

## *Rachel Morpurgo*

Y A E L L E V I N E K A T Z

THE ITALIAN JEWISH POET RACHEL MORPURGO, A MEMBER of the prominent Luzzatto family,<sup>1</sup> was born in Trieste in 1790, and died in 1871, at the age of eighty-one. Rachel's Hebrew poems were published in her lifetime in the Hebrew literary journal *Kokhevei Yizhak* ("The Stars of Isaac"), issued in Vienna.<sup>2</sup>

On the occasion of Rachel's one-hundredth birthday, Rabbi Hayyim (Vittorio) Castiglioni (1840–1911), a native of her hometown, Trieste, and subsequently chief rabbi of Rome, compiled her writings, publishing them in Cracow as a volume of their own, entitled *Ugav Rahel* ("Rachel's Organ"), appearing some nineteen years after her death. *Ugav Rahel* contains fifty of Rachel's poems, as well as letters and additional miscellaneous writings. The introduction to the work also includes a biography of Rachel.<sup>3</sup> This was based, in part, on materials found in the writings of her cousin Samuel David Luzzatto, known as Shadal. Castiglioni was also assisted by Perla, Rachel's daughter, who filled in various details pertaining to her life, and provided him with the manuscripts of her mother's writings that were in her possession. An essay on the position of women in Judaism opens the volume, preceding the biographical account,<sup>4</sup> and followed by a scholarly article authored by Castiglioni on contemporary Italian Hebrew poetry.<sup>5</sup>

Rachel Morpurgo never received any formal education, but acquired her knowledge mostly of Jewish subjects by studying with private tutors and

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relatives. By twelve she had studied the Pentateuch with her mother's brother, David, who never married. Prior to that, she had studied the ethical work *Hovot ha-Levavot*, by Bahya ibn Paquda of the eleventh century,<sup>6</sup> and other biblical texts with the commentaries of *Mezudat David* and *Mezudat Ziyon* by David Altschuler of the eighteenth century.<sup>7</sup> With tutors she studied the commentary of Rashi as well as the popular ethical work *Menorat ha-Ma'or* by Isaac Aboab of the fourteenth century.<sup>8</sup> At the age of fourteen, she commenced studying the Babylonian Talmud with a rabbi from Mantua. With him she completed the study of the entire tractate Megillah as well as several other Talmudic sections. She also studied *Reshit Hokhmah* by Elijah de Vidas, a kabbalist of the sixteenth century.<sup>9</sup> With Shadal's father, Hezekiah, she studied Talmud and math. The various tutors hired by Rachel's father to instruct her brother Isaac, later to become a businessman in Trieste, taught her as well.

Shadal was born in the very same building as Rachel. When he was eight, his family purchased a house on the outskirts of Trieste. Every day Shadal would go to Rachel's home to utilize the library of Hebrew books that had been bequeathed to Rachel's brother, Isaac, by his uncle David. It was from that library that Rachel and Shadal acquired most of their Judaic knowledge. They spent many hours together studying and discussing issues of Torah and wisdom.<sup>10</sup> Shadal, a rationalist, related that Rachel once asked him to secure her a copy of the Zohar. He indeed located one, and she reimbursed him for the expenditure. She then asked him what he would like in return for his effort. He said that all he requested of her was not to believe what was written in it. She responded by saying: "You have asked a difficult thing" (II Kings 2:10). Her reply quoted Elijah's response to Elisha following the latter's request that a double portion of the former's spirit pass on to him (II Kings 2:9).<sup>11</sup> Rachel worked in the family business, as a turner on a lathe (*drechsler*), a skill she learned from her uncle and father. She also sewed, making most of her own clothing.<sup>12</sup>

Rachel insisted on marrying Jacob Morpurgo from Gorizia, a businessman, despite opposition on the part of her parents and other relatives, refusing to meet other men. Shadal composed a sonnet on this matter in 1816 entitled "To a Wise Woman, the Daughter of My Father's Sister." This commences with her praise, but goes on to criticize her for her tenaciousness in wishing to marry Morpurgo, and her reluctance to meet other young men. In response, Rachel likewise composed a sonnet, similar in meter and form to that of Shadal. The opening portion is based on the Zohar. She professed that she had found a fine man who was not interested in money, but rather in family pedigree. She

acknowledged her parents' refusal to acquiesce, and concluded with the assertion that she would marry no one, save Jacob, not even the Messiah.<sup>13</sup> After several years, her parents finally relented, and the couple was wed on Friday, March 5, 1819, shortly before her twenty-ninth birthday. In honor of the occasion Rachel herself composed the following poem.<sup>14</sup>

וזאת אשר שָׁרָה רַחֵל עַל חַתּוּנְתָהּ

תּוֹדָה לְאֵל נִוְרָא  
לֹא-עוֹד אֶהְיֶה שׁוֹמֵמָת:  
אֲשַׁלֵּיךְ אֶת-כָּל-מוֹרָא.  
לֹא-עוֹד אֶהְיֶה דוֹמָמָת.

בְּחֹר יָפֵה עֵינַיִם  
יְהִיָּה פֶּאֶר רֵאשִׁי:  
נִתַּן אֲדוֹן שָׁמַיִם  
שְׂאֵהֲבָה נִפְשִׁי.

בְּרַךְ יוֹם שִׁמְחָתָנוּ.  
הִגִּיָּה אֶת חֲשַׁכְנוּ:  
חַיֵּשׁ נָא קִץ הַיָּמִין.

כּוֹנֵן בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ.  
אֲזוּ נְשִׁיר שִׁיר חֲדָשׁ:  
הוֹשִׁיעָה-לּוֹ יָמִין.

And this is the poem Rachel composed for her wedding.

Thanks to an awesome God  
I will be desolate no more:  
I shall cast off all fear,  
I will be silent no more.

A bright-eyed bridegroom  
Will be the glory of my head:  
The Master of the Heavens gave  
He whom my soul loves.

Bless our joyous day,  
Light up our darkness;  
Hasten please the End of Days.

Establish the Sanctuary,  
We will then sing a new song:  
His right hand has won Him victory.

