**Samuel Benvenist’s Egodocument: The Prologue to his Hebrew Translation of Boethius’ *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (c. 1412)**

Niran Garshtein and Gad Freudenthal

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| In the hope that the numerous individuals who still suffer from human-inflicted torment, such as those experienced by Samuel Benvenist, may, like him, find consolation. |

Like the dedicacée of this *Festschrift*, the concept of egodocument emerged from Holland in the 1950s (1953 and 1958, respectively). However, while Resianne Fontaine has become a central figure in the field of Jewish Studies, making lasting contributions to it, the notion of the “egodocument” has largely remained outside this discipline.[[1]](#footnote-1) In this article, we offer a brief introduction to the notion of “egodocument,” followed by a significant case-study: Samuel Benvenist’s prologue to his Hebrew translation of *De Consolatione Philosophiae* by Boethius (c. 480–524). In this prologue, which was written around 1412 and is presented here ­­in a scientific edition for the first time, Benvenist recounts the horrific events he endured—both as a witness to a massacre and as a hostage survivor— reflecting on the emotional toll of these experiences and the ways in which he sought consolation for his emotional state.

The term “egodocument” was coined by the Dutch historian Jacques (Jacob) Presser (1899–1970)[[2]](#footnote-2) to denote “those historical sources in which the researcher is faced with an ‘I’ [….] as the writing and describing subject with a continuous presence in the text.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Examples are autobiographies, personal letters, diaries—any kind of writing in which the author’s individuality shines through the text. In fact, Presser was not “only” a historian, but also a novelist and a poet, a fact that helps understand his emphasis on the subjectivity of the historical individuals whose texts he studied. For example, in a comprehensive introduction to a two-part anthology of poems by Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), he described the poem *Die Lorelei* as “an ego-document, as a confession, as a revelation and masking of his [= the poet’s] inner self.”[[4]](#footnote-4) The historiography of the concept “egodocument” ran against the well-established traditions of historical writing that stipulated relying on “neutral” sources.

Presser’s “personal turn in historiography” should be understood against the background of his own biography. Presser was born in 1899 in the Jewish quarter of Amsterdam (near the Waterlooplein) to a secular family with leftish leanings. He studied history and Dutch literature, two disciplines that shaped his disciplinary matrix. Since 1926 he taught in the prestigious Vossius Gymnasium, but after the German occupation of Holland he lost his job, and between 1941 and 1943 taught in Joods Lyceum. In March 1943, Presser’s twenty-nine-year-old wife, Debora Suzanna Presser-Appel, was arrested and exterminated in Sobibor. Presser himself survived the war in hiding in several places. After the Liberation he was appointed professor at the University of Amsterdam (1947).

In 1946, Presser published a major biography of Napoleon Bonaparte (written before the war), making extensive use of what he would later call “egodocuments” – i.e. memoirs, letters, and other private documents of all kinds retrieved in archives. Presser stressed that this approach is opposed to the Marxist historiography which is constructed around overarching schemes in which the individual actor disappears. His next major enterprise took fifteen years to write. Published in 1965 and entitled *Ondergang* (= downfall; English translation title: *Ashes in the Wind*), it was a study of the destruction of Dutch Jewry by the Nazis commissioned by the Dutch government. For this study he relied heavily, in addition to different egodocuments, on oral testimonies, a method that would gain widespread use in later decades. Historians Baggerman and Dekker comment: “*Ondergang* is a very personal book and the author is always present in the text as ‘the author’, ‘the historian’ or ‘we’, which was unusual for historians and even a taboo in a scholarly work.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

