

IN MEMORIAM  
SHLOMO SELA  
(9.I.1948–26.VII.2022)

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REMINISCENCES ABOUT A REMARKABLE SCHOLAR

Professor Shlomo Sela passed away near the end of July 2022 after a five-year battle with cancer. He was Professor Emeritus in the Department of Jewish Philosophy at Bar-Ilan University and one of the leading scholars in the world in the history of medieval Jewish science. Over the course of two decades, he single-handedly rescued Abraham Ibn Ezra's vast astrological corpus from oblivion by systematically and methodically preparing critical editions and annotated translations of all the extant Hebrew works in their various versions, as well as of medieval translations of them and of other texts by Ibn Ezra (or ascribed to Ibn Ezra) that are no longer extant in Hebrew. At Bar-Ilan, he introduced a wide variety of courses in medieval Jewish science into the curriculum of the department. Through his many books, numerous studies, and lectures abroad, Sela gained an international reputation as the expert in his field. To his students at Bar-Ilan, he was a caring professor, enthusiastic about the subjects he taught, who opened vistas and made the difficult material accessible and interesting through his dedicated teaching. In what follows we wish to reflect upon his academic life and convey what was so special about this remarkable scholar.

I. *From Student to Professor*

Shlomo Sela received his doctoral degree from the Department of General History at Tel-Aviv University in 1998 with highest honors with a dissertation, written in Hebrew, entitled « Scientific Data in the Exegetical-Theological Work of Abraham Ibn Ezra: Historical Time and Geographical Space Conception ». His advisor was Professor Ron Barkai, who at the time was completing his own book, *A History of Jewish Gynaecological Texts in the Middle Ages*. Sela's B.A. and M.A. were also from the Department of General History at Tel-Aviv University, with the B.A. being awarded in 1975 and the M.A. in 1992. His M.A. thesis – which also received highest honors – was on the « *Pedarii* [in the Roman Senate] ». It was written under the supervision of Professor Ze'ev Rubin, a specialist on the history of late antiquity, the Sasanian dynasty, and the early Byzantine period. The *pedarii* were presumably those Roman senators who had not been elected as magistrates and were not permitted to speak or were of too low a rank to have an opportunity to speak. There is little scholarly consensus concerning them, and perhaps this is what aroused Sela's curiosity. In any case, the thesis had little to do with medieval Jewish science and thought. In fact, Sela's rather unusual turn from ancient Roman history to medieval Jewish astrology and biblical exegesis, from a budding honors master's student in one subject to a doctoral student in a very different period and in totally different academic disciplines is curious. His Doktorvater, Professor Barkai, has shed light on Sela's thinking at the time.<sup>1</sup>

Sela indeed fully intended to specialize in ancient history and accordingly devoted his M.A. studies to it. Yet, at some point during his studies, he began taking advanced courses in applied mathematics and computer sciences. These studies would also prove important for his own research. Around this time, Barkai, in his capacity as Director of the School of Historical Studies at Tel-Aviv University, invited Sela for a personal meeting, as he did with other graduate students in order to discuss any problems or difficulties the students may be having and what could be done to ease them. Sela told him that he was thinking of leaving the field of ancient history and had recalled Barkai's suggestion to him, while an undergraduate student, to specialize in medieval Spanish history. He and Barkai agreed that he would first complete his M.A. degree in ancient history and only then turn to the Middle Ages. Sela did so with renewed energy. His advanced knowledge of ancient Greek and Latin from his classical studies would be crucial for his future research.

In his discussions with Barkai, Sela suggested a specialization in astrology, inspired, in part, by Barkai's own French article on the theoretical and practical

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<sup>1</sup> We thank Professor Barkai for sharing his recollections with us.

aspects of medieval Jewish astrology.<sup>2</sup> Barkai suggested Sela pursue a subject connected to medieval astrology but much broader. Barkai had been attracted at the time to Abraham Ibn Ezra (c. 1089–c. 1161) and, in particular, his view on the relation between religious belief and science and viewed Ibn Ezra as a pioneer insofar as he did not hesitate to interpret Scripture through foreign or secular science. He suggested Sela explore these themes, and Sela enthusiastically agreed. The rest is history. Sela developed these thoughts into an ambitious, thoroughly researched, and most informative dissertation, rooted in biblical exegesis and a masterful understanding of ancient and medieval astrology. From there the Abraham Ibn Ezra project was born.<sup>3</sup>

After Sela received his M.A. in 1992 and in consideration of his expertise in computer software and his background in computer sciences, he was offered a position at the Computer Center at Bar-Ilan University. This position allowed him to focus his free time on his doctoral research on Ibn Ezra's exegetical and scientific writings, which he did with passion and gusto. Six years later, in 1998, at the age of fifty, Sela received his doctorate with highest distinction. In 1999, he was awarded the annual Amos Funkenstein Prize of the Cohn Institute and the School of History at Tel Aviv University. This award is given for the outstanding dissertation of the year, one that « can be singled out as daring and highly original ». Later that year his first book, *Astrology and Biblical Exegesis in the Thought of Abraham Ibn Ezra*, written in Hebrew, was published by Bar-Ilan University Press. As Sela explained in his foreword to the book, it is based on his thesis but significantly revised and expanded. The new study, he added, « affirmed, for the most part, the conclusions of the dissertation, but, at times, changed them ».<sup>4</sup> The core focus of both studies remained the same: Ibn Ezra's integration of scientific material into his exegetical-theological work and the contribution of his scientific writings to the history of science and the transmission of Graeco-Arabic science to Western Europe.

In 2003, Sela's first English book, *Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science*, was published by Brill. Sela explains that although he treats similar subjects and ideas as in his Hebrew book, the material is presented from a different perspective. As the title makes clear, Sela's emphasis in this book is quite different

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<sup>2</sup> RON BARKAI, « L'astrologie juive médiévale, aspects théoriques et pratiques », *Le Moyen Âge*, 93 (1987), p. 323–348. Cf. RON BARKAI, *Science, Magic and Mythology in the Middle Ages* [Hebrew], The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, Jerusalem 1987, p. 9: « Medieval Jewish science acquired a place of honor in modern research, but astrology, despite being an integral part of these Jewish intellectual activities, is virtually absent. [...] My purpose in these words is to fill the gap, if only partially. [...] A thorough inquiry into the art of Jewish astrology is in need of a Researcher ».

<sup>3</sup> During his doctoral research, Sela came to realize the striking extent to which the astrological corpus of the otherwise much studied Ibn Ezra had been neglected. Cf. the above footnote.

