Shlomo Sela’s scholarly biography and his outstanding\remarkable contribution to the field of medieval science, and particularly\in particular\ to the study of Abraham Ibn Ezra’s astrological work, are manifested\presented in the first part\section of this *in memoriam*. But reflecting upon Sela’s academic life would certainly never be comprehensive\full\exhaustive\ without presenting a few additional aspects of his career. For me, Sela was not only a specialist in his fields and a highly diligent and prolific scholar. He was the one who introduced me to the world of medieval science and largely shaped my academic interests, my M.A. and Ph.D. supervisor, and the first person with whom I could consult, discuss and share my [academic] thoughts, questions, or insight. During one\a decade of a relationship, we have had numerous interactions and many discussions on a wide variety of subjects, mostly, but not exclusively, on medieval science and history. In what follows I try to sketch the contours of [only?]one specific aspect of Sela’s academic career: Shlomo Sela the teacher, mentor, and caring advisor.

My first interaction with Sela happened in 2012, in his introductory course [entitled?] ‘Introduction to Jewish Science in the Middle Ages’. Back then I was a B.A. student whose main academic interest was early modern philosophy, and my knowledge of medieval history was indeed limited. In fact, Sela’s class was my first real acquaintance with the field of medieval science. It was in his classroom that I was not only introduced to \the history of\medieval\ astronomy, astrology, and mathematics, but it was also the place in which I was firstly\first infatuated with these fields[of study?]. The credit for this somehow quick captivation of these areas of study, I must admit, could\should not exclusively be given\[?]\ to the indeed\highly intriguing and most alluring world of medieval science, but so too, at least to some extent, to Shlomo Sela the teacher.

One prominent characteristic\feature of Sela \as a\the\ lecturer, which none of his students could have missed, was his passion for the topics he had taught, and his infectious enthusiasm in discussing them. Already in the first lesson of his introductory course, it was clear that Sela was not only a highly\most erudite professor, but also a scholar\person who wholeheartedly loved\s his subject area, and truly lived\s it, in the full sense of the word.[[1]](#footnote-1) This strong impression was not limited to his students. Both Sela’s commitment to and passion for his research, alongside his diligence and \\vast learning\exceptional academic talent\capabilities\\, are perhaps the most mentioned personal qualities of Sela that were voiced by scholars I discussed with over the years who were in direct contact with him.

