

## The Salvia Plant and the Menorah Revisited

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In this study I pay tribute to David Marcus, who introduced me to the academic study of Akkadian, Syriac, and Ugaritic at Columbia University. David is not only a leading scholar of ancient Semitic languages and literatures, a master teacher of the grammar, syntax, and literary aspects of ancient texts, and a highly gifted pedagogue, but also a rare teacher of the study skills which a student should adopt in preparing one's written and oral assignments as in successfully pursuing one's own research.

Like my revered mentor, David Marcus, in the course of the many years since I first encountered him in the spring of 1967, I embraced many new areas of research. The present study was inspired first and foremost by our teacher the late Moshe Held's lectures on the abiding contributions to biblical research of the medieval Hebrew commentaries. In one of his lectures Held mentioned that Rashi's Bible commentaries originally included pictorial illustrations. Consequently, I visited libraries all over Europe, the USA, and Israel in search of these fascinating pictures.

In the course of my serving on the faculty of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, I met the botanist, Allan Witztum. He and I authored two articles on aspects of biblical and Semitic lexicography. Many years ago he mentioned to me the idea that the biblical lampstand or *menorah* described in Exodus 25 was inspired by the *Salvia* plant. In preparing to complete my discussion of the biblical *menorah* for a forthcoming comprehensive study of Rashi's exegetical drawings, I made sure to examine in detail Steven Fine's 2016 book, *The Menorah*.<sup>1</sup> I was struck by the fact that Fine dismissed out of hand the comparison of the biblical *menorah* with the *Salvia* plant. In the winter of 2020

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Fine, *The Menorah: From the Bible to Modern Israel* (Cambridge, MA-London: Harvard University Press, 2016).

I returned to Witztum, and we began to reexamine the comparison. Sadly, before we could complete this project, he was summoned to the Academy on High. I have thus completed this study on my own.

For better or worse, my reexamination of the question of a possible relationship between the Salvia plant led me to critique various aspects of the important and learned volume by Steven Fine. Integral to Fine's rejection of the importance of Maimonides's famous drawing of the *menorah* in his commentary on the Mishnah is Fine's elaborate rejection of the authority granted to this drawing by Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson,<sup>2</sup> the most recent spiritual leader of Habad Hasidism. Both for Rabbi Schneerson and his followers and for those who reject his authority, the matter of the shape of the biblical *menorah* became a theological controversy. For me, it is a matter of art history, lexicography, and history of exegesis, which all merge in both Rashi's commentary on Exodus and Maimonides's commentary on the Mishnah. As my mentor Moshe Held, of blessed memory, would say, "I just want to understand and explain the text. If someone wants to use that text for religious inspiration, that is not my problem." I do think that the search for truth—even if it involves rejecting the findings of people whom we admire—is also both true science and true religion, and that is why the search for attainable truth has been and continues to be my life's work. This is my reason for penning an article in honor of David Marcus. I wish David many, many more years of searching for the truth and cultivating students who search and find it.

As said above, the late Allan Witztum and I sought to present some important findings concerning plant terms employed in the biblical instructions for the construction of a lampstand with seven lights and in the verbal and pictorial exegesis of those instructions in the exegetical works by Rabbi Solomon Isaaki (1040-1105 CE), commonly known by his acronym, Rashi, and Moses Maimonides (1038-1204 CE), commonly known by his acronym, Rambam. By selecting this topic, we sought to combine our

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<sup>2</sup> Fine, *The Menorah*, 154-62.

respective long-standing interests in names of plants named and/or described in ancient and medieval Jewish texts (Witztum) and the relationship or lack of it between Rashi's written commentaries and the illustrations that accompany those commentaries in both medieval manuscripts and modern printed editions (Gruber). Here I present highlights from hours of conversation with Witztum and from stacks of materials collected over more than thirty years by Witztum—and over the last few years by me for a chapter in a forthcoming book on the line drawings that were part of Rashi's commentaries on the Bible. I take sole responsibility for any errors in this article, which Witztum did not have a chance to examine and correct.

