

Authors, Targets and Versions of Ibn Ezra's *Iggeret ha-Shabbat*; A Polemic against Calendrical Heresies*

Leor Jacobi**

Bar-Ilan University

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7670-3197>

Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra's *Iggeret ha-Shabbat* is a short, three chapter polemical work devoted to refuting calendrical heresies. A prologue describes the fantastic circumstance of its composition: the Sabbath Day appeared to Ibn Ezra in a dream and delivered a poetic lament castigating him for contributing to heretical desecration of the Sabbath. Voluminous scholarship has been devoted to the question of whether the heretical work refuted is the Commentary of R. Samuel ben Meir (*Rashbam*). This literature is reviewed *in toto*, with a focus on Samuel Poznański's seminal 1897 study identifying the heresy with the obscure Mishawite sect. The importance of the earliest known manuscript is first noted; copied in Lleida in 1382, it served as a basis for a little-known 1840 edition. The authenticity of the fantastic prologue – previously published separately, appended to various Rabbinic volumes – had already been questioned in the 18th century. Manuscripts that Samuel D. Luzzatto (*Shadal*) wrote and corrected by hand in preparing his first edition are reviewed. A previously unpublished note of his addresses a responsum by R. Hai Gaon, paraphrased by Ibn Ezra or his students in two different works, regarding *tequfot* superstitions, magical forces associated with the solstices and equinoxes.

KEYWORDS: Abraham Ibn Ezra; Karaites; Jewish Calendar; Mishawites; Samuel David Luzzatto.

AUTORES, OBJETIVOS Y VERSIONES DEL *IGUÉRET HA-ŠABAT* DE IBN EZRA, UNA POLÉMICA ACERCA DE HEREJÍAS CALENDÁRICAS.— El *Iguéret ha-Šabat* del rabino Abraham ibn Ezra es un breve trabajo polémico de apenas tres capítulos, que trata de las herejías calendáricas. En el prólogo se describen las fantásticas circunstancias que rodearon su compo-

* I would like to thank Marc Shapiro, Gad Freudenthal, Emma Abate, Justine Isserles, Shimon Steinmetz, Jose Manuel Fradejas Rueda and anonymous reviewers for their valuable input. I acknowledge support received from The Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture. Most research was carried out at the National Library of Israel, which graciously granted access to manuscripts and rare books and whose staff provided vital bibliographic guidance. As Jean Rafael and Tania Guetta's love of Sephardic culture and scholarship knows no bounds, neither does my gratitude to them.

** leor.jacobi@biu.ac.il

sición, pues el *šabat* se le apareció a Ibn Ezra en un sueño y, por medio de un poético lamento, le amonestó por haber contribuido a la herética desacralización del *šabat*. Han corrido ríos de tinta acerca de si el trabajo herético rebatido es el Comentario de R. Samuel ben Meir (*Rašbam*). En este artículo se revisan todas las publicaciones que hay sobre el tema, y se presta atención especial al estudio seminal de Samuel Poznański, publicado en 1897, en el que se identifica la herejía con la oscura secta mishawita. Por primera vez, se pone de relieve la importancia del manuscrito más antiguo, el copiado en Lérida en 1382, que constituye la base de la poco conocida edición de 1840. La autenticidad del prólogo fantástico –publicado previamente y de manera aislada en varios volúmenes rabínicos– había sido puesta en duda durante el siglo XVIII. En apéndice se analiza el manuscrito que Samuel David Luzzatto (*Šadal*) corrigió mientras preparaba su edición. Una nota inédita recoge un *responsum* de R. Hai Gaon, que parafrasearon Ibn Ezra o sus discípulos en dos obras diferentes, referente a las supersticiones *tecufot* y a las fuerzas mágicas asociadas a los solsticios y equinoccios.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Abraham ibn Ezra; caraítas; calendario judío; mišahuitas; Samuel David Luzzatto.

An apparition appeared to R. Abraham “The Sefaradi” Ibn Ezra in a dream on the night of the Sabbath during his sojourn in England. It delivered a poetic lament bemoaning his role in the desecration of the holy Sabbath day. The great 12th-century sage awoke, dragged his library of Bible commentaries into the moonlight and eventually located the offending passage. Contrary to established tradition and practice, the heretical commentary stated that the Sabbath day begins in the morning rather than the evening and is to be observed until the following morning. “Better to desecrate one Sabbath” thought Ibn Ezra (*Yoma* 85b), as he considered ripping up the manuscript; but he refrained, cursing its author instead and whoever would dare to copy it. He also vowed to compose a refutation immediately upon the close of the Sabbath the following evening. That polemical work is *Iggeret Ha-Shabbat* (*‘The Sabbath Epistle’*).¹ Its three chapters refute calendrical heresies concerning the Biblical year, month, and day, respectively, with a brief introduction – all prefaced by this legendary account of how it came to be written.

¹ On the history of the Jewish calendar and sects, see Sacha STERN, *Calendar and Community* (New York: Oxford University, 2001), and *Calendars in Antiquity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University, 2012) pp. 332-424.

Who authored the heretical commentary that the Sabbath Epistle was directed against? Why? Did Ibn Ezra himself compose all (or any) of the Sabbath Epistle, as proclaimed by the fantastic prologue? Extensive scholarship related to these questions will be surveyed, mostly from the 18th century to the present day, reviewing manuscripts of the work and early printed editions.

This study does not include significant analysis of either the central astronomical aspects of the letter or Ibn Ezra's biblical interpretations. However, a brief description of the controversial interpretation and how it diverges from the traditional interpretation is in order. In the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, at the end of each day of each day a verse states: *ויהי ערב ויהי בקר* and then "the first day," "the second day," etc. The term *ויהי* is traditionally translated as "And there was," thus: "And there was evening and there was morning".² The daily cycle begins with the evening and hence ends with the approach of evening. Thus, Jewish observance of the Sabbath Day, a commemoration of the seventh day of creation, begins at sundown, traditionally accompanied by the lighting of candles. However, *ויהי* could be translated "was" or "arrived," meaning that the evening arrived and then the morning arrived. The moment morning arrives, the previous day ends and a new one begins. This revolutionary interpretation was opposed vigorously by R. Abraham Ibn Ezra because it contradicts traditional observance of the Sabbath and Festival days.³

1. EARLY PUBLICATIONS OF THE PROLOGUE AND CRITICISM

Both R. Isaac Abravanel in late 15th-century Spain⁴ and R. Hayyim Moshe ibn Attar in the early 18th century⁵ unquestioningly accepted the

² *Tanach*, ed. Nossou SCHERMAN (Brooklyn: Mesorah, 1996) p. 3.

³ For example, the very first sugia of the Babylonian Talmud (*Berakhot* 2a) appears to follow the traditional interpretation of the verse.

⁴ R. Isaac ABRABANEL, *Yeshuot Meshicho*, in *Mikraot Gedolot Orim Gedolim*, Supplement to Vol. 13 (Jerusalem, 1992-1999) p. 76 loc. "u'b'omro v'sha'r."

⁵ R. Hayyim IBN ATTAR, *Or HaChayyim* (Bnei Brak, 1981) Lev 19:3, loc. "v'et shabtotai".

attribution of the Sabbath Epistle to R. Abraham Ibn Ezra. However, based upon its preponderance in manuscripts and early publications, they probably had access to the prologue only and assumed that it was the entire work. Shabbethai Bass (Kalisz-Breslau, 1641-1718), the father of Hebrew bibliography, described the Epistle as a “*pilpul* on the Sabbath eve and following night, how the day followed the first night.”⁶ The surprising description as a *pilpul* suggests that the entire work is referred to, but the first two chapters are ignored, those not mentioned in the dramatic prologue. Bass knew of the work from a manuscript or from a secondhand account.⁷

In the introduction to his 1840 edition,⁸ R. Abram Benedict Piperno stated that *Iggeret HaShabbat* had already been published several times, but only excerpts (referring to the prologue).⁹ An early publication of the prologue alone was at the end of *Shulhan Arukh Ha-Ari*, published in Lvov (Lemberg) in 1788.¹⁰ That version came to the attention of R. Rafael Ashkenazi (Florence, Italy, 18th cent) when a late 18th-century handwritten marginal note to the super-commentary of R. Joseph Tuv Elem (the Sephardi) to Ibn Ezra’s Bible Commentary noted that the *Iggeret HaShabbat* referred to by R. Joseph ben Eliezer Bonfils (14th century, Mediterranean) was printed in *Shulhan Arukh Ha-Ari*.¹¹

⁶ Shabbethai BASS, *Sifte Yeshenim* (Amsterdam: Tartas, 1680) list 3, p. 3, #57.

⁷ See: Menahem M. SLATKINE, *Reshit Bikure ha-Bibliyografiya b’safrut ha-ivriyt* (Tel-Aviv: Malan, 1958) p. 10.

⁸ Published together with R. Nathan bar Samuel HA-ROFE, *Sefer Mivchar HaMa’amarim*, ed. A. B. PIPERNO (Livorno: E. M. Ottolenghi, 1840) pp. 59r-68r.

⁹ Such as: *Hemdat Yamim* (Izmir: Israel Yaakov ALGAZI, 1731) Ch. 5; (Constantinople, 1735) p. 28b. The author reproduced the preface in its entirety in a chapter on the holiness of the Sabbath. His enthusiastic introduction states that it was copied from a manuscript written in the author’s hand. He also clearly believed that the preface was the entire work and the *Iggeret* was sent by the Sabbath. For a list of early editions of the Epistle, see Kineret SITTIG, “The ‘Sabbath Epistle’ by Abraham Ibn Ezra: its Purpose and Novelty,” in *Time, Astronomy, and Calendars in the Jewish Tradition*, eds. Sacha STERN & Charles BURNETT (Leiden: Brill, 2014) pp. 209-220: 210-211.

¹⁰ Other early editions: Frankfurt, 1791, and Amsterdam, 1809.

¹¹ “Ohel Yosef” in *Sefer Margalioth Tovah*, Amsterdam 1722; see locations in Josef BONFILS, *Sophnath Pan’eah*, ed. D. HERZOG (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1930) p. 29, 32. Not much is known about this author other than that he travelled widely in the Mediterranean in the 14th century.

פרק ה אגרת השבת להראב"ע

הגדור את שבתותי שתי שבתות שבת העיקר
ושבתות השבתות. כי לברית יש בזה יותר להודיע
מפני הכריות האלו וכן לא היו להם אונס ע"י זה
ונתתי להם יד ופס טוב מכניס ומבטל כי אם היו מולידים
בניס ובגנות. ואי אפשר שיהיו מולידים למאמץ ולאליפיס
לכן בפעולה זו אפש להם להוסיף מחול על הקדש כדכונ'
ולפי ההפסד מהבדלים הנשמות למה אלפים ורבבות
ומזה הענין גם כן אחר בתקונים וכל המוסף מוסיפוס
להנפס מיריה בשבת כי במרה שמדד להוסיף נשמות
על שראל מורדיו לו להוסיף לו ג' כנפס מיריה.
וכן דלאני למורי גר' היה מזה על איש חכם
מקדוכו שלא הח לו בני ומתחנן לפגנו ובמראו'
לאנח מרד על הדבר וההדור על תוספת שבת להוסיף
כפי כחו ולהיות טוב ברחיבות קריה בערבי שבתות
ומבטלי שבתות להודיע את הענין להוסיף מחול הקדש
ובכן יונח תקון לנפשו ולבני סלחתי על הדבר והשיבנו
לעולם אפוטונוס גדול לקדושת השבת אשר תרומם
קרנו למעלה למאת מכניסיהם של שבת חלופה ומידעם
ולמען תתלכ בפסד בעבודת בוראך אנויך לך מה
שמאלתי במגלות סתרי' מכתב ידו של החכם הגדול כה"ר
אברהם בן עזרא ע"ה הוא איגרת שלחה אליו מאת השב'
במלחם חזון לילה וזל בשנת ארבעת אלפים ותשעה מא'
וי"ט בחגי ליל שבת ב"ר לחדש טבת ואני אברהם
הספרדי הקרא' בן עזרא הייתי בעיר אחד מעירי הא'
הקרא' קנה הארזון שהוא גבול ז' מבוטלות ארזון נוספת
ואני הייתי שם ופגתי ערביה עלי ואלהיה בתלמי ונהנה
עומד לגדי במרא' גבר וכדור איגרת חמומה ועני ויאמר
ל' קח נא האיגרת ששלחה אליך השבת ואקור ואכתומה
ל' ואבדך את ה' אשר כוונתי לו הכבוד והתפס' בשתי
יד ויד נטפון מר ואקראתה ותהי כפי כדכס למתוק אף
בקוראי הטורי' חס לבי בקרבי ובכעני נאיתה נפשו ואש'
העומד לגדי מה מפעמי' חטאיתי כי מיום אשר ידעתי
את ה' הנכבד והטורי אשר בראני ולמדתי מנאותיו לעולם
ואהבתי את השבת ובטורם בואה הייתי ויזל לקראתה בכל
לבי גם בלילי הייתי משלח אותה בשמחה ובשירים
ומי בכל עבודה כמוני גאון ומרוע שלחה אלי זאת
האיגרת וזו היא.