The mingling of personal feeling and religious imagery makes her marriage a public event.<sup>15</sup>

After her marriage, she had little time to devote to her studies. Rachel bore three sons and a daughter. She was occupied with raising the children and housekeeping, and subsequently did not have much free time to learn. She would study at night after she completed the household chores and after the children were asleep. Castiglioni stated that her husband did not find much joy in her studies nor in her writings, but rather in his business affairs, and she fulfilled everything he requested of her. The sons followed in the footsteps of their father, becoming businessmen. According to Castiglioni, they themselves opted not to marry. Perla, her daughter, also never married. Even after the children were grown, Rachel was free to write only at night, since as her daughter recollected, she had no help in the home, while the household chores grew. She also devoted the days of Rosh Hodesh, when it was customary in certain Jewish communities for women to refrain from housework, to her writing. When she could not sleep, she would arise and commit some lines to writing, lest she forget them. Only after her husband realized that many prominent writers of the time lauded her,<sup>16</sup> did he and their sons come to recognize the full extent of her talent.

In a letter written in 1858 to the editor of *Kokhevei Yizhak*, for instance, she mentioned that she was writing on the Eve of Yom Kippur. She apologized for being unable to adhere to her initial intention of sending him four poems, stating that since it was the third hour past midnight, she would have to send the fourth another time.<sup>17</sup>

These three poems as well as her accompanying letter were subsequently published in the twenty-fifth issue of *Kokhevei Yizhak*, issued in 1860.<sup>18</sup> One of Rachel's poems explores the inner turmoil she experienced in her attempt to reconcile her literary life and her duties and obligations as a homemaker.<sup>19</sup>

אֲנִסָּה אֶךְ הַפְּעֵם  
 אִם אוֹכֵל לְשִׁיר.  
 מֵאֶצֶל הַסִּיר  
 רָחֵקְתִּי מֵרֹב זַעַם

I will attempt just this once  
 To see if I can compose a poem,  
 From near the kettle  
 I distanced myself in great wrath.

Rachel continued to compose poems and write letters, despite the stroke she suffered in 1865, at the age of seventy-five. Her later writings remained unpublished in her day. Her last poem was written several days prior to her death. The last word she wrote was “Elohai,” “My God.”<sup>20</sup>

The sonnet that Rachel had composed concerning Jacob Morpurgo in response to Shadal’s appeared in 1847, i.e., some two years after *Kokhevei Yizhak* commenced publication, at the initiative of Shadal.<sup>21</sup> Already in her teens she wrote the epitaph of her tombstone, which was indeed later used.<sup>22</sup> The poem Rachel composed in honor of her wedding was published in the tenth issue of *Kokhevei Yizhak*. From that issue onwards, the writings of Rachel, be it poem, riddle or letter, appeared regularly until the twenty-second issue published in 1856, and thereafter in issues twenty-five and twenty-six (1860 and 1861). Shadal continued to serve as her patron, encouraging her to pursue her writing. Rachel generally sent her poems to Shadal, who forwarded them to the editor of *Kokhevei Yizhak*.<sup>23</sup> Shadal himself, in a letter written to Abraham Geiger, stated that it was he who “gave Hebrew literature a live poetess.”<sup>24</sup> Many of her poems address friends, male and female.<sup>25</sup>

Apart from sonnets, which comprise a considerable portion of Rachel’s poems,<sup>26</sup> six of her poems assume the form of emblem-riddles. Generally, these were preceded by an enigmatic picture or a verbal description of it, i.e., the riddle’s image. Three of Rachel’s poems include such a verbal description.<sup>27</sup>

Rachel composed a riddle for Tamar Luzzatto, wife of the rabbi of Padua Mordecai Samuel Ghironi (1799–1852) and cousin to both Rachel and Shadal.<sup>28</sup> Ghironi was also author of *Toledot Gedolei Yisrael*, an avid collector of Hebrew manuscripts and a close friend to Shadal.<sup>29</sup> The solution to the riddle is the lulav, which in the bible is called “Kapot Temarim” (branches of palm-trees) (Leviticus 23:40), Tamar being the personal name of Rachel’s cousin.

חידה אחת קטנה, בלי יתד ותנועה לכבוד אשה חכמת לב ותורת חסד על לשונה הרבנית תמר לוצאטו אשת חיל. נודע בשערים בעלה. הרב הגדול מורה צדק בקריה נאמנה פאדובה. ה'ה כמוהר"ר מרדכי שמואל גירונדי נר"ו.

שְׁמַעְתִּי שְׁמוּעָה  
 אֶךְ כִּי אַתְּ צְנוּעָה  
 כִּי תְּבֹא הַשְּׁעָה.  
 כָּל-עֲדַת יִשְׁרָאֵל  
 עַל כַּפְיֶךָ יְבָרְכוּן  
 גַּם אוֹתְךָ יִשְׁקֹון:  
 לֹא תִגְוִרִי מְזָה  
 כִּי אִישׁךָ בְּכָל-זֶה  
 אוֹתְךָ לֹא יִבְזֶה:  
 הוּא הַדּוֹר וּמַהוֹדָר  
 כַּפְרֵי הָעֵץ הַדָּר

A small riddle, without a meter and rhythm in honor of the wise-hearted woman, and on whose tongue is the law of kindness, Tamar Luzzatto, a woman of valor, her husband is prominent in the gates, the great Rabbi in the faithful city Padua, Rabbi Mordecai Samuel Ghironi,

I have heard a rumor  
 That even though you are modest  
 When the time will arrive.  
 All of the Congregation of Jeshurun  
 At your palm will bless you  
 And also water you:  
 Fear not this  
 Because your mate in all this  
 Will not demean you:  
 He is glorious and magnificent  
 As a citron tree.

