prague, 1800). This fact seems to have been forgotten in later years, since the letter was again printed in 1886 from a copy of the original “to be preserved for us and for generations to come” (*Ha-Meliz*, XXVI, 48, [2 Tamuz 1886], p. 750). The earlier version is more accurate than the later. In *M’lekhet Kodesh* (Prague, 1812), Rabbi Fleckeles referred several times to the translation, as stated in the above paper. He termed Wessely “the famous Ashkenazi scribe” (p. 10b. Cf. p. 17a. See also pp. 2b, 13b, 15b). In 1793 Rabbi Fleckeles referred to Wessely’s *Bi’ur* on Leviticus. See *She’elot u-Teshuvot Teshuva me-Ahava*, I (Prague, 1809), para. 1. See also the text below, note 135, for his explanation designed to remove any possible taint of heresy from one of the interpretations in Genesis. The vital importance of the translation into German is apparent in his *haskamah* of 1819 for the edition of the *Arukh* containing Rabbi Moses Landau’s additions, *Ma’arkhei Lashon*, including the translation of words into German. Rabbi Fleckeles lauded this project, stating that now, unlike in the past, there was a need for the translation, “so that all may understand and learn the Law of the Lord according to the words of our rabbis, the sages of the Talmud.” Rabbi Samuel Landau of Prague similarly mentioned in his *haskamah*, the German language “which we have become accustomed to” (part II, Prague, 1836). Incidentally, Wolf Fleckeles, one of the heads of the Prague community and the brother of Rabbi Fleckeles, was a subscriber to the edition of *Netivot ha-Shalom* published in Vienna in 1817–18. Regarding their relationship, see Yom-Tov



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II

One important source for such an examination, are approbations for the various editions of Mendelssohn's translation and *Bi'ur*. Three such *haskamot* appeared in front of the first edition of *Netivot ha-Shalom*, published in Berlin in 1783. The first, granted in 1778, was by Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Lewin,²⁴ rabbi of Berlin. It argued that the Hebrew language had been forgotten in the diaspora, and noted with disfavor the fact that the Jews of Germany were not well-versed in German. The Pentateuch translation published in Amsterdam in 1679, it indicated, was not sufficient. He praised Mendelssohn lavishly for his knowledge of Judaism, his command of Hebrew grammar and most notably for his proficiency in the German language. He had risen to the challenge to interpret the literal meaning of the Law on the basis of four commentators.²⁵ He also noted the role that Dubno played.²⁶ On the basis of his personal acquaintance with Mendelssohn, Rabbi Lewin was confident that "nothing improper could be produced by him."²⁷

Shpitz, *Zikhron Elazar* (Prague, 1827), p. 45, note. In 1824 Rabbi Fleckeles termed his brother Wolf "the glorious and honorable *Parnes Umanhig*." See Rabbi Solomon Sofer, *Iggrot Soferim* (Vienna-Budapest, 1929), "Kitvei Hatam Sofer," p. 54.

²⁴ On his relations with Mendelssohn, see Altmann, Index under "Lewin Hirschel," and Agnon, *Takhrikh shel Sippurim*, p. 57. See also below, note 138.

²⁵ In his preface, "Or li-Netiva," Mendelssohn mentions *Rashi*, *Rashbam*, *Ibn Ezra* and *Ramban*. He adds that *Radak* joined with them in *Ha-Shorashim* (Offenbach, 1821, p. 12a).

²⁶ Dubno wrote an exegesis of the *Massorah (Tikkun Soferim)*, as well as the commentary for Genesis (except for the first chapter). In 1781 he withdrew from this project and moved to Berlin. See Sandler (above, note 1), pp. 16-30, and Altmann, Index, under "Dubno Solomon." See also below, notes 63, 68 and 165.

²⁷ Cf. *Pesahim* 9a. Apparently, Rabbi Lewin did not read Mendelssohn's work. His *haskamah*, like most *haskamot*, emphasized mainly the author's personal qualities and ability. This is also true of those rabbis who wrote approbations for books citing Mendelssohn.

The final *haskamah* to this edition was by the members of the *bet din* of Berlin: Rabbi Samuel Zanvil of Brandenburg, who also served as *Av bet din* of Strelitz; Rabbi Judah Leib Fernbach, also a *dayyan* (judge) at Fürth and *Av bet din* of Heidingsfeld; and Rabbi Schmaja Landsberg of the *bet midrash* of Berlin. In their opinion, Mendelssohn was blessed with the qualifications of a great translator: a command of the original language, the language of translation, and a precision in translating.²⁸ To this he had added a commentary, which was a great boon for Jewish youth.²⁹

In summation, the essence of the *haskamot* emphasized Mendelssohn's broad knowledge of Jewish as well as general subjects and languages. They applauded his accomplishment in accurate translation, and expressed the hope that this translation would take the place of the older translations.

Some thirty-five years later, a new edition appeared with new approbations. These are of particular interest, since during the time that elapsed from the first edition, a controversy had arisen over that edition.³⁰ The authors of the new approbations were presumably aware of this dispute.

This edition, published in Vienna in 1817–18, together with the *Ha-Korem* commentary by Herz Homberg, was granted two approbations: the first by Rabbi Mordecai Baneth, rabbi of Nikolsburg and district rabbi of Moravia. In his approbation,

²⁸ In this regard, see the following studies: Edward Richard Levenson, "Moses Mendelssohn's understanding of logico-grammatical and literary construction in the Pentateuch: A study of his German translation and Hebrew commentary (The Bi'ur)" (Dissertation, Brandeis Univ., 1972); Werner Weinberg, "Language Questions Relating to Moses Mendelssohn's Pentateuch Translations," *HUCA*, LV (1984), 197–242.

²⁹ In the margins of the *haskamah* Isaac Jaffe, *Sofer ve-Ne'eman* (scribe and trustee) of the Berlin community, noted that Rabbi Aaron Horowitz, who, as noted above, was one of those who endorsed Mendelssohn's exegesis on Ecclesiastes, had wished to affix his signature as well, but he died before he could do so.

³⁰ See Samet (above, note 1), also Altmann, *op. cit.*, p. 821, n. 93.

Rabbi Baneth applauded Anton Schmidt for initiating the publication of the book,³¹ enhanced by the *Rashi* commentary "and the other interpretations." He pleaded for support of this edition, so that this book could reach as many people as possible. A second approbation was by Rabbi Moses Mintz, rabbi of Alt Ofen. He too applauded the work of the publisher, and was especially gratified by the publication of an "Ashkenazi translation," prepared by individuals well-versed in the native tongue, together with an exegesis based on the teachings of the ancient rabbis.

Two years later, Rabbi Baneth again referred to Mendelssohn's translation. In a statement of his position regarding the polemic of the temple in Hamburg, written in 1819,³² he stated that the German translations of the prayers based on Biblical texts could not compare with the original Hebrew. There were numerous ways in which to interpret the verses, yet the translator chose the one which most appealed to him for the lucidity of the language. Moreover, the different translators did not always agree among themselves as to the meaning of certain words.³³ The Bible had indeed been translated into German, but the

³¹ Anton Schmidt wrote a preface to Numbers, which first appeared in this edition. He stated that he had decided to print a new edition of *Netivot ha-Shalom* in the same format as the first edition, including the *haskamot*, in honor of Mendelssohn, whom he praised effusively, and so that the generations to come would know how highly the great rabbis had esteemed him. For similar reasons, these *haskamot* were included in the subsequent edition published in Warsaw, 1836–1837. See the 1835 remarks of Moses Tennenbaum, at the end of Genesis.

³² *Ele Divrei Ha-Berit* (Altona, 1819), pp. 13–15.

³³ As an example he noted the tetragrammaton which bears two meanings: eternity and creation. "And the wise Ashkenazi translator" could not find a word with both meanings, and thus translated it as *Ewige* (Eternal). However, he stated that for the purposes of interpreting the Bible, it was not necessary to be as precise as it was for the prayers. For the translation of the name of the Lord, see Franz Rosenzweig, "Der Ewige — Mendelssohn und der Gottesname," *Kleinere Schriften* (Berlin, 1937), pp. 182–198. See also Sandler (above, note 1), pp. 63–66, and below, notes 48, 50 and 130.

prayers were not to be recited in a foreign tongue. Furthermore, there was a danger that as a result of such a translation the Jews might even forget the Hebrew language altogether.

Rabbi Baneth had mixed feelings about one of the basic points of Mendelssohn's philosophy of Judaism. In the approbation which he granted to Samson Bloch's *Shvilei 'Olam* in 1825,³⁴ he praised the author both for what he wrote and for writing it in Hebrew. At the same time, he noted that the author had committed one error. He repeated Mendelssohn's contention in *Jerusalem*, that the Bible contained no injunctions regarding faith, but only regarding observance and behavior.³⁵ Rabbi Baneth saw this as an error, and advised Bloch to rectify it in the next edition. In the margins of the approbation, Bloch noted that he had no desire to defy Rabbi Baneth, and certainly did not wish to displease him since the rabbi's intentions were pious. Nevertheless, it seems that he did not plan to alter the content of his book. The passage under discussion was retained

³⁴ Part II (Żolkiew, 1828). The book contains historical and geographical descriptions. The others who endorsed the book and praised its author were Rabbi Moses Mintz (an additional letter written by him was printed at the end of Part II), Rabbi Moses Sofer (Ḥatam Sofer), Rabbi Elazar Fleckeles of Prague, and Rabbi Samuel Landau, the son of Rabbi Ezekiel Landau (Noda' bi-Yehuda), who noted that there was a growing tendency on the part of foreign scholars to revive the Hebrew language, while the opposite trend could be seen among some Jews, who did everything they could, so that the youngsters should forget the language. An exegesis by his brother, Rabbi Yakobke Landau, appears at the beginning of the first part of the book.

³⁵ Rabbi Baneth referred his readers to a footnote on page 107 (in the Żolkiew edition of 1822, vol. I, p. 95b). This portion of the book was quoted by Rabbi Judah Aszód, rabbi of Duna-Szerdahely, *She'elot u-Teshuvot Mahariya Yehudah Ya'aleh* (Lemberg, 1873), para. 92. The discussion concerned the fact that great Torah scholars could be found in large unknown Jewish communities, with India given as an example: "as written in *Shvilei 'Olam* of our rabbi and mentor S. Bloch, part I, p. 84 [in the above edition, p. 77b] ... and in *Maggid Ḥadashot*, by our rabbi and mentor Rabbi Naphtali Herz Weisel of holy blessed memory, *Me'assef*, 1790 [in the month of Shvat, p. 159]." Bloch used a somewhat different phrase for Wessely in his book, referring to him as "the Rabbi, the scholar, the poet R'".

in the subsequent editions of the book which appeared after the death of Rabbi Baneth.³⁶

Interestingly enough, in the preface to the book, which Rabbi Baneth attests to have personally reviewed, the author stated that only the works of Rambam and Mendelssohn revealed the hidden light concealed beneath the cloak of the precepts, laws and ordinances, for they had been communicated by the same shepherd.³⁷

In point of fact, previously, in the year 1799, Rabbis Baneth and Mintz had granted approbations to a book which referred favorably to Mendelssohn. This was *Korot ha-Ittim* by Abraham Ḥayat. Amongst other writings, the book referred to the essays of “the perfect rabbinical sage our mentor Rabbi Herz Wessely of Berlin,” and to “the commentary on the Pentateuch and Ashkenazi translation of the perfect scholar, the sage R. Moses Dessau son of R. Menahem Mendel of Berlin, learned in the Law and in contemporary knowledge, in logic and in the grammar of the sacred tongue. He was esteemed and admired by the ministers of the nations, and known as Mendel’s Sohn or Moses Mendels, who passed away in the year 1793.”³⁸ Rabbi Baneth was well acquainted with the author, who was his

³⁶ These editions in fact appeared after the death of the author. See Rabbi Kalman Kahana, “Al ‘Hazarotav’ Shel ha-Rambam,” *Ha-Ma’ayan*, XVII, 4 (1977), pp. 25–26. An additional reference to Mendelssohn by Bloch can be found in the preface to his Hebrew translation of *Yeshu’at Israel* by Menashe Ben Israel (Warsaw, 1854). He noted that in 1781 the book was translated from English into German by “the wise divine scholar,” Mendelssohn (p. 2).

³⁷ Another reference to Mendelssohn is to be found in the chapter on India (p. 71b). Wessely is also mentioned (p. 84b). In *Zehav Shva* (Lemberg, 1855), the third volume of Bloch’s work, at the end of the chapter “Nidḥei Israel,” the author wrote that he had explained his ideas to Rabbi Baneth, who praised them highly. This part of the book contains a letter he had written in 1835 to Rabbi S.Y. Rappaport in which he mentioned Mendelssohn (second enumeration, p. 1). He also called Mendelssohn “the crown of our generation” (p. 14). Incidentally, this section of the book appeared after the death of the author.