חדות נקבות וזכרים ושמים כי זקנים עם נערים ולא
יתאבלו כי אכלים ובילא יספרו על מית ישרים והשקט
ימלא עבד ואמה והגרים אשר בשערים ירחוק כל בהמות
הם ביד איש בסוסים וחמורים ושורים וכל המשכיל ביום
הוא יקדש וגם יגדל חפוסם כבודי' בכל יום ימלאו שצרי
תבונה וכיומי נפתחו מאה שערים מוטבד מעשו דרך וכוון
מוזא חפץ ודבר כל דברים אני שמרתיך מכל אסם למען
שמרתי מאד מימי נעורם וכבודותך שגבה נמלאת כן
אשר באו אליך הספרים וגם כבוד לחלל יום ו' ואף תחשה
ולא תדור נדרים לחבר איגרת דרך האמונים ותשלחם אל
כל העברים ועני ויאמר לי נור השבת הגדל הודר לה אשר
הביאו תלמידך אל ביתך אתמול שפרים פירומי התורה
ושם כתוב לחלל את השבת והתה תאזור מתוך כבוד
כבוד השבת להלחם במלחמת התורה עם אויב השבת
ולא תשא פני איש ואיך תתפגעם רוחי עלי ותפגע נכחיה
מאד וארחץ ידי ואזכיר את הנפלים מזה אל אור הלכה
והנה כתוב שם פי' הספוק ויהי ערב ויהי בוקר יום אחד
והוא אומר כי כאשר היה בוקר יום כ' עליה יום אחד שלם
כי הלילה הולכת אחד היום וכמעט קרית את כבדי גם
קרבתני זה הפיו' כי אחרת טוב לחלל שבת א' ולא יחללו
ישראל שבתות הרבה אם ילאו זה הפיו' הרע גם הנה
כולנו לעב וקלם בעניי הנשים והאנשים בעבוד כבוד שבת
ואורי נדר אם אתן שניה לעני עד נחת יום הקדוש עד
שאכתוב איגרת ארוכה לבאר את ראשית יום התורה
להרם מכשול ולהסיר פח המוקש כי כל ישראל הפורשים
גם הדקיקים פגמים יודעים כי לא ככתבה פגשתי בראשית
מעשה הש"ת בכל יום רק בעבוד שבת שירעו שומרי התורה
אף ישמרו את השבת כאשר שבת השם להסיר ימי בראשית
והנה אם יהיה סוף ה' עד בוקר יום ו' היה לנו לספור
הלילה הבא הנה זה הפירוש מתבטל על שראל במזרח
ובמערב גם הקדושים גם הרחוקים גם חיים גם מתים
והמאמין בפיו' הזה השם יתברך יקום נקמת השבת
ממך והקורא אותו בקול גדול תדבק לשון אל חיבו גם
הסופר הכותב אותו בפירוש התורה ידוי יבט תיבס ויבין
ויזמן כזה תבנה ולכל בני ישראל יהיה אור עכל'.

בבאן

מודעא דכח להודיע ולהודיע כמה וכמה
מקפדת שבת הקדוש על כבודה עניך
הרואות מעשה ה' כי תלמדי' השם אף שבתה מהם
שבתו מעשה לא עשו ח' ועם כל זאת הרצון והחיר
את כל הארדה הזאת על דם אף כי לרשע ומושא לחלל
את כבוד הדעה של שבת שהשבת יתבע עלכונה מהם
להשיב להם שבתותם אל חיוסם וכיותר תכבד עליהם עון
אשמה בהקל כבוד כניסה כאשר חכמים הניחו כבוד לילה
קובס לבכור הצמחיה כל לא להוציא מלב המיון האומרי'
שהיום הולך אחד הלילה על כן הגדילו את יד תפארת
גדולתה

Figure 1: *Hemdat HaYamim* (Constantinople, 1735) p. 74
Reproduction of the Epistle begins in the middle of the first row.¹²

¹² Image available at www.hebrewbooks.org.

Not much is known about Rafael Ashkenazi, but he was praised by R. Malachi ben Jacob HaCohen in his *Yad Malakhi*,¹³ and R. Chaim Joseph David Azulai (*Chida*), the great 18th century bibliographer, cited him as an expert in the writings of Ibn Ezra.¹⁴

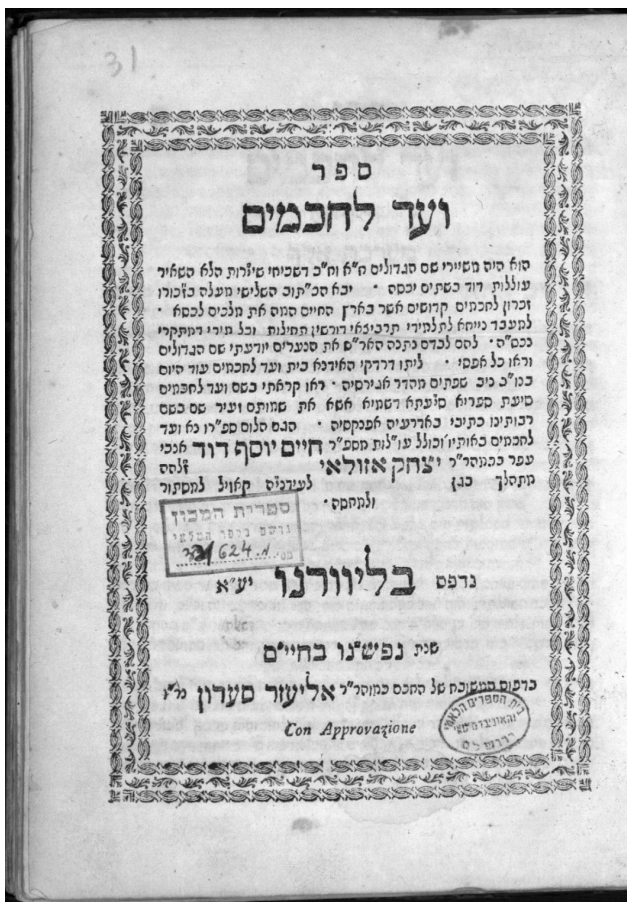


Figure 2: Chida's *Va'ad La-Hakhamim* (Livorno, 1796)
Courtesy of the National Library of Israel. Photo: Leor Jacobi

¹³ Malachi ben Jacob Ha-COHEN, *Yad Malakhi* (Livorno, 1767) # 283.

¹⁴ R. C. J. D. AZULAI, *Va'ad L'Chakhamim* (Livorno, 1796) p. 3. This section was included in later editions of *Shem HaGedolim* as a supplement to the entry on Ibn Ezra found in volume two of the first edition.

In a letter to R. Gamliel of Monselice describing lesser known works of Ibn Ezra, Rafael Ashkenazi categorically rejected the attribution of the printed prologue to Ibn Ezra:¹⁵

... האגרת אשר נדפסה כנ"ל לפענ"ד אפילו במחשבה אינה מחבורי הראב"ע כאשר יראה הרואה בפירוש הרב בכמה וכמה מקומות אשר המה מצויים אצלי. ועוד כי הנדפסת בש"ע הנ"ל איננה אלא דף אחד והאגרת השבת אשר חבר הראב"ע הוא חבור גדול הכמות שהרי בה רבה מקומות מצאנו דבריו אשר הם בשער שלישי. ועוד כי הרואה יראה כי דבריו אינם אפילו ברמיזה באותה אשר נדפסה ועל כן אמרתי שדברי חלומות לא מעלים ולא מורידים.

In my humble opinion, there is no conceivable possibility that the printed letter is a composition of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra. This is evidently clear due to [contradictions with principles of] his commentary in numerous instances I have identified. Furthermore, the version printed in the aforementioned *Shulchan Arukh* is only one page, but R. Ibn Ezra's *Iggeret HaShabbat* is a much longer composition, as its third chapter is often cited [by R. Joseph Tuv Elem]. Also, anyone can see that this content is not even hinted at in the printed version. Therefore, I say here that "dreams do not raise or lower one" [= dreams are irrelevant].

Rafael Ashkenazi opposed the attribution to Ibn Ezra both generally, based on unstated "evidently clear" contradictions between it and Ibn Ezra's other writings, and specifically, due to a lack of correspondence between the printed version and citations from R. Joseph Tuv Elem. One of the factors which Ashkenazi undoubtedly considered was Ibn Ezra's own direct response to this very same heretical interpretation in his Bible Commentary (Exod 16:25), where he referred to it as emanating from "many who lack faith" and as "foolish". However, the cursing and vitriol of the prologue to the *Iggeret* are muted in Ibn Ezra's Bible Commentary. On the contrary, Ibn Ezra's sharp refutation there is but par for the course in his continuing dialogue with other Rabbinic, Karaite and heretical interpretations.

¹⁵ Naftali BEN-MENACHEM, *'Inyanei Ibn Ezra* (Jerusalem: Mosad Ha-Rav Kook, 1978) pp. 305-306. Ben-Menachem made light of R. Rafael's critical abilities regarding his rejection of this attribution (pp. 250-251).

Piperno also stated that his full publication proves that Ibn Ezra was the author of *Iggeret ha-Shabbat*. He meant that it directly resolves R. Rafael Ashkenazi's objections to the attribution. While it does directly resolve the second objection (that the real *Iggeret* must be much longer than the prologue version), Piperno ignored Ashkenazi's first objection regarding the contents of the prologue. Unfortunately, R. Rafael Ashkenazi did not explicitly state the contradictions between what we now know as the prologue of the *Iggeret* and Ibn Ezra's other writings.

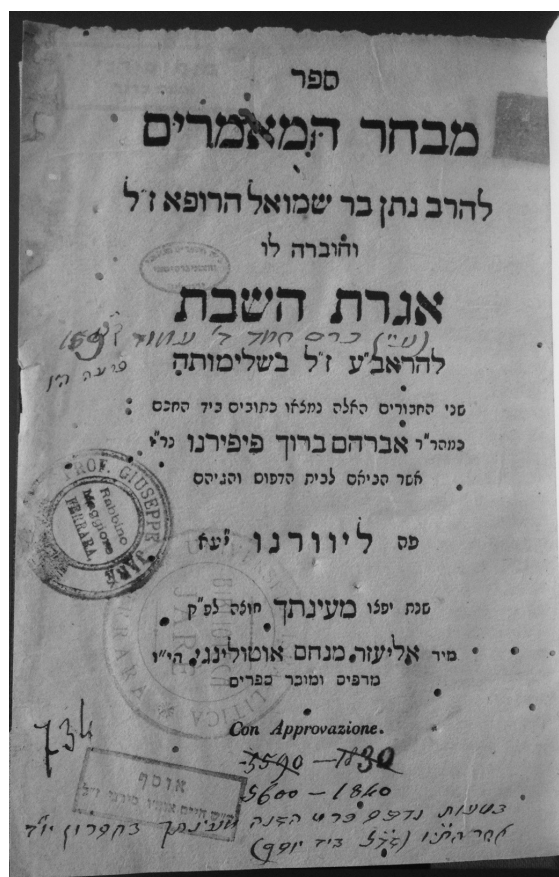


Figure 3: Piperno edition of *Iggeret Ha-Shabbat*, title page.

Personal copy of Prof. Giuseppe Jaré, one of the last students of Samuel David Luzzatto, with a reference to Luzzatto's correction of the dating error.

