Abstract

Shlomo Sela and Renate Smithuis

Two Hebrew Fragments from Unknown Redactions of Abraham Ibn Ezra’s Sefer ha-Mivḥarim and Sefer ha-Šeʾelot

The examination of MS 363.3, a parchment bifolium in the Archivio di Stato, Modena, recently led to striking findings. First, although the right side of the verso and the left side of the recto bear a fragment of a hitherto unknown redaction of Sefer ha-Mivḥarim (Book of elections) by Abraham Ibn Ezra, the left side of the verso and the right side of the recto contain another fragment of a hitherto unknown redaction of the same author’s Sefer ha-Šeʾelot (Book of interrogations). Second, a very close Latin translation of these Hebrew fragments has been located in two Latin manuscripts that contain two astrological works designated therein as Liber eleccionum and Liber interrogacionum, confirming that these Latin texts are translations of the full texts of the lost Hebrew redactions of Mivḥarim III and Šeʾelot III. Finally, the fact that we now have these fragments of Mivḥarim III and Šeʾelot III as well as their Latin counterparts corroborates the thesis that Ibn Ezra composed at least three Hebrew astrological encyclopedias, consisting of several individual redactions of the various works. The present notice announces this discovery and offers a brief account of the Hebrew fragments and their correspondence with their Latin counterparts. Six excerpts from both fragments are published, accompanied by the Latin translations in Liber eleccionum and Liber interrogacionum and an English translation of a collation of the Hebrew excerpts with their Latin counterparts.
Shlomo Sela and Renate Smithuis

Two Hebrew Fragments from Unknown Redactions of Abraham Ibn Ezra’s *Sefer ha-Mivḥarim* and *Sefer ha-Šeʾelot*

The examination of MS 368.3, a parchment bifolium in the Archivio di Stato, Modena, recently led to striking findings. First, although the right side of the verso and the left side of the recto bear a fragment of a hitherto unknown redaction of *Sefer ha-Mivḥarim* (Book of elections; henceforth *Mivḥarim* III) by Abraham Ibn Ezra (ca. 1089–ca. 1161), the left side of the verso and the right side of the recto contain another fragment of a hitherto unknown redaction of *Sefer ha-Šeʾelot* (Book of interrogations; henceforth *Šeʾelot* III) by the same author. Second, a very close Latin translation of these Hebrew fragments has been located in two Latin manuscripts that contain two astrological works designated in them as *Liber eleccionum* and *Liber interrogacionum*, confirming that these Latin texts are translations of the full texts of the lost Hebrew redactions of *Mivḥarim* III and *Šeʾelot* III. Finally, the fact that we now have these fragments of *Mivḥarim* III and *Šeʾelot* III as well as their Latin counterparts corroborates the thesis that Ibn Ezra composed at least three Hebrew astrological encyclopedias, consisting of several individual redactions of the various works.
The discovery and identification of the bifolium was carried out over a period of time by several scholars: Mauro Perani, the current director of the Italian Geniza project, discovered the bifolium among the materials held by the State Archive in Modena. Dr. Ezra Chwat and Dr. Simcha Emanuel, on a record of the digital catalogue of the Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem (henceforth IMHM), tentatively assigned the text on the bifolium to Ibn Ezra and identified one folio as probably containing a fragment from Sefer ha-Šeʾelot in an unknown redaction and the other as a fragment on elections. Reimund Leicht identified the contents of the Modena bifolium as fragments from hitherto lost redactions of Ibn Ezra’s Sefer ha-Mivharim and Sefer ha-Šeʾelot. Shlomo Sela studied and established the Hebrew text of the bifolium, thereby corroborating this identification, and put forward the hypothesis that the Hebrew fragments might have a Latin counterpart. Finally, Renate Smithuis, who had previously identified Liber eleccionum and Liber interrogacionum as translations of lost Hebrew treatises by Ibn Ezra and established these texts, confirmed this hypothesis by comparing these Latin texts with the Hebrew texts of the bifolium.

The main aim of this notice is to announce this discovery and offer a brief account of some key features of the Hebrew fragments and their correspondence with their Latin counterparts. This involves publication of six excerpts from both fragments, accompanied by the Latin translations in Liber eleccionum and Liber interrogacionum and an English translation of a collation of the Hebrew excerpts with their Latin counterparts. A study of the full Hebrew and Latin texts is reserved for a full critical edition.