³⁸ *Korot ha-Ittim*, I (Brünn, 1801), 27b–28a. The year 1793 is an error and the year should be 1786.

student and a member of his congregation.³⁹ He mentioned Ḥayat's merit in Torah study and his desire to instill moral values and a recognition of divine providence. He recommended that the book be widely read. The members of the *bet din* of the community, Rabbi Israel Ḥayyim Deutsch and Rabbi Aron Spitz-Segal, affixed their signatures to his *haskamah*. In a separate *haskamah* Rabbi Mintz attested that he had discussed Torah issues with the author, and came to realize his great Torah knowledge. An additional *haskamah* (1797) by Rabbi Zvi Joshua Halevi Ish Horowitz, rabbi of Trebitsch and the son of Rabbi Samuel Shmelke of Nikolsburg, noted Ḥayat's ceaseless Torah study.⁴⁰

Rabbi Jacob Avril Baneth, son of the aforementioned Rabbi Mordecai Baneth, wrote of his father that "he knew the books of *RaMaD* [Mendelssohn] very well."⁴¹ Similar evidence comes

³⁹ He had previously written a *haskamah* for *Ruah Hayyim* by Moses Graf-Praeger, published by Abraham Ḥayat and Abraham ben Isaac Leib in Brünn, 1785.

⁴⁰ The author stated that he had *haskamot* from other rabbis as well, but because of the printing cost he refrained from printing them (p. 3a). The title page of the book bears the legend: "I wrote the truth and did not lie."

⁴¹ *Toldot Adoni Avi Mori ve-Rabbi ... MeHaReR Mordekhai Baneth ...* (Ofen, 1832), p. 22. He also noted his knowledge of various disciplines, including grammar (p. 19). He quoted a eulogy for his father by Judah Leib Jeiteles of Prague — printed in *Bikurei ha-Ittim*, XI, 1831, p. 188 — including a statement by Judah Leib Ben Ze'ev that when visiting Rabbi Baneth, he had found him familiar with grammar books. He knew Ben Ze'ev's *Talmud Lashon Ivri* from start to finish (p. 20). In his eulogy for his father, Rabbi Naphtali Baneth, who officiated as rabbi of the Schaffa community, remarked on his parent's broad knowledge of all Jewish subjects, including "books on the revealed and the hidden." See *Misped Gadol ve-Kaved meod al Mot Adoni Avi Mori ve-Rabbi ... MeHoReR Mordekhai Baneth ...* (Vienna, 1830), p. 19. Rabbi N. Baneth was also conversant with non-Jewish literature, according to his father Rabbi M. Baneth in his *haskamah* of 1822 to the son's book *Emunat Israel* (Prague, 1822). In this book, whose aim was to teach the basic tenets of the faith, the author, with the encouragement of his father, made use of non-Jewish scholars. Support for this, according to his preface, he obtained from Mendelssohn's introduction to his commentary on Ecclesiastes. Rabbi N. Baneth in his eulogy of Rabbi Moses Sofer referred to Mendelssohn's introduc-

from Isaac Hirsch Weiss, who claimed to have heard that Rabbi Baneth often referred to the translation and *Bi'ur*, and was especially impressed by Wessely's contribution: the *Bi'ur* on Leviticus.⁴²

Rabbi Baneth's viewpoint seems to reflect the state of affairs in Moravia. Evidence of this can be found in the memoirs of I.H. Weiss. In 1822 a new school was founded in the town of Meseritsch, by the local rabbinical scholar Rabbi Moses Aaron Teichler. At the recommendation of the rabbi of the community, Rabbi Tobiah Levit,⁴³ Weiss's parents sent him there to study. For most of the day they studied *Gemara*. For one hour each day they studied the Pentateuch with Mendelssohn's translation, the *Rashi* commentary and the *Bi'ur*. For two hours weekly they studied grammar from Ben Ze'ev's book, *Talmud Lashon Ivri*. It is obvious, even the *Heder* was affected throughout the country, by the introduction of similar changes in the syllabus. In most *ḥadarim* the Pentateuch was taught with

tion to Maimonides' *Millot ha-Higgayon*. See *Imrei Shefer* (Pressburg, 1840), p. 21a, and see his remarks on the study of non-Jewish subjects (*ḥokhmot*), *ibid.*, 17b.

⁴² *Zikhronotai* (Warsaw, 1895), p. 36. Cf. the story told of Rabbi Baneth, that one of his students found him reading the *Bi'ur*. When the Rabbi saw his student's surprise, he said: "we may say 'of blessed memory' concerning Mendelssohn." See Mordecai Breuer, "Al Zehut ve-Hizdahut," *Ha-Ma'ayan*, XLVII, 1, 1987, p. 6. The author informed me that his father, Dr. Isaac Breuer, heard this detail from his father, Rabbi Solomon Zalman Breuer, rabbi of Frankfurt-am-Main, who heard it in turn from his grandfather, Rabbi Simon Wiener, a student of Rabbi Baneth. Concerning the preference for Wessely's *Bi'ur*, see the comments of Rabbi Yehosef Zecharia Stern in the text below, note 139. A similar story is told, of Rabbi 'Akiva Eger. See Rabbi 'Akiba Joseph Schlesinger, *Lev ha-Ivri*, I (Lemberg, 1868), 81b ("One of the greats, a relative of our rabbi [Ḥatam Sofer]" — apparently referring to Rabbi 'Akiva Eger). See below, note 52.

⁴³ Concerning Rabbi Levit, see Weiss, *Zikhronotai*, p. 75. He authored *Berurei ha-Midot* (Prague, 1807). The book was granted *haskamot* by Rabbi Elazar Fleckeles and Rabbi Samuel Landau of Prague, as well as by Rabbi M. Baneth. They all praise the author's scholarship. The preface refers to Rabbi Ezekiel Landau as the author's rabbi.

Mendelssohn's translation. The better teachers were familiar with Hebrew grammar and taught it to their students.⁴⁴ It is told that in 1820, when Rabbi Nahum Trebitsch, district rabbi of Moravia after Rabbi Baneth, was serving as the head of a yeshiva in Prague, he advised someone to study, together with his son, the Pentateuch with only Mendelssohn's translation.⁴⁵ At the yeshiva which he headed in Nikolsburg, some of the students studied also secular subjects, as one of them attested.⁴⁶

The edition of the Pentateuch and translation that appeared in Basel in 1822, was granted a *haskamah* by Rabbi Naphtali Hirsch Katzenellenbogen, rabbi of Frankfurt a.d. Oder, Winzheim and the upper district of the Rhine.⁴⁷ This approbation, written in that year, was based on the *haskamot* of Rabbi Baneth and Rabbi Mintz, granted the edition of Vienna of 1817-18. Rabbi Katzenellenbogen particularly noted Rabbi Mintz's remarks in regard to the importance of the translation. He stated that these "righteous men" had undoubtedly examined the book carefully before recommending it, and he would trust them. He held the special value of the new edition to be in the fact that through it women and the general public could understand the Pentateuch.

⁴⁴ *Zikhronotai*, pp. 15, 16. Cf. his statement that the elder rabbis of Moravia, with whom he was acquainted, and their sons, did not scorn learning and allowed their sons and students to study the Bible, grammar and other disciplines, and to be fluent in the local language. In this they differed from the rabbis of Hungary (p. 37; similarly, pp. 72, 79. For the situation in Bohemia, see pp. 76-77).

⁴⁵ Guttman Klemperer, "Reminiscenzen aus meiner frühen Jugendzeit," *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, IV (1934), 25, 27.

⁴⁶ Toldot he-Ḥaver Professor Aharon Ze'ev Bruen, *Talpiyot*, 1895, section: *Toldot Anshei Shem*, p. 7. Also see Michael Silver, "Shoreshei ha-Pilug be-Yahadut Hungaria: Temurot Tarbutiot ve-Hevratiot mi'me Yosef Ha-Sheni ad Erev Maḥapekhat 1848," Dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1985, p. 247, n. 38.

⁴⁷ In 1809 his name appeared on the list of subscribers to the edition of *Netivot ha-Shalom* published in Offenbach. See below, p. 104.

In 1831–33, the *M'Kor Hayyim* Pentateuch was published in Berlin. In addition to what had appeared in the earlier editions of the *Netivot ha-Shalom* it contained the *Bi'ur la-Talmid* by the publisher, Jeremias Heinemann. This edition bore several *haskamot*.

The Book of Genesis contained the *haskamah* of Rabbi Zavel Eger, rabbi of Braunschweig and a cousin of Rabbi 'Akiba Eger. In his approbation, written in 1832, he praised the *Bi'ur la-Talmid*. Following this, was the *haskamah* of Rabbi Gerson Asche, rabbi of Prenzlau, who noted the importance of the translation by "a man wise in the Law whose name was praised in all districts, our mentor Rabbi Moses bar Menachem of blessed memory, and by the great and learned men of that time." He also praised Heinemann, as a very knowledgeable man, who based his interpretation on the *Bi'ur*, the translation and the "*Tikkun Soferim*" by Dubno.

The Book of Exodus contained the *haskamah* of Rabbi 'Akiba Eger, the celebrated rabbi of Posen and father-in-law of Rabbi Moses Sofer (Ḥatam Sofer). His approbation, written in 1832, praised the elegant edition containing translations,⁴⁸ *Rashi's* commentary, *Tikkun Soferim* and *Bi'ur la-Talmid*. Rabbi Eger expressed his hope that the work would be completed, and noted that he had subscribed to purchase it.

The Book of Leviticus, earned the *haskamah* of Rabbi Jacob Zvi Mecklenburg, rabbi of Königsberg. His words, written in

⁴⁸ In 1815 Rabbi 'Akiba Eger came out against prayers in foreign languages. In support of this view he cited the translation by "the 'head scribe,' Rabbi M. Dessau, of the verse, 'Hear O Israel' [Deut. 6:4]: '*Der Ewige unser G-tt ist ein einzig[es] ewiges Wesen.*' He substituted the word *Elokim* with the word *Hashem*" (*Liqqut Teshuvot ve-Ḥidushim mi-Rabenu 'Akiba Eger*, Bnei Brak, 1968, para. 2). His intent is that Mendelssohn translated the word *Elokim* with the traditional translation for the word *Hashem*. This sentence appears in Mendelssohn's translation in the relevant edition of the Pentateuch. See also below, note 139. For reference to the *Bi'ur* in a letter to Rabbi 'Akiba Eger, see below, note 73.

1832, discussed at length the Biblical exegesis and the great value of the *Bi'ur la-Talmid*.

Rabbi Joshua Elijah Herzfeld's *haskamah* appeared in the Book of Numbers. This approbation, by the rabbi of Rawitsch, written in 1833, lauded the work of Heinemann for being readily comprehensible to any person.⁴⁹

Three *haskamot* appeared in the Book of Deuteronomy. The first was that of Rabbis Jacob Joseph Ettinger and Elhanan Rosenstein, members of the *bet din* of Berlin, written in 1834. They praised the edition of the Pentateuch containing various interpretations, "an Ashkenazi translation and *Bi'ur* by our wise rabbi and mentor Moses Dessau of holy blessed memory." The second, written in that year by Rabbi Judah Leib Karlburg, rabbi of Krefeld and district rabbi of Westphalia, noted the importance of a carefully prepared edition containing "translations ... and other proper interpretations," that would put a stop to the study of the Pentateuch from foreign sources. The third approbation was written in 1833 by Rabbi Abraham Loewenstamm, rabbi of Mezrich and Emden. He endorsed the edition containing both "Targum Onkelos and Ashkenazi and the *Rashi* commentary, and the celebrated *Bi'ur*, and an outline of the *Tikkun Soferim* of *RaSHaD* [Dubno]." It should be noted, however, that in *Zror ha-Hayyim*, Rabbi Loewenstamm vehemently attacked the Reform translations of the prayers.⁵⁰

An examination of the *haskamot* reveals that in some — those of Rabbi Z. Eger, Rabbi Mecklenburg and Rabbi Herzfeld

⁴⁹ See below, note 139.

⁵⁰ Amsterdam, 1820, pp. 42a–53b. See especially pp. 47a–49b, and cf. his remarks regarding the inability of the German language to accurately translate the meaning of the Hebrew (p. 46b). Hebrew tends to be terse, and German expansive (p. 48a). Following the *haskamot* is a poem by Moses Mendelssohn of Hamburg, written in 1833, in praise of the edition. This poem does not appear in *Pnei Tevel*. For his attitude to Mendelssohn, see below, pp. 117–118.

— no mention is made, explicitly or implicitly, of either the *Bi'ur* or the translation. This does not seem to imply, however, a repudiation of Mendelssohn and his work. Seven years later, for example, Rabbi Mecklenburg published his exegesis of the Pentateuch entitled *Ha-Ktav ve-ha-Kabbala*, and in it he referred several times to the words of “*RaMaD*”.⁵¹ And, in fact, in his above *haskamah* for the *M’Kor Hāyyim* Pentateuch, he did speak of Wessely’s commentary on Leviticus.⁵²

Moreover, we may assume that Heinemann, the publisher of this edition, informed the rabbis, from the start, of his aims in publishing the book.⁵³ In the preface he outlined his plans as follows:

First, the preface of “the sage, our teacher, Moses ben Menachem of holy blessed memory” to the Pentateuch. Though it had been printed before, the publisher had then made a number

⁵¹ For example, several citations are presented and are disputed: Exodus 10:8, 10:23, 14:13, 21:34, 22:3, 23:33; Leviticus 23:2. In some places the translation is disputed, though Mendelssohn’s name is not mentioned. See, for example, Genesis 7:11, 16:2; Numbers 31:6; Deuteronomy 17:16, 31:17.

⁵² He also referred to his comments at the beginning of *Lebanon*. In *Ha-Ktav ve-ha-Kabbala*, Rabbi Mecklenburg frequently referred to Wessely’s commentary, particularly on Leviticus. See also his commentary “*Iyyun Tefilla*” in *Sidur Tefillat Israel* (Warsaw, 1895), p. 196. Likewise, he cites Dubno in his exegesis of the Torah. See also above, note 14 and below, note 135.

