

Introduction

Rabbi Solomon Yitzhaqi (1040–1105), known as Rashi, is perhaps the most influential Jewish Bible interpreter of all time. A native of Troyes in the French county of Champagne, Rashi traveled in his youth to study for a decade in the Rhineland talmudic academies (*yeshivot*) of Mainz and Worms, then the intellectual center of the Ashkenazic (Franco-German) Jewish world.¹ He returned to Troyes around 1070 and established a vibrant school of Jewish learning that ultimately drew from the best and brightest students of the Ashkenazic community, who would, in turn, become its leading rabbinic figures in the twelfth century.² Rashi's literary output centers on two major works: his Talmud commentary and his Bible commentary, each monumental in its own right.³ Drawing upon his training in the Rhineland academies by the disciples of the renowned Rabbenu ("our rabbi/master") Gershom ben Judah (c. 960–1028), known as the "luminary of the diaspora," Rashi composed a line-by-line commentary on virtually the entire Talmud, the central rabbinic work that embodies the halakhah (Jewish law). Continually perfected throughout his lifetime, Rashi's Talmud commentary is comprised of lemmas and gloss-type notes that elucidate this highly complex and cryptic multi-volume rabbinic legal work. Though innovative in quality and style, its lineage can be traced to earlier exegetical work in the Rhineland

¹ On Rashi's early life, see Grossman, *Rashi*, 12–19. On the Rhineland talmudic academies, see Kanarfogel, *Intellectual History and Rabbinic Culture*, 37–53, 96–97.

² On Rashi's later life and the school he founded, see Grossman, *Rashi*, 19–70.

³ Rashi also composed liturgical poetry (*piyyutim*), wrote commentaries on earlier liturgical poetry, and issued *responsa*, mostly on halakhic matters. See Grossman, *Rashi*, 149–161; Gruber, *Rashi on Psalms*, 29–37, 75–105.

academies, from which would emanate the Talmud commentary of “the sages of Mainz,” a collective work rooted in the teachings of Rabbenu Gershom that was in the process of formation in Rashi’s day, reaching its final form in the twelfth century.⁴

Rashi’s Bible commentary, on the other hand, was unprecedented in Ashkenazic learning, in which the standard accompaniment to the biblical text was midrash (also referred to as *derash*), the creative and at times fanciful rabbinic genre of interpretation. Rashi, on the other hand, pioneered a model of *peshat*, or plain-sense Bible exegesis, which he used as a standard for evaluating rabbinic midrashic interpretations.⁵ Displaying philological and grammatical acumen as well as keen methodological awareness, the rabbinic master of Troyes regularly noted his departures from midrashic readings that, as he put it, are not “settled upon” (*mitya-shevim ‘al*), i.e., do not sit well with, “the language of Scripture” (*leshon ha-miqra*) and its “sequence” (*seder*) – values that became his exegetical touchstones. Rashi’s commentaries were copied widely and spread quickly. The *peshat* method was refined and brought to new heights by his close students Joseph Qara (c. 1055–c. 1125) and Rashbam (Rashi’s grandson Samuel ben Meir, c. 1080–c. 1160), and their students throughout the twelfth century.⁶ With the advent of printing, Rashi’s popularity

⁴ On Rashi’s Talmud commentary and its relation to earlier Rhineland works, see Grossman, *Rashi*, 133–148; Ta-Shma, *Talmudic Commentary I*, 32–56; Soloveitchik, *Collected Essays II*, 32–35, 62–64; Gruber, *Rashi on Psalms*, 38–52.