<sup>4</sup> SHLOMO SELA, *Astrology and Biblical Exegesis in the Thought of Abraham Ibn Ezra* [Hebrew], Bar-Ilan University Press, Ramat – Gan 1999, foreword, p. 9.

from his Hebrew one. While the Hebrew book focused on Ibn Ezra's « biblical commentaries and their interconnections with science », Sela writes that for this book, he « intentionally shifted the center of gravity to science ». Notwithstanding, this volume retains Sela's conviction that would remain with him for the rest of his life that the « only effective manner to grasp the essential features of Ibn Ezra's thinking is to break the formal dichotomy between his scientific and exegetical work and follow his encyclopedic and interdisciplinary approach ».<sup>5</sup>

Sela intentionally directed this book to the English reader, and it justifiably brought him international recognition. Particularly influential was the chapter he devoted to the « creation of a new scientific vocabulary ». The study of science and philosophy in Hebrew begins in earnest in the twelfth century with two Spanish scholars, Abraham Bar Ḥiyya (c. 1065–c. 1136) and Ibn Ezra. Sela calls Bar Ḥiyya, the older of the two by over two decades, the « genuine pioneer in the task of creating a new Hebrew scientific vocabulary », and indeed his technical terms were favored by later Jewish authors over those of Ibn Ezra. Sela compares the approaches – or « terminological strategies », to use Sela's phrase – of both scholars in coining terms to convey the meanings of Arabic scientific terms. Bar Ḥiyya's terms were more intuitive and often cognates or calques of the Arabic, but Sela clearly was fascinated by Ibn Ezra's « idiosyncratic » terms, creatively drawn from the Bible. Sela explains that Ibn Ezra did not think of himself as one who borrows biblical terms and integrates them into a completely new context. Rather, for Ibn Ezra, the biblical words originally expressed scientific meanings, and his task was « to restore an original scientific meaning that had been forgotten ».<sup>6</sup> Sela gives many examples of such terms, explaining at some length their meanings and biblical sources. This appreciation could already be seen in Sela's account of some of these terms in his Hebrew book and in his 2001 article on Ibn Ezra's Hebrew scientific terminology.<sup>7</sup> Sela concludes that despite the popularity of Ibn Ezra's writings, « the following generations were quite reluctant to adopt Ibn Ezra's peculiar scientific terminology », including virtually all of the « bizarre words » that Sela had discussed. But while most of these terms were « short-lived and were generally ignored by subsequent Hebrew writers and translators », one cannot

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<sup>5</sup> SHLOMO SELA, *Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science*, Brill, Leiden 2003, preface, p. XI.

<sup>6</sup> SELA, *Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science*, p. 106.

<sup>7</sup> SHLOMO SELA, « Abraham Ibn Ezra's Special Strategy in the Creation of a Hebrew Scientific Terminology », *Micrologus: Nature, Sciences and Medieval Societies*, 9 (2001), p. 65–87. Sela's chapter is a much expanded and revised version of this paper with many new terms discussed – including two of his favorites, *meshartim* (planets, p. 129–130) and *toledet* (nature, p. 130–137) – and a very important comparative section on the Hebrew terminologies of Bar Ḥiyya and Ibn Ezra (p. 96–104).

understand Ibn Ezra's writings without understanding them.<sup>8</sup> Sela knew this better than anyone. Not surprisingly, an important feature of Sela's editions and translations of Ibn Ezra's works is the presence of rather comprehensive, detailed and most helpful glossaries of technical terms with translations.

Sela is also the one who prepared a full bibliography of Ibn Ezra's scientific writings. This required, inter alia, studying and distinguishing among Ibn Ezra's many astrological writings and identifying and examining the cross-references found throughout his corpus. The lengthy first chapter of the *Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science*, « Abraham Ibn Ezra's Scientific Corpus », does precisely this. This chapter, a slightly revised and expanded version of a 2001 ASAP article,<sup>9</sup> makes known the purpose and importance and describes the contents of each book and its various versions, presents a history of the book and its publication, establishes, in some cases, Ibn Ezra's authorship of the particular work, offers the likely order in which the books were written, and explains the connections between them. Three years later, Sela co-authored with Gad Freudenthal an annotated chronological listing of all of Ibn Ezra's treatises and books, including the biblical commentaries and those books related to the Hebrew language, but excluding Ibn Ezra's poetic oeuvre.<sup>10</sup>

The third and fourth chapters of Sela's book illustrate his claim that « Ibn Ezra's singular and innovative contribution was not so much related to original astrological or astronomical doctrines or new technical data [although Sela gives some examples of these] as to a singular combination of scientific ideas with religious, philosophical and cultural concepts ».<sup>11</sup> To make his case, Sela relies on a detailed study of Ibn Ezra's important introductions to some of his scientific works. He explains: « These introductions, written in brilliant, incisive and extremely concise Hebrew, were not only meant to catch the reader's interest in the book, but also presented his singular and personal view about the astrological subject to be dealt with ».<sup>12</sup> These fascinating chapters are wide ranging in content and deal with a host of issues, including those of great philosophical and theological concern, such as Ibn Ezra's portrayal of the righteous person and the scholar, the connection of each to the wise soul, their differences, and the ways in

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<sup>8</sup> SELA, *Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science*, p. 142–143.

<sup>9</sup> SHLOMO SELA, « Abraham Ibn Ezra's Scientific Corpus: Basic Constituents and General Characterization », *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 10 (2001), p. 91–149.

<sup>10</sup> SHLOMO SELA and GAD FREUDENTHAL, « Abraham Ibn Ezra's Scholarly Writings: A Chronological Listing », *Aleph*, 6 (2006), p. 13–55. A final bibliographical update by Sela was published posthumously: SHLOMO SELA, « Abraham Ibn Ezra's Scholarly Writings: An Update », *Aleph*, 22 (2022), p. 287–300. This article not only updates the 2006 study but also, as Sela notes, « corrects and complements information about works discussed in the 2006 article ».

<sup>11</sup> SELA, *Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science*, p. 15 and 144. On Ibn Ezra's occasional « creative ideas », see p. 144.

<sup>12</sup> SELA, *Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science*, p. 15.

which each can « override the designs of the stars »;<sup>13</sup> and the role of God's providence and omnipotence in a seemingly astrally determined universe.

The fifth and last chapter of Sela's book deals with Ibn Ezra's attitude to his sources – at times, quite critical – and, in particular, to Ptolemy, « his chief scientific source ».<sup>14</sup> An extra and most important benefit of Sela's book is the collection of numerous texts from Ibn Ezra, cited in the book, in their original Hebrew and with English translation.<sup>15</sup> This book, as a whole, serves as a most fitting and useful, if not requisite introduction to the editions and translations of Ibn Ezra's astrological corpus to which Sela would devote the last two decades of his life.

While Sela's early articles, to some extent those in Spanish but particularly those in English, acquainted readers with his name and his expertise, it was his first English book that at once established his international reputation. Sela now set his mind on his incredibly ambitious – indeed seemingly overly ambitious – plan to prepare critical editions and annotated translations of the full Ibn Ezra corpus of astrological writings.

In 2004, Sela was still working at the Bar-Ilan Computer Center<sup>16</sup> and was teaching courses in Bible – and beginning around then – also in Jewish Philosophy at Bar-Ilan. Somehow all this did not impede his publishing plans, as his articles – written in English, Spanish, and Hebrew – continued to appear in the leading journals in his fields. One particularly important article from this time was a study on the queries on astrology that were sent by a circle of rabbis and scholars from Provence to Maimonides beseeching him to make known his views on astrology.<sup>17</sup> Before the article appeared, scholars and students of Jewish philosophy were well aware of Maimonides' response wherein he distinguished the « exceedingly glorious science » of astronomy from the « stupidity » of judicial astrology, but few were familiar with the queries that resulted in the letter and fewer still studied Maimonides' response in light of these queries. Sela changed this with his 100-page article that included a new critical edition of the Hebrew text and the first translation of it into a European language, accompanied by detailed notes,

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<sup>13</sup> SELA, *Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science*, esp. p. 172–191; citation on p. 190.