⁵³ This can be deduced from his preface to the *haskamot* of Genesis: “And I turned to my teachers to present to them what I had produced with the Lord’s help, and to ask them to speak well of me to the people.” The *haskamot* were to be printed separately at the start of the different books. Heinemann stated that he had additional *haskamot* from the great contemporary rabbis. He planned to publish them in *Kuntras Aḥaron*. This pamphlet was to be printed in two volumes. This information appears in a list of books, *Reshimat Sefarim Yeshanim v’gam Hādashim*, that Heinemann offered for sale in Berlin. The date of the sale does not appear. This list also contains several books by Mendelssohn, including two editions of the *Bi’ur*. The pamphlet, however, was never published.

of alterations in it.⁵⁴ At the very start of his introduction to his exegesis, *Bi'ur la-Talmid*, Heinemann expressed his deep admiration for Mendelssohn and his work on the Pentateuch: "and who am I to come after him and expand on it." Teachers would instruct their young pupils by means of the commentaries of *Rashi* and Mendelssohn, but the available editions of the Pentateuch were imperfect. In his edition he thus adopted the following guidelines:

- a. The correction of lapses in the text of the *Rashi* commentary and *Targum Onkelos*. Precision in regard to vocalization and cantillations as instructed by Mendelssohn, and not as in other systems.⁵⁵
- b. The errors in Mendelssohn's translation were corrected, including those in the first edition printed during the author's lifetime. Heinemann presumed that various missing conjunctions had been omitted by the printer, and their absence was overlooked by the proof-reader.
- c. The *Bi'ur* was treated similarly. Heinemann detailed various improvements he had made in the translation and *Bi'ur*. It was obvious to him that had the author

⁵⁴ Those matters which were not of interest to Heinemann in this project were only treated briefly. Appended to it was Mendelssohn's lengthy preface to the "Beshalah" portion, discussing the question of Biblical prose. Mendelssohn referred the reader to his preface to the commentary on Ecclesiastes. Since few people were in possession of this book (p. 12a), Heinemann summarized the major points. In his preface — Mendelssohn wrote — Dubno wished to include all of the grammatical rules. Thus, in several places it is noted that the reference is to the elements of language and cantillation as explained in the preface. However, these rules were not, in fact, included in the preface because of Mendelssohn's objection. The printers of the former editions had not noticed this omission, and left the references in their original form (p. 136).

⁵⁵ The reference is to Wolf Heidenheim in the edition of the Pentateuch *Me'or 'Anayim*, to Isaac Premyslotto in *Tikkun Soferim*, or to the accepted system in *Mikraot Gedolot*.

been able to reprint his edition, he himself would have made every effort to correct these errors.⁵⁶

- d. In his own exegesis, *Bi'ur la-Talmid*, he paid special attention to the literal meaning of the words and the various grammatical constructions. There were instances in which he disagreed with Mendelssohn, "and perhaps I did not grasp his meaning."⁵⁷

Heinemann considered the personal history of Mendelssohn in his preface to Deuteronomy. Mendelssohn had been attacked for supposedly championing an alien spirit. This was not so. He had sought faithfully to unify wisdom literature, scientific enquiry and kabbala. Evidence of his piety in observing the Torah can be found in his book, *Jerusalem*. His translation followed the teachings of our sages. He deviated from them only where their interpretations seemed to depart from the literal meaning of the text. Heinemann was of the opinion, that had Mendelssohn reprinted his translation, he would have made these corrections himself. The *Bi'ur* carefully preserved the homiletic interpretation, which was included even when it did not comply with the literal meaning. Most of the deviations in interpretation were the work of Mendelssohn's disciples. Thus,

⁵⁶ Cf. the remarks of Avigdor of Glogau from 1794 (see above n. 9). Corrections were also made in other editions. The title page of the Book of Genesis in the Prague edition of 1807 states, that the mistakes of the first edition were eliminated. The title page of the Johannesburg (Germany) edition of 1863 states, that errors in *Targum Onkelos* and the *Rashi* commentary had been corrected, and that the language had been improved. A great deal of effort and attention had been devoted to purging the translation and *Bi'ur* from the "blemish of errors" in previous editions.

⁵⁷ Heinemann based his publication of Isaiah (Berlin, 1842) on similar principles. The edition included: errors in the *Massorah*; translation into German with particular attention to cantillations as well; a comprehensive exegesis based on previous commentators and foreign interpretations; and an examination of grammatical rules.

“we must be grateful to him and we live by his words, and his intentions were pious.”⁵⁸

Several of the issues Heinemann raised, are mentioned in the *haskamot*. It would thus appear, that these rabbis endorsed the publication of this revised edition of the *Bi'ur* and translation, designed primarily for young students. They would seem to have regarded this book as a means of forestalling the study of the Law from alien sources.

III

The many editions of Mendelssohn's Pentateuch published throughout Eastern and Western Europe, indicate the extent to which it was read by wide sectors of the nation.⁵⁹ Of particular interest to us here is the degree of its popularity in rabbinical circles. Although we have no precise information in this regard, a great deal can be learned from examining the lists of subscribers to the various editions. Following is a selection of the names of the rabbis who appear on those lists.⁶⁰

Netivot ha-Shalom, Genesis, Berlin 1783:

R. Aron Hurwitz, *Av bet din* of Hasenpot, and *dayyan* in Berlin; R. Samuel Landau of Prague, the son of R. Ezekiel Landau (Noda' bi-Yehuda);⁶¹ R. Eliezer, r. of Neschwitz; R.

⁵⁸ Heinemann stated that the commentary on Numbers and Deuteronomy was poorer than those of the previous books. See below, p. 125.

⁵⁹ See Steven M. Lowenstein, "The Readership of Mendelssohn's Bible Translation," *HUCA*, LIII (1982), 179-213.

⁶⁰ The names are presented in the order in which they appear on the lists. In some cases, the rabbis' positions after the date of their subscription is noted. See above, note 23 (end), and below, note 111.

⁶¹ He later replaced his father as rabbi of Prague. Rabbi Ezekiel Landau strongly objected to Mendelssohn's translation. In time, circumstances changed. In 1816, Rabbi Samuel Landau praised the translation. See his book *Ahavat Ziyyon*, I (Sudytkow, 1834), 16a. See above, note 23. Other descendants of Rabbi Ezekiel Landau were also among the subscribers to the editions of Mendelssohn's translation: His son, Rabbi Israel, subscribed to the Prague edition of 1801, and his grandson, Rabbi Joshua, to the Fürth edition of Psalms of 1805.

Mansch Braunschweig, *dayyan* in Berlin; R. Zalman of Vilna, r. of Pakrojus; R. Moses, r. of Kletz; R. Moses, r. of Ezalibak; R. Samson Kraslaver.

Derekh Slula, Genesis, Fürth 1801:

R. Hirsch Conriet;⁶² R. Abraham Benjamin Wolff Hamburger, head of the Fürth yeshiva; R. Abraham ben R. Joseph Meir, *More-Zedek* (Assistant Rabbi) in Ilreichen; R. Jacob Yucab Neumburg, r. of Offenbach (author of *Nahalat Ya'akov*); R. Benjamin Wolff Bratsfelder, a preacher at Bayreuth (author of *Minhat Yehudah*); R. Gedaliah Mitz-Rothenberg, *More-Zedek* of Digheim; R. Israel Israli Katz, *More-Zedek* of Hürben; R. Samuel Hirsch, *More-Zedek* of Wertheim and R. Henley Dikelspiel-Fürth and R. Hillel Schotten, heads of the yeshiva in the *bet midrash* at Mannheim; R. Moses Schwartzschild, *Av bet din* of Frankfurt-am-Main; R. Simon Disbeck, *dayyan* in the district of Beiersdorf; R. Moses Tauber, *More-Zedek* of Pappenheim; R. Arie Leib Berlin, r. of Bamberg and Kassel; R. Moshe Moses Marburger, r. of Friedberg; R. Kopel ben R. Hayyim of Schoningen, *dayyan* at Heidingsfeld.

Derekh Slula, Exodus, Fürth 1802:

R. Hirsch, r. of Frankfurt a.d. Oder.

Derekh Slula, Leviticus, Fürth 1802:

R. Abraham Reiss, r. of Mühringen and Endingen.

Derekh Slula, Deuteronomy, Fürth 1803:

R. Philta Epstein, r. of Bruchsal; R. David Ginzburg, r. of Ihringen and Breisach (author of *Divrei David ha-Aharonim*); R. Aaron Kuttna of the *bet midrash* at Frankfurt-am-Main; R.

(see below). His grandson Moses, the son of Rabbi Israel, published the Prague edition of 1833–1836, together with a commentary, *Ha-Me'ammer*, which he co-authored with Wolf Meyer.

⁶² This apparently refers to Rabbi Naphtali Hirsch Kunreuther, later known as Rabbi of Mergentheim and Gellenhausen.

Sender Elzas, r. of Freudenthal; R. Isaac Zekal Wiermech, r. of Fulda.

Netivot ha-Shalom, Genesis, Prague 1801:

R. Baer Perles; R. Israel Landau (the son of R. Ezekiel Landau), author of *Har ha-Zeitim* and other books.

Netivot ha-Shalom, Deuteronomy, Offenbach 1809:

R. Israel of Höchberg; R. Naftali Hirsch Katzenellenbogen, r. of Frankfurt a.d. Oder, Winzheim and the upper district of Rhine; R. Samuel Hilman Levy, r. of Worms and Mainz; R. Gottslick Elzantz-Cohen, head of the yeshiva, the *bet midrash* at Mannheim; R. Seckel Leib Wormser (the "Ba'al Shem of Michelstadt"); R. Solomon Zalman Trier, r. and head of the yeshiva at Frankfurt-am-Main; R. Baruch Guggenheim, r. of Pfalzburg.

Derekh Slula, Exodus, Fürth 1824:

R. Elazar Dov Ottensosser, *More-Zedek* of Aub, r. and head of the yeshiva of Höchberg; R. Pincus Katzenellenbogen, r. of Ettingen-Spielberg; R. Yitzhak Isaac Hocheimer, r. of Ichenhausen; R. Judah Benjamin Wolff Neckarsulmer, r. of Schnaittach and head of the yeshiva in the *Klaus* at Fürth; R. Yitzhak Isaac Hirsch Gunzenhauser, r. of Binswangen; R. Abraham Bihem, *More-Zedek* of Gunzenhausen; R. Yitzhak Isaac Skutsch, r. of Treushtlingen; R. Ḥayyim Disbeck, head of the yeshiva in the *bet midrash* at Hechingen; R. Uri Leib Feitel-Halevy, *dayyan* at Fürth and r. of Dittenheim; R. Ḥayyim Cohen, *More-Zedek* of Thalmessingen; R. Judah Ezekiel Hessel, r. of München; R. Gabriel Adler, r. of Müringen and Oberdorf; R. Nathaniel Weidersheim, r. of Metz; R. Solomon Zalman Trier, r. of Frankfurt-am-Main; R. Jacob Zilberkron, *dayyan* at Frankfurt-am-Main; R. Joseph Zvi Hirsch Westphalen, r. of Kreuznach; R. Yitzhak Isaac Hess, r. of Stadt Langsfeld.

Derekh Slula, Leviticus, Fürth 1824:

R. Ḥayyim Joseph Yezelah Emden, r. of Pappenheim.

Derekh Slula, Deuteronomy, Fürth 1826:

R. 'Akiba Wertheimer, r. of Altona.

M'Kor Hayyim, Genesis, Berlin 1831:

R. 'Akiba Eger, r. of Posen; R. Gershon Asche, r. of Prenzlau;
R. Jacob Zvi Mecklenburg, r. of Königsberg.

Netivot ha-Shalom, Genesis, Warsaw 1836:

R. Moses Eger of Warsaw (the son of R. 'Akiba Eger).

Psalms with Mendelssohn's translation and Joel Brüll's commentary was published under the title *Zemiroth Israel*, Berlin, 1791. Among the subscribers from Berlin was R. Solomon Zalman Hirschell, son of R. Zvi Hirsch Levin, r. of the community. From Breslau: R. Rephael Gedeiss, the son-in-law of R. Jonathan Eibeschütz. From Halberstadt: the wife of R. Judah Leib Eger, r. of the community (uncle of R. 'Akiba Eger). From Frankfurt-am-Main: Wolf Heidenheim. From Strasbourg: R. David Zinsheim, r. of the community. From Amsterdam: Solomon Dubno.⁶³

Subscribers to the 1805 Fürth edition were:⁶⁴

R. Abraham Benjamin Wolff Hamburger and R. Joshua Landau of Prague (the grandson of R. Ezekiel Landau); Solomon Dubno, from Amsterdam; R. Pincus Katzenellenbogen from Ettingen; and R. Jacob Weil (who later authored *Torat Shabbat*) from Karlsruhe.

Zemiroth Israel — *Derekh Mesila*, published in Fürth in 1844, counted among its subscribers:

R. Aaron Guggenheimer, r. of Kriegshaber.

⁶³ It is of interest that Dubno was also a subscriber to the discussed edition and to the following one. As mentioned above, he had ceased to participate in Mendelssohn's Pentateuch project.

⁶⁴ As mentioned above, two of them were subscribers to editions of the Pentateuch which appeared in Fürth: Rabbi Hamburger to the 1804, and Rabbi Katzenellenbogen to the 1824 edition.