⁵ The scholarly literature on Rashi’s Bible exegesis is vast and will be introduced throughout this study as relevant. For a helpful introductory overview, see Grossman, *Rashi*, 73–132; Gruber, *Rashi on Psalms*, 52–75. The precise definition of *peshat*, as will be seen in this study, is a complex matter – debated through the centuries as well as in modern scholarship. As an initial working definition, the Hebrew/Aramaic term *peshat* can be rendered *the plain sense* or *plain sense exegesis*, though the correspondence is not exact, and this translation does not reflect the fact that various key *pashtanim* (practitioners of *peshat*) in the formative medieval period worked with somewhat different conceptions of *peshat*. See Cohen, “Emergence”; Cohen, *Rule of Peshat*. In any case, the common translation of *peshat* as *the literal sense*, while workable in many cases, is problematic because *peshat* readings are at times figurative, in accordance with contextual factors. (The term *mashma’*, on the other hand, can be said to connote *the literal sense*, and Rashi does at times acknowledge its correlation with *peshat*, as discussed in Chapter 1.) Midrash or *derash*, which characterizes virtually all rabbinic Bible interpretation, connotes a reading that departs from the plain sense or *peshat*. Working with the assumption that the biblical text is written as a sort of cipher that hints to its hidden “true” meaning, midrash often violates the rules of grammar and philology, as well as historical-scientific sensibility – all of which guided medieval *peshat* exegesis.

⁶ The extensive scholarly literature on the exegetical work of these two key students of Rashi and their students will be introduced in this study as relevant. For a helpful overview, see Grossman, “Literal Exegesis,” 346–371. The years of the birth and death of Qara and

increased even further. His Talmud commentary became a standard accompaniment of the Talmud, and his Bible commentary, which displaced midrash as a standard accompaniment of Hebrew Scripture, became a central pillar of the highly influential Rabbinic Bible (*Miqra'ot Gedolot*) – both appearing in publications reprinted and used widely to this day.⁷

Even within certain Christian interpretive schools Rashi's Bible commentary would become a key exegetical resource. Christianity traditionally considered the Jews blind to the true, inner, "spiritual" sense of the Law, as they stubbornly adhered to its "letter" and the "carnal" or literal sense of Scripture. Yet a movement emerged in medieval Latin learning that increasingly privileged the literal sense (*sensus litteralis*), prompting scholars to consult Jewish sources to an extent unprecedented in Christian tradition since Jerome.⁸ Most notably, Nicholas of Lyra (d. 1349), considered by many to have been the best-equipped Latin Bible scholar of the Middle Ages, cites Rashi often.⁹ Nicholas was following a trend set by earlier medieval Christian Bible scholars, as Rashi's interpretations were evidently utilized extensively by Andrew of St. Victor (c. 1110–1175)¹⁰ and Herbert of Bosham (1120–1194);¹¹ and they may have even been known to Hugh of St. Victor (c. 1096–1141).¹² By the time of the Renaissance, Christian Hebraists would regularly turn to Rashi's Bible commentary, which became readily accessible in the printed Rabbinic Bible.¹³

So sharp and sudden was Rashi's introduction of *peshat* exegesis that within a mere two generations – from the Troyes master to his grandson Rashbam – the Ashkenazic scholarly community moved from the "pious meditations" of midrash (to borrow a term used by Beryl Smalley¹⁴) to

Rashbam are not known precisely. On the range of possibilities raised in modern scholarship, see Grossman, *France*, 254–258; Liss, *Fictional Worlds*, 57–58.

⁷ See Stern, *Jewish Bible*, 142–157; Heller, *Printing the Talmud*.

⁸ See Dahan, *Les Intellectuels chrétiens*, 289–322; Dahan, "Connaissance"; Klepper, *Insight of Unbelievers*, 13–31.

⁹ See Klepper, *Insight of Unbelievers*, 32–57; see also Geiger, "Student and Opponent"; Geiger, "Commentary"; Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars*.

¹⁰ See van Liere, "Andrew of St. Victor"; Leyra Curiá, *In Hebreo*; Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 149–156; van 't Spijker, "Literal and Spiritual."

¹¹ See Goodwin, *Herbert*; Smalley, "Hebraica"; de Visscher, *Reading the Rabbis*.

¹² See Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 102–105, 364–366; Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars*, 105–110; Leyra Curiá, *In Hebreo*.