1 In Italy, thousands of parchment folios and bifolia from medieval Hebrew manuscripts ended up in archives and libraries, where they were reused, especially during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as book bindings or to cover archival volumes and registers. Known as the “Italian Geniza,” this scattered collection has received extensive research and cataloguing attention over the last three decades: http://www.morasha.it/zehut/mp02_ghenizaitaliana.html. We are grateful to Mauro Perani for providing bibliographical information as well as pictures of the bifolium, which were crucial for the completion of the research.


3 The doctrine of elections is concerned with finding the best time to begin a particular activity; the doctrine of interrogations is designed to allow astrologers to reply to questions related to daily life. In both cases the astrologer attempts to answer the question by constructing and analyzing a horoscopic chart—in the first case, for the assumed time of inception of the requested activity; in the second case, for the exact time and place at which the question was asked.
and whether she will give birth to a male or a female child: Excerpt 1), includes the entire sixth house (whether a sick person will die or recover: Excerpts 2, 3, 4, and 5), and breaks off at the beginning of the seventh house (about quarrels related to women: Excerpt 6).

The two Hebrew fragments were discovered on a parchment bifolium in the State Archive in Modena, MS 368.3, which had been reused to bind a notarial register from the series Notarile di Pavullo, containing the deeds of the notary Giovanni Bartolini for the years 1650–1691. The bifolium was written on both sides in Ashkenazi script in the fourteenth or early fifteenth century. The flesh side is well preserved and quite legible for the most part, but the hair side is erased and faded and therefore quite illegible.

The Latin translation of the two fragments comes from two manuscripts found in Erfurt, MS Amplon. O.89 (henceforth: E) and Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS 5442 (henceforth: V). They include Liber nativitatum, Liber revolucionum, Liber eleccionum, and Liber interrogacionum, all of which can be safely attributed to Ibn Ezra.4


5 *Sefer Rešīt Ḥokmah*, in Raphael Levy and Francisco Cantera, *The Beginning of Wisdom* (Baltimore, 1939), VII, iviii:15–16; *Sefer ha-Te’amim* (I), *The Book of Reasons, A Parallel Hebrew–English Critical Edition of the Two Versions of the Text*, edited, translated, and annotated by Shlomo Sela (Leiden: Brill, 2007), §1.5.5, pp. 34–35; §3.2:1, pp. 60–61 et passim; *Sefer ha-’Olam* (I), MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, héb. 1056 (IMHM: F 14659), ff. 80b, 84a; *Sefer ha-Seʿelot* (I), MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, héb. 1056 (IMHM: F 14659), ff. 62a, 62b. The same formula is used once in *Liber eleccionum* (MS Erfurt, Amplon. O.89, f. 39b20) and eight times in *Liber interrogacionum* (MS Erfurt, Amplon. O.89, ff. 20a8–9, 20b1, 20b24, 21b19, 22a4, 25b3, 29a13, 30a23).

6 See also *Mivharim* III, Excerpt 2.

**Attribution**

Due to their fragmentary state, the two Hebrew texts lack the usual ascription to an author and the title of the work. We know from several of Ibn Ezra’s Hebrew astrological works as well as from the Latin translation of some of his lost Hebrew works that he habitually referred to himself as “Abraham.”5 This is also the case with *Šeʾelot* III, where we read (Excerpt 3): ‘אני אברם ומתי מצומס (“I, Abraham, have tested <many> times”), which has its Latin equivalent in “ego Abraham temptavi multotiens.” Ibn Ezra used this phrase whenever he claimed to have a scientific insight based on his own experience.6

Moreover, the author of both fragments identifies himself as the author of several astrological treatises, which were written by Abraham Ibn Ezra, through the following cross-references: *Mivharim* III refers in the past tense to *Sefer Rešīt Ḥokmah* (Excerpt 3) and to *Sefer Miṣpēṭei ba-’Olam*, which is an alternative name for *Sefer ha-’Olam* (Excerpt 4); *Šeʾelot* III also refers in the past tense to *Sefer Rešīt Ḥokmah* (Excerpt 2) and to *Sefer ba-Meʾorot* (Excerpt 5). A detailed study of the cross-references, which occur throughout Ibn Ezra’s astrological corpus and might cast light on the position of *Mivharim* III and *Šeʾelot* III in the framework of a third astrological encyclopedia, must await a full edition of these texts.

**Terminology**

The astrological terminology of the two fragments reveals beyond all doubt that Ibn Ezra is the author of *Mivharim* III and *Šeʾelot* III. We can go further and note similarities in vocabulary with certain parts of...
his astrological corpus; for example, the use in both fragments of נאמנים ‘faithful’ (Se’elot III, Excerpt 4) to designate the fixed signs (Taurus, Leo, Scorpio, Aquarius). In other parts of his astrological corpus Ibn Ezra uses עומדים ‘standing’, but we find נאמנים in Mişpetei ba-Mazzalot, in the second redaction of Sefer ha-Se’elot, in Sefer ha-Me’orot, and in the recently identified Sefer ha-Tequfah. Another minor correspondence between Mivharim III and Mişpetei ba-Mazzalot is their single reference to the astrologers as חכמימשפטיהמזלות ‘scholars of the judgments of the zodiacal signs’.

