

James T. Robinson

Samuel Ibn Tibbon's Commentary on Ecclesiastes

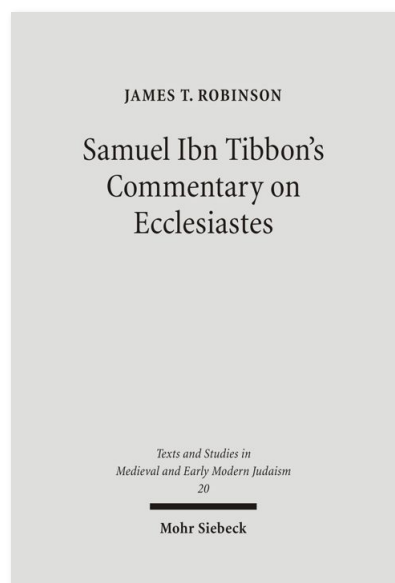
The Book of the Soul of Man

[Samuel Ibn Tibbon's Commentary on Ecclesiastes]

Published in English.

Samuel Ibn Tibbon (c. 1165-1232) - the eminent translator, philosopher, and exegete - is most famous for his Hebrew translation of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*. However, he wrote original works as well, and laid the foundations for a distinctive philosophical-exegetical movement, what is today called 'Maimonideanism'. James T. Robinson's book includes a first English translation of Ibn Tibbon's commentary on Ecclesiastes, which was the foundational work of the Maimonidean tradition. The translation, with full annotation, is accompanied by an introduction, which provides relevant historical, philosophical and exegetical background, explains difficult passages, and identifies Ibn Tibbon's important contributions to the emergence of Maimonideanism. The author analyzes Ibn Tibbon's sources and influences (in Jewish philosophy and exegesis and in Graeco-Arabic philosophy, especially al-Farabi and Averroes), discusses his theory and method of exegesis, and explains the main arguments and allegories of the work which relate to the problem of human perfection. Responding to and developing the various positions of his time - especially the infamous view of al-Farabi that immortality of the soul »is nothing but an old wife's tale« - Ibn Tibbon argues that conjunction with the active intellect is possible but rare: only »one man in a thousand« can attain it. Thus, while the elite few should pursue it - through a life of study and contemplation - the many should focus on perfection in this world: they should »eat, drink, and show the soul good«.

James T. Robinson Born 1965; 2002 PhD (Harvard University), Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations; Assistant Professor of the History of Judaism at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago.



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