

‘Widening the Holes in the Settings’: Hermeneutical Guidelines in the Bible Exegesis of Samuel Ibn Tibbon

Rebecca Kneller-Rowe

Samuel Ibn Tibbon (1165-1232), known primarily for his translation of Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*, was also an original philosopher and an audacious exegete in his own right. His main literary works include a philosophical treatise, *Ma’amar Yiqqawu ha’Mayim* (Let the Waters be Gathered) and a long interpretation of Ecclesiastes. Recent research has dedicated several studies to Ibn Tibbon, his thought, and his role as an ‘intellectual broker’ of Maimonidean rationalism [a term coined by Isadore Twersky, ‘Aspects of Social and Cultural History of the Provencal Jewry,’ *Cahiers d’histoire mondiale* 11 (1968), p. 203.] However, little attention has been paid to Ibn Tibbon’s independent exegesis.

Ibn Tibbon claims repeatedly that his exegesis ‘*widens the holes in the settings*’ – a phrase that relates inversely to Maimonides’ ‘*apples of gold in settings of silver*’ (Prov.

25:11), which depicts biblical and rabbinic sources as two-layered, esoteric texts. The

phrase conveys metaphorically the connection and influence of Maimonides on Ibn Tibbon. This paper examines the meaning and purport of Ibn Tibbon’s claim and seeks to advance our understanding of the hermeneutical presuppositions that guided his exegetical work.