In 1851, Rachel composed a poem in honor of the birthday of educator and scholar Mayer Randegger (1780–1853).<sup>30</sup> From 1810 he began teaching Shadal German and French, and was “first responsible for his interest in the broad vista of general European culture.”<sup>31</sup> He fulfilled a decisive role in the shaping of several aspects of his scholarship. It was owing to his insistence that Shadal commenced sending his essays on Hebrew synonyms to the Hebrew

literary journal *Bikkurei ha-Ittim*, and to his encouragement that Shadal published the compilation of poems that he had composed in his teens.<sup>32</sup> Mayer's son, Giuseppè Aron, was Shadal's first student, and Shadal regarded him as a son. He too became an educator, and remained in close contact with Shadal. In 1851, Randegger published a Passover haggadah that included an Italian translation rendered by his daughter.<sup>33</sup> The opening section of Rachel's poem makes special mention of Randegger's daughter, whose rendition had been shown to her. Upon seeing this, Rachel "rejoiced in the joy of the Torah."

"Oh! desolate valley," a lyric poem composed in 1867<sup>34</sup> and included in an anthology of Hebrew poetry edited by Asher Barash published in Jerusalem in 1938,<sup>35</sup> Joseph Klausner thought to be her best.<sup>36</sup>

### הוי עמק עכור

וגם פה לא עשיתי מאומה. כי שמו אותי בבור לפיך.

הוי עמק עכור חשך ערפל  
עד אנה תאסרני בנחשתים?  
טוב לי מותי טוב התלונן בצל  
משבת בדרך במצולות המים!

גבעות עולם הן מרחוק אשקיפה  
ופרחי הוד יעטו פניהן נצח.  
כנפי נשר אשא. עיני אעיפה.  
בשמש לחזות ארים המצח!

השחק! מה יפו תהלוכותיך.  
מקום שם החרות נצח תופיע.  
ורוחות נושבות על במותיך  
מה-מתקו. מי זה מי זה יביע!

Nor have I done anything here that they should have put me in the dungeon  
(Genesis 40:15).-

### Oh. Desolate Valley

Oh! desolate valley darkness mist  
How long will you keep me chained in bronze fetters?

I would rather die, rather dwell in the shade of God  
Than sit solitary in the depths of the waters!

The eternal hills I watch from afar  
And glorious flowers their faces will don eternity.  
I will take me eagles' wings, my eyes I will raise,  
To gaze at the sun I will lift my forehead!

O skies! how fair your paths,  
Where freedom is eternity will appear,  
And winds that are blowing through your lofty places  
How sweet they are, who can who can utter!

The publication of Hebrew poetry composed by a woman drew a considerable amount of interest and attention. The very notion appeared to be inconceivable to many, who were convinced that the author was actually male.<sup>37</sup> Apart from her own writings, no less than nine poems in honor of Rachel appeared in various issues of *Kokhevei Yizhak* in which she won the acclaim and reverence of her contemporary male counterparts; amongst them rabbis, poets, and authors. She herself responded to several of them in verse form.<sup>38</sup>

Already in her time Rachel served as forerunner and role model to later female Hebrew writers and poets of the nineteenth century, such as Jetty Wohllerner, Miriam Markel-Moseson, a translator into Hebrew, Sarah Shapira, Breindel Gold, Sheindel Segal, and Deborah Weissman.<sup>39</sup>

Contrary to the recognition and acclaim accorded Rachel in the writings of her contemporaries including her reviewers after her death, her writing was disparaged by Dan Miron who minimized her contribution to and the mark she impressed on Hebrew literature. Prior to the “lyric breakthroughs associated with the appearance of the first women Hebrew poets in the years after World War I,” “there were incidental cases of educated women whose circumstances and thirst for learning brought them to acquire a knowledge of Bible, Midrash or even Gemara, and who wrote poems for certain occasions,” wrote Miron. “[E]ven the best known of these, Rachel Morpurgo . . . was a minor poetic talent. Only her letters and her prefatory comments to her poems are readable today. The praise showered on her poems in her own time—like the interest shown in her at later times by historians, scholars, and critics—resulted from the oddity of her being a woman Hebrew rhymester.”<sup>40</sup> Miron’s comment does not do justice to her work.<sup>41</sup>



Several scholars considered and reflected upon Rachel's poetic talent in the wider context and broader perspective of the Luzzatto family in general. A recurring theme in the moving Hebrew essay on Morpurgo by Abraham Shlonsky is the notion that her soul was a spark of that of her forebear Ramhal.<sup>42</sup> And Dov Sadan commenced his essay on Rachel by posing the question of whether Rachel's achievement should be viewed as a product of the illustrious Luzzatto family, or, perhaps, as a direct result of her unique personality, which was distinguished by her desire to act according to her own will. He posited that it is possible that herein rested her desire to study Torah, a trade, as well as her insistence upon marrying the man of her choice.<sup>43</sup>

Rachel probably owes her fame to Rabbi Hayyim (Vittorio) Castiglioni, a disciple of Shadal, who was a native of Trieste and taught mathematics and pedagogy until he was summoned in 1903 to Rome where he assumed the position of Chief Rabbi, a title he held until his death in 1911. In 1904, he dedicated the new Great Synagogue of Rome in the presence of King Victor Emmanuel III and other Italian officials.<sup>44</sup> Rachel was fifty years his elder, and he, thus, came into contact with her in her later years, at a time when she had already gained acclaim and renown.

*Ugav Rahel* was but one of the published works of Castiglioni, a prolific author and poet himself. Another work of his, recalling the form of *Ugav Rahel*, is *Dvar Shmuel*, published in Cracow in 1895. It is a compilation of the poems and letters of scholar and teacher Samuel Lolli. Much as the publication of *Ugav Rahel* served to mark the hundredth birthday of Rachel Morpurgo, Castiglioni published in 1900, in commemoration of the hundredth birthday of Samuel David Luzzatto, a volume of his letters. Prior to that, already in 1895 he published his Hebrew translation of Shadal's essay on the history of the Hebrew language. Other works of Castiglioni include *Pe'er ha-Adam*, which contains a discussion of Darwin's theories (Cracow, 1892), and *Nizmei ha-Zahav*, a book of his sonnets (Frankfurt, 1907). He translated the Mishnah into Italian (1895), and published a special Hebrew prayerbook for students, which was reissued several times.<sup>45</sup> He also contributed to various publications, amongst them the noted Italian Jewish monthly *Il Vessillo Israelitico*.<sup>46</sup>