The Song of Songs, translated by Mendelssohn and commented upon by Samuel Deutschländer, "*Mar'eh ha-Lebanon*," was published in Pressburg, 1848.⁶⁵ Among the rabbis who subscribed to it were:

R. Abraham Samuel Benjamin Sofer (Ktav Sofer), r. of Pressburg, and members of its *bet din*; R. Moshe Schick (*MaHaRaM* Schick), r. of Vergin; R. Aaron Joseph Samuel Halevy, r. of Trencsin; R. Ze'ev Wolf Lippe, r. of Gyongyos; R. El'azar Strasser, r. of Neustadt.

Ecclesiastes, translated by Mendelssohn with a commentary by Gabriel Zeidfeld under the title *Rehovot ha-Bi'ur*, was published in Prague in 1850. Amongst the subscribers was R. Joshua Tauber, r. of Teteni.

The fact that over eighty Rabbis and religious leaders, some of them celebrated figures, subscribed to the various editions of Mendelssohn's *Bi'ur* and translation would seem to indicate that they showed at least an interest in the publication of these volumes.

IV

It is only proper that in an examination of the historical place of Mendelssohn and his work on the Biblical texts, consideration should also be given to the attitude of those rabbis who, unlike the aforementioned, were not directly associated with the publication.

⁶⁵ Deutschländer pointed out that in some instances Mendelssohn's translation had been emended, noting at the same time the great importance of the translation as long as German would continue to be used (11a). In his commentary he referred to the *Bi'ur* in a number of places: 16a, 18b, 22a, 28a, 39b, 51a, 52b and 68b. He also referred to books by Wessely: 5a, 13b, 52b, 75a and 76a; and again to Mendelssohn's commentary to *Millot ha-Higayyon* (8b). See Deutschländer's comments to the *Bi'ur* to Leviticus, *Ha-Maggid*, VII, 5 (9 Shevat 1863), pp. 37–38, and see response, *ibid.*, 9 (6 Adar 1863), pp. 69–70.

Mendelssohn and his translation are referred to in the *haskamot* later granted by rabbis of Vilna to a commentary which Dubno intended to publish.⁶⁶ Rabbi Noah Lipschitz⁶⁷ noted that it was Mendelssohn's translation "which did not suit the needs of everyone in this country," that induced Dubno to broach his own project.⁶⁸ Rabbi Moses Meisel⁶⁹ described Mendelssohn as: "a man of the greatest stature, whose name alone is sufficiently great" — and the aim of the translation is — "that every man should be sovereign, and speak according to the language of his people."⁷⁰ Rabbi Joseph Fassels, the son-in-law of Rabbi Samuel ben Rabbi Avigdor, the *Av bet din* of Vilna, and Rabbi Arie Leib ben Rabbi Dov Baer, known as Rabbi Leib-Rabbi Baers, stated that they had in the possession copies of the Pentateuch published "in a manner we approve of" by Mendelssohn, to whom they referred as "the noted, great, wondrous sage, the philosopher, our honorable mentor and

⁶⁶ Samuel Joseph Funn included these *haskamot*, written in 1783, in his book *Kiryat Ne'emana* (Vilna, 1860). They were in a handwritten diary of subscribers to the editions of the Pentateuch published by Dubno, which he had in his possession. One of them contains the complete date: 27 Nisan 1783 (p. 160) and the others the year 1783 (pp. 168[1], 228, 246). Another *haskamah* bears the date: Wednesday, 28 Nisan 1787 (p. 170). This should, however, read 1783. In 1787 this date fell on a Sunday. Dubno seems to have kept another diary of subscribers in Germany and Holland. It contained a notice for his book written in 1784. The rabbinical *haskamot* in this diary were written between 1786 and 1788. See Gabriel Pollak, *Ben Gorni* (Amsterdam, 1851), pp. 42–50.

⁶⁷ He was known as Rabbi Noah Mindes, an in-law of the Gaon of Vilna. He authored *Parpera'ot la-Hokhma* and *Nifla'ot Hadašot*.

⁶⁸ *Kiryat Ne'emana*, p. 170. Samuel Jacob Yatzkan presented reasons — based on assumptions and theories entirely of his own invention — as to why Rabbi Mindes had written this *haskamah* for Dubno, who was a colleague of Mendelssohn. See his book, *Rabbenu Eliyahu mi-Vilna* (Warsaw, 1900), p. 118. See also p. 120.

⁶⁹ The beadle of the community of Vilna, and one of those close to the Gaon. He authored *Shirat Moshe* on the 613 commandments. He was later among the founders of the Ḥabad community in Hebron.

⁷⁰ *Kiryat Ne'emana*, p. 246.

rabbi.” However, the translation was not readily comprehensible by their countrymen,⁷¹ its language being too difficult for them.⁷²

Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer lived on the border between Eastern and Western Poland, and served voluntarily as a *dayyan* at Thorn. In a halakhic debate with his rabbi, Rabbi ‘Akiba Eger, in 1837, Rabbi Kalischer relied on the *Bi’ur* to the portion of *Truma*.⁷³ In his commentary to the Pentateuch, he leans occasionally on the *Bi’ur*⁷⁴ and translation,⁷⁵ as well as on Mendelssohn’s commentary to Ecclesiastes,⁷⁶ and the *Bi’ur* on Psalms,⁷⁷ and Proverbs.⁷⁸ Rabbi Kalischer regarded Mendelssohn as “a great man and crown of the sages,”⁷⁹ and a “sage of the world.”⁸⁰ This assessment comes from one of the forerun-

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 223–224.

⁷² Regarding the attitude of the Lithuanian rabbis to Mendelssohn and his Bible work, see Abraham Baer Gottlober, *Zihronot u-Massa’ot*, II (Jerusalem, 1976), 118–119.

⁷³ “*Drishat Ziyon*” in the collection of Rabbi Zvi Kalischer’s Zionist writings (Jerusalem, 1947), p. 87. The commentary on Exodus was composed largely by Mendelssohn. Rabbi Kalischer stated correctly that this particular interpretation was Dubno’s. His words include a repudiation of the words of “the Ashkenazi translator.” Sandler (p. 105) presents evidence that Dubno added his own interpretations to Mendelssohn’s exegesis of Exodus, though he does not mention this source.

⁷⁴ *Sefer ha-Berit*, Exodus (Warsaw, 1873), 22:3, 32:1. Leviticus (Warsaw, 1875), 21:1.

⁷⁵ *Sefer ha-Berit*, Exodus 20:15, 24:6; *Sefer ha-Berit*, Deuteronomy (Warsaw, 1875), 3:24. It should be noted, that the *Targum Ashkenazi*, in the edition of the Pentateuch with Rabbi Kalischer’s commentary, is identical with the text of Mendelssohn’s translation.

⁷⁶ *Emuna Yeshara*, I, pp. 37, 109 and 151. *Sefer ha-Berit*, Genesis (Warsaw, 1873), 47:30. His commentary on Ecclesiastes, at the end of *Sefer ha-Berit*, Deuteronomy 1:6.

⁷⁷ *Emuna Yeshara*, I, second enumeration, exegesis on Job (*Ma’alot Tam ve-Yashar*), p. 41.

⁷⁸ *Emuna Yeshara*, I, pp. 40, 119.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁸⁰ In the above collection of his writings, p. 176. The reference appears in an article Rabbi Kalischer published in 1845.

ners of the nationalist Jewish movement, whose views in regard to the integration of the Jews into the general culture were diametrically opposed to those of Mendelssohn. Nevertheless, Rabbi Kalischer was a modern man and realized that times had changed. Accordingly, in his philosophical discussions, he cited Mendelssohn's books *Phaedon*⁸¹ and *Morgenstunden*.⁸² Rabbi Kalischer also admired Wessely, whom he termed "the wondrous sage"⁸³ and "the rabbi, the celebrated sage,"⁸⁴ and he often quoted from his exegesis on Leviticus.⁸⁵

It is only natural that a discussion of Mendelssohn's life and works focus primarily on the views of German rabbis. Rabbi Zvi Benjamin Auerbach, rabbi of Halberstadt, wrote that Rabbi Abraham Halberstadt, who apparently served as *dayyan* and deputy rabbi of the community, highly praised Mendelssohn's commentary on Ecclesiastes, and the broad knowledge and intelligence of the author. He lauded the piety and modesty of both Mendelssohn and Wessely.⁸⁶

Rabbi Abraham Zutro, the rabbi of a number of communities, among them Münster, and one of the most outspoken

⁸¹ *Emuna Yeshara*, I, pp. 96, 102, 120–121, 122, 141 and 142. His exegesis on Job (above, note 77), pp. 5 and 17.

⁸² *Emuna Yeshara*, I, p. 21.

⁸³ *Emuna Yeshara*, II (Thorn, 1870), 68.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 167. The terms are used in the context of quotations taken from his book *Gan Na'ul*. This book is also cited in *ibid.*, pp. 69–70, 71 and 71. *Sefer ha-Berit*, Exodus 32:1. See also a similar reference to Wessely in *Emuna Yeshara*, I, p. 38.

⁸⁵ *Emuna Yeshara*, II, p. 141. *Sefer ha-Berit*, Leviticus (Warsaw, 1875), explanation of the particles: 3:5, 11:27, 12:2, 14:14, 37; 19:2, 19:3, 4. Explanation of the particles 19:17, 23–20:17, 21:1, 4, 5; 25:8, 31; 26:3.

⁸⁶ B.H. Auerbach, *Geschichte der israelitischen Gemeinde Halberstadt* (Halberstadt, 1866), pp. 189–90. (Regarding the aforementioned, see Esriel Hildesheimer, "Rabbanei Halberstadt ve-Ḥakhameha," *Sefer Aviad* [Jerusalem, 1986], p. 235.) See the remarks of Rabbi Hirsch of Halberstadt, the son of the *dayyan* Rabbi Aaron of Dessau on Mendelssohn, *ibid.* See also Samet (above, note 1), p. 236, n. 19. Rabbi Auerbach added that he had read that Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschütz admired Mendelssohn's piety (p. 198).

opponents of the Reform movement, crowned Mendelssohn with the titles "divine philosopher"⁸⁷ and "wise philosopher."⁸⁸

The leaders of the new Orthodoxy in Germany carefully scrutinized Mendelssohn's character. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, rabbi of Frankfurt-am-Main, accepted Mendelssohn's basic concept of Judaism as a revealed law, rather than a set of beliefs and articles of faith, as well as his explanation of the symbolic essence of the precepts.⁸⁹ He expressed his esteem for Mendelssohn in his book *Iggrot Zafon*.⁹⁰ At a time of abating external repressions, Mendelssohn represented "an excellent and superior figure, a highly-distinguished figure." The source of his fine spirit, however, was not Judaism. His distinction was mainly in the philosophical disciplines of metaphysics and esthetics. He interpreted the Bible in what was only a philosophical-esthetic manner. Rather than strengthening Judaism from within, he defended it from its attackers, devout Christians, from without. Mendelssohn was an observant Jew,⁹¹ and demonstrated that it was possible to preserve this way of life "and at the same time" gain distinction as the Jewish Plato. Rabbi Hirsch noted that the key expression here was "at the same time." In other words, he set the two cultures one against

⁸⁷ *Milhamot ha-Shem*, I (Hannover, 1836), 129. Similarly *ibid.*, IV (Halberstadt, 1865), 46.

⁸⁸ *Shomer Ziyon ha-Ne'eman*, CLXXV (9 Nisan 1854), p. 348b. He is also referred to as "the sage" in *Milhamot ha-Shem*, III (Hannover, 1863), 25, 29. Incidentally, this book also contained a letter from Rabbi Jacob Ettlinger, rabbi of Altona, in regard to the value of the book in the war against the Reform movement (p. 4). Wessely is referred to as "the rabbi," *Milhamot ha-Shem*, I, p. 16. Similarly, *ibid.*, 11 (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1862), p. 44.

⁸⁹ Nathan Rotenstreich, *Ha-Maḥshava ha-Yehudit ba-'Et ha-Ḥadasha* (Tel-Aviv, 1966), I, pp. 115, 134, 273, 286; II, p. 29.

⁹⁰ Jerusalem, 1952, Letter 18.

⁹¹ In his writings, Rabbi Hirsch quoted passages from Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* which discuss the obligation to observe the precepts. See Rabbiner Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Gesammelte Schriften*, III (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1906), 495, 508-509.

the other, without attempting to unify them. His students did not follow in his footsteps.⁹²

Rabbi Hirsch bewailed the fact that Mendelssohn had not completed his work. Had he been able to do so, it stands to reason that the Reform movement might never have come into being. This attitude seems to reflect the change that took place in the status of Orthodoxy in Germany in the 1840's. At this time it was gaining strength and changing from a passive to an aggressive position. Nevertheless, on the whole, Rabbi Hirsch does not seem to have been seriously disquieted by Mendelssohn. This emerges from an article written by his son, Isaac Hirsch, on the one hundredth anniversary of Mendelssohn's death. Rabbi Hirsch was still alive at the time, and there is reason to believe that he endorsed the article. Mendelssohn is termed "one of the noblest sons of Israel," who had taken his place among the righteous and honest men in heaven. His memory remains alive amongst men who pay homage and admiration to his blessed work. Mendelssohn had devoted his life to bringing "true joy," but for us he would always be remembered as "a great and noble Jew" by virtue of his contribution to and appreciation of Judaism. He served as "a supreme example of truly devout Jewish conduct" together with a broad knowledge of all of the scientific disciplines.⁹³ It should be noted that Wessely too was greatly esteemed in the home of

⁹² For Rabbi Hirsch's attitude to Rambam and Mendelssohn, see *Iggrot Zafon* (above, note 90). See also Isaac Heinemann's preface to the above edition, p. 9, and his *Ta'amei ha-Mizvot be-Sifrut Israel*, II (Jerusalem, 1956), 102, 116, 118–119. See also Rabbi Jacob Yehiel Weinberg, "Torat ha-Hayim," *Ha-Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch Mishnato ve-Shitato* (Jerusalem, 1962), pp. 192–193. For the relationship between Mendelssohn and Rabbi Hirsch, see Mordecai Breuer, "Shitot Tora im Derekh Erez be-Mishnato shel R. Shimshon Raphael Hirsch," *Ha-Ma'ayan*, IX, 1 (1969), 3–4; Tsemach Tsemariyon, *Moshe Mendelssohn ve-ha-Ideologia shel ha-Haskala* (Tel-Aviv, 1985), p. 100, note 162; Eliezer Stern, *Ishim ve-Kivvunim* (Ramat-Gan, 1987), pp. 24–25.

