

fact, the tone of both critiques is very similar. Yet, Zunz bases his view on certain literary evidence—a number of references to ibn Plat in Rabad's writings—which is far from definite or conclusive.⁹⁴ It would seem rather that Joseph ibn Plat was only an erudite senior colleague of Rabad and does not merit a place alongside Rambam and Meshullam as one of his teachers.

As is the case with so many other biographical and chronological details, it is difficult to draw a clear line of demarcation between the formative, preparatory period of Rabad's career and the period of his teaching and writing. One cannot even establish the chronology of his student years with any exactitude. Though his birthplace, Narbonne, was a comparatively populous city and intellectual center, well-qualified to offer all the instruction he craved—"a place . . . whence the study of the law spreads over all countries"—it is understandable why Rabad should desire sooner or later to spend some time in Lunel, which was the emergent hub of southern France. The cultural center of gravity was gradually shifting from Narbonne to Lunel.⁹⁵ Meshullam's fame as Talmudic authority and patron of culture, around whom there had nucleated a galaxy of scholars, was widespread, and Rabad must have been attracted toward this circle. Having already been a student of Rambam at his famous school in Narbonne, Rabad must have made great strides in his learning before leaving for Lunel. He came to Lunel as a proficient student, far advanced in his Talmudic studies. There Rabad was welcomed and encouraged by Meshullam, who considered him ready to produce his first written piece. The brief yet meaningful sketch by David of Estella, in which the description of Rabad as an independent scholar is connected with Lunel,⁹⁶ may also be interpreted to mean that Rabad's earliest fame as scholar is associated with Lunel. Furthermore, he flaunted his independence of mind by adhering steadfastly to a bold decision in ritual law which was apparently opposed by all the Lunel scholars at that time.⁹⁷ Other references singling out Rabad as a

94. Zunz, "Abraham b. Isaak und Abraham b. David," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift*, II, 308. None of the references that Zunz collected—from TD, *Sefer Adam we-Hawah*, *Sefer he-Terumot*—mention Joseph ibn Plat as a teacher of Rabad. In them, Rabad merely cites the views of ibn Plat. Zunz's view is repeated by Reifmann, *ha-Maggid*, VI, 382 and Drachman, *Dibre ha-Ribot*, XI.

95. *Itinerary*, 3-4; see Benedict, 96.

96. David of Estella, *Kiryat Sefer*, in Neubauer, *Medieval Jewish Chronicles*, II, 231: ובימים ההם הופיע בגבול לונל אוז בוהיר הוא הרב הגדול רבינו אברהם בן דוד ממשקיקירש.

97. *Orhot Hayyim*, II, 407. This was a very bold judgment. I find no other Talmudic authority who dared permit such a case. See *Hullin* 46b and commentaries *ad. loc.*; also *Bet Joseph on Tur Yoreh De'ah*, 39.

special, noteworthy personality within the celebrated group of Lunel scholars also apply most likely to this period.⁹⁸ To complete the picture one may conjecture that he then returned to Narbonne, studied under Rabi, and became his son-in-law. A mature scholar, Rabad was ready to begin disseminating his knowledge throughout Provence.

2. Provence in the Twelfth Century

The twelfth-century Jewish community in Provence to which Rabad turned—and on which he was destined to leave an indelible imprint—was a dynamic, animated place, pulsating with intellectual activity and characterized by a high degree of originality. Traditional, highly ramified Talmudic studies, stimulated by contact with the sustained rabbinic scholarship of Spain and northern France, flourished.¹ Midrash, in particular, both compilation and independent composition, was a widespread and favorite subject; it constituted one of the areas of greatest creativity. Philological and philosophical studies, recently introduced by Spanish émigrés, notably the Tibbonites and Kimḥis, began to be cultivated and were destined to attain a reasonably high level of creativity, synthesis, and definitive summation. The natural sciences, and most prominently medicine, were developed by Jews and Christians alike. Belletristic literature—religious and secular poetry with a sprinkling of rhymed prose—was making its appearance in Provence. The appearance of a corpus of mystical literature—systematic tracts, commentaries on early classics of mysticism, cryptic manuals, and mystical allusions in otherwise conventional literary forms—was yet another facet of this pervasive cultural dynamism.

This mental restlessness was not confined to the Jewish community; all Provence was bustling with activity. One need mention only the lyric poetry of the Midi Troubadours and their elaborate doctrines of chivalry and courtly love.² It is particularly significant that this activity

98. Assaf, "Yahaso shel ha-Rabad el ha-Rambam," *Ḳobez Rabbenu Moses b. Maimon*, ed. J. L. Fishman (Jerusalem, 1935), 277, n. 14. R. Meir of Rothenberg also refers to "Rabad of Lunel"; see Gross, 343, n. 35.

1. The simultaneous revival of Roman law at such centers as Montpellier and Toulouse is noteworthy; see Paul Vinogradoff, *Roman Law in Medieval Europe* (New York, 1909).

2. For a later Hebrew troubadour, see J. Schirmann, "Isaac Gorni, poète hébreux de Provence," *Lettres romanes*, III (1949) 175-200. See also I. Davidson, *Tarbiz*, II (1930), 90-100.

was most pronounced on the theological-spiritual plane. Speculation was rife and heresies of all sorts were rampant. On one hand, religious liberalism entrenched itself, especially among the counts and nobles, and this engendered intermittent friction between the temporal and sacerdotal powers. Fulminating popes and defiant counts became common spectacles. On the other hand, extreme dualistic and ascetic doctrines—of ancient Gnostic, especially Manichean, provenance—gained adherents who, in turn, became vociferous critics of the Catholic Church, its dogmatic foundation as well as its institutional superstructure. An assortment of mystical tenets also caught the fancy of imaginative Provençal thinkers. In other words, religious thought and practice were in flux throughout the twelfth century; the inhabitants of Albi, Toulouse, Béziers, Narbonne, and Lyons were cultivating old ideas while blazing new paths. The religious tension was so noticeable and the theological debates so ubiquitous that Jews must have sat up and taken notice.³ In short, the stirring, receptive Jewish community was itself encased in a flourishing, fast-moving country.

Although they were not exempt from humiliation and discrimination, the socio-political status of the Jews in southern France was comparatively favorable. They were befriended by most of the Languedocian counts with sustained benevolence. They enjoyed a measure of social prominence; some were appointed to important administrative and notarial offices, much to the displeasure of the popes.⁴ A wider range of economic activities was accessible to them in the ports, metropolises, and villas of this region; some were captains of commerce⁵ while others

3. In addition to J. Guiraud, *Histoire de l'Inquisition au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1935) cited by Scholem, *Reshit ha-Kabbalah*, 15, see H. C. Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1922), I, esp. chs. 2-4; Steven Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee: A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy* (Cambridge, 1947), 116-171. Richard Emery, *Heresy and Inquisition in Narbonne* (New York, 1941).

4. E.g., Abba Mari b. Jacob in Bourg de St. Giles—*Itinerary*, 4; Kalonymus ha Nasi in Beaucaire—Judah al-Harizi, *Tahkemoni*, ch. 46. See G. Saige, *Les Juifs du Languedoc antérieurement au XIV^e siècle* (Paris, 1881), 15-16; L. I. Newman, *Jewish Influence on Christian Reform Movements* (New York, 1925), 133-150; S. Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1933), 125 (Innocent III to the Count of Toulouse). Pope Alexander III (1159-1181), however, had Jewish officials in his own court; see H. Vogelstein and P. Rieger, *Geschichte der Juden in Rom* (Berlin, 1895), I, 225.

5. See I. Loeb, "Les Negotiants juifs à Marseille au milieu du XIII^e siècle," *REJ*, XVI (1888), 73-83; and the reservations of R. Emery, *The Jews of Perpignan in the Thirteenth Century* (New York, 1959), 5-6; also, S. Kahn, "Documents inédits sur les Juifs de Montpellier au Moyen Age," *REJ*, XIX (1889), 259-281 and *Itinerary*, 4: הוא מקום יפה לטחורה קרוב מן הים שתי פרטאות ובהם אליו מכל מקום לטחורה אדם וישמאל מארץ אל-ערבה ולגונדידיא ומלכות רומא רבמא ומכל ארץ מצרים וארץ ישראל וארץ יון וארץ ספרד ואינגליטריה.

occupied key positions in the textile industry.⁶ Some managed to retain their ancient property rights (note especially the famous *villa judaica* of Narbonne or the *burgus judaicus* of Nîmes) and continued as independent *allodeurs* or even as seigneurs of "domaine utile."⁷ Yet, this greater diversification (trade, crafts, professions, and realty) notwithstanding, the pervasive process of compulsory restriction and progressive shrinkage of the spheres of economic activity was at work here too and moneylending was to remain the major economic enterprise.⁸

The basic precariousness of the Jewish position and its haunting insecurity were most pointedly brought to mind by the physical manifestations of religious humiliation and oppression which lingered on in these regions. In Béziers, for instance, Palm Sunday was the occasion for street brawls during which the bishop urged the Christian populace to stone the Jews. In Arles, where the bishops had jurisdiction over the Jewish residents, they had to transport stones for public works on communal-owned donkeys. Toulouse had its ceremony of *calafus judeorum*: on the eve of all Christian holidays, the seigneur slapped the Jewish community leaders on the face. In time—during the twelfth century for the most part—these vestigial forms of religious harassment were commuted to special taxes and extraordinary fines, but even these poignantly emphasized the alien status of Jews.⁹ This was reinforced

6. G. Saige, *Juifs du Languedoc*, 5; in light of this, see Rabad's statement in *Sifra Commentary*, 89a: אבל לבישה שעתה וכיוצא בו שאין הגוים מוחרין עליהם אין ישראל גמוע מלעשה; also Rabad, *BK*, 339; *MT*, *Kele ha-Mikdash*, VIII, 2, 13; *Shabbat*, IX, 15. Jews undoubtedly participated in the newly established fairs of southern France; for the fairs at Nîmes (established 1151) and Carcassone (established 1158), see A. Dupont, *Les Cités de la Narbonnaise Première* (Nîmes, 1942), 611-614; A. Gouron, *La Reglementation des Métiers en Languedoc au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1958), 40-42. Such fairs which often lasted for eight days, may have been in Rabad's mind when he wrote: לרוד שהוא תופס ח' ימים או י' והיום איך הוא בטוף הירוד נעין אותו של מגרש *Commentary on Abodah Zarah*, 13a. For מגרש as Perpignan, see *GJ*, 457.

7. G. Saige, *Juifs du Languedoc*, 5; J. Regné, *Étude sur la Condition des Juifs de Narbonne* (Narbonne, 1912), 171 ff. H. Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe* (New York, n.d.), 133.

8. This is the thesis of R. Emery, *Jews of Perpignan*, 5-6; see my review notes in *American Historical Review*, LXV (1959), 160; also, *TD*, 43, 44, 46; J. Kimhi, *Sefer ha-Berit*; the *Milhemet Miswah* of Meir b. Simon of Narbonne is a defense of usury; see H. Gross, "R. Meir b. Simeon's *Milhemet Miswah*," *MGWJ*, XXX (1881), 295-305, 442-452, 554-569; and now S. Stein, "Me'ir b. Simeon's *Milhemet Miswah*," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, X (1960), 45-63; also S. Grayzel, *Church and Jews*, 86, 105, and others.

9. Devic and Vaissette, *Histoire Generale de Languedoc*, II, 486, II, 813; G. Saige, *Juifs du Languedoc*, 10-12; A. Dupont, *Les Cités*, 525-530, 673-678; H. Gross, "Zur Geschichte der Juden in Arles," *MGWJ*, XXVII (1878), 61-71, 130-137, 145-160, 193-201, 248-256, 377-382, 470-477 and further installments, esp. 150; J. Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History* (Cincinnati, 1931), I, 16 ff.; A. Granget, *Histoire du*

by the humiliating oath *more Judaico*.¹⁰ It is small wonder, therefore, that, together with pleas for amicable relations and upright business dealings, bitterly resentful and contemptuous attitudes toward Christianity are found even in Provençal Jewish writings.¹¹

As for the "inner," spiritual life of the community—the entire complex of its religious and cultural mores—one can, on the basis of assorted references, reconstruct the picture of a land of intense religiosity, sincere pietism, scrupulous ceremonialism, ethical altruism, and rigorous moralism—to the extent of asceticism and self-abnegation. Its Torah-centered educational system was geared to the cultivation and intensification of these spiritual qualities. Such a picture might in fact be reconstructed as follows.

There are certain general testimonies concerning the religious habits and social consciousness of Provençal Jews, all of which underscore the same qualities and traits. The informative traveler Benjamin of Tudela says about the people of Provence: "They would support and instruct every student who came from a distant land to study Torah. They would supply the students with food and clothing at public expense for the duration of their stay in the school. Ritually observant people, they habitually perform meritorious acts, standing in the breach to assist all their brethren, near and far." Elsewhere he observes that "there is there a holy community of Israelites who are engaged in the study of the Torah day and night."¹² Precisely the same qualities of magnanimous philanthropy and pure devotion to Torah scholarship which Benjamin found in Provence as a whole are singled out by him with reference to Rabad in particular.

Diocese d'Avignon (Avignon, 1862), I, 352-353. Also, C. Roth, "The Eastertide Stoning of the Jews," *JQR*, XXV (1945), 361-371. Rabad's lengthy explanation of the famous passage in *Abodah Zarah*, 11b (טן קירי פלסטר) becomes more meaningful in light of these conditions: ועכשו מי שהוא רואה בשפלותו בשעה זו רואה ומי שאינו רואה בשפלותו בשעה זו שאנו בכאן שמא לא יראה עוד כל ימיו לפי שאין המעשה הזה נעשה אלא אחת לע' שנה. לפי' כל מי שרוצה בנקמתו של עשו יבוא עכשו ויראה דלא אהני ליה רמאה ליעקב ברמאותיה שעשה לעשו שהרי הוא תחת עשו. אע"ג שבעונותינו בכל יום היו יכולין לראות הענין הזה שהרי ישראל תחת ידם. His severe judgment on the popes should perhaps be correlated with the Provençal situation, where the popes constantly remonstrated against local officials for their leniency toward Jews: פי' ושיאיה הם האפיפיורים שלהם פפא בלע"ז ואין באותם האפיפיורים שיהא לו חלק לעולם הבא. *Commentary on Abodah Zarah*, 10b.

10. See, for example, Gross, "Judens in Arles," *MGWJ*, XXVII, 147-149. All this notwithstanding, Bernard of Clairvaux still found reason to decry the rampant "Judaizing" tendencies in southern France: see his letter to the Count of Toulouse in *Life and Works of St. Bernard*, ed. J. Mabillon and S. Eales (London, 1889) II, 707 (letter ccxli).

11. S. Stein, "Milhemet Mišwah," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, X, 58-59; see Rabad's statements quoted supra, nn. 8-9. Also, Rabad, *BK*, 313.

12. *Itinerary*, 3, 4.

A similar evaluation is offered by David Kimḥi in a letter to the Spanish physician Judah Alfakar: "Our house is wide open to every wayfarer and person seeking rest. We weary ourselves in the study of the Torah day and night, support the poor unostentatiously, do righteousness at all times, furnish books for needy children of the poor, and provide teachers' salaries for study of Scripture and Talmud." Probably setting himself up as a representative of Provençal rabbis, he adds the following personal note: "There is no rabbi in Spain or France who is more observant of Talmudic laws, severe or lenient, than I."¹³ Though this letter is apologetic and, therefore, somewhat hyperbolic perhaps—written in the heat of the Maimonidean controversy in an effort to dispel Alfakar's suspicions concerning the noxious effects of philosophic study (which found a home in Provence)¹⁴—the details of the description are unassailable. The pervasive emphasis on piety and ceremonial conformity is accurate. Furthermore, although written at the beginning of the thirteenth century, the letter undoubtedly reflects earlier conditions as well. Interestingly enough, it reflects the spirit of some of the remarks of his father, Joseph Kimḥi. Although general and abstract, uttered in the course of an imaginary disputation between a Jew and a Christian, the remarks have historic value in their specific context: "Jews observe their Sabbath and festivals punctiliously"; "we have not forgotten our sacred Law, for even the women know the commandments and statutes and are intimately acquainted with the minute details of rabbinical enactments." Kimḥi also speaks of the exemplary philanthropic spirit and practice of the Jews.¹⁵

While the comments on charity and generosity speak for themselves,¹⁶ the picture of religious orthodoxy may perhaps be substantiated by the following argument *ex silentio*: there are no complaints about religious laxity, about material prosperity bringing in its wake religious indifference or liberal thought causing a decline in ritual observance. Even the few plaintive notes heard in contemporary writing—especially in the introductions to codes, where they come as justification for the composition of these works—are clearly qualified: laxity or improper observance stem not from contemptuous indifference or rationalized liberalism but from inadvertence and ignorance. Asher b. Saul, citing

13. *Ḳobez Teshubot ha-Rambam*, III, 3d.

14. Sarachek, *Faith and Reason* (Williamsport, 1935), 101-102.

15. J. Kimḥi, *Milhemet Ḥobah* (Constantinople, 1700), reprinted in J. Eisenstein, *Ozar ha-Wikkulim* (New York, 1928), 67-77.

16. See, for example, J. Bergmann, *Ha-Zedakah be-Yisra'el* (Jerusalem, 1944), 65 ff.

the need for his *Sefer ha-Minhagot*, says: "I saw people treating the customs lightly," but adds, "because they do not know the reasons."¹⁷ Rabad likewise notes that some people err in ritual matters but blames this on lack of knowledge.¹⁸ This is a far cry from some of the heated statements found later in the very same areas—or even earlier elsewhere¹⁹—concerning both the causes and consequences of religious laxity; the corrupting influence of extreme allegorization, for instance, becomes a recurrent theme. It can be contrasted, for example, with the exhortatory statements made by such an itinerant preacher and scholar as Moses of Coucy, who reprimanded his listeners for flouting rabbinic customs.²⁰ There is no such articulateness concerning religious laxity in Provence of our period.

It may be assumed, furthermore, that the repeated references to intensive study were not mere homiletical hyperbole, for Provence was covered at this time with a network of flourishing schools and academies. Narbonne, Lunel, Posquières, Béziers, Montpellier, Marseilles, Arles, Trinquetaille, Toulouse, and others were citadels of learning. From distant Cairo, Maimonides singled out Provence as one of the greatest centers of Talmudic study in a period of general eclipse.²¹ Sheshet b. Isaac of Spain depicts Narbonne—often a metonymy for all of Provence—as the source from which rivers of learning flow in all directions.²² Earlier Benjamin of Tudela had characterized Narbonne as "a place of eminence in consequence of the studies carried on there; from there the study of the law spreads over all countries";²³ while later, Yedayah

17. *Sifran*, 129: שאין יודעים טעמים בהם מפני שאין יודעים טעמים.

18. *BH*, 4: אשר רובם מתנהגים עליהם בשגגה; see also *TD*, 1.

19. As in the commentaries of the northern French exegete Joseph Bekor Shor; see M. H. Segal, *Parshanut ha-Mikra* (Jerusalem, 1944), 72. See Reuben b. Hayyim, *Sefer ha-Tamid*, ed. B. Toledano *Ozar ha-Hayyim*, VII (1931), 10: באחת מן המצות שום דבר שאין באחת מן המצות שום דבר רע לפי שאינם משלים כמו שחשבו החורשים.

20. *Sefer Miẓvot Gadol* (Venice, 1522), 3, Positive commandment 3 (concerning phylacteries); see Urbach, *Ba'ale ha-Tosafot*, 71, and my remarks in *Tarbiz*, XVI (1957), 225. In general, see L. Ginzberg, *Ginze Schechter* (New York, 1929), II, 536-538; Grünspan, "Le-Korot Miẓvat Tefillin we-Haznaḥatah," *Ozar ha-Hayyim*, IV (1928), 159-164.

21. His letter to the sages of Provence, *Ozar Nehmad*, II (1857), 3-4 (also *Kobez Teshubot ha-Rambam*, II, 44): הרי אני מודיע לכם שלא נשאר בזמן הזה הקשה אנשים להרים דגל . . . אבל בכל המקומות האלה אגודת חרה משה ולדקדק בדברי רב אשי אלא אתם וכל הערים אשר סביבותיכם . . . מבינים . . . ולא נשאר לנו עורה אלא אתם אחינו אנשי גאולתנו . . . See also Abraham Maimonides, *Milhamot ha-Shem*, ed. R. Margaliyot (Jerusalem, 1953), 52. For Maimonides' entire correspondence with Provence, see S. M. Stern, "Ḥalifat ha-Miktabim ben ha-Rambam we-Hakme Provence," *Zion*, XVI (1951), 18-29.

22. D. Kaufmann, "Lettres de Scheschet b. Isaac," *REJ*, XXIX (1899), 67: ער הנה ממקור מים חיים אשר בה יצאו כל נהרות להשקות את הארץ.

23. *Itinerary*, 4.

Bedersi described the Narbonne school of R. Meshullam b. Moses as conducive both to scholarship and saintliness.²⁴

Moreover, if, as is now generally assumed, the *Hukke ha-Torah*—a unique syllabus, rich in pedagogic insights, outlining the various stages of education up to the equivalent of a seven-year institute for advanced study—is of Provençal provenance,²⁵ there must have been some measure of educational theory behind this activity and these institutions. The *Hukke ha-Torah* insisted upon the absolute primacy and indispensability of education; a sense of urgency and commitment pervades the entire document. It strives, by a variety of stipulations and suggestions, to achieve maximum learning on the part of the student and maximum dedication on the part of the teacher. It operates with such "progressive" notions as determining the occupational aptitude of students, arranging small groups in order to enable individual attention, grading the classes in order not to stifle individual progress. The teacher is urged to encourage free debate and discussion among students, arrange periodic reviews—both short-range and long-range—utilize the vernacular in order to facilitate accurate comprehension. Above all, he is warned against insincerity and is exhorted to be totally committed to his noble profession. The question whether these statutes are an *œuvre d'imagination*, never realized in practice—as maintained by Isidore Loeb²⁶—or actually constitute an historic document—as believed by most scholars²⁷—is not really too crucial. Such imaginativeness—if this is the case—must have been conceived only in a country where rabbinic scholarship was well established in practice and of paramount importance in theory. The least that can be said—with maximum concession to Loeb's skepticism—is that the very existence of the *Hukke ha-Torah* and its educational scheme are themselves meaningful.

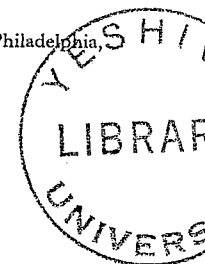
The *Hukke ha-Torah*, fostering, as it does, traditional rabbinic learning, also focuses attention on another facet of Jewish life in Provence: the prevalence of intensely pietistic, partially ascetic tendencies. This is

24. Neubauer, "Yedaya de Beziers," *REJ*, XX (1890), 245-248; reprinted by S. Assaf, *Meḳorot le-Toledot ha-Hinnukh* (Tel-Aviv, 1925-36), II, 33-35: כי שם נמצאו הכמנים מחוכמים אנשי השם בכל חכמה ומדע.

25. Published for the first time by M. Guedemann, *Ha-Torah weha-Hayyim*, I, 73-80, and reprinted by S. Assaf, *Meḳorot le-Toledot ha-Hinnukh*, I, 6-16; see B. Dinaburg, *Kiryath Sefer*, I (1924), 107; Benedict, 98; Scholem, *Reshit ha-Kabbalah*, 85; also, Assaf, *Misifrut ha-Geonim*, 4, n. 10.

26. In his review of Guedemann, *REJ*, II (1881), 158-164.

27. See n. 123; also S. Baron, *Social and Religious History of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1958), VI, 395, n. 163.



most clearly reflected in the passage which describes *perushim*, an elite group of advanced students who isolate themselves almost hermetically in a special building for seven years, eating and sleeping there and refraining from idle chatter. They must study uninterruptedly, for only "one who kills himself for it" can become truly wise and proficient in Torah. These students, we are informed in a preceding article, are to be recruited from the ranks of the firstborn, for every father, and especially a descendant of the tribe of Levi, is urged to "consecrate" his oldest son to study.²⁸ Instead of saying that this paragraph merely describes the institution of *perushim*, it would be more accurate to say that it fervently recommends this institution as necessary for the spiritual well-being of the community. Here is the core of the article:

Just as we institute readers who officiate at public services in order to serve as the medium through which the community at large may fulfill its obligation of prayer, so we should institute professional students to study the Torah uninterruptedly in order to serve as the medium through which the community at large may fulfill its obligation of study and in this way the divine kingdom will not be turned backward. *Perushim* are students consecrated to the study of the Torah. In Mishnaic Hebrew they are called *perushim* and in Scriptural Hebrew, *nezirim* (*nazirites*) . . . Such isolation (and abstemiousness) leads to purity.²⁹

The subsequent article specifies that the *perushim* "should not leave the house until the end of seven years. They should eat and drink there and sleep there . . . If the *perushim* should leave the house of study before the seven years have passed, they will be liable to pay a pre-determined fine."

Now, while these quasi-monkish scholars, whose sole mandatory function was study, were not full-fledged ascetic pietists, this possibility is latent just below the surface. Voluntary segregation for purposes of intense, uninterrupted study of the Torah—especially when accompanied by a devout sense of mission, of symbolic representation of the entire community—was the natural prelude to more intense forms of abstention and mortification aimed at attaining saintliness and purity:

28. This statement apparently had interesting repercussions. It is reported (*Orhot Hayyim*, II, 562) in the name of Asher b. Saul—his authorship is noteworthy—that in Provence one did not mourn the death of the firstborn because "the firstborn was [consecrated] to God." Assaf ingeniously explains this odd custom, which puzzled many commentators, in light of the *Hukke ha-Torah*; see *Misifrut ha-Geonim*, 4, n. 10.

29. Assaf, *Mekorot le-Toledot ha-Hinnuk*, I, 10: כי כאשר מעמידין חונים להוציא רבים ידי חובתם מן התפלה כך מעמידים תלמידים קבועים להגות בתורה בלי הפסק להוציא רבים ידי חובתם מתלמוד תורה ולא תהיה מלכות שמים נסוגה אהורנית. פרושים—הם תלמידים המקודשים לתלמוד תורה. ונקראין בלשון משנה פרושים ובלשון מקרא גזירים. והפרשות מביאה לידי טהרה.

"isolation leads to purity." The use of such terms would inevitably channel people's thinking in the direction of the famous string of aphorisms attributed to the saintly Pinehas b. Yair³⁰—a popular figure in Provençal midrashim. Or they might be reminded of other Talmudic idioms which associate isolation with sanctification.³¹

Such a development seems to have taken place. These terms and concepts, in abeyance for the most part since Talmudic times, began to be freely associated and juxtaposed. Asher b. Meshullam, known as Asher the "Parush," is described not only as "poring over books day and night" but also as "separated from mundane matters, fasting, and not eating meat."³² Terms such as *nazir*, *hasid* (pious),³³ *kadosh* (holy),³⁴ not found hitherto in any significant measure, become common designations. There is R. Jacob ha-Nazir who was engaged in mystical studies and is credited by kabbalistic tradition with having swayed Maimonides to Kabbalah.³⁵ Professor Scholem has observed that this R. Jacob ha-Nazir was also called *hasid* by R. Ezra of Gerona at the beginning of the thirteenth century.³⁶ It should be added that Rabad's father-in-law was already referred to as *hasid* and *kadosh* by Isaac b. Abba Mari of Marseille,³⁷ while Rabad himself, whose exemplary piety and self-imposed, mild asceticism were usually noted, was called both *hasid* and *kadosh*.³⁸ Judah ibn Tibbon describes Meshullam of Lunel

30. *Sotah*, 49b; *Abodah Zarah*, 20b; see A. Büchler, *Types of Jewish-Palestinian Piety* (London, 1922), 42 ff.; R. Mach, *Der Zaddik in Talmud und Midrasch* (Leiden, 1957); G. Scholem, "Die Lehre vom Gerechten . . ." *Eranos Jahrbuch*, XXVII (1958), 237-299.

31. E.g., *Yomah*, 8b; *Sanhedrin*, 106b; *Berakot*, 5b; *Genesis Rabbah*, 44.

32. *Itinerary*, 3.

33. On the usage of this term, see S. Schechter, *Studies in Judaism: Second Series* (Philadelphia, 1908), 148-181; Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 92 ff., 371, n. 35, and bibliography on 428. Add to his references, Büchler, *Jewish-Palestinian Piety*, 43, and the new edition of the *Sefer Hasidim* by R. Margaliyot (Jerusalem, 1957). It is significant that the term *hasidut* emerges almost contemporaneously as the designation of a mystical-pietistic movement in Germany.

34. That "*kadosh*" designates any saintly person, not necessarily a martyr (as maintained by S. Rappaport) was already observed in *Ozar Nehmad*, IV (1864), 38 in connection with Rabad. See also *GJ*, 562. Actually, this usage may be traced back to *Midrash Shōher Tob*, XVI, 2: *אילו בקשו אבות העולם שתהא דירתן למעלה היו יכולין ואע"פ לא נקראו לאו נקראו קדושים עד שמחו ונחמו הגליל בפניהם לכן נאמר לקדושים אשר בארץ ישראל. רבינו יהונתן . . . בן כבוד גבירנו וקדושו מרינו ורבינו דוד זצ"ל".* Also, *Bereshit Rabbati*, 159. Death, not martyrdom, was the prerequisite for this title. See also *Teshubot ha-Rambam*, ed. Freimann, LVII: "רבינו יהונתן . . . בן כבוד גבירנו וקדושו מרינו ורבינו דוד זצ"ל".

35. *Sifran*, 124, n. 6; Scholem, "Mihoker Limekubbal," *Tarbiz* VI (1935), 96.

36. Scholem, *Reshit ha-Kabbalah*, 86.

37. *Sefer ha-Iṭtur* (Lemberg, 1860), I, 29a, 34b. See Assaf, *Sifran*, 2, n. 1.

38. Nahmanides, *Sefer ha-Zekut*, introduction; Rashbah, *Torat ha-Bayit*, *Bet ha-Nashim*, introduction; Aaron ha-Kohen of Lunel, *Orhot Hayyim*, I, 102b, and others; see Gross, XXIII, 170-171, who refers to Moses de Leon, *Sefer ha-Nefesh ha-Hakamah* (I have not found this reference).

as "he-ḥasid ha-ḳadosh."³⁹ R. Jonathan ha-Kohen of Lunel—also designated by the term ḥasid⁴⁰—is described as leading an ascetic life, despising luxuries and rejecting pleasures, dedicating himself unqualifiedly to learning;⁴¹ he is the same type of saintly scholar represented by Rabad. It is almost as if the insightful description of Jonathan is a practical application of the ideal abstractly depicted in the *Hukke ha-Torah*. Asher b. Saul, whose *Sefer ha-Minhagot* already has decidedly pietistic and mystical strains, designates Joseph ibn Plat as ḥasid.⁴² Rabad himself describes the father of a certain Judah, whom he sincerely admires, as ḥasid.⁴³ It is noteworthy that R. Meshullam, the antagonist of R. Tam who went from Provence to settle in Melun, is described as *parush*,⁴⁴ just as Pineḥas b. Meshullam, the judge who went from Provence to Egypt where he was cordially received by Maimonides, is described as ḥasid.⁴⁵ On the other hand, R. Sheshet ben Isaac of Barcelona, who sojourned in Narbonne for many years is eulogized as the "foundation of all the ḥasidim."⁴⁶ Other individual perushim of this time are known by name.⁴⁷ Interesting is Abraham ibn Ezra's laudatory acknowledgment of two ḥasidim in Béziers who graciously befriended him: Abraham b. Ḥayyim and Isaac b. Judah.⁴⁸ Razah designated Lunel as "a place of learning and ḥasidut," and referred to "its sages and ḥasidim."⁴⁹ Outstanding is Rabad's son Isaac the Blind who was to become the ḥasid par excellence in kabbalistic literature⁵⁰—just as Rabad himself was to become the critic par excellence in halakic literature. R. Isaac is also called ḳadosh⁵¹ and *parush*,⁵² so that practically

39. Judah ibn Tibbon, introduction to *Ḥobot ha-Lebabot*.

40. Samuel ibn Tibbon, introduction to *Moreh Nebukim*: החסיד הכהן ר' יהונתן. Assaf, "Kinot," *Minḥah li-Yehudah* (Jerusalem, 1950), 164: ארי על חסיד בהודו הנאה במקראו ובתלמודו.

41. N. Wider, "Sifro ha-Nisraf shel Judah ibn Shabetai," *Meẓudah*, II (1944), 124 ff.

42. *Sifran*, 142.

43. *TD*, II, 11: החכם החסיד ר' אברהם; see Benedict, *Sinai*, XIV (1951), 193 ff.

44. *Sefer Mordecai on Shabbat*, section 452; Urbach, *Ba'ale ha-Tosafot*, 125, n. 1.

45. *Teshubot ha-Rambam*, ed. Freimann, LVIII.

46. Judah al-Ḥarizi, *Taḥkemoni*, ch. 46.

47. *Sefer Ma'or wa-Shemesh* (Livorno, 1839), 9; see *REJ*, XV (1887), 88; Assaf, *Misifrut ha-Geonim*, 4.

48. Abraham ibn Ezra, *Sefer ha-Shem* (Fiorda, 1834), 1 (the rhymed dedication).

49. Quoted by Marx, 222, n. 3: ואני יראתי לומר דבר זה עד שבאחי למקום התורה והחסידות מגדל . . . לוייל . . . ומתוך כך הרציתי דברי אלה לפני אחד מיושרי מגדולי הארץ והכמה חסידיה לוייל . . . See also Samuel ibn Tibbon, introduction to *Moreh Nebukim* and al-Ḥarizi, introduction to his translation of Maimonides' Mishnah Commentary (about Marseille).

50. Gross, XXIII, 181; Scholem, *Reshit ha-Kabbalah*, 102.

51. *Oẓar Nehmad*, IV (1864), 37.

52. D. Sassoon, *Ohel David*, II, 1014.

all the current titles and their implied attributes are united in him; he is truly symbolic in this respect. In sum, the Provençal atmosphere seems to have been charged with such traits of piety and inclinations to mystical thought and practice; *perishut* was becoming fashionable and Provence was one of its best agents.

3. Teaching and Writing

The first station in Rabad's itinerary was at Montpellier, a citadel of Talmudic learning and a bastion of general culture. Moses b. Judah, Meshullam's son-in-law and correspondent of Rabad, lists Montpellier as the seat of one of the three foremost rabbinical courts in southern France.¹ Most manuscripts indicate that Maimonides addressed his celebrated epistle on astrology to the Jewish community of Montpellier, where Jonathan ha-Kohen was probably residing at that time (1194).² Benjamin of Tudela mentions with fervent admiration many famous scholars of Montpellier,³ while Judah al-Ḥarizi lavishes several lines of glowing metaphors on the city and its sages.⁴ Moreover, in addition to cultivating specifically Jewish learning, the Jews of Montpellier were interested in the advance of general culture. They were among the first teachers at the European-wide famous medical school of this city.⁵ Rabad established himself in this city and presumably achieved prominence there.

There is no direct information on his stay here or about his official status in the community. One reference in later code books relates that it was his custom to buy an *etrog* (a kind of citron used with the festive wreath on the Feast of Booths of *Sukkot*) for the entire community of Montpellier for the holiday of *Sukkot*.⁶ This casual report may suggest more than a manifestation of his sociability or an illustration of the use of his wealth for communal needs. It might imply a position of recognized

1. *TD*, 7.

2. *GJ*, 322, and Marx, "The Correspondence between the Rabbis of Southern France and Maimonides," *HUCA*, III, 324.

3. *Itinerary*, 2-3.

4. Judah al-Ḥarizi, introduction to his translation of Maimonides' Mishnah Commentary; see also Samuel ibn Tibbon, introduction to *Moreh Nebukim*.

5. Cl. Devic and Dom Vaissette, *Histoire Générale de Languedoc* (Toulouse, 1872), II, 806; A. Germain, *L'Ecole de Médecine de Montpellier* (Montpellier, 1880), 6; the bibliographical review in S. Baron, *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, VIII, 398.

6. *Orḥot Ḥayyim* (Florence, 1750), I, 116b; *Kol Bo* (Lemberg, 1860), 71.

leadership, for the joint use of one etrog by an entire community—a practice originating most likely in the financial inability of many individuals to purchase an etrog as well as the scarcity of this fruit—was a controversial halakic issue. On purely formal grounds and upon the basis of the letter of the Scriptural commandment traditionally interpreted, authorities frowned upon the practice of the common use of one etrog.⁷ However, by certain legal arrangements which required the sanction of recognized legal authority, ways could be found by which this sharing was permissible. Presumably such sanction was officially given by Rabad in Montpellier. That this was common procedure is indicated by the fact that the compiler of the *Kol Bo* mentions other Talmudic authorities who, *ex officio*, encountered the same problem in their domain.⁸

To infer purely from this bit of legalistic subtlety that Rabad had an official position in the community of Montpellier would not be very certain. The aforementioned letter of Moses b. Judah, however, suggests that Rabad conducted a school in Montpellier or was a member of the local court (*bet-din*). For, in closing this letter, he mentions the three celebrated courts of Montpellier, Lunel, and Nîmes, whose aid he invokes and whose opinion he seeks. He believes their view vital, in all matters of Jewish law—"from *alef* to *tav*," that is from *alpha* to *omega*, or from "a" to "z." In a personal letter addressed to Rabad, such a reference appears irrelevant or incongruous, unless some connection can be established between Rabad and these centers. He studied and wrote in Lunel and was associated by contemporaries with the city's scholars. At Nîmes, he later headed a flourishing school, where this letter seems to have been sent. If teaching activities or other official duties on Rabad's part at Montpellier may be assumed, all the references in Moses b. Judah's letter will be apropos. Moses is recalling the centers where Rabad flourished previously, all of which remained prominent thanks to the seeds which Rabad planted. Nîmes is the greatest of all—

7. Levit. 23:40; *Sukkah* 29b, ff.; *Orhot Hayyim*, 649, 658; Commentary of Rashbam on *Baba Batra*, 137b. The problem was already widespread in the Geonic period: see B. M. Lewin, ed., *Ozar ha-Geonim* (Jerusalem, 1934), *Sukkah*, 56.

8. *Kol Bo*, 71. That Rabad acted in an official rabbinic capacity is more easily inferred from the full-length description given by the Provençal R. David b. Levi in the *Sefer ha-Miktam*, ed. A. Sofer (New York, 1959), 96: "אך הראב"ד ז"ל היה נוהג לקנות משלו: וביזמא דערבן היה מבקש לכל אחד ואחד עד כדי שיפרע דמי האחריות וכל זה היה עושה מפני שיש מפקפקין לצאת בשל צבור לפי שהוא משותף לכולם והיה מקנה אותה לכל אחד ואחד בהקנאה גמורה על מנת לחזיר לו." All the sources—*Orhot Hayyim*, *Kol Bo*, *Sefer ha-Miktam*—for this fact are Provençal.

"from there," as he says, "Torah radiates to all neighboring communities"—for that is where Rabad was at the time and his presence eclipses all residues of previous influence.⁹

Nîmes, where Jewish émigrés from Spain were cordially received as early as the seventh century, was Rabad's next residence in his Provençal travels.¹⁰ He refers to his stay there in one of his responsa. The query directed to him in a certain letter had already been brought up by his "colleagues" at Nîmes, and there he adduced lucid, convincing demonstrations for his answer which he summarily reproduced in this reply.¹¹ This is a clear-cut reference to his school, for the term "colleague" usually applies to Rabad's senior students, whom he treated most cordially.¹² It is this school or court of Nîmes which Moses b. Judah, in a very allusive hyperbole, describes as being situated in the cell of *Gazit* (or "Chamber of Hewn Stones"), an interior chamber of the Temple which served as the meeting place of the great *Sanhedrin*.¹³ This laudatory comparison was made presumably in the early sixties, before Rabad settled at Posquières and established there the most famous of his schools. At the time, he was still heading a school in Nîmes, from which learning was being disseminated to many parts of Provence.¹⁴

Posquières,¹⁵ the city with which Rabad is historically associated, was, in the middle decades of the twelfth century, a small, sparsely populated Jewish community, shrouded in insignificance when compared to the

9. *TD*, 7: "בתי דינים . . . והג' יושב בלשכת הוית שמשם יוצאה תורה לכל סביבותיה והוא בנומי." Another reference by David b. Levi to a presumably official act of Rabad in Montpellier is found in *Sefer ha-Miktam* (Lemberg, 1904), 13: "אברהם ברבי דוד ז"ל היה: מוחה ביד בני החר כשהיו אוכלין פירות מן האילנות שהיו שם בבית הקברות . . ."

10. On Nîmes, see the brief sketch by S. Kahn, *Notice sur les Israelites de Nîmes* (Nîmes, 1901), and its bibliography on p. 5, n. 1; see especially Menard, *Histoire de la Ville de Nîmes* (Nîmes, 1871), I, 200–201.

11. *TD*, 19.

12. See page 39.

13. *M. Middot*, V, 4.

14. Much confusion among historians concerning Rabad's activities at Nîmes and Posquières was created by the term "Kiryat Ye'arim," "city of forests" (see Jos. 9:17)—one of the many nicknames which Provençal Jews applied to French cities. Some (Gross, Zunz, Reifmann, and Kahn) identified it with Nîmes: see Gross, 344; Zunz, *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift*, II, 310; Reifmann, *ha-Maggid*, VI (1862), 382; Kahn, *Juifs de Posquières*, 7. Carmoly (*La France Israelite*, 119) believes it to be Carcassonne. Atlas (English introduction, Rabad, *BK*, 12, n. 5) and Marx (204), relying on the same text of ha-Me'iri, show that Posquières was called "Kiryat Ye'arim."

15. For a few background facts and a list of the various Hebrew spellings of this name, see *GJ*, 446. The following variations should be added to Gross's list: פישקירה in *Dibre ha-Yamim le-Joseph ha-Kohen*, ed. D. Gross (Jerusalem, 1955), 35; פישקירה in Azariah dei Rossi, *Mazref la-Kesef* (Vilna, 1865), 18; פושקראש in Vatican ms. 202, quoted by Scholem, "Te'udah Hadasah," *Sefer Bialik*, 143.

greater southern centers. It could boast of only a few scholars, foremost among whom, perhaps, was Menaḥem b. Simeon the exegete and grammarian.¹⁶ Not far from Nîmes and about two miles from Lunel, such a community would understandably suggest itself as the perfect site for a rabbinic school. Here a respected scholar, provided with the necessary funds, could maintain a thriving school for advanced students in Talmud. Peaceful, secluded, surrounded by forests, it was conducive to study, reflection, and research. Thoughts such as these must have appealed to Rabad, for whom pedagogic and scholarly interests had always been paramount, for, by 1165 approximately,¹⁷ he was located in Posquières at the head of an already famous school.

Benjamin of Tudela, that observant traveler with the penetrating eye and facile pen who visited Posquières during Rabad's lifetime, left an invaluable description of Rabad's school, which mirrors the sincerity and nobility of Rabad's personality.¹⁸ Benjamin portrays Rabad as being generous not only with his immense erudition but also with his great wealth. His house was practically converted into a dormitory for the

16. Benjamin of Tudela (*Itinerary*, 4) mentions Joseph b. Menaḥem Benveniste, Benjamin, Abraham b. Moses, and Isaac b. Moses; see *GJ*, 398, 450; M. Barul, *Menaḥem ben Simon aus Posquières und sein Kommentar zu Jeremia und Ezechiel* (Berlin, 1907); E. Urbach, "Hassagot ha-Rabad 'al Perush Rashi," *Kiryath Sefer*, XXXIV (1959), 107-108; also the references in M. Steinschneider, *Jewish Literature* (London, 1857), 331, n. 20.

17. For a discussion of the date of Benjamin's journeys, see Israel Davidson, ed., *Sepher Shashuim* of Joseph ibn Zabara (New York, 1914), Appendix A; see the references in S. Baron, *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, VI, 435, n. 88.

18. *Itinerary*, 4: ושם ישיבה גדולה על יד הרב הגדול רבי אברהם בר רבי דוד זצ"ל, רב פעלים, חכם גדול בחלמוד ובפסוקי ונבאים מארץ מרחק אליו ללמוד תורה, ומוצאים מקום מנוחה בביתו והוא מלמדם ומי שאין לו ללמוד הוא מוציא להם משלו וממנוהו לכל צרכיהם. הוא עשיר גדול. This fact, objectively reported by Benjamin of Tudela, has an interesting history of its own. It is one of the few facts about Rabad repeated with differing emphases by practically every student of this period—for the *Itinerary* was available in many translations. Some writers mention it with ostensible pride, some report it with scholarly detachment, while others are caught unawares by the historicity of this fact and repeat it begrudgingly. A distant echo—to mention one curious case—is heard from the pages of Jean François de Maucomble's *Histoire abrégée de la Ville de Nîmes* (Amsterdam, 1767), 24. This son of the Enlightenment, who took to history and poetry after interrupting a military career for reasons of poor health, apparently lost no sympathy on the Jews. However, because of Benjamin's *Itinerary*, which he must have read in French or Latin translation, he was compelled to admit that even Jews could be generous. Note the half-heartedness of the admission: "Si nous n'avions des monuments certains sur cette partie de l'histoire de l'esprit humain, on auroit aujourd'hui bien de la peine à se persuader qu'un Juif ait en cette générosité." (!) Maimonides was also reputed to have been extraordinarily philanthropic and successors were very impressed with his generosity as they were by Rabad's; see Nahmanides' letter in *Kobez Teshubot ha-Rambam*, III, 9 (בגודת כיסו במעשיו הנפלאים); Menaḥem b. Zerah, *Zedah la-Derek* (Warsaw, 1880), 6 (חסיד גדול גורם על החכמו ונריב בעל אכסניא); *REJ*, IV (1882), 179.

students, and he provided for all the other needs of the indigent students out of his own pocket.¹⁹ His students were many and came from afar, for even then it was common for students to leave their homes and travel in order to attend a well-known school or study under a recognized authority in his field.²⁰ In northern France, at a somewhat earlier date, Rashi, who traveled great distances in search of instruction, left a picturesque description of itinerant students: "Like doves that wander from one dovecot to the second to seek their food, so they go from the school of one scholar to the school of another scholar to seek explanations (reasons) for the Torah."²¹ In the celebrated Babylonian schools of Sura and Pumbeditha there were students from Palestine, Egypt, Africa, Spain, Italy, and Byzantium,²² while "there resided in Egypt Israelites who came from all the lands to R. Moses [Maimonides]."²³ Similarly, students poured in to Rabad's school from all sides.²⁴ A thirteenth-century kabbalistic tract mentions eminent students from Spain, Germany, and Damascus who converged on Rabad's school at Posquières.²⁵ One famous student was brought by his father from Carcassonne to study under Rabad. Benjamin of Tudela comments, probably on the basis of personal interviews, that "they come from distant lands to him to study Torah."

The school's success and reputation were direct consequences of Rabad's limitless attention and devotion. His intense love for learning and his total intellectual commitment to Talmudic studies motivated the establishment and maintenance of the school. He referred to his

19. The medieval "college" originated as an "endowed hospice or hall of residence." See C. H. Haskins, *The Rise of Universities* (New York, 1923), 26.

20. Medieval institutions of higher learning—Jewish or Christian—came into existence, subsequently to be institutionalized, as a result of the fame and authority of regional scholars, whether R. Isaac of Dampierre and Rabad of Posquières or Peter Abelard of Paris and Irnerius of Bologna. Planned establishment of universities was a thirteenth-century development; see, for example, Cyril E. Smith, *The University of Toulouse in the Middle Ages* (Milwaukee, 1958), 32-34.

21. Rashi, Cant. 5: 16.

22. Assaf, *Tekufat ha-Geonim we-Sifrutah* (Jerusalem, 1955), 43.

23. Neubauer, *REJ*, IV (1882), 179. On traveling students, see also ha-Me'iri, *Magen Abot*, 11, 14; A. Neuman, *The Jews in Spain* (Philadelphia, 1948), II, 91; Assaf, *Mekhorot le-Toledot ha-Hinnukh* (Tel Aviv, 1954), I, 33; A. Aptowitz, *Mabo le-Sefer Rabi'ah* (Jerusalem, 1932), 346; I. Davidson, introduction to *Sepher Shaashuim* (New York, 1914), XV. On the perils which traveling students faced, see P. Kibre, "Scholarly Privileges: Their Roman Origins and Medieval Expression," *American Historical Review*, LIX (1954), 548-550.

24. Menaḥem ha-Me'iri, *Bet ha-Behirah* on *Abot*, ed. S. Waxman (New York, 1944), 67.

25. Scholem, *Reshit ha-Kabbalah*, 124.

disciples as colleagues and friends (*haverim*).²⁶ Even if this term suggests that they were well-advanced students, such modesty and spirit of comradeship is noteworthy. This personal relationship with students and colleagues presents a sharp contrast to the emotionally detached, often combative attitude displayed in his critical writings. Although the *Yeshivah* was first-rate, Rabad constantly desired to improve it in quality and quantity by attracting promising young scholars. In answer to the letter of Judah b. Abraham, he expressed the wish that the latter might join the *Yeshivah* circle in order to share in and contribute to the joy of learning.²⁷ He constantly referred to the school. Many of his favorite theories were elaborated in its classrooms. He shared the results of his investigations with his students and often employed "modern" methods of visual aid to illustrate his lectures. For instance, Rabad encouraged the empirical study of animal anatomy, knowledge of which was basic for many aspects of the dietary law, by actually bringing to class parts of the animal, such as the bunch of converging sinews in the thigh (*zomet ha-gidin*).²⁸ Classroom discussion on many occasions provided the stimulus for his novellae and theoretical innovations. Many of his famous *hassagot* were obviously intended for school use. Some were suggestions for further study, while others were challenging invitations to more speculation.²⁹ It is also possible that some of the pieces preserved in *Temim De'im* were initially composed for the benefit of the school.³⁰

Rabad's life was spent in various cities of southern France such as Narbonne, Lunel, Montpellier, Nîmes, Posquières, and, for a while, Carcassonne, which served as his successive places of residence.³¹ He

26. *TD*, 19; כבר שאלוני חברי 50 ל—א; מעורת המקום ומעורת חברי ישמרם הא—ל 113 וחברינו הכינונו 113. See also *MT*, *Zekiyah U-Matanah*, VIII, 12; *hassagot* on Alfasi, *Gittin*, 33b; Assaf, "Yahasos shel ha-Rabad," *Kobez ha-Rambam*, 278; כל זה הסכמנו ונעשה על פינו ועל פי: *Kobez ha-Rambam*, 278. The use of the term "Talmid-Haver" by ha-Me'iri (*ibid.*) has the same connotation. Also Crescas, *Or Adonai* (Vienna, 1860), 2a; ובהשקפת החברים ובעוררתם. See *Ta'aniit*, 7b; *Baba Batra*, 158b.

27. *TD*, 11.

28. *Ibid.*, 3; ואמר חלה מה שראו עיני ומשמשו ידי והראיתי לתלמידי. See *MT*, *Shehitah*, VIII, 14; ומעולם לא בדקתי צומת הגידין אלא מן הארכובה ולמעלה. That these very modest beginnings were relatively advanced, in the perspective of general history, see now C. O'Malley, "The Inception of Anatomical Studies in the University of Paris," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, XXXIII (1959), 436-445.

29. For example, *MT*, *Shabbat*, XXV, 13; *Lulab*, VIII, 5; *Mikva'ot*, III. The first part of *Edut*, XXII, 2 is probably a student's remark.

30. See my discussion of *TD*, 61, page 74 ff.

31. A fourteenth-century Provençal writer, Jacob b. Moses of Bagnols—who compiled a long roster of Provençal authorities—apparently places Rabad in the city of Arles also: בעיר ארלזי זיל בעיר ארלזי. See Neubauer, *REJ*, IX (1884), 53. There are,

was not much of a traveler. Though there were definite literary connections between the scholars of northern and southern France,³² he never visited Paris, Sens, Vitry, Ramerupt, or other centers of Jewish learning in northern France. It is therefore doubly significant that he did visit Spain. Rabad himself states that he was in Barcelona.³³ Provence and Catalonia were bound at this time not only by geographical proximity, but also by some sort of feudal-institutional unity. The counts of Barcelona had achieved suzerainty over most of Provence at the beginning of the twelfth century, and communication between the two regions must have been frequent.³⁴ Some assume that Rabad's father-in-law also visited Barcelona.³⁵ Shortly after Rabad's visit Jonathan ha-Kohen of Lunel went to Toledo to study,³⁶ while yet another Provençal scholar, Meir ha-Kohen of Narbonne, later settled there.³⁷

One tangible result of Rabad's trip to Barcelona was the broadening of his horizon. He must have observed the folkways and traditions of Spanish Jewish life carefully, for he later cited the customs of Barcelona in matters of civil law.³⁸ Rabad's literary acquaintance with Spain was, thus, supplemented by personal contact and firsthand experience. The influence of Spanish-Jewish learning in Provence was growing, as was personal contact between the countries. Rabad's trip is another link in the chain which drew Spain and southern France closer together.

The date of Rabad's Spanish excursion is unknown; it may have preceded his removal to Posquières or provided an interlude during this period. In any event, his halcyonic existence in Posquières was violently disturbed in 1172 by some hostility on the part of Elzear, the local seigneur of Posquières. The exact sequence of this event—its feudal

however, no other reference to Arles as one of Rabad's places of residence. Moreover, the phrase may be interpreted to mean that he issued a decision—through the medium of a responsum—in connection with a case from Arles. Kahn, "Juifs de Posquières," 7 without any documentation, speaks parenthetically of a "momentary sojourn in Arles"; also *JE*, II, 116.

32. See Chapter IV, §2. Note also that R. Samuel ben Meir already quotes Narbonne sages collectively; see his *Perush ha-Torah* on Ex. 25:33 (פרשים בנרבונו), ed. D. Rosin (Breslau, 1881), 126. Legend, however, made Rabad pay a visit to Rameru, the home of R. Tam; see D. Kaufmann, "Liste de rabbins dressée par Azriel Trabotto," *REJ*, IV, 212, 215, 223, n. 87.

33. Marx, 206, n. 3; see Benedict, 109. Marx reads "דין ברצלונה" which implies merely that he answered questions sent to him from Barcelona, while the version in *KS*, I, 25 is "גברצלונה".

34. Dèvic and Vaissette, *Histoire de Languedoc*, III, 852.

35. Assaf, 1; Benedict, 109, analyzes this issue thoroughly.

36. See Chapter V, §1.

37. *GJ*, 422; see *Yesod 'Olam*, ed. Cassel (Berlin, 1848), II, 35.

38. *TD*, 51.

antecedents and implications—is not clearly established, and its details have to be reconstructed from the reticent sources which mention it. If not for the extreme brevity, bordering on concealment, of the sources, we might have found here interesting material on the dynamics of feudalism.

Until the publication of ha-Me'iri's *Magen Abot*, the only reference to these sudden tribulations of Rabad was in the sixteenth-century chronicle, *Shebet Yehudah*, of Solomon ibn Virga. There are two entries which read: (1) "1172—the oppressor Elzear seized the Rabbi, Abraham son of Rabbi David"; (2) "and in the year 1173, the lord was seized and exiled to Carcassonne before the Master."³⁹ This meager report can now be supplemented by the following parenthetical observation recorded by ha-Me'iri in connection with the composition of Rabad's *Hilkot Lulab*: "... which the Master composed upon leaving Posquières because of the wars of one of the lords who fought with his lord."⁴⁰

A few brief, prefatory comments on the feudal situation and dynastic rivalries in this area at the time will help illumine the sketchy and vague allusions of our texts. The two most powerful suzerains, approximating and in some respects exceeding, the status and hegemony of the king were the counts of Toulouse and of Barcelona. There was practically unremitting strife and friction between them for suzerainty over southern France—a fact which underlies most of the feudal history of the twelfth century. The most important local dynasty, whose homage was a precious prize, was the house of Trencavel, which held such important viscounties as Béziers, Carcassonne, and Nîmes. Alliances and counter-alliances among lords were legion. Yet feudal vicissitudes during the twelfth century did not substantially affect the comfortable position, relatively free of restrictions, enjoyed by Provençal Jewry, for most rulers looked favorably upon their traditional prerogatives. Most consistently sympathetic was the house of Trencavel. Under Raymond Trencavel the Jews of Béziers were allowed to pay a special Easter fine in lieu of the humiliation, affront, and actual beating to which they had always been subject on this holiday. As a result and in appreciation of this seigneurial benevolence, the Jews took no part in the bourgeois plot of 1167 which cost Raymond his life. This chain reaction of favor and gratitude was carried further when, in 1169, Raymond's son, Roger

39. Solomon ibn Virga, *Shebet Yehudah*, ed. Shohet-Baer (Jerusalem, 1947), 146, 221.

40. *Magen Abot*, 103.

II, recaptured the city of Béziers, mercilessly punished the inhabitants, and excepted the Jews from the vengeful massacre. Roger's friendship was manifest further not only in his liberal tax policy, but also in his elevation of Jews to influential administrative and notarial positions: the bailiff of Carcassonne was Moses Caravita, while another Jew, Nathan, was one of Roger's chief stewards. Moreover, Roger seems to have taken important Jewish figures under his personal protection. Placing chosen individuals under personal protection (*sauvegarde*) was one of the means by which powerful suzerains or even the king extended their direct influence and encroached upon the domain of lesser vassals. Jews, who protruded roughly from all ends of the feudal hierarchy, were especially prone to such protection. It was during the ascendancy of this Roger that Rabad became involved with the local seigneur and it was Roger's amicability that offset the seigneur's animosity.⁴¹

In light of these facts, the statements of ha-Me'iri and ibn Virga can be interpreted as follows: "One of the lords" referred to by ha-Me'iri is probably Elzear, seigneur of Posquières and Uzès, explicitly mentioned by the later chronicle.⁴² There was general feudal unrest at the time and, in particular, ha-Me'iri speaks of "wars" between a vassal ("one of the lords"), Elzear, and his suzerain ("his lord"), or Roger of Carcassonne. Rabad, whose wealth must have aroused the envy of neighboring vassals, was a victim of the unrest and was "seized," most likely imprisoned, by Elzear. Ha-Me'iri comments only on a feudal war between vassal and suzerain which compelled Rabad to leave Posquières, without mentioning Rabad's "seizure," while ibn Virga reports the seizure independently of the feudal clash and its consequences, but the two are undoubtedly intertwined. Rabad's seizure was a breach of feudal discipline by Elzear, for Rabad seems to have been under the personal protection of Roger II, Elzear's suzerain. Therefore, Roger intervened in favor of Rabad, and in the following year Elzear was "exiled to Carcassonne before the master." This last phrase, which troubled Graetz and for which he found no meaning,⁴³ might indicate that he was exiled to Carcassonne where, according to ha-Me'iri, Rabad was temporarily residing. It connotes, in other words, the presence of

41. Devic and Vaissette, *Histoire de Languedoc*, III, 813, 852; V, 27 ff., 38-39. Also, G. Saige, *Les Juifs de Languedoc*, 17, 133; Graetz, IV, 266, 415; *GJ*, 477.

42. While an Elzear was seigneur of Posquières both before and after 1172, there is none in 1172; see Vaissette, *Histoire de Languedoc*, IV, 228 for a genealogy of the seigneurs of Posquières. Perhaps the date in the *Shebet Yehudah* is inexact.

43. Graetz, IV, 415.

Rabad. Or it might mean that Elzear was exiled to Carcassonne "before the Master," in order to clear the way for Rabad's peaceful return to Posquières. Exile (usually accompanied by confiscation of territory) was common punishment for a feudal felony. So, while implementing justice, Roger again asserted his friendship to the Jews of Provence.

The exact sequence of Rabad's moves again was clarified by ha-Me'iri. Upon leaving Posquières, as an aftermath of his clash with Elzear, Rabad went to his birthplace, Narbonne. It was only after a delegation of notables from Carcassonne "entreated him" to honor their community with his presence that he moved there. He spent some time in Carcassonne, at the home of Menahem b. Isaac, where he composed the *Hilkot Lulab*; he then returned to Posquières.⁴⁴

Details about the rest of his life are scanty. It must have been a peaceful period, for it was certainly a prolific one. He was plucking the ripe and full-grown fruits of his relentless industry and mature scholarship. The bulk of his hassagot on Alfasi, Razah, and Maimonides were composed during this period. Many of his responsa were issued. His reputation was widespread and his prestige was immense. A chronicle designates him rather laconically as the "greatest of all" the eminent Provençal sages,⁴⁵ while the salutation of a legal question addressed to him aptly invokes the Biblical metaphor designating Abraham as "the father of a multitude."⁴⁶ Even in distant Cairo, Maimonides describes Rabad as "the great rabbi of Posquières." One of the praiseworthy characteristics of R. Me'ir, a Provençal scholar who had migrated to Egypt and whom Maimonides mentions with obvious approval to Samuel ibn Tibbon, is that he had been a student of Rabad.⁴⁷ The incident of the Carcassonne dignitaries who so earnestly and cordially invited him to their city also attests to his fame and popularity. Finally, Rabad himself asserts that his word is law in all Provence, and with a flourish of righteous indignation, he rebukes the sages of Béziers for questioning and rejecting his decisions. He writes to them as follows:

44. Graetz (IV, 266) is uncertain whether Rabad spent the time in Nîmes or Carcassonne.

45. Supplement to *Sefer ha-Kabbalah*, Neubauer, *Medieval Jewish Chronicles* I, 84: כל אלה עמודיהם גדולים בחורה שבכתב ושבעל פה אבל הרב ר' אברהם ב"ר דוד הגדול על כלם. The order in which the names are listed, Rabad's being first, also seems significant; see Benedict, "Le-Miklol le-Hakme Provence," *Kiryath Sefer*, XXVII (1951), 239.

46. TD, 113 (see Gen. 71:5).

47. *Ḳobez Teshubot ha-Rambam*, 27a. Simeon b. Zemah Duran, *Sefer ha-Tashbez*, 72, also quotes the phrase הרב הגדול אשר במושקירוש. This is the only extant Maimonidean reference to Rabad.

"Such is the custom in all Provence, in accord with what we have said; moreover, our colleagues have concurred with us and have not rebuffed our teaching as, we have been told, you have done."⁴⁸ If excess arbitrariness and self-esteem appear in this passage, as in the entire letter, there are also an illuminating reflection of Rabad's true position in Provence and a realistic appraisal of his influence.

The image of the trajectory, frequently used by biographers to depict the careers of their subjects, is not very appropriate for Rabad. Having made an early literary start, his teaching and scholarship continued unabated. He went "from strength to strength," from codes to commentaries to hassagot. There was no literary decline or cultural atrophy. His old age crowned his youthful and middle-age activities. The final mishnah of *Ḳinnim*, which he so aptly interpreted, is justly applicable to Rabad:

R. Simeon b. Akashieh says: Uninstructed persons, the older they become, the more their intellect gets distracted, as it is said: "He removeth the speech of men of trust and taketh away the sense of the elders" (Job 12:20); whereas of aged scholars it is not so. On the contrary, the older they get, the more their mind becomes composed, as it is said: "With aged men there is wisdom and understanding in length of days" (Job 12:12).

4. Personality

The querulous incident concerning the sages of Béziers focuses attention on Rabad's personality. Having already described certain aspects, perhaps capturing some of its sensitivity and intensity, it may be helpful to delineate more fully a few general character traits and in this way obtain a picture of Rabad the man—the man behind the scholar—his strengths and weaknesses, passions and convictions, virtues and qualities. Such a sketch must be subject to rigid discipline if it is not to pass from the carefully lined notebook of the historian to the supple and suggestive canvas of the artist. Enthusiastic devotion or unreasonable antipathy must not be allowed to substitute for realistic evaluation. If one claims that Rabad was vitriolic, fair, opinionated, moderate, amiable, withdrawn, generous, forthright—whatever the

48. TD, 113. Note the interesting apologetic use made of this letter by David Ganz, *Zemah David* (Warsaw, 1871), 4.

claim, be it flattering or damning—it must be empirically substantiated. If one encounters, and is compelled to combat, preconceived judgments in the course of literary and conceptual analysis, how much more must one be wary of distortions in the delicate, often evasive task of characterization.

There is no doubt that Rabad was an independent, outspoken, and aggressive individual, possessed of great self-esteem and confidence. Vigorously and candidly, in theory and in practice, he focused attention on his traits of autonomous judgment and self-reliant, logical reasoning. He chose to depict himself—and others did the same¹—as an unflinching individualist and critic, engaged in an unrelenting quest for the true and the accurate. (This quest was oriented almost exclusively toward halakic objectives, in keeping with his character as a “man of halakah,” although he did not rigidly limit his vision so as to exclude cognate areas of nonhalakic learning.) He assured his correspondents that “he does not traverse strange roads in pursuit of remote possibilities but keeps to the paved roads with theories that good taste accepts and reason dictates,” adding that “excluding nonsensical matters, I can adjudicate all legal cases.”² In the conclusion of a consultation which he forwarded to an eager correspondent he notes: “Continue to inquire, my son, about all matters which are doubtful to you, for interpretations belong to God and to the children [intellectual faculties] which He has graciously given to his servant Abraham.”³ He advises another scholar: “Open your eyes and observe that the truth is in keeping with my explanation.”⁴ Elsewhere, he declares forcefully, with only a weak, perfunctory qualification, that all predecessors and contemporaries, including his teachers, groped in the dark like blind men in the absence of his novel and accurate interpretation.⁵ “This is the proper and correct interpretation” recurs in his writings almost with the rhythmic regularity of a refrain.⁶ Very expressive is the resounding declaration at the beginning of his commentary on *‘Eduyot*: “. . . in all these matters I have nothing to fall back upon, neither from a rabbi or a teacher, but only upon [that which

1. His father-in-law writes (in the poem at the end of *Ḳinmin*): וזכני להיות חותן לרבך (in the poem at the end of *Ḳinmin*): והוא מלמד ומרדע ודרבני. הקשה אדם קשה כבודו. See Nahmanides, *Milḥamot, Yebamot*, 20b.

2. *TD*, 50; see also 61.

3. *Ibid.*, 59 (see Gen. 33:5, 40:8); see also 3, 19, 21, and others.

4. *Ibid.*, 114; see *MT*, *‘Erubin*, V, 15, *Nezirut*, II, 5; *KS*, I, 33, 35. *Hassagot* on Alfasi, *Ketubot*, 45a, 48a (השכל והראיה מורים על דברי כאשר פירשתי והמשכיל יבין) 51a, 59b.

5. *Dibre ha-Ribot*, 35; כל ימיו . . . אף עת ללך חפץ תחת השמים וכוה מקומות הניחו לי אבותינו להתגדר בהם . . .

6. E.g., *KS*, I, 15; *TD*, 16; *BH*, 23; see *Hassagot* on Alfasi, *Ketubot*, 21b.

I have received] with the help of God alone who teaches man to understand.”⁷

To offset these ostentatious flourishes of vigorous self-reliance, one might point to a few casual expressions of humility and diffidence scattered through his writings. He modestly informs one of his cherished friends that he undertakes to answer his queries “not by virtue of my wisdom, for I am unworthy,” and implores him to supplement and correct his statements whenever necessary.⁸ To yet another admirer he retorts: “I have seen the letter with your questions and I am unworthy to answer.”⁹ In one instance he avoids making a practical decision concerning a question of prayer because of his unworthiness.¹⁰ He deftly manipulates Biblical metaphor: “I, Abraham, am but dust and ashes.”¹¹ But these occasional concessions to the literary conventions of humility are not too significant in the total picture. There are those cases where Rabad lavishes praise upon a correspondent, and a measure of calculated diffidence definitely tends to make the praise more effective. In general, instances of Rabad’s humility, whether real or feigned, are rare in comparison with their abundance in the writings of his contemporaries, while such uncamouflaged assertions of greatness as appear in the writings of Rabad are scarce in others.¹²

In view of the high premium which Rabad placed on his ability and acumen, it is not fortuitous that he appears as a strident polemicist and so much of his halakic activity is centered in a polemical context. To be sure, the eristic element always played a prominent role in Jewish intellectual development. Polemics have stimulated, immediately or remotely, many important creations in all branches of Jewish literature. In the field of rabbinics, for example, one thinks immediately of the massive critical literature inspired by such writers as Alfasi and Maimonides, or the prolonged literary debate between such rivals as Rashbah

7. אין עמי בכל אלה לא מפי רב ולא מפי מורה כי מעורת הא-ל לבדו המלמד לאדם דעת. See a similar statement by Rashi, Ezek. 42:3: ולא עזר בכל הבנין הזה אלא . . . כמו שהראוני מן השמים. A. J. Levy, *Rashi's Commentary on Ezekiel* (Philadelphia, 1931) omits this phrase. Most manuscripts and early editions, however, have it, as shown by Heschel, “Al Ruah ha-Ḳodesh,” *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume* (New York, 1949), 193, n. 105.

8. *TD*, 11.

9. *Ibid.*, 51.

10. *MT*, *Tefillah*, III, 10.

11. *KS*, I, 30; see *Hassagot* on Alfasi, *Ketubot*, 38b, 51a.

12. E.g., R. Samuel b. Meir, *Perush ha-Torah*, Ex. 3:11: עיקר על עיקר. Compare on Rashi, I. Repha'el, “Rashi bi-Teshubotaw,” *Sefer Rashi*, ed. J. Maimon (Jerusalem, 1956), 573-574.

and R. Aaron ha-Levi of Barcelona. Dissension—in varying degrees of moderation or violence—was always and still remains to a great extent an inextricable element of halakic research and writing. Yet, the constancy of the eristic element notwithstanding, Rabad seems to have set an all-time record in this respect. From his *Issur ve-Heter* through his critical annotations on Joseph ibn Plat's famous responsum, his reverent yet forthright critique of Alfasi and his animadversions against Razah and Maimonides, Rabad moved constantly in an arena of controversy and debate. Regardless of whether there were pressing practical implications to the debate or whether the only issue at stake was academic truth and logical exactitude, Rabad saw and stressed the necessity for incessant discussion, qualification, and reevaluation. Only such interminable refinement of views would yield a measure of truth.

Rabad was not only committed to debate in practice but seems to have cultivated a certain theoretical conception of what might be called amicable disagreement, by means of which he justifies his predilection for polemics. In his early epistolary dispute with Razah, Rabad defends his occasional lapse into harshness by presuming to follow a Spanish precedent: He disclaims any intent of personal degradation or *ad hominem* argumentation. Spanish scholars, he avers, "love each other exceedingly but when they debate an halakic issue they appear to be implacable enemies."¹³ He assures Razah that he desires their intellectual relationship to be guided by the custom of the Spaniards. It is interesting to note that, although Razah refused to acknowledge the prevalence of such a custom among Spanish scholars,¹⁴ in the introduction to his commentary on *Kinnim*, whose sole purpose was to subject Rabad's parallel commentary to a relentless scrutiny, he echoes a similar apology. His objective was to refute those assertions which were logically inadmissible, for "this is the measure of the Torah—love of kindness and paths of peace. The ultimate end of its battles is love and peace."¹⁵ Personal prejudice, he avows, is totally absent. He merely pleads for an objective hearing and evaluation of his views.

This theme is further developed by Rabad in the prefatory remarks

13. *Dibre ha-Ribot*, 30: שהם אוהבים זה לזה ובהוהכחם על דבר תורה נראים כאויבים זה לזה. See *Kiddushin*, 30b: *Abot de R. Nathan*, ch. 1.

14. *Dibre ha-Ribot*, 47: ומנהגי ספרד שאמרת לא ראייתם ולא שמעתם מעולם שיש בו רעה תחת טובה וקלון תחת כבוד והמנהג הזה לא לספרדים כי אם לסר פריד הם ש"ג בהם ואיש כי יגע בהם.

15. *Kinnim Commentary*, introduction: לפנינו משיבין לפנינו דאל ישר בעיניו להסתיר פניו ולאטום אוניו . . . וכן מדה התורה באהבת חסד ונחיתות שלום וטוב מלחמותיה אהבה ושלום.

to his critique of Alfasi. In a reverent tone, similar to that of Razah toward him, Rabad underscores the "ubiquitous need for disagreement." Only for the sake of objectivity and veracity did he vanquish his natural reluctance to cross swords with such an intellectual giant as Alfasi. There were many points on which he could not possibly concur with Alfasi and their mutual cause of "making the Torah great and glorious" would be best served by a frank avowal of their differences.¹⁶ It was the same solicitousness for the cause of independent investigation and reasoning that motivated Rabad's indictment of the *Mishneh Torah* as an arbitrary codification of law which presented the reader with a definitive, monolithic interpretation and implicitly demanded that others relinquish their scholarly prerogative of weighing the cogency of divergent conclusions, assessing the reasoning behind them, and reaching a decision on the basis of independent judgment. Rabad naturally refused to acquiesce in such a scheme and it was this refusal which gave rise to the *hassagot*.

If Rabad believed this eristic conception to be generally valid and beneficial—witness his approbatory reference to Spanish precedent—it was particularly appropriate for a person of his temperament and intellect. His innate creative faculties, of which he was fully cognizant were supplemented and further nourished by an exemplary assiduousness and total devotion to study. He felt consequently that he was intellectually superior and his tireless efforts in study deserved recognition. In a supposedly sincere tone which nevertheless appears supercilious, he consoles Razah for not being able to compete with him scholastically and for not penetrating into the depth of his statements:

How much sleep have I kept from my eyes and how much food have I spoiled by not eating it in time as a result of my engagement in the study of Torah. My fat and blood, intestines and heart—I devoted all to it. Consequently, be not angry if you do not overtake me in attention and understanding.¹⁷

Such unabashed self-commendation and its concomitant spirit of independence understandably made for frequent disagreement—often couched in harsh terms.

One gets the impression, moreover, that this sense of independence and self-esteem was occasionally so extreme that it warped his view of

16. *Hassagot* on Alfasi, *Ketubot*, 14b.

17. *Dibre ha-Ribot*, 31.

the role of polemics and resulted in onesidedness. Being so sure of himself, so confident in his talents and proud of his achievements, he was not inclined to accept criticism supinely. It almost appears as if the polemics were restricted to a one-way route, leading from him to others. He must have been sustained in this feeling by the deferential attitude generally shown him. Consequently, his view on the role of polemics notwithstanding, when some colleagues or disciples differed with him—as, for example, Meir b. Isaac of Trinquetaille,¹⁸ Razah, or the sages of Béziers¹⁹—he denounced them forcefully. Such blunt disparagement of colleagues and correspondents did not in the least diminish their reverence and deference to Rabad. They accepted his criticism in stride.²⁰

Yet, while he was undoubtedly a proud and powerful person, he was not hard or cantankerous. Much of his apparently excessive stridency of expression must be assigned to conventional stylistic usage. Unreserved criticism, even to the extent of satire and defamation of character, was a commonplace in medieval literature not only among avowed antagonists but also among friends, even relatives.²¹

In addition to this external qualification, the immediate effect of this harshness is offset by the presence of some internal, alleviating factors. Despite the halakic polemics and stylistic belligerency, which usually went hand in hand, Rabad seems to have been eminently fair, “acknowledging the truth and seeking the truth in his heart.” Just as his admiration and acceptance are invariably tempered by dissent, so is his criticism flavored with praise and acclamation. He saved many a kind word for Razah and Maimonides. It is almost as if he were allocating what seemed to him to be just proportions of praise and criticism.

Moreover, Rabad possessed that sterling quality of fairness which, according to the Talmud, was responsible for the ultimate acceptance and authoritativeness of the opinions propounded by the school of Hillel against those of the school of Shammai: “what was it that entitled Beth Hillel to have the halakah fixed in agreement with their rulings? Because they . . . studied their own rulings and those of Beth Shammai and even presented those of Beth Shammai before their

18. Ha-Me'iri, *Bet ha-Behirah* on *Abot*, 67; see ch. V.

19. *TD*, 113.

20. At first Razah resented this very much. See *Dibre ha-Ribot*, 29: ואני בראשית דברי עשתי עצמי כאחד מקטני תלמידיך ואהא לקחת הדברים כפשוטן וחרשת על גבי והארכת למעניתך. Later, the stridency is almost assumed; see introduction to his *hassagot* on *BH*.

21. See Chapter III, §4, and my remarks in *Tarbiz*, XXVI (1956), 220.

own.”²² Rabad did the same. Instead of launching a frontal assault on the position of his adversary, he first fortifies this position by analyzing its foundations. Rather than dismiss the discredited view—whose original formulation might sometimes be inaccessible to the interested student—with a curt reference, Rabad brings a sufficiently lengthy exposition to enable the reader immediately to judge the validity of the conflicting views. In his disagreement with Judah b. Barzilai, Rabad quotes him accurately and impartially.²³ When he sides with Barzilai against his grandfather, he meticulously reproduces the view and supporting arguments of his grandfather.²⁴ The heart of his essay on the “power of attorney” is prefaced by a neat, objective presentation of the four views already promulgated in this connection.²⁵ Many *hassagot* on the *Mishneh Torah* are introduced by a clarification of Maimonides’ intention and only subsequently does he register his reservations or dissensions.

He goes one step further. When a writer based his argument on an earlier source which he refers to parenthetically or paraphrases only partially, Rabad fills in all the gaps in the reproduction of this view. Then he attacks it with his usual argumentative skill and demolishes it. For instance, Razah in one place quotes Hai Gaon and with the strength of this reference refutes Alfasi’s statement. Rabad, who prefers Alfasi’s view and wishes to vindicate it, first amplifies Hai Gaon’s statement, which Razah described only cursorily, then demonstrates the superiority of Alfasi’s view and does away with Razah’s critique.²⁶ Rabad’s attitude toward his halakic opponents, in short, is analogous to that of Hasdai Crescas toward his philosophic opponents: “not wishing to appear as if he were arguing in the absence of his opponent, he felt it was necessary for him to present Aristotle’s case before trying to demolish it.”²⁷

This clarification, a gracious gesture of intellectual generosity, is not offered exclusively as a prelude to criticism. Rabad also elaborates and elucidates statements with which he concurs but which he feels are too brief or obscure. For instance, he commends an explanation which Razah adduced for a vague theory of Alfasi, but his own didactic and analytic sense—as well as his sense of fairness—was not satisfied by

22. *Erubin*, 13b.

23. *TD*, 62.

24. *Ibid.*, 12.

25. *Ibid.*, 61.

26. *KS*, I, 51; *Hassagot, Berakot*, 24a.

27. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle* (Cambridge, Mass., 1929), 3.

Razah's presentation: "He did not illuminate it adequately and one who is not an expert will not benefit from his words."²⁸ Rabad then supplied the necessary "illumination." He frequently admits that Razah is heading in the right direction but his gropings have to be extended and Rabad extends them.²⁹ Many more examples are found in his *Mishneh Torah hassagot*.

Another trait, while not contributing directly to the extenuation of harshness in Rabad's writings, acts as a general antidote to his apparent aggressiveness and overconfidence. Though a person of rigid independence and certitude, Rabad took to heart the Talmudic maxim "teach your tongue to admit 'I do not know.'" He was not reluctant, if necessary, to suspend judgment on a problem, ponder over its contents time and again, and display doubt. He admits that he frequently left a subject unsolved for "many days" until new light was shed on it. Sometimes he submitted a tentative explanation which was subsequently revised in the light of further study.³⁰ He states a well-known difficulty and then adds: "This matter annoyed me for many years until I reflected and observed that the Mishnah nowhere says."³¹ In this case it was the sudden abandonment of the stereotype approach to the text which allowed him to resolve the question. In the hassagah on a Maimonidean decision, identical with a similar decision of Alfasi which Rabad had previously refuted, he repeats the grounds of his rejection but continues: "this was our opinion for many years until I noticed again the beginning of the Baraita."³² This new text led him to reconsider. Finally—and this was the next logical step—he consented to leave a problem in abeyance if no satisfactory solution was forthcoming. In his *Baba Kamma* commentary he notes, in passing, that a certain view of Alfasi struck him as problematic, but he does not reveal the nature of the difficulty. Approximately two decades later, in his *Mishneh Torah hassagot*, he indicates what aspects of the view disturbed him—and he candidly admits that he still had found no way to resolve the difficulty.³³ He simply does not know.

There is also in Rabad—as he reveals himself in his theoretical con-

28. *KS*, I, 10: טוב הוא הפירוש אבל הוא לא האיר אותו כל צורך ומי שאינו בקי לא יועיל מדבריו.

29. *Ibid.*, I, 19, 20, and others; also *Hassagot, Sukkah*, 12a.

30. *KS*, II, 25; Rabad, *BK*, 61.

31. *Ibid.*, 110.

32. *MT, Shabbat*, XXV, 13; see also *Hassagot, Pesahim*, 10a.

33. Rabad, *BK*, 68; *MT, Hovel u-Mazik*, VII, 11. See also *Sifra Commentary*, 87b: ונפלאה דעת ממני ונשבחה לא אוכל לה עד יבא ויורה צדק לני.

ceptions and attitudes—a sustained, therefore significant, tendency to moderation. This dynamic person, outspoken and uncompromising, confident and determined, adopted a moderate stand as often as he did an extremist position. It is whimsical to dismiss Rabad as a Spartan halakist, rigidly exacting and doctrinaire. He was often a liberalizing influence, advocating greater latitude in observance or more lenient interpretation of the law.

The same is true in the realm of thought and *anschauung*; in the regrettably scarce comments on or allusions to philosophical and ethical problems, there is marked, even preponderating moderation. For example, when seen in perspective, his polemical comments on the question of anthropomorphism espouse an intermediate, conciliatory view. There were three possibilities. The uncompromising rationalists insisted upon the unequivocal propagation of the abstract God-idea, free of all corporeal allusions. They contended that none of the anthropomorphic or anthropopathic expressions in Scripture were to be interpreted literally. Anyone who is misled by the literal sense of certain Scriptural verses into accepting divine corporeality has fallen into notorious error, bordering on outright heresy. On the other hand, a small group of simple-minded traditionalists and extreme literalists maintained that belief in the corporeality of God was a perfectly sound doctrine. Scriptural passages and rabbinic homilies abound in descriptions of God in terms of qualities, affections, and emotions characteristic of human beings and under no circumstances is such a belief to be considered reprehensible. The majority of medieval thinkers held an intermediate view. Anthropomorphic attributes were used metaphorically, to vivify the subject matter and facilitate its comprehension. Belief in the corporeality of God was certainly absurd. However, any person who accepts such anthropomorphic statements literally as a result of his inability to think in abstract terms or professes a belief in the corporeality of God because he cannot extricate himself from materialistic conceptions should not be condemned. To each according to his intellectual comprehension and rational faculties. This moderate view was shared by Rabad.³⁴

Rabad's ethical views, as sketched in the *Sha'ar ha-Kedushah* of the *Ba'ale ha-Nefesh*, are also realistic and moderate.³⁵ There is no extreme

34. *Ibid.*, *Teshubah*, III, 7; see Chapter VI, §2.

35. *BH*, 81, 87, and others. Note especially the three-fold classification of motives or intentions which elevate and legitimize sexual intercourse; see page 92, n. 157.

pietism nor are demands made for any form of asceticism. He tacitly assents to Maimonides' repeated formulations of the golden mean theory.³⁶ In depicting the interminable conflict which goes on in man between good and evil as a conflict between the irrational soul and the rational soul or between the evil imagination and the good imagination, Rabad employs the conventional terminology found in medieval philosophy.³⁷ Carnal appetites—the discussion centers for the most part on sexual indulgences—are to be satisfied within a framework of “eudaemonistic prudence.” Lust is to be regulated, not extirpated; virtue means control, not extinction. Even in the nonascetic school, Rabad's attitude must be considered quite latitudinarian.

A very sententious animadversion against Maimonides affirms the same general moderation and earthly realism in matters of psychology and human conduct. In his enumeration of negative commandments, Maimonides includes the following: “That soldiers be not afraid nor fear their enemies in time of war, for it is said ‘Be ye not affrighted at them.’” Rabad adds: “This is a promise, not an admonition.”³⁸ It seems that Maimonides demands from man full and unconditional control of his emotions. Man must put a distance between himself and his emotions; he must be able, if necessary, to overcome his innermost drives. This is better understood in light of Maimonides' view concerning transgressions committed under compulsion or duress.³⁹ If man sins because of external compulsion—physical pressure, for instance—then not only is the deed not punishable but the doer is fully exonerated; if, however, man sins because of inner emotional fears or psychological weakness, the deed is not actually punishable but is considered theoretically culpable. Emotional pressures, which should be subject to control, are not as extenuating as physical pressures. Rabad obviously feels that such totalitarian control and self-discipline are unrealistic and unattainable. Man is not an automaton. Consequently, it seems improbable that Scripture should simply admonish man not to be afraid in battle and even couch this admonition in terms of a negative commandment, similar to such injunctions as not to desecrate God's name or not to forget the evil doings of Amalek. Rabad submits that “thou shalt

36. *MT*, *De'ot*, *passim*.

37. *BH*, 3, 80; see *Hobot ha-Lebabot*, ed. A. Zifroni, 245; Abraham ibn Ezra, *Commentary* on Ex. 23:25 and, generally, Wolfson, *Philo*, II, 268 ff.

38. *MT*, *Miqvot Lo Ta'aseh*, 58; see also *Melakim*, VII, 15; Nahmanides repeats Rabad's comment: *Bible Commentary*, *Deut.*, 20:4.

39. *MT*, *Yesode ha-Torah*, V.

not be affrighted at them” must be understood as a benevolent promise and divine commitment.

More illustrations of this sort, lifted from exegetical or halakic contexts,⁴⁰ are readily forthcoming but should not be cited loosely, for they may not always reflect cherished personal views. They frequently stem from compelling interpretative reasons rather than personal bias or conviction. One must proceed cautiously in the correlation of personal character traits with opinions expressed in the course of halakic discussion. What can presumably be asserted is that the presence of so many instances of moderation, especially in nonhalakic contexts, modifies further the picture of a perpetually frowning scholar, possessed of a harsh temperament and extremist tendencies.

In conclusion, Rabad's harshness was essentially a literary mannerism and did not too seriously affect personal relations. He can be envisaged as a poignant personality, caustic and witty, an individual of astounding force and energy, totally committed to rabbinic scholarship, confident in his erudition, firm in his convictions, weighty in his influence, but this did not isolate him or prevent his “disposition from being pleasant with people.”

5. Influence

The one indisputable, self-evident generalization to be inferred from a study of Rabad's life and activities is his importance for his generation; the forthcoming description and evaluation of Rabad's works will, in turn, underscore the importance of his legacy for successive generations. It almost seems gratuitous to proclaim that in terms of Jewish learning, he was a seminal personality. (הגותו הייתה פורצת דרך)

His influence on contemporaries was profound. I have specified various forms of Rabad's influence on his disciples, as well as the general stimulus which he provided for colleagues, correspondents, and casual acquaintances who eagerly awaited his decisions and opinions.¹ This was true, moreover, not only of devoted admirers but of antagonists and dissenters as well. It is all too natural that a former pupil, finding himself on one occasion at academic loggerheads with Rabad, should still retain a reverential attitude while pressing his own view.² It is more

40. E.g., *MT*, *Ḳeri'at Shema*, IV, 7 (see *Tosafot*, *Berakot*, 16b); *Zekiyah u-Matanah*, III, 8; *TD*, 56.

1. See Chapter V.

2. Ha-Me'iri, *Bet ha-Behirah* on *Abot*, 67.