The first and opening portion of the introduction to *Ugav Rahel* is a discourse on the situation of the Jewish woman, in which Castiglioni sought to dispel accusations voiced at the time in Christian circles to the effect that the position of women in Judaism was lowly and inferior to that of their male counterparts, and that Christianity alone was responsible for improving the position of women.<sup>47</sup> In his attempt to dismiss these claims, he utilized biblical

and talmudic sources which, in his opinion, point to the high standing of women in Judaism already in antiquity. An Italian version of the entire preface follows the Hebrew version.<sup>48</sup>

He notes that among the many allegations,

against the Jewish religion and customs ignorantly and erroneously upheld by our adversaries was the notion that the woman was considered to be disdainful and despised as a servant and counted merely as chattel to be used when necessary and disposed of when no longer needed; that Christianity alone bettered the situation of women, raising them to the position of men, freeing them from his control. However, in reality, there is no truth whatsoever to this charge, because even if we were to assume that in ancient times the Jewish woman was not as important as the man—a situation that is not to be found at present amongst the gentiles, who seek to perfect themselves, nor one that will ever exist, since there are inherent differences between the characteristics of man and woman as well as distinct purposes to their existence—nevertheless, there are no historical events, rules or laws in the Bible or Oral law which can justify such a claim. On the contrary, not only have any obstacles prevented her from presiding over her family within the confines of her home, but she could also lead state matters and attain prophecy, which is the highest level merited by a select few, perfected in wisdom, knowledge and all virtues.

He justifies his claim by biblical reference,

I shall commence by mentioning that already at the outset the Torah instructed us concerning the equality between man and woman. We find that Adam acknowledges: “This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called woman, for from man was she taken” (Genesis 2:23). Following it is written: “Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Is there any greater equality than this? And, truly, even though the Torah did not prohibit the taking of many wives, as was the custom of the surrounding nations, nevertheless, only one wife was generally taken. This is what the Torah meant when saying “And clings to his wife,” stressing “wife,” and not “wives.”<sup>49</sup>

Our saintly fathers have already set us an example concerning the duty incumbent upon every man to respect his wife and listen to her, as did Abraham when Sarah placed her servant in his bosom, and when she later sent her away with his beloved son. It was regarding this matter that God said to him: “Whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says” (Genesis 21:12). When Jacob our forefather conceived of misleading his father-in-law who had deceived him tenfold and return to his own land clandestinely, he did not coerce his wives to heed to him and leave, even though God had commanded him: “Now, arise and leave this land and return to your native land” (Genesis 31:13), but rather sought their approval. It was when they

expressed their consent that he took them, the children and all his possessions and departed. Despite the fact that Jacob did not love Leah to the extent he loved Rachel, he buried her in the Cave of Machpelah alongside his ancestors and made Joseph promise to bury him nearby her, saying: "And there I buried Leah" (Genesis 49:31). Judah, too, upon hearing Tamar's accusation, admitted his wrongdoing, confessing: "She is more in the right than I." (Genesis 38:26)

His discussion ranges through the Judges, Samuel I and II, and Kings,

Likewise, the daughters of Israel were not forced to remain constantly within the confines of home as prisoners, because even if one assumes that it wasn't befitting for women to leave their homes and mingle publicly with men, they were, in fact, free to come and go as they pleased. They also participated in all national and local events, as can be seen from Miriam the prophetess, who chanted with all the women the Song of the Sea after Moses and the men (Exodus 15:20-22). Deborah persuaded Barak to rebel against Jabin, king of Canaan, to cast off his yoke from the neck of the people of Israel, went to war with Barak, and, following the victory, sang a glorious song (Judges, chapters 4-5), which until this day is wondrous to all who read it.

The examples he offers emphasize the power of these women:

The women went out and offered praise to King Saul and to his commander, David. Queen Michal did not refrain from speaking ruthfully to David for carrying the Ark of the Covenant from the home of Obed-Edom to the city of David, an act which displeased her, despite the fact that he was king (II Samuel 6:9-23). Would an abject maidservant dare do such a thing? The wise woman of Tekoa convinced David to reconcile with Absalom (II Samuel, chapter 14). A wise woman spoke to the inhabitants of Abel, and persuaded them to behead the rebellious Sheba ben Bichri, thus restoring peace (II Samuel, chapter 20). These prooftexts, including Hannah's prayer, serve to disprove the assumption of our slanderers that the women of Israel were ignorant.<sup>50</sup>

His justification becomes an argument for the importance of women in traditional Jewish life:

The Exodus from Egypt was the most central event in the history of the Jewish people in the eyes of our prophets and sages, culminating in the formation of Israel as a nation. It is our obligation to remember the redemption all our lives, since the signs and wonders witnessed by our ancestors at the time were so marvelous and awesome that it is stated that "A maidservant perceived in the light of the Divine Presence on the sea and at the Giving of the Law what the prophet Ezekiel did not see."<sup>51</sup>

Castiglioni made it possible for us to become acquainted with and enjoy Rachel Morpurgo's poetry. One of her most charming poems is a farewell poem to her cousin Rachel Luzzatto upon her marriage to Solomon Sullam, which mirrors the close relationship they shared.<sup>52</sup>

רחל עם רחל נקשרת  
 כְּעֵינֵק עָלַי גְּרִיגֵרֶת.  
 אֲהַבְתֶּךָ לִי תַפְאֵרֶת  
 עַל רֵאשִׁי הֵנֶךָ פֹּתֶרֶת.

Rachel with Rachel is bonded  
 Like a necklace about the neck,  
 Your love for me is an ornament  
 On my head you are a crown.

The nimble play of rhyme and wit in this poem offer the pleasure her contemporaries found in her work.

