

EARLY MODERN WORKSHOP: Jewish History Resources

Volume 12: Continuity and Change in the Jewish Communities of the Early Eighteenth Century, Ohio State University, Columbus, August 17-19, 2015

Experience is Proof: Texts versus Observation in Eighteenth-Century Italy

Debra Glasberg Gail, Columbia University

Introduction:

The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries marked a significant period in the transformation of scientific scholarship. The Latin philosophical tradition's dominance waned as empirical methods gained credence. University educated men of science began to trust information actually seen and tested more than knowledge contained in books, especially ancient ones. The larger implications of this transformation -- the questioning of the authority of the written word of the Bible and the accompanying narrative of the origins of the universe -- have received significant scholarly attention. The smaller shifts in the way individuals weighed textual and empirical sources of authority, however, has been largely overlooked. The work of Italian rabbi and physician Isaac Lampronti (1679-1756), whose years as a student and teacher overlapped with these shifting grounds, provides a significant entry point into the subject. Lampronti saw the rabbinic and scientific systems as fundamentally compatible and accordingly employed his personal medical knowledge throughout his encyclopedia of Jewish law, the *Pahad Yitzhak*. Examination of two passages from his work shows both the influence of empirical authority on rabbinic scholarship and the continued importance of ancient texts, even non-Jewish ones. Through such analysis, historians can better understand the influence and reach of the new epistemology and the complex hierarchies of authority that emerged in the era.

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Isaac Lampronti, *Paḥad Yiṣḥak*, Vol. 2, p. 100r, s.v. “*dam nidah*” (Venice, 1750) (first printed edition); Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale de France, Ms. Hebrew 481, f. 266r (manuscript original).

Dam nidah - See Pliny Book 9, Chapter 15,¹ who says the following but in another language: “There is nothing more wondrous and amazing about women than their menstrual blood, for [contact with it] turns wine sour, [it causes] the fruit of the earth to become barren, [as well as] shoots to die and garden seeds to burn up. The fruit of trees falls off if the [menstruating] women happen to sit on them. The bright glimmer of mirrors becomes darkened from the glance of the menstruating woman, the sharpness of the iron is blunted, and the gleam of ivory dulled. Dogs become crazy and rabid if they happen to eat the blood of a menstruating woman and their bite is infected with a poison from which they cannot be cured.”²

The previously mentioned scholar [Pliny] returned to these words in Book 28, Chapter 6.³ And all the iniquities attributed to this blood were absolved, and in agreement with him were Fallopio,⁴ Rodericus Ma-Castro [Rodrigo de Castro],⁵

¹ The correct citation is actually Book 7, Chapter 15. This is a printing error. The manuscript says Book 7.

² There are only a few small differences between the Latin original and Lampronti’s translation, namely the absence of the last few clauses about hives of bees, bronze and iron rusting, and a horrible smell filling the air. The structure of Lampronti’s rendition is otherwise faithful to the Latin.

Latin original: “sed nihil facile reperitur mulierum profluvio magis monstrificum. acescunt superventu musta, sterilescent contactae fruges, moriuntur insita, exuruntur hortorum germina, fructus arborum [quibus insidere] decidunt, speculorum fulgor adspectu ipso hebetatur, acies ferri praestringitur, eboris nitor, alvi apium moriuntur, aes etiam ac ferrum robigo protinus corripit odorque dirus aera, in rabiem aguntur gustato eo canes atque insanabili veneno morsus inficitur.”

Translation by WHS Jones: “But nothing could easily be found that is more remarkable than the monthly flux of women. Contact with it turns new wine sour, crops touched by it become barren, grafts die, seeds in gardens are dried up, the fruit of trees falls off, the bright surface of mirrors in which it is merely reflected is dimmed, the edge of steel and the gleam of ivory are dulled, hives of bees die, even bronze and iron are at once seized by rust, and a horrible smell fills the air; to taste it drives dogs mad and infects their bites with an incurable poison.”

³ The printed text says Chapter 6, but the manuscript says Chapter 7. In Chapter 7, Pliny discusses the therapeutic use of saliva. Elsewhere in Book 28, however, he discusses the positive benefits of menstruation. For example, Book 28, Chapter 10 says: “Many kinds of illness are cleared up by the first sexual intercourse, or by the first menstruation; if they do not, they become chronic, especially epilepsy.” And in Book 28, Chapter 23 Pliny mentions that women are powerful and hailstorms are driven away by menstrual blood.