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We now wish to illustrate the notion of the egodocument by studying a single instance: the prologue written by the medieval Hebrew translator of Boethius’ *De Consolatione Philosophiae*; a work originally composed during Boethius’ imprisonment as he awaited execution. The *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (henceforth, *Consolation*) consists of an intense dialogue between the figure of the narrator—Boethius himself—and a female personification of philosophy, who guides and consoles her interlocuter. The five books of *Consolation* became one of the most popular works of late antiquity and later. It was widely read, commented on, and studied throughout different societies of the medieval West, influencing both scholarly and popular cultures.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Originally composed in Latin, the work was translated into several vernacular languages, including Middle English, Old French, Catalan, German, Dutch, and Italian. The work was also translated, twice, into Hebrew. The first Hebrew translation was completed around 1412 by Samuel Benvenist,[[7]](#footnote-7) who translated the work from Pere Saplana’s Catalan translation (c. 1360), or more likely, from the Catalan revision of this translation made by Antoni Ginebreda (d. 1394).[[8]](#footnote-8) Ginebreda maintained close contacts with both King Peter IV of Aragon and with his son John I of Aragon—a cultural milieu that, as will be noted below, Benvenist shared.[[9]](#footnote-9) For his translation, Benvenist chose the title *Menaḥem mashiv nafshi* (*lit.* *The Consoler Who Revives My Soul*), derived from the Book of Lamentations 1:16. As will become clear below, we believe that the focus on the soul in the title is not incidental. The second Hebrew translation was made in 1423 by the physician Azaria ben R. Joseph b. Abba Mari of Perpignan (Bonafoux Bonfil Astruc; c. 1385–after 1440), under the tile *Neḥamat ha-filosofia* (*lit.* *The* *Consolation by [or: of] Philosophy*). While Azaria’s translation (including his personal prologue) was published in a modern edition,[[10]](#footnote-10) Benvenist’s translation, comprising the prologue, remains, with the exception of a few passages,[[11]](#footnote-11) in manuscript form. The present study partially fills this lacuna by publishing a scientific edition of the Hebrew text of the prologue, together with a commentary on the text, shedding light on this relatively unknown translator and the circumstances that led him to translate Boethius’ *Consolation*.

Benvenist’s translation survives in two manuscripts, only one of which includes the prologue.[[12]](#footnote-12) In fact, the latter manuscript contains a sequence of four prologues: Benvenist’s personal prologue is followed by three texts translated from the Catalan version (the three also appear in MS V).[[13]](#footnote-13) Of the three, the last is of particular interest: a prologue by the Catalan translator, probably Pere Saplana, who dedicated his translation to James IV of Majorca (c. 1336–1375), himself imprisoned under the command of Peter IV of Aragon.

From both literary and structural perspectives, Benvenist’s prologue can be divided into two parts. The first is more philosophical in nature, while the second provides biographical information about Benvenist and his methodology in translating Boethius’ work. In what follows, we provide a brief description of the two parts:

 (A)

The first part of Benvenist’s personal prologue (§§ 1–15; approximately 1,200 words) is often difficult to understand but still conveys a sense of despondency. In it, Benvenist expresses his anxiety and tremor in the face of the instability of human existence, acknowledging how one’s fate can change from one extreme to its opposite, where there are two equivalent movers—one which raises lower beings to high up, and one which cuts off those who are tall. The author opines that at any moment, there is an equal probability of one’s sliding to one fate or its opposite [§2]. This, as we shall see later, reflects his life experience. In light of these life vicissitudes, Benvenist writes: “I reflected upon [the question]: What is the Good for the human being?” [§2]. Is it better to be someone who sits safely and “quietly at his home”, yet lives in constant worry, knowing that when the movement of fortune is reversed, trembling will come upon him [§3]? Or perhaps it is preferable to be an individual who must content himself with “dry bread”, yet lives with the hope and fantasy that the future may grant him delicious foods [§4]?

Benvenist then states that one might argue: “Let future trouble be dealt with when it comes,” implying that one should fully enjoy the goods of the present without concern about the future. Furthermore, such individuals may claim that even if, in the future, fate brings misfortune, all adversity will ultimately be transformed into good at the end (*ʾaḥarit*) [§5]. Benvenist responds to this argument by questioning, “who has ever witnessed three worlds [*‛olamim*]? Our forefathers spoke about two worlds only,” perhaps suggesting that life consists of at most two distinct periods. One who is fortunate now cannot assume that if misfortune arises, fortune will inevitably return later in life. It is therefore better for the period of misfortune to come first rather than the other way around [§6].

The next passages shift to a more theological-philosophical perplexity: How can the fact that God is all-powerful and the “judge of the world” be reconciled with the reality that human fate changes in a seemingly arbitrary manner—like fish that are caught, some cast onto burning coals while others escape and return to the depths of the sea? The same applies to humans: now they rise to the sky, now they sink to a dark abyss [§7]. He devotes several lines to describing God’s mighty power, emphasizing and questioning how God, who created man from dust and can perform great miracles, also allows that all good things humans possess may vanish, and be replaced by adversity [§§8-9].