Photo: Leor Jacobi

2. THE WISSENSCHAFT SCHOLARS AND THEIR EDITIONS

Samuel David Luzzatto (*Shadal*, Trieste, Padua, Italy, 1800-1865) published the first complete version of *Iggeret HaShabbat* in *Kerem Chemed* in 1838-1839, just a year or two before Piperno's 1840 edition.¹⁶ Like other classic 19th-century Wissenschaft journals, *Kerem Chemed* adopted a literary form of learned correspondence between scholars.¹⁷ Ever since 1818, Luzzatto had corresponded prolifically in spurts with

¹⁶ S. D. LUZZATTO, *Kerem Chemed* 4 (1839), Letter 22, pp. 158-172. Thus, the two editions can be thought of as twin first editions. See below, on the Lleida manuscript, basis for Piperno's Livorno edition. Curiously, a printing error in Piperno's chronogram on the opening page caused a lasting perception that his edition appeared in 1830, ten years before its actual publication. The word מעינתך (Prov 16:16) was printed defectively, without the second *yod*. In response to a query, Luzzatto verified the error with Piperno, who apologized. See S. D. LUZZATTO, "Correspondence from Padua (16.11.1840)," in *Israelitische Annalen: ein Centralblatt für Geschichte, Literatur und Cultur der Israeliten aller Zeiten und Länder*, ed. J.M. JOST (Frankfurt) 50 (11.12.1840) pp. 416-417; cited in *S. D. Luzzatto's hebräische Briefe*, Vol. 8, eds. E. GRAEBER, & I. LUZZATTO (Przemyśl: Zupnik & Knoller, 1882) #548, p. 1204; also mentioned by Luzzatto in: S. D. LUZZATTO & G. ALMANZI, *Catalogue de la bibliothèque de littérature hébraïque et orientale de feu Josef Almanzi [=Yad Yosef]* (Padua, 1864) #526, p. 62 (Hebrew section), cited by Giuseppe Jaré, one of Luzzatto's last students, correcting the title page of his personal copy of Piperno's edition; see Figure 3. Jaré also researched polemics, publishing a 17th century Hebrew disputation by Alfonso Caracciola and a biography of the author; Giuseppe JARÉ, *Della immutabilità della legge Mosaica. Pubblica controversia tenuta in Ferrara nell' Aprile 1617 fra un rabbino ed il P. Don Alfonso Caracciola. [È aggiunto il] Capitolo XXV. sezione III. dei Fondamenti del R.G. Albo* (Livorno, 1876), and *Abramo Colorni, ingegnere di Alfonso II. d'Este: nuove ricerche* (Ferrara: Premiata Tipografia Sociale, 1891 [1st edition: Mantova, 1874]). See Judah ROSENTHAL, "Anti-Christian Polemics from its Beginnings to the End of the 18th Century" [in Hebrew], *Aresheth* II (1960) pp. 130-179: 157, #106. On erroneous chronograms, see Marvin J. HELLER, *Further Studies in the Making of the Early Hebrew Book* (Leiden: Brill, 2013) pp. 409-413, and Yaakov S. SPIEGEL *Amudim b'Toldot ha-Sefer ha-Ivri: B'Sha'are ha-Defus* (Petah Tikva: Spiegel, 2014) pp. 247-248 and 270-273. In his letter to Jost, Luzzatto also clarified a misconception that Piperno's edition had been published by his student, Sanson Gentilomo. I hope to address this issue in a future publication.

¹⁷ On the publication of "personal" correspondence as a literary style of the enlightenment, see Moshe PELLI, "The Beginnings of the Epistolary Genre in Modern Hebrew Literature: Isaac Euchel and His Letters" [in Hebrew], *Bikoret u-Farshanut* 16 (1981) pp. 85-101.

Isaac Samuel Reggio (*Yashar*, Gorizia, Italy/Austria, 1784-1855). When Reggio alluded that he did not possess a copy of *Iggeret HaShabbat*, Luzzatto prepared an edition for him which was soon published in the journal in its entirety, along with their other Hebrew correspondence. The volume of *Kerem Chemed* appeared in 1839 with the letters written in 1838.¹⁸ Luzzatto stated that he copied the text from two manuscripts, one which he purchased for twenty eight gold coins and another one which belonged to the Rabbi of Padua, R. Mordechai Samuel Girondi, from which he made corrections.¹⁹ Luzzatto filled the margins of his personal copy with glosses, mostly textual emendations cited from Girondi's manuscript (which might yet be identified by comparing the texts of other Italian manuscripts with those notes) and the version printed in

¹⁸ The correspondence begins with Luzzatto's letter (20) on page 131. Ibn Ezra is the topic, beginning with discussion of Ibn Ezra's second commentary to the book of Exodus, freshly discovered by Luzzatto, which Reggio would soon publish (Prague, 1840, new editions can be found today in Menachem Cohen's Bar-Ilan University *ha-Keter* and Asher Weiser's edition in Mossad ha-Rav Kook *Torat Hayyim* editions of *Miqraot Gedolot*). Luzzatto takes a critical stance against Ibn Ezra "personally" and favors the approach of Rashi's school. This doesn't prevent Luzzatto from publishing Ibn Ezra poetry on pages 138-145 of the journal. Reggio's response begins on page 147 (letter 21), sympathetic to Ibn Ezra and diplomatic. Reggio described a dispute with a Karaite guest who he facetiously argued with, proposing that they abandon tradition and learn halakha from the plain Biblical verse alone, which understandably appealed to the Karaite. So, Reggio proceeded to convince him that the halakhic day begins at sunrise, reinterpreting advantageously every verse the Karaite cited. Unable to defend himself other than by resorting to rabbinic tradition, Reggio won the debate against the Karaite. On page 153, Reggio stated that he would like to compare his arguments with those in the Sabbath Epistle but doesn't possess a copy. Luzzatto's response begins (letter 22) with a short introduction and then *Iggeret ha-Shabbat* itself until page 174. Luzzatto then continued with extended philological discussions and an edition of *Seder Tana'aim and Amoraim*. In his correspondence with Reggio, Luzzatto attacked Ibn Ezra as being "two-faced". He doesn't mention the preface of *Iggeret ha-Shabbat* explicitly, but perhaps Luzzatto's criticism might have been abated had he rejected the attribution of it to Ibn Ezra. On the other hand, Reggio did cite the prologue in his introduction to the Exodus Commentary (Prague, 1840, p. 5), responding to an unnamed critic (p. 4), in fact Luzzatto himself. The dispute between Luzzatto and Reggio contributed to the breakdown of their relationship, points not yet recognized by scholars which I hope to devote a future article to.

¹⁹ For a short Hebrew biography of M.S. Girondi, see Josephi ALMANTII, *Momentum Josephi* [In Hebrew: *Jad Joseph*] (Tergeste, 1889) p. 9. A brief letter from Girondi was also published in the same issue 4 of *Kerem Chemed*, pp. 13-14.

Hemdut Ha-Yamim (prologue only, see Figure 1, above), all of which were incorporated unmarked within the printed Kerem Chemed edition. The manuscript Luzzatto owned was rather corrupt and hence filled with his corrections, but he still managed to note some locations where Gi-

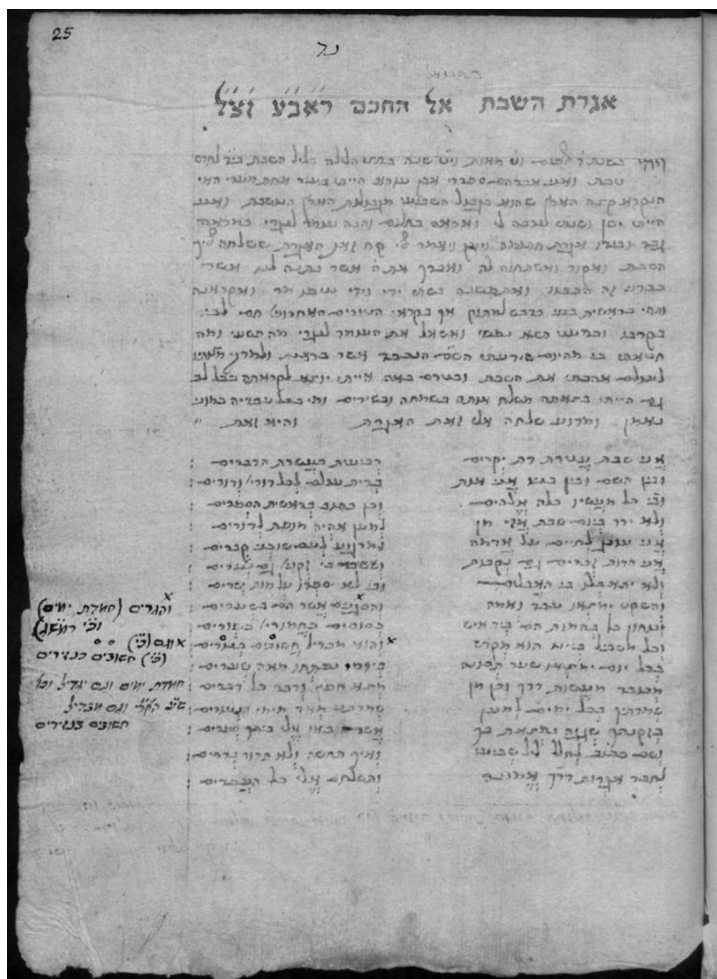


Figure 4: *Iggeret ha-Shabbat*. Ms. Berlin – Staatsbibliothek (Preussischer Kulturbesitz) Or. Oct. 244 (Steinschneider 79), f. 25r. Manuscript featuring Luzzatto's handwritten marginal notes, poem offset in double columns.

rondi's manuscript can be corrected from it. Some of Luzzatto's glosses were printed in parenthesis or footnotes in the Kerem Chemed edition, edited by Luzzatto, Reggio, or the publisher, Rapoport. Luzzatto's base manuscript is extant,²⁰ as are the copy he sent to Reggio which was published and another copy of that version that he apparently kept for himself.²¹

Hot on the heels of the Kerem Chemed edition he himself edited, R. Solomon Judah Leib Rapoport (*Shir*) incisively proposed that *Iggeret HaShabbat* was composed to counter a heretical sect residing in Cyprus described by Benjamin of Tudela in his famous travelogue.²² Rapoport opened by stating that the attribution of the Sabbath Epistle to Ibn Ezra had been proven by the full Kerem Chemed edition (as Piperno claimed independently that same year).

However, another possibility presented itself when a previously missing folio of R. Samuel ben Meir's commentary (*Rashbam*, France, 12th century, grandson of *Rashi*) was published by Abraham Geiger in an issue of Kerem Chemed fourteen years later.²³ That passage contains an

²⁰ Berlin – Staatsbibliothek (Preussischer Kulturbesitz) Or. Oct. 244. See Moritz STEINSCHNEIDER, *Die Handschriften-Verzeichnisse der Königlichen Bibliothek: Verzeichnisse der Hebraeischen Handschriften*, Band 2:1 (Berlin, 1878), 79:6, p. 56. Friedländer based his own edition upon another manuscript: British Library, Add. 27038, which he erroneously identified as the basis for Luzzatto's edition. That manuscript contains a similar textual version and may be a copy of the Berlin manuscript. See Mordechai S. GOODMAN, (ed.), *The Sabbath Epistle of Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav, 2009) p. X, who lists both the Luzzatto edition and the London manuscript in his lists. Israel Levin also based his critical edition of the preface upon the London manuscript, as David Rosin had utilized it for his edition and German translation of the poem; see note 57.

²¹ New York – Jewish Theological Seminary Ms. 4041; Ms. 4047.

²² Rapoport, born in Lemberg, hailed from a prominent rabbinic family of scholars and eventually became Chief Rabbi of Prague. *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela*, ed. A. ASHER, Vol. II (London, 1840) pp. 56-57. Zunz also contributed notes to this volume, published in English! Regarding whether the Dead Sea Sect started the Sabbath on Saturday morning, see Lawrence SCHIFFMAN, *The Halakhah at Qumran* (Leiden: Brill, 1975) pp. 84-85; Jacob Z. LAUTERBACH, *Rabbinic Essays* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1951) p. 446.

²³ Abraham GEIGER, *Kerem Chemed* 8 (1854) Letter 7, pp. 41-51. One line of the commentary was omitted in this edition, probably erroneously, but the meaning is clear.

interpretation (of Gen 1:5) that in the biblical days of creation, day preceded night. With Geiger's publication of the additional folio of Rashbam's commentary, Heinrich Graetz connected the dots and proposed that the Bible commentary mentioned in *Iggeret HaShabbat* which aroused Ibn Ezra's ire and served as its *raison d'être* was none other than Rashbam's commentary.²⁴ Graetz proposed this theory with hesitation due to uncertainty as to whether Ibn Ezra was at all aware of the commentaries of Rashbam, his contemporary. Graetz neither mentioned Rapoport's proposition nor did he question the attribution of any of the letter to Ibn Ezra or refer to Rafael Ashkenazi's objections cited by *Chida*.²⁵ David Rosin, in the introduction to his complete edition of Rashbam's commentary, which incorporated the additional sections published by Geiger, accepted Graetz's proposal, as did other 19th-century scholars.²⁶

Alexander Harkavy evaluated the propositions of both Rapoport and of Graetz. While skeptical of Rapoport's theory, he rejected Graetz's proposition outright for two reasons.²⁷ First of all, as Graetz himself admitted, it is not clear that Ibn Ezra ever encountered Rashbam's com-

²⁴ Heinrich GRAETZ, *Geschichte*, Vol. 6 (Leipzig: O. Leiner, 1867) pp. 415-416. Ironically, Geiger's own analysis at the end of his edition describes points of conflict between Ibn Ezra and Rashbam but ignores this case.