⁴ Gabriele Fallopio (d. 1562) was a Paduan anatomist known for his anatomical studies of the reproductive organs, especially his identification of the uterine tubes.

Guglielmo Balogno [Guillaume de Baillou],⁶ and Daniel Sennert⁷ and others, as one can see in their books.⁸

In spite of this, the instances that we see every day teach us how many sicknesses come to women who do not have a menstrual flow and also how many come to those who do at the time of their flow. And every day we have seen with our eyes and our ears have heard that the men and women who eat the blood by way of a *philtre* [magic potion] no longer have a memory, a bitter darkness [i.e. melancholy] controls them, they become mad, and their madness waxes and wanes according to the phases of the moon, and others become lepers.

The cure for this sickness can be accomplished in many ways that should be performed by experts in wisdom, knowledge, and understanding as is written in medical books: One *drama*⁹ of pearls thin like dust¹⁰ with water of *melissa fillo*;¹¹ One to two *scrupolo*¹² of *trochisci viperni*;¹³ The *Conciliator*¹⁴ mentions only one

⁵ Rodrigo de Castro (d. 1627) was a converso physician who wrote an important two-volume gynecological work, *De universa mulierum medicina*, which was printed widely throughout Europe in the seventeenth century.

⁶ I searched the following medical bibliographies and resources and Guillaume de Baillou is the only name that seems to possibly match the Italian version transliterated into Hebrew by Lampronti as seen in the text: James Ricci, *The Genealogy of Gynaecology: History of the Development of Gynaecology Throughout the Ages* (Philadelphia: The Blakiston Company, 1950); Wellcome Historical Medical Library, *A Catalogue of Printed Books in the Wellcome Historical Medical Library*, (London: Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1962); Leslie T. Morton and Robert J. Moore, *A Bibliography of Medical and Biomedical Biography* (Brookfield, VT: Gower, 1989); Alain Besson ed., *Thornton's Medical Books, Libraries and Collectors: A Study of Bibliography and the Book Trade in Relation to the Medical Sciences* (Vermont: Gower, 1990). The exact work Lampronti may have referenced is: Guillaume de Baillou, *De Virginum et Mulierum Morbis liber, in quo multa ad mentem Hippocratis explicantur* (Paris, 1643). For a note on Guillaume de Baillou's role in the development of gynecology see: Helen King, *Midwifery, Obstetrics and the Rise of Gynaecology: The Uses of Sixteenth-Century Compendium* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 16.

⁷ Daniel Sennert (d. 1637) was a German physician and prolific author of books on chemistry, alchemy, and medicine. He is chiefly known for his contributions to atomic theory, but his medical writings, including *Practicae medicinae* (Volumes 1-6) were also widely circulated. Book 4 of *Practicae medicinae* specifically covers female illnesses. In Book 4, Section II, Part 2 Sennert addresses a question as to whether menstrual blood is negative in its quantity or quality and he answers that it only offends in quantity (based on the Hippocratic/Galenic understanding that women have too much blood in their bodies), and that there is nothing inherently bad or toxic about the blood itself.

⁸ As far as I can tell, none of these individuals made statements about the magical or toxic qualities of menstrual blood itself. They do, however, talk about female illnesses, some of which are closely related to menstruation, either caused by it or by the lack thereof.

⁹ *Drama/dracma* is a measurement equal to 1/16 of an ounce.

¹⁰ Giambattista Morgagni (d. 1771) mentions a substance containing extracts of pearls in one of the consultations he wrote to Lampronti. See: Saul Jarcho, ed., *The Clinical Consultations of Giambattista Morgagni: The Edition of Enrico Benassi (1935)* (Boston: The Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, 1984), p. 155, see footnote 555 p. 389.

¹¹ *Melissa officinalis* (lemon balm) was a widely used medicinal herb, often prepared with water. Nicholas Lemery (d. 1715) discussed *melissa* water specifically in his pharmacological work, *Farmacopea Universale*. See: Lemery, *Farmacopea Universale* (Venice, 1720), p. 391. I reference this text because I have seen Lampronti mention it specifically on other occasions in the *Paḥad Yiẓḥak*.