Let me explain\describe how Sela’s courses and seminars looked like, and why they were so significant and attractive, at least in my point of view. I take his introductory course as a representative example of\for all of his seminars I participated in, with the exception of his highly important course called ‘Advanced Computerized Methods’.[[2]](#footnote-2) The first [few] lessons of Sela’s introductory course were devoted to the historical and social circumstances that led to what he called ‘the rise of medieval Hebrew science’. As he did in his first English book, Sela opened his first lesson with a quotation from\of Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, in which Chaucer referred, inter alia, to Jews who had made their scientific contribution in Hebrew. Sela then turned to briefly and concisely discuss\sketch\outline the history of the transmission of scientific knowledge, from antiquity to the twelfth century. Greek and Hellenistic science, the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the Greek-into-Syriac translation activity, the Arabic translation movement, the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates, the *Taifas*, the Jews of Al-Andalus in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and the rise of the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties – were all picturesquely and vividly\lively described in his classroom. Next, Sela outlined\delineated\described\ what he called “a few rules”, which are basically\virtually some [of the] principles presented in the beginning of Ptolemy’s *Almagest* (esp. in Book I.3–8), but also some basic\fundamental\ Aristotelian doctrines. With these basic principles and historical setting, his class turned to the core of all of Sela’s courses and seminars – the texts, mostly those written by Abraham Ibn Ezra, Maimonides and Gersonides. Practically\virtually\essentially, all of Sela’s classes were \focused on\devoted to\ text reading, and their format was always the same: Sela had brought a text to class and asked one student at a time to slowly and carefully read one sentence and explain its meaning. Sela, it must be noted, could not, and probably did not try to, hide his affection and sentiment for the texts he had brought to class\we read. “Read it more slowly, loud and clear. You must give the text the respect it deserves”, he used to interrupt the reading of a student who read too fast or not loud enough. In addition of clarifying the scientific contents\notions \of\found in\ the passages\text read in class, Sela put great effort in providing his students with methodological tools that could\would assist them working with \any text\texts\[in the future?]. “You must stick to the text like a tick”, he used to say each time we, his students, tried to clarify the meaning of a sentence using prior knowledge we had in mind. “What should we do when we do not understand the meaning of a term?”, “what is the role of this specific sentence in the text we read?”, “Why do you think Ibn Ezra decided to use this specific term in this context, but an alternative one in a different context?”, [these]are only a few examples of the many questions he asked us, attentively waiting for our response. This pedagogical approach, alongside his enthusiasm and the relatively small number of students in each of his classes, led to the active participation of his students and a [highly?] vivid\lively learning experience.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In 2015 I asked Sela to be my M.A. advisor, and he agreed immediately.[[4]](#footnote-4) I received the very same response from him a year later, when I asked if he could be my Ph.D. supervisor, despite the fact the he had already retired. Let me say at the outset that Sela was an outstanding supervisor. On the one hand, he gave me much freedom to do my own independent work; or course, always available for questions and requests. On the other hand, his standards were meticulously high, and his sharp and severe critical notes\remarks, accurate advice, and insight were all invaluable and crucial for both my development and research. This combination was priceless. The impression I have had was of a supervisor who trust of his students, but at the same time always push them to be better researchers, expecting them to work hard, \and produce\producing\ eloquently and lucidly written studies that would, [at least in potential,] advance the state of research. On a personal level, Sela was a source of inspiration, and each and every conversation we had was truly a boost for my research\work. Essentially, he was, and still is, a role model of a humble, extremely diligent outstanding scholar.

Sela’s high levels of commitment to and forthrightness with his students must be highlighted\emphasized here. After Sela was diagnosed with cancer, he contacted me and candidly shared the bad news and its implications with me. At the time I was in an early stage of my doctoral studies. Sela implied that due to his disease, he might be less available than usual for some period of time, but this should not prevent me from \contacting\addressing\ him with any question I [may] have. He then added that in these circumstances, and in order to be fair, he wants me to know that it is acceptable if I choose looking for a different advisor, although he would willingly continue supervising my dissertation, and would be very glad and pleased to do so. [[\\\[[After expressing my wishes for his good health and full recovery, and not before I [wittingly?] told him he should not be worried about me disturbing him while he [expectedly] puts his energy into his recuperation, I responded that I would be glad if he keeps being my doctoral supervisor, but only if it is not a burden for him now, or will be in the future]]]\\]]. [eventually\ultimately,] despite his illness\disease, Sela continued devotedly guiding me in my work\research, and I was privileged to have him as my advisor throughout my entire doctoral studies. It was only after Sela passed away that I discovered that he held the more or less same conversation with another former doctoral student of his, Miriam Eichenbaum. This story\anecdote provides a small glance into\of\at a few more aspects of Sela’s character, illustrating his integrity\fairness, candor\honesty, and openness.

It should also be noted that Sela’s commitment to his students was not limited to assignment related to their master or doctoral theses\thesis. Sela never refused reading and commenting on drafts of my papers, or writing me a letter of recommendation, and he did so expeditiously and punctiliously, before and even after I completed my doctoral studies. Once, I sent him a draft of a not-too-short article, politely asking if he would be able reading it. Less than three hours afterwards, I received an extremely detailed report on the paper, with invaluable comments and a few important suggestions. Needless to say how insightful these remarks were, how significant they were for the improvement of the paper, and how much I have learned for them.[[5]](#footnote-5)

