

SHLOMO SELA, *ABRAHAM IBN EZRA'S INTRODUCTIONS TO ASTROLOGY. A PARALLEL HEBREW-ENGLISH CRITICAL EDITION OF THE BOOK OF THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM AND THE BOOK OF JUDGMENTS OF THE ZODIACAL SIGNS*, BRILL, LEIDEN – BOSTON 2017 (ÉTUDES SUR LE JUDAÏSME MÉDIÉVAL, 69; ABRAHAM IBN EZRA'S ASTROLOGICAL WRITINGS, 5), XIII + 822 PP., ISBN 9789004342279 (HBK), 9789004342286 (EBK)

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Abraham ibn Ezra (c. 1089–c. 1161) was born to a Jewish family in Andalusia where he obtained the typical Jewish education of his time that included Arabic culture and science. At that time he contributed to the field of *piyyut*, the Hebrew poesy. When he was aged 50 he started his life as a traveler through the Latin speaking world. During his stays in France, Italy, and England he wrote all of his Bible commentaries as well as all his contributions to sciences. To the latter field he contributed some thirty treatises that deal with mathematics, astronomy, the astrolabe and other scientific instruments, the Jewish calendar, and astrology. These scientific treatises were mainly written in Hebrew, although sometimes Ibn Ezra also might have written in Latin.

Nineteen of the scientific works deal with astrology. Among them we find three introductions to astrology (two are included in the present volume), two versions of the *Sefer ha-Te'amim* (« Book of Reasons »), in which the astrological reasons behind the concepts are explained, three different treatises on nativities, and eleven treatises on different aspects of astrology such as horoscopy, elections, interrogations, world astrology, and medical astrology. Since 2007 Shlomo Sela has undergone the task to critically edit all these works. The volume under review is the fifth of altogether six volumes planned (it appeared in 2019). All of Ibn Ezra's treatises on astrology have some characteristic features in common. Firstly, they all are derived from similar genres of the Graeco-Arabic astrology as can already be seen from their titles. Secondly, some of the treatises complement each other and from parts of a larger encyclopedia. Thirdly, Ibn Ezra usually produced two versions of treatises on one subject as he did with the Bible commentaries.

The volume under review opens with a general introduction into Ibn Ezra's astronomical works (p. 1–45). It is followed by the critical edition of the *Reshit Hokhmah* (« Book of the Beginning of Wisdom ») which is accompanied by an

English translation (p. 48–271). To this a commentary (« Notes ») is added (p. 275–485). A second edition with an English translation comprises the *Mishpeṭei ha-Mazzalot* (« Book of the Judgments of the Zodiacal Signs », p. 488–555) which again is followed by notes (p. 559–632). To these editions several Appendices are added. Firstly, a list of the manuscripts of the two treatises known so far is given (p. 635–639). Secondly, quotations of several Arabic treatises with English translations are added (Abu Mashar's *Kitāb al-mudkhal al-kabīr*, p. 640–661; Al-Qabīṣī's *Kitāb al-mudkhal* and the *Kitāb al-thamarah*, p. 662–666). A third kind of appendix are Hebrew texts with English translations from Ibn Ezra's *Ṭe'amim* (p. 667–676). In a separate table the places of the lots of the twelve zodiacal signs are presented synoptically (p. 677–690). Further appendices contain a « Hebrew-Arabic Technical Glossary » (p. 691–710) and two English-Hebrew glossaries of technical terms in *Reshit Ḥokhmah* (p. 711–753) and in *Mishpeṭei ha-Mazzalot* (p. 754–783) together with an index to the glossaries (p. 784–798). Further indices to authorities, sources, and technical terms within the editions (p. 799–806) are supplied. The volume is concluded by a « Bibliography » (p. 807–814) and a general index (p. 815–822).

Despite differences in length and style both treatises have in common that they serve as introductions into astrology. The longer *Reshit Ḥokhmah* seems to have been completed in summer of 1148; Ibn Ezra indicates himself as the translator of a passage of Abu Mashar. It contains approximately 28,000 words and is preserved in at least 70 manuscripts. The shorter *Mishpeṭei ha-Mazzalot* seems to have been written towards the end of Ibn Ezra's life in c. 1158. Although the author is not mentioned verbally it is likely that it was written by Ibn Ezra because he refers to further works of his. Nonetheless the treatise is still extant in 25 copies which all bear markers of a reworking either by Ibn Ezra or his copyists. That later introduction has only one third of length of the first one (c. 9,500 words). The longer introduction is divided into ten chapters whereas the shorter one is not divided into chapters but follows a series of catchwords.

Both treatises have in common that they explain the zodiacal signs and the planetary dignities which depend on the position of the planets in the signs as the basis of all astrological enterprises. Accordingly, the aspects, the quadrants of the horoscopic chart, and the twelve horoscopic places are demonstrated. Another topic are the natures and significations of the seven planets and their powers and weaknesses as well as their fortunes and misfortunes, their changing positions in relation to the sun in connection with their movement in the orbs. From that their meaning for nativities, anniversaries, and so on, are derived. Both deal with the lots of the planets and the lots of the twelve horoscopic places, but put different emphasis in their elaboration within the respective treatise. In the final section of each treatise the projection of the planet's ray and the directions are presented.

Beside the astrological contents Ibn Ezra also deals with some astronomical features, among them 48 Ptolemaic constellations. According to the editor it is the first occurrence within a twelfth-century text.

The editor and translator Shlomo Sela is to be commended for his careful editorial work as well as for the easy-to-read translation. The only minor mistake worth mentioning is that in the list of manuscripts in two cases the same folios are give for the two different treatises (see p. 635 # 4 / p. 638 # 1 and p. 638 # 70 / 639 # 25).