CHAPTER ELEVEN
THOMAS AQUINAS'S SUMMA THEOLOGIAE IN HEBREW:
A NEW FINDING

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The theological works of the Dominican friar and regent master at the University of Paris, Thomas Aquinas (1224/5–1274), were widely read in the Middle Ages by university students and masters as well as by friars and monks, but they enjoyed much less popularity among other segments of society. Aquinas was read by “relatively few high ecclesiastics” and “among the laity ... some jurists and doctors.” However, for most of the lay population Aquinas’s works “had no appeal at all.”

Jews were neither clerics nor “university people” in medieval Europe. Nevertheless, among the medieval readers of Aquinas we do find some Jews: in Italy, Hillel of Verona during the late thirteenth century and Judah Roman in the first decades of the fourteenth century translated substantial passages from several of Aquinas’s works into Hebrew. A major researcher of the subject, Giuseppe Sermoneta, coined the phrase “Jewish Thomism” to characterize the Jewish interest in Aquinas’s thought. A second wave of Latin-to-Hebrew translations of Aquinas’s philosophical writings occurred

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on the Iberian Peninsula in the fifteenth century, within a broader phenomenon of a new Jewish occupation with Latin scholastic texts that Mauro Zonta has dubbed “Hebrew Scholasticism.”

Since Jewish readers and translators of Aquinas lived mostly in Italy or on the Iberian Peninsula, it is not surprising to find Italian and Sephardi Hebrew manuscripts that contain Hebrew versions of Aquinas’s works. On the other hand, one does not expect to find much evidence of a Jewish reception of Aquinas in Hebrew manuscripts from Germany or Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, as we shall see presently, three Ashkenazi manuscripts preserve a hitherto unknown Hebrew translation of long excerpts from the first part of Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae*.

1. **Sefer Ḥoḵmat ha-ʾelohut**

A Hebrew philosophical text entitled *Sefer Hokmat ha-ʾelohut* (Book of the Science of the Deity), by an unknown author, is attested by three manuscripts: (1) Oxford, Bodleian, MS Opp. 583 (Neubauer 1331), an early fifteenth-century manuscript containing various scientific and philosophical texts written in Ashkenazi hands; (2) Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ebr. 388, written in an Ashkenazi hand, probably in Germany, fifteenth century, which also contains Gershom ben Solomon of Arles’ *Šaʿar ha-šamayim* (Gate of Heaven); and (3) St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Yevr. I. 460, Ashkenazi hand, sixteenth century. The text is divided into seventy-eight sections. The Vatican manuscript contains only the first twenty-one sections; the Oxford and St. Petersburg manuscripts contain the full text.

The title *Sefer Ḥoḵmat ha-ʾelohut* appears only in the Oxford manuscript. The identity of the text attested in the three manuscripts has not been recognized in catalogues, including the online catalogue of the Institute of

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6 The scribe copied the title in larger letters at the beginning of the text. The same title appears on a separate sheet as well, which is a later addition to the manuscript.