¹² *Scrupolo* is a measurement equal to 1/3 dram.

remedy, the *belzoar*;¹⁵ And also very effective is the seed of the *cavolo*¹⁶ and the stomach of the rabbit;¹⁷ Very helpful is the *theriaca*,¹⁸ two *dracmas* with *fumaria* water.¹⁹ The sick person's drink should be boiled wine with *melissa* herb or wine in which the previously mentioned herb has been steeped. Above all,²⁰ he should increase the washing of his body, always in warm water with boiled herbs in it.

¹³ A preparation of viper meat, discussed in another Italian pharmacological work I have seen Lampronti mention elsewhere: *Antidotario Romano* (Rome, 1624) p.108. Morgagni also mentions the use of viper frequently in his consultations and even mentions it specifically with reference to menstrual ailments. See Saul Jarcho, ed., *The Clinical Consultations of Giambattista Morgagni: The Edition of Enrico Benassi (1935)* (Boston: The Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, 1984), 73-4.

¹⁴ The *Conciliator* is a scholastic medical written by Paduan physician Pietro d'Abano (d. 1313). In 1472, an edition of the *Conciliator* was printed together with Pietro d'Abano's short treatise on toxicology, *De veneris eorumque remediis*. There Abano discussed the therapeutic qualities of the bezoar stone.

¹⁵ The bezoar stone (a small mass found in the stomach) was long considered an antidote to poison. A short article on the belzoar can be found in the 1743 edition of the *Giornale de'letterati: Giornale de'letterati, Della Pietra Belzoar, Articolo XXII*, (Rome, 1743), p. 274-5. Morgagni also mentions a substance containing the bezoar stone in his exchange with Lampronti: *The Clinical Consultations of Giambattista Morgagni*, p. 155, see footnote 555, p. 389.

¹⁶ Lemery discussed *cavolo* (cabbage): Lemery, *Farmacopea*, p. 161.

¹⁷ The stomach of the rabbit is mentioned in a medieval Hebrew translation of Galen's *Book on the Womb*. See Ron Barkai, *A History of Jewish Gynaecological Texts in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), p. 174.

¹⁸ Theriaca was one of the most common ancient and medieval medicinal cures, often considered a universal cure-all. See Barkai, p. 221.

¹⁹ *Fumaria officinalis* is a medicinal herb discussed by both Lemery and Morgagni.

²⁰ The manuscript reads: "לרחוץ ירבה הכל ועל".

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ומתמיה פלא דבר אין: אחרת בלשון אבל האלה בדברים ט"ו פרק עיתשי ספר פלינייו עיין נדה דם הנטיעות, תמותינה מות עקרים יהיו הארץ פירות. מחמיץ התירוש כי יען נדותן מדם יותר בנשים במראות אשר נוגה אור. עליהם ישבו הנשים במקרה אם האץ פירות לארץ ויפלו. ישרפו הננות וציצי הכלבים יהיו שוטים. הפיל שן מראה ויחשך, יבוטל הברזל חדוד בהן, הנדה עיני ראות מפני אפל יהיה הנ"ל החכם וחזר. להרפא תוכל לא וראש לענה נשיכת ונשיבתם, נדה דם יאכלו במקרה אם וכעסנים פ"ו כ"ח בספר האלה הדברים כל על

גוליי'למו, מאקאסט'רו רודרי'קו, ייפאל'ופ בעדו והליץ טהרם זה לדם נתנו אשר פשעים ומכל בספריהם הרואה לראות יוכל כאשר ואחרים, סינר'טי דניאל, באלוניו

שאין הנשים על באים חולאים כמה אותנו מלמדים הם יום בכל רואים אנו אשר המעשים זה כל ועם כי שמעו ואזנינו ינועינ ראו ויום ובכל. יציאתו בזמן השופעות באותן וכמה נדה דם שופעות נעשים, בהם שולטת שחורה מרה, זכרון להם עוד אין פילטרו בדרך הדם יאכלו אשר ונשים האנשים מצורעים יעשו ואחרים, הלבנה רבות או מעוט כפי ומתמעטת רבה ושטותן, שוטים