Traces of Old French

The four treatises—including Liber eleccionum and Liber interrogacionum—identified by Renate Smithuis as translations of lost Hebrew treatises are also important because they contain traces of Old French in passages that were presumably too obscure for the translator to render them properly into Latin. These remnants of Old French reinforce the general hypothesis that all Latin versions of Ibn Ezra, i.e., those by Peter d’Abano, Henry Bate, Arnould de Quincampoix, and several anonymous translators, were made not from the Hebrew originals but rather from the Old French versions of Hagin le Juif. Most of Hagin’s versions are presumed lost, although systematic study of the large selection of Old French astrological manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France might uncover important new finds.

The Hebrew fragment of Liber interrogacionum contains one example of Old French (Excerpt 4). “Au germinant ou a ses signeurs” is paralleled, as expected, by by יא שהбереж את המקס, for Hagin le Juif regularly used germinant for “ascendant.” Another indication that the translator of Liber interrogacionum worked from the Old French is the use of “claritas” for אור (א), which parallels Hagin’s “clarté” in similar cases (Excerpts 2 and 5).

Excerpts from Mivharim III and their translation in Liber Eleccionum

Collation of the Hebrew fragment with its Latin counterpart shows that the supposed Old French intermediary version was made from a manuscript that was different and in some parts more complete than...
The Hebrew and Latin texts run nicely parallel in most places, but sometimes *Liber Eleccionum* is more extensive. The most substantial difference between the two (E, f. 45a29–b1), which is not shown below, is simply a case of parablepsis. The copyist of the Hebrew text (or one of the copyists in the chain before him) did not notice that he was skipping some text and continued with the next text unit that began with the same words. Excerpts 1 and (probably) 6 contain other examples of parablepsis. Striking differences between the Hebrew and Latin are highlighted in bold.

**Excerpt 1 (E, f. 44b19-22).**

Nec potest inferior vincere superiorem, nisi fuerit inferior in angulo primo vel decimo et superior in domo cadente. Item inferior sit fortificata ex parte solis et superior contrario et quod scilicet superior sit sub radiis solis. Item quod inferior sit directa et superior retrograda.

A lower <planet> cannot be victorious over an upper <planet> unless the lower is in the first or the tenth house [i.e., the tenth house] and the upper is in a house falling from the cardines. Likewise the lower <planet> becomes stronger when it is in the side of the Sun, and the opposite applies to the upper <planet> when it is under the rays of the Sun. Likewise the lower is stronger than the upper when the lower is direct in its motion and the upper is retrograde.

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For conclusive evidence that *Liber eleccionum* and *Liber interrogationum* were translated from Old French, see the examples of French words that occasionally turn up in them instead of their Latin equivalent: Smithuis, “Abraham ibn Ezra the Astrologer,” pp. 268–69.

We thank Charles Burnett for checking and, where needed, correcting the Latin transcriptions of this article. Any remaining mistakes are of course our own responsibility.

The ninth, third, twelfth, and sixth mundane houses are called “falling from the cardines.”

There is blank space here in E and V, as if to indicate a lacuna. However, a comparison to the Hebrew indicates that the Latin is complete.

19 Taurus is the planetary house of Venus but not of Mars.
Excerpt 3 (E, f. 45a11-8).

Then find out which of them is victorious, as I mentioned in the Book of the Beginning of Wisdom.

Excerpt 4 (E, f. 45a20-4).

You should find out, at the revolution of the world-year, how the luminaries aspect Mars, or its conjunction, or whether the terminal sign reaches, from the place of conjunction at the beginning of the triplicity, to the place of Mars, or whether the terminal sign completes twenty years [the cycle of the small conjunction of Saturn-Jupiter], as I have explained in the Book of the Judgments of the World.

20 The domain of burning is an interval counted with respect to the Sun where the planets are said to be “burnt” and without power. This interval, counting from 16° with respect to the Sun, is 6° for Saturn and Jupiter, 10° Mars, and 7° for Venus and Mercury.

21 The revolution of the world-year occurs when the Sun enters the sign of Aries.

Excerpt 5 (E, f. 45b9-12).