<sup>14</sup> SELA, *Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science*, p. 239. Earlier (p. 91), Sela cited Ibn Ezra's assessment of Ptolemy from the first version of his *Book of Reasons*: « I will now give you a rule: everything that you may find of Ptolemy that deals with the spheres is excellent and nothing is available that surpasses it, but his assertions related to the judgments of astrology do not befit his wisdom ».

<sup>15</sup> SELA, *Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science*, Appendix Two, p. 336–386.

<sup>16</sup> Sela would continue to work at the Computer Center for several more years. To this day, he is remembered as a legend, and, from time-to-time, one hears specialists in Computer Help at Bar-Ilan say with a knowing smile that a particularly difficult question that was raised is one that only Shlomo Sela could have answered.

<sup>17</sup> SHLOMO SELA, « Queries on Astrology Sent from Southern France to Maimonides: Critical Edition of the Hebrew Text, Translation, and Commentary », *Aleph*, 4 (2004), p. 89–190.

explanations, and analysis. In addition, Sela's article contained a most important discovery: the queries sent to Maimonides included verbatim quotations and paraphrases of passages from several of Ibn Ezra's astrological writings, which Sela identified in his study. These queries along with Maimonides' response are invaluable documents for discerning the place of astrology in the Jewish communities of Western Europe (and beyond) before and after Maimonides.

A second important article related to Maimonides' negative views on astrology was published by Sela eight years later. This study concerned the sources of Maimonides' quite different discussions of the outermost and starless ninth orb in the beginning of his *Mishneh Torah* and in the *Guide of the Perplexed*.<sup>18</sup> Most interesting is his discussion in the *Mishneh Torah*, which as Sela points out, is a « schematic and straightforward description of the cosmos », but one in which Maimonides focuses on the ninth orb and gives an elaborate and detailed account of it, presenting some « peculiar features » of it not found in most sources. For example, Sela was interested in Maimonides' statement that the ninth orb is divided into twelve signs named after the names of the twelve zodiacal constellations that lie in the eighth orb, and that the twelve signs and the twelve zodiacal constellations of the eighth orb coincided only at the time of the Flood. Maimonides attributed these features to the « ancient sages », but it was unknown who these scholars were and what was Maimonides' source for these features. Sela identified these features with those in a treatise, commonly known as *De orbe*, attributed to the eighth-century Jewish astrologer Māshā' allāh (d. c. 815), and at the time known only via Latin translation. Sela compared a section of this text in Latin (along with his accompanying English translation of it) with the passage from Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*. He showed that the text was Maimonides' source and that the « ancient sages » mentioned there were certain ancient astrologers, whom Sela was able to describe.<sup>19</sup> Sela then turned to the question why Maimonides discussed the ninth orb in such detail in this text and why he adopted

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<sup>18</sup> SHLOMO SELA, « Maimonides and Māshā' allāh on the Ninth Orb of the Signs and Astrology », *Aleph*, 12 (2012), p. 101–134.

<sup>19</sup> The Arabic original of *De orbe* was discovered by Taro Mimura while researching Arabic manuscripts at McGill University. Sela was in contact with Mimura, who supplied him with his unpublished transcription of part of the book. Mimura subsequently published an article on the *De orbe* that rejected Māshā' allāh's authorship and suggested that the *De orbe* is actually the *Book on the Configuration of the Orb* by the tenth-century Jewish scholar Dunash ibn Tamim. See TARO MIMURA, « The Arabic Original of (ps.) Māshā' allāh's *Liber de orbe*: its Date and Authorship », *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 48 (2015), p. 321–352. The fourteenth-century Andalusian manuscript of this work, one of two known copies, located at the University of Pennsylvania, MS Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, LJS 439, may be viewed on-line at: <<https://openn.library.upenn.edu/Data/0001/html/ljs439.html>> (Accessed November 2022). Sela was also in contact with Barbara Obrist, who provided him with a transcription of a fragment from the longer version of the Latin *De orbe* that deals with the ninth orb.

the main elements of the *De orbe*. He argued that while Maimonides must have viewed this account of the ninth orb as « original and coherent », he likely perceived that it contained « a serious attempt to defend astrology against one of its basic weaknesses », its « Achilles' heel ». Maimonides followed his account of it by rejecting it. The ninth orb has no division, the fictive twelve signs of the ninth orb that were thought to correspond to the twelve zodiacal constellations of the eighth orb thus have no physical existence, and even if they had, they could almost never overlap the zodiacal constellations of the eighth orb because they rotate in different planes. Sela explained that by repeating the astrologers' claim that the twelve signs and the twelve constellations aligned only at the time of the Flood, Maimonides was « sarcastically highlighting the radical difference between the two systems », and thus exposed the « fatal flaw in Māshā' allāh's model ».<sup>20</sup>

After the publication of his first English book and his article on the queries on astrology addressed to Maimonides, Sela accepted the Skirball Fellowship for 2004–2005 at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies. Within the space of two months – from mid-October to mid-December 2004 – Sela gave at least six lectures on a variety of topics at universities and institutes throughout England, including the Warburg Institute and, of course, Oxford. Yet, he still found time to work on his life's project, the editions and translations of Ibn Ezra's astrological corpus. It may be mentioned that not all of Sela's lectures in England focused exclusively on Ibn Ezra, as Bar Ḥiyya also was discussed. In fact, in the 2005 Routledge encyclopedia, *Medieval Science, Technology and Medicine: An Encyclopedia*, Sela had entries on both Ibn Ezra and Bar Ḥiyya, and it is in 2005 that he published his learned, wide-ranging, and informative study on Bar Ḥiyya's astrological work – or rather, as Sela noted, on his writings that contained astrological material; for, unlike Ibn Ezra, we have no extant works by him wholly devoted to astrology.<sup>21</sup>

When Sela returned to Israel in 2005, he focused with full resolve on the Ibn Ezra project. There would inevitably be minor interruptions and diversions but invariably his computer would be open to the edition on which he was working. In 2007, the first volume, on Ibn Ezra's *Book of Reasons*, extant in two versions, appeared. Three years later in 2010, the second volume, on Ibn Ezra's *Book of the World*, also extant in two versions, was published. Sela had carefully planned out the structure for each of the volumes, and volume 2 clearly follows that of volume 1: Introduction, including, inter alia, information on the place and date of composition, information on the Hebrew text and the editorial and translation principles; Part 1 containing the Hebrew text and English translation on facing pages of the first version of the book; Part 2 containing detailed notes to Part 1;

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<sup>20</sup> SELA, « Maimonides and Māshā' allāh on the Ninth Orb », esp. p. 122–128, citation on p. 128.

<sup>21</sup> SHLOMO SELA, « Abraham Bar Ḥiyya's Astrological Work and Thought », *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 12 (2005), p. 128–158.



Part 3 containing the Hebrew text and English translation of the second version of the book; Part 4 containing detailed notes to Part 3; and a part containing various relevant appendices, such as references in Ibn Ezra's other writings to the texts edited in the volume, lists of the authorities and sources mentioned in the edited texts, and lists of all extant manuscripts.<sup>22</sup> Finally, the volumes conclude with a bibliography, index, and, as mentioned above, glossary of technical terms with translations. For the remaining volumes, the structure is the same, *mutatis mutandis*. Volume 3 contains editions and translations of three books, two of which are extant in three versions (or more accurately for both books: extant in two complete versions and one partial one), and the third in a single version. The remaining volumes all feature more than one book in a single version (with the exception of volume 8), but again the general structure of each volume is basically the same.<sup>23</sup>

In his preface to the second volume, Sela pointed out that this volume is volume 2 of the series, *Abraham Ibn Ezra's Astrological Writings*, as is written on the cover and title page. Due to a technical problem, no mention of this series was made in the first volume. Henceforth, all volumes in the series would be listed as such and numbered. These two most impressive volumes provided, as would the volumes that followed, all the information and more that one could reasonably hope to find in such an edition and translation of these books.