⁹³ *Jeschurun*, 1885, pp. 833–834.

Rabbi Hirsch,⁹⁴ who cited his interpretations in several places in his own exegesis of the Pentateuch.⁹⁵ Moses Mendelssohn of Hamburg, Rabbi Hirsch's uncle, reported that the rabbi was in possession of all of Wessely's books, including manuscripts yet unpublished at the time of his death.⁹⁶

Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer, the rabbi of the Adat Israel community in Berlin, and head of the Rabbinical Seminary, credited Mendelssohn, "the great worldly sage," for his theory and practice of Judaism, for his influence in Jewish political and civil circles, and his value as a source for scholars in matters of religious life and attitudes. Mendelssohn was a loyal adherent of his religion, and acknowledged the same in his writings. In thought and practice, in his philosophy and conduct, he upheld the Biblical-Talmudic basis of Judaism. His work was faithfully depicting Judaism to members of the alien culture, among them philosophers, scholars and the higher echelons of society. "Small minds" who sought to raise themselves to a level of importance which they did not deserve, by climbing on his shoulders, called themselves his disciples and heirs, although they did not conduct themselves in accordance with either his spirit or his actions. They crudely distorted the essence of his philosophy, and thus dishonored him in the eyes of the vast majority of their peers. As a result, Mendelssohn was then held responsible for the actions of these "disciples" of his. Mendelssohn's translation of the Pentateuch and Book of Psalms inspired similar attempts, enabling laymen, and even Gentiles, to understand additional treasures of Judaism. The *Bi'ur* had

⁹⁴ Breuer (above, note 92), p. 5.

⁹⁵ At the first citation, Leviticus 3:5, Rabbi Hirsch added "his soul is in heaven." See Yona Emanuel, *Parshanim u-Poskim Aharonim be-Perusho shel ha-Rav S.R. Hirsch al ha-Torah* (Jerusalem, 1962), pp. 10-11.

⁹⁶ *Pnei Tevel*, p. 241.

generated an interest in the study of Hebrew grammar, and a return to the literal meaning of the Biblical text.⁹⁷

In remarks, most likely originating from the pen of his son, Dr. Hirsch Hildesheimer, and written in honor of the anniversary of Mendelssohn's death, he noted that Mendelssohn's exemplary life had demonstrated how a true Jew could live and think in a manner faithful to the religious traditions of Judaism, while actively sharing the ambitions of the public and literary world. His investigations had included research into religious questions, and lucidly conveyed the sense of Jewish religiosity. His translation of the Bible had made the Book of Books available to all sectors of the Jewish nation as a source of religious uplift, and had later served as a powerful means of enticing many thousands of people to a study of the holy texts in their original language. Such a markedly revolutionary period inevitably entailed unrest and upheaval, and this was the negative aspect of any change in religious life. This was particularly so in regard to the corruption of the religious life of several of Mendelssohn's sons and students, and it was this that had led a number of Jewish leaders at the time to vilify his work. It was

⁹⁷ *Jüdische Presse*, 1886, pp. 1–2, 14–15. Rabbi Hildesheimer's remarks, delivered on the centennial of Mendelssohn's death, were reported in the Hebrew press. See *Ha-Meliz*, XXV, 98, (5 Shvat 1886), p. 1640; *Ha-Maggid*, XXX, 2, (8 Shvat 1886), p. 13; *Ha-Zfira*, XIII, 2, (13 Shvat 1886), p. 10. The last journal maintained that this homily had removed the shame that Mendelssohn's students had attached to his name, disgracing it for one hundred years. See also *Festschrift ... Salomon Carlebach* (Berlin, 1910), p. 257. Nevertheless, Rabbi Hildesheimer was critical of Mendelssohn's translation. In 1861, Rabbi Reuben Fink, rabbi of Alt-Berun, wrote to him claiming that a stand should be taken against a translation that contained words whose translation differed from the original meaning, and mentioned three references in Mendelssohn's work. In his reply, Rabbi Hildesheimer wrote that his correspondent was undoubtedly correct, and that additional examples could be given (the letter is in the archives he left after his death, and is in the possession of my father). It should be noted that Rabbi Hildesheimer opposed the erection of the memorial to Mendelssohn, raised in Dessau on the centennial of his death, on the grounds that it was forbidden by Jewish law and custom (*Israelit*, 1886, p. 39).

only later that it had borne fruit. Today, any work based on the true Jewish traditions, along with aspects of contemporary culture, was associated with Mendelssohn.⁹⁸

Rabbi Meir Lehmann, rabbi of Mainz and editor of *Israelit*, noted that as an observant Jew, Mendelssohn united science and Judaism. After many had converted, he remained as the model of a religious Jew who was also involved in science. By means of such a combination, a pious Jew could win the admiration of Christian citizens.⁹⁹

Rabbi Naphtali (Hermann) Adler of London, later the chief rabbi of England, produced an elaborate essay on Mendelssohn, in which he used the expression, "from Moses to Moses there has been none like Moses."¹⁰⁰

An additional way to examine the attitude toward Mendelssohn is to consider references to the *Bi'ur* and the translation in the exegeses and writings of other rabbis who were not directly involved with the *Bi'ur*.

Reference to Mendelssohn is made by Rabbi Samuel Straschun of Vilna,¹⁰¹ Rabbi Mordecai Gimpel Jaffe, rabbi of Rosenau,¹⁰² Rabbi Baruch Isaac Lipschitz, rabbi of Lands-

⁹⁸ *Jüdische Presse*, 1885, pp. 519–520. Unsigned editorial. The editor was H. Hildesheimer.

⁹⁹ *Israelit*, 1886, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ "A Popular Address on the Life and Work of Moses Mendelssohn," *Jewish Chronicle*, 1886, pp. 10–12.

¹⁰¹ In Rabbi Straschun's annotations on *Ta'anit* 9b, *Yebamoth* 62b, *Horayot* 11b. The citations appear in an article by Rabbi Raphael Katzenellenbogen, "Rashash Le-Shitato" in *Mekorei ha-Rambam le-Rashash* by Rabbi Samuel Straschun (Jerusalem, 1957), p. 30. The library of his son, Rabbi Matthew Straschun, contained several editions of the *Bi'ur*. See David Straschun, *Likkutei Shoshanim* (Berlin, 1889), p. 291, no. 5512–5513.

¹⁰² In his book, *Bi'urim ve-Hidushim al Perush ha-Rambam la-Torah* (Jerusalem, 1954), Exodus 4:20.

berg,¹⁰³ Rabbi Jacob Koppel Halevy Bamberger, rabbi of Heidelberg, Bischofsheim and Worms;¹⁰⁴ Rabbi Solomon Zalman Geiger, *dayyan* at Frankfurt-am-Main;¹⁰⁵ Rabbi David Zvi Hoffmann, head of the Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin;¹⁰⁶ Rabbi Judah Leib Shapiro in his work *Ha-Rekhasim le-Bik'ah*;¹⁰⁷ Rabbi Nathan Adler, chief rabbi of England, in his exegesis on

¹⁰³ *Misgeret Zahav*, "Al Kalkalat Shabbat," para. 1, phrase beginning: "agav zeh." His father, Rabbi Israel Lipschitz, mentioned Wessely and his book *Yain Lebanon* in his commentary on the *mishna*, *Tiferet Israel*, *Avot* 3, *mishna* 11, *ziyyunim* 72, 76 (he stated that his interpretation of this *mishna* and others in the tractate was based on Wessely's commentary which was "very appealing and true"). In his introduction to the *mishna* tractate *Nega'im*, he also mentioned twice Wessely's *Bi'ur* on Leviticus. Rabbi Joseph Saul Halevy Nathanson, rabbi of Lemberg, protested to Rabbi Hayyim Halberstam of Nowy Sacz that his son, Rabbi Ezekiel Schinowa had spoken ill of the commentary *Tiferet Israel*, and directed that it be bound in a double-binding. Rabbi Halberstam's grandchildren found various things in *Tiferet Israel* that were not to their liking, including references to Mendelssohn. Rabbi Halberstam justified his son's action (Rabbi David Leiter, "Le-Toldot ha-Gaon Rabbi J.S. Nathanson HaLevy" in *Shem mi-Shim'on* [Pittsburgh, 1965], p. 27). It should be noted that Rabbi Simon Lichtenstadt, from Prague, quoted Wessely's book *Yain Lebanon* in his exegesis on the *mishna* *Shesh ha-Ma'arechet*, V (Prague, 1852), 40a. In the first part of *Shesh ha-Ma'arechet* (Prague, 1839), the *haskamot* of the Rabbis were printed. Among them Rabbi Moses Sofer (Ḥatam Sofer), who praised Rabbi Lichtenstadt's erudition in the Torah as well as his high ethical standards.

¹⁰⁴ *Shomer Ziyon ha-Ne'eman*, LVI, (19 Menahem Av 1840), p. 112b. In an elucidation of the *Targum Jonathan* (Jonathan translation) of the Bible he referred to "the sage and scholar *raMBeMaN* (Mendelssohn)."

¹⁰⁵ *Divrei Kohélet* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1862), p. 148 (*Bi'ur*), p. 451 (translation).

¹⁰⁶ *She'elot u-Teshuvot Melamed le-Ho'il, Even ha'Ezer* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1933), para. 33 (translation). His exegesis of the Pentateuch, Genesis (Bnei Brak, 1971), 18:23–26; 31:51–53; 33:1–3; Leviticus (Jerusalem, 1953), p. 14 (*Bi'ur*).

¹⁰⁷ Altona, 1815. Exodus 14:1; Leviticus 11:18 (translation); Exodus 1:16, 11:4; Leviticus 1:1 (*Bi'ur*).

Targum Onkelos entitled *Netina la-Ger*,¹⁰⁸ and Judah Leib Krinski of Minsk in his commentary on *Ibn Ezra* entitled *Mehok'kay Yehudah*.¹⁰⁹

In concluding this part of our study, it seems appropriate to cite the name of Rabbi Elijah Guttmacher, rabbi of Grätz and a student of Rabbi 'Akiba Eger. He was a kabbalist, famed even among Eastern European rabbis, as a man who effected miraculous cures. He was also active in encouraging Jews to settle in Eretz Israel. It appears that he often studied the *Bi'ur*. In a sermon he delivered in 1850, he referred to a book cited "in the books of the Bible printed with the *Bi'ur* and translation." In another homily, dated 1863, he noted: "After I had offered my own interpretation, I found that the *Bi'ur* was of the same

¹⁰⁸ The following citations refer to the Vilna 1886 edition. *Bi'ur* on Genesis — Genesis 14:5, 19:15, 23:6, 23:13, 26:10; Numbers 16:15. See the reference to Wessely at Genesis 9:5. *Bi'ur* on Exodus — Exodus 3:19, 10:10, 20:7, 23:21, 23:28 (stating that the *Bi'ur* explains that the letter ז was replaced by ס. In fact, the *Bi'ur* speaks of its replacement by ש), 25:37, 27:18, 28:11 (the reference is the the *Bi'ur* of verse 17. The citation mistakenly includes the words of *Ramban*, quoted in the *Bi'ur*, as part of the *Bi'ur* itself), 31:4. *Bi'ur* on Leviticus — Leviticus 14:22, 16:12 (translation), 17:7, 26:39. *Bi'ur* on Numbers — Numbers 3:48 (the reference is to the commentary of verse 46), 6:21, 24:17, 24:19. *Bi'ur* on Deuteronomy — Deuteronomy 15:18. *Bi'ur* on Ezra — Genesis 24:19. Rabbi Joseph Deutsch, rabbi of Reudnitz, is said to have read Mendelssohn's books thoroughly, and made use of his ideas to elucidate obscurities in the Talmud (*Bikkurei ha-Ittim*, 1828, p. 56).