ככתוב רבה ותבונה דעת בחכמה בקיאים ידי על תעשה אשר רבים דרכים על היא זה לחולי התרופה ויפירני טרק'ישי; פ'יללו מליס'סא מי עם אחת דרא'מה כעפר דקים הפני'נים: רפואות בספרי זרע הוא מאד טוב וגם; הבילז'אר יחידה לתרופת מזכיר הקונציל'אטור; שנים עד אחד מסקרופולו חולהה שתיית. פומארי'אה מי עם שתים דראקמ'אס התירי'אקא מאד תועיל; ארנבת קיבת וגם קאו'ילו גופו לרחוץ ירבה הכל ועל, הנ"ל העשב בתוכו שנשרה יין או מליס'סא עשב עם מבושל יין תהיה בתוכם מבושלים עשבים עם חמים במים תמיד

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Nital ha-lev - Removal of the heart whether by hand or by sickness: *terefah*. *Shulḥan ‘arukh*, *Yoreh de‘ah*: *siman mem*, *se‘if heh*.¹ The issue of a peacock without a heart came before our *yeshiva* and after discussion, we ruled it a *terefah* even though one of the teachers was inclined to rule leniently, for here and there we found the *kanei* [pipes] of the heart that are called in *Hulin* the *shorashei* and *sehosei*. But we do not consider them the heart itself as Maimonides wrote in Chapter 6 of *hilkhot sheḥitah* and so forth, and in Chapter 14. And everyone wrote intelligently that if any of the organs we discussed is punctured, the animal is *pasul*; the same is true if one of the organs is missing, and so forth.

And even if logic makes this matter seem impossible, since no creature can live without a heart, nonetheless the spirit of God speaks through the sages of blessed memory and they do not contradict reality. And according to the rule that is written: regardless of whether [the absence of the organ occurred] by the hands of man or on account of sickness, this and that are proven through experience. I saw it in the writings of the great Rabbi Del Bene, that the wife of R. Del Bene, the daughter of the rabbi, the author of the *Be‘er ‘esek*,² thus the daughter and wife of a *haver*,³ saw with her eyes in Lugo a gentile castrating a rooster to turn it into a capon⁴ and the heart was pulled out along with the testicles. And in spite of this the capon did not die. And [this is because] any creature like this, even if it cannot live for 12 months, can live for an hour, a day, or a month without a heart. And also on account of illness it disintegrates and is destroyed little by little.

¹ The printed text says *se‘if aleph*, but this is a misprint. The manuscript clearly reads *mem*.

² Shabttai Be‘er Fonte, *Be‘er ‘esek* (Venice, 1674).

³ Lampronti is arguing here that the woman is a trustworthy witness because she is both the daughter of a rabbi and the wife of a rabbi.

⁴ A capon is a castrated rooster, considered a delicacy because the hormonal and behavioral differences resulting from the castration make the meat more tender.

And even though the words of our rabbis do not need support, we found and saw in the book *Mappamondo Istorico* written by the priest Foresti,⁵ see there Book 2, page 84v, and these are the words translated from Italian into Hebrew: “And also the Caesar, on the day of his death by the hands of his enemies [the conspirators] while offering two cows, said they both did not have a heart. And also of the sacrifice, Natus Ceasar explained that it was missing both a heart and a liver.” See there.

And Gur 'Aryeh Levi Finzi *se'if katan* 3, on *Shulhan 'arukh Yoreh de'ah siman* 40 wrote these words:⁶ “Because I have seen people mocking the words of the sages saying it is impossible for any animal to live without a heart, I decided [saw fit] to copy the words of Aristotle found in the book *Goren nakhon* Part 2, Section 3:⁷ ‘And Alexander heard from Aristotle his mentor that worry shrinks a person’s heart and destroys it, and he wanted to establish the truth of the matter so he took a type of animal that resembled a human in its nature and imprisoned it for several days in darkness and commanded it be given enough food for it to survive, and afterwards he took it out and slaughtered it and found the heart destroyed and disintegrated.’ Thus blessed be the one who chose them and their teaching.”