Interestingly, while many ancient, medieval, and modern illustrations of the tabernacle *menorah* picture the branches of the lampstand described in Exodus 25 as arced, Rashi in his commentary on Exodus 25 describes the branches as diagonal. Indeed, the biblical text in Exod 25:32 reads as follows: "Six branches shall issue from its sides; three branches from one side of the lampstand and three branches from the other side of the lampstand."<sup>3</sup> Rashi in his commentary on that verse writes as follows:

SHALL ISSUE FROM ITS SIDES. Diagonally from either side, extending up to the height of the lamp---that is, the central shaft. These branches issue from the central shaft one above the other. The lowest ones are the longest, the middle ones somewhat shorter, and the top ones the shortest of all, so that their height matches that of the seventh, middle shaft, from which the other six issue.<sup>4</sup>

Carasik concludes his English version of Rashi's commentary on Exod 25:36 with the words "It looked like this," which correspond to the Hebrew formulae *kēmîn haṣṣûrâ hazzō't* "like this illustration" or *kazzeh* "like this," which frequently appear in medieval manuscripts of Rashi's commentary on Exodus

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<sup>3</sup> Translation according to NJPS.

<sup>4</sup> So translates Michael Carasik, *The Commentators' Bible: The JPS Miqra'ot Gedolot: Exodus*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2005), 225. However, where he uses bold type for the biblical lemmas, I place every letter of each biblical lemma in capitals.

25 as introductions, either to an illustration of a lampstand or *menorah* or to a blank space, in which an unnamed graphic artist was to have inserted an illustration of the lampstand or *menorah* described in great detail in Exodus 25 and elaborated upon in Rashi's commentary on this chapter. In Carasik's English version of Rashi the formula "It looked like this" introduces an illustration of the lampstand described in Exodus 25 and elaborated upon in Rashi's commentary, precisely as do the corresponding Hebrew formulae in many of the better medieval manuscripts of Rashi's commentary. The illustration provided by Carasik reproduces literally Rashi's description of the branches issuing from either side diagonally (Rashi on Exod 25:32 cited above).

Wisely, Carasik supplies an illustration of the lampstand in which the six outer branches, three on the left and three on the right, are diagonal to the central shaft of the lampstand.<sup>5</sup> Carasik pointed out to me that the beautiful illustration of the lampstand with the six outer branches diagonal to the central shaft is the work of his wife, Yaffa Bruckner. One of the consequences of Carasik's and Bruckner's verbal translation and pictorial illustration of Rashi's understanding of the shape of the lampstand commanded in Exod 25:32, is that Rashi's understanding of the shape of the lampstand corresponds to the shape of the lampstand which Moses Maimonides provided in the drawing appended to Maimonides' Arabic commentary on the Mishnah. Another consequence of Rashi's and Maimonides' shared understanding of the six outer branches being diagonal to the central shaft of the lampstand is that this common interpretation of the form of the lampstand is totally compatible with Nogah Hareuveni's arguments that the form of the Tabernacle lampstand was inspired by the appearance of the *Salvia* plant.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See *ibid.*, 225.

<sup>6</sup> See Nogah Hareuveni, *The Emblem of the State of Israel: Its Roots in the Nature and Heritage of Israel* (3rd ed.; Lod: Neot Kedumim, 1996), 10-15 [Hebrew]; and see also the front cover of that pamphlet. See also Nogah Hareuveni, *Nature in Our Biblical Heritage* (3rd ed.; Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense of the State of Israel, 1982), 125-30 [Hebrew]; and see also the illustration of the *Salvia* plant on p. 137 in that volume. See the photograph below.

In his comprehensive study of the history of the menorah from antiquity to the present day, Steven Fine disparages Ephraim Hareuveni and his son Nogah Hareuveni and their research.<sup>7</sup> However, with all due respect to Fine's many accomplishments in the field of art history, his flippant attitude toward the Hareuveni's is to be understood in large part alongside his equally flippant attitude toward Rashi and Maimonides.

Fine asserts, "Scholarship since has not followed [Ephraim] Hareuveni's lead, though his menorah plant has struck deep roots in Israeli culture through the work of Neot Kedumim: The Garden of Israel, a botanical garden founded by his son [Nogah Hareuveni] on the road between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, [...] features a 'Hill of the Menorah'." <sup>8</sup> However, notwithstanding the impression that Fine seeks to create, the Hareuveni's were not lone voices in the history of botanical research in the State of Israel. The late Avinoam Danin (1939-2015) was a professor in the Alexander Silberman Institute of Life Sciences at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and

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<sup>7</sup> Fine, *The Menorah*, 119, describes Ephraim Hareuveni as follows: "a cultural Zionist and Jewish lover of plants in British Mandatory Palestine, who was, even by the standards of his peers, no professional botanist. Hareuveni is known today, *inter alia*, for the relationship that he drew between the Tabernacle menorah and a rather diminutive sage plant, the *Salvia palaestina*, that grows in Israel. Not satisfied with the notion that Scripture employs a botanical metaphor in a general way, Hareuveni yearned to identify the lampstand with a specific plant. He dubbed the *Salvia palaestina* the menorah plant, which he identified as such because of its parallel paired branches and because it develops bulbs within calyxes on its branches in the springtime."