²⁵ Amos Goldreich, one of the last active direct students of Gershom Scholem, relates in a personal communication that, according to Scholem, Graetz had the sharpest eye for pseudepigraphy of all the wissenschaft scholars.

²⁶ *Torah Commentary of R. Shmuel ben Meir (Rashbam)*, ed. David ROSIN (Breslau, 1882) pp. XXXI-XXXII and p. 5, note 11; David ROSIN, *Reime Und Gedichte Des Abraham Ibn Ezra Gesichtet Und Gesammelt* (Breslau: W. Köbner, 1885) pp. 79-80, note 16, here crediting Graetz directly. See scholars cited by Samuel POZNANSKI, "Meswi Al-Okbari, Chef d'une Secte Juive," *REJ* 34 (1897) 161-191: 178. Graetz, whose own scholarship was deemed beyond the pale by his former mentor, Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch, has thus ironically served as a source for contemporary Orthodox censorship of the Biblical commentary of R. Samuel ben Meir (*Rashbam*). See Marc B. SHAPIRO, *Changing the Immutable* (Oxford: Littman, 2015) pp. 58-59. Shapiro discusses modern censorship of Rashbam's Commentary in two posts: <https://seforim.blogspot.co.il/2014/12/self-censorship-in-arukh-ha-shulhan.html>; <https://seforim.blogspot.co.il/2015/01/artscrolls-response-and-my-comments.html>.

²⁷ Alexander HARKAVY, *Neuaufgefundene Hebräische Bibelhandschriften* (St. Pétersbourg: Eggers, 1884) pp. 32-34.

mentaries.²⁸ Secondly, Ibn Ezra's vitriol is clearly directed against heretics, fitting neither the elevated rabbinic stature of Rashbam nor the content of his commentary, which a few lines later (verse 14) suggests that the Sabbath day is to be observed in practice from sundown. Furthermore, Ibn Ezra had a brief positive poetic correspondence with R. Jacob Tam, Rashbam's younger brother, so it is unlikely that Ibn Ezra would have cursed Rashbam.²⁹ To Harkavy's taste, Rapoport's suggestion remains the only plausible one. Ibn Ezra may have received word of the heretical sect of Cyprus via correspondence, even if he never reached Cyprus or Greece. Harkavy's rejection of Graetz's identification of Rashbam as the target of the *Iggeret* would be echoed by many scholars in a muted form: reluctance to fully embrace the proposition.

The next major scholarly contribution would come from Michael Friedländer.³⁰ Independently, he attacked Graetz's theory as Harkavy had, but refrained from rejecting it. He reasoned that Ibn Ezra may have been concerned with the effects of the commentary on delicate students who could easily succumb to apostasy, requiring drastic preemptive defensive measures on the part of the master. Friedländer cited Rapoport's suggestion (source unattributed, crediting Gaster for the reference!), but didn't reject the possibility that members of the sect reached France or Germany where Ibn Ezra might have become aware of them. Friedländer provided a new critical edition of the complete letter itself in a lengthy appendix. He utilized Luzzatto's edition and several other manuscripts but was unaware of the existence of Piperno's edition. Friedländer's edition cites many variants in the preface and then tapers off greatly in the main body of the work. It is not clear if this is a result of less textual variance, fewer manuscript exemplars for the main body of the text, or a midcourse shift in methodology.

²⁸ Much scholarship has been dedicated to this point; Yehoshua MONDSHINE, "L'Sheilat HaYachas," *Teuda* 16/17 (2001) pp. 40-45, parallels Harkavy. See also Itamar KISLEV, "'Exegesis in Perpetual Motion': The Short Commentary of Ibn Ezra as a Source for Rashbam in his Commentary on the Pentateuch," *Tarbiz* 79 (2010) pp. 413-438.

²⁹ See *Kerem Chemed* 7 (1843) p. 35.

³⁰ Michael FRIEDLÄNDER, "Ibn Ezra in England," in *Transactions: The Jewish Historical Society of England* (London: Wertheimer, 1894-5) pp. 47-75.

Significantly, Friedländer voiced skepticism as to the attribution of the preface to Ibn Ezra.³¹ He noted that, on the face of it, the preface was written *ex post facto*, not in England, and thus wonders why the letter states that it was “written in haste.”³² Friedländer wrote:

I doubt whether the whole account of the dream, which is intended as a poetical introduction to the three essays on the beginning of the year, of the month, and of the day, was written by Ibn Ezra himself. Some of the ideas contained therein seem foreign to the spirit of Ibn Ezra, who does not elsewhere emphasize the use of wine for *kiddush* and *habdalah*,³³ as is found in this introduction. Ibn Ezra does not believe that the Sabbath is a day of rest for the dead more than any other day; his idea of the future life of our soul is entirely different.³⁴

³¹ FRIEDLÄNDER, “Ibn Ezra in England,” pp. 55-56.

³² Yehuda L. FLEISHER, “R. Abraham Ibn Ezra and his Literary Activity in the Land of England” [in Hebrew], *Oẓar ha-Haim* 7 (5691=1931) pp. 129-133: 133, responded by connecting the conclusion to the preface, where “Ibn Ezra” promises to complete the letter immediately upon the conclusion of the Sabbath, rather than desecrating the Sabbath by tearing up the commentary. Fleisher’s reply is adequate within the context of the letter as a literary unit but does not sufficiently address Friedländer’s point. This issue links the concluding paragraph with the preface and its pseudepigraphic author, highlighting the literary chasm between the folkloric preface-conclusion and the Torah and astronomy of the main body, which probably wasn’t written in a single evening.

³³ Friedländer did not interpret a reference to havdala on beer as suggested below. He contrasted the poem with *Yesod Mora*, chapter 2, where wine is not stressed in the context of *kiddush*. The Sabbath hymn: *Ki Eshmera Shabbat*, composed by Ibn Ezra, mentions wine in the context of general *oneg* festivity, not in relation to *kiddush*. It is listed by Israel DAVIDSON, *Thesaurus of Medieval Hebrew Poetry* [in Hebrew], Vol II (New York: JTS, 1929) #194, p. 471.

³⁴ Friedländer cited *Yesod Mora*, chapter 10, where the afterworld is discussed without any mention of respite on the Sabbath day. He referred to the end of the prologue, which states that the offensive Bible commentary misleads the dead, among others. The concept that the dead in *gehinom*, purgatory, receive a respite on the Sabbath day is found in later Midrash and various Ashkenazi customs, see Yehuda L. ZLOTNICK, “Mei-Agadat Ha-Shabbat u-Minhageha,” *Sinai* 26 (1950) pp. 75-89: 84-89; Gershom SCHOLEM, “Notes: Elysium” [in Hebrew], *Kiryat Sefer* 1 (1925) pp. 163-168: 168; both cited by I. M. TA-SHMA, *Early Franco-German Ritual and Custom* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1999) p. 201, note 1. Friedländer points out that the concept is foreign to Ibn Ezra’s intellectual world. A Sabbath custom of not drinking water during twilight hours relates to the custom of *tequfot*, to be discussed in an addendum. There, differences in a parallel passage cited within the body of the text suggest that *Iggeret ha-Shabbat* was compiled after Ibn Ezra’s *Sefer ha’Ibbur*, likely by a later editor.

Friedländer also speculated that the entire Epistle may have been composed by a student of Ibn Ezra. He noted that the interpretation of the word “*Iggeret*” as a *collection* of arguments, found at the end of the letter, contradicts the traditional interpretation of the word, “letter,” found in the preface, and probably represents “a later interpolation.”³⁵

3. HERETICAL SECTS: KARAITES AND MISHAWITES

Hot on the heels of Friedländer, in 1897 Samuel Poznanski provided a major review of scholarly literature in *REJ*. Poznanski’s study is dedicated to Meswi al-Okbari, leader of a 9th-century sect of followers referred to as the Mishawites.³⁶ Poznanski’s main exhibit was his publication in an appendix of a Karaite Hebrew work composed by Tobias ben Moses in 11th-century Byzantium, devoted to refuting the heresies of Meswi’s sect. Tobias wrote in a vitriolic style and referred to Meswi as Jeroboam, who caused Israel to sin. Among other heresies, Tobias attacked the heretical view that the Biblical day begins at sunrise, as well as the calendrical opinions regarding the year and month addressed in parts one and two of *Iggeret Ha-Shabbat*. Three of Meswi’s five main arguments are cited by Ibn Ezra in his commentaries or in the Epistle and three of Tobi’s retorts are anticipated by Ibn Ezra.³⁷ Tobias’s responses and Ibn Ezra’s also overlap, although there are significant differences between them, such as whether *yom* and *laylah* refer to day and night or to light and darkness. Poznanski followed Harkavy’s rejection of Graetz’s suggestion that the letter was directed against Rashbam’s

³⁵ This interpretation may stem from later anxiety of the pseudepigraphic author regarding the substantial content of the astronomical body of the work (parts one and two), topics not concerning the beginning of the day/Sabbath.

³⁶ See Zev ANKORI, *Karaites in Byzantium* (New York: Columbia University, 1968) pp. 372-415. Elli KOHEN, *History of the Byzantine Jews: A Microcosmos in the Thousand Year Empire* (Lanham, Md: Univ. Press of America, 2007) pp. 133-136, summarizes. See also Golda AKHIEZER, “Byzantine Karaism in the Eleventh to Fifteenth Centuries,” in *Jews in Byzantium: Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures*, ed. Robert BONFIL (Leiden: Brill, 2012) pp. 723-758: 745-748.

³⁷ Uriel SIMON, “The Exegetic Method of Abraham Ibn Ezra, as Revealed in Three Interpretations of a Biblical Passage,” *Bar-Ilan* 3 (1965) pp. 92-138: 11 [=102].

interpretation. Instead, he proposed that *Iggeret HaShabbat* was composed to refute the Mishawites and that Ibn Ezra was familiar with the sect only through Tobias's letter refuting them.³⁸ Ibn Ezra may or may not have been personally familiar with the Cyprus Mishawite cell and other non-calendrical heresies the sect maintained which Tobias felt obligated to refute but Ibn Ezra ignored.

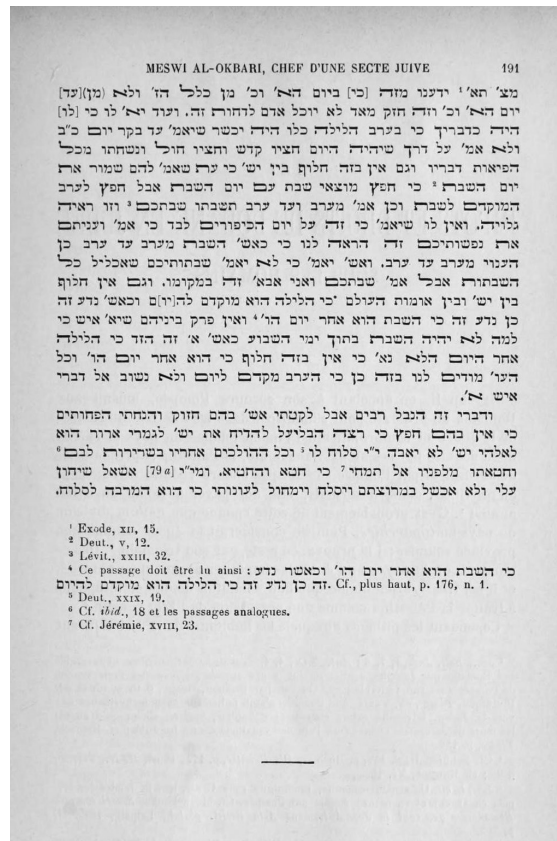


Figure 5: The conclusion of Tobias' attack on the Mishawites, ending with a curse, as published by Poznanski in *REJ* 34 (1897) p. 191.³⁹

³⁸ According to ANKORI, *Karaïtes*, p. 378, note 59, Ibn Ezra may have encountered the Mishawites via the writings of the Karaite Yefet ben 'Ali, who Ibn Ezra cites frequently. The vitriolic polemic style of the prologue does harken back to Tobias.

³⁹ Image available at www.archive.org.