¹³ See Burnett, "Strange Career"; Burnett, *Christian Hebraism*, 99–102.

¹⁴ Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 2. Smalley's characterization will be discussed more fully later in this chapter.

producing an analytic mode that anticipates many aspects of modern philological Bible scholarship. As Moshe Greenberg, for example, has remarked: “In principle, nothing has changed in the definition of . . . *peshat* interpretation of the Bible from Rashbam’s day till today . . . We can still participate in the excitement of these exegetical pioneers who witnessed the remarkably rapid development of a clearly formulated exegetical method in [Rashi’s] lifetime.”¹⁵ To be sure, Rashbam emphasized the incomplete nature of his grandfather’s *peshat* project, which did not preclude frequent adoption of midrashic interpretation. In a revealing passage that will be discussed later in this chapter, Rashbam records that Rashi himself acknowledged the “*peshat* interpretations that newly emerge (*ha-mithaddeshim*) every day,”¹⁶ on the basis of which more “pure” *peshat* commentaries on various books of the Bible would be composed by Rashbam and his circle. And yet, Rashbam credited Rashi with the revolutionary endeavor to interpret “the *peshat* of Scripture” in the first place.

Given the powerful influence Rashi ultimately exerted on the later tradition of Bible interpretation, it is understandable that modern scholarship has largely viewed his accomplishments in light of the subsequent development of the concept of *peshat* – and, in parallel, the concept of the “literal sense” in Christian interpretation. The aim of this study, on the other hand, is to explore Rashi against the backdrop on his eleventh-century intellectual setting, taking into consideration developments in Latin learning and Bible interpretation in northern France just prior to what has been termed the “twelfth-century renaissance.” The central argument it puts forth is that a comparative study of Rashi and contemporaneous trends in Christian interpretation – as represented most clearly by Bruno of Cologne (c. 1030–1101), master at the cathedral school of Rheims (66 miles from Troyes) from the mid-1050s until around 1080 (after which he would go on to found the Carthusian order, and accordingly he would come to be known as St. Bruno the Carthusian)¹⁷ – can offer a fresh account of Rashi’s innovative exegetical program and conception of *peshat* by revealing common features of how Jews and

¹⁵ Greenberg, “Relationship,” 567 (my translation from Hebrew).

¹⁶ Rashbam on Gen 37:2, Rosin ed., 49.

¹⁷ See Levy, “Bruno the Carthusian,” 5; Mews, “Scholastic Culture,” 49. Bruno left Rheims c. 1077 to become a hermit, initially in the forest of Colan. By 1084 he had moved to La Grande Chartreuse, where he established the Carthusian order of cloistered monastics. On Bruno’s substantial influence on Christian learning in northern France in the second half of the eleventh century, see Steckel, “*Doctor doctorum*” and the discussion below.

Christians encountered sacred Scripture in the second half of the eleventh century in northern France. This comparative analysis, in turn, offers a powerful tool for a reassessment of the further developments within the northern French *peshat* school by Qara, Rashbam, and their circle, against the backdrop of new conceptions of Bible interpretation that emerged in twelfth-century Latin learning in the school of St. Victor and elsewhere in the cathedral schools of northern France.

KEY CHALLENGES IN RASHI SCHOLARSHIP

Given his Ashkenazic rabbinic background, it is hardly surprising that Rashi turned to the Talmud as a source of authority for emphasizing the importance of “the *peshat* of Scripture” (*peshuto shel miqra*). The maxim that “a biblical verse does not leave the realm of its *peshat*” – cited three times in the Talmud – is the touchstone of Rashi’s Bible commentaries.¹⁸ Yet this talmudic lineage must not obscure the innovative nature of Rashi’s *peshat* program, for in the Talmud the *peshat* maxim is actually quite marginal, and rabbinic exegesis, as a rule, is midrashic.¹⁹ In privileging “the *peshat* of Scripture” Rashi reconfigured the hermeneutical landscape in the Ashkenazic community.²⁰ As an essential part of his *peshat* program, Rashi engaged extensively in grammatical and philological analysis of the biblical text, aided by the Aramaic Targums, glossaries that rendered difficult biblical words into Old French, as well as the lexicographic works of Menahem ben Saruq (a dictionary entitled the *Mahberet*) and Dunash ben Labrat (extensive critical notes on Menahem’s *Mahberet*), two tenth-century lexicographers who lived and worked in al-Andalus (Muslim Spain).²¹ Harnessing these sources, which he combined in a powerful new way, Rashi often challenged traditional midrashic interpretation.

