

ABSTRACT

AMANOS OR AMMANA: AN EMERGING INTERPRETATIVE TRADITION
AND MAIMONIDES' EMENDATION OF THE MISHNAH

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This paper traces the references to and interpretations of Amana/Amanam, a site on the northern border of the Land of Israel, from the early Palestinian traditions of the Mishnah through its printed editions, with a special emphasis on Maimonides' commentary on the Mishnah. I show that אמנה, the dominant spelling in Mishnah editions and in scholarship to this very day, is actually secondary. Earlier versions of the Mishnah have other spellings – such as Amanam, Amanos or Hamanos – which probably refer to the Amanus mountain range in Southern Turkey, a well-known border point in antiquity, as some scholars have correctly suggested.

However, over time, as the geographic location lost its significance, the site has been identified with the biblical location of אמנה, one of the anti-Lebanon mountains, apparently due to a misinterpretation of an amoraic homily. This ultimately led to the change in spelling in the later versions of the Mishnah, which can be traced unequivocally to the version employed by Maimonides himself in his commentary of the Mishnah. Through a close reading of Maimonides' writings, I uncover a deliberate and surprisingly uncharacteristic emendation to the text of the Mishnah on the part of Maimonides, offering a rare glimpse into his methodology and his approach to the intensive work of interpreting the Mishnah.