Poznanski's 1897 REJ study and identification of the Mishawite sect explained the unity of the three chapters of the Epistle. The three calendrical heresies addressed by the *Iggeret* were all maintained by the sect. Poznanski's proposition amounted to an extension and validation of Rapoport's theory, further refined according to new evidence, contra Graetz, who identified Rashbam as the target. Poznanski's explanation was embraced by leading scholars of Karaism. According to Zev Ankori, Ibn Ezra engaged in "an obvious polemic against Mishwaism".⁴⁰

Other refutations of the Mishawite heresies are found in Byzantine Karaite literature but not in European Rabbinic literature.⁴¹ If the Sabbath Epistle was indeed composed by Ibn Ezra, it is the only extant exemplar. What would drive Ibn Ezra to address a distant obscure sect attacked by Karaites? Perhaps the original author of *Iggeret HaShabbat* was himself a Karaite like the other opponents of the Meshawites? Just as Ibn Ezra immersed himself in Karaite literature, Karaites studied him as well and certainly had no compunctions in quoting from the Talmud when it suited them (it is only cited sparingly in the *Iggeret*).⁴² According to Ankori, the implied address of the Karaite authors disputing the Mishawites was actually the Rabbinate, to incur favor via a gesture of unity in opposing the *real* heretics. If so, Karaite polemics could resemble rabbinic ones or were adjusted to suit the audience.

Speculation and the search for a motivating factor driving Ibn Ezra might be in vain. According to S. D. Luzzatto, Ibn Ezra constantly re-

⁴⁰ ANKORI, *Karaites*, p. 378. Yoram Erder also follows Ankori's understanding that Ibn Ezra's criticism is levelled against the Mishawites. Erder diverges from Ankori in considering Mishawism as primarily an outgrowth from **within** Karaism and its regard for independent halakhic thought, and less as a product of Christian influence as per Tobias' face value accusations. See Y. ERDER, *The Karaite Mourners of Zion and the Qumran Scrolls* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz Ha-meuchad, 2004) pp. 177-183: 180, and *Methods in Early Karaite Halakha* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz Ha-meuchad, 2012) pp. 286-287, esp. note 483 regarding *Iggeret ha-Shabbat*.

⁴¹ See ANKORI, *Karaites*, p. 372, note 40.

⁴² See, for example, Aaron BEN JOSEPH, *Sefer HaMivhar* (Ketzlev, Crimea: I. Finkelman, 1835), Leviticus, p. 6a. This thirteenth-century Karaite argues with Ibn Ezra and explicitly cites *Ozar Nechmad* of Tobias ben Moses. In this case Ibn Ezra had adopted the Mishawite position! See ANKORI, *Karaites*, p. 372, note 40. Hadassi's *Eshkol ha-Koffer* also cites Ibn Ezra; see AKHIEZER, "Byzantine Karaism", p. 732, and p. 735 on citations from Talmudic literature.

wrote and repackaged his compositions for his wealthy patrons.⁴³ Furthermore, questions were brought to Ibn Ezra on matters such as these. See, for example, his short responsum to three related questions attributed to R. David ben Yosef of Narbonne (apparently an ancestor of Moses of Narbonne, 14th cent, author of a famous commentary to Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed*). A version of this composition was promised to Reggio by Luzzatto at the conclusion of the letter with the Epistle, and it is extant in Luzzatto's own hand at the end of his copy of his letter to Reggio, but would eventually be published by Steinschneider along with a text attributed to Maimonides.⁴⁴ One could easily imagine Ibn Ezra gliding from these three questions as a sort of prospectus to the Epistle. If the Epistle was extant, why wasn't it cited in the responsum? In any case, Ibn Ezra need not have ever encountered or heard of Mishawites in order to address these topics.

Ibn Ezra was an accomplished and articulate Biblical scholar and astronomer, comfortable debating heretics, trading barbs and even learning from them in intellectual give and take, unlike the author of the prologue. The main chapters of the Epistle are not dry, but it is the dramatic flair of the prologue that succeeded in popularizing the *Iggeret* as folklore, lifting it from the "dustbin" of ignored astronomical treatises. That is not to say that the purpose of the prologue was to sell more manuscript copies of the work, but if that was the goal, it succeeded. The original letter was a lengthy burden—or even a liability—in that it presented a scientific author and his calculations at odds with the zealous mystical protagonist of the prologue. Thus, many Kabbalistic miscellanies and the early incomplete printed versions simply dropped the body entirely and copied only the exciting and awe-inspiring prologue.⁴⁵ Fur-

⁴³ *Kerem Chemed* 4 (1839) p. 132-3. According to Luzzatto, Ibn Ezra received better terms of employment by promising his patrons new books of higher quality than any predecessor, but they were mostly just recycled versions of his previous works, rearranged. Ibn Ezra copied passages from memory without proofreading; even Biblical verses were corrupted.

⁴⁴ *Schene ha-Meoroṯ*, ed. M. STEINSCHNEIDER (Berlin, 1847) pp. 1-6. See above, note 20 for Luzzatto's manuscripts.

⁴⁵ SITTIG, *The Sabbath Epistle*, pp. 210-211 lists several early printed editions of the prologue only and states that half of the forty extant manuscript versions contain only the prologue.

thermore, the poem in the prologue, a missive composed by the Sabbath Day, was referred to as *Iggeret HaShabbat*, leading to misidentification of the prologue as consisting of the entire composition, as Rafael Ashkenazi pointed out, mentioned above.

4. CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP

In an influential Hebrew study of Ibn Ezra's related Bible commentary, Uriel Simon includes analysis of the *Iggeret*, with important tangential questions such as the order of composition of Ibn Ezra's various commentaries and at which stages he may or may not have been familiar with the writings of Rashbam.⁴⁶ Poznanski's proposition of a Meshawite target is not rejected, but Simon prefers Graetz's theory of Rashbam as a target. The main basis for Simon's decision is the prologue, where it seems like Ibn Ezra picked a quarrel with a contemporary commentary, not a distant insignificant sect. Both the sense of urgency and the content of the prologue support this conclusion. Poznanski explained that not all of Tobias's arguments were repeated by Ibn Ezra because he did not consider them worthy. Simon considers it more likely that Ibn Ezra did not possess a firsthand copy of Tobias's refutation. If a sect is to be identified as the target of the *Iggeret*, a local Christian sect is more likely than the remote Meshawite sect.

Subsequent Ibn Ezra scholarship would follow Simon in discounting the Meshawites as a likely target of the epistle.⁴⁷ Shlomo Sela briefly mentions Friedländer's reservations, and, as an alternative to Graetz's Rashbam theory, proposes that *Iggeret HaShabbat* was composed by Ibn Ezra to preemptively counter potential criticism of his own Bible commentary to Exod 35:3.⁴⁸ There, to prove the necessity of reliance upon

⁴⁶ SIMON, "The Exegetic Method of Abraham Ibn Ezra."

⁴⁷ Samuel POZNANSKI's brief Hebrew footnote in his *Introduction to Eliezer of Beaugency's Commentary to Ezekiel and the Twelve Minor Prophets* [in Hebrew] (Warsaw, 1913) p. 43 is cited by LAUTERBACH, *Rabbinic Essays*, p. 450, note 60, and by GOODMAN, p. xiv, who didn't follow the pointer to הצופה הצרפתי (=REJ).

⁴⁸ Shlomo SELA, *Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science* (Leiden: Brill, 2003) pp. 49-57; ROTH, *Ibn Ezra*, note 43 (cited below), counters that if so, Ibn Ezra would have recanted explicitly or edited his commentary.

Talmudic tradition to a Karaite, Ibn Ezra nonchalantly and facetiously adopted the very Meshawite position he argues so ferociously against in the *Iggeret*. According to Sela, the *Iggeret*'s goal was to establish Ibn Ezra's strict opposition to the selfsame heresies he had previously flirted with himself.

Kinneret Sittig follows through on Simon's lead. She develops a theory that the target of the *Iggeret* was an unidentified Christian-influenced English Jewish commentary.⁴⁹ The proposals of Sela and Sittig stem from a reluctance to accept Graetz's proposal (even more so than Simon), and for good reason (see above, Harkavy). Unlike Simon, both Sela and Sittig do explicitly acknowledge the possibility that the prologue is pseudepigraphic, but neither discuss the implications of such a possibility regarding the questions of the target and attribution of the parts of the Epistle.

Martin Lockshin has focused considerable scholarship on Rashbam and his Torah commentary. In the notes to his English translation of the commentary, he favored a Karaite target for Ibn Ezra's Sabbath Epistle, probably referring to sects in general.⁵⁰ However, in his recent Hebrew edition, Lockshin hesitantly came around to the perspective of the Ibn Ezra scholars who identified the target as Rashbam.⁵¹ He emphasizes that Rashbam's divergence from tradition only relates to interpretation of *pshat*, not legal practice, based upon *drash*, as Rashbam himself stated in his frequently cited comments at the beginning of Parshat *Vayeshev*.

A dramatic new discovery, published online by Hillel Novetsky after the first draft of this article was already completed, may eliminate Rashbam as a potential target of the original *Iggeret*.⁵² Novetsky shows that much of the 10% that is missing from Rashbam's commentary can

⁴⁹ SITTIG, *The Sabbath Epistle*, pp. 216-218. Note that Christian influence on the Meshawites themselves according to Tobias, was noted by ANKORI, *Karaites*, p. 378, note 2, p. 402, esp. pp. 414-415.

⁵⁰ MARTIN LOCKSHIN, *Rabbi Samuel ben Meir's Commentary on Genesis. An Annotated Translation* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1989) p. 38.

⁵¹ MARTIN LOCKSHIN, *Rabbi Samuel ben Meir's Commentary on Genesis* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Chovev, 2009) p. 6, end of note 61.

⁵² HILLEL NOVETSKY's preliminary discoveries (retrieved 17.04.2016) are presented at: http://alhatorah.org/Commentators:Rashbam's_Torah_Commentary.

be reconstructed from a Bible commentary compendium found in a lone manuscript. There, it emerges that Rashbam's commentary explicitly differentiates between the six days of active creation, each of which began in the morning, and between the Sabbath, the day of rest, which began at nightfall, immediately upon the conclusion of the work of the sixth day. Without direct evidence, R. Menahem Mendel Kasher had previously proposed this explanation of Rashbam's commentary, minimizing the heretical aspect and shielding Rashbam from Ibn Ezra's glare.⁵³ Novetsky proves that Kasher's sense was correct here, not mere apologetics. If Ibn Ezra's target was Rashbam, why didn't he just read a little more of the commentary and realize that the commentary explicitly endorses traditional Sabbath observance from evening to evening?

5. IBN EZRA IN *INGLATERRA* AND SIGNS OF PSEUDEPIGRAPHY

The final scholarly contribution under review in this survey comes from Norman Roth. He revolts against the regnant Ibn Ezra scholars, unambiguously rejecting attribution of the preface to Ibn Ezra and adopting Friedländer's skepticism as to the authorship of the three main chapters. Roth addresses the issue in the context of questioning the historicity of Ibn Ezra's alleged sojourn in England.⁵⁴

However, the crowning proof of his alleged stay in England is the peculiar little treatise *Igeret ha-Shabbat* ("letter of the Sabbath"), rehashing statements already made by him elsewhere with respect to the start of the month, of a day, etc., and containing an introduction in which the personified Sabbath "appears" to him to complain about statements in some Torah commentaries that students had given Ibn 'Ezra which are contrary to Jewish law. While such "prophetic appearances" are part of medieval literature, even in Spain, it is inconceivable that a rationalist like Ibn 'Ezra would have conjured up such an image, to say nothing of the fact that he apparently did not know of "nontraditional" interpreta-

⁵³ Menachem M. KASHER, *Torah Shlema*, Vol 11 (New York: Shulsinger, 1946) pp. 277-279.

⁵⁴ Norman ROTH, "Abraham Ibn Ezra: Highlights of his Life," *Iberia Judaica* IV (2012) pp. 25-39: 34.

tions in these commentaries... However, Friedländer, the editor of the text, was correctly skeptical about the so-called “dream,” which is either a forgery or was written by one of Ibn ‘Ezra’s students or followers (as, indeed, may be the case with the entire treatise).

If the only source for the attribution of the *Iggeret* to Ibn Ezra is the preface, and if that is likely pseudepigraphic, on what basis should the attribution of the rest of the work be accepted at all? Reliance of others on the veracity of the preface? If the *Iggeret* contains similarities to or quotes from commentaries of Ibn Ezra, how does that indicate that the author is not a student, even a much later student, or a pseudepigrapher adopting Ibn Ezra’s persona?

Another reason to doubt the authenticity of the preface is the far-fetched premise of Ibn Ezra sojourning in England with manuscripts in tow or under his jurisdiction. Alternatively, since the manuscript belongs to his host, why is the apparition angry at Ibn Ezra, who wasn’t even familiar with them? On the other hand, England would indeed be a likely location for Ibn Ezra to encounter the commentary of Rashbam, as the Jewish English communities at the time were effectively satellites of the French Tosafists. The author of the preface didn’t mention England by name, but rather, referred to it as “one of the cities on the island referred to as ‘the end of the earth’ in the seventh zone of the inhabited zones.” By establishing the venue as somewhere “over there,” rather than a specific location, the pseudepigraphic account could not be refuted by anyone from “there” who could testify that there never was a visit from Ibn Ezra to the site or that no such an event ever took place.