And yet, Rashi’s exegetical practice as a whole does not seem consistent with his programmatic statements regarding the importance of “the *peshat* of Scripture.” Notwithstanding the remarkably clear applications of philological-contextual interpretation he offers regularly, the bulk of Rashi’s Bible commentaries are actually drawn from rabbinic midrashic interpretation and seem to violate the rules of *peshat* that he himself exemplifies adeptly elsewhere. This disparity was noted acerbically by

¹⁸ See Gelles, *Rashi*, 1–14. The *peshat* maxim appears in b.*Shabbat* 63a; b.*Yevamot* 11b, 24a.

¹⁹ See Weiss Halivni, *Peshat & Derash*, 53–79. ²⁰ See Kamin, *Categorization*, 57–59.

²¹ See Chapter 1.

Abraham Ibn Ezra (Spain, Italy, France, England; 1089–1164), a staunch *pashtan* (practitioner of *peshat*) who epitomized the philological-contextual interpretive tradition that had developed separately among Jews in Muslim lands in the tenth and eleventh centuries, powered by substantial advances in Hebrew grammar and philology inspired by developments in Arabic linguistics.

Already in the early tenth century, Saadia ben Joseph al-Fayyumi (882–942, Fustat, Baghdad), known as Saadia Gaon, and regarded by Ibn Ezra as “the first speaker in all areas,” had pioneered a rational, philological-contextual method of Bible interpretation that privileged the literal sense of Scripture.²² Saadia penned extensive Bible commentaries and translated a number of biblical books into Arabic, most notably the Pentateuch, a translation that came to be known as the *Tafsir*.²³ Saadia’s model was followed by virtually all Rabbanite Bible commentators in Muslim lands.²⁴ (In parallel, a vibrant Karaite tradition of Bible interpretation emerged in the Muslim East beginning in the late ninth century; but it is beyond the purview of this study to explore in detail.²⁵) Saadia’s exegetical methods were

²² For further details, see Chapter 4. The broad gamut of Saadia’s achievements has been discussed extensively in modern scholarship and surveyed in a recent monograph by Robert Brody. See Brody, *Sa’adyah Gaon*. For an in-depth view of Saadia’s work within the broader geonic context, see Brody, *Geonim*, 235–332.

²³ See Brody, *Sa’adyah Gaon*, 58–78.

²⁴ The term “Rabbanite,” used both as a substantive noun (“a Rabbanite”) and as an adjective (“a Rabbanite author”), should be distinguished from the term “rabbinic” (used only as an adjective), which, when used to describe a scholar, connotes proficiency in the midrashic style of learning and interpretive methods of the Rabbis. Ibn Ezra (like many of his Andalusian predecessors), for example, was a staunch Rabbanite, but was not a rabbinic scholar, as he was not an expert in Talmud, and he distanced himself from rabbinic interpretive methods (as discussed below). Saadia, on the other hand, might well be termed a rabbinic scholar, since he was an expert in Talmud. Moreover, despite the novelty of his philological exegetical methods, he was prone, at times, to incorporate midrashic material into his Bible commentaries. See Ben-Shammai, *Leader’s Project*, 10–14, 336–373. The terms “rabbinic Judaism” and “Rabbanite Judaism” are much closer to one another, as both connote Judaism in accordance with the teachings of the Rabbis (i.e., not following the Bible alone). The term Rabbanite Judaism, though, is used especially to connote opposition to Karaite Judaism.