Shortly after the appearance of the second volume, a rare full-time position in Jewish Philosophy opened up at Bar-Ilan University. Two years later in February 2012, Shlomo Sela, the world's leading authority on the science of Abraham Ibn Ezra and an internationally renowned scholar of the history of medieval Jewish science, was appointed Associate Professor with tenure at Bar-Ilan. Less than a year later, after the publication of his fifth book, the third volume of *Abraham Ibn Ezra's Astrological Writings* (which was not published in time to be considered by the evaluators and the promotion committee), Sela was promoted to Full Professor and finally received the recognition he so richly deserved for many years. The most unusual journey from doctoral student to professor was complete. Four years later, he would retire, but he would continue with a resolute passion and at an even greater pace to devote himself till his last days to the remaining volumes of the Ibn Ezra project.

Charles Burnett has reflected upon Sela's wholehearted determination in his last years to publish critical editions of the Latin translations (and the French ones upon which some of them were based) of Ibn Ezra's astrological writings after completing his critical editions of all of them in their original Hebrew versions:

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<sup>22</sup> In the first volume, this is Part 5; in the second volume, it is Part 6, with the preceding part (Part 5) on « related texts ».

<sup>23</sup> On the order and subject matter of each of these volumes, see below, Appendix, Shlomo Sela's Scholarly Writings: A Bibliography.

Shlomo Sela's research on Abraham Ibn Ezra inevitably led him to explore the melding of Hebrew and Latin astrology in the Middle Ages. The Latin versions of successive versions of his « astrological encyclopedia » came in two forms: Latin translations by well-known scholars (Pietro d'Abano, Henry Bate et al.) usually made a century after the originals, and via the French translations; and anonymous versions that appear to date from Abraham's lifetime, and may have been made by Latin Christian students of his, studying astrology alongside their Jewish counterparts. Sela was as keen to publish these Latin versions as to provide critical editions of the Hebrew, but died before completing the Latin translation project that he had embarked on. It was always a joy for me to puzzle over a Latin word or phrase with Shlomo, usually by email. He was an excellent correspondent and a meticulous scholar.<sup>24</sup>

Shlomo Sela published his first English book and his entire series, *Abraham Ibn Ezra's Astrological Writings*, with Brill. Brill, one could say, was his academic home. Like many scholars, Sela also had his favorite journals and was on the editorial board of several of them. He published in many of the leading journals in his field, but in several more than once; for example, eight times in *Sefarad*, twice in *Miscelanea de Estudios Arabes y Hebraicos*, and more recently, twice in *Mediterranea*. But perhaps the journal at which he felt most at home was *Aleph: Historical Studies in Science and Judaism*. He published his first journal article in English in the first volume of *Aleph* (2001) and his last two journal articles posthumously in the twenty-second volume of *Aleph* (2022). All in all, he published fifteen articles in *Aleph*, two of which he co-authored. Resianne Fontaine, co-editor of the journal, has known Sela for over two decades and, in particular, over the past ten years through *Aleph*-related matters, as well as through academic conferences. She recalls his subtle humour and was always impressed by the originality of his ideas and depth of his studies. Fontaine gives a glimpse as to what it was like to work with Shlomo from the viewpoint of a journal editor. His many contributions over the years became a prominent fixture in *Aleph* and were always most welcome and appreciated. Speaking for herself and also her co-editor, Reimund Leicht, and managing editor, Esti Micenmacher, she emphasizes that it was a distinct pleasure to work with Sela. He responded quickly to all queries and requests and was very appreciative of the care and attention he received.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> From an email letter to Steven Harvey, from January 2023. We thank Professor Burnett for these remarks.

<sup>25</sup> We thank Dr. Fontaine for sharing her recollections with us. Fontaine and Leicht have written a brief *In memoriam* for Sela as the « Editors' Foreword », in *Aleph*, 22 (2022), p. 7. It concludes: « His vast erudition will be thoroughly missed. We will remember him as a great scholar and an amiable colleague ».

A complete list of the titles and publication details of the volumes in Professor Sela's series, *Abraham Ibn Ezra's Astrological Writings*, together with a full bibliography of Sela's publications, follow the personal Reminiscences that we now share with the Reader.

## II. *Niran Garshtein, Reminiscences of a Doctoral Student*

In the first section of this *In memoriam*, we have sketched Shlomo Sela's academic biography and pointed to his outstanding contribution to the field of medieval science, and particularly to the study of Abraham Ibn Ezra's astrological work. We would like to complement this picture by presenting a few additional facets of his career. For me, Sela was not only a specialist in his field and a diligent and prolific scholar. He was the one who introduced me to the world of medieval science and largely shaped my academic interests. Professor Shlomo Sela, my M.A. and Ph.D. supervisor, was the first academic figure with whom I could consult and share my thoughts, questions, and insights. Over the past decade, we engaged in numerous and, for me, fruitful discussions on a wide variety of subjects, mostly, but not exclusively, pertaining to medieval science and history. In what follows, I will attempt to sketch the contours of one specific aspect of Sela's academic career: Shlomo Sela the teacher, mentor, and dedicated advisor.

My first interaction with Sela took place in 2012, in his introductory course « Introduction to Jewish Science in the Middle Ages ». In those days, I was a B.A. student whose main academic interest was early modern philosophy, and my knowledge of medieval history was limited. Sela's class was my first real acquaintance with the field of medieval science. It was in his classroom that I was introduced to the history of astronomy, astrology, and mathematics, and it was there that I became infatuated with these fields of study. My sudden fascination with these subjects cannot only be attributed to the intriguing and alluring world of medieval science – it must also be credited, at least to some extent, to Shlomo Sela the professor.

One of Sela's defining features as a teacher, which none of his students could miss, was his passion for the topics he taught and his infectious enthusiasm in discussing them. From the first lesson of his introductory course, it was already clear that he was not only a highly erudite professor, but a scholar who wholeheartedly loved his subject area and lived it in the full sense of the word.<sup>26</sup> This powerful impression was not limited to his students. Over the past years, when I spoke about Sela to other scholars who were in direct contact with him, their most common reaction was to note his passion for his research, alongside his diligence and his vast body of scholarship.

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<sup>26</sup> As noted below, Sela was committed to his research until his very last breath.