Was Ibn Ezra unaware of the name of the town or province where he sojourned? Did he consider it insignificant? If so, why did he deem it significant to state the precise date in the same sentence, at the very beginning of the preface, in formulaic Hebrew?

In the year four thousand, nine hundred and nineteen, in the middle of the night, on the Eve of the Sabbath, on the fourteenth day of the month of *Tevet*, I, Abraham the Sephardi, [known as] Ibn Ezra was in one of the cities on the island referred to as ‘the end of the earth’ in the seventh zone of the inhabited zones. I slept a pleasant sleep and saw a vision in a dream ...

Not just for dramatic effect, the author manipulates the reader into accepting his pseudepigraphy as historical fact. He taunts and challenges the skeptical reader into verifying whether the date cited from centuries gone by in fact falls on the Sabbath day as prominently advertised. After calling the author's bluff and making the necessary calendrical calculations, the reader finds that the historical date does indeed fall on the Sabbath. His skepticism has now been vented and allayed. The letter must be authentic! This stroke of pseudepigraphic genius also demonstrates that the author of the preface was well-enough versed in the astronomical sciences to make the calculation or that he consulted with someone who was.

The main sign of pseudepigraphy is the dramatically personal literary folklore style of the preface. The reader familiar with the writings of Ibn Ezra, such as Raphael Ashkenazi, recognizes his terse style and acerbic wit. Nothing compares with this glimpse into the emotions and dreams of our hero, the self-aggrandizement and pathos of his account. A senior scholar remarked to me that neither Friedländer nor Roth provided any actual evidence that the preface of the Epistle is pseudepigraphic. On the other hand, there is no outside evidence that it is genuine and these issues are sufficient to eliminate a *prima facie* presumption of authenticity.

6. THE YEAR, THE MONTH, AND THE POETIC LAMENT COMPOSED BY THE SABBATH DAY

According to the preface, the Epistle was written in the heat of the moment on the eve of the conclusion of the Sabbath with zeal to defend the Sabbath. If so, why does the author begin with two lengthy technical chapters on the year and month unrelated to the Sabbath/day issue? Fitting hand in glove, each of the chapters of the main body of the work refutes an actual calendrical heresy of the Mishawites,⁵⁵ whereas the author of the preface and the short conclusion was concerned solely with the Biblical interpretation of *vayehi erev vayehi boqer* (Gen 1:5). The author of the preface does not exhibit either the orientation or the style of the author of the three chapters. A pseudepigraphic author of the

⁵⁵ See ANKORI, *Karaites*, pp. 377-380.

preface may indeed have been referring to the commentary of Rashbam, as Graetz postulated concerning the entire Epistle. Rashbam's commentary, or parts of it in compendia, did in fact reach Spain in the 13th and 14th century, although, unlike Rashi's popular commentary, the commentary of Rashbam did not circulate widely outside of France.⁵⁶

The preface contains a poem which is unique, not only in the Ibn Ezra corpus, but of all medieval literature. It was ostensibly written by the Sabbath Day itself, as channeled to Ibn Ezra in a dream. The poem alone is also referred to as "*Iggeret HaShabbat*," the missive sent by the Sabbath. This contradicts the identification of the *Iggeret* which follows as referring to the entire astronomical treatise, with contradictory etymologies provided in the prologue and coda, as described above.

The "classical poem" –within the heritage of the Spanish Hebrew school of poetry– follows a *shir shaqul had-ḥaruzi* rhyme form similar to Ibn Ezra's poem at the end of the first chapter of *Sefer Ha'Ibbur*.⁵⁷ The meter is common for Spanish Hebrew and Arabic poetry, known in Hebrew as המשקל המרוצח and in Arabic as وافر.⁵⁸ That song contains technical astronomical information absent in the poem of *Iggeret HaShabbat*, casting doubt upon their composition by the same author. One might posit that Ibn Ezra is speaking here to a popular audience (on behalf of the Sabbath) and thus adjusts and "lowers" his style. However,

⁵⁶ A visual depiction of a commentary of R. Joseph BEKHOR SHOR to Exod 7:15, itself an expansion of Rashbam's commentary, is found in the so-called 'Hispano-Moresque' Haggadah, BL, Or. 2737; see Leor JACOBI, "Jewish Hawking in Medieval France," *Oqimta* 1 (2013) pp. 421-504: 459-466. Rashbam's commentary to this verse is depicted in the Rylands Haggadah, produced in Catalonia circa 1330, and its "Brother" Haggadah. On these manuscripts see Marc M. EPSTEIN, *Medieval Haggadah* (New Haven and London: Yale University, 2011) pp. 201-245.

⁵⁷ Jefim SHIRMANN and Ezra FLEISCHER, *The History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain and Southern France* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1997) pp. 30-31; Israel LEVIN, *Abraham Ibn Ezra: Reader* [in Hebrew] (New York: Israel Katz Foundation, 1985) pp. 133-136.

⁵⁸ ROSIN, *Reime Und Gedichte*, p. 78, identified it as: יתד ושתי תנועות ויתד ושתי תנועות, the seventh form listed on p. 9. Compare with preliminary verses of *Sefer ha-Mispar*, p. 80, and others: p. 55, 75, 77, 82, 99, etc. The common form is the first one listed by: Shulamit ELIZUR, *Hebrew Poetry in Spain in the Middle Ages* [in Hebrew], Vol. III (Ramat-Aviv: Open University, 2004) pp. 39-40, with her primary example from Moses ibn Ezra. I thank Avi Shmidman and Gabriel Wasserman for guidance.

the stylistic differences can be more simply explained as a later imitation.

The text of one line is particularly unclear. Luzzatto explored textual variants in manuscript and printed versions and proposed his own speculative variant. The Lleida manuscript and first edition read:

וכל משכיל ביינו הוא מקדש Every *Maskil* makes *kiddush* with his own wine
וגם מבדיל חשובים כנזירים Also, the important ones perform *havdala* like
Nazirites.

The second half of the line might refer to reciting havdala over *shekhar*, beer, instead of wine, as beer is permitted to the Nazirite.⁵⁹ Only grape products are forbidden to him, whether they are alcoholic or not. The Talmud explicitly states that beer may only be employed for *havdala* if it is considered *hamar medinah*, literally: the “wine” of the province, the beverage consumed locally (more so than wine). This law was accepted by all medieval authorities and different attitudes towards the suitability of beer appear to result from geographic differences. Predict-

⁵⁹ Luzzatto discussed this word in depth. One alternative to this variant is חשוכים (with a sin rather than a shin), meaning *the sheltered (from transgression)*, as in חשוכים חטא מכל in the Havdala addition to the Amida prayer (I thank Michael Steinberg for this interpretation). Either way, the reference to beer remains a possibility. Goodman translates “the lowly,” חשוכים with a shin, and considers Nazirites examples of the lowly. This interpretation would not relate to beer. One could read this textual variant into our interpretation above, substituting “lowly” for “important” and argue that Ibn Ezra was referring to a secondary custom of the poor in Spain to recite havdalah blessings on beer. Alternatively, this variant could be understood as “those who wait until nightfall on the border,” mentioned in Shabbat 150b, who may recite havdalah without wine according to the Palestinian tradition cited there. See: TA-SHMA, *Early Franco-German Ritual and Custom* p. 224-225. Joseph JACOBS (*The Jews of Angevin England: Documents and Records from Latin and Hebrew Sources, Printed and Manuscripts* [London: D. Nutt, 1893] p. 37) translates: “And all who are wise both sanctify and conclude the feast with wine, those who indulge in it as well as abstainers.” According to this fanciful interpretation, “Naziretes” refers to teetotalers, who make special exceptions for both Kiddush and Havdalah. However, the Lleida manuscript, unlike many of the Italian manuscripts, clearly differentiates between *bet* and *caf*, reading חשוכים. It remains likely that with the term ‘Nazirites’ the author is hinting at the custom of reciting havdalah on beer.

ably, in Ashkenaz, a beer-producing region, it was widely accepted, but in Spain it was not, as wine was more prevalent.⁶⁰

With migration of Ashkenzi Jews and their customs into Christian Spain in the 13th and 14th centuries (notably, *Rosh* and his sons and their disciples) the custom of using beer for havdala was probably imported. If the poem refers to beer then the author is probably a member of one of these communities, as opposed to Abraham Ibn Ezra the Spaniard, who did not inherit this custom. He would not have endorsed it in such a general sense, even if he did in fact sojourn in England and the *Iggeret* was composed there.

⁶⁰ See Haym SOLOVEITCHIK, *Wine in Ashkenaz in the Middle Ages* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2008) pp. 102-109, on popularity of beer in Germany and England (as opposed to France), and Rabbinic responses to its ubiquitous presence. According to Rashbam (*Pesachim* 107a, loc. 'hamar medinah'), a lack of availability of wine in a location leads the alternate beverage to be considered *chamar medinah*. However, R. Asher ben Yehiel states in his *Pisqei HaRosh* that the deciding factor is whether wine is produced in the general region. *Magen Avraham* describes the opinion of *Rosh* as a leniency. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine beer as *chamar medinah* anywhere in Spain, where wine was much more common, without resorting to the opinion of *Rosh*, and in a case where wine is not grown in the immediate vicinity. R. Moshe ISSERLES in *Darkhei Moshe and HaMapah*, O.H. 296, 2, cites Abudarham (Spain, 14th cent) as preferring recitation of the havdalah blessing on a *kos pagum*, a "blemished" cup, to a cup of *shekhar*. If so, we could have evidence of local resistance to a developing or imported custom of using beer for havdalah even though it is not *hamar medinah*. However, *Magen Avraham* protests that Abudarham was not referring to *shekhar* at all; rather, his stated default: *b'lo yayim*, "without wine," refers to reciting havdalah without any beverage, in prayer or on bread. Rema then cites an authoritative custom which appears to be what his version of Abudarham was protesting, disregarding the requirement of *hamar medinah* and reciting havdalah on *shekhar* as a preference, *havivin alav*. This Eastern European custom is not recorded in earlier Ashkenaz sources, to my knowledge, but beer was considered *hamar medinah*, so the point is moot. For surveys of the legal issues, see R. Gedalia WEISEL, "B'Inyan Havdah al Chamar Medinah," *Be'er HaChaim* 2 (1998) pp. 364-367; and more extensively, R. Pesach BORNSTEIN, "Birur Maqif b'Gidrei Chamar Medinah b'Halachah ub'Ma'ase," *Beit Aharon v'Yisrael* 57 (1995) pp. 60-80, and discussions in the following issue 58, pp. 116-119.

7. THE LLEIDA MANUSCRIPT AND OTHER MANUSCRIPTS

The Sabbath Epistle circulated widely during the late middle ages. It is found in at least thirty-five manuscripts, mostly philosophical, Kabbalistic, and/or folkloric miscellanies.⁶¹ The earliest clearly dated manuscript is from Lleida in Catalonia (Castillian: L rida), composed in 1382, the only one written in a Spanish cursive hand.⁶²



Figure 6: Livorno Talmud Torah 29, Lleida 1382

Earliest complete manuscript and basis of first edition, with poem clearly offset in double columns.

Reproduced with the gracious permission of the Comunita Ebraica di Livorno

⁶¹ According to SITTIG, *The Sabbath Epistle*, p. 210, there are forty extant manuscript versions. She has announced a detailed study on all manuscripts in her forthcoming dissertation on *Iggeret ha-Shabbat*.

⁶² Livorno Talmud Torah 40; see Mauro PERANI, *I Manoscritti della Biblioteca del Talmud Torah di Livorno* (Livorno: Comunit  Ebraica di Livorno, 1997) pp. 39-40 (manuscript 7).

A couple of other manuscripts may possibly date from this period,⁶³ with another six probably 15th century. However, most are from the 16th-17th centuries, with a few 18th century. Most extant manuscripts are from Italy, not surprising considering Italian Jewry's scientific orientation. Later manuscripts hail from Byzantium and Ashkenaz, indicating propagation throughout the Diaspora.