And in the responsa of the great Rabbi Zevi of Amsterdam #74, 76, 77, 78⁸ I saw that he struggled to prove that it is impossible to find an animal or bird that can live without a heart, see there his proofs, but they are not irrefutable and experience proves this. And he [Hakham Zevi] of blessed memory wrote [once], and again a second and third time,⁹ and he brought the responsum of Naftali Kohen. But who would deny the *terefut nital ha-lev* of a healthy and fat chicken when the *nital* occurred on account of illness? And even if the removal occurred by human hands, if it was not when it was slaughtered immediately [then who would ever deny its *terefut*]?

[Cross reference:] *'Ever she-'im nital terefah.*

⁵ The *Mappamondo Istorico* (Historical World Map), written by Italian Jesuit Antonio Foresti, was first printed in 1690 in Parma. In 1715, the Venetian printer Girolamo Albrizzi reprinted the work as the first part of a more comprehensive universal history; the later volumes of the collection were written by Apostolo Zeno, one of the founding editors of the *Giornale de' Letterati d'Italia*, Domenico Suarez, and Silvio Grande.

⁶ Gur Aryeh Levi Finzi, *Shulhan 'arukh, Yoreh de'ah (Glosses)* (Mantua, 1721), Section 40, Comment 3.

⁷ The *Goren Nakhon* is a sixteenth-century collection of three classic philosophical texts: *Tikun midot ha-nefesh* by Solomon Ibn Gabirol, *Sefer musrei ha-filosofim*, and the *Sefer ha-tapuah* attributed to Aristotle. The volume was edited by Joseph Ashkenazi of Padua and printed in 1562 in Riva di Trento. The specific quote here is found in Ibn Gabirol's *Tikun midot ha-nefesh: Goren nakhon, helek 3, sha'ar 2* (Riva di Trento, 1562), p. 13v.

⁸ Zevi Hirsch b. Jacob Ashkenazi, *She'elot u-teshuvot Hakham Zevi* (Amsterdam, 1712) #74, 76, 77, 78.

⁹ This phrase is a quote from B.T., *Shabbat* 61a.

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לב בלא טווס ע"א בישיבתנו בא. ה' סעיף א' סי' י"ד ש"ע טריפה חולי מחמת בין ביד בין - הלב ניטל הלב קני בו נמצאו ומכאן שמכאן מפני להקל חוכך היה המורים מן שאחד אע"ג הטרפנוהו העיון ואחרי. ובי"ד וכו' מה"ש פ"ו מהרמב"ם כמ"ש עצמו כלב להו דיינינן לא כי. וסחסי שורשי בחולין הנקראים. וכו' חסר אם כך; פסול ניקב שאמרנו אברים אלו שכל בשום כתבו וכולם.

דבר ה' רוח מ"מ, לב בלא לחיות יכולה בריה שאין ובלא יראה בלא זה דבר נראה שכלנו לפי ואם נתאמת וזה חולי מחמת בין אדם בידי בין שכתב הדין וכפי, המציאות מכחישים ואינם ז"ל בחכמינו בת, עשק באר בעל הרב בת, מהטוב הר"ר אשת כי, זצוק"ל מהטוב הגדול הרב בכתבי ראיתי. בנסיון גם הביצים אחרי ונגרר, ברבור לעשותו תרנגול מסרס נכרי בלוג"י בעיניה ראתה, חבר ואשת חבר או שעה איזו לחיות תוכל חדש י"ב חיה אינה שכמוה בריה וכל. מת לא הברבור זה כל ועם. הלב מעט מעט וכלה נתמסמס חולי מחמת וכן. לב בלא חדש או יום איזה.

מ"ע מ"ע חברו איסטוריקו מאפאמונדו בספר ראינו מצאנו, חזוק צריכים רבותינו דברי דאין ואע"ג הקיסר "וכן: קדש ללשון איטלקי מלשון מוסב ז"ל, ע"ב פ"ד דף שני בספר שם עיין פורסטי הגלח פירשו לקרבן וכן, לב בלא נמצאו שניהם כי אמרו פרים שני בזבח הקושרים מיד הומת אשר ביום ע"ש והכבד הלב חסרו קיסר נאציס.