Let me now provide a glimpse into Sela's courses and seminars; in doing so, I will attempt to explain why they were so meaningful and attractive to a young student such as myself. I will take Sela's introductory course as a representative example of all of his courses that I participated in, with the exception of his important course « Advanced Computerized Methods ».<sup>27</sup> The first few sessions of his introductory course were devoted to the historical and social circumstances that led to what he called « the rise of medieval Hebrew science ». As in his first English book, Sela opened his first class with a quotation from Geoffrey Chaucer's *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, in which Chaucer referred, inter alia, to Jews who had made their scientific contribution in Hebrew. Sela then concisely outlined the long history of the transmission of scientific knowledge from antiquity to the twelfth century. Greek and Hellenistic science, the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the Greek-into-Syriac translation activity, the Arabic translation movement, the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates, the Taifas, the Jews of al-Andalus in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and the rise of the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties – all were brought vividly to life in his classroom. Next, Sela delineated what he called « a few rules », which were essentially several of the principles presented in the beginning of Ptolemy's *Almagest* (esp. in Book I, 3–8), alongside a number of fundamental Aristotelian doctrines.

Armed with these basic principles, and rooted in their historical context, his class turned to the core of all of Sela's courses and seminars – the texts. These were mostly from the works of Abraham Ibn Ezra, Maimonides, and Gersonides, the protagonists of his courses. Virtually all of Sela's classes were devoted to the reading of texts, and their format was always the same: Sela brought a text to class and asked one student at a time to read a single sentence, slowly and carefully, and explain its meaning. It must be noted that Sela could not, and probably did not try to, hide his affection for the texts we read in class. When a student read too fast or not loud enough, he would interrupt: « Read it slower, loud and clear. You must give the text the respect it deserves ». In addition to elucidating the scientific content of the specific passages we read, Sela made a great effort to provide his students with methodological tools that would assist them in working with any text. « You must cling to the text like a tick », he used to say every time we, his

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<sup>27</sup> Sela was an expert on Microsoft Office and other software, and his course on computerized methods provided his students with vital research tools, many of which I still use today. When editing texts, Shlomo used numerous macro functions that he had created on his personal computer. On several occasions, I saw Sela working on his editions of Ibn Ezra's astrological writings; his Microsoft Word file was always colorful, with an elaborate system of highlighting that only he knew how to use. In addition to his introductory course and his class on computerized methods, I participated in the following two of his seminars: « The Scientific and Philosophical Exegesis of Abraham Ibn Ezra and Gersonides » (2013–2014) and « Astrology in Jewish Medieval Philosophy » (2014–2015).

students, tried to clarify the meaning of a sentence using our own prior knowledge. « What should we do when we do not understand the meaning of a term? », « What is the role of this specific sentence in the text we read? », « Why do you think Ibn Ezra decided to use this specific term in this context, but an alternative one in a different context? ». These are only a few of the many questions he would ask the class, waiting attentively for our response. This pedagogical approach, alongside his enthusiasm and the relatively small number of students in each of his classes, led to the active participation of his students and created an exceptionally lively learning experience.<sup>28</sup>

In 2015, I asked Sela to be my M.A. advisor, and he agreed at once.<sup>29</sup> I received an identical response from him a year later, when I asked him to supervise my doctoral dissertation, despite the fact that he had already retired. It must be said that Sela was an outstanding supervisor. On the one hand, while he was always available for questions and requests, he gave me ample freedom to do my own independent work. On the other hand, his standards were meticulously high, and his rigorous critical notes and sharp insights were invaluable to my research and my academic development. This combination was priceless. Sela placed considerable trust in his students, while always pushing them to be better researchers, expecting them to work hard and produce eloquent, lucid studies that would advance the state of research. On a personal level, Sela was a source of inspiration and a role model, and my research benefited from each and every conversation we had.

Sela's commitment to and forthrightness with his students must be emphasized here. After Sela was diagnosed with cancer, he contacted me, candidly sharing the bad news and its implications. At the time, I was in an early stage of my doctoral studies. Sela implied that due to his disease, he might be less available than usual for some period of time; however, he made it clear that this should not prevent me from contacting him with any questions that might arise. He then added that given the circumstances, he wanted me to know that he would understand if I chose to look for a different advisor, although it would be a great pleasure for him to continue supervising my dissertation. After expressing my best wishes for his full recovery, I responded that I would be glad to continue working with him as my doctoral supervisor, but only as long as it was not a burden for him. Indeed, despite

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<sup>28</sup> Sela's unique sense of humour also played a role in creating this atmosphere. To give only one example, his seminars were usually small in size; when a student arriving late to class left the door open, Sela would stop the lesson and loudly respond: « Close the door before the masses get in ».

<sup>29</sup> Sela was a visiting scholar at L'Institut d'études avancées de Paris for most of the time that I worked on my M.A. thesis. Despite the geographical distance between us, he was always responsive to my questions and requests.

his illness, Sela continued to guide me in my work, and I was privileged to have him as my advisor throughout the entirety of my doctoral studies. It was only after Sela passed away that I discovered that he had held more or less the same conversation with another former doctoral student of his, Miriam Eichenbaum. This anecdote illuminates another side of Sela's character, illustrating his integrity, honesty, and openness with his students.

Sela's commitment to his students was not limited to their master's or doctoral theses. Sela never refused to read or comment on drafts of my papers or write me a letter of recommendation; he did so expeditiously and punctiliously, before and even after I completed my doctoral studies. Once, I sent him a draft of a not-so-short article, politely asking whether he would be able to read it. Only a few hours later, I received a detailed response to the article, with learned comments and a few important suggestions. As one might imagine, I learned a great deal from his insightful and accurate remarks, and they always improved my articles considerably.

In mid-July 2022, Sela's upcoming book on Henry Bate's Latin translations of Abraham Ibn Ezra's astrological writings (Volume 8 of his outstanding Brill series, *Abraham Ibn Ezra's Astrological Writings*) was nearly ready for publication. Unfortunately, despite his best efforts to complete the book, his health condition was deteriorating, and the proofreading stage had yet to be completed. On July 20, Sela called me to ask whether I could meet him and assist with the proofs and indexing of the book. I agreed immediately. Since I was in Munich for research purposes at the time, we decided to meet in his house eleven days later, after my return to Israel. Sadly, this meeting never took place. Shlomo Sela passed away on 26 July 2022, surrounded by his loving and beloved family.<sup>30</sup> After he passed away, and with his family's and Brill's permission and support, I reverently revised the proofs and drew up the index. It is my fondest hope that I managed to meet, or at least approach, the same high standards that Sela applied to the other volumes in the series.<sup>31</sup> In December 2022, Sela's 1285-page book was published in a two-volume set.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Sela dedicated most of his books to various members of his family, including his wife, children, grandchildren, and the memory of his parents. In his book on Henry Bate, he writes: « To my beloved wife, Leah, without whom I could not have produced this volume ».

<sup>31</sup> I am grateful to Shlomo Sela's family and to Emma de Looij from Brill for their permission to complete what was necessary for the publication of the book, as well as to Bart Nijsten and his team for providing me with all the information I needed throughout the process and for their meticulous work on the book's manuscript.

<sup>32</sup> *Abraham Ibn Ezra Latinus: Henry Bate's Latin Versions of Abraham Ibn Ezra's Astrological Writings, with English Translation and a Collation with the Hebrew and French Source Texts*, edited, translated, collated, and annotated by SHLOMO SELA, Brill, Leiden 2022 (*Abraham Ibn Ezra's Astrological Writings*, 8.1 and 8.2). On this and other volumes in the series, see below, Appendix, Shlomo Sela's Scholarly Writings: A Bibliography.