The Lleida manuscript migrated from Catalonia to Leghorn (=Livorno), the main port of Tuscany, Italy. It would serve as a basis for the Piperno edition, printed there in 1840. It likely arrived earlier, perhaps leaving Catalonia during the great migrations proximate to the 1391 tragedies which decimated Jewish communities across the Spanish peninsula, including Lleida, culminating in the eventual expulsion of Spanish Jewry in 1492.⁶⁴ Most likely, the manuscript arrived towards the end of the 16th century when Livorno developed rapidly, including many new Jews and Conversos, as Tuscany recognized the global importance of Sefardic economic networks. A generous charter of freedoms granted by the Medici at the end of the sixteenth century is known as the Livornina.⁶⁵

Ibn Ezra's sojourn in Italy might explain why so many manuscripts of the Epistle are Italian; on the other hand, an early migration of the Lleida manuscript could be how *Iggeret ha-Shabbat* reached Italy in the first place and the preface of the Epistle purports it to have been composed in England. The year the Lleida manuscript was copied, 1382, postdates the lifetime of Ibn Ezra by over two hundred years.

Bordering Catalonia and Aragon, jurisdiction over Lleida flip-flopped between the two kingdoms.⁶⁶ At its peak in the 14th century it was the

⁶³ Moscow 362 and Parma 3030. The Parma manuscript, also Spanish, only contains the prologue. Manuscript data was obtained from the online catalog of the National Library of Israel, Department of Manuscripts.

⁶⁴ See Mauro PERANI, "Manuscripts Brought to Italy by the Jews Exiled in 1492," *Hispania Judaica* 10 (2014) pp. 287-310.

⁶⁵ Attilio MILANO & Alessandro GUETTA, "Leghorn (Livorno)," *Encyclopedia Judaica*. Vol. 12 (2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan, 2007) pp. 608-609; Francesca BREGOLI, *Mediterranean Enlightenment: Livornese Jews, Tuscan Culture, and Eighteenth-Century Reform* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014) pp. 21-30.

⁶⁶ Yom Tov ASSIS, *Jewish Economy in the Medieval Crown of Aragon, 1213-1327* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) p. 199, 224.

major Jewish community of Catalonia after the great centers of Girona and Barcelona. The community joined the ban on Maimonides' works imposed by R. Solomon of Montpellier in 1232.⁶⁷ Lleida did not produce prolific rabbinic scholars. Instead, leaders of the community addressed numerous halakhic inquiries to R. Solomon ben Adret (*Rashba*).⁶⁸ I am aware of only one other extant manuscript produced in Lleida in the 14th century, dated to 1325-28.⁶⁹ It is a Kabbalistic miscellany which also migrated to Italy. One of the works contained therein is *Iggeret HaQodesh*, "the Holy Letter," commonly attributed to Nahmanides. Gershom Sholem, in disputing that attribution, noted that the Lleida manuscript, in which the composition is not attributed to Nahmanides, is the oldest known version of the letter.⁷⁰ Long before that attribution was ever made, R. Joshua ibn Shuaib, a disciple of Rashba from Navarre, cited *Iggeret HaQodesh* from Recanati in his *Derashot* and attributed it to Ibn Ezra!⁷¹

⁶⁷ Haim BEINART and Yom Tov ASSIS, "Lérida," *Encyclopedia Judaica*. Vol. 12 (2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan, 2007) pp. 654-655. See note 92, below.

⁶⁸ The many responsa of Rashba to Lleida and discussing Lleida found in Isidore EPSTEIN, *The Responsa of Rabbi Solomon ben Adreth of Barcelona (1235-1310) as a source of the history of Spain: studies in the communal life of the Jews in Spain as reflected in the Responsa* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1925); Yom Tov ASSIS, "Los Judíos de Cataluña: fuentes y posibilidades de estudio" in *Actes: Ir. Colloqui d'Història dels jueus a la Corona l'Aragó* (Institut d'Estudis Ilerdencs: Lleida, 1991) pp. 139-156, and *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry: Community and Society in the Crown of Aragon, 1213-1327* (London: Littman, 1997), are all listed by Amor AYALA, *Fonts per a l'estudi de la Comunitat Jueva de Lleida* (Barcelona: Catalonia Hebraica, 2003) pp. 199-209. Rashba often spells the name לאריידה but in volume three of the Responsa it is spelled לארדאד sixteen times, with alternate spellings. Particularly notable are regulations for appointment of berurim, Jewish officials, who were, among other things, responsible for dealing with informers and, as needed, handing them over to the Crown for capital punishment.

⁶⁹ Firenze – Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Plut. II 41.

⁷⁰ Gershom SCHOLEM, "Did Nahmanides compose *Iggeret HaQodesh*?" [in Hebrew], *Kiryat Sefer* 21 (1944-1945) pp. 179-186: 182. R. Shuaib also composed a commentary on cabbalistic passages of Nahmanides; see Israel M. TA-SHMA, "Ibn Shuaib, Joshua," *Encyclopedia Judaica*. Vol. 9 (2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan, 2007) p. 694.

⁷¹ SCHOLEM, "Did Nahmanides compose *Iggeret HaQodesh*?", p. 183. Yaakov S. SPIEGEL ("An Unknown Fragment of 'Iggeret Ha-Kodesh', Attributed to Nahmanides" [in Hebrew], *Kiryat Sefer* 51 [1976] pp. 488-491) notes that the Lerida manuscript con-

The Lleida manuscript served as the sole basis for the 1840 Piperno edition which can thus be considered a twin *editio princeps*. It generally follows the text of the manuscript faithfully. Unsurprisingly, the term הערלים in the preface, “the uncircumsised”, was altered by Piperno (or Ottolenghi, the printer) to העכו"ם, “the idol worshippers”. Other manuscripts and editions read הגויים. Friedländer noted הערלים in the London manuscript and there can be little doubt that it is the original vorlage. Ibn Ezra employed it in this sense in his Bible commentary (Exod 3:22, 12:2, 12:7, 16:1, etc.) as did many other sages.

In sum, the Lleida manuscript is one of the most important of the many extant manuscripts because it is closest to the source temporally and likely geographically as well (despite his journeys to Italy and elsewhere, Spain was Ibn Ezra's main base). Lleida was a community which fostered study of kabbala and tended to rabbinic authority opposed to rationalist philosophy, such as *Rashba*. These facts should be considered while charting the course of *Iggeret HaShabbat* through the narrow channel of Lleida, where the illustrious personage of Ibn Ezra may have been drafted to the camp of the mystics, just as another Lleida scribe appears to have done with Nahmanides.⁷²

8. S. D. LUZZATTO CRITIQUES IBN EZRA, *TEQUFOT* AND MAGICAL MOMENTS

This section consists of a digression into criticism of Ibn Ezra's Epistle with ramifications regarding its attribution. Luzzatto's disdain for

tains an additional discussion of foods to be consumed before sexual relations which was previously cited by R. Elijah bar Abraham Solomon ha-Kohen, Rabbi of Izmir (died 1829). Spiegel consulted with Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who replied that since many medieval medical manuals discuss this topic, the addition to *Iggeret Ha-Kodesh* cannot be attributed to any particular sage in the absence of a word-for-word correlation with a parallel source.

⁷² The Book of Ecclesiastes comes to mind as an archetype. The original composition appears to have been reframed by a later pious editor, including his own preface and conclusion. Some of the Talmudic sages denied its sanctity (*Eduyot* 5:3; *Megillah* 7a) and S. D. LUZZATTO went so far as to claim that it was originally a forgery attributed to King Solomon and that the editors changed the name to *Qohelet* in defiance; see *Meḥqerey haYahadut*, Vol II (Warsaw 1873) pp. 60-69.

Ibn Ezra is already evident in the notes to his edition of the Epistle. Nevertheless, many years later, in 1856, responding to an inquiry from an Italian professor regarding Ibn Ezra, Luzzatto did not mention these criticisms, but rather, praised Ibn Ezra for noting errors in the Julian calendar 423 years before the Gregorian reform.⁷³

As for the criticisms, we begin with a short explanation of a published criticism and follow with an in-depth analysis of one which remained unpublished. At the beginning of the second chapter, R. Saadia Gaon observed a solar eclipse in Bagdad which led to his pointing out errors in the traditional calendar.⁷⁴ In a parenthetical comment, Luzzatto objected that “without a doubt this is not R. Saadia”. However, Rapaport, the editor, refuted Luzzatto in a footnote: R. Saadia’s account was also reported in the responsa of Simeon ben Zemah Duran (Majorca, 1361-Algeria, 1444). Later, in an Italian letter to Isaac Markus Jost, which he translated to German and published, Luzzatto retorted that Duran’s account does not mention the error and other explanations are possible for any discrepancy in calculations, such as variance between a far eastern meridian and ones based upon the coordinates of either Bagdad or Jerusalem.⁷⁵ Furthermore, R. Isaac Israeli ben Joseph’s *Sefer Yesod Olam* also describes the account of R. Saadia.⁷⁶ Thus, according to Luzzatto, Ibn Ezra falsified the account. This charge seems to imply that Ibn Ezra used Saadia as a mouthpiece to voice his own controversial calendrical opinions.

⁷³ Samuel D. LUZZATTO, *Epistolario: italiano, francese, latino* (Padova, 1890) p. 852.

⁷⁴ *Kerem Chemed* 4, p. 168.

⁷⁵ LUZZATTO, *Epistolario*, pp. 360-361; *Israelitische Annalen* (6.3.1840) p. 88. Luzzatto mentioned the issue previously in a letter to Reggio, *Epistolario*, p. 343, note e. I thank Hanna Zoe Trauer and Sara Natale for assistance.

⁷⁶ Isaac ISRAELI ben Joseph, *Sefer Yesod Olam* (Berlin, 1777) p. 70. R. Isaac Israeli was a disciple of R. Asher ben Yehiel (*Rosh*) in early 14th century Toledo. Luzzatto cited this work several times in his notes to the Epistle.

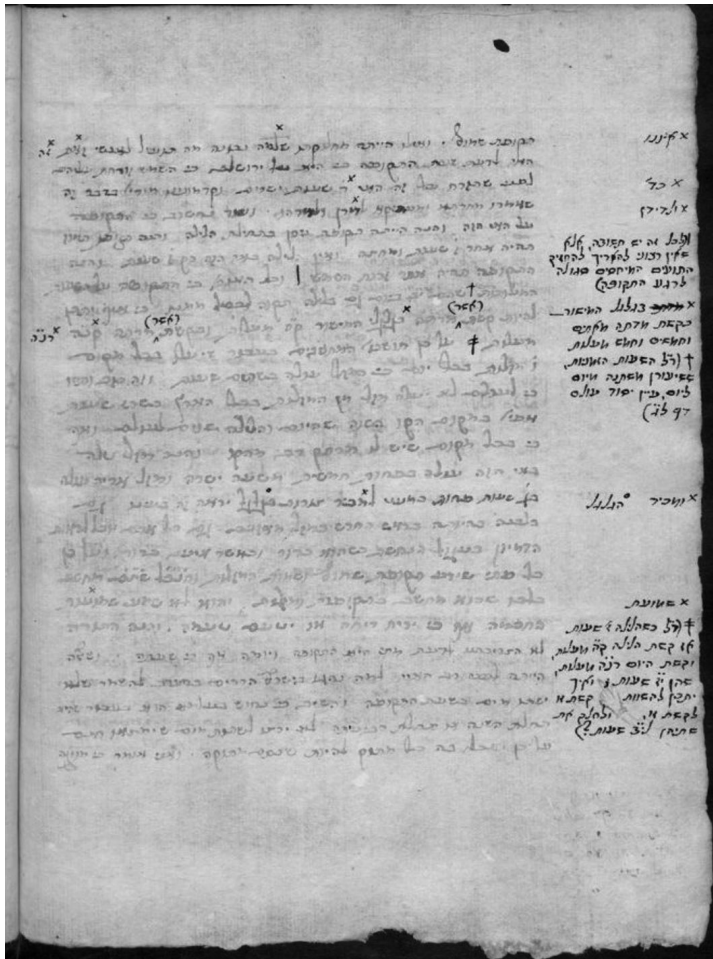


Figure 7: Ms. Berlin - Or. Oct. 244, f. 27b, with Luzzatto's copious handwritten notes in margin.

The marginal note discussed below appears at line 6 of the main body of text.

Luzzatto's unpublished criticism of Ibn Ezra will now be discussed. A comment in his personal copy which he added to the Berlin manuscript would have appeared on page 164 of the edition but it was not included in his letter to Reggio, perhaps due to his many other comments there (see image below). Ibn Ezra sharply criticized the opinion of the Baby-

Ionian Amora Shmuel (*Eruvin* 56a) regarding calculation of *tequfot* (solstice/equinox moments).⁷⁷ Luzzatto interjects:

לכל זה יש תשובה אלא שאין רצוני להאריך להחזיק התועים המיח-
סים סגולה לרגע התקופה

There is a rebuttal to all of these arguments, but I do not wish to expound on the matter as that would give credence to the mistaken ones who attribute magical properties to the moments of the solstice/equinox.