#### NOTES

1. Rachel was a descendant of Rabbi Moses Hayyim Luzzatto, known by the acronym Ramhal (1707–1746), renowned kabbalist, author of ethical works, and Hebrew poet (Joseph Dan, "Luzzatto, Moses Hayyim," *Encyclopedia Judaica* [Jerusalem, 1972, Vol. 11], pp. 599–604). She was the daughter of Baruch Luzzatto. Her paternal grandfather was Isaac Luzzatto (1730–1803), noted physician and poet (Editorial Staff, "Luzzatto, Isaac," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 11, p. 598). Isaac's brother was the physician and poet Ephraim Luzzatto (1729–1792) (Elieser Kagan, "Luzzatto, Ephraim," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 11, pp. 597–598). Rachel's mother, Bracha, was a sister to Hezekiah Luzzatto (1761–1824), father of scholar Samuel David Luzzatto (1800–1865), who was known by the acronym Shadal (Alexander Tobias, "Luzzatto, Samuel David," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 11, pp. 604–607).
2. Thirty-seven issues were published between the years 1845–1873. All but the last were edited by publisher and writer Max Emanuel Stern (1811–1873) (Menucha Gilboa, *Hebrew Periodicals in the 18th and 19th Centuries* [Hebrew], Jerusalem, 1992, pp. 89–91. On Stern, see: Getzel Kressel, "Stern, Max Emanuel," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 15, p. 390). During the first few years of its publication, the journal functioned in the capacity of a quarterly. Thereafter, it appeared at more irregular intervals. Many of the prominent writers and scholars of the time had their works published in this periodical.
3. *Ugav Rahel* (henceforth: *UR*), pp. 5–9. An Italian version of this account appears on pages 19–27.
4. *UR*, pp. 1–4. The Italian version of the essay is found on pages 11–19.
5. *UR*, pp. 29–45.
6. Georges Vajda, "Bahya ben Joseph ibn Paquda," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 4, pp. 105–108.
7. Tovia Preschel, "Altschuler David," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 2, pp. 783–784.
8. "Aboab, Isaac I," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 2, pp. 90–93.
9. Gershom Scholem, "Vidas, Elijah ben Moses de," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 16, p. 120.

10. Samuel David Luzzatto, Letter, *Kokhevei Yizhak* (henceforth: *KY*) 35 (1868): 17.
11. Luzzatto, *KY* 35 (1868): 18. Compare Castiglioni, *UR*, "Introduction," p. 6, according to whom this was a continuous request.
12. Luzzatto, *KY* 35 (1868): 17.
13. *KY* 8 (1847): 32–34 [= *UR*, pp. 50–51]; Samuel David Luzzatto, *Kinnor Na'im*, II (Padova, 1879), pp. 17–18.
14. *KY* 10 (1847): 13 [= *UR*, p. 52]; *Kinnor Na'im*, II, p. 205.
15. Shadal also wrote a sonnet on occasion of Rachel's marriage (*Kinnor Na'im*, II, p. 204). Rachel was later to compose one upon the marriage of Shadal (*KY* 17 [1852]: 74 [= *UR*, p. 67]).
16. See in further detail below.
17. "Three years have elapsed in which I have not merited to offer before you a praise of thanks, for the good that you have bestowed upon me, in placing your handmaid among the stars. Now you have granted and honored me with the twenty fourth issue, which I received last week. . . . I have sent my cousin Shadal some poems, but I do not know if all have reached you or perhaps some of them, because it is two years since I have received a letter from him. I present here before you four poems, perhaps they will find favor in your eyes. May peace be with you and your household. May God inscribe and seal us in the book of good life together will all of Israel, Amen so may it be. Tomorrow is Yom Kippur 5619. The fourth poem I will send another time because I couldn't, since it is the third hour past midnight" (*UR*, p. 114).
18. *KY* 25 (1860): 53–55 [= *UR*, pp. 83, 84, 82, 114].
19. *UR*, p. 94.
20. *UR*, "Introduction," p. 8; p. 99.
21. *KY* 8 (1847): 33–34 [= *UR*, p. 5]. Samuel David Luzzatto, *Kinnor Na'im*, II, p. 18. Some thirty years were to transpire from the time Rachel composed her first sonnet until its publication.
22. *KY* 12 (1848): 2 [= *UR*, p. 49].
23. See the letter to Stern mentioned above, note 17.
24. S. D. Luzzatto, *Epistolario Italiano Francese Latino* (Padova, 1890), II, p. 623. The majority of Rachel's poems were occasional, i.e., composed for specific events, as was the custom of the time. The Austrian revolution of 1848 served as inspiration for the poem "The Events of the Times," in which she noted the disaster and ruin that the war had shed, stating that the servants of God bear the Yoke of their Rock. She concluded by expressing her hope that God would bring the Messiah (*KY* 14 [1851]: 2 [= *UR*, p. 59]). The Jewish movement for the return to the Land of Israel evoked in her profound feelings of redemption. She composed a poem in honor of Moses Montefiore's journey to Jerusalem in 1855, the entourage of whom passed, among other places, through Trieste (*KY* 21 [1856]: 77 [= *UR*, p. 71]). She herself wished to accompany him and his wife Judith on this journey, and serve Judith Montefiore. This prospect did not, however, materialize.  
The subject of a poem composed in 1855 is the cholera epidemic that broke out the same year (*KY* 22 [1858]: 36–37 [= *UR*, p. 72]). She composed a poem concerning the comet that was seen in the skies in 1859 (*UR*, p. 84). In a letter dated 1869, she made mention of the newly-discovered Falasha tribe (*UR*, p. 116). Rachel composed a poem in honor of the biblical prophetess Deborah (*UR*, p. 83).  
The halakhic discussions on the possibility of sacrificing the Passover offering on the Temple Mount, even without the existence of the Temple itself, that were voiced in the nineteenth century, found their expression in one of her poems (*KY* 15 [1851]: 2 [= *UR*, p. 60]). She composed a prayer of the "Mi she-Berakh" type in which she expressed her hope that this would soon come to pass (*UR*, p. 107). In her version of the prayer, she invoked the matriarchs as well as the patriarchs. Various prayers of the "Mi she-Berakh" form pertaining to women are known, such as for childbirth and for sick women (On prayers of the Mi she-Berakh type see: A. Yaari, "Tefillot 'Mi she-Berakh'" (Hebrew), *Kiryat Sefer* 33 [5718]: 118–130; 233–250; Yaari, "Tosafot la-Ma'amar Tefillot 'Mi she-Berakh'" (Hebrew), *Kiryat Sefer* 36 [5721]: 103–118; Daniel Y. Cohen, "He'arot u-Millu'im le-Mekharo shel A. Yaari al Tefillot 'Mi she-Berakh,'" *Kiryat Sefer* 40 [5725]: 542–559). However, this is the only known prayer of this form to have been composed until Rachel's time by a woman.