Shlomo Sela's international reputation and his tremendous contribution to the world of medieval science are widely recognized. His academic publications and discoveries have already been of great use to contemporary historians and will certainly serve scholars for many generations to come. While Sela was surely aware of his significance as a scholar, he always remained humble and approachable.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, as I have tried to show here, Sela's impact goes well beyond his numerous academic achievements. Shlomo Sela was also an admired professor and dedicated advisor who has left an indelible imprint on the hearts and minds of his students.

### III. *Carlos Steel, Reminiscences of a Colleague and Collaborator*

I met Shlomo Sela for the first time at a conference on astrology in the Middle Ages that took place at the University of Bari in 2016. He presented a lecture on Ibn Ezra, and I discussed the influence of Henricus Bate's astrological doctrine on Pierre d'Ailly. I told Shlomo how much Bate was influenced by the work of Ibn Ezra that he had come to know, probably during his student time in Paris, between 1265–70. When Bate returned to his native town, Mechelen, he started in 1273 a translation project of the astrological works of Ibn Ezra with the help of a Jewish scholar, Hagin, who lived in the same town. When I started working on the edition of the astrological autobiography of Bate, I invited Shlomo to join this project, as he was the only scholar with expertise to identify the multiple references by Bate to the work of Ibn Ezra. This was the beginning of an intense and fruitful collaboration. After the publication of Bate's *Nativitas* (in 2018),<sup>34</sup> we worked together on the edition of a newly discovered translation by Bate of a treatise of Ibn Ezra that so far had remained unknown (published in *Mediterranea* in 2020).<sup>35</sup>

In 2019, Shlomo and his wife Leah visited me in Leuven and we travelled together to Mechelen to discover the town where Bate and Hagin had lived. At the city archives, we could see new documents attesting to the presence of Hagin in Mechelen. In one document (dated 1288), Hagin was mentioned: « Ysaac dictus Hackinj Iudeus in Bafferstrate (Isaac called Hackinj [a] Jew in the Bafferstrate). Shlomo was excited about this discovery, for it indicated that Hagin lived in a street very close to Bate's paternal house. The two may even have known one another from their childhood.

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. below, footnote 40.

<sup>34</sup> CARLOS STEEL, STEVEN VANDEN BROECKE, DAVID JUSTE, SHLOMO SELA (eds.), *The Astrological Autobiography of a Medieval Philosopher: Henry Bate's Nativitas (1280–81)*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2018 (Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, 1).

<sup>35</sup> SHLOMO SELA, CARLOS STEEL, C. PHILIPP E. NOTHAFT, DAVID JUSTE, CHARLES BURNETT, « A Newly Discovered Treatise by Abraham Ibn Ezra and Two Treatises Attributed to Al-Kindī in a Latin Translation by Henry Bath », *Mediterranea: International Journal on the Transfer of Knowledge*, 5 (2020), p. 193–305.

In the last two years of his life, when he had already told me that he was seriously ill, Shlomo started another huge project, an edition of all the Latin translations of Ibn Ezra made by Bate, with a comparison to the Hebrew original text, and an English translation. I could not join him in this project as I was involved in another research project. I warned him, however, that this was a complex difficult project, and that he had to work on medieval manuscripts with Latin text and with translations in old French, fields outside his expertise in Hebrew texts. However, he absolutely wanted to do this work and he even considered it as the culmination of his lifelong research on Ibn Ezra. As he said, he only now realized how important Bate's contribution was for the transmission of Ibn Ezra's work, for the medieval scholar had at his disposal excellent now lost copies of the original Hebrew texts. It took him an enormous effort, with deteriorating health conditions, to have this complex edition finished. We had regular mail correspondence on difficult passages in the manuscripts and I was astonished to see how much progress he had made in reading medieval Latin manuscripts. I knew that he was seriously ill, and he made occasional remarks on it. I am grateful to see that he could finish this edition and that it is published in his Brill series, *Abraham Ibn Ezra's Astrological Writings*, as the conclusion of his monumental edition of Ibn Ezra. It is, in all respects, his *opus ultimum*.

#### IV. Steven Harvey, Reminiscences of a Bar-Ilan Colleague

I have known Shlomo Sela for over twenty-five years. In early 1996, I was an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at Bar-Ilan University. I had just purchased a new generation computer with WORD, and I needed help and advice on how best to use it. I was advised to speak to a certain Shlomo Sela at Bar-Ilan's Computer Center. Sela asked what I wanted the computer for and proceeded to give me the most helpful and personal guidance. It was the first of many visits to his office at the Computer Center, most without any computer questions. You see, I very soon learned that Sela, at the time an advanced doctoral student at Tel-Aviv University, was a colleague in my field, an expert on Abraham Ibn Ezra and medieval Jewish science, who was writing on Ibn Ezra's exegetical and astrological writings. Every time we met, I learned something new, actually many things. It seemed that he always had a new discovery he wished to share.

At the end of the year, I began to organize an international conference that would be held at Bar-Ilan in January 1998 on the medieval Hebrew encyclopedias of science and philosophy. In the following months, I sent out invitations to the leading scholars who had worked on the medieval Hebrew encyclopedias, as well as to scholars who had researched the Arabic and Latin ones. Naturally, I discussed my conference with Shlomo. One day, I asked him if Ibn Ezra's astrological writings could be considered an encyclopedia. He replied with those words I always enjoyed



hearing from him, « Let me tell you something interesting ». He then continued with words similar to the following:

Did you know that Millás Vallicrosa had already spoken of the encyclopedic features of Ibn Ezra's scientific corpus, although he never really explained what he meant? I believe he was correct, and it certainly seems accurate to speak of Ibn Ezra's astrological writings as comprising an encyclopedia of astrology, but it needs to be shown clearly in which ways this is true. On the one hand, this will require explaining something of each of his astrological works and how together they comprise an encyclopedia with the basic features of such a work. On the other hand, it will be useful to say something about his encyclopedic approach, in general, including in his biblical commentaries.

I at once enlisted him to lecture at the conference. In the months that followed, we would discuss questions such as: What constitutes a medieval encyclopedia of philosophy and science? And what are its main features? Although Shlomo had not yet completed his doctorate, I was certain he would give a most interesting, original, and informative lecture, and I was not disappointed. His lecture, « Encyclopedic Aspects of Abraham Ibn Ezra's Scientific Corpus », was his first at an academic conference. His chapter with the same title, published in the *Proceedings* of the conference in 2000, would be his first academic publication in English.<sup>36</sup> Shlomo would continue to present Ibn Ezra's astrological writings as constituting an encyclopedia of astrology in his first two books and in later publications.<sup>37</sup>

Around 2003, I was appointed chair of Jewish Philosophy at Bar-Ilan. One of my first tasks was to invite Shlomo to teach a course in our department. This was something I wanted very much to do but I did so apologetically for we both knew that he deserved a full-time position. Regrettably, there were precious few positions in those years. It would not be for another seven years, in my second tenure as chair, that we could put forward Shlomo for a full-time position. At that time, our department desperately needed Shlomo for the courses he could teach as well as for guiding advanced graduate students and evaluating the theses of others. What followed was remarkable and rather unprecedented at Bar-Ilan. We persuaded the Dean to propose Shlomo for the rank of associate professor with tenure. This was remarkable because he had previously not held a full-time position at any rank, and it seemed that sticklers, pedants, and jealous-minded scholars might not approve of skipping the standard processes of academic

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<sup>36</sup> SHLOMO SELA, « Encyclopedic Aspects of Abraham Ibn Ezra's Scientific Corpus », in STEVEN HARVEY (ed.), *The Medieval Hebrew Encyclopedias of Science and Philosophy*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht 2000, p. 154–170.