The opinion Luzzatto referred to was itself the topic of a responsum attributed to Rav Hai Gaon, cited in *Iggeret ha-Shabbat* by Ibn Ezra, as well as in his *Sefer ha'Ibbur*.⁷⁸ A custom developed among Jewish communities not to drink water during the hours of the solstices and equinoxes. Rav Hai responds (as paraphrased by Ibn Ezra) that it is only harmless “white magic” (*niḥush b'alma*). In *Ozar Ha-Geonim*, B. M. Lewin cited this version of the responsum, others and related items, anchoring them all on a Talmudic teaching not to drink water on certain nights of the week located in an extended section on magic and omens at the end of Tractate *Pesahim* (112a).⁷⁹ According

⁷⁷ In the middle of the page at the only paragraph break, beginning ועוד נחשוב. Note that Ibn Ezra's third responsum published by Steinschneider deals with the opinion of Shmuel but he raises no objections. However, the end alludes to the infallibility of the sages according to “sod,” hinting at problems. See note 43.

⁷⁸ Ed. Solomon J. HALBERSTAM (Lyck, 1874).

⁷⁹ Benjamin M. LEWIN, *Ozar HaGeonim. Pesahim* (Haifa, 1930) Responsum 318, p. 115. Customs not to drink water before *kiddush* and *havdalah* are also related, as will be discussed; see Elisheva BAUMGARTEN, “Shared and Contested Time: Jews and the Christian Ritual Calendar in the Late Thirteenth Century,” *Viator* 46:2 (2015) pp. 253-276: 262, note 54; and Justine ISSERLES, “Some Hygiene and Dietary Calendars in Hebrew Manuscripts from Medieval Ashkenaz,” in *Time, Astronomy, and Calendars in the Jewish Tradition*, eds. Sacha STERN and Charles BURNETT (Leiden: Brill, 2014) pp. 273-326: 282. A notable early source which rejects *tequfot* is R. Menaḥem Mendel of Krakow, a disciple of *Levush*; see “Hearot b'Shulei ha-Shulḥan Arukh,” *Sefunot* 15 (1992) pp. 21-23. He was commenting on R. Moses Isserles' *Darkhei Moshe* and *Mapa* commentaries which cite the custom. This authoritative legal source was responsible for a contemporary resurrection of this forgotten custom by the Rabbinat of predominantly secular Modi'in, Israel, who issued a public health advisory not to drink water between the hours of 2 and 3 PM on July 8, 2015, because of *tequfot* (<https://www.inn.co.il/Forum/Forum.aspx/t730784>, retrieved 24.02.2019).

to Israel M. Ta-Shma,⁸⁰ the source Ibn Ezra paraphrased was the responsum attributed to R. Hai Gaon.⁸¹ There, in full, the Gaon responds that it is appropriate to begin a new period with sweet, rich foods, not water. The Gaon cited related customs: not to drink water immediately at the first moment upon the departure of the Sabbath and to begin the Eve of the New Year with sweet, fatty foods. The first custom contradicts the Talmud, which explicitly exempts water from a prohibition on eating and drinking before havdalah (*Pesahim* 105a). Ta-Shma cited a French custom found in *Mahzor Viṭri* and *Midrash Shokher Tov* not to drink water during twilight (it robs from the dead) and states that there is no relationship between the two customs.⁸² On the face of it this appears to be the case since the custom not to drink water at the close of the Sabbath is apparently unattested elsewhere and contradicts normative halakhah; however, it may be a reinterpretation of the French custom, a “rationalization” (relatively speaking) in terms of *tequfot* and *simanim* of Rosh ha-Shannah customs.⁸³ The Rosh ha-Shannah custom mentioned here is similar to the custom of R. Hai described by his student R. Matzliach, based on wordplay and mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud.⁸⁴ A third responsum,⁸⁵ attributed to R. Netrunai Gaon,⁸⁶ describes an alternate

⁸⁰ Israel M. TA-SHMA, “The Danger of Drinking Water During the Tequfa: The History of an Idea” [in Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 17 (1995) pp. 21-32: 21.

⁸¹ LEWIN, *Oẓar HaGeonim. Pesahim*, Responsum 321, p. 116 (= *Hemda Genuza*, 166).

⁸² TA-SHMA, “The Danger of Drinking Water,” note 2, who refers to his study on French Customs of the Third Sabbath Meal in *Early Franco-German Ritual and Custom* Chapter 9; see especially pp. 201-208 on the custom not to drink water during twilight.

⁸³ A lack of familiarity may be explained by distance from France. One of the many points R. Tam disputed with R. Meshullam was the related French custom to fast during the Sabbath late afternoon. R. Meshullam did not follow this custom in Provence; see Abraham (Rami) REINER, ‘Parshanut v’Halakhah’, *Shanaton HaMishpat HaIvri* 21 (1998-2000) pp. 207-239: 215-217.

⁸⁴ Benjamin M. LEWIN, *Oẓar HaGeonim*, Vol. 5, *Rosh Ha-Shannah* (Haifa, 1933) Responsum 92, p. 52.

⁸⁵ LEWIN, *Oẓar HaGeonim*, Vol. 5, *Rosh Ha-Shannah*, Responsum 94, p. 53.

⁸⁶ Robert BRODY, *Teshuvot R. Netrunai bar Hilai Gaon* (Jerusalem: Ofef, 1994) Responsum 179, pp. 305-307; a continuation of Responsum 90, p. 204, note 1. There,

custom, a *symbolic* one not directly related to the Talmud or wordplay. The prohibition on water also appears in that responsum. On the eve of Rosh HaShannah, meat dishes should not be cooked in plain water, but rather, in *ptisane*, an infusion or broth probably made from barley, symbolizing richness.⁸⁷

Both this responsum and the one attributed to R. Hai Gaon which mentions *tequfot* respond to rationalist criticism of these forms of magic, countering that they are permitted and follow Biblical tradition. A rationalistic apologetic is appended by Ibn Ezra to his paraphrase of the Gaon in *Sefer ha'Ibbur*, as an alternate opinion. It is notably absent in *Iggeret ha-Shabbat*. According to this additional explanation, the Sages knew that the superstitions associated with *tequfot* are bogus, but nevertheless prescribed the custom to intimidate common folk into repentance.

Analysis of the text of both versions of the responsum reveals subtle but significant differences between the version in *Sefer ha'Ibbur*⁸⁸ and the one appearing in *Iggeret ha-Shabbat*⁸⁹:

<i>Sefer ha'Ibbur</i>	<i>Iggeret ha-Shabbat</i>	
וכבר שאלו חכמי קרואן לרבינו האי ז"ל למה נהנו שלא לשתות מים בשעת התקופה	ושאלה היתה לפני רב האי גאון ז"ל למה נהגו ישראל הדרים במערב להשמר שלא ישתו מים בשעת התקופה	1

Brody accepts the attribution to R. Netrunai, contra Lewin, who amidst a maze of attributions in various manuscripts identified the author as a Palestinian Gaon. In my opinion, none of the contradictory attributions have much historical value.

⁸⁷ *Ptisane* is mentioned in the Talmud, with the most prominent opinion interpreting it as a particular cut of grain. However, Saul LIEBERMAN (*Tosefta KiPshuta*, Nedarim [New York: JTS, 1967] pp. 456-457) proposed that this opinion is based upon folk etymology and it should be identified it as a type of grain according to Tosefta, the Palestinian Talmud, and a minority opinion in the Babylonian Talmud.

⁸⁸ Ed. Solomon J. HALBERSTAM (Lyck, 1874) p. 9r.

⁸⁹ The text follows the first edition and Lleida manuscript. No relevant significant differences are found in the other manuscripts and editions.

<i>Sefer ha'Ibbur</i>	<i>Iggeret ha-Shabbat</i>	
והשיב כי נחוש בעלמא הוא כי בעבור היות חתקופה החלת השנה על כן לא נהגו היהודים לשתות בה מים בעבור שאין להם דמים	והשיב כי נחוש בעלמא הוא בעבור שהיא תחלת השנה או תחלת רביעיתה לא ירצו לשתות מים שימצאו חנם	2
על כן יאכלו כל מתוק להיות שנתם מתוקה	על כן יאכלו בה כל מתוק להיות שנתם מתוקה	3
ואני אומר מתוקה שנת העובד השם בכל רגע	ואני אומר מתוקה שנת העובד השם הבוטח בו לבדו	4

The differences indicate different textual traditions. Alternatively, if Ibn Ezra composed both texts, then they were produced at different times and/or places, relying on alternate source texts available to him during his travels.⁹⁰ In any case, the primacy of the *Sefer ha'Ibbur* version is suggested (by the principle of *lecto difficilior potior*). In line 1, “the Sages of Kairouan” were likely generalized to “the Sages dwelling in the Magreb” (=N. Africa). An explanation at the end of line 2 states that the undesirable characteristic of water is that it “has no monetary value”, lending itself to a misinterpretation: “has no blood”. The ambiguity was eliminated by a new version: “is freely available”. Line 4 expresses skepticism towards the custom, rather, Hashem should be served “each moment,” juxtaposed with the customs of the *tequfot* moments. *Iggeret ha-Shabbat* has diverted the statement to refer to trusting in Hashem alone, excluding other forces, no longer implying *tequfot* specifically. One who is superstitious about *tequfot* does not place trust in them; he is just trying to avoid damage from the demons active in those moments. These factors suggest the primacy of the *Sefer ha'Ibbur* version.

Around 1340, R. David Abudarham (Seville, 14th cent) quoted the responsum from the writings of Ibn Ezra.⁹¹ His citation resembles the *Iggeret ha-Shabbat* version. This work includes many Provencal, French,

⁹⁰ Or it may have been cited from memory, see note 43.

⁹¹ Abraham J. WERTHEIMER, (ed.), *Abudarham ha-Shalem* (Jerusalem: Usha, 1963) p. 311. Halberstam noted this source in his notes to *Sefer ha'Ibbur*, note 1.

and Ashkenazi sources and provides even earlier testimony than the first Lleida manuscript of *Iggeret ha-Shabbat* from 1382.⁹²

The comparison of texts suggests two main possibilities: 1) that *Iggeret ha-Shabbat* was compiled after Ibn Ezra's *Sefer ha-Ibbur*, likely by a later editor, or 2) all extant manuscripts are derivatives of a single manuscript actively edited by scribes. The later editors eliminated Ibn Ezra's own rationalist apologetic that the sages did not really believe in the magical forces active during the *tequfot*.

9. CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of this study is to present the state of research, not to promote a theory. More questions are raised than answers offered. It is only possible to describe the subject as it appears, not to state conclusively who wrote what.

According to traditional rabbinic thought, unless a work can be demonstrated a forgery or pseudepigraphic, its authenticity is accepted. However, from a more critical historical perspective, it appears that the three chapters of *Iggeret HaShabbat* were composed by Abraham Ibn Ezra or a rationalist student of his works, in response to the Mishawite heresies. In any case, Ibn Ezra can be functionally considered the author, because it draws heavily upon his writings and thought.

The preface attributes the work to Ibn Ezra and contains the dream narrative, poem, and the curse. It and the brief conclusion to the *Iggeret* appear to be pseudepigraphic additions, possibly composed in Catalonia during the 13th or 14th centuries. The author of the preface (*terminus ad quem*: 1382) may have compiled the three chapters himself or realized that they relied heavily upon the teachings of Ibn Ezra. The author of the preface identified Rashbam's commentary or a compendium containing it as the approach Ibn Ezra rejected in his own commentary and in

⁹² Recently, I proposed that one of his unidentified source texts was composed by one of the great opponents of Maimonides in Provence, R. David ben Saul. Fragments of the Talmudic commentary were identified in bookbinding fragments of Girona; Leor JACOBI, "Talmudic Honey," *Giluy Milta b'Alma* (17.2.2016), <http://imhm.blogspot.co.il/2016/02/leor-jacobi-talmudic-honey-fragments-of.html>. See note 67, above.

Chapter 3 of the Epistle. Thus, he focused upon this aspect in the fantastic preface that he composed for the work, complete with a poem imitating the master. Thus, the great Ibn Ezra, whose rationalistic coded “esotericism” was a form of medieval science, became transformed into a folklore hero, a mystic wielding powerful curses whose zeal was stirred by a poetic lament of the Sabbath Day in a dream.⁹³

Recibido: 17/05/2018

Aceptado: 19/02/2019

⁹³ A character of the sort is jibed at towards the end of the second chapter of the Epistle (trans. GOODMAN, *The Sabbath Epistle*, p. 35): “Then he will understand all disciplines by himself without the need for days and years of study, something that no man has achieved from the day that man was created upon the earth. Perhaps God will listen to his plea and perform for him this miracle and sign and amazing feat, making him a second to the donkey of Balaam”.