מי שברך אבותינו אברהם יצחק ויעקב שרה רבקה רחל ולאה יברך את כל קהל עדת ישראל ונוכח  
 נחיה ונעלה להקריב פסחים על גבי המזבח, שמחים וששים בבנין בית מקדשנו במהרה בימנו אמן.

He Who Blessed our forefathers and foremothers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, may He bless the entire congregation of Israel, and may we merit that we live and ascend and offer Paschal sacrifices on the altar, exultant and joyous in the rebuilding of the Temple, may it be speedily in our day, Amen.

25. She, thus, composed a poem lauding poet, scholar and book collector Joseph Almanzi of Padua (1801–1860) (*UR*, p. 81. See: Gedalyah Elkoshi, “Almanzi, Joseph,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 2, pp. 660–661). In the last two years of his life he resided in Trieste, and would often frequent her home and consult with her on various literary matters (*UR*, “Introduction,” p. 7). She wrote a poem in honor of rabbis Mordecai Ashkenazi, dayan in Trieste, as well as his son in law (*UR*, p. 86), and a poem of thanksgiving to the doctor who operated on her finger (*UR*, p. 97). She composed a eulogy in memory of Rabbi Sabbato Graziadio Treves, chief rabbi and dayan of Trieste, upon his passing in 1856. It was published in the compilation of eulogies issued following his death (*UR*, pp. 74–75). In 1870, she composed one in memory of the aforementioned Rabbi Ashkenazi (*UR*, p. 98). On poems addressed to female contemporaries, see further below.

26. *KY* 8 (1847): 33–34 [= *UR*, p. 51]; *UR*, p. 53; *KY* 11 (1847): 3–4 [= *UR*, p. 54]; *KY* 11 (1847): 4 [= *UR*, p. 56]; *KY* 12 (1848): 2 [= *UR*, p. 57]; *KY* 13 (1850): 22 [= *UR*, p. 58]; *KY* 14 (1851): 84 [= *UR*, p. 63]; *KY* 16 (1852): 85–86 [= *UR*, p. 61]; *UR*, p. 62; *KY* 18 (1853): 41 [= *UR*, p. 65]; *KY* 19 (1854): 60 [= *UR*, p. 66]; *KY* 21 (1856): 77 [= *UR*, p. 71]; *KY* 21 (1856): 77–78 [= *UR*, p. 70]; *KY* 22 (1856): 36–37 [= *UR*, p. 72]; *UR*, pp. 81, 83, 86, 89, 92–93, 94, 97.

27. Dan Pagis, *A Secret Sealed: Hebrew Baroque Emblem-Riddles from Italy and Holland* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1986), p. 154. See further Pagis, pp. 165, 224.

28. *KY* 16 (1852): 8 [= *UR*, p. 64].

29. Cecil Roth, “Ghirondi, Mordecai Samuel ben Benzion Aryeh,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 7, p. 548.

30. *KY* 18 (1853): 41 [= *UR*, p. 65].

31. Morris B. Margolies, *Samuel David Luzzatto: Traditionalist Scholar* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1979), p. 25.

32. Margolies, *Samuel David Luzzatto*, pp. 25, 32–33, 125.

33. *Haggadah* (Hebrew title), *Racconto degli avvenimenti memorabili occasionanti la Pasqua. Traduzione riveduta e corretta [da] . . . Mayer Randegger* (Vienna: Adalberto della Torre, 1851). In his introduction Randegger stated that his daughter had prepared the translation. The Hebrew version of Rachel’s poem makes use of the term “Perush ha-Haggadah,” which may also be interpreted, in theory at least, as commentary, though here it is not the correct connotation. See, for example: Howard Adelman, “Women’s Voices in Italian Jewish Literature,” in *Women of the Word: Jewish Women and Jewish Writing*, edited by Judith R. Baskin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), p. 64. On this haggadah, see further: *The Haggadah Thesaurus: Bibliography of Passover Haggadot From the Beginning of Hebrew Printing until 1960* (Hebrew), edited by Isaac Yudlov (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1997), p. 75, #952; p. 77, #974.

34. *UR*, pp. 95–96. An Italian translation of the poem by Castiglioni ensues the Hebrew version (p. 96).

35. Asher Barash, *Mivhar ha-Shirah ha-Ivrit ha-Hadashah* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1938), p. 30.

36. Joseph Klausner, *Historyah shel ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit ha-Hadashah*<sup>2</sup> (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Ahi’asaf, 1954), p. 45.

37. Castiglioni, *UR*, “Introduction,” p. 6.

38. The first such poem by Adolf Ehrentheil appeared in 1850 (*KY* 13 [1850]: 43–45). Mentioning the biblical poetesses Miriam, Hannah, and Deborah, he stated that throughout the generations the voice of women had become silent until the Hebrew poetess Rachel Morpurgo arose. He called on the poetic souls, presumably male, to stand by her side, and express their support in and favor of her. Indeed, response to Ehrentheil’s plea did not linger, and an outpouring of laudatory writings

ensued. Rachel herself reacted to Ehrentheil's praise in a poem that appeared in the following issue (KY14 [1851]: 84 [=UR, p. 63]). In it she asserted that her intention was not to have her voice heard, but rather that the Torah be made great. A short piece of poetry directed to Rachel's husband, Jacob, then appeared in 1851, by Hermann Boss, a teacher of religion (KY 14 [1851]: 64). The author juxtaposed him with Jacob our forefather. Stating that Jacob worked for Rachel who was beautiful for seven years, he concluded by posing the following question: How many years has Jacob worked for Rachel who possessed "intelligence together with grace of language." Writer and scholar Alexander Langbank viewed her as the "glory of women," one who surpassed all. Whereas the wisdom of most women consisted of making mantles and headdresses, she strove to amass wisdom (KY15 [1851]: 64). She responded in a poem belittling her poetry, stating that if as a fleeting shadow the spirit of poetry carried on its wings dust that it accumulated, it rested on her clothing, but none remained; her poetry was like a shaken out garment (KY16 [1852]: 85-86 [=UR, p. 61]).