²⁵ The Karaites rejected the authority of talmudic interpretation, which, in their view, distorted the true intention of the Bible. Notwithstanding the popular view of Karaite interpreters as strict literalists, the truth is that early Karaite (or proto-Karaite) interpretation was not completely literal, and, indeed, displayed many of the same characteristics of the rabbinic interpretative mode of Late Antiquity. The Karaite philological-contextual method emerged toward the end of the ninth century, and was developed fully in the tenth, especially by younger contemporaries of Saadia in what has come to be known as the Karaite “Jerusalem school.” For further references, see Frank, *Search Scripture*; Polliack, “Major Trends.”

developed further by Samuel ben Hofni Gaon (d. 1013) and transplanted to al-Andalus a generation later.²⁶ As a scion of the Andalusian exegetical school, Ibn Ezra was familiar not only with the lexicographic works of Menahem and Dunash – which were composed in Hebrew and therefore accessible to Rashi – but also with the highly influential grammatical, philological, and exegetical works by subsequent Andalusian scholars, who all wrote in Judeo-Arabic (as did Saadia), a language Rashi did not read.²⁷

Within the Andalusian school, the lexicographic achievements of Menahem and Dunash had been superseded by Judah Hayyuj (c. 945–c. 1000, born in Fez, settled in Cordoba in 960), who revolutionized the study of Hebrew grammar through his discovery of the principle of the triliteral verb-root, i.e., that every Hebrew root is composed of at least three radicals (root letters), though some of them “disappear” in various verbal conjugations of the “weak” and “geminate” roots.²⁸ That discovery put Andalusian biblical exegesis on a methodologically sound footing by endowing it with a precise template for philological analysis. Jonah Ibn Janah (late tenth to early eleventh century; Lucena, Cordoba, and Saragossa) codified Hayyuj’s linguistic revolution in his influential grammar (*Kitāb al-Luma’*) and dictionary (*Kitāb al-Uṣūl*), which would serve as the foundation for subsequent Andalusian Bible exegesis, particularly the influential commentaries of the eleventh-century exegetes Moses Ibn Chiquitilla and Judah Ibn Bal’am.²⁹ Those Andalusian authorities informed the exegetical outlook of Ibn Ezra, to whom the grammatical conceptions in Rashi’s commentary, which he probably first encountered when he arrived in Italy in 1140, appeared rudimentary. As Ibn Ezra’s younger Andalusian contemporary Joseph Kimhi (c. 1105–1170) noted, the linguistic horizon of Ashkenazic scholars was limited, as they knew only the lexicographic works of Menahem and Dunash, which had long been outmoded among Arabophone Jewish scholars.³⁰ Even more egregious for Ibn Ezra was Rashi’s frequent reliance on midrash notwithstanding his claim to adhere to the talmudic *peshat* maxim, a disparity that prompted Ibn Ezra to remark:

Our early [Sages] . . . interpreted sections, verses, words and even letters by way of *derash* (i.e., midrashically) in the Mishnah, Talmud and Baraitas. Now there is no doubt that they knew the straight path as it is and therefore expressed the rule: “A

²⁶ See Ibn Ezra, *Sefer Moznayim*, Jimenez Paton and Sáenz-Badillos ed., 4*–6*; Brody, *Geonim*, 300–316.

²⁷ See Chapter 4. ²⁸ See Maman, “Linguistic School,” 263–267.

²⁹ See Maman, “Linguistic School,” 267–281.

³⁰ Joseph Kimhi, *Sefer ha-Galui*, Mathews ed., 3.

biblical verse does not leave the realm of its *peshat*,” whereas *derash* is [merely] an added idea. But the later generations made *derash* essential and fundamental. For example, Rabbi Solomon (=Rashi) of blessed memory, who interpreted Scripture by way of *derash*. He thought that it is by way of *peshat*; but the *peshat* in his books is less than one in a thousand. Yet the sages of our generation celebrate these books.³¹

Coming from an Andalusian perspective, Ibn Ezra distinguished sharply between the typically midrashic interpretations of the Rabbis in the Talmud and “the *peshat* of Scripture” – something Rashi does not seem to do, as he most often engages in midrashic interpretation.