Octava. Si vis eligere horam quaerendi rem furatam vel perditam, quere stellam que est domina signi fortis et sol vel luna dederint ei fortitudinem vel in aspectu ad ipsam et illi qui est timorous de nocte, dederit dominus octave fortitudinem vel quod sit in aliquo angulumarum.

The eighth <house>: if you wish to choose an hour to find something that was lost or stolen, try to find a sign whose lord is strong <in it> and the Sun or the Moon give the power to it or are aspecting it, and the lord of the eighth <house> gives the power to it or it [i.e., the lord of the eighth house] is in one of the cardines.

Excerpt 6 (E, f. 45b17-23).

Nona. Qui querit eligere horam ad scribendum vel ad discendum vel scribendum librum et ad aperieendum cor, ponas semper lunam in aliquo domorum Mercurii et non sit Mercurius retrogrados. Et si sit in .1. gradu cum sole, tunc bonum. Et si fuerit Mercurius in domo prima vel cum domino ascendentis vel dominus hore fuerit, tunc Mercurius tunc melius.

The ninth <house>: One who tries to choose an hour to begin learning or writing a book should always put the Moon in one of Mercury's houses and <should take care that> Mercury is not retrograde. If it is in the same degree with the Sun, this is fortunate. But if Saturn is the lord of the hour this is unfortunate because it signifies idleness. If Mars is the lord of the hour ...

Excerpts from Še’elot III and their translation in Liber Interrogacionum

Liber interrogacionum suggests that the Old French translator Hagiin le Juif used a manuscript that was more complete than Modena, Archivio di Stato, MS 368.3. Thus two sentences in the Latin version have no match in the Hebrew text and are not due to parablepsis. On the other hand, in some places the Hebrew fragment is more detailed than Liber interrogacionum. Overall, the two texts are remarkably close, however.

Excerpt 1 (E, f. 25a6-12)

... הנופלים מן היתדות. ואם השאירהאם ישלאשההריון, אם המורהיתן הסתכל ואומרהוא, אם היה המורה הנתנן כחנו לכוכב ביתד, וככה אם בעל השעה ביתד ואם היהצדקאו נוגה,וככה אם היה המורה מקובלב מקומו,וככה אם היה הצומחנותן כחנו לכוכב בחמישי,וככה אם התלוי התלוי שבתוכה...

... falling from the cardines. If the query is <to know> whether a woman is pregnant, you should state that <the women is pregnant> if the significator gives <its power in the following cases>: if the significator gives <its power to a planet that is in a cardo, and likewise if the lord of
receptus in loco suo et similiter si fuerit ascendens dans fortitudinem stelle in quinta et similiter si fuerit signum ascendens signum bicorporeum.

Excerpt 2 (E, f. 25a28-b1)

Sixth <house>. Query about a sick person, whether he will die or be cured, either slowly or quickly. These are the things that signify <that the sick person will be cured>: that the lord of the ascendant is clean of any aspect with a malefic planet, and that it is in a fortunate place with respect to the ascendant, that it is not burnt or that it does not enter under the ray of the Sun the number of degrees that I have shown you in the Book of the Beginning of Wisdom.

3° הלל בшеול.

Excerpt 3 (E, f. 25b3-5)

Et ita iudicaverunt Antiqui et ego Abraham temptavi multotiens quod si fuerit dominus ascendents dans fortitudinem aut coniungatur cum stella in quarta, morietur infirmus quia ipsa est dominus,23 fovee. The Ancients passed such a judgment and I, Abraham, have tested <many> times that if the lord of the ascendant gives power or is in conjunction with a planet in the fourth house, the sick person will die because this is the house of the grave.

Excerpt 4 (E, f. 25b22-7)

The fixed signs are very harmful, and the bicorporal <signs> signify that the disease will return or that the sick person will contract a new disease, and the tropical <signs>24 signify quickness for life or death. If a harmful planet <aspects> the ascendant.

23 Sic! Should be dominus.
24 The tropical signs are Aries, Cancer, Libra, Capricorn; the fixed signs, Taurus, Leo, Scorpio, Aquarius; the bicorporal signs, Gemini, Virgo, Sagittarius, Pisces. This is a well-known tripartite classification of the zodiacal signs in accordance with the prevailing weather when the Sun travels through them in its annual path.
Excerpt 5 (E, f. 26a6-8)

If you know the place of the Moon at the moment when the sick person fell ill, this is more correct, as it is written in the Book of the Luminaries, in <the section on> the critical days.

Excerpt 6 (E, f. 26a11-3)

Seventh <house>. Includes four queries. The first is about quarrels related to women. Find out whether the lord of the ascendant gives power, either in aspect or in conjunction, to the lord of the 7th house ...