Israel Fürth, Rabbi in Strakonig, lauded her and her writing in both prose and poetry (KY 16 [1852]: 10-11). He commended her on her resolve to write, pointing out that insofar as most women were interested only in jewels, she desired to devote her time to Torah and learning. Moses J. Finkelstein from Jassy wrote that he had been totally overcome by Rachel's poetry, stating that she was queen to Hebrew writers, and expressing his utmost respect for her (KY 17 [1852]: 81). Much like Langbank and Fürth, Jakob Sperling commended Rachel on her spiritual yearnings which were in stark contradistinction to the ways of the majority of women. He expressed his hope that poets from all over would come and chant her glorious name forever (KY 18 [1853]: 71-72). Giuseppe Levi Gattinara, chief Rabbi of Casale, beckoned all to observe the miracle of God. He contended that those who prevent women from "the secret of the Book" have erred, enlisting in the substantiating of his argument the biblical figures of Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Esther, Rachel. He concluded by asserting that she would put to shame other Italian Jewish Hebrew-speakers (KY 21 [1856]: 2). Leopold Winkler compared Rachel to the biblical female personalities of Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, pointing out the various ways in which she surpassed each of them. Deborah, for example, also composed poetry, but did not subscribe to the biblical words "Let the mouth of another praise you" (Proverbs 27:2), intimating that Rachel Morpurgo was humble, but nevertheless renowned in all corners of the earth. Hannah said words of glory in the House of God, but was jealous of Penninah. No traces of this trait may be found in Rachel, he noted, for there were no other poetesses with whom to compete (KY24 [1858]: 92-93). The poem of the editor of *Kokhevei Yizhak*, Max Emanuel Stern, appeared in the same issue as well. He devoted the lion's share of his work to the enigma of why Rachel's voice had ceased to be heard, wondering why her spark had extinguished. He urged her to "spread out her brilliance on the pages of *Kokhevei Yizhak* as of old." (KY24 [1858]: 95-96. For other writings of these authors in *Kokhevei Yizhak*, see: Bernhard Wachstein, *Die Hebräische Publizistik in Wien [Wien: Selbstverlag der Historischen Kommission, 1930]*, p. 40 [Ehrentheil]; pp. 19-20 [Boss]; pp. 110-111 [Langbank]; pp. 61-62 [Fürth]; p. 50 [Finkelstein]; pp. 213-214 [Sperling]; p. 63 [Gattinara]; p. 245 [Winkler]; pp. 216-223 [Stern]).

39. Dov Sadan, *Avnei Bohan* (Hebrew) (Tel-Aviv: Mahbarot le-Sifrut, 1951), p. 10; Dov Sadan, *Avnei Gevul* (Hebrew) (Tel-Aviv: Massada, 1964), p. 36; Shmuel Feiner, "The Modern Jewish Woman: A Test-Case in the Relationship between *Haskalah* and Modernity" (Hebrew), in *Sexuality and the Family in History*, edited by Israel Bartal and Isaiah Gafni (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1998): 253-303.

40. Dan Miron, "Why Was There No Women's Poetry in Hebrew Before 1920?," in *Gender and Text in Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literature*, edited by Naomi B. Sokoloff, Anne Lapidus Lerner, and Anita Norich (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992), p. 65.

41. In this context it is noteworthy to mention that a similar pattern may be discerned with regard to the poetry of Shadal himself. In his own time he was held in extremely high esteem, though some later Hebrew literary critics tended to examine it in a rather dimmer light (Margolies, *Samuel David Luzzatto*, pp. 186-188). As Margolies already pointed out, artistic taste is subject to change with the passage of time, much as critical opinion rests upon comparisons (*Samuel David Luzzatto*, p. 186). Cecil Roth went so far as to opine that Rachel's "verses attained perhaps a higher poetical level than his own" (*The History of the Jews of Italy* [Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1946], p. 498).

42. Abraham Shlonsky, "Rahel Morpurgo le-Veit Luzzatti," *Ketuvim* (Hebrew), 12 (October 28, 1926): 1.

43. Dov Sadan, *Avnei Bohan*, pp. 7-8; Dov Sadan, *Avnei Gevul*, p. 34.

44. On Castiglioni, see: Getzel Kressel, "Castiglioni, Hayyim," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 5, p. 241; "Castiglioni, Vittorio," *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3 (New York, 1941), p. 61; Lois C. Dubin, "The Reconciliation of Darwin and Torah in 'Pe'er ha-adam' of Vittorio Hayim Castiglioni," *Gli ebrei nell'Italia unita 1870-1943* (Roma, 1993), pp. 273-284, and literature cited there, p. 274, n. 3.

45. The Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem has in its holdings copies of four editions: Trieste, 1891; Cracow, 1897; Trieste, 1901; Rome, 1911.

46. Castiglioni did not offer any reasoning for his choice of the title *Ugav Rahel*. However, it would appear that a connection may be drawn with the compilation *Kol Ugav* ("The Voice of the Organ") published in Livorno in 1846 by Abram Baruch Piperno. This volume was a compendium of selected poems by Jewish Italian writers in previous generations. No writings of women were included in this anthology. It would seem that Castiglioni, in choosing the title *Ugav Rahel* sought to allude to that of the aforementioned work, indicating that a female counterpart had now been found.

Rachel was not the first Jewish Italian female poet. Sarah Copio Sullam, composer of sonnets and letters in Italian, who lived in Venice in the seventeenth century (1590-1641), preceded her. Fourteen of her poems have been preserved (Helen Leneman, "Sara Coppio Sullam: Seventeenth-Century Jewish Poet in the Ghetto of Venice," *Response XV* 3 [1987]: 13-22; Carla Boccato: "Sara Copio Sullam, La poetessa del Ghetto di Venezia: episodi della due vita in un manoscritto del secolo XVII," *Italia VI*, 1-2 [1987]: 104-218). An additional poetess in the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries was Devorah Ascarelli (Sondra Henry and Emily Taitz, *Written Out of History: Our Jewish Foremothers* [New York: Biblio Press, 1985<sup>2</sup>], pp. 127-130, and literature cited there). She translated many prayers from Hebrew into Italian, as well as two works by Italian scholar, physician and poet, Moses of Rieti (1388-after 1460) (Yona David, "Rieti, Moses ben Isaac da," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 14, pp. 171-172).