A number of modern scholars echo Ibn Ezra’s critique. In his systematic study of Rashi’s conceptions of *peshat* and *derash*, Benjamin Gelles, for example, concludes that Rashi “had not yet reached the modern finality of evaluation which allocates to each sense a realm of its own.”³² This outlook, however, was challenged by Moshe Greenberg, who remarked: “The concept of *peshat* was considered so self-evident that scholars of Rashi saw no need to discern precisely how he understood it, and regarded his work as missing the mark rather than asking if he had set a different target than they imagined.”³³ In other words, instead of measuring Rashi according to the standard of Ibn Ezra’s *peshat* ideal, it is necessary to assess the eleventh-century northern French exegete in his own terms and clarify his distinctive exegetical objectives. This challenge was taken up by Greenberg’s student Sarah Kamin in her seminal book *Rashi’s Exegetical Categorization in Respect to the Distinction between Peshat and Derash*, published in Jerusalem in 1986. As Kamin shows, composing a pure *peshat* commentary was not actually Rashi’s objective. Rather, Rashi aimed to produce a commentary that “settles” the words of Scripture properly by respecting its “language” (*lashon*) and “sequence” (*seder*), a goal he often fulfilled through a selective deployment of midrashic interpretations. In Kamin’s view, *peshat* was a central value for Rashi, but not his exclusive exegetical aim.

According to Kamin, by contrast with Gelles’ understanding, Rashi was fully capable of discerning “the *peshat* of Scripture” consistently, but deliberately chose not to do so, preferring instead to compose a critically selected midrashic commentary.³⁴ But this raises the question: If Rashi indeed knew how to discern “the *peshat* of Scripture,” why didn’t he apply that method consistently rather than relying so heavily on the

³¹ Ibn Ezra, *Safah Berurah*, Wilensky ed., 288. ³² Gelles, *Rashi*, 33.

³³ Greenberg, “Relationship,” 561.

³⁴ Building on Kamin’s perspective, subsequent scholars have explored Rashi’s goals in producing such a midrashic commentary. See, e.g., Marcus, “Rashi’s Choice”; Viesel, “Secret.”

older rabbinic midrashic mode of reading? As Moshe Ahrend remarked, by Kamin's account, "Rashi . . . resembles a craftsman who perfected a new and original technique, but set it aside to display to his audience a haphazard collection of works by his predecessors."³⁵ Why, then, did Rashi not compose a "pure" *peshat* commentary – as his grandson Rashbam would do – and thereby display his own powerful new exegetical method exclusively?

The answer to this question, as we aim to demonstrate in this study, is dependent on a proper assessment of the cultural-intellectual background of Rashi's exegetical program. Offering a valuable contemporary perspective on Rashi's trailblazing role within Ashkenazic learning, Rashbam makes the following foundational programmatic remarks:

Our Rabbis taught us that "a biblical verse does not leave the realm of its *peshat*," even though the essence (*'iqqar*) of the Torah comes to teach and inform us the *haggadot* (traditions, lore), *halakhot* (laws), and *dinim* (regulations) through the hints of (*remizat*) the *peshat* by way of redundant language, and through the thirty-two hermeneutical rules (*middot*) of Rabbi Eliezer . . . and the thirteen hermeneutical rules (*middot*) of Rabbi Ishmael. Now the early generations, because of their piety, tended to delve into the *derashot*, since they are fundamental (*'iqqar*), and therefore they were not accustomed to the deep *peshat* of Scripture . . . Now our Master, Rabbi Solomon (=Rashi), the father of my mother, luminary of the Diaspora, who interpreted the Torah, Prophets and Writings, endeavored to interpret the *peshat* of Scripture. And I, Samuel, son of his son-in-law Meir (of blessed memory), debated with him personally, and he admitted to me that if he had the opportunity, he would have to write new commentaries according to the *peshat* interpretations that newly emerge (*ha-mithaddeshim*) every day.³⁶