<sup>37</sup> See, e.g., SELA, *Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science*, esp. p. 57–74; and SELA, *Astrology and Biblical Exegesis* (above, footnote 4), p. 21–22 and 370–377.

advancement. But Shlomo was a remarkable scholar and his curriculum vitae, now boasting four books, spoke for itself. The remarkable scholar deserved a remarkable appointment. Although the protocols of the appointment committees at Bar-Ilan, as well as all letters evaluating the candidate, must be kept confidential, I think I can say that the diverse members of the committee were all in favor of Sela's appointment to associate professor and that the preliminary letters of evaluation supported their opinion. There was one difficulty. If I remember correctly, at least two of the letters said explicitly that he really deserved and should be considered for full professor. One even praised Jewish Philosophy at Bar-Ilan for finally rectifying the great embarrassment to Israeli academia for not having previously appointed him to such a position, which should have been done long ago. The problem was that considering Sela for full professor meant sending his portfolio back to the university appointments committee to receive permission to do so. If they agreed – and it was not certain they would – all scholars who evaluated him would have to send in new letters recommending him for full professor, and that too was not certain. In any case, additional evaluations would be needed from leading scholars in Sela's field. If they would be asked to support his appointment for full professor and would not do so unanimously, Sela might be left with no appointment at all. In the end, my recollection is that the committee received permission from the university appointments committee to consider Sela for full professor, and evaluations at this rank were requested. All letters received were very strong in support of Sela and virtually all for the rank of full professor. But in this extraordinary situation, unanimity was needed. The committee made a highly unusual recommendation to the university appointments committee. Sela was recommended for the appointment at the rank of associate professor with tenure but with the recommended added proviso that given the exceptional evaluations received, all by renowned professors in Israel and abroad in Sela's fields of expertise, and given the unanimous opinion of the committee, Sela should be promoted to full professor at once after the acceptance of his next book for publication. On 26 February 2012, Sela received a letter confirming his appointment to associate professor with tenure. Ten months later, on 26 December 2012, shortly before his sixty-fifth birthday, he received another letter confirming his promotion to full professor. The meteoric rise – and these words are chosen carefully – of this remarkable scholar from the doctoral student who changed his field of study after receiving his M.A. with highest honors; to world-renowned scholar; to full professor in less than a year after his first appointment, was complete. Four years afterwards, Sela retired; and another six years later – to the delight and amazement of appreciative scholars and students throughout the world – he

finished the volume on Henry Bate's translations that was so important to him and with it his work on his life's project, *Abraham Ibn Ezra's Astrological Writings*.<sup>38</sup>

### V. Concluding Remarks

When we reflect on the life and accomplishments of our dear teacher, colleague and friend, Professor Shlomo Sela, we are at once drawn to comparisons between him and the focus of his research, Abraham Ibn Ezra. Both scholars began their « academic careers » late in life at the age of about 50. Ibn Ezra left his native Muslim Spain for Christian Europe at this age, and virtually all of his known writings, including all the extant scientific treatises, date from the Christian period; and Sela received his doctorate when he was 50, and his first book appeared

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<sup>38</sup> Sela completed the critical editions and translations of all the astrological writings extant in Hebrew in 2017 with the publication of the fifth volume. From 2019 to 2022, he published three volumes (four books) of the *Abraham Ibn Ezra Latinus*. There were other medieval translations of Ibn Ezra's astrological writings that Sela likely intended to edit and translate, in particular, the four old French translations by Hagin le Juif and the seven Latin translations by Pietro d'Abano. Regarding the former, Sela was at a very advanced stage in the preparation of the editions of all of them. Jean-Patrice Boudet – who has published on thirteenth-century French astronomical texts and with whom Sela was consulting on his editions of Hagin le Juif's translations – informed us that versions of editions of all four translations were sent by Sela to him for his examination, along with Sela's English translation of one of them (email letter to Niran Garshtein, from August 2022). We thank Professor Boudet for this communication. On Pietro's translations of Ibn Ezra, see the lengthy comprehensive article, SHLOMO SELA, « Pietro d'Abano, Translator of Abraham Ibn Ezra's Astrological Writings », *Sefarad*, 79 (2019), p. 7–87. In this same study, Sela concluded that « Pietro d'Albano employed all four of the Hebrew to French translations produced by Hagin le Juif in 1273 for his own Latin translations ». Vol. 7 of Sela's *Abraham Ibn Ezra's Astrological Writings* includes, inter alia, a critical edition and English translation of Pietro d'Albano's translation of a work, no longer extant in Hebrew, that Pietro attributed to Ibn Ezra and called *Tractatus particulares*. Sela compared Pietro's translation with that of Arnoul de Quincampoix. He concluded that the original Hebrew text was not by Ibn Ezra. See also, SHLOMO SELA, « What is *Tractatus Particulares*, A Four-Part Work Assigned to Abraham Ibn Ezra? A Study of its Sources and General Features », *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 86 (2019), p. 141–195. His interest in the three Latin translations of Ibn Ezra's astrological writings associated with Peter of Limoges (one of them complete, two only partial) may be gauged from his recent article, « The Abraham Ibn Ezra–Peter of Limoges Astrological-Exegetical Connection », *Aleph*, 19 (2019), p. 9–57. On the three Latin translations attributed to Arnoul de Quincampoix, see, e.g., SELA, « Ibn Ezra–Peter of Limoges », p. 11, n. 5. It seems likely that Sela considered all these translations and a few more anonymous ones as part of his project to edit and translate the translations of Ibn Ezra's astrological treatises and make these texts accessible in critical editions for the modern reader. In fact, the clearest evidence that Sela still intended and hoped to keep working on the Ibn Ezra project is that he applied for his fourth prestigious Israel Science Foundation (ISF) grant in early 2022. A few days after his death, the ISF sent a notification that he had been awarded a three-year grant for his project, « Abraham Ibn Ezra and His Latin Translators », for preparing critical editions and English annotated translations of Latin translations of Ibn Ezra's writings, along with comparisons with the underlying Hebrew texts and French translations.

a year later. Over the next two decades – by the standards of their times or, for that matter, of any times – both men were very prolific before their deaths in their early 70s.<sup>39</sup> The discipline at the heart of their scientific production was astrology. Both luminaries made their writings on astrology very interesting and took pains to carefully explain the astral topics they discussed. They were, in a certain sense, kindred souls. But what impressed us most about Shlomo was not his vast learning, nor his truly impressive productivity and grand achievements, but the excitement and enthusiasm with which he shared his many discoveries and conveyed his knowledge. We remember fondly how easily he could capture our interest with words like « Let me tell you something interesting », « I want to tell you a secret », « What you must understand is », and « I just made an exciting discovery ». In short, Professor Shlomo Sela was not simply a most learned scholar, but also a passionate one, who delighted in sharing his research and enthusiasm with others and knew well how to do so. This, we suspect, is the secret to being a remarkable scholar.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Scholars can only estimate Ibn Ezra's dates.

<sup>40</sup> Another important aspect of Sela's persona has been expressed well by Professor Barkai in his correspondence with us: « Shlomo was well aware of the significant academic and intellectual value of his work, but rarely have I met people in the academic world whose humility approached that of Shlomo ».