¹⁰⁹ Piotrkow, 1907. In his preface at the start of Genesis, the author listed the commentators he quoted, among them Mendelssohn, Dubno and Wessely. This edition was granted *haskamot* by a large number of rabbis, including: Rabbi Jacob David Ben-Ze'ev (*RYDBaZ*), rabbi of Slutsk and later in Safed; Rabbi Eliezer Rabinowitz, rabbi of Minsk; Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer, rabbi of Slutsk (author of *Even ha-Ezel*); Rabbi Elijah Klatzkin, rabbi of Marianpol and later of Lublin. It should be noted that Rabbi David Sperber, rabbi of Brashov in Transylvania who later moved to Eretz Israel, referred to the *Bi'ur* on *Rashi* in Ezekiel (*Mikhtam le-David al ha-Mo'adim*, I [Jerusalem, 1984], 151), and to Wessely's *Sefer ha-Midot* (*Mikhtam le-David al ha-Torah*, I [Jerusalem, 1965], p. 307).

mind."¹¹⁰ An examination of his manuscripts reveals that between 1821 and 1867 he made some twenty references to the *Bi'ur* and the translation of the Pentateuch, Prophets and Hagiographa. In *Zofnat Pa'neah*¹¹¹ he cited the *Bi'ur* on Ecclesiastes, which was authored by Mendelssohn himself, and references to *Phaedon* appear in his discussions of the immortality of the soul.¹¹²

V

One cannot ignore the fact that Mendelssohn and his work on the Pentateuch were the subject of controversy. On the one hand, there were members of the new Orthodoxy who endorsed Mendelssohn's work wholeheartedly. Moses Mendelssohn of Hamburg declared in *Pnei Tevel*¹¹³ that Mendelssohn sought to

¹¹⁰ *Yeri'ot Shlomo*, II, p. 527a (see above, note 14); *Kever Raḥel*, vol. II, p. 542b (in the manuscript dept., National and University Library, Jerusalem, no. 8°2573).

¹¹¹ Brody, 1875, p. 22b. See the discussion with his son, Rabbi Zvi, on the "Ashkenazi translator," *Hidushei Rabbi Eliahu Guttmacher, Berakhot Mo'ed* (Jerusalem, 1979), p. 228. Another son, Zelig Guttmacher, subscribed to the Book of Genesis of the *Or Israel* Pentateuch, Krotoschin, 1839, which included the *Bi'ur* and translation. In 1872 a school for Jewish boys and girls was established in Radom. The curriculum included the study of several languages, as well as the study of the Pentateuch with Mendelssohn's translation and *Bi'ur*. At the opening ceremony for the school, Rabbi Samuel Mohilewer, rabbi of the community and one of the leaders of the national movement, delivered an address extolling the school. All of the listeners were deeply impressed by his remarks (*Ha-Maggid*, XVII, 4, [23 Tevet 1873], p. 38).

¹¹² *Yeri'ot Shlomo*, I, p. 153b (in the manuscript dept., National University Library, Jerusalem, no. 1120,1); *Bet Ya'acov*, II, p. 381a (see above, note 14).

¹¹³ The following citations refer to this volume. Several of his remarks on Mendelssohn are based on the comments of his father, Rabbi Menahem Mendel Frankfurter, *Av bet din* of Altona. See Yehezkiel Dukas, *'Ivah le-Moshav* (Krakow, 1903), pp. 88–92; and his uncle Rabbi Judah Leib Shapiro, author of the commentary *Ha-Rekhasim le-Bik'a*, p. 227. See his father's remarks in regard to Mendelssohn's piety and conscientiousness as a student, pp. 229 and 234. See also p. 248.

restore the crown of Torah to its original splendor.¹¹⁴ His writings were designed to strengthen the faith of his people.¹¹⁵ He felt that had the rabbis in Mendelssohn's time understood this, they would not have objected to the translation. Over the years, the translation had become popular throughout the nation, and as a result a new generation of teachers had arisen to teach German-speaking children.¹¹⁶ Ze'ev Ya'avetz considered Mendelssohn and Moses Montefiore, two "great luminaries," the former by virtue of his wisdom, and the latter by virtue of his actions. Most of Mendelssohn's books were written in German, with the aim of demonstrating to the Gentiles the excellence of Jewish achievement. By translating the Pentateuch, Mendelssohn hoped to forestall the use of foreign translations. The rabbis who attacked the translation, did not object to the fine German in it, but rather to the impure motives of those who sought to popularize it. Many Berliners were dishonest men who hoped to further their own reputation by association with Mendelssohn. In point of fact, however, both their way of thinking and their idea of the purpose of the translation were quite different from those of Mendelssohn.¹¹⁷

Rabbi Mordecai Eliasberg, rabbi of Bausk, spoke out in Mendelssohn's defense. Mendelssohn, he declared, had meticulously observed all of the Torah's precepts. He had not deviated from the divinely-prescribed path by as much as a hair, and his conduct was consistently righteous both in public and in private.¹¹⁸ Rabbi Eliasberg devoted a lengthy discussion to the reasons which had led Mendelssohn to abrogate the authority of

¹¹⁴ Page 227.

¹¹⁵ Page 235.

¹¹⁶ Page 230. See his criticism of Dubno's approach in the commentary to *Sefer ha-Yashar*, pp. 108–109; similarly, pp. 230–231. See also his great esteem for Wessely and his work (pp. 138–139; 239–241; 253–254). And in his book *Meziat ha-'Arez ha-Hadashah*, I (Altona, 1807), in the preface. See below, note 151.

¹¹⁷ "Migdal ha-Me'a," collected in *Toldot Israel*, XIII (Tel-Aviv, 1937), 190, 193 and 197.

¹¹⁸ *Shvil ha-Zahav* (Warsaw, 1897), pp. 7 and 21.

the *bet din* to enforce its rulings. He concluded that Mendelssohn should not be castigated for taking this position, since he was compelled to adopt it by the circumstances prevalent at the time. He had chosen to forego on this one prerogative, rather than see the Law totally supplanted.¹¹⁹

Meyer Fürth¹²⁰ lauded Mendelssohn's translation in *Divrei Yosher*,¹²¹ finding it the best of the available German translations, and offering the example of the representation of the name of the Lord by four letters.¹²² When Rabbi Wolff delivered a sermon in German in the synagogue of Dessau, and, using Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* as his source, he chose not to translate the Hebrew *emuna* (faith) as *glauben*,¹²³ Fürth drew on Mendelssohn's method in translating the Pentateuch to take issue with this decision.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, he also noted a number of undesirable consequences of the translation. Fifty years

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 21–30. See especially pp. 26 and 30. See also p. 69. In regard to his son, see below, note 162.

¹²⁰ Meyer Fürth was one of the opponents of the Reform movement (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. V, p. 538). His signature appears on the list of those approving the establishment of a *bet midrash* in Dessau for the study of the *Mishna* and *Gemara* (*Ha-Me'assef*, 1786, p. 14; 1788, p. 336; 1789, p. 351. His name also appears on the 1785 list of subscribers to this journal).

¹²¹ Dessau, 1818. Two years earlier, Fürth had completed his *Divrei Yosher* and had shown his manuscript to three rabbis: Rabbi Michel, *Av bet din* of Dessau; Rabbi Zanvil, *Av bet din* at Schwaben and rabbi of the *bet midrash* at Dessau; and Rabbi Meister, rabbi of Sonderslaben. The three lauded his book (p. 28a).

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 24b.

¹²³ The reference is apparently to Wolf (Ze'ev) Dessau. See *Sechs Deutsche Reden gehalten in der Sinagoge zu Dessau von J. Wolf...* I (Dessau, 1812), pp. vii, 40–41, 62 and 86; II (Dessau, 1813), p. 87.

¹²⁴ *Divrei Yosher*, pp. 17a–b. *Reshit Limmudim*, by Abraham Joseph Mentz was published in Berlin in 1770 with the annotations and elucidations of Fürth. Mendelssohn's name appears on the list of subscribers. Fürth subscribed to the Berlin 1783 edition of *Netivot ha-S'halom*. In 1811 *Shlemut ve-Zurat ha-Nefesh*, a commentary on Mendelssohn's *Sefer ha-Nefesh* by David Friedlander, appeared in Dessau with the added comments of Fürth. See also Joseph Klausner, *Historia shel ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit ha-Hadasha*, I (Jerusalem, 1952), p. 85.

earlier, it had been the habit of women to read the weekly portion in *Ze'ena u-Re'ena*. The language was faulty, but at least they knew what was written in the appropriate text. Now they read it only in German.¹²⁵

Two years later, in 1820, Fürth was even harsher in his criticism of the adverse effects of Mendelssohn's work. True, Mendelssohn's translation was superior to the others, in that it considered the meaning and not only the words of the text. However, children who studied the *Chumash* from his *Bi'ur* alone, would not fully understand even a single verse. Moreover, Jewish girls who also received this type of schooling, considered themselves thereby educated and so flouted Jewish law.¹²⁶

Rabbi Yehiel Michel Epstein, rabbi of Novogradok (and author of *Arukh ha-Shulhan*), maintained, that where some celebrated men had gone astray in consequence of their study of philosophy, Mendelssohn "had stood firmly on the path, and had never overstepped the bounds."¹²⁷ His son, Rabbi Baruch Epstein, rabbi of Pinsk (and author of *Torah Temima*), noted, that everyone, including Mendelssohn's opponents, conceded his great knowledge and wisdom. Furthermore, Mendelssohn had observed the Law and the commandments in accordance with his understanding and social position, and had instructed others to do likewise. His fault lay in his denial of the national unity of the Jewish people.¹²⁸ As a result of the assimilation his work had encouraged, "many and great" men had taken exception to Mendelssohn and departed from his path.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ *Divrei Yosher*, p. 6b. He also claimed that fifty years earlier Wessely had written something that displeased the rabbis of Poland. They thus rightly excommunicated him and burned his book (*ibid.*, pp. 14b-15a).

¹²⁶ *Yir'at Shamayim* (Dessau, 1820), "Kevod Elokim" preface. This section of the book contains the author's new interpretations of the Talmud. Sandler (above, note 1), p. 207, mentions this book, but is incorrect in stating that Mendelssohn is cited even in the part of the book on astronomy.

¹²⁷ Rabbi Baruch Epstein, *Mekor Barukh* III (Vilna, 1928), 1614.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 1028.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1058.

Rabbi Baruch Epstein held that the holy texts could not be translated into a vernacular language, without sacrificing their beauty and detracting from their spiritual purpose. In addition, incorrect meanings and interpretations are susceptible to creep in. There are matters and phrases in the Pentateuch that can only be understood by someone who had been brought up in the spirit of faith and the Law as originally written.¹³⁰ Mendelssohn's translation of the Pentateuch into German¹³¹ — the reasons for which are unknown by the author — generated the downfall of the Torah, and led to the abandonment of the faith by many. Ever since, all of the studies of Jewish literature in Germany had been written in German.¹³²

It seems that the two controversies demonstrate the checkered appraisal of Mendelssohn. Rabbi Elazar Fleckeles of Prague thought that one of the interpretations of Mendelssohn and Dubno in Genesis, seems to indicate that Moshe Rabbenu himself had originated several words in the Pentateuch.¹³³ Rabbi Fleckeles held that this could not be the intention of the

¹³⁰ *Safa la-Ne'emanim* (Warsaw, 1893), pp. 14–27.

¹³¹ It is not mentioned by name. It is said that the Pentateuch was translated in the middle of the previous century “in a nearby country,” into “the most beautiful and richest language in the world, and by wise scribes knowledgeable in both languages.”

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29.

¹³³ The reference is to the words “the god of their father” (Gen. 31:53). In *Tikkun Soferim*, Dubno wrote: “and thus it is correct here according to the Ashkenazi translator who translated that these are the words of Moshe Rabbenu, may he rest in peace, scribe of the Torah, who interpreted that each of them, Laban and Jacob, swore by the god of his fathers.” The *Bi'ur* states: “this phrase is unnecessary. In the words of the Ashkenazi translator: ‘these may be the words of Moshe Rabbenu, may he rest in peace, scribe of the Torah, that is that each of the parties to the covenant swore on the god of his father, and Jacob added and stated explicitly that he swore on the awe of his father Isaac and not on the god of Nahor.’ So that according to this, ‘the god of their father’ is like a parenthetical remark, and so the above translator placed it in parentheses.” The translation indeed places parentheses around the words “naemlich die Goetter ihrer Vorfahren,” the translation of the phrase “god of their father.”

text, since it would be heresy.¹³⁴ He offered an explanation that removed any taint of heretical thinking from the given interpretation.¹³⁵ On the other hand, Rabbi Moses Sofer (Ḥatam Sofer) referred to one of the interpretations in Deuteronomy, to illustrate the apostasy in the *Bi'ur*.¹³⁶

Rabbi Yehosef Zacharia Stern, rabbi of Shavli, referred to “the RaMBeMaN’s [Mendelssohn] *Bi'ur* on Leviticus.”¹³⁷ His remarks provoked the reaction of Rabbi Shalom Mordecai Schwadron, rabbi of Berzhan, in which he expressed his astonishment that Rabbi Stern should have cited such a source, after *Aliyot Eliyahu*¹³⁸ had exposed Mendelssohn’s infamy, “for the spirit of apostasy was upon him.” Rabbi Medini was interested in hearing Rabbi Stern’s reply to Rabbi Schwadron, since he

¹³⁴ See Sanhedrin 99a; Rambam *Hilkhot Teshuva*, chap. 3, *halakha* 8. Cf. Mendelssohn’s comments in his preface (“Or li-Netiva”): “It is true and clear that all of the Torah, from the beginning of the Book of Genesis to ‘before the eyes of all Israel’ [Deut. 34:12] was written by Moshe by divine word” (Offenbach, 1821, p. 1b).