Although he prominently cites the talmudic *peshat* maxim, Rashbam also explains why "the *peshat* of Scripture" was effectively ignored in the Talmud. As an accomplished talmudist, Rashbam knew full well that the laws and creed of rabbinic Judaism are not based on contextual-philological analysis of Scripture, but rather on talmudic scrutiny of the "hints of the *peshat*," using the rules of midrashic derivation (known as *middot*) codified in lists ascribed to the ancient Sages Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Ishmael.³⁷ By Rashbam's account, this was the exclusive focus of Jewish Bible interpreters – the pious "early generations" – prior to Rashi,

³⁵ Ahrend, "Concept," 245–246.

³⁶ Rashbam on Gen 37:2, Rosin ed., 49. This passage is discussed more fully in Chapter 9.

³⁷ On these lists see Elon, *Principles of Jewish Law*, 57–67; Kahana, "Halakhic Midrashim," 13–16; Yadin, *Scripture as Logos*, 97–121; Enelow, "Thirty-Two Rules."

who was the first to privilege “the *peshat* of Scripture.” Rashbam goes on to record that Rashi himself acknowledged – and approved of – the further development of the *peshat* method he had initiated.³⁸

Rashbam’s words underscore the revolutionary nature of Rashi’s exegetical program, which prompts the following question: Why, in fact, did Rashi choose to focus attention on “the *peshat* of Scripture” in a way that was unprecedented in Ashkenazic tradition? In other words, what could have motivated Rashi to embark on his innovative exegetical program in the first place? Four theories, broadly speaking, have been advanced in modern scholarship to answer this question.

In the mid-twentieth century some scholars argued that it was Rashi’s intensive activity as a Talmud commentator that prompted him to engage in philological-contextual analysis of the Bible, as he did in analyzing the Talmud line by line.³⁹ To be sure, Rashi’s substantial skills in Talmud exegesis, imbued in him from his early studies in the Rhineland academies, would have proved invaluable in his endeavor to ascertain “the *peshat* of Scripture.” But Avraham Grossman points out that this factor, by itself, does not suffice to explain Rashi’s motivation for engaging in *peshat* exegesis in the first place. At least two generations of intensive Talmud exegesis preceded Rashi in the Rhineland academies, as reflected in the surviving fragments of the Talmud commentary of “the sages of Mainz.” Yet there is no evidence that actual *peshat* commentaries on Scripture were produced within that school.⁴⁰ If the endeavor to elucidate “the *peshat* of Scripture” were a natural result of this sort of commentarial activity, Grossman reasons, it should have emerged in the Rhineland before Rashi’s time.⁴¹

Avraham Grossman regards Rashi’s exposure to Jewish Bible exegesis in Muslim lands – particularly in al-Andalus – as a key impetus for his *peshat* program. As already mentioned, it is well known that Rashi drew upon the lexicographic works of the Andalusian linguists Menahem and Dunash,

³⁸ The post-Rashi development of the *peshat* method is discussed in Chapters 8 and 9.

³⁹ See Grossman, *France*, 458–459.

⁴⁰ Interestingly, Grossman himself argues elsewhere that a tendency to analyze the biblical text philologically (rather than exclusively midrashically) can be detected, albeit sporadically, in the Rhineland academies in the eleventh century – and that this may have inspired Rashi’s *peshat* program. See Grossman, *France*, 462–466. Grossman’s evidence, however, is meager. See Berger, “Ashkenazic Rabbinat,” 484, n. 7. More importantly, even according to Grossman, the few philological glosses attested in the writings produced in the Rhineland academies hardly amount to *peshat* commentaries anywhere near the scale of Rashi’s work.

⁴¹ Grossman, *France*, 459.