*Appendix*

SHLOMO SELA'S SCHOLARLY WRITINGS: A BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. Shlomo Sela's Brill Series, *Abraham Ibn Ezra's Astrological Writings*

VOLUME 1. *Abraham Ibn Ezra, The Book of Reasons: A Parallel Hebrew-English Critical Edition of the Two Versions of the Text*, Brill, Leiden 2007 (Études sur le judaïsme médiéval, 35).

The two versions of *Sefer ha-Te'amim* (Book of Reasons) intend to explain the astrological reasons (*te'amim*) behind the concepts employed in both versions of *Reshit Hokhmah* (Beginning of Wisdom). The first version of *Reshit Hokhmah* was published in vol. 5; the second version is lost, but some fragments were discovered and published by Sela (see below, « A Fragment From an Unknown Redaction » (2010).

VOLUME 2. *Abraham Ibn Ezra, The Book of the World: A Parallel Hebrew-English Critical Edition of the Two Versions of the Text*, Brill, Leiden 2010 (Études sur le judaïsme médiéval, 39).

The two versions of *Sefer ha-'Olam* (Book of the World) address world astrology, i.e., the astrological branch concerned with the reconstruction, interpretation, and prognostication of historical, political, and religious events, and with weather forecasting. A hitherto unknown Latin translation of a lost third version of Ibn Ezra's *Sefer ha-'Olam* was recently discovered, published and translated into English. See Shlomo Sela et al., « A Newly Discovered Treatise by Abraham Ibn Ezra » (2020).

VOLUME 3. *Abraham Ibn Ezra on Elections, Interrogations, and Medical Astrology: A Parallel Hebrew-English Critical Edition of the Book of Elections (3 Versions), the Book of Interrogations (3 Versions), and the Book of the Luminaries*, Brill, Leiden 2011 (Études sur le judaïsme médiéval, 50).

This volume is devoted to Ibn Ezra's works on Elections (*mivharim*), Interrogations (*she'elot*), and medical astrology. Elections is an astrological doctrine that is concerned with finding the best time to begin a particular activity. Interrogations allows the astrologer to reply to any question raised by his client or patron. *Sefer ha-Me'orot* (Book of the Luminaries) expounds

the astrological theory behind the doctrine of critical days and addresses the course of both acute and chronic diseases.

VOLUME 4. *Abraham Ibn Ezra on Nativities and Continuous Horoscopy: A Parallel Hebrew-English Critical Edition of the Book of Nativities and the Book of Revolution*, Brill, Leiden 2014 (Études sur le judaïsme médiéval, 59).

This volume is devoted to Ibn Ezra's works on nativities (*moladot*) and continuous horoscopy in nativities. According to the astrological doctrine of nativities, the destiny of the newborn is determined by the configuration of the celestial bodies at the moment of birth, and it may be learned from the natal horoscopic chart. Continuous horoscopy in nativities posits that a new horoscopic chart should be cast every time the Sun arrives at the same point in the zodiac where it was at the time of the person's birth (or even at the beginning of every month, week, day or hour), and that this new chart should be compared with the natal chart. *Sefer ha-Moladot* (Book of Nativities) addresses the doctrine of nativities and the system of continuous horoscopy in nativities. *Sefer ha-Tequfah* (Book of Revolution) is devoted exclusively to continuous horoscopy in nativities. An anonymous Latin translation of a second lost version of *Sefer ha-Moladot* is published in vol. 6.

VOLUME 5. *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 the Judgments of the Zodiacal Signs*, Brill, Leiden 2017 (Études sur le judaïsme médiéval, 69).

*Reshit Ḥokhmah* (Beginning of Wisdom) and *Sefer Mishpetei ha-Mazzalot* (Book of the Judgments of the Zodiacal Signs) are both introductions to astrology, i.e., the astrological genre that conveys basic elements of the world view that underlies astrology and that explains technical concepts of the various branches of astrology. *Reshit Ḥokhmah* was Ibn Ezra's most widely diffused and read astrological work among Jews in the Middle Ages. As mentioned above, a fragment from the second lost version of *Reshit Ḥokhmah* was published by Sela in « A Fragment From an Unknown Redaction » (2010).

« *Abraham Ibn Ezra Latinus* » (vol. 6, 7, 8): With vol. 5, Sela completed his publication of all of Ibn Ezra's extant Hebrew astrological writings. However, Sela's life project, « *Abraham Ibn Ezra's Astrological Writings* », did not end here. The following volumes of the series carry the title « *Abraham Ibn Ezra Latinus* », which according to Sela, signals « that they look at the same cultural phenomenon: Abraham Ibn Ezra's renaissance in the Latin West ». Sela divided Ibn Ezra's Latin astrological corpus into three categories: (a) Latin translations whose Hebrew source texts are extant; (b) Latin translations that have no surviving Hebrew

counterpart and that are undoubtedly translations of texts by Ibn Ezra; (c) Latin translations that have no extant Hebrew counterpart and whose affiliation with Ibn Ezra is unclear. Volumes 6 and 7 present specimens of the second and third of these categories; vol. 8 falls into the first category.

VOLUME 6. *Abraham Ibn Ezra Latinus on Nativities: A Parallel Latin-English Critical Edition of Liber Nativitatum and Liber Abraham Iudei de Nativitatibus*, Brill, Leiden 2019 (Études sur le judaïsme médiéval, 78).

This volume comprises critical editions of two treatises on nativities. The first, *Liber nativitatum*, is an anonymous Latin translation of the second lost Hebrew version of Ibn Ezra's *Book of Nativities*. The second, *Liber Abraham Iudei de nativitatibus*, is a work whose connection with Ibn Ezra is unclear.

VOLUME 7. *Abraham Ibn Ezra Latinus on Elections and Interrogations: A Parallel Latin-English Critical Edition of Liber Electionum, Liber Interrogationum, and Tractatus Particulares*, Brill, Leiden 2020 (Études sur le judaïsme médiéval, 83).

This volume comprises editions of three texts: *Liber electionum*, *Liber interrogationum*, and *Tractatus particulares*. The first two works are anonymous Latin translations of the third and almost completely lost Hebrew versions of the *Book of Elections* and the *Book of Interrogations*, respectively. *Tractatus particulares* is a four-part work assigned to Ibn Ezra, which is extant in two Latin translations. In addition to his edition and translation of this work, Sela offers a close study of it, including a list of all the sources on which the author of *Tractatus particulares* drew.

VOLUME 8/1. *Abraham Ibn Ezra Latinus: Henry Bate's Latin Versions of Abraham Ibn Ezra's Astrological Writings*, With English Translation and a Collation with the Hebrew and French Source Texts, Brill, Leiden 2022 (Études sur le judaïsme médiéval, 93/1).

VOLUME 8/2. *Abraham Ibn Ezra Latinus: Henry Bate's Latin Versions of Abraham Ibn Ezra's Astrological Writings*, With English Translation and a Collation with the Hebrew and French Source Texts, Brill, Leiden 2022 (Études sur le judaïsme médiéval, 93/2).

This volume is divided into two books. It is devoted to Henry Bate of Mechelen (1246–after 1310), « the first scholar to bring Ibn Ezra's astrological work to the knowledge of Latin readers ». It includes critical editions with English translations of all six of Bate's complete Latin translations of Ibn Ezra's astrological writings.

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