באמרם חז"ל דברי על מלעיגים שראיתי מפני: ז"ל מ' סי' י"ד ש"ע על ג' ס"ק גא"ל מהר"ר וכתב: ז"ל ח"ג 'ב שער נכון גורן ספר הביאם ארוסט"ו דברי להעתיק ראיתי לב בלי לחיות חי לבעל שא"א אמיתת לעמוד ורצה אותו ומכלה אדם של הלב ממעטת הדאגה כי רבו מאריסט"ו אלכסנדר ושמע במחשכים רבים ימים במשמר אותה ואסר בטבעו האדם אל דומה שהיא מה בהמה מקצת ולקח הדבר שבחר ברוך ע"כ ונמס שכלה לבה ומצא ושחטוה הוציאוה ואח"כ חיותה כדי המזון מן לה לתת וצוה ובמשנתם בהם.

להמצא אפשר שאי להוכיח שנתחבט ראיתי וע"ה ע"ז ע"ו ע"ד סי' מאמשטרדם צבי מהר"ר ובתשובות בעוף הלב ניטל טרפות וסריב ומאן כהן נפתלי אבל, ראיותיו שם עיין ויחיה לב בלא עוף או בהמה מיד תכף כשנשחט לא אם אדם בידי כשניטל וגם חולי ידי על בניטל ושמן בריא.

טריפה ניטל שאם אבר.

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“Jewish Space and Spiritual Supremacy in Eighteenth-Century Italy”
David Sclar, Princeton University

Introduction

This primary text, dated 11 October 1720, is taken from a *pinkas* belonging to the Jewish community of Padua. It concerns the establishment of an *eruv hatserot*, a boundary covering most of the city in which Jews would be permitted to carry possessions on the Sabbath. References to contemporary *eruvim* ordinarily appear in responsa literature. Perhaps uniquely, this document provides communal context for the construction of the Padua *eruv*. In so doing, it sheds light on the social and religious lives of Italian Jewry in the first half of the eighteenth century.

Padua’s Jewish community at the time consisted of approximately seven hundred people. Three official synagogues populated the ghetto – serving the respective Ashkenazic, Italian, and Sephardic populations – but the different ethnic groups lived under one political banner (unlike Venetian Jewry, for instance, which technically consisted of separate communities). As such, the Padua community employed only one rabbi, who was responsible for all religious matters.

The rabbi involved in the construction of the *eruv*, Isaiah Bassan, strengthened the community’s relations with the Mantuan rabbinate. Although Padua had been under Venetian control for centuries, the Jews of Venice and Padua were not particularly connected on a rabbinic level during the first half of the eighteenth century. In contrast, through Bassan and others, the Jews of Padua and Mantua retained strong rabbinic and social ties spanning several decades, demonstrating that communal identity could be defined across political, economic, and cultural boundaries.

Contemporary documents in Padua *pinkasim* refer to a drop in religious observance and a struggle to maintain a presence in the community’s once thriving *bet midrash*. Yet, despite or because of this, members of the community’s scholarly elite, including men with rabbinic ordination and/or

medical degrees, formed a confraternity called *Mevakshe Hashem*, which was devoted to studying and copying mystical texts. Core members of the group were inspired by Bassan, and especially his father-in-law Benjamin Kohen Vitale, and later teamed with Moses Hayim Luzzatto in an attempt to form a ‘perfected community.’¹

The document’s appearance as a copied text in a manuscript owned by the Pesaro rabbi Isaiah Romanin,² who had been a member of both *Mevakshe Hashem* and Luzzatto’s circle, suggests that this *eruv* was deeply significant to kabbalists in Padua. Luzzatto himself considered it to be Bassan’s great *tikun*.³ As such, the document reflects the nexus of general communal behavior and a rabbinic attempt at religious rectification. It may also elucidate a mentality that (self-) identified rabbis as mystically responsible for communal spiritual welfare.

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¹ Luzzatto used the term קיבוץ השלימות in his introduction to theosophical Kabbalah, *Derekh Hashem*.

² Oxford, Bodleian, Mich. 439 (Neubauer 2239).

³ Mordecai Chriqui, *Igerot Ramhal u-bene doro* (Jerusalem: Mekhon Ramhal, 2001), no. 30, p. 86.