¹³⁵ See his book *Mlekhet ha-Kodesh*, p. 8a. See also *Ha-Ktav ve-ha-Kabbala*, *ad. loc.*

¹³⁶ The reference is to the *Bi'ur* on Deuteronomy 2:20, written by Herz Homberg: “The scribe of the Torah seems to begin here to relate, as above, how the Ammonites settled their land and, in verse 24, returns to the Lord, ‘Rise up, journey on and pass over the brook Arnon,’ and this is also the opinion of the Ashkenazi translator.” Ḥatam Sofer is quoted by Rabbi A.J. Schlesinger in *Lev ha-Ivri*, I, p. 81b.

¹³⁷ Rabbi Ḥayyim Ḥezkiah Medini, *Sedei Ḥemed* I (New York, 1959), p. 35.

¹³⁸ The reference is to the book by Rabbi Joshua Heshel Lewin. It includes the story of a letter from Vilna addressed to Mendelssohn, in Berlin. Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Lewin, rabbi of Berlin and his *bet din*, ruled that the letter could be opened before it was delivered to the addressee, on the grounds that Mendelssohn’s nature was not yet known, and he was suspect in regard to several matters. The letter was written by a man who had been sentenced to a flogging for — as he stated in his letter — telling the Gaon of Vilna that the authors of the midrashic interpretations did not properly interpret the literal meaning of the text. When Mendelssohn received the letter, he wondered, even before he had read it, what the writer wished of him (Vilna, 1885, pp. 24a–25b, n. 34. See also there in regard to the writer’s identity).

himself was not familiar with the *Bi'ur*. In his response, Rabbi Stern explained that Wessely's *Bi'ur* of Leviticus was excellent. In essence, it was a profound explanation of the literal meaning of the texts based on the words of our Sages.¹³⁹ Wessely had been granted *haskamot* "by the greatest men of his generation" for his books *Gan Na'ul* and *Yain Lebanon*.¹⁴⁰ Rabbi Stern explained that he had mentioned Mendelssohn's name because that particular explanation had been written by him. Moreover, "*ha-gaon he-ḥasid*," the author of *Ateret Rosh* had cited Mendelssohn.¹⁴¹ Evidently, he had no compunctions about doing so when Mendelssohn's comments seemed worthy.¹⁴² It should be

¹³⁹ In his exegesis on the Passover Haggadah, *Zekher Yehosef* (Vilna, 1899), he referred to Wessely. See pp. 22b and 26b. Cf. Rabbi Solomon Plessner's statement that the great contemporary rabbis will be pleased with the commentary of the "sage and the *zaddik*" on Leviticus. See his book, *Edut le-Israel* (Breslau, 1850), p. 12, note. Additional references to Wessely can be found on the title page and in the notes on pp. 5, 14, 17 and 18. He also referred to Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* (p. 20, note). The book begins with a *haskamah* from Rabbi J.E. Herzfeld of Rawitsch. Rabbi 'Akiba Eger read *Edut le-Israel* and lauded it. See *Iggrot Soferim*, "Kitvei Rabbi 'A. Eger," pp. 22–25. Rabbi J.E. Herzfeld was among the subscribers to Rabbi Plessner's book *Nozlim min Lebanon* (Berlin, 1833), in which Wessely is also mentioned. See (first enumeration): pp. 16, 22 and 52; (second enumeration): pp. 19, 33, 41 and 107. Mendelssohn is also mentioned in this book. See (second enumeration): pp. 16 and 26.

¹⁴⁰ *Gan Na'ul*, Amsterdam, 1765–1766. The work deals with synonyms and carries *haskamot* from Rabbi Saul ben Arie Leib of Dubno, Ashkenazi rabbi of Amsterdam; Rabbi Solomon Shalem, Sephardi rabbi of Amsterdam; Rabbi Saul ben Isaac Halevy, Ashkenazi rabbi of Den Haag. *Yain Lebanon*, Berlin, 1775. Commentary on *Pirkei Avot. Haskamot* from the two aforementioned rabbis of Amsterdam; Rabbi Ezekiel Landau, rabbi of Prague (Noda' bi-Yehuda); Rabbi David Tabeel ben Nathan, rabbi of Lissa and members of its *bet din*.

¹⁴¹ Rabbi Levy ben David, *Ateret Rosh*, I (Amsterdam, 1766), 59b.

¹⁴² *Sdei Hemed*, vol. IX, pp. 3845–3846, and see his reference in his letter of 1892 to Mendelssohn's introduction to the Pentateuch, Or li-Netivah, *ibid.*, p. 3834 (*RaMBaN* should be corrected there to *RaMBaMaN*). The controversy between the two rabbis in regard to the meaning of the instructions in the will of the Ḥatam Sofer concerning Mendelssohn's books, will be discussed elsewhere.

noted that Rabbi Stern also referred to additional portions of the *Bi'ur* in his other works.¹⁴³

VI

In later years, specific criticisms were raised against Mendelssohn's work on the Pentateuch. Joel Brüll praised Mendelssohn's translation, though noting that he had abandoned a literal translation in order to meet the spirit of the German language, but this made it impossible at times to recognize the original. Nevertheless, he held that the translation was not suitable for use in schools since the pupils would not understand the flowery style in which it was written.¹⁴⁴ Two Italian scholars also discussed this issue. Isaac Samuel Reggio (*YaSHaR*) of Gorizia held Mendelssohn up as a model of scholarship and observant Judaism, while noting that his disciples had misrepresented him.¹⁴⁵ It was his wish to prepare an edition of the Pentateuch in Italian, primarily for the use of the youngsters in his country, following the example that Mendelssohn had set; namely, a translation and commentary. In 1818

¹⁴³ *Bi'ur* on Genesis — in *Bi'ur Ḥadash al Megilat Ruth, Eikha, Kohelet, Esther* (Vilna, 1876), pp. 13a, 13b and 24a. *Bi'ur* on the Song of Songs — in *Bi'ur Ḥadash al Shir ha-Shirim* (Vilna, 1877), pp. 14a and 32a (termed “*Bi'ur Ḥumshei Netivot ha-Shalom*”); *Bi'ur* on Ruth — in *Bi'ur Ḥadash al Megilat Ruth*, etc., p. 4a; *Bi'ur* on Chronicles — *ibid.*; *Bi'ur Ḥadash al Shir ha-Shirim*, p. 32a.

¹⁴⁴ Joel Brüll genannt Loewe, *Chamisha Chumshei Torah* nebst einer wörtlichen Übersetzung, Genesis (Breslau, 1797), preface, pp. 5–7. Compare his remarks on Mendelssohn's translation in the “First Preface,” in the introduction to his commentary on Psalms, *Zemirot Israel*, Berlin 1797.

¹⁴⁵ *Ha-Torah ve-ha-Philosofia* (Vienna, 1827), pp. 161–162. See also his letter to Samuel Leib Goldenberg from 1830 in *Kerem Ḥemed*, I (1833), 88–89. See also *Behinat ha-Dat* by Rabbi Eliyahu Delmedigo with comments by Reggio (Vienna, 1833), p. 72, note, phrase beginning: “*ha-sheku'im be-ḥokhmot*.” See also *Iggrot YaSHaR*, II (Vienna, 1836), 3–11.

Reggio remarked that Mendelssohn's work had eliminated the need to use translations produced by gentiles, which are liable to lead the reader to abandon his religious obligations.

Nevertheless, with all of the virtues of the *Bi'ur*, in certain places, Mendelssohn discussed at length what he might better have treated more briefly. For example, he had devoted too much attention to matters of language, had offered several interpretations of a single verse, discussing each, and had given too lengthy explanations of the poetry of Scriptures. On the other hand, there were places that deserved more attention than Mendelssohn had afforded them. The author lists a large number of verses for which insufficient explanation is offered. Reggio also found the *Bi'ur* for Numbers and Deuteronomy¹⁴⁶ to be lacking.

In 1835, Samuel David Luzzatto (*SHaDaL*) recommended to Moses Ḥayyim Hacoen, a teacher in Joseph Perl's school in Galicia, the use of the *Bi'ur*.¹⁴⁷ In his own writings,¹⁴⁸ *SHaDaL* cited the *Bi'ur* several times, but held that Mendelssohn failed to comprehend the principles of Hebrew poetry, as well as certain difficult verses in the Book of Psalms.¹⁴⁹ In a manner typical of his personal point of view, Luzzatto stated in 1835, that the

¹⁴⁶ *Torat ha-Elokim* in Italian translation (Vienna, 1818), 2a–8b.

¹⁴⁷ *Iggrot SHaDaL*, I (Przemyśl, 1882), p. 306. Cf. the testimony of the heads of the “Mekizei Nirdamim” society who stated that when they spoke to Luzzatto about publishing his commentary on the Pentateuch, he replied that priority must be given to the publication of Wessely's commentary on Genesis (see their preface to *Imrei Shefer* by Naphtaly Herz Wessely, Lyck, 1869).

¹⁴⁸ Primarily in his commentary on the Torah, *Ha-Mishtadel* (Vienna, 1847). See also his *Collected Writings*, II (Jerusalem, 1976), 126 and 129; *Perushei SHaDaL Zal al Yirmiyahu, Yehezkel, Mishlei ve-'Iyov* (Lemberg, 1876), 214a.

¹⁴⁹ Luzzatto's preface to his exegesis on Isaiah (Tel-Aviv, 1970), p. 11. See also *Iggrot SHaDaL*, vol. I, p. 86.

commentaries of Mendelssohn and his disciples had been fine seventy years before, but they were no longer appropriate.¹⁵⁰

The decline in the popularity of the translation was noted in 1872 by Moses Mendelssohn of Hamburg. He maintained that Mendelssohn's translation was falling out of favor, because of its outdated language, and because of the excellence of newer translations.¹⁵¹

A spirit of criticism permeates the articles written in honor of the bicentennial of Mendelssohn's birth in 1929. Rabbi Joseph Wohlgemuth, a lecturer at the Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin, discussed Mendelssohn's virtues and shortcomings. He compared Mendelssohn to Rambam and demonstrated the superiority of the latter.¹⁵² Mendelssohn was a pious man, but at

¹⁵⁰ This is because in the meanwhile the spurious critical theory and false philosophy had been expounded. Dubno frequently relied on *Sefer ha-Yashar* (cf. above, note 116). Wessely believed that the Oral Law invariably expressed the profound meaning of the text. Mendelssohn held that if the literal text differed from the midrashic interpretation of the sages, the midrashic should be followed. To Luzzatto's mind *Netivot ha-Shalom* ("the paths of peace," the title of Mendelssohn's edition) are none other today than the paths of dissension and ruin" (*Ha-Maggid*, XIV, 30, [6 Av 1870], p. 237). See Sandler (above, note 1), pp. 226–230.

¹⁵¹ *Pnei Tevel*, p. 108. See the difficulty with the translation of one of the verses in Genesis (*ibid.*, p. 289), and his explanation of the fact that Mendelssohn's translation of the Book of Psalms was never widely accepted (*ibid.*, p. 234; similarly pp. 252 and 281. See also his comment on the translation of one of the verses in this book, p. 290).

¹⁵² Joseph Wohlgemuth, "Moses Mendelssohn und das thora-treue Judentum," *Jeschurun*, 1929, p. 321. It should be noted that Rabbi Elhanan Pincus Moses Ḥayyim ("Hile") Wechsler, rabbi of Hóchberg, linked Rambam and Mendelssohn together. See his book: *Ein Wort der Mahnung an Israel um Beherzigung der Judenhetze und merkwürdige darauf bezuegliche Träume von Jaschern milo Debora in Würzburg* (Würzburg, 1881), p. 44. See the text above in notes 37 and 92. See also Simon Bernfeld, *Dor Tahpukhot*, I (Warsaw, 1897), 59–60. Incidentally, Rabbi Judah Loeb Edel of Zamość wrote in his homiletic volume *Afiqei Yehuda* that certain authors had noted the different methods used in writing books. He mentioned Rambam in his Mishna commentary of *Helek* in the Tractate *Sanhedrin*, and "the Ashkenazi" — that is, Mendelssohn — "in

times an imperfect Jew.¹⁵³ Franz Rosenszweig voiced his objections to the synthesis Mendelssohn sought between Judaism and German culture. He felt the attempt to create such a synthesis had failed, and the fact that his descendants had not remained faithful to their religion was a warning to Rosenszweig's generation, the spiritual heirs of Mendelssohn. He himself was aided by the spirit of his times, and was able to preserve each of the two sides of this dangerous combination intact. But he had not taught us how to maintain ourselves in the face of danger, and therefore we failed. We must set out on our own path.¹⁵⁴

The opposing views in regard to Mendelssohn and his work, seem to have been embraced by two students of Rabbi Nathan Adler of Frankfurt-am-Main. Rabbi Moses Sofer (Ḥatam Sofer), rabbi of Pressburg and the leader of Orthodox Jewry, is traditionally considered to have been the most dominant figure in the nineteenth century to voice reservations in regard to Mendelssohn.¹⁵⁵ The opposite position was held by Rabbi

his preface." Since they had not treated the subject exhaustively, he had taken it upon himself to do so (Lemberg, 1803), p. 5a.

¹⁵³ *Jeschurun, ibid.*, pp. 331–32. To demonstrate this point, he related the story of a non-Jew who had come to visit Mendelssohn on the eve of the Sabbath. After they had conversed for a while, Mendelssohn excused himself and retired to the next room to pray. When he returned, his wife appeared and lit the candles. Wohlgenuth questioned whether this was the manner in which to welcome the Sabbath. In contrast, Heinemann saw this incident as evidence of Mendelssohn's conscientious observance of the precepts (his preface to the Pentateuch *Mekor Ḥayyim*, Deuteronomy, p. 6).