<sup>8</sup> Fine, *The Menorah*, 122. I note with appreciation that Fine, 77 and 122, treats most positively my research concerning the diagrams found in Rashi's commentaries on the Bible. In fact, Fine seems to suggest that the fact that many of the medieval manuscripts of Rashi's commentaries on Exodus 25 feature pictorial illustrations of the lampstand with arced rather than diagonal branches may support his view that when Rashi writes "diagonally" he does not really mean that. However, even though there is considerable evidence that many of the drawings found in medieval manuscripts of Rashi's commentaries are probably copies of Rashi's original drawings, even the highly rated Bavarian State Library Hebrew Ms. 5 exhibits a phenomenon, which calls for extreme caution. This phenomenon, which is attested in many medieval manuscripts of Rashi's biblical commentaries, is the displacement of drawings. Apparently, the illustrator and/or graphic artist was given a set of drawings to insert in the appropriate blank spaces, and sometimes she/he placed a drawing in the wrong place. See Mayer I. Gruber, "Notes on the Diagrams in Rashi's Commentary on the Book of Kings," *Studies in Bibliography and Booklore* 19 (1994), 29-41. In addition, some of the drawings in some of the manuscripts are simply wrong. Consequently, when a drawing placed in a manuscript of Rashi's commentary at least 92 years after Rashi's death does not correspond to the literal meaning of the text of Rashi's commentary, the drawing should probably be invoked only with the utmost caution to reinterpret the commentary.

recipient in 2014 of the University's Lifetime Achievement Award for his botanical research. With his son Barak, Danin founded the database "Flora and Vegetation of Israel."<sup>9</sup> This website provides scientific information concerning the plant life of Israel and its neighbors: their photographs, distribution and habitat data, morphological diagnostic characters, etc. Danin, like my mentor and co-researcher Allan Witztum, was a strong scientific advocate of Ephraim Hareuveni's thesis concerning the influence of the *Salvia* plant upon the biblical description of the Tabernacle *menorah* or lampstand. In fact, Danin translated all the elder Hareuveni's research on the comparison, and he made it available to Jo Ann Gardner, who incorporated, canonized, and mainstreamed the Hareuveni comparison of the Tabernacle *menorah* with *Salvia palaestina* in her seminal work on flora in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>10</sup> At the end of her fascinating, lucid, and meticulously documented treatment of the comparison between the various varieties of the *Salvia* and the biblical lampstand, Gardner writes as follows:

We may never know whether sage plants inspired the design for the ancient menorah, but the fact that they grow in many places in Israel precisely the way as described in the Bible, with "*three branches of the menorah stemmed from one side and three branches from the other side . . . its knobs of one piece with it*" is very suggestive.

There is another apparent reason that Fine marginalized Ephraim Hareuveni as well as the descriptions of the biblical *menorah* found in Rashi's commentary on the book of Exodus and Maimonides' commentary on m.*Menaḥot* 3:7. The comparison of the biblical lampstand and the *Salvia* plant requires that the branches of both be at a diagonal to the central shaft of the *menorah*, corresponding to the trunk of the *Salvia*. This means we must accept

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<sup>9</sup> Among Avinoam Danin's very important publications mention should be made of *Plants of Desert Dunes* (Berlin-Heidelberg: Springer, 1996); *Distribution of Plants in the Flora Palaestina Area* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2004); and *Flora of the Shroud of Turin* (St. Louis, MO: Botanical Garden Press, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Jo Ann Gardner, *Seeds of Transcendence: Understanding the Hebrew Bible through Plants* (Mount Vernon, NY: Decalogue, 2014), 149-58.

the assertions of both Rashi and Maimonides that the six outer branches of the lampstand are diagonal to the central shaft. Fine vehemently denies this.<sup>11</sup> Fine invokes the arguments that (1) Rashi did not really mean what he wrote and (2) Maimonides did not know how to draw so that his drawing of diagonal branches is unreliable.