47. *UR*, "Introduction," pp. 1-4.

48. *UR*, pp. 11-19. *Ugav Rahel* was first published in Cracow, 1890. A second edition of the book was printed in Tel Aviv, 1943 (*Ugav Rahel*, edited by Y. Zmora). The editor, Y. Zmora, arranged the material in a different fashion. Castiglioni's essay on the position of women in Judaism was omitted from the second edition. It is thus preserved only in the 1890 edition of *Ugav Rahel*, of which few copies remain. My thanks to the late Zipora Brody for reading the translation of the preface.

49. "From the simplistic rendering of the biblical narrative it appears the Lemech was the first to have taken two wives. Even though his action was not explicitly condemned, the evils that befell him from this situation were alluded to (see: Genesis 4:19, 23-24), the underlying assumption being that the illustration of a specific case would exert greater influence on the reader than the setting down of hard rules. This situation demonstrates that "the more wives the more worry" [See: Tractate Avot 2:7, where it is stated: "The more possessions, the more worry, the more wives, the more witchcraft." The Hebrew erroneously reads: "Whom you have chosen"], that such a person will lead a life of grief [Tractate Avot 6:4], and that this is not the right path to be chosen by a man who wishes that peace reign in his dwelling. [Tractate Avot 2:1.] Similarly, Kohelet has said: "Enjoy happiness with a woman you love" (Ecclesiastes 9:9), and not "with women," because he who has many wives can not lead a happy life. Should, however, the first wife be barren, then the husband may take a second wife, because it is an embarrassment for him to be childless. This is borne out in the cases of Abraham our forefather, Elkanah, and in many other instances. Noah and his sons took only one wife, as did Lot and Isaac our forefather. Jacob, too, had intended to marry Rachel alone. However, when Laban deceived him and gave Leah to him, he was forced to take two wives, and subsequently their two maidservants were given to him (Genesis 29:16-35; 30:3-4, 9). Only the rulers and kings followed in the footsteps of the nations, violating the Biblical injunction ("And he shall not have many wives" [Deuteronomy 17:17]), and took many wives, as was the case with David and Solomon. [In reality, the halakhah distinguishes between the two cases, and permitted a king to take up to eighteen wives (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 21a). David did not exceed this number, whereas Solomon is condemned for taking some one thousand women (See: I Kings 11:1-7; Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 21b).] There is, however, no basis for the assumption that all of the subsequent kings of Israel and Judea were polygamous. Quite the opposite, much evidence may be advanced to the contrary. Similarly, no support can be adduced pointing to the fact that any of the High Priests, prophets, or sages from the mishnaic or talmudic periods were polygamous. From all the above, it clearly appears that the custom of marrying one woman alone was not adopted at a later time from the Christians, but was already related to us in the Torah in



the above-mentioned verse, and that monogamy was a commonly accepted practice amongst our forefathers, even in ancient times.”

50. “If Hannah, wife of Elkanah, who was not known as one of the important people of the nation, was so well versed in the language of poetry (I Samuel, chapters 1–2:21), what can be said of the wives of prophets, kings and princes? When King Solomon spoke in the book of Proverbs of the merits and virtues of the “woman of valor” (Proverbs 31:10–31), he was not referring to the wife of a king or prince, but to that of a working man, which points to the high rank of a woman in her family at the time. From his words, it can be assumed that the reality of such women of valor, crowns to their husbands (Proverbs 12:4), was not at all uncommon. [For opposing and concurring views, see literature mentioned in my article: “Eshet Hayil’ ba-Pulkhan ha-Yehudi” (Hebrew), *Beth Mikra* 31 (1986): 339, n. 2. ] I will not be able to dwell at any length upon the bravery of Queen Athaliah (II Kings, chapter 11), Jezebel’s power in royal matters (I Kings 16:31–22:40), the magnanimity of Judith and Esther who saved their people from their enemies, and the many other such glorious women.”

51. *Sefer Hasidim*, edited by Reuben Margalio (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1973), #233, pp. 207–208. (In the edition of this work utilized by Castiglioni, the section was stated as 233–234.) Earlier sources for this quote are: *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishma’el*, edited by Hayyim Saul Horovitz and Israel Abraham Rabin (Jerusalem, 1970<sup>2</sup>), Tractate Amalek, chapter 3, p. 212 (compare *Yalkut Shimoni* by Simeon of Frankfurt, Be-Shallah, #244); *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai*, edited by Jacob Nahum Epstein and Ezra Zion Melamed (Jerusalem, 1957), to Exodus 20:15, pp. 154–155. The references hereafter were in the main brought down by Castiglioni parenthetically in the text, without any mention of the editions used. Castiglioni then goes on to “present three additional proofs from the talmudic literature which outweigh all of the others. And they are the following: ‘A person should always be careful not to insult his wife for since her tears are frequent, she is easily hurt’ (Babylonian Talmud, Bava Mezia 59a). Secondly: ‘A man should always be careful to honor his wife, since blessings rest on a man’s home only on account of his wife’ (Babylonian Talmud, Bava Mezia 59a). Thirdly, it is written: ‘Any man who has no wife lives without happiness, without blessing, without goodness, without Torah, without a protecting wall, without peace’ (Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 62b). Is it possible for all these benefits to accrue from a servant or chattel? On this matter it is also stated: ‘Any man who has no wife is not a complete person, as it says: ‘He blessed them and called them Man’ (Genesis 5:2) (*Midrash Bereshit Rabbah*, edited by Julius Theodor and Hanokh Albeck [Jerusalem, 1965<sup>2</sup>], 17:2, pp. 151–152. An earlier source for this quote is Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 62b). The two together are called a person.”

52. *KY* 12 (1848): 2 [=UR, p. 57].