¹⁵⁴ Franz Rosenszweig, "Vorspruch zu einer Mendelssohnfeier," *Kleinere Shriften*, p. 53. See also *Franz Rosenszweig Briefe* (Berlin, 1935), p. 551; Isaac Heinemann, *Ta'amei ha-Mizvot be-Sifrut Yisrael*, vol. II, pp. 44–46; Nathan Rotenstreich, *Ha-Mahshava ha-Yehudit ba-Et ha-Ḥadasha*, vol. I, pp. 217–18; vol. II, pp. 30, 113 and 165–66; Eliezer Schweid, *Toldot ha-Hagut ha-Yehudit ba-'Et ha-Ḥadasha* (Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 148–51.

¹⁵⁵ The attitude of Ḥatam Sofer and his disciples to Mendelssohn will be discussed elsewhere.

Seckel Leib Wormser (the “Ba’al Shem of Michelstadt”), rabbi of Michelstadt, a kabbalist famed for his miraculous powers of healing. In his writings, in 1826 and 1834, he consistently referred to Mendelssohn as “our rabbi and mentor Rabbi Moses of Dessau [!].” Mendelssohn’s introduction to the Pentateuch, *Or li-Netiva*, appears on a list of books dealing with the theme of poetical and rhetorical language. In various places Rabbi Wormser referred to the *Bi’ur* on the Pentateuch. Prophets and Hagiographa. Even Mendelssohn’s pedagogical techniques were exemplary. In a discussion of the stages of learning, Rabbi Wormser cited Mendelssohn’s introduction to *Morgenstunden* in which he instructed his son on the techniques for the study of philosophy. Rabbi Wormser also referred to Isaac Euchel’s biography of Mendelssohn,¹⁵⁶ in connection with the study of grammar and foreign languages.¹⁵⁷

The spirit which permeates the latter view seems to reflect rather substantially the attitude of many nineteenth-century rabbis toward Mendelssohn. There is no doubt that they were familiar with the various objections raised over the years: the impropriety of the very act of translation; the risk of the translation to the continued use of Yiddish; the suggestion of an alternative to the traditional exegesis; the author’s close association with the alien culture and the German intelligentsia; and the role Mendelssohn’s work played in encouraging the Reform movement and assimilation. On the other hand, however, Mendelssohn’s piety and his observance of the commandments were noted, his exemplary combination of religion and enlightenment, and the fact that his work enabled many more people to understand the Pentateuch. Yet, the pivotal argument

¹⁵⁶ *Toldot Moshe ben Menahem* (Vienna, 1814).

¹⁵⁷ See above, note 14.

was that his students and his own children had not followed in his footsteps. By their way of life and outlook, as well as by the character with which they endowed the *Haskalah* movement, they supplied a pretext for the opposition to Mendelssohn's work on the Pentateuch texts.

On the other hand, the controversy which raged in regard to Mendelssohn and his work cannot overshadow the very basic fact that Mendelssohn was never entirely rejected by all rabbinical circles. He remained within the camp. The *haskamot* granted by the rabbis for the various editions of the translation and *Bi'ur*, the laudatory remarks written about him, and the references made to his work, supply ample proof that this was so, although they do not necessarily indicate an unconditional acceptance of his ideas and viewpoint.

The fact remains that there was a sizeable number of rabbis who were among the leaders of the opposition to the Reform movement and vociferous in the polemic over the Hamburg temple, and yet they later endorsed the publication of the Mendelssohn *Chumash* or referred approvingly to his life and work.¹⁵⁸ Some noted the importance of his work in preventing the use of foreign sources. A certain amount of evidence has survived indicating that the Mendelssohn *Chumash* was later used by those who had initially objected to it,¹⁵⁹ and that it was in the

¹⁵⁸ In 1870 Zvi Greenberg of Plotzk relied on Mendelssohn's statement that the prayers during the Second Temple period were arranged and determined by the *Anshei Knesset ha-Gedola*, in order to reject a proposal concerning changes in the wording of the prayer "ve-al yedei 'avadekha ha-nevi'im" (*Ha-Maggid*, XIV, 47 [13 Kislev 1871], p. 375).

¹⁵⁹ In 1814 an edition of the Pentateuch was printed by the printing house at Kopust, allied with Ḥassidic circles. The title page of the Book of Deuteronomy stated that it had been prepared on the basis of various books, among them "the worthy *Tikkun Soferim* printed in the *Chumashim of RaMaD*."

possession of rabbis and religious officials.¹⁶⁰ Some rabbis were in contact with Mendelssohn. It was rumored that Rabbi Joseph Steinhart, rabbi of Fürth, corresponded with him, and approved of his efforts to instill in the Jews modern learning.¹⁶¹ Rabbi Jacob, known as Rabbi Yankele Neustadter, who was the father of Rabbi Eliyahu Rogaler, the rabbi of Kalish, was famed for his piety. Yet on a certain occasion, when hearing that Mendelssohn would be visiting the town of Memel, he too went there and debated a large number of philosophical questions with him.¹⁶²

An examination of the historical impact of the translation and *Bi'ur*, must certainly not neglect to indicate the effect it had on the study of the Pentateuch. The Jewish community of

¹⁶⁰ The Vienna 1795 edition was in the Kneset Yehezkel *bet midrash* in Grodnitz, Germany (this copy is now in the National and University Library, Jerusalem). The Offenbach 1821 edition was in the possession of Gabriel Jacob of Wreschen, when he served as cantor and ritual slaughterer at Münster, Germany. This was noted by hand in 1833 on the inside cover. At the end of the Pentateuch he added various versions of the "mi she-berekh" prayer. It would thus seem that he used the volume for his duties in the synagogue (this copy is now in the Jewish Theological Seminary Library, New York). The Prague 1833–36 edition was in the possession of Rabbi Benjamin Wolf Singer, rabbi of Miklos, Hungary (this copy is now in the Bar-Ilan University Library, Ramat Gan). The Warsaw 1836–37 edition was in the possession of Rabbi Joseph Zundel of Salant, when he was in Jerusalem (Sandler, p. 216, n. 47). Rabbi Sondel was a student of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and Rabbi 'Akiba Eger. Rabbi Israel of Salant was one of his students. He moved to Jerusalem and served as the rabbi for both Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews. Rabbi Samuel of Salant, rabbi of the Ashkenazi community of Jerusalem, was his son-in-law. Rabbi Joseph Zvi Duschinsky, rabbi of Huszt, Hungary, and later rabbi of the Ashkenazi community in Jerusalem, owned all of the volumes of the *Bi'ur* (communicated to me personally by Jacob Baror, Tel-Aviv, on April 1st, 1987).

¹⁶¹ Jacob Obermeyer, *Modernes Judentum* (Vienna and Leipzig, 1907), p. 17.

¹⁶² Arie Leib Frumkin, *Toldot Eliyahu* (Vilna, 1900), pp. 8–9. This information was supplied by Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg, rabbi of Volkovyshki. According to his story, foreign scholars were with Mendelssohn at the time. Mendelssohn told them that he must give priority to a fellow member of his own faith.

Holland seems to provide the finest example. The Jews of Holland were deeply impressed by Mendelssohn's translation, and in its wake attempted to translate the Bible into Dutch.¹⁶³

Under the auspices of Rabbi Samuel Berenstein,¹⁶⁴ chief rabbi of Amsterdam and the outlying area, a society for religious studies known as *Reshit Hokhma* was founded in Amsterdam in 1813. It held Torah lessons daily. On the Sabbath they studied the Pentateuch with *Rashi's* commentary and Mendelssohn's *Bi'ur*. It was Dubno who advised them as to the choice of books.¹⁶⁵ Although he had not been a member of the society, his name was included in the membership list after his death, and a memorial service was held in his honor. The East European members of the community did not participate in the Sabbath classes. Some objected to the lengthy discussion of grammatical issues in the *Bi'ur*, particularly in Wessely's *Bi'ur* of Leviticus. This society, whose members included some of the most noted rabbis and scholars, continued to function until World War II.¹⁶⁶ Over the years, other societies bearing the same name were established in various communities through-

¹⁶³ Joseph Michman, "Hashpa'at Yahadut Germania al Yahadut Holland bame'a ha-Tsha 'Esrei," *Mehqarim al Toldot Yahadut Holland*, IV (Jerusalem, 1985), 33, n. 14. See also Frédérique P. Hiegentlich, "Reflections on the Relationship between the Dutch Haskalah and the German Haskalah," *Dutch Jewish History* (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 207–208.

¹⁶⁴ In 1819, in the statement of his position on the polemic of the temple in Hamburg, he referred to Mendelssohn as "the great sage, our rabbi and mentor" (*Ele Divrei ha-Berit*, p. 55). He also referred to Wessely as "the great wise interpreter, our rabbi and mentor."

¹⁶⁵ This would seem to be significant, since Dubno, as mentioned above, had withdrawn from Mendelssohn's project. Dubno's legacy included editions of the translation and *Bi'ur*, Berlin and other editions, and other works of Mendelssohn, Wessely, Isaac Satanow and various volumes of *Ha-Me'assef*. See *Reshima mi-Sefarim ... ha-Nimza'im b'Izavon ... Shelomo mi-Dubno ...* (Amsterdam, 1814).

¹⁶⁶ Benzion Jochanan Hirsch, "Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis der Bioer," *De Vrydagavon*, II (1926), pp. 307–310, 324–328 and 338–339.

out Holland: in Den Haag in 1873,¹⁶⁷ Gouda in 1881,¹⁶⁸ Dordrecht in 1895,¹⁶⁹ and Zwolle in 1902,¹⁷⁰ amongst other places.

Another society for Torah study, named *Hogei Dat*, was founded in Amsterdam in the 1870's, by members of three families in the city. Among their other activities was the study of the Pentateuch with commentaries including *Bi'ur*. This society was also still active in the 1930's.¹⁷¹

Rabbi Elazar Kalir (the author of *Or Hādash*) also referred to the value of the translation as a tool in the study of the Pentateuch. In his opinion, each person was to study on the level of which he was capable, "particularly now that several books of ethics have been published in a foreign language as well as the Bible." Rabbi Kalir served in the communities of Rechnitz in Poland and Kolin in Moravia from 1768 to 1801. His reference to the translation of the Bible published in his time, could consequently only apply to Mendelssohn's work.¹⁷² Additional evidence for the spread of the *Bi'ur* presumably may be found in the fact that Rabbi Ezra Reuben Dangur, chief rabbi of Baghdad in the years 1923–1927, directs readers to this commentary in his own commentary on the Torah.¹⁷³

Perhaps the most telling comment is that of Rabbi Jacob Weil, one of the most radical opponents of the Reform move-

¹⁶⁷ D.S. van Zuiden, *De Hoogduitsche Joden in 's-Gravenhage van af hunne Komst tot op heden door* (Den Haag, 1913), p. 160.

¹⁶⁸ *Jaarboek von 5674 (1913–1914) uitgegeven door de Centrale Organisatie voor de religieuze en moreele verheffing der Joden in Nederland* (Amsterdam, 1913), p. 154.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹⁷⁰ *Centraal Blad voor Israëlieten Nederland*, 15 Juli, 1932.

¹⁷¹ Meir Jacob Perath, "Talmud Tora be-Amsterdam," *Mehkarim al Toldot Yahadut Holland*, I (Jerusalem, 1975), 323.

¹⁷² *Havat Ya'ir Hādash* (Prague, 1792), p. 29a. See also Yekutiel Judah Greenwald, *Lifnei Shetei Me'ot Shana* (New York, 1952), p. 48.

¹⁷³ *Adi Zahav 'Al ha-Torah* (Jerusalem, 1987), I, Exodus 15:16, 32:15; II, Leviticus 10:1.

ment, who decreed that the weekly portion should be read twice and once in translation.¹⁷⁴

If one recited the text twice and studied the *Rashi* commentary on it,¹⁷⁵ it is comparable to having read the *Targum* on it. A G-d-fearing person should read both the *Targum* and the *Rashi* commentary. One who does not understand the *Rashi* commentary, should read a foreign language commentary. Among us: "Mendelssohns Übersetzung."¹⁷⁶

Mendelssohn's translation is thus qualified to serve as one means of observing this injunction.

¹⁷⁴ *Shulḥan Arukh, Oraḥ Ḥayyim*, para. 285, part 2.

¹⁷⁵ *Magen Avraham*, by Rabbi Abraham Ebely Gumbiner, holds that the *Rashi* commentary is of primary importance, since it is constructed on the basis of the Talmud.

¹⁷⁶ *Torat Shabat* (Karlsruhe, 1839), p. 65b. This ruling is based on *Turei Zahav* (by Rabbi David Halevy) and *Eliyah Rabba* (by Rabbi Eliah Shapiro, citing *Turei Zahav*). *Turei Zahav* states that he who is incapable of understanding the *Rashi* commentary, may read the commentary of the Pentateuch in the language of Ashkenaz available in our times, as in *Ze'ena u-Re'ena*, so that he comes to understand the Torah portion. The author thus states: "this man [i.e., Mendelssohn] truly based his translation largely on the Talmud and *Rashi* commentary." Rabbi Weil, an aforementioned subscriber to the Book of Psalms which contained Mendelssohn's translation, stated in his book (p. 62a) that the significance of the bridal canopy (*Trau-Himmel*) was explained to the Prussian authorities by "the great Mendelssohn."