However, Fine undermines his credibility as a critic of Rashi, Maimonides, and Ephraim Hareuveni by his own carelessness. For example, while Rashi employs the term *ba'ālāksôn*, meaning “diagonally” only once in his commentary on Exodus 25, Fine, in attempting to show that Rashi could not possibly have meant what he wrote, employs the malapropism *alkason* a total of three times in the course of his argument that Rashi could not possibly have meant to say that the six outer branches of the lampstand were meant to be placed diagonally vis-à-vis the central shaft (like the branches of the *Salvia*

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<sup>11</sup> Fine, *The Menorah*, 76-77. The Rabbinic Hebrew term for diagonal, which Rashi employs in his commentary on Exod 25:32, is the Greek loanword *'ālāksôn*. To be precise, Rashi employs the adverbial prepositional phrase *ba'ālāksôn*, meaning ‘diagonally’ to describe the six outer branches’ position relative to the central branch. Even Fine, *The Menorah*, 77 admits that Joseph ben Isaac Bekhor Shor of Orleans (second half of the twelfth century CE) and Levi Gersonides (1288-1344), who was born in Provence, noted that the seven branches of the Tabernacle lampstand would therefore look like “the branches of a tree.” For reasons that I explain below, Fine cannot accept the likelihood that Rashi really means to say ‘diagonally.’ Admitting that “a strict interpretation of ‘diagonal’ as angular may be reasonable,” Fine prefers to say “that Rashi’s use of this geometric term was an attempt to approximate the shape.” Noting that the overwhelming evidence of illustrations of the biblical lampstand in medieval Hebrew manuscripts show arced branches, Fine would prefer to see Rashi as not literally meaning ‘diagonally.’ However, in footnote 40, Fine acknowledges that Bavarian State Library Hebrew Codex 5, fol. 65r, features a lampstand with diagonal branches. Fine does not mention two important facts about that illustration and the manuscript in which it is found. First of all, the biblical commentaries of Rashi contained in that codex constitute the oldest dated manuscript of Rashi’s biblical commentaries. The manuscript was written at Würzburg in 1232 and 1233 CE by Samuel son of Solomon. This manuscript is also the oldest dated Ashkenazic illuminated manuscript. For details concerning this manuscript in the history of Jewish art, see Thérèse Metzger, “*Exégèse de Rashi et iconographie biblique juive au moyen âge*,” in *Rashi et la culture juive en France du Nord au moyen âge*, ed. Gilbert Dahan, Gérard Nahon, and Élie Nicolas (Collection de la Revue des Études juives, ed. Gérard Nahon and Charles Touati; Paris-Louvain: Peeters, 1997), 203-24; see also eadem, “Le manuscrit enluminé Cod. Hebr. 5 de la Bibliothèque d’Etat à Munich,” in *Mélanges Edmond René Labande: Études de Civilisation Médiévale (IX<sup>e</sup>-XII<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, ed. Benoit Jeanneau (Poitiers: Centre d’études supérieures de civilisation médiévale, 1974), 537-52. Concerning the manuscript in question, see also Eva Frojmovic, “Jewish Scribes and Christian Illuminators: Interstitial Encounters,” in *Between Judaism and Christianity: Art Historical Essays in Honor of Elisheva (Elizabeth) Revel-Neher*, ed. Katrin Kogman-Appel and Mati Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 279-305.

*palaestina*). Any good scholar can misspell words. However, misspelling makes far less convincing Fine's argument for a novel interpretation of the word.<sup>12</sup> In fact, Fine is forced to invoke these arguments because he wishes to undermine the assertion of R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson that Maimonides' depiction of the lampstand with diagonal branches is authoritative and should be followed in the Hanukkah lamp.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the significance of the Ephraim Hareuveni thesis concerning the relationship of the Tabernacle lampstand to the branches of the *Salvia* plant, one other important contribution of Hareuveni to understanding the Tabernacle lampstand, which can be discussed in the space allotted to me in this volume, is the extensive light Hareuveni shed on the biblical description of the branches of the lampstand found in Exodus 25. Space does not allow me to discuss all of the various botanical terms employed in Exod 25:33-34, where we read as follows:

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<sup>12</sup> Perhaps had Fine checked the dictionaries of Rabbinic Hebrew and other learned studies on Rabbinic Hebrew lexicography, not only might he have spelled the word correctly but would also not have doubted the intentions of Rashi and Maimonides. The following is a summary of what the famous dictionaries and other studies of Rabbinic Hebrew lexicography reveal. According to Alexander Kohut, *Aruch Completum* (8 vols.; Vienna and Berlin: Menora, 1926), 1:94, the correct pronunciation of this word is *'ālāksûn*. It derives from the Greek word *λοξόν*, and it describes an object as slanted. So also Samuel Krauss, *Griechische und lateinische Lehnwörter im Talmud, Midrash und Targum* (2nd ed.; 2 vols.; Berlin: S. Calvary, 1898-1899), 2:54. Joannis Buxtorf the Elder, *Lexicon Chaldaicum, Talmudicum et Rabbinicum* as ed. by Joannis Buxtorf the Younger, ed. Bernard Fischer (Leipzig: Mauritius Schaefer, 1874-1875), 580, vocalizes *'ālaksôn*, and he lists this word to mean primarily "diameter" as a derivative of the Greek adjective *λοξός* meaning in Latin *obliquum*, *inflexum*, *transversum*, and *incurvum*. The Greek lexeme, interestingly enough, can mean, *inter alia*, "crooked" and "curved." Buxtorf lists our lexeme primarily under *loksân* on p. 580 with a cross-reference under *'ālaksôn* on p. 54. Julius Fürst, *Glossaire Graeco-Hebraeum über der griechischer Wörschatz der jüdischen Midraschwerke* (Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1890), 134, lists the Hebrew form under the letter *l* as either *lksn* or *lwksn* and as a loanword in Rabbinic Hebrew from *λοξόν* and meaning *schräge*, i.e., "oblique" or "slanted." Eliezer Ben Yehuda, *A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew* (17 vols.; Jerusalem: Ben-Yehuda Hozaa-La'Or, 1948-1959), 1:243 likewise vocalizes *'ālaksôn*, and he likewise notes that the noun derives from Greek *λοξόν* and that the basic meaning is "diagonal line," and that the secondary meanings "hypotenuse, diameter" account for the use of the expression "half an *'ālaksôn*" in Medieval Hebrew to mean "radius." Finally, Gustav H. Dalman, *Aramäisch-Neuhebräisches Handwörterbuch zu Targum, Talmud und Midrasch* (2nd ed.; Göttingen: E. Pfeiffer, 1938), 20, vocalizes *'ālāksôn*, and he notes that the lexeme is a loanword from Greek *λοξόν*, and that the word means in German (1) *schräg, quer*; and (2) *Diagonale*. Dalman is noted for his especially correct and scientific vocalization of Rabbinic Hebrew.

<sup>13</sup> See Fine, *Menorah*, 155-61.



Three bowls made like unto almonds, with a knop and a flower in one branch; and three bowls made like almonds in the other branch, with a knop and a flower: so in the six branches that come out of the candlestick. And in the [central branch of the] candlestick shall be four bowls made like unto almonds, with their knops and their flowers (so KJV).

Of special importance for appreciating the possible botanical inspiration of the description of the lampstand in Exodus 25 is the use of the term *kaptorim*, which NJPS translates “calyxes” and KJV translates “knops.” Ephraim Hareuveni pointed out that in the TB *Menaḥot* 28b it is asserted by Samuel [of Nehardea] (157-277 CE) in the name of Sabba that *kaptorim* are like Cretan apples. Hareuveni found that there is indeed one plant found in Crete which produces fruit that look like apples. Strange to relate, this plant is the *Salvia pommifera*, which is to say, a *Salvia* that bears fruit.<sup>14</sup> It follows, therefore, that the juxtaposition of a lampstand that has the form of a *Salvia* plant with parts of it that resemble the fruit of a kind of the *Salvia* is not fortuitous.

It is especially intriguing about Rashi’s writing in his commentary on Exod 25:32 that the six branches of the Tabernacle lampstand are supposed to extend diagonally vis-à-vis the central shaft; and Maimonides’ drawing of the branches in his commentary on m. *Menaḥot* 3:7, precisely as described by Rashi, is the unexpected conclusion that in Maimonides’ illustration we may have one more confirmation of a phenomenon, examined with utmost caution by Shamma Friedman, with respect to Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*—that it may well reflect the influence of Rashi’s written exegesis.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ephraim Hareuveni, “The Calyxes of the Menorah and the Cretan Apples,” *Leshonenu* 1 (1929), 49-52 [Hebrew]. For extensive details, see there, 29. See esp. the lucid description and explanation in Gardner, *Seeds of Transcendence*, 152-56.