In mid-July 2022, Sela’s upcoming book on Henry Bate’s Latin translations of Abraham Ibn Ezra’s astrological writings (volume 8 of his outstanding Brill series *Abraham Ibn Ezra’s Astrological Writings*) was nearly ready for publication, but the proofreading stage was still needed to be done. Concurrently, [[despite his greatest efforts to complete the book on time]], Sela’s health condition deteriorated. On July 20, Sela contacted me via phone, asking if I could meet him and assist with the proofs and indexing of the book. I agreed immediately\instantly. Since at the time I was visiting\in\ Munich for research purposes, we decided to meet in his house eleven days later, after my arrival\I arrive\ in Israel. Sadly, this meeting never took place. Shlomo Sela passed away on July 26 2022, surrounded by his loving\caring and beloved\ family, which he wholeheartedly loved.[[6]](#footnote-6) After he passed away, and with his family’s and Brill’s permission and support, I reverently and carefully revised the proofs and drew up the index; hopefully did so in, or at least close to, the same high standards to which Sela held \himself\the rest of his books in the series\.[[7]](#footnote-7) In December 2022, Sela’s 1286-page book was published in a two-volume set.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Shlomo Sela’s international reputation and his tremendous contribution to the world of medieval science are widely-recognized. His academic publications and discoveries are already of great usage and benefit for contemporary historians, and will certainly serve many future scholars for many years\generations to come. [[Sela was probably aware of these facts, still he was a most humble intellectual]]. Still\But Sela’s impact exceeds over his \numerous academic achievements\many published books and papers\. Shlomo Sela [[,it was illustrated above,]] was also an admired professor and caring advisor, a significant figure in the life of his students, whose unique imprint will always remain in their hearts.

1. As noted below\indeed, Sela was committed to his research till his very last breath. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Sela was an expert on Microsoft Office and additional software, and his course on computerized methods provided his student with significant\pivotal research tools, which I still use today. In editing texts, Shlomo had used numerous macro functions he created in his [personal] computer. [[[In a few occasions, I saw Sela working on his editions of Ibn Ezra’s astrological writings, and his WORD file was always colorful, with many distinct color highlighting [perhaps adding:that only he knew their meaning?]]]]. In addition to his introductory course and his class on computerized methods, I participated in \the following two seminars of his\two of his seminars[?]\: “The Scientific and Philosophical Exegesis of Abraham Ibn Ezra and Gersonides” (2013–2014); “Astrology in Jewish Medieval Philosophy” (2014–2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Sela’s unique sense of humor also played a role in creating this unique atmosphere. To give only one example, his seminars were usually not full of students, and when a student got late into class while leaving the door open, Sela used to stop the lesson and loudly respond: “Close the door before the masses will arrive”. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sela was a vising scholar at L’Institut d’études avancées de Paris during most of the time I worked on my M.A. thesis. Despite the geographical distance, he was always available for any of my questions and requests. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This article was later published in *Aleph: Historical Studies in Science and Judaism*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Sela dedicated much\most of his books to [[his family, including]] his wife, children, grandchildren or the memory of his parents. In his book on Henry Bate he writes: “to my beloved wife, Leah, without whom I could not have produced this volume”. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. [[I am grateful to Shlomo Sela’s family and to Emma de Looij from Brill for their permission to complete what was necessary for the publication of the book, and to Bart Nijsten and his team for providing me with all the information I needed throughout the process, and for their meticulous work on the book’s manuscript.]] [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Abraham Ibn Ezra Latinus: Henry Bate’s Latin Versions of Abraham Ibn Ezra's Astrological Writing, with English Translation and a Collation with the Hebrew and French Source Texts*. edited, translated, collated, and annotated by Shlomo Sela (Leiden: Brill, 2022). [*Abraham Ibn Ezra's Astrological Writings*, vols. 8.1 and 8.2]. On this [publication] and other volumes in the series, see below, n. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)