Shlomo Pines on the Translation of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*

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Introduction

The following letter, dated September 10, 1956, from Shlomo Pines to Leo Strauss is one of three preserved in the Leo Strauss Archives, Special Collections, The University of Chicago Library. A second letter is undated but, on the basis of its reference to a written but not yet published paper on "Jehuda Hallevi's polemics against the philosophers," we can surmise that it was written in 1955-6. In that letter Pines also refers to his discovery of "an unknown Aristotelian text in Arabic," a text he later published as "Un texte inconnu d'Aristote en version arabe." The third letter, *This letter is kindly published with the permission of Uri Pines, Executor of the Estate of Shlomo Pines, and the Leo Strauss Archives, Special Collections, The University of Chicago Library. We wish to thank Uri Pines, Rémi Brague, Zev Harvey, Tzvi Langermann, and Ralph Lerner for discussion and comments of an earlier draft.*

1 "Notes sur la doctrine de la prophétie et la réhabilitation de la matière dans le Kuzari," *Mélanges de philosophie et de littérature juives* 1 (1957): 253-260. Because of a reference it contains to a previous paper published in 1954, this paper could not have been composed much earlier.

dated August 23, 1956, is the letter written from Rome to which
Pines refers in the first and the third from last paragraphs of the
letter printed below. Regrettably, the Strauss Archives contain no
copies of letters from Strauss to Pines. However, one letter, dated
July 15, 1959, from Strauss to Pines, was made available to us by
the Estate of Shlomo Pines. We shall refer to it below.3

All three letters are handwritten in English, although Pines and
Strauss were German emigres whose friendship dated back to their
university days in Berlin.4 And notwithstanding their close rela-
tionship, this letter is remarkable for the tension it reveals between
its author and addressee. Because we do not possess Strauss’ reply
to Pines’ letter of August 23rd, we can only guess at its critical
content. But in order to imagine the tone with which Strauss must
have levelled his criticism against him, we need only contrast the
letter of September 10 with Pines’ confident description of the
progress of his translation in the earlier letter of August 23. We
quote from that earlier letter:

I expect to finish translating the second part of the “Guide for the Perplexed”5
in December, or January. The translation of this part will then be definitive and
will only need to be typed.

Pines’ reply to Strauss in the letter that follows is exoterically
deferential but esoterically defiant. He is apologetic for the errors

3 We have also been unable to locate Strauss’ translation of the Epistle to
Joseph ben Judah, to which Pines refers in the letter. According to Uri Pines,
his father did not preserve correspondence, especially when it was sent to him
away from his home in Jerusalem, as was the case here. The letter from Strauss
to Pines of July 15, 1959 is indeed one piece in a very small selection of
 correspondence that was, more accidentally than deliberately, not discarded or
destroyed by Pines. We assume that there was additional correspondence
between Strauss and Pines concerning the translation of the Guide. When the
archives of the University of Chicago Press become accessible to the public,
additional correspondence may be discovered.

4 Here we rely on Warren Zev Harvey’s brief biography in “Professor
Shlomo Pines and his Approach to Jewish Thought” (in Heb.), Shlomo Pines
Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday, Two Volumes, Volume I

5 Ultimately, Pines settled on the translation “Guide of the Perplexed,”
Perplexed, trans., Shlomo Pines, with an Introductory Essay by Leo Strauss
(Chicago, 1963).