<sup>15</sup> See Shamma Friedman, “Maimonides’ Use of Rashi’s Commentaries: A Reevaluation,” in *Rashi: The Man and His Work*, ed. Avraham Grossman and Sara Japhet (2 vols.; Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2008), 403-38 [Hebrew]. Without daring to conclude that Maimonides had actually read any of Rashi’s commentaries on the Talmud, Friedman notes that (1) Maimonides does indeed mention French halakhic authorities in the introduction to the *Mishneh Torah*; (2) Maimonides mentions French Jewish customs in the

No less interesting is Ms. Parma De Rossi 682/3 [= Parma 3256 = Richler-Beit-Arié catalogue #504], folio 109r, which provides a picture of a lampstand with diagonal branches followed by the comment: "This diagram is according to the commentary on the Mishnah by Moses b. Maimon, may his memory be for a blessing, and not according to the view of our master, Solomon [i.e., Rashi], may he be remembered unto the life of the world to come."<sup>16</sup> Thus it appears that when copies of Rashi's own drawing of the *menorah* could not be located, the illustrator could supply an illustration from a conventional drawing found elsewhere, leave the space blank, or, as in the case of Parma 682/3, supply a drawing well known to be from Maimonides but suitable enough to give concrete expression to the notion of a seven-

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*Mishneh Torah*, in his responsa and letters. Consequently, with all due caution, Friedman concludes his fascinating article with the assessment that in four successive editions of the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides introduced changes, which brought him closer and closer to Rashi's approach. Friedman makes it clear that he is not prepared to say whether or not Maimonides learned of what we know to be Rashi's view from having read Rashi's commentary on the Talmud.

I, however, feel secure in suggesting the following: (1) Rashi meant what he said when he used the expression *ba'ālāksôn* to mean "diagonal." (2) Maimonides deliberately drew diagonal lines in his drawing of the lampstand in his commentary on m. *Menaḥot*. (3) It is not unlikely that Maimonides derived his unusual but not unprecedented (in the history of Jewish art) understanding of the shape of the branches of the Tabernacle lampstand from Rashi. The idea that Maimonides derived his view of the diagonal branches of the *menorah* from Rashi's commentary on Exod 35:32 has already been suggested in a reply to Shemarya Rosenberg's "The Rebbe and the Menorah" (December 18, 2005) in an anonymous post, dated February 27, 2007 (p. 12); see also the post by a certain David dated December 19, 2005 (p. 19). These responses are all related to an on-going polemic on a blog called "Failed. Messiah.com," which challenges the belief that Menachem Mendel Schneerson was/is the long-awaited messiah. Some Modern Orthodox and some Ultra-Orthodox Jews regard Rabbi Schneerson as tainted because some of his followers claim him to be the messiah even after his demise on June 12, 1994. Antipathy toward Schneerson's view on the shape of the *menorah* may be playing itself out in debates over the *menorah* in the academic world. It is therefore possible that Maimonides' famous drawing, which was even copied into a fifteenth century manuscript of Rashi's commentary on the book of Exodus, has been marginalized and botanists supporting the interpretation of Rashi and Maimonides have been marginalized for possibly theological reasons.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin Richler, *Hebrew Manuscripts in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma: Catalogue, Palaeographical and Codicological Descriptions* by Malachi Beit-Arié (Jerusalem: Jewish National and University Library, 2001), 92-93. The codicological note by Ben-Arié there indicates that according to the colophon, Rashi's commentary on the Pentateuch in this manuscript was completed at Bevanga in Italy on 23 Adar 5072 AM [= March 10, 1302 CE]. The scribe, who tells us that he produced an eclectic text by the comparison of three previously existing manuscripts, was Jekutiel b. Meshullam, who prepared the manuscript for his own personal use.

branched lampstand, which would not necessarily be familiar to medieval readers, who had no access to ancient synagogue mosaics, ossuaries, or synagogue *menorahs*, which were not yet in vogue. In light of the ubiquitous appearance of *menorahs* with arced branches in ancient and medieval Jewish art including manuscripts that contain Rashi's biblical commentaries, we can now readily understand why both Rashi and Maimonides made a point of both describing the lampstand and drawing it.



*Salvia palaestina Benth.* Also known as Israeli Moriah found on the Menorah Hill at Neot Kedumim, the biblical landscape reserve located near the city of Modi'in, Israel. Photograph by Nogah Hareuveni, reproduced from his *Nature in our Biblical Heritage*, 3rd ed. (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense of the State of Israel, 1982), 137 [Hebrew]. I thank Sarit Leybovitch Zalz of the Marketing Department; Rotem Bernstein, Marketing Director; and Dr. Tova Dickstein,

Curator of the Botanical Garden at Neot Kedumim, for permission to reproduce the photograph here. Special thanks to *Helena Sokolovsky*, graphic artist in the Department of Bible, Archaeology, and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev for enhancing the picture for this publication.