Now Benvenist raises a quandary: How can we understand the fact that God subjected man to the “accidents” of time (*miqreh ha-zeman*), i.e. the fortune resulting from [stellar] system and chance (*ma‛arekhet ha-mazzal ve-ha-hizdamen*)?[[14]](#footnote-14) His answer is that God created man in His image, but man chose to do evil. Therefore, God made him dependent on chance: he is subjected to God, who at one time grants an individual a house and wealth, yet at other times hides His face and the individual will wither like grass. [§§10-12].

Benvenist inserts a short fable about a ship full of treasures and honored men that a wind steered by God brought to a foreign land [§§ 14-15]. The dwellers of this land robbed the ship and chased the passengers who now wandered, poor and deprived, from one kingdom to another. The allusion to the Jewish people in Exile is obvious. This is God’s eternal rule: He takes from some and gives to others. This concludes the first part of the prologue.

 (B)

In the second part of the prologue (§§ 16–29; approximately 1000 words) Benvenist, who refers to himself as Samuel ben R. Benvenist ben R. Samuel z”l ben Benvenist,[[15]](#footnote-15) states that he originally lived in Barcelona [§18] and recounts the circumstances that led him to translate the *Consolation*. It is from this part that we learn that he was an eyewitness to two major events in medieval Iberian history: the notorious Massacre of 1391;[[16]](#footnote-16) and the interregnum period (1410–1412) in Aragon after the death of King Martin I (1356–1410).

Benvenist does not describe his personal experiences during the 1391 Massacre. However, he does provide a testimony of what occurred during the massacre, including the killing of children, women, and the elderly. Benvenist mentions that the massacre left him “poor, in pain, broken and oppressed”. According to his testimony, he had lost all his material possessions, but nevertheless, “with God’s grace,” he and his family survived and were exiled from their homeland to “a foreign land” [§19].

Benvenist again faced turmoil later in his life, particularly following the death of King Martin I of Aragon in 1410, which led to a two-year interregnum that ended only after the resolution taken by the parliamentary representatives of the Crown’s realms (known as the Compromise of Caspe). By the time Martin I of Aragon passed away, all his legitimate descendants had also died, including his son, Martin I of Sicily (d. 1409). The king’s failure to clearly designate his successor resulted in a two-year interregnum, during which various contenders vied for the throne.[[17]](#footnote-17) Benvenist describes the contenders for the throne as dangerous individuals, “venomous snakes,” greedy, and willing to “devour human prey” (based on Ezekiel 19:3) [§20]. As we shall see, Benvenist will encounter the forceful grasp of one of those “venomous snakes”.

Benvenist’s connection (if any) to the succession battles remains unclear, but his explicit mention that one of the contenders sent “horsemen with drawn bows” looking specifically for him (*va-yeḥapsuni*), carrying out an ambush (*ma’arav*) [§21], nevertheless indicates some connection to the Crown. This suggests that until Martin’s death, Benvenist may have held a position in the king’s court. We know that the ramified Benvenist family was indeed prominent among Spanish Jews, with several members maintaining close ties to the Crowns of Aragon and Castile, serving as physicians or tax officials.[[18]](#footnote-18) Nevertheless, the specific reason that irritated (as it seems) one of the claimants to the throne remains unclear. Benvenist does not address it, nor does he identify individuals who sought him out. Instead, he informs us that he was captured, focusing on the torture he suffered during his imprisonment.

Initially, Benvenist was bound in iron chains and brought to prison [§21]. There he was tortured by some officials: they placed his head between two wooden logs and tied a rope around the logs which they stretched forcefully until it broke. The officials then replaced the broken rope with a new one, which pressed into Benvenist’s flesh and wounded him [§23]. Benvenist was later released, perhaps to allow him to collect his own ransom and return to deliver it to his captors. Yet the exact sequence of events remains unclear.

Benvenist’s ordeal did not end here. “A huge trouble came a second time”, he writes [§24]. On his way (perhaps his way back to pay the ransom), “ruthless gentiles found me, hunted me down, struck and stunned me, beat and wounded me, took me far away from the people of the city” [§24]. Unlike those specifically sent by one of the contenders, these captors seem to have been wandering brigands who encountered him by chance. They bound him with chains of brass, threw him into a dry pit, and rolled a stone over it, leaving him alone in the darkness without water. Benvenist eventually managed to regain his freedom, but only after giving them “all that I have, the ransom of my soul and body” [§24].

The dreadful and agonizing events that Benvenist endured had a strong impact on his mental state, which he recognized and shared with his readers. The openness about his phycological symptoms is impressive. If we may interject a personal remark in an academic article, Benvenist’s account left us deeply moved. Benvenist describes his heart as miserable, stating that while he was in the brigands’ hands he chose death over life. Benvenist reports that following these events, he remained rattled and empty inside, continually frightened, dazed, desolate, and silent: “a man that cannot hear and cannot open his mouth, like a man who has drunk wine – his body is whole and healthy, yet mute” [§25]. Without any pretension to diagnose the mental state of a person who lived six centuries ago, we can cautiously suggest that the symptoms he describes align with both depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Today, there is a growing number of treatments alleviating the suffering of individuals who have experienced similar horrifying events. One might take solace in knowing that in the fifteenth century Benvenist discovered his own path to consolation. He states that reading Boethius’ work gave him joy and strength, serving as a “cure to my illness [*maḥalati*], calm for my wound, and rest for my distress” [§26]. (Note that Benvenist refers to his mental state as an illness.) According to his account, it was Boethius’ *Consolation* itself that inspired him to translate the work into Hebrew, naming it after Lamentations 1:16 [§26]: *Menaḥem mashiv nafshi* (*lit.* *The* *Consoler Who Revives My Soul*(. In addition to the book’s utility as a consoler, Benvenist notes, it contains a valuable discussion of the nature of contingency and admonishes its readers to pray and ask for God’s mercy [§27].

Finally, Benvenist briefly broaches a subject that was discussed by numerous medieval translators before him: the methodology to be followed in translating a text. He explains that he follows the approaches of the author (Boethius) and the “translator-commentator” (probably Antoni Ginebreda) of the *Consolation*: “I translated [the work] letter by letter, word by word, so that the form of the matter would not change and the meaning [of the text] would not be lost. In some places, I preserved the meanings, not the words, in order to maintain a clear understanding [of the matter]” [§28]. Benvenist concludes his prologue with a terminological note, explaining that he translated the term *fortuna* by the biblical term *se‛ara* (storm), and providing his (not altogether convincing) rationale for this choice [§29].

**Conclusion**

Jacques Presser introduced the concept of “egodocument” and demonstrated its usefulness in historical writing. By examining the egodocuments of a past figure, the historian places him or her in a particular historical context and allows us to understand the motivations that led him or her to make particular choices. The history of ideas and the history of science thereby acquire a new dimension: rather than being the history of disincarnated ideas freely floating in a metaphysical space, they become a history of ideas grounded in their time and place.

In this article, we have presented the prologue of Samuel Benvenist’s Hebrew translation of Boethius’ *Consolation* as a remarkable instance of a medieval egodocument. Benvenist’s egodocument enables—nay: compelled—us to view the fifteenth-century intellectual in his social setting, consisting of much and gruesome violence, which motivated Benvenist to translate Boethius’ popular book as a means of alleviating his own suffering and perhaps also that of his brethren. For Presser, this reliance on egodocuments also carries a moral dimension. In the prologue addressed “to the reader” opening his own *Ondergang*, he refers to the “duty to speak up for all those thousands now doomed to eternal silence, whose last cries of despair went unheard, and whose ashes no one was allowed to gather up”.[[20]](#footnote-20) It pleases us to think that this article, too, has a moral dimension in that it contributed to making Samuel Benvenist’s voice to be heard about six hundred years after his death.

**Appendix I: Samuel Benvenist’s Prologue and Commentary**

The following is a diplomatic edition of Samuel Benvenist’s prologue, according to the only manuscript that carries it: MS P (see n. 12), fols. 3r–6v. Together with the text, we provide a commentary of difficult terms and passages.

**Text**

[1] [3א] ספר בואיסי לחכם כשמו כשמו בואיסי, מחכמי רומא, מתורגם ללשון הקדש. וזה הַחִלִי:

[2] על זה היה דָוֶה לבנו [איכה ה:יז] אחזני חיל ורעדה, נבהלתי ואשתומם כשעה חדא [דניאל ד:טז]. ואשקול במאזני[ם], כי נקל לכל האדם לנטות מצד אל צד, ואפשרות ההשתנות שוה, ושנים המנועעים לשום שפלים למרום [איוב ה:יא] ורמי הקומה גדועים [ישע׳ י:לג]. ואחשבה: מה טוב לאדם?

[3] הטוב טוב כי הוא שקט בביתו ובהיכלו—רענן שליו ושקט ושַׁלְאֲנָן [ירמ׳ ל:י; איוב כא:כג]. יגיל ברעדה, יירא בלבבו [עפ"י תהל' ב:יא] מרוח רעה, מצער יירא רע, ושואה יפל בה [עפ"י תהל' לה:ח] באחרית הזעם [דניאל ח:יט] בהשלם התנועה, בהתהפך התנועה המסֵבה. או אם טוב לעיני האוכל פתו במלח, פת חריבה [עפ"י משלי יז:א], ופעמים בתאוות, והקיץ וריקה נפשו [ישע׳ כט:ח] בדאבון נפש.

[4] ישיש וישמח אַף גִּילַת וְרַנֵּן [עפ"י צפנ' ג:יז; ישעי' לה:ב], – יֹאמַר: הֶאָח [איוב לט:כה], כי יְקַו לְאוֹר [איוב ג:ט], וְזָרַח בַּחֹשֶׁךְ שמשו [עפ"י ישע' נח:י]. עוד מעט שבע ודשן, אָכוֹל וְשָׂבוֹעַ וְהוֹתֵר [דבר' לא:כ; דה"ב לא:י], מחֵלֶב מְרִיאִים [ישע' א:יא], מעֶגלֵי מַרבֵּק [ירמ' מו:כא], וברבורים אבוסים [מלכים א ה:ג], גם מעוף השמים הקורא בהרים [שמואל א כו:כ], פסיוני וטווסים. יאסוף כסף כאבנים, כל הון יקר מפנינים כי טוב אמר לי מהשפיל: עתה ארומם, עתה אנשא, מהפיל.

[5] ואם יאמר אומר: ׳דיה לצרה בשעתה׳ [ברכות ט ע"ב], ועתה נתעלסה באהבים, נִרְוֶה דודים [משלי ז:יח], נלינה בכפרים [שה״ש ז:יב], לְרֵיחַ שְׁמָנֶיךָ טובים [שה"ש א:ג] נְרָדִים עם כפרים [עפ״י שה״ש ד:יג], יערוך שלחן, אכול שתה בשמחה ורננה, אף עַרְשֵׂנוּ רעננה [עפ״י שה״ש א:טז]. כי אם יאספו גדודים וַתִּפֹּל שְׁבָא [איוב א:טו], או גנבים או שודדים, הלא גם באחרית שב ורפא לנו [עפ״י ישע׳ ו:י] רופא כל בשר [תפילת שמונה עשרה] וייטיב למשנה, עוד נִטַּע כרמים [עפ"י ירמ׳ לא:ד] ובית חדש נבנה, לבושי מִכְלוֹל [יחז׳ לח:ד] שֵׁשׁ ומשי [יחז׳ טז:יג] נלבש, ובלויי סחבות נשליך [עפ"י ירמ' לח:יא]. שקמים גודעו וארזים נחליף [ישע׳ ט:ט].

[6] אשיב ואומר: ומי גבר יחיה יראה [עפ"י תהל' פט:מט] שלשה עולמים? לא הוגד ולא שמענו מאבותינו רק שנַיִם שלמים. כמאמר חז״ל מהמלך שלמה שהיה ׳מלך והדיוט ומלך׳ [בבלי, סנהדרין כ ע״ב]. ואיוב העיד עליו הכתוב שהצליח באחרית ויגדל וילך [עפ"י איוב מב: יב]. ואם עוד רבים: נח ודניאל – מי יבוא עד תכונתם ובמדרגתם מאן עייל [= מי יכנס [בעבי הקורה]]? רב לכם שֶׁבֶת בהר הזה [דברים א:ו] מָכוֹן לשבת עולמים [עפ״י מלכים א ח:יג] מעוט רבים שְׁנַיִם, ויקרא שם המקום מַחֲנָיִם [ברא׳ לב:ג]. ואשרי האיש בצר לו בימי חורפא [השוו איוב כט:ד] וַיִּדַּל בילדותו – את פושעים נִמְנָה [ישע' נג:יב] בימי בחורותיו, ואת עשיר בְּמוֹתָיו [השוו ישע׳ נג:ט]. כמאמר ירמיה בתוך דבריו: ׳טוב לגבר אשר ישא עול בנעוריו׳ [עפ"י איכה ג:כז].

[7] ועוד אשוב אתפלא: כי השופט כל הארץ [ברא׳ יח:כה], זה ישפיל וזה ירים [תהל׳ עה:ח], לא יעשה משפט ערוֹם הוא יערים [שמ״א כג:כב]? כי אראה שמיו מעשה אצבעותיו ירח וכוכבים [עפ"י תהל' ח:ד] [3ב] אשר כוננו ביום הבראם [עפ"י יחז' כח:יג], ביום ההִוָלְדם, בלכתם ילכו, ויעמודו בעמדם [עפ"י יחז' א:כא]. שומרים ערכם מיום היותם, והיו לאחדים [יחז' לז:יז]. לא חלפו חקם ואונם. לא שנו קרום[?] ותפקידם, לא המירו כבודם [עפ"י תהל' קו:כ] ואונם. מלאכי אלהים עולים ויורדים [ברא' כח:יב]. ויעש אדם כדגי הים שנאחזים [4א] במצודה רעה [עפ"י קהלת ט:יב], פעם הם [מילה לא קריאה] והרמים יחשבום לאכול ולצלות על גחלים, ופעם ינוסו מן הפח, ירדו בקעות במצולות ים [עפ"י תהל' קד:ח; שמות טו:ה], בנקיקי סלעים יְסֻכֻּהוּ [בכת"י :יסכום] צאלים [איוב מ:כב] – כן המה בני אדם גם בני איש [תהל מט:ג]; פעם יעלה לשמים שיאו וראשו [איוב כ:ו]; ופעם ירד מטה מטה [דברים כח:מג], תהום אל תהום [תהל׳ מב:ח], יחשך יומו ושמשו [עפ״י קהלת יב:ב].

[8] והנני אוסיף [בכת"י: יוסיף] להפליא הפלא ופלא [ישע׳ כט:יד]. מי הוא זה, ואיזה הוא אשר מלאו לבו לעשות את כל הגדולות והנוראו[ת], האותות והמסות [עפ"י דבר' כט:ב]: לקחת עפר מן האדמה ויהי לנפש חיה [ברא׳ ב:ז]? בכל אשר יפנה ישכיל להבין ולהורות, יגבר חיילים [עפ"י קהלת י:י], ימשל משלים, כאלו נמשח לנביא, ידע נטיעת קשואים, יבין צפצופי עופות ושיחת דקלים, וידבר על העצים ועל האבנים [מל״א ה:יג] נפלאות, ועל אל אלים [עפ"י דני' יא:לו], ישאהו על אֶבְרָתוֹ [דבר' לב:יא], ירכיבהו על בָּמֳתֵי עב [עפ"י דבר' לב:יג; ישע' יד:יד], על כרוב ויעוף [שמואל ב כב:יא]. ואל על יקראוהו יחד לא ירומם [הושע יא:ז] בשמים ממעל [דברים ד:לט] מן הצבא ומן הכוכבים [דניאל ח:י], ומעט מאלהים יחסרהו [עפ"י תהל' ח:ו]. כל אשר שאלו עיניו לא אצל מהם [עפ"י קהלת ב:י], כל שת[ה] תחת רגליו [תהל' ח:ז], כל דבר אין מחסור [עפ"י שופ' יח:י], מרוב אונים ואמיץ כח [עפ"י ישע' מ:כו], שרה עם לא[ה], ועל אנשים יָשֹׁור [איוב לג:כז]. [9] וכאשר [אולי: ובאשר] ירום ונשא וגבה מאד [ישע' נב:יג], אך אם יום או יומים יעמוד [שמות כא:כא] יִכָּרֵת מָשִׁיחַ וְאֵין לוֹ [דני' ט:כו], אין חכמה ואין עצה ואין תבונה [עפ"י משלי כא:ל], ואין דעת אלהים [הושע ד:א] – כי שכח תלמודו, וכל אשר יש לו נתן בידו [עפ"י ברא' לט:ח], יְאַבֵּד בענין רע כספו וכל מאודו, ה' יִגָּפֶנּוּ או יומו יבוא [שמואל א כו:י]. והפילו השופט והכהו [דבר' כה:ב] פצע וחבורה, מכה בלתי סרה [עפ"י ישע' יד:ו], ממרום ישפוך לארץ מְרֵרָתוֹ [עפ"י איוב טז:יג]. מן שמים [4ב] לשאול חייו הגיעו אל ירכתי בור כָּרָה [עפ"י ישע' יד:טו]. קבורת חמור יקבר, סחוב והשלך למטה לארץ [ירמ' כב:יט; קהלת ג:כא]. כי ממנה לקח מהֲמוֹנָהּ וּשְׁאוֹנָהּ. והרוח תשוב אל האלהים אשר נתנה [קהלת יב:ז].

[10] הנה האדון ה' צבאות עשה את האדם ישר [עפ"י קהלת ז:כט] הדמותו בצלמו מְחֻקֶּה, ומשוח בַּשָּׁשַׁר [עפ"י ירמ' כב:יד]. והמה בקשו חשבונות [קהלת ז:כט] לבחור ברע, ומאוס דברי חכמים כַּדָּרְבֹנוֹת [קהלת יב:יא], ורועה כסילים יריע [עפ"י משלי יג:כ], אף יצריח במלאת ספקו [ישע' מב:יג; איוב כ:כב]. מפרי מעשיו מתוק לחכו [עפ"י תהל' קד:יג; שה"ש ב:ג]. על כן מסרו למקרה הזמן למערכת המזל וההזדמן, אם טוב ואם רע, ואם שמן חלקו [חבק' א:טז]. ולֹו [בכת"י: ולא] הכין כלי מות וחיים [עפ"י תהל' ז:יד], ושם ה' בסופה ובסערה דרכו [עפ"י נחום א:ג]. [11] והוא בלבי פעם יציץ ציץ ויוצא פרח יגמול [עפ"י במד' יז:כג], יחוס על דל ואביון [תהל' עב:יג], ירחם ויחמול. פעם יתן לו בית והון נחלת אבות, עושר ונכסים [משלי יט:יד; קהלת ה:יח]; ופעם יסתיר פניו ממנו [עפ"י תהל' כב:כה], והוא כָעֵשֶׂב ייבש [עפ"י תהל' קב:יב] כִּקְדוֹחַ אש הֲמָסִים לְעָנִי כִי יַעֲטֹף [ישע' סד:א; תהל' קב:א] כרעב יאכילהו כִּלְיוֹת חִטָּה [דבר' לב:יד] לשובע נפשו לפי אכלו. והשבע לעשיר איננו מניח לו [קהלת ה:יא], כי לא בידויקח הכל את כל כבודו. [12] הוי אדון והוי הודו [ירמ' כב:יח], נהפך למשחית וְכִלַּתּוּ את עציו ואת אבניו [זכר' ה:ד]. כי כָלָה היא ונחרצה [עפ"י ישע' י:כג], לְבֹשֶׁת וגם לחרפה [ישע' ל:ה] יתנהו לִמְשִׁסָּה [עפ"י ישע' מב:כד]. וגם כי יזעק וִישַׁוֵּעַ, וּבְשַׁוְּעוֹ אליו שמע [תהל' כב:כה] כמו פתן חרש יאטם אזנו [תהל' נח:ה], יגרסו עצמותיו במלתעותיו, לַחָפְשִׁי יְשַׁלְּחֶנּוּ תַּחַת שִׁנּוֹ [שמות כא:כז], ומי יוכל לדין עם שתקיף ממנו [עפ"י קהלת ו:י]?

[13] ובראשית היצירה הכין רוח אלהים מרחפת על פני המים [ברא' א:ב], ותהלך חוג השמים [עפ"י איוב כב:יד]. רוח שקר נִסְכּוֹ [עפ"י ירמ' י:יד], ובגידה [נִ]סְכּוֹ. אשר השליטו האלהים ושָׂם לו חֹק ומשפט, [5א] להיות רוח גדולה וחזק [מל״א יט:יא] ברוחים [=בָּרְוָחִים?], לסור מכשול צִנִּים פַּחִים [עפ"י משלי כב:ה]. קל הוא על פני מים [איוב כד:יח], בחלקלקות יעשה מִדְחֶה [משלי כו:כח], בְּאֵין אומר ׳הָשֵׁב׳ – אין מונע ואין מוחה.

[14] רוח המושל [קהלת י:ד] יביא אוניה מארץ מרחק [משלי כה:כה] מלאה כל טוב, ובה סוחריה שרים רבים ונכבדים [במד' כב:טו], וישליכם אל ארץ אחרת [דבר' כט:כז], אל אשר יהיה שמה הרוח ללכת [יחזק' א:יב]. נדחים ואובדים בעיי הָעֲבָרִים [במדבר כא:יא] מאִיֵּי הים, בַּעְיָם רוּחוֹ [ישע' יא:טו]. כלו בדפוס יקבענה כיון ויבקיענה בין החולות. [15] בא יושב האי ההוא, ועלז בה בשמחה ובשירים בתופים ובמחולות [עפ״י ברא׳ לא:כז]. ולקח את כל שללה לעיניה, ויגרשם מהסתפח בנחלת [עפ"י שמואל א כו:יט], ערומים ויחפים, ויתהלכו מגוי אל גוים וממלכה [עפ"י תהל' קה:יג] באשר יתהלכו מבוהלים וּדְחוּפִים [אסתר ח:יד]. כה משפטו כל הימים [שמ"א כז:יא]: נוטל מזה אוצרות זהב, ובסוד טמונים צרורים וחתומים, ונותן לזה אשר עמל ולא יָגַע בהם יום מִיוֹמִים. כי מה ומה יוסיף אשר אין לו חלק ונחלה [דבר' יד:כט], איננו רואה את כל מאומה בידו [עפ"י ברא' לט:כג]. אין דבר חי ה' [שמ"א כ:כא], איך לו דמים [שמות כב:א].

[16] על כן על כל דברי האגרת הזאת אמר עם הספר [אסתר ט:כו; ט:כה] השר הפילוסוף בואיס"י מחברו. וקרא שם המערכת המזל וההזדמן ׳שׂערה׳ במאמרו.

[17] ובראותי הספר הזה רב התועלת לי ולאנשים אשר בגילי, השרויים בצער ובצרה, ביגון ובאנחה, לתור להם מנוחה [במד' י:לג], להשקיט מִימֵי רע [תהל' צד:יג], ולכבות רתיחת דם מרֵי נפש, הנואשים כמעט מן הרחמים, לתת להם שם ושארית, [5ב] תקוה ותוחלת, יוסיפו אומץ כל רבים עמים [תהל' פט:נא].

 [18] עם היות בַּעַר אנכי מאיש [משלי ל:ב], וְהַדִּבֵּר אין בי [עפ"י ירמ' ה:יג], העירוני רעיוני ונתון לבי [עפ״י קהלת ח:ט], אני שמואל בר' בנבנשת בר שמואל ז"ל בן בנבנשת, מתושבי ברצלונה, עם שרידי חָרֶב מיום ה' שפך כאש חמתו, יום עברה ונאצה – להמית אחר דתו ביום אֵידֵי ה', ביום נחלה וכאב אנוש [ישע' יז:יא], ביום שבות זרים חֵילוֹ [עוב' א:יא], ונכרים לפריצי עמים באו שעריו כמו במארב, ביום אשר שִׂבְּרוּ אויבי היהודים [אסתר ט:א] לטבוח טבח, והכו [בכת"י והכן] נער וזקן, יצאו גדודים בעבד [נ״א בשולים: בשבט] רודים, וימהרו לשפוך דם ביום הרג רב. יובל שי לה' צבאות [ישע' יח:ז], העלו עולות, ויזבחו זבחים שלמים, וכן רבים – טף ונשים, גם שָׂב גם ישיש [איוב טו:י], פשטו צוארם כשה לטבוח [עפ"י ישע' נג:ז], צאן קדשים צאן אדם [עפ"י יחז' לו:לח].

[19] ואני עני וכואב נשבר וְנִדְכֶּה, לא נשאר לפני כי אם גויתי ובני ביתי היה לי [עפ״י בראש׳ מז:יח]. וַיֵּט ה' אלי חסד, ויתנני לרחמים, ויתן לי מחיה בארץ נכריה. האירו ברקיו אור לנתיבתי ונר לרגלי.

[20] ואחרי עשרים שנה, בשנת מות המלך דון מרטין נ"ע, מלך חסד, אשר לא נשאר [מחוק: לא] נין לו, ולא נכד יורש עצר, קמו אדוני הארץ במלכות ארגון, אדונים קָשֶה [ישע' יט:ד], אלה מפה ואלה מפה, כמספר עשר. פריץ חיות [ישע' לה:ט], גברו מאריות [עפ״י שמ״ב א:כג], נצבו לעומת משמר [עפ״י נחמ׳ יב:כד], לטרוף טרף אדם [יחז' יט:ג], כנשר חש יָטוּשׂ עֲלֵי אוכל [חבק' א:ח; איוב ט:כו], כי ימצא חלל [דבר' כא:א]. [21] נחשים נושכים בעם, שרפים עומדים ממעל [ישע׳ ו:ב] אחר האורב. ילכו אחרי הבצע, בצע כסף, