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## The Copernican Revolution in the History of Interpretation of Job 28\*

**Abstract:** While the overwhelming majority of modern scholars assume that the unspecified subject of Job 28:1–11 is human, before the 13th century virtually all exegetes assumed that subject was divine. Thus, there was a major shift in the interpretation of Job 28. The first interpreter to have proposed an “anthropocentric” reading of the biblical chapter was Immanuel of Rome, whose commentary on Job remains unpublished. Here I offer a short summary of the “theocentric” commentaries and a brief intellectual profile of Immanuel, as well as a close reading of his interpretation of the chapter. This analysis shows that this reading was shaped by rationalistic and humanistic tendencies Immanuel had absorbed both from his own Jewish background and from early Renaissance Italy. Although the “theocentric” approach dominated the minds of readers who were closer in time to the biblical text than we are, the anthropocentric interpretation should ~~still~~ be preferred.

**Key words:** Immanuel of Rome, anthropocentric/theocentric, Humanism, medieval science, exegesis.

*Should a mirror be broken into many fragments, or parted into many pieces, the reflection shall appear in each and every one of them.*

From Judah Romano’s translation of Albert the Great’s *De forma resultante in speculo*.

The Salamanca poet and exegete Fray Luis de León read Job 28 as alluding to the discovery of America. Writing in Spain in the 1570s, he tells us that the entire chapter is about how “everything, however rare, however hidden, however intricate it may be, can be found and *is* found; wisdom, however, if God doesn’t provide it, can neither be found nor acquired.”<sup>1</sup> In this context, the opening section of the biblical chapter was intended to “relate, in an elegant and poetic manner, the many hidden things that . . . , sooner or later,

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1 Fray Luis de León, *Exposición Del Libro de Job*, ed. Javier San José Lera (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 1992) 616. My translation. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

human industriousness finds and discovers.”<sup>2</sup> The *crux interpretum* of v. 4 thus referred the eventual discovery of a “peregrine people” that had been divided up and covered by “a sea,” pointing,

as if it were with the finger, to the discovery of the New World, which was made in the age of our fathers. And this is a manifest prophecy of it, very appropriately placed here. For Job – intending to show ... everything is eventually found and discovered through industriousness – could not have uttered ... a more efficacious proof of what he was saying, than to certify that humans would eventually discover an entire world, for so many thousands of years covered and absconded.<sup>3</sup>

For decades, the return of gold-laden galleons and the fantastic stories of chroniclers had been feeding the European imagination about the strange continent, and Fray Luis’ ears were not impervious to the rumors. If Job had spoken about a land of fire (v. 5), it was because America was an igneous country, with “fire ... erupting suddenly and unthinkingly” out of its innumerable volcanoes; a land of sapphire and golden dust (v. 6) referred to “the abundance of precious stones” and the vast amounts of gold nuggets that could be found in the midst of its soil. In this New World, the human eye had indeed come to contemplate “every precious thing” (v. 10), for it was soon becoming clear the continent was home to incomparable riches.<sup>4</sup>

Most of all, Fray Luis was in awe of what this discovery represented: the unsurpassable potential of his own kind. The cosmological and cartographic knowledge of his age had become so sophisticated that it was now possible to traverse “immense seas” and reach (as Job 28:7 suggested) “a land so distant that not even those birds ... who fly through many regions in a short period of time” could ever see it.<sup>5</sup> “The diligence and the audacity of humanity” allowed for a wide range of exploits to be performed: to “overturn mountains ... and drill through crags, ... to penetrate the rivers and extract non-believable riches out of its entrails,” as implied by Job in 28:9, 11.<sup>6</sup>

Though Fray Luis’ interpretation of the biblical passage may seem a quaint historical curiosity today, it was the result of a crucial exegetical assumption that was only starting to become common in his time, but which has come to be shared by virtually all modern commentators: that the agent of the acts recounted at the outset of Job 28 – which is not explicitly identified in the Hebrew – is human and not divine.<sup>7</sup>

2 De León, *Exposición*, 616.

3 De León, *Exposición*, 618.

4 De León, *Exposición*, 618–621.

5 De León, *Exposición*, 620, 622.

6 De León, *Exposición*, 622.

7 The most important example of the growing popularity of this position in Fray Luis’

Job 28:3 reads *qets sam laḥoshekh u-lekhol takhlit hu' ḥoqer 'eben 'ofel ve-tsalmaḥvet* (he puts an end to darkness, and every limit he probes; dark and pitch-black stone). With its syntactical laconism and imagistic impressionism, and the lack of an explicit antecedent for the masculine pronoun *hu'*, this verse is pervaded by difficulty. When faced with obscure texts, readers are forced to rely on external information to reconstruct a coherent meaning, and as a result such reconstruction will often be tinged by the reader's own worldview. It is therefore intriguing that the assumption that Job 28:1–11 is talking about human activities was becoming common among Hebraist philologists living in the age of Erasmus. To what degree does this anthropocentric reading of those verses have its historical roots in European humanism?

The present study is an attempt to answer this question. Section 1 discusses the state of modern scholarship on the question of the agent in Job 28:1–11. Some scholars have already contrasted the human-centered approach with an ancient view that saw God as the unnamed focus of those verses.<sup>8</sup> But it has not been previously noted that this old opinion is not just one approach, but is reflected in virtually all available sources from before the 13th century, as shown here in Section 2. Thus, the first and perhaps most fundamental discovery of this study is that there was a major shift in the interpretation of Job 28. So far as I can tell, the first interpreter to have proposed an anthropocentric reading of the biblical chapter was Immanuel of Rome in the late 13th century. Section 3 presents a brief intellectual profile of this Italian commentator, as well as a close reading of his interpretation of Job 28. This analysis shows that Immanuel's novel interpretation is solidly grounded in the rationalistic and humanistic tendencies Immanuel had absorbed from his own Jewish background and from early Renaissance Italy. From this perspective, he emerges as a precursor of the approach that Fray Luis would come to emblemize. In fact, the continuity between Immanuel and Fray Luis is perceptible in a very concrete way, for, just as

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time is Luther's translation, *Die Bibel, Oder Die Ganze Heilige Schrift Des Alten Und Neuen Testaments Nach Der Deutschen Uebersetzung D. Martin Luthers* (Halle: Cansteinische Bibel-Anstalt, 1784) 545. See also, e. g., Johannes Brenz, *Hiob cum piis and eruditiss Ioannis Brentii commentariis* (Haugenau: Secerius, 1527) 223–4; Thomae de Vio Caietani, *In Librum Iob Comentarii* (Rome: Antonii Bladi Asulani, 1535) 82r; and, explicitly against this view, Ioannis Mercieri, *In Librum Iob* (Geneva: Eustathius Vignon, 1573) 116 r.

<sup>8</sup> See, e. g., N. H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job: A New Commentary* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1957) 396–7; Edward L. Greenstein, "The Poem on Wisdom in Job 28 in Its Conceptual and Literary Contexts," in *Job 28: Cognition in Context*, ed. Ellen Van Wolde (Leiden: Brill, 2003) 267–269.

the Spaniard made America emerge from the obscurity of v. 4, this Jewish-Italian poet had descried, in the imprecise grammatical contours of v. 3, a reference to another outlandish region: the North Pole.

## 1. The modern view

At least since the 18th century, biblical scholars have almost universally assumed that the actions described in Job 28:1–11 are those of human beings. It is not a coincidence that the first to disagree in modern times was N. H. Tur-Sinai, a rabbinically trained scholar who was aware that “Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and other early commentators related these verses to God.”<sup>9</sup> He first adopted this position in 1920, when he argued that the modern understanding of the chapter was the product of a faulty arrangement of the verses in the present form of the Masoretic text (MT). However, if one was “not misled by this unreliable succession,” ~~he said,~~ with his proposed rearrangement it was clear that “our chapter intends to praise God as the only master of wisdom.”<sup>10</sup>

Although the view attracted virtually no supporters,<sup>11</sup> Tur-Sinai stuck to this bold text-critical reconstruction in his Hebrew commentary of 1957, insisting that the only realistic candidate for the actions described in vv. 3–4 and 7–11 had to be supernatural and that similar activities were attributed to YHWH elsewhere in the Bible.<sup>12</sup> Yet subsequent scholarship continued to ignore his stance on this matter,<sup>13</sup> until Edward Greenstein published an essay that included a small section devoted to this question in 2003.<sup>14</sup> Although Greenstein did not deem it necessary to alter the present order of the text, he also felt that the verbs in 28:3–11 could only have God as their subject. Thus, for example, he said about v. 3 that “setting an end to

<sup>9</sup> N. H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job*, 396.

<sup>10</sup> Harry Torczyner (later Tur-Sinai), *Das Buch Hiob: Eine Kritische Analyse Des Überlieferten Hiobtextes* (Wien: R. Löwit, 1920) 197. For his proposed rearrangement of the verses, see 197–200.

<sup>11</sup> In 1925 Houtsma claimed to have arrived at the same conclusion independently; see M. Th. Houtsma, *Textkritische Studien Zum Alten Testament. I. Das Buch Hiob* (Leiden: Brill, 1925) 68.

<sup>12</sup> E. g. Job 26:10, Ps 74:15a. See Tur-Sinai, *Book of Job*, 396–402.

<sup>13</sup> An exception is Walter Michel, “The Ugaritic Texts and the Mythological Expressions in the Book of Job (Including a New Translation of Philological Notes on the Book of Job)” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1970) 408.

<sup>14</sup> Edward L. Greenstein, “The Poem on Wisdom in Job 28 in Its Conceptual and Literary Contexts,” 267–269.

darkness” was something only the deity could be expected to do.<sup>15</sup> Greenstein concluded that “these acts may have pale reflections in certain human activities, but it seems to me highly doubtful that any Biblical author ... would attribute the prerogatives of the divine creator to mere mortals. It is surely for this reason that ancient readers ... understood that the subject in Job 28:3–11 is God.”<sup>16</sup> Greenstein assumed that the consensus opinion of contemporary scholars stemmed from an anachronistic application of modernity’s more fluid conception of the categories of humanity and divinity.

Greenstein’s call to revive the old understanding of Job 28 was unsuccessful.<sup>17</sup> In fact, while many commentators have recognized that the language of vv. 1–11 evokes divine activity,<sup>18</sup> they resist this reading because they feel it makes poor contextual sense and/or is not rhetorically effective.<sup>19</sup> If the verses are about human activity, the skillful pen of the biblical author lifts us up in a celebratory *crescendo* of the technical and intellectual abilities that put humanity in such distinguished place in the natural world, to culminate in a disjunctive note in v. 12 (“But wisdom, where shall it be found?”), whose fronted subject abruptly breaks the tide of human self-assurance to remind us that we are, despite everything, excluded from the knowledge of wisdom. It may be more reasonable to think it is God who puts an end to darkness or overturns mountains, but in contrast to the dramatic modulations of the anthropocentric reading, the result of the theocentric approach is disappointingly flat; its interrogative refrain about the place of wisdom simply confirms what the reader already knew: that only God knows where to find wisdom.

15 Greenstein, “Poem,” 267–268.

16 Greenstein, “Poem,” 269.

17 Of the few scholars who are aware of his argument, not one is convinced by it. See Scott C. Jones, *Rumors of Wisdom: Job 28 as Poetry* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009) 70 f.; Lindsay Wilson, *Job* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015) 134; Michael V. Fox, “The Speaker in Job 28,” in *Essays in Honor of Choon Leong Seow on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. C. L. Seow and Scott C. Jones (Boston: De Gruyter, 2018) 21–38.

18 E. g., Roland Murphy, *Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 37; Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985) 397; Stephen A. Geller, “Where Is Wisdom? A Literary Study of Job 28 in Its Settings,” in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Baruch A. Levine and Ernest S. Frerichs (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 159.

19 Hankins, for example, believes that while “empirical evidence unequivocally supports” the view that the activities in vv. 3–11 are typically divine, this must be rejected for reasons of literary coherence and rhetorical effectiveness. Davis Hankins, “Wisdom as an Immanent Event in Job 28, Not a Transcendent Ideal,” *Vetus Testamentum* 63 (2013) 216.

## 2. An old assumption

The ancient position that the subject of Job 28:1–11 is divine was expressed in sources from worlds as far removed as Hellenized Egypt and late medieval Paris, by writers as different as Gregory the Great and Abraham Ibn Ezra. For centuries this interpretative stance remained unchanged, one common denominator behind vastly different readings of the text. It is in part because of its great diversity that this early exegetical history is worth revisiting. But it is equally important because it allows one to see how this history came to a critical point with the development of rationalistic/literalist hermeneutics, when interpreters who still embraced a theocentric approach began to perceive a tension in that reading – a tension that ultimately resulted in the radical interpretative shift we are exploring.

The theocentric approach to Job 28:1–11 is first attested around the second century BCE, in the Greek translation of the Septuagint.<sup>20</sup> Although the oldest layer of the Septuagint of Job 28 is significantly shorter than MT,<sup>21</sup> this interpretative stance can already be perceived there. While the translator faithfully reproduced the lack of specificity of the subject of v. 3a (*taxin etheto skotei*, “he imposed an order on darkness”), his rendering of the Hebrew *qets* as *taxis*, meaning “order” or “regularity,” already implies that he thought the Hebrew writer was speaking about God – specifically, the divine manipulation of natural substances and the emergence of celestial order.<sup>22</sup> That a higher power was in view in the opening of the chapter is made clear by the rendering of 28:11, where the agent “uncovered (*anekalypsen*) the rivers’ depths (*bathe*) and exposed his own power (*edeixen de heautou dynamin*) into the light.”<sup>23</sup> This, as Takamitsu Muraoka suggests, points to “God’s self-revelatory act.”<sup>24</sup>

20 For the date of composition, see John Gray, “The Massoretic Text of the Book of Job, the Targum and the Septuagint Version in the Light of the Qumran Targum (11Qtarg-Job)” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 86 (1974) 339.

21 Reflecting only 1–3a, 4b–c, 9b–13, 20–21a, 22b–26a and 27b.

22 In Job 38:12, *taxis* appears in a similar cosmological context, where it translates *makom* and refers to the “post” of the morning star. In Hab 3:11b it translates *zebul* and refers to the stable course of the moon, and in Judg 5:20 it points to the stellar trajectories (*mesillot*) that do battle against Sisera. The only other instance of *taxis* rendering *qets* occurs in Job 16:3, where Job rhetorically asks whether there is any “order to windy words” (compare 2 Mac 9:18 and Prov 31:25). Symmacus later offered a more literal translation of the Hebrew *qets*: *prothesmia*, “appointed time.”

23 For the logic behind this translation, see Edouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (Nashville: Nelson, 1967) 405.

24 Takamitsu Muraoka, “Words of Cognition in Job 28,” in *Job 28: Cognition in Context*, ed. Ellen Van Wolde (Leiden: Brill, 2003) 97.

Like the Septuagint, ancient translations and glosses of the unit tended to keep the subject of Job 28:3 anonymous. But in their renderings of difficult expressions, translators left us valuable clues as to their understanding of the text. In 28:7–8 the Hebrew speaks of a path unseen by birds and untrodden by what it calls *benei shaḥats*. Most modern commentators interpret this as an allusion to some kind of fierce creature<sup>25</sup> and explain that not even impressive beasts can surpass the exploratory capabilities of humans. Yet the author of the traditional Aramaic Targum did not share this interpretation, for he saw in the *benei shaḥats* a reference to *benei de'adam* (human beings) themselves.<sup>26</sup> A similar point can be made with regard to the Vulgate, which speaks here of *filiu institorum* (merchants).

### 2.1. Greek and Latin Exegesis

Both Greek and Latin Patristic writers followed the same interpretation in their commentaries. Already in the 4th century, Julian the Arian understood Job 28:3 as an allusion to the omnipotence of God: “For I, says God, I am the maker of light and darkness.”<sup>27</sup> About a hundred years later, Olympiodorus of Alexandria read the laconic statement as an affirmation of the all-embracing nature of divine wisdom: “Wisely God discerns every boundary and limit, comprehending (*sumperilambanon*) everything with incomprehensible (*aperilepto*) foresight.”<sup>28</sup>

Their contemporary John Chrysostom offered two alternative readings of 28:3, both of which presume God to be its subject. If the emphasis is put on cosmic ordering (28:3a), the point is that “God, who has put all things of the world into order (*taxis*), takes great care of human affairs and attends to their doings, and nothing happens simply and at random;” if it is put on knowledge (28:3b), it emerges that “God’s plan (*oikonomia*) is inscrutable (*adelos*), for silver and gold have their place, but nobody knows the place of wisdom.”<sup>29</sup>

25 Cf. BT Sanh. 95a.

26 David M. Stec, ed., *The Text of the Targum of Job: An Introduction and Critical Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1994) 184\*. This Targum has been roughly dated to the first half of the first millennium CE (Gray, “Masoretic,” 332).

27 Dieter Hagedorn, ed., *Der Hiobkommentar Des Arianers Julian* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1973) 169.

28 Olympiodor Diakon von Alexandria, *Kommentar Zu Hiob*, ed. Ursula Hagedorn and Dieter Hagedorn (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1984) 231.

29 Johannes Chrysostomos, *Kommentar zu Hiob*, ed. Ursula Hagedorn and Dieter Hagedorn (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990) 148.

Whether it is by God's providential care, creative power or unsurpassable intellect, these Greek commentators saw the statement of putting in order as a description of a divine quality. By contrast, the anonymous author of an opinion preserved in the Greek catenae related the verse to a future teleological event, offering the first Christological interpretation of the verse: God *will* put end of darkness "until Christ's return."<sup>30</sup>

The theocentric approach to Job 28 is also typical of early Latin commentaries: in their heavily allegorical exegesis, Augustine, Jerome and Gregory the Great identified the subject of the passage with God.<sup>31</sup> Jerome understood the "end of darkness" (v. 3) to refer to God's punishment of the wicked, explaining that in the figurative language of "the divine Scriptures ... darkness is called sin."<sup>32</sup> In his *Morals on Job*, Gregory understands Job 28 as the immediate continuation of Job's speech on the lot of the wicked; for this pioneer of large-scale evangelization, our verse implied that God had set bounds to the wicked by bringing the light of the Church into the world.<sup>33</sup>

It was only with Albert the Great's 13th-century commentary that the enduring influence of the allegorizing method epitomized by Gregory began to wane.<sup>34</sup> Albert's literalism and scientificism are manifest in his Aristotelian hermeneutical method, in which he identifies larger units of meaning and schematically dissects them into their constitutive parts.<sup>35</sup> One such unit is Job 28:1–11, which seeks to express "the profound wisdom of the things that are generated in the depths."<sup>36</sup> Albert has Job speak like a scientist, both establishing that the source of precious metals is deep in the ground and describing their place of origin.<sup>37</sup> Thus, when Job claims that "He sets a time in darkness," he means that "God sets the time/circumstance of their [the metal's] generation in the dark."<sup>38</sup>

Aquinas, Albert's most famous disciple, affirms in the prologue to his commentary on Job that the book's central teaching is that "human reality

30 Ursula Hagedorn and Dieter Hagedorn, eds., *Die älteren griechischen Katenen zum Buch Hiob* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000) 59.

31 For Augustine, see *Patrologia Latina (PL)* 34:854. For Jerome, *PL* 26:738.

32 *PL*, 113:827.

33 Pope Gregory I, *Morals on the Book of Job*, vol. 2 (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1845) 348–349.

34 Lawrence L. Besserman, *The Legend of Job in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

35 Albertus Magnus, *Comentarii in Iob*, ed. Melchior Weiss (Freiburg im Breisgau: Sump-tibus Herder, 1904) 306–307.

36 Albertus Magnus, *Comentarii*, 307.

37 Albertus Magnus, *Comentarii*, 307–308.

38 Albertus Magnus, *Comentarii*, 309.

is ruled by divine providence.”<sup>39</sup> This presupposes the superiority of God’s knowledge, which is why 28:1–11 is dedicated to showing that “the majority of things which are hidden from men are subject to divine knowledge.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, divine disposition has determined a fixed time for darkness.<sup>41</sup> Vv. 4–8 speak of other things that remain inaccessible to man, but the things that remain beyond our grasp “do not escape the notice of God,” for he has the power and wisdom to “overturn mountains ... cut out rocks ... and see the precious things which lie hidden” (vv. 9–11).<sup>42</sup>

A generation after Aquinas, growing interest in the literal sense of Scripture inspired Nicholas de Lyra to identify the subject of Job 28:3a with “God, who orders the succession of days and nights.”<sup>43</sup> However, he was starting to perceive a tension in this interpretation. For, since he was convinced that vv. 1–2 were about how precious metals can “be found by means of human toil and application,” his theocentric reading of v. 3 required a sharp turn in subject. De Lyra tried to alleviate the tension by explaining that v. 3 was a parenthetical remark, reminding us that our capacity to survey the depths is nothing compared to God’s.<sup>44</sup> But others would begin to feel that the hermeneutical pressure was not resolved.

## 2.2. Jewish Exegesis

The earliest exegetical evidence of a theocentric reading of our passage in the Jewish tradition is found in midrashic literature, where Job 28:3 is understood as an expression God’s wise management of creation. Commenting on *miqqets shnatayim yamim* (at the end of two full years) in Gen 41:1, Genesis Rabbah (ca. 400 CE)<sup>45</sup> notes an inter-textual link with Job 28:3a:

*He puts an end (qets) to darkness: a period has been set for how many years the world will spend in obscurity ('ofel) ... as long as the evil inclination (yetser ha-ra') exists in the world there is obscurity and gloom ('ofel vetsalmavet).*<sup>46</sup>

39 Thomas Aquinas, *The Literal Exposition on Job: A Scriptural Commentary Concerning Providence*, ed. Martin D. Jaffe and Anthony Damico (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989) 31.

40 Aquinas, *Literal Exposition*, 332.

41 Aquinas, *Literal Exposition*, 332.

42 Aquinas, *Literal Exposition*, 334.

43 *Biblia Sacra cum Glossa Interlineari, Ordinaria. Et Nicolai Lyrani Postilla, atque Moralitatibus, Burgensis Additionibus, and Thoringi Replicis*, vol. 3 (Venice, 1588) 52r.

44 *Biblia Sacra cum Glossa Interlineari*, 52v.

45 For this approximate date, see Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis: A New American Translation* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985) x.

46 Enoch Zondel ben Joseph, ed., *Midrash Rabbah: 'al Chamishah Chumshe Torah*

Thus, the *qets* in Job 28:3 refers to the divinely allotted timespan for the duration of darkness/evil.<sup>47</sup>

In Rashi's estimation, Job 28 is a continuation of the protagonist's speech on the lot of the wicked in Job 27:13–23. Against the midrashic idea that 28:3 implies God puts an end to evil, Rashi understands the verse's language of obscurity, totality and termination to indicate that at a future time God will unleash the forces of darkness to punish the wicked, and he interprets vv. 4–5 as allusions to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Thus, for him the preposition *lamed* in *qets sam laḥoshekh* introduces the purpose of the action – that is, God sets an end “for” (not “to”) darkness: “God has set an end/time when the darkness will prevail (*qets sam ha-maqom matai tihyeh ha-ḥoshekh*), for the heavens will dissipate and the earth will be worn out (Isa 51:6); he fathoms the end of everything.”<sup>48</sup>

The primary reason Rashi connected the divine actions of Job 28 with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is that *vetaḥteha nehepakh kemo-esh* (“and its underneath is turned over as if by fire,” Job 28:5) is strongly reminiscent of the description of the destruction on the sinful cities in Gen 19:24–25 and Deut 29:22, which refer both to “fire” and to “turning over.” This inter-textual link, first identified in the Talmud (Sanh. 109b), is a typical feature of many theocentric readings of Job 28 by medieval Jewish exegetes. It appears already in Saadia, for whom Job 28:1–11 contains a “description of the tenor of God's treatment of the world, how He takes a land in which there had been wheat and *food* (v. 5), mines of *gold, silver, copper and iron* (vv. 1–2), and transforms it into a fiery inferno, as he did with Sodom.”<sup>49</sup> Rabbeinu Tam mentions the episode in his commentary to vv. 4–5 and explicitly identifies the unspecified subject of Job 28:1–11 in his gloss of v. 10, where he writes that “the Almighty extends his hands and turn mountains from their root.”<sup>50</sup> Rashbam, too, reads 28:3 as a direction allusion to God's destruction of the people of Sodom.<sup>51</sup> Gersonides, in his

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*Ve-Chamesh Megilot. 'Im Ha-Perushim 'Ets Yosef, 'Anaf Yosef, Ve-Yad Yosef*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Ch. Yagshel, 2006) 453 (89:1).

47 An analogous interpretation appears in the Zohar's discussion of the same *parasha*. Relatedly, Job 28:3b is understood to have another subject: not God, but the Satan himself; see Daniel Chanan Matt, ed., *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004) 3.180.

48 Menachem Cohen, ed., *Mikra'ot Gedolot Ha-Keter* (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1992; www.mgketer.org/tanach/29/28/1) ad loc.

49 L. E. Goodman, *The Book of Theodicy: Translation and Commentary on the Book of Job by Saadia Ben Joseph Al-Fayyumi* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) 331.

50 *Mikra'ot Gedolot*, ad loc.

51 *Mikra'ot Gedolot*, ad loc.

1325 commentary, has a different interpretation, but asserts that God sets an end to all the things that exist in nature (v. 3).

The theocentric reading of Job 28 is also characteristic of the Judeo-Spanish exegetical tradition. Ibn Ezra's commentary, composed during his stay in Rome, also assumes that 28:1–11 is describing divine actions, for he summarizes this section by saying that "God does one thing and its opposite, giving good things to the wicked, but also paying him back with bad things."<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, for Nachmanides, Job 28 teaches that God revealed all things to man "except the wisdom which he contemplated during the creation of humans, for he concealed that wisdom from all creatures."<sup>53</sup> Thus, vv. 1–2 imply "that he knew and showed humans how to find silver in the depths of the mountains," and v. 3 that "God set an end to darkness, and made it [the limit] known to humans."<sup>54</sup>

In their 12th-century commentaries, both Yosef and Moses Kimhi assume the subject of the actions in 28:3–11 is divine. For the former, verses 4 and 10 describe the foundational moment when God caused rivers and waterways to emerge from the watery depths, and v. 5 asserts that God punishes the wicked, through its allusion to Sodom and Gomorrah. For the latter, the intent of the whole chapter is to argue that although men can find the source and location of "metals, river springs, plants and precious stones, the location of wisdom is unknown to humans."<sup>55</sup> And so, although the unit begins with two verses centered on the human capacity to find precious metals, in vv. 3 f. the book turns to describe actions whose author has to be divine. Hence, the all-powerful "he" that was capable of probing the furthest limits of the cosmos (v. 3) also had to be behind the feats described vv. 4, 9–10, all of which are well beyond human strength.<sup>56</sup>

For reasons that will become evident, we conclude our exegetical survey in Italy. For Isaiah di Trani (first half of the 13th c.), the point of Job's discourse about wisdom was condensed in its last verse (28:28): piety and righteousness are the only form of wisdom one can hope to attain, for "it is not for humans to explore the wisdom of the heavens and the world." Thus, v. 3 is read as saying that the entirety of worldly existence is determined by God, who "investigates all things and fixes their end."<sup>57</sup>

52 Mariano Gómez Aranda, *El comentario de Abraham Ibn Ezra al Libro de Job* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2004) 52\*.

53 Cf. 28:23–27. Haim Dov Chavel, ed., *Kitve Rabenu Moshe Ben Nahman* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kuk, 1959) 77–78.

54 Chavel, *Kitve Rabenu Moshe Ben Nahman*, 78.

55 Moses Kimhi, *Commentary on the Book of Job*, 70.

56 M. Kimhi, *Commentary*, 71.

57 *Mikra'ot Gedolot*, ad loc.

A significant change comes with the extensive commentary on Job written by Zerahiah in Rome in the last quarter of the 13th century. Zerahiah was an émigré from Barcelona whose thought was profoundly influenced by Maimonides and Ibn Tibbon, and whose interest in philosophy and science, amply reflected in his Job commentary, is also attested by his translations of Galen, Avicenna, Aristotle and Al-Farabi.<sup>58</sup> Priding himself on being the first commentator to perceive the true meaning of Job 28,<sup>59</sup> he proposed that the text in no way implied that wisdom was out of reach for humans; it could be acquired through “the individual intellect which clings to the soul” – “not a thing to be found in a specific place.”<sup>60</sup> And so, the question “where should it [wisdom] be found?” was posed only “in order to inform us that the reality of wisdom is unlike the realities of natural objects, which have a known location.”<sup>61</sup>

Going against the grain of traditional interpretations, then, Zerahiah understood Job 28 to be affirming the extraordinary human capacity to partake of a “wisdom whose source is linked to the Creator.”<sup>62</sup> And yet, he still identified the unspecified subject of chapter’s first section with God. However, he did not read the relevant verses as celebrations of God’s wise manipulation of nature. Instead, he claimed the intent of these opening verses was to establish, by means of contrast, “that all bodies have a specific place, but everything that does not have a body does not have a specific place.”<sup>63</sup> It is in this context that 28:3 speaks of “darkness,” alluding to the ontologically shadowy world of matter, where “every body is transient (*ba’al qets*).”<sup>64</sup> Similarly, the claim that “he seeks to the farthest limit” refers to the fact that “the Creator” knows the history and the quality of the formation of every natural object that has shape. For Zerahiah, it is still God who is invoked in the Job’s description the material realm.

But his explicit claim that the biblical text does not imply that humans are excluded from wisdom represents an important transitional step in the

58 On Zerahiah’s work and thought, see Aviezer Ravitzky, “The Hypostasis of Divine Wisdom” (Hebrew), *Italia* 3 (1982) 16–21; “Zerahiah Ben Isaac Ben Shealtiel,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 21.514–515; Lavinia Cohn-Sherbok and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Medieval Jewish Philosophy: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2005) 125–126.

59 “I have not encountered any commentator who perceived the intention of these verses, not even in one of them.” Israel Schwarz, ed., *Tikvat Enosh* (Hebrew; Berlin: Hotsa’at ha-Mehaber, 1867) 258.

60 *Tikvat Enosh*, 257–258.

61 *Tikvat Enosh*, 257.

62 *Tikvat Enosh*, 258.

63 *Tikvat Enosh*, 258.

64 *Tikvat Enosh*, 258.

history of interpretation of Job 28. Indeed, as far as I have been able to tell, the earliest anthropocentric interpretation of Job 28 appears in the pages of a commentary composed by a Roman scholar who may well have studied under Zerachiah: Immanuel ben Solomon of Rome.<sup>65</sup>

### 3. The Turn: The Anthropocentric Interpretation of Job 28 by Immanuel of Rome<sup>66</sup>

#### 3.1. Intellectual profile

Immanuel ben Solomon (1261–1328) (or Manoello Giudeo, as he was known to his Christian contemporaries) was emphatically both a Jew and a Roman, and he relished in the riches of both worlds.<sup>67</sup> The dual aspect of his cultural identity is clearly reflected in his *Maḥberot* (Notebooks), the

<sup>65</sup> See Robert Eisen, *The Book of Job in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 266 n. 70. Ravitzky notes, however, that Zerachiah is not mentioned in any of Immanuel's writings (a bold claim, since many of them remain unedited) and thus his influence on the Italian may not be taken for granted; Aviezer Ravitzky, "Mishnato shel Zerachiah ben Shealtiel Hen vehahagut ha-Maimonit-Tibbonit ba-me'ah hashelosh esrei" ["The Thought of R. Zerachiah b. Isaac b. Shealtiel Hen and the Maimonidean Tibbonian Philosophy in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century"] (Hebrew; PhD diss., Jerusalem, 1977) 108–119. Much of this debate hinges on the question of whose translations of Aristotle's *Book of the Soul* and *Book of Natural Hearing* were known to Immanuel: Ibn Tibbon's or Zerachiah's. See Ann Brener, "Stealing Wisdom: A Story of Books (and Book-Thieves) from Immanuel of Rome's *Maḥbarot*," *Prooftexts* 28 (2008) 18.

<sup>66</sup> Soon after Immanuel, we find an anthropocentric interpretation of the chapter in the work of the 14th-century French polymath Abba Mari ben Eligdor. Eligdor's commentary, *Perush 'Iyob uma'ase bereshit*, which exists only in manuscript (Provence, 14th c., De Rossi, no 1372, Biblioteca Palatina of Parma, Italy.) Like Zerachiah's, it has a decidedly scientific and philosophical orientation. In his elaborate paraphrase of our chapter (fol. 26), Eligdor suggests that Job is casting his poetic discourse as a fictional dialogue with an "investigator" (*hoqer*). It is this *hoqer*, not God, "who probes into the secret of reality and puts an end to the darkness of the things that are sought; he probes every limit and finds a dark and pitch-black stone (fol. 26r). Shimon ben Zemah Duran (1361–1444) (1361–1444) appears to be the first to present the theocentric and anthropocentric interpretations as alternative readings; in *Ohev Mishpat* (Neubauer 127, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford) he focuses on compiling different interpretations (see esp. vv. 3, 9, and 11 in fols. 127v.–129r.).

<sup>67</sup> For Immanuel's life and thought, see Dov Jarden, ed., *Maḥberot Immanuel HaRomi* (Hebrew; 2 vols; Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1957) 1.xi–xxx; Umberto Cassuto, "Immanuel (Ben Solomon) of Rome," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 9.740–41; Isabelle Levy, "Immanuel of Rome and Dante," *Digital Dante* (<https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/history/immanuel-of-rome-and-dante-levy>); Fabian Alfie, "Immanuel of Rome, Alias Manoello Giudeo: The Poetics of Jewish Identity in Fourteenth-Century Italy," *Italica* 75 (1998) 308–311.

collection of poetry and rhymed prose he is most famous for, and a work which may therefore serve to sketch a brief intellectual profile of its author. On the one hand, the genre, style and prosody of the *Mahberot* reveal that Immanuel was educated in the school of the Judeo-Spanish tradition that scholars like Zerachiah had brought to Italy.<sup>68</sup> The work is ultimately rooted in the forms of Arabic poetry that writers like Ibn Gabriol, Judah Halevi and Judah al-Harizi had so successfully adapted into Hebrew; in its alteration between prose and poetry, the work as a whole is in essence a *maqama* and appears to have been modeled on al-Harizi's masterpiece, the *Tahkemoni*.<sup>69</sup> The content of the work also evinces important cultural interests and realities of learned Jews in 13th-century Italy. Ann Brener, for example, has pointed to a delightful story told in the *Mahberot* about a Rabbi from Toledo who comes to Perugia with hundreds of rare books in Hebrew and Arabic and naively entrusts them to the care of three bored young scholars.<sup>70</sup> This humorous tale, as Brener shows, brings to life a number of aspects that were characteristic of Immanuel's context: "the flow of knowledge from Spain to Italy," "the rage for Aristotelean philosophy," the centrality of the debate over Maimonidean rationalism, and the admiration for scholars like Ibn Tibbon, whose translations had made classical works of philosophy and natural sciences accessible to the Hebrew readership.<sup>71</sup>

On the other hand, Immanuel's *Mahberot* bear the unmistakable mark of the vernacular Italian literature in vogue during his time. Immanuel may have been the first to compose a sonnet in a language other than Italian,<sup>72</sup> and the *Mahberot* include as many as 38 of his Hebrew sonnets. There are also numerous examples of poetic forms like the *madrigale*, the *canzone* and the *servantese*,<sup>73</sup> as well as amusing and often sarcastic little tales with

68 "From Spanish poetry [Immanuel] got syllabified meter and the ornamentations that are proper to it" (Hebrew; Jarden, *Mahberot*, 1.xxxi).

69 Umberto Cassuto, "Immanuel (Ben Solomon) of Rome," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 9.740–741.

70 Brener, "Stealing," 1–27.

71 Brener, "Stealing," 2, 18–22. For Immanuel's interest in Aristotle, see also the dialogue where he flaunts knowledge of all his works: Jarden, *Mahberot*, 1.154–156. A memorable instance of the influence of Maimonidean thought on Immanuel is the poem from the fourth *mahberet* about the 13 Principles of Faith, which is in fact the source for the *piyyut* "Yigdal" that is included in the daily prayer book. Jarden, *Mahberot* 1.90–91 (see line 416).

72 Jarden, *Mahberot*, 1.xxxi. Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 154.

73 Fabian Alfie, "Immanuel of Rome, Alias Manoello Giudeo: The Poetics of Jewish Identity in Fourteenth-Century Italy," *Italica* 75 (1998) 309. Jarden, *Mahberot* 1.xxxi–ii.

realistic depictions of daily life in medieval Italy, reminiscent of Boccaccio.<sup>74</sup> No text demonstrates as memorably Immanuel's indebtedness to his Christian counterparts as the concluding unit of the *Maḥberot*, where Immanuel imitates Dante's masterpiece by embarking on a journey of his own through hell and heaven under the guidance, not of Virgil, but of Daniel.<sup>75</sup> But it is in Immanuel's love poetry that we find perhaps the most telling sign of his commitment to the intellectual trends of what came to be called early Renaissance humanism, and that is his participation in the most important literary movement of his time, the *dolce stil nuovo* – an aesthetic creed inaugurated by Guido Guinizelli in the second half of 13th century, which affirmed “the power of love as mediator of divine wisdom” and “the direct communication between the mistress and the Kingdom of God.”<sup>76</sup> Indeed, according to the careful analysis that Erich Auerbach devotes to this movement in his *Dante: Poet of the Secular World*, the new attitude towards earthly love expressed by the *stilnovisti* was the product of a “mimetic revival” that had been taking shape during the later Middle Ages. In the course of this revival, Auerbach tells us, the earlier tendency to disregard sensory appearance – observable in allegoresis and exempla – was progressively overcome. In its place, the emulation of cultural standards expressed in classical texts resulted in the “spiritualization of the earthly world which however retained its sensuous reality,” and a parallel conception of the individual life as the unique and most meaningful embodiment of one's spiritual destiny.<sup>77</sup>

Immanuel's intellectual profile and cultural milieu were thus vividly tinged with the spirit of an epochal transformation within the history of ideas – the very transformation that, on a more modest scale, appears to be emblemized in his novel exegetical approach to Job's discourse on wisdom. Our close reading of his commentary will show that this intellectual framework had a decisive role in his interpretation of Job 28:1–11.

74 Brener, “Stealing,” 1. See also David Malkiel, “The Inheritance Tale in Immanuel of Rome's *Maḥbarot*,” *Prooftexts* 16.2 (1996) 171.

75 For English, see *Tophet and Eden (Hell and Paradise) In Imitation of Dante's Inferno and Paradiso*, trans. Hermann Gollancz (London: University of London Press, 1921).

76 Erich Auerbach, *Dante, Poet of the Secular World*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: New York Review of Books, 2007) 27. See also Umberto Cassuto, *Dante e Manoello* (Florence: Società Tipografico-Editoriale, 1921) 60. From very early on, Immanuel's much shorter corpus of vernacular poetry earned him an association with *stilnovismo*, a fact that appears to be confirmed by his appearance in a number of “important compendia of lyric poetry of the Italian Middle Ages, particularly, of the *dolce stil nuovo*” (Alfie, “Immanuel,” 312). A fine and exhilarating example of Immanuel's *stilnovist* tendencies is found in the four sonnets that are exchanged during his courting of an irresistible nun (Jarden, *Maḥberot*, 1.50–70).

77 Auerbach, *Dante*, 19–28.

### 3.2. Immanuel's commentary

The anthropocentric thrust of Immanuel's commentary on Job 28:1–11 is clear from the synopsis with which he introduces it:

After mentioning the calamity that should be applied to the wicked, he [Job] returns to set down his complaints, and praises wisdom with a great encomium, saying: "See, it is a great marvel that everything in the world has a known place where it is found and from which it is taken, but we ignore the place of wisdom, as it is said later, *'But wisdom, where shall it be found?'*"<sup>78</sup>

Thus, for Immanuel, the first eleven verses launch in a direction that is brusquely altered by the first appearance of the refrain about wisdom in v. 12, which retroactively affects the meaning of what precedes it. Every thought expressed before the refrain must be read proleptically, as if it were the first, subordinate part of a longer sentence expecting a disjunctive "however." And this is why his exegesis of each verse invariably concludes with a line that says something along the lines of "humans can do X and Y, and yet, they cannot attain wisdom."

In Immanuel's eyes, vv. 1–11 make up a rich mosaic celebrating our extraordinary capacity to achieve all kinds of goals, notwithstanding their incredible difficulty. Even considering that our commentator always accompanies his descriptions of these heroic vignettes with the reminder that we nevertheless lack access to wisdom, the picture of humanity that emerges from this section could hardly be more flattering. Ranging from the faculty to conceive abstract shapes, to the physical ability to make water emerge from the depths of the soil, humankind's cognitive and technical skills are as sophisticated as they are all-encompassing. Here is how Immanuel understands the first two verses: despite the fact that silver, gold, copper and bronze are "heavy and precious" things that are "not found along with everything else," there are places in "certain mountains and valleys" where people "dig and extract" them, so that, incredibly, these absconded places become "not only known, but even famous!"<sup>79</sup> But that is not all: human expertise has even managed to determine the common (al)chemical composition of those metals. Hence, the verses not only teach that "all metals come from the earth," they also corroborate the remarkable discovery that gold, silver, copper and bronze result from very high-quality combinations of mercury and sulfur.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Fol. 82v. col. 1.

<sup>79</sup> Fol. 82v., cols. 1–2.

<sup>80</sup> Fol. 83r., cols. 1–2.

What did Immanuel have to say about v. 3? He still assumed that the subject of this line had to be God. At the same time, however, he has a unique grammatical understanding of it that also makes room for humans:

And after this it says: *he sets a limit to darkness*, which is to say that the Almighty sets a known limit and domain for darkness (*qets u-gbul yadu'a*); and it may be that darkness refers to obscure and hidden things. *And to every limit that it probes –* [“it” being] human understanding (*sekhel 'adam*). Which is to say: God sets a limit to darkness, and in the same way he sets a limit on the capacity of the individual intellect (*yekholet ha-sekhel ha-'enoshi*), so that it is able to successfully come to investigate each and every limit, except the limit of wisdom, which it cannot reach.<sup>81</sup>

Immanuel thus reads the verse as a continuous sentence with an asyndetic relative clause, where the relative pronoun *'asher* has been elided: *qets sam lahoshekh u-lekhol takhlit [ 'asher] hu' [= sekhel 'adam] hoqer –'eben 'ofel ve-talmavet*, meaning “He [God] puts a limit to darkness and to every limit [that] it [human understanding] explores – the dark and pitch-black stone.” This shadowy stone is therefore taken as exemplary of the extreme limits that human understanding is able to reach. And, in a surprising cosmological discussion about the Earth’s furthest latitudes, Immanuel identifies this limit with the North Pole: a geographical extremity where darkness prevails for six months. Here, then, is another emblematic instance of how far humanity can go. “Despite that these regions are uninhabited, human understanding can examine them,” Immanuel wrote. No one in 14th-century Italy would ever dream of setting foot on those distant lands, and yet, as he playfully commented, human understanding was able to “stand on their truth.”<sup>82</sup>

Now, the same species whose subtle intellect allows it to describe the planet’s conditions on the basis of abstract mathematical projections can also manipulate the forces of nature so that the face of the Earth is transformed beyond recognition. Immanuel’s two readings of v. 4 describe contrasting instances of the human manipulation of water – a contrast that demonstrates the impressive degree of our mastery. This verse, he says, might connote either the sudden disappearance of bodies of water (as a result of planned human intervention in the natural flow of watercourses) or their sudden appearance (through the deliberate extraction of groundwater and the creation of artificial pools or springs).<sup>83</sup> In a similar vein,

<sup>81</sup> Fol. 82v., col. 2.

<sup>82</sup> Fol. 82v., col. 2.

<sup>83</sup> In the first alternative, people are “shattering and breaking up a stream [to deviate it] from the place where it flows and advances,” with the result that “the waters that used to flow there are forgotten, because people’s feet are now able to walk” through a place that was once filled by those waters, which seem to have “disappeared from man – that

v. 5 points to yet another distinctive marker of civilization – agriculture – and celebrates the human capacity to determine the nature of a particular type of soil and distinguish between those that are “appropriate for labor or sowing” and those that are not.<sup>84</sup>

The exploration of what lies below our feet may render even more extravagant results, which is why the next line marvels at the discovery “of a place on Earth whose nature is such that the stones found there are sapphires” and other regions “in whose dust one may find gold.”<sup>85</sup> And “lest you think that those places ... are popular and famous locations with settlers, and this is why human inquiry can reach them,” vv. 7–8 make it clear that “the aforementioned places are unknown even to the bird of prey ... whose habit is to fly over strange, remote locations.”<sup>86</sup> The human quest for the unknown thus sets our species apart from all others – be it the soaring bird called *'ayyah*, the proud beasts called *bene shaḥats* or the “desert-dwelling” feline called *shaḥal*.<sup>87</sup> Humanity reigns undisputed at the crown of Creation.

In Immanuel’s reading, the text also expresses admiration of the subtle integration of inventiveness and strength involved in the sphere of craftsmanship. Commenting on v. 9, he says, “a person’s volition and the quality of intellect are such that he will even take hold of flint, which is hard rock, in order to take advantage of its toughness in the performance of various crafts; and similarly, he can overturn the root of the highest mountains.”<sup>88</sup> And, given how penetrating our intellectual faculties can be, this verse might just as well be allegorical, referring to the fact that the mind “examines that which is difficult, lofty, and mysterious.”<sup>89</sup> The same is the case with v. 10

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is, diminished and evaporated.” In the second reading, humans make “an opening for water to come out from the gathering place where it dwells” until the places where the water appears are forgotten, for “passersby do not walk on them.” And so, in this case the last clause refers to the disappearance of water from its underground source. Fol. 82 v., col. 2.

84 Immanuel offers two possibilities: the verse might be speaking of a single piece of land whose surface is fertile while its underside is extremely hot and dry, in which case it is remarkable that humans are able to determine what happens “in the depths of the earth.” “Or it [the verse] might be saying a *land which gives bread and* [another] *whose underside is overturned like fire*, in this sense: there are lands which are appropriate for sowing and there are other lands whose underside is changed like fire and which are not appropriate for labor or sowing.” Fol. 83r. col. 1.

85 Fol. 83r. col. 1.

86 Fols. 83r. col. 2–83v. col. 1.

87 Fol. 83v., col. 1.

88 Fol. 83v., col. 1.

89 These three qualities, Immanuel argues, are encoded in the mention of “flint and high mountains on account of their hardness and loftiness.” Fol. 83v., col. 1.

(“he breaks through the rocks of riverbeds”), which not only refers literally to the persistency involved in digging through rocky strata in search of subterranean waters,<sup>90</sup> but figuratively evokes the insatiable tenacity of the intellect, either because it moves from one intricate problem to the next, or because it remains unsatisfied with its ability to grasp the physical world and seeks also to “apprehend more abstract shapes than material ones.”<sup>91</sup> Whatever the reason, the result is that humans are able to contemplate every precious and hidden thing with the “eye of their mind.”<sup>92</sup> The literal and allegorical possibilities offered here are thus representative of the interpreter’s conception of the extraordinary range of human activity – at times imposing itself on matter, at times hovering on the domain of intangibles.

The empirical and the conceptual realms are again juxtaposed in Immanuel’s reading of v. 11. Its first, pragmatic half – “he blocks the source of streams” – refers to the highly developed techniques that prevent streams from leaking. What attracts Immanuel’s attention here is the ambitiousness of the enterprise: “It is not enough for him [man] to stop abundant leakage,” he even makes sure that the waterway is perfectly sealed so that “not even a drop, as small as a teardrop (*tipa q̄tana kedim’at habekhi*), comes out!”<sup>93</sup>

Immanuel presented another interpretative possibility for v. 11, one that is dependent on Ibn Ezra: “Or water sources (*nibkhe yam*) are what is referred as *bekhi* here, and the point is that the human makes one thing and its opposite (*’adam ya’ase dabar vehaphkho*), for sometimes he causes rivers to break through rocks, and other times he obstructs the water sources of the streams (*nibkhe ha-neharot*).”<sup>94</sup> Ibn Ezra is not only the unnamed source for the connection between *bekhi* and *nibkhe yam*,<sup>95</sup> he is also in the background of what follows immediately after. Ibn Ezra understood the first part of Job 28 as a series of contrasting divine actions meant to show the unpredictability of fortune, and he summarized the section thus:

God makes one thing and its opposite (*hamaqom ya’ase dabar vehaphkho*), giving good things to the wicked, but also compensating him with evil. Even the Earth’s locations vary: one piece of land blossoms, while another is dry. And man is incapable of knowing the reason for these situations – why this is so.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Already mentioned in the commentary on v. 4.

<sup>91</sup> Fol. 83v., col. 2.

<sup>92</sup> Fol. 83v., col. 2.

<sup>93</sup> Fol. 83v., col. 2.

<sup>94</sup> Fol. 83v., col. 2.

<sup>95</sup> See Job 38:16; Mariano Gómez Aranda, *El comentario de Abraham Ibn Ezra al Libro de Job*, 52\*.

<sup>96</sup> Aranda, *Comentario*, 52\*.

Immanuel thus copied the sentence from Ibn Ezra, but replaced its divine subject with a mortal one. This reads almost like a deliberate provocation. Not only does it demonstrate that Immanuel was aware of the existence of a diametrically different reading of the passage (a fact that his commentary neglects to mention), but that he had the audacity to ascribe to humans a scope and power of action that others thought could only be attributed to God.

In his commentary to v. 10, Immanuel spoke of the “eye of the mind” in reference to intellectual contemplation. He again applies the visual metaphor to the parallel statement in v. 11, “he brings to light every hidden thing.” Reminding his readers of the old rhetorical equation whereby “the clear, known thing is called light, whereas the uncertain, convoluted thing is properly called darkness,” Immanuel explains that the point here is “the human brings light from hidden things, which is to say, he illuminates with his mind the darkness of uncertainty.”<sup>97</sup> This language harks back to the beginning of the section, where Immanuel had proposed, parenthetically, that the darkness whose domain is delimited by God (v. 3) “may refer to obscure and hidden things.” At this point of the commentary, however, the reader is left to wonder what darkness could possibly restrict the human’s cognitive power, which has so far been portrayed as anything *but* bounded.

It is therefore clear that, for Immanuel, the specific confines of what escapes humanity’s ever-insightful gaze must be fairly restricted. The wisdom that is finally mentioned in v. 12 refers exclusively “to the wisdom of knowing God’s command of this reality, and the truth about God’s providence.”<sup>98</sup> On this point rests the rhetorical force of Job’s argument:

he [Job] says this [*but where is wisdom?*] in order to strengthen his response, for his friends had said that providence responds to righteousness, and that one’s fortune is according to one’s righteousness, and one’s misfortune according to one’s sins. But Job, who knew in himself that he was a perfectly righteous person despite the tribulations that had befallen him, says “I know that the bad things that happened to me are not on account of sins that increased in me; rather, they are because of God’s will, or because he abandoned the Earth to the influence of the stars.”<sup>99</sup> And it is therefore difficult to comprehend on which principle God conducts reality, and what is the reason that demands that being righteous one should suffer evil, but being evil one should enjoy good fortune.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Fol. 83v., col. 2.

<sup>98</sup> Fol. 84r., col. 1.

<sup>99</sup> This last clause has been left out from Parma 2961, perhaps because the idea of a universe left to its own devices scandalized the scribe.

<sup>100</sup> Fol. 84r., col. 1.

Thus, for all its might, the human mind cannot wrap itself around Fate. But this failure is not as ontologically degrading as it may appear. For, according to Immanuel, Job 28 later teaches us that this cognitive deficiency is shared by all other life-forms, including spirits (*ruḥot*), demons (*shedim*), angels (*mal'akhe ha-'elohim*) and “even celestial constellations and those pure, sanctified shapes which are separate from matter.”<sup>101</sup>

While primarily a defense of divine omnipotence, the rationalistic rejection of astrology and divination implied here runs parallel to a valorization of the position of the human being within a world now deprived of magical agencies. If the whole host of heaven is equally excluded from the comprehension of providence, the individual's capacity to shape his own destiny is no longer dependent on planetary alignments. If we are not substantially different from angels, it is not because humanity has been sanctified, but rather because the angelic sphere has been deprived of its supernatural powers, traversed by the democratizing exigencies of rationality. Only the divine intellect occupies a space that is categorically superior to ours, but outside our insurmountable lack of awareness of our fates, there seems to be no limit for what humans are able to accomplish.

The individual praised in Job 28 is thus not a remote legendary hero, nor the abstract *exemplum* of an ethical virtue: his greatness is wholly grounded in living historical reality.<sup>102</sup> It is on account of its realistic, dignified portrayal of the individual – the sagacious author of astounding exploits, the ever inquisitive explorer of the universe – that Immanuel of Rome's reading of Job 28 may be properly called humanist.

### 3.3. Immanuel's plagiarisms

Medieval standards of citational responsibility were not what they are today; yet Immanuel's penchant for presenting other's ideas as his own is nothing short of scandalous. We have already seen him reutilize Ibn Ezra's words without mentioning him, but that instance pales in comparison with two substantial scientific digressions found in his commentary on Job 28:1–12 from the works of others. These instances have something important in common with Immanuel's modification of the passage from Ibn Ezra, and

<sup>101</sup> Fol. 84r., col. 1–2. For the reference to angels, see fol. 85v., col. 2.

<sup>102</sup> The only aspect of 28:1–11 that Immanuel does not really comment on is the overturning of mountains mentioned in v. 9. This may be because Immanuel was unable to identify of a realistic action behind the seemingly impossible one being described. While this is an argument from silence, it is informed by the fact that Immanuel locates the rest of the scenes within a strictly secularized sphere of action.

once we recognize the scientific digressions for what they are, they start to shed light on the picture of the intellectual history behind Immanuel's anthropocentric interpretation of Job 28. On the one hand, they provide us with valuable information about our author's intellectual profile and atmosphere, and, on the other, they help us trace historical trajectories of specific interpretative practices and content.

In the twelfth Notebook, dedicated to the translator Judah Romano ben Moshe, Immanuel's literary alter-ego makes this shocking and elaborate confession to a zealous admirer called the Prince (his poetic interlocutor throughout the *Mahberot*):

"In truth, sir, I have not stolen *silver, gold, assets or turquoise*; not *sapphire, precious stones* or *Kushite topaz* (Job 28:15–17). But I have indeed stolen the pearls of his utterances, plundered the treasures of his books. Is there a sin as great as my sin, a theft comparable to my theft? He graciously *carried me on eagle's wings* (Exod 19:4); *the king brought me to his chambers* (Song 1:4), and showed me the sapphires of his books and the pearls of his utterances ... But I, the transgressor, paid evil in exchange for good, and for no reason. From his books I took the pearls, and look: here they are inside *my* books, presented in *my* exegeses ... And everyone knows that without the knowledge of his books my own books could not exist. And whenever a word of *truth or pious utterance* (Ps 45:5) is found in them, they have been thought by him, for whoever examines his books will find them there ... But whenever a mistake is found in them – it is me who made it ..." And the Prince replied: "Truly, he has a right to hate you, for you have intentionally sinned against him; he has no forgiveness, after you neglected to reproduce those utterances under his name."<sup>103</sup>

Ingeniously drawing on the biblical theme of the incommensurable value of wisdom, the repentant plagiarist argues that having stolen another's thoughts, which is to say the other's wisdom, is far greater a crime than stealing his material goods. This theme is central to Job 28; and, paradoxically enough, Immanuel's confession has plundered the chapter for its rich list of precious metals.

### 3.3.1. Albertus Magnus

Still more paradoxical is the fact that Immanuel's discussion about the alchemical nature of the metals mentioned in Job 28:1–2 was taken from one of Judah's many translations of philosophical and scientific works, the optical treatise by Albertus Magnus entitled *De forma resultante in speculo*.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Jarden, *Mahberot*, 1.219.

<sup>104</sup> Albertus Magnus, *De forma resultante in speculo*, ed. Henryk Anzulewicz (Munster: Aschendorff, 1999) 181–211. For Judah's translation, see Carsten Wilke, "Albert's

Given the intellectual trends that were in vogue in 14th-century Italy, it is not surprising that Roman *literati* such as Immanuel and Judah should have displayed an interest in a work like Albert's, a treatise that draws on the classical tradition, specifically Aristotelian philosophy and Euclidean geometry, to offer a scientific and theoretical analysis of the empirical phenomenon of reflection. Of special interest to Albert were the types and qualities of objects that serve as mirrors. In this context, he devoted a long paragraph to metals that were capable of reflection, explaining how each of them was (al)chemically formed and detailing how that composition contributed to their reflective properties.<sup>105</sup> Albert made special mention of the same metals that appear at the beginning of Job 28: "The metals that are polished on the surface and whose purity is great, such as gold, silver, bronze and refined copper, are mirrors."<sup>106</sup> To Immanuel, the correspondence did not seem coincidental. Though he was not immediately interested in the qualities of mirror-like surfaces, he selectively copied Albert's observations in order to show that Job 28:1–2 reflected accurate scientific knowledge of the metals' nature and composition (underlined passages are literal quotes or close paraphrases of Judah's translation of Albert):<sup>107</sup>

And keep in mind that when it says *For there is a place for silver, a place where gold is refined/Bronze is taken from the dust, and there is a stone from which copper is smelted* (Job 28: 1–2), and similarly *and [the place] has dust of gold* (v.6), it is in order to inform us that all metals come from the earth. And the true sages, who spoke wonderfully about natural things, already clarified that gold, silver, bronze, copper, tin and lead are all made from mercury and sulfur. And mercury is made from fine powdery substance and fine watery substance. If the mercury is finely grounded and so is the sulphur, mixing them together with flaming, cooking heat produces gold. And so it is with silver, though the heat applied to it does not produce as good a mixture, and is not as intense as it is when applied to gold. Gold takes after the appearance of sulphur, while silver takes after mercury. And pure copper is from refined sulphur and not very well refined mercury, which [together] produce a mixture. And bronze is from those two [elements], only unrefined, and properly mixed together. As for tin and lead, these are from unrefined mercury when it has been not properly mixed with sulphur, which leaves dark and earthy sections on their surfaces, and which prevents the reception of light. And this is why they do not produce a mirror [reflection], as gold, silver, copper and bronze do.<sup>108</sup>

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Optical Treatise on the Mirror Image in the Fourteenth-Century Hebrew Translation by Judah Romano," *Przegląd Tomistyczny* 21 (2015) 105–123.

<sup>105</sup> Wilke, "Albert's Optical," 121–122 (lines 170–191).

<sup>106</sup> Wilke, "Albert's Optical," 121 (lines 170–1).

<sup>107</sup> See Appendix A: Alchemy for the Hebrew passages in parallel.

<sup>108</sup> Immanuel, fol. 83r., col. 1.

It is clear that Immanuel thought the knowledge contained in the biblical text was every bit as sophisticated as the pioneering scientific discoveries of his time. This becomes evident in the remarks he inserts immediately after the unattributed quote, where he relies on the scientific information in order to show that the different ways in which Job mentioned the precious metals are in fact allusions to the specific combinations of sulphur and mercury that result in each of them:

Because of this, the writer [Job] said *for there is a place for silver and a place where they refine gold*, meaning that there is place where, for natural reasons, mercury and silver are mixed from what is refined in them, and gold emerges from them. And this is why it is mentioned in relation to gold [that] *they refine it*, but not in relation to silver, for heat applied to it does not produce such a good mixture, and it is not as intense as it is when applied to gold, and it sufficed for it to say *for there is place for silver*. Indeed, in relation to bronze it is mentioned that *bronze is taken from the dust* because it is from unrefined mercury and sulphur – dark and dirt-like. And in relation to copper it is mentioned that [*there is*] *a stone from which copper is refined*, because it comes from refined sulphur and unrefined silver.<sup>109</sup>

### 3.3.2. Abraham ben Hiyya

Immanuel's other plagiarized scientific digression occurs in the context of his identification of the "dark and pitch-black stone" (*'eben 'ofel vetsalmavet*) of Job 28:3c, where he substantially paraphrases Abraham ben Hiyya's treatise on the Jewish calendar, *Sefer ha-Ibbur*<sup>110</sup> (paraphrase underlined).<sup>111</sup>

[Job 28:3] means that it is within the capacity of humans to explore ... places of darkness and death, and these are the places in which darkness prolongs itself for half a year. And this is the place where the [celestial] North Pole stands directly above their heads, and the equator (which is the virtual or imaginary line that divides the world into two halves, crossing from the eastern half to the western half) is the circle that separates for them between what is hidden and what is visible in the sky. And during the whole time when the sun is at the beginning of Aries and up until the end of Virgo (which are the northern constellations – which means they are inclined from the equator towards the northern edge), there will be day [there]. And during the entire time when it [the sun] is at the beginning of Libra up until the end of Pisces (which are the six constellations that are inclined from the equator to the southern side), they will have night.<sup>112</sup>

109 Fol. 83r., col. 2. Compare Wilke, "Albert's Optical," 120–121 (lines 170–191).

110 Abraham Bar Chyiah, *Sefer ha-Ibbur*, ed. T. Philipowsky (London, 1851) v–x. In parallel to Philipowsky's edition, I have examined the work in manuscript, found in London, British Library, Or 10538 (BH, London 10538) fols. 1v–89r, which dates from the 14th–15th c.

111 See Appendix B: The North Pole for the Hebrew passages in parallel.

112 Fol. 82v. col. 2.

Here Immanuel is copying from a small introductory sub-section of the *Sefer ha-Ibbur*, which Ben Hiyya had devoted to explaining “the variability found through inhabited regions from north to south.”<sup>113</sup> Like his Islamic predecessors, the Jewish cosmologist had adopted the system of geographical description found in Ptolemy’s *Geography*,<sup>114</sup> which divided the inhabited area of the Earth’s hemispheres into seven horizontal strips parallel to the equator, each representing a “climate zone.” In line with the didactic tone of his work, Ben Hiyya expounds scrupulously on this topic, identifying each region for its latitude and explaining how the latter affects the length of the day throughout the year, as well as the visibility of the constellations in the night sky. After he gets to the northernmost climate, Ben Hiyya pauses to say that that from that point on (69° of latitude), there are no human inhabitants<sup>115</sup> – that is, no eye-witnesses for what actually happens there. And yet, Ben Hiyya tells us, thanks to knowledge (*da’at*) and investigation (*mehqar*), one can infer the conditions of those inaccessible provinces.<sup>116</sup> Right after this vigorous affirmation of the power of the intellect is the discussion about the North Pole that Immanuel copied from.<sup>117</sup> It seems clear, then, that what prompted Immanuel to identify the shadowy stone of Job 28:3 with the North Pole was not simply its prolonged exposure to darkness; it was rather that the source from which he learned about the conditions at the North Pole presented that particular piece of information as an extraordinary achievement of human reason – and it did so by using the very same verb as the verse he was interpreting: “he probes (*hoqer*) every limit” (28:3). Immanuel found Ben Hiyya’s enthusiasm for science’s ability to contemplate the unseen to be contagious.

But there is a more immediate reason why this subsection of had made Immanuel think of Job. Ben Hiyya concludes his systematic presentation on latitudinal variability with a brief digression on Joban exegesis. The verse in question there was 38:19. Having previously ascribed to the words *’orekh* and *roḥab* the specialized meaning of “longitudinal span” and “latitudinal span,”<sup>118</sup> Ben Hiyya writes,

<sup>113</sup> Bar Chyiah, *Sefer ha-Ibbur*, 10.

<sup>114</sup> On the adoption of the Ptolemaic model by Islamic astronomers, see M. Tolmacheva, “Ptolemaic influence on medieval Arab geography,” in *Discovering New Worlds: Essays on Medieval Exploration and Imagination*, ed. S. D. Westrem (New York: Garland, 1991) 125–251.

<sup>115</sup> *Sefer ha-Ibbur*, 12.

<sup>116</sup> Bar Chyiah, *Sefer ha-Ibbur*, 12.

<sup>117</sup> Bar Chyiah, *Sefer ha-Ibbur*, 12.

<sup>118</sup> “The Earth is divided into four sections by two imaginary lines: the first one goes from east to west, marks the Earth’s longitudinal span (*orekh*) and is called equator

I have noted that, interpreting the divine scriptures, the grammarians find an allusion to light remaining in a single place over many days in the following verse: *where does light dwell, or which is the place of darkness?* (Job 38:19). *Where does light dwell?*— in what place does light dwell for six months? *Or which is the place of darkness?*— during the six months when light dwells on such a place, which is the place where darkness is stalled? And the proof of [the correctness of] this interpretation comes from the verse that precedes it, namely: *have you comprehended the vastness of the earth* (rahabe ha-'arets), *say: do you know it all?* (38:18). So God asks Job: 'Have you visited the regions of the earth [which extend] from north to south? If you have indeed comprehended the *latitudinal span* of the earth (*merhab 'arets*), and you presume to know its *latitudes* (*roh'bah*), then tell me which is the place where light dwells for three, four, six months without turning away! And during the time when light stays there, where is darkness? Tell me, if you know any of this!' And [this is why] he says: 'have you comprehended the *latitudinal span* of the earth (*roh'be 'arets*)' and not its *longitudinal span* ('orekh ha-'arets), for the *longitude* ('orekh) of the earth extends from east to west, and there is no variation of light throughout this line."<sup>119</sup>

Ben Hiyya therefore believed that in Job 38:18 God was employing specialized scientific nomenclature, which in his eyes demonstrated that previous interpreters of v. 19 had been right to identify the places of residence of light and darkness with the edges of the world. Unsurprisingly, we find a lengthy reformulation of Ben Hiyya's argument in Immanuel's commentary on 38:18–20. Immanuel says that in v. 18 God speaks of latitude, not longitude, because in longitude "each climate is inhabited and known from beginning to end"; by contrast, all matters pertaining to the poles remain undisclosed, for "those two extremities are uninhabited on account of the predominance of the cold."<sup>120</sup>

It appears that the rather distinctive cosmological interpretation of Job 38:19 was first put forward by Saadia.<sup>121</sup> Saadia's reading of the divine

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(*kav ha-shave*); the second goes from north to south, marks the Earth's latitudinal span (*roh'ab*) and is called meridian (*kav 'emtsai*"); Bar Chyiah, *Sefer ha'Ibbur*, 6–7. This is the source of Immanuel's description of the equator quoted above.

<sup>119</sup> Bar Chyiah, *Sefer ha'Ibbur*, 12–13.

<sup>120</sup> Fol. 118v, col. 2. As with 28:3, the main body of Immanuel's commentary on 38:19 is comprised of Ben Hiyya's thoughts on the North Pole, but here Immanuel incorporates the additional detail that the Pole is inclined 90° in relation to the equator. As he explains in reference to v. 20, this is because, whereas in 38:18 God had asked Job for the whereabouts of the Pole "in general terms," here God was asking "where its place is exactly" (*ei zeh meqomo hameyuhad mamash*). Fol. 118v, col. 1. Parma 2961 has an addition that makes this even more pointed, requiring that the coordinates be given in degrees (*ma'alot*) minutes (*shniot*) and seconds (*shlishiot*) (fol. 100r, col. 1).

<sup>121</sup> Ibn Ezra quotes Saadia's interpretation but ultimately rejects it, arguing that that "although his statements are correct, they are not germane to the passage" (Aranda, *Ibn Ezra*, 77\*–78\*).

address to Job in chapters 38 to 41 betrays a passionate interest for science. Indeed, even though he had noted that no one could fully answer God's questions and that their ultimate purpose was to make Job "submit to Him,"<sup>122</sup> Saadia often provided detailed scientific answers to these purportedly unanswerable questions. In the context of Job 38:19, he reminded his audience of how "geometrical constructions derived from astronomical observations"<sup>123</sup> had come to explain the latitudinal variation of climate, including, in the most extreme case, the conditions at the North Pole:

You know, moreover, as to the North Pole, which is one of the two axis points of the heaven's revolutions, that the closer it comes to being directly overhead, the greater the excess of day over night in summer and of night [over day] in winter ... At the Pole, then, the day will be a year in length, six months of daylight and six months of night.<sup>124</sup>

Saadia then paraphrases v. 19 in such a way that one can immediately tell which "grammarian" Ben Hiyya was thinking of:

Since there are places where the sun remains six months at a stretch, without admixture of darkness, he says referring to them, *In which course doth light abide?* (Job 38:19). Similarly, of the places where darkness prevails for six months without light, He says, *Darkness, where is its abode?*<sup>125</sup>

Saadia was confident in the human ability to decipher the mysteries of the universe through empirical observation and logical reasoning. Even if it could not be verified through eye-witness accounts, he was certain that the sun stays on the Pole for six uninterrupted months – a conviction that was not based on Scripture, but on the firm belief in the effectiveness of applying mathematical principles to God's meticulously ordered universe. The same can be said about Ben Hiyya and Immanuel of Rome, who supported and amplified the argument.

It is hard to overemphasize the radicalism of this exegetical strategy. By providing what they thought was a clear and distinct answer to the question about the places of light and darkness in Job 38:19, all three interpreters put themselves on the side of knowledge – not just any knowledge, but one that the biblical text unambiguously presented as a secret that could only be accessed by the divine. The esoteric nature of this knowledge was the only thing that guaranteed that the rhetorical force of God's questions to Job would humble the human addressee. Instead of puzzling over the mysteries

122 Goodman, *Book of Theodicy*, 396.

123 Goodman, *Book of Theodicy*, 395.

124 Goodman, *Book of Theodicy*, 395.

125 Goodman, *Book of Theodicy*, 396.

of the question, or simply limiting themselves to elucidate its meaning, these human commentators chose to flaunt their knowledge of the answer. In a scene meant to emphasize the incommensurable ontological distance between creation and creator, the language of science allowed them to identify with the perspective of the character that was most unlike them. In this sense, Saadia's reading of 38:19 is not only the ultimate source behind the content of Immanuel's exposition of both 38:19 and 28:3, but also, more importantly, an unmistakable philosophical precursor of the dignified conception of the human that made Immanuel's anthropocentric understanding of Job 28:1–11 possible.

Why did Immanuel apply to Job 28:3 an interpretation that had been applied to Job 38:19? As a possible trigger, we have pointed to Ben Hiyya's presentation of knowledge about the North Pole as an extraordinary achievement of human inquiry. Immanuel may have also been familiar with the 10th-century Karaite commentary of Japheth ben Eli, whose paraphrase of Job 28:3 not only essentially follows that of Saadia ("he set a term to darkness and to everything; he is an investigator of darkness"), but adds "these places [of darkness] are such that the light of the stars does not reach them, and there is *'ofel* (obscurity) and *tsalmavet* (the shadow of death) constantly on them, and only God knows them."<sup>126</sup> In more general terms,<sup>127</sup> Immanuel may have noticed the linguistic and thematic relationships between Job 28:1–3 and 38:18–20: after the location (*maqom*) of precious metals is mentioned in 28:1–2, 28:3 speaks about the end/edge (*qets*) of darkness (*ḥoshekh*), and the intellectual capacity to investigate (*ḥqr*) every purpose/limit (*takhlit*). In 38:18–20, God asks rhetorically about Job's capacity to comprehend (*yd'*; *b[ly]n*) the entirety of the Earth (*raḥabe ha-'arets*) and the dwelling places (*maqom*; *shkhn*) of light and darkness (*ḥoshekh*), as well as to reach/grasp (*lqkh*) their territories or boundaries (*gbl*).

There is still another, perhaps supplementary, possibility. Neither Saadia nor Ben Hiyya tells us whether they believe Job was aware of the scientific truth that they, as commentators, professed to know. By contrast, in Immanuel's commentary Job does know the answer to the question he is asked in 38:19, for he has already alluded to the conditions at the North Pole in 28:3.

<sup>126</sup> I am indebted to Arik Sadan and Adi Shiran for the translation from Judeo-Arabic. The manuscript consulted is St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Ms. EVR ARAB I 244 (fol. 22v.). Putting the pause after *takhlit* instead of *ḥoqer* (as the Masoretic accentuation recommends), Japheth's reading 28:3 is attractively simple, resulting in two straightforward sentences: *qets sam laḥoshekh u-lekhol takhlit/hu' ḥoqer eben 'ofel ve-talmavet*.

<sup>127</sup> 

Of course, Immanuel might have simply applied the same interpretation to both passages. But the possibility remains that he deliberately meant to suggest that Job was not as clueless about the world as God thought him to be.

## Conclusion

It is a remarkable fact of the history of interpretation that the opening verses of Job 28 should have been connected to divine activity for so many centuries. This ancient assumption stands in sharp contrast with what appears to be an equally naturally-held assumption in modern scholarship, that they refer to humanity. This paper has traced the genealogy of both interpretative strands, focusing on the figure responsible for first proposing the anthropocentric reading of this chapter was Immanuel of Rome, whose “Copernican revolution” in the interpretation of Job 28 is very much a product of the early humanism and rationalism that formed and informed his intellectual interests and attitudes. In this way, the historical situatedness of Immanuel’s exegesis demonstrates, on a larger scale, what can be learned from the individual readings of the chapter that have been offered throughout history. To refer back to our epigraph, those individual readings may be compared to the pieces of Albert’s broken mirror, each reflecting the biblical text in a way that betrays the singularity and radical contingency of the reflecting agencies.

We should always keep this lesson in historical situatedness in mind. Still, we can and should try to determine which of two main approaches to Job 28:1–11 is truer to the intention of the author. For some, like Greenstein, the fact that the theocentric assumption dominated the minds of ancient readers should, in itself, push us to question the more recent, anthropocentric position. There is also a linguistic argument in favor of theocentric reading: ever since Gregory the Great, commentators have pointed out that the language of our verses resonates strongly with other biblical passages whose the explicit subject is God.

And yet, contextually, it seems that the central question about the locus of wisdom ought to ~~be~~ stand in sharp disjunctive contrast to what precedes it, and it makes sense that this disjunctive sentiment would have been opposed to an enthusiastic celebration of the human. As Immanuel of Rome’s commentary shows, the rhetorical intent behind an anthropocentric reading of the text appears to be consistent with Job’s argument that humans can grasp everything except their fate, and that one should therefore refrain from

judgment about the fortunes of an individual. (Moreover, this obviates the need to understand Job 28 as an *intermezzo* or a misplaced insertion).

While Greenstein deems it “highly doubtful” that the biblical author, with all his piety, would have celebrated human affairs in such grandiose terms as those used in Job 28:1–11, the emergence of an anthropocentric reading of the verses in the history of exegesis is indissociable from the emergence of European humanism. Since this humanism constitutes in large part a recovery of the valorization of human dignity found in ancient sources, is a humanist outlook inherently incompatible with the worldview of the biblical writer? Sophocles, who lived closer in time to our author than all the commentators discussed, wrote:

Many things are formidable, and none more formidable than man! He crosses the gray sea beneath the winter wind, passing beneath the surges that surround him; and he wears away the highest of the gods, Earth, immortal and unwearying, as his ploughs go back and forth from year to year, turning the soil with the aid of the breed of horses. And he captures the tribe of thoughtless birds and the races of wild beasts and the watery brood of the sea, catching them in the woven coils of nets – man the skillful. And he contrives to overcome the beast that roams the mountain, and tames the shaggy-maned horse and the untiring mountain bull, putting a yoke about their necks. And he has learned speech and wind-swift thought and the temper that rules cities, and how to escape the exposure of the inhospitable hills and the sharp arrows of the rain, all-resourceful; he meets nothing in the future without resource; only from Hades shall he apply no means of flight; and he has contrived escape from desperate maladies.<sup>128</sup>

To assume that this kind of reasoning was fundamentally foreign to the person who composed the book of Job is to perpetuate a simplistic dichotomy between Athens and Jerusalem, between proud rationalism and submissive faith. Ancient Hebrew authors also conceived of our kind as having a very deep connection to the divine. The most obvious example comes from Genesis 1, where humans are made in God’s image and acquire the exceptional capacity to “subjugate the earth, dominate the fish in the sea, the bird in the sky, and every creature that moves upon the earth” (Gen 1:28). One may also refer to Psalm 8, where the poet marvels at the fact that YHWH, architect of such a vast universe, was so concerned with one particular type of creature that he made it almost divine, crowning it “with glory and honor” (v. 6).

That there is an other side to this glory could hardly have escaped anyone. In the anthropocentric reading of Job 28, the awesome inventory

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<sup>128</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Hugh Lloyd-Jones (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) 34–37 (lines 332–364).

of power and inventiveness is contrasted with a fundamental, unsurpassable limitation. In Sophocles' play, too, the tragedy confirms that, despite its "formidable" capabilities, humanity is ultimately helpless in the face of fate. This is the same paradox that animates the story of Job. It is a paradox that, with exquisite irony, Sophocles forces us to pronounce in one and the same breath. Humanity: *pantoporos*, *aporos*; "all-resourceful, without resource."<sup>129</sup>

## Appendix A: Alchemy

From Immanuel of Rome's Commentary on Job 28:1–2

ודע כי אמרו כי יש לכסף מוצא ומקום לזהב יזוקו ברזל מעפר יקח ואבן יצוק נחושה וכן אמרו ועפרות זהב לו באו להודיע כי כל המתכות מוצאם מהארץ, וכבר אמרו החכמים האמיתיים אשר הפליגו לדבר בענינים הטבעיים כי הזהב והכסף והברזל והנחושת והבדיל והעפרת כולם יתהוו מכסף חי ומגפריית, והכסף חי הוא מקור יעשה מעפריי דק ומדק מימי. אם כן להיות הכסף חי דק מאד והגפריית גם כן ויתערבו יחד על ידי חום מבשל ומלהיב וייעשה זהב. אמנם הכסף החום בו אינו מערב עירוב כל כך טוב ולא מבשל בישול ומלהיב על תכונה טובה כמו בזהב. והזהב נמשך אחר מראה הגפריית והכסף אחר הכסף חי. והנחשת הצרוף הוא מגפריית נקי ומכסף חי לא מאד נקי מעורבים עירב. והברזל הוא משנהם בלתי נקיים ומעורבים עורב טוב. והבדיל והעופרת הם מהכסף חי בלתי נקי ולא מעורב ערוב טוב עם הגפריית ויישאו חלקים חשוכים וארציים בשטחם מונעים קבלת האור ולסת זה לא יתהוו מהם מראה כמו שיתהוו מהזהב והכסף ונחשת וברזל. ואחר שהתבאר זה אמר כי בעבור זה אומר הכותב כי יש לכסף מוצא ומקום לזהב יזוקו, כלומר מקום יש שבעבור סבות טבעיות יתחברו הכסף חי והגפריית מן המזוקק שבהם ויתהוו מהם הזהב. ולכן הזכיר בענין הזהב יזוקו, ולא הזכיר כן בענין הכסף כי החום בו אינינו מערב עירוב כל כך טוב ולא מבשל כמו בזהב, ולו הספיק בו כי יש לכסף מוצא. אמנם

From Judah Romano's Hebrew translation of Albert the Great's *De Forma Resultante in Speculo*.

המתכות הצרופות בשטח והטהורות טוהר מופלג כמו הזהב והכסף והברזל והנחשת הצרוף הם מראות, כי אלו יתהוו מסולפור וכסף חי, והכסף חי יעשה מעפריי דק ומדק מימי. אם כן להיות הכסף חי דק מאד והסולפור גם כן ויתערבו יחד על פי חום מבשל ומלהיב, יעשה זהב ויהיה מקבל הניצוץ ומהפך בשטח הצרוף לסבת הדק המימי, ויהיה מוגבל לסבת הדק הארצי, ועל זאת התכונה יעשה מראה. והכסף גם כן יעשה מראה לאותם הסבות עצמם, לבד שהחום בו אינו מעורב עירוב כל כך טוב ולא מבשל בשול ומלהיב על תכונה טובה כמו בזהב. והזהב נמשך אחר מראה הסולפור, והכסף אחר מראה הכסף חי, ובשניהם נמצא קור מקפיא, ועל כן מקבל גם הוא האור ומהפך. והנחשת הצרוף הוא מסולפור נקי ומכסף חי לא נקי מאד מעורבים ערוב טוב, ועל כן יעשה ממנו מראה כשהוא צרוף צירוף טוב וטהור טוהר שטחי. והברזל הוא משניהם בלתי נקיים ומעורבים עירוב טוב, ולחותרו הוא מדובק בלתי נפרד ממנו על פי התכת חום, ועל כן יעשה ממנו מראה חשוכה יותר על תכונת הבטה אחת ועל תכונת הבטה אחרת חשוכה פחות, כי במה שהוא צרוף יתקרב יותר לטבע הספיריי לסבת מראה המים, כי אין מראה מקבל יותר הצורה והדמות, ובמה שהוא מחלקים עבים ארציים הוא יותר חשוך ומקבל קבלה פחותה. אבל הזהב והנחשת מקבלים הצורה והמראה קבלה פחותה במה שהם בעלי

129 Sophocles, *Antigone*, 36 (line 360).

From Immanuel of Rome's Commentary  
on Job 28:1-2

From Judah Romano's Hebrew translation of Albert the Great's *De Forma Resultante in Speculo*.

בענין הברזל הזכיר ברזל מעפר יוקח בעבור היותו מכסף חי וגפרית ושניהם בלתי נקיים רק חשוכים ועפריים. ובענין הנחשת הזכיר ואבן יצוק נחושה בעבור היותו מגפרית נקי ומכסף חי מלתי נקי אמנם הם מעורבים ערוב טוב; ולכן הזכיר בו אבן יצוק הזכיר בו לשון אבן לרמוז אל היותו מכסף חי לא נקי והזכיר בו יצוק בעבור היותם מעורבים ערוב טוב.

מראה, ומקבלים יותר מהברזל כמה שיש להם הדק הארצי. ועל כן הכסף הצרוף הוא מראה יותר טובה מכל המתכות, להיותו מתקרב במראה אל הספירי ויש לו הדק הארצי מעורב עירוב טוב. והבדיל והעופרת הם מכסף חי בלתי נקי ולא מעורב עירוב טוב עם הסולפור, ועל כן ישארו חלקים חשוכים וארציים שטחם מונעים קבלת האור ולסבת זה לא יתהוה מהם מראה.

## Appendix B: The North Pole

From Immanuel of Rome's Commentary  
on Job 28:3

From Abraham Ben Hiyya's *Sefer ha-'Ibbur*.

ואמרו אבן אפל וצלמות ר"ל וכן ביכולת האדם לחקור אבן אפל וצלמות ר"ל מקומות החושך והצלמות והם המקומות שיאריך החושך בהם חצי שנה. והוא המקום אשר הקוטב הצפוני עומד על נוכח ראשם והקו השווה (אשר הוא הקו המדומה או הנחשב החולק העולם לשני חלקים העובר מחצי מזרח לחצי מערב) הוא האופן המפריש להם בין הנסתר ובין הנגלה מן השמים, וכל זמן היות השמש מראש טלה עד סוף בתולה (שהם המזלות הצפוניים ר"ל שהם נוטים מקו השווה לפאת צפון) יהיה ליום, וכל הזמן היותו מראש מאזנים עד סוף דגים (שהם השש המזלות הנוטות מקו השווה לצד דרום) יהיה להם לילה.

ובמקום אשר הוא רחוק מקו השווה צ' חלקים יהיה קוטב הצפון עומד נגד ראשו ויהיה גלגל המישור לו אופן מפריש בין הנראה מן הרקיע בין הנסתר, ויהיה ששה מזלות צפון מראש טלה עד סוף בתולה עומדין עליו לעולם, וששה מזלות דרום והם מראש מאזנים עד סוף דגים נסתרים לעולם, וישתנה במקום הזה דרך הקפת הרקיע ולא יהיה עולה עליו ולא יורד אבל תהיה הקפתו דומה להקפת הריחים, ויהי שם ששה חדשים חמה נראית על הארץ כל ימי היותה במזלות דרום, ותהיה השנה כלה נחלקת לשני חלקים שוים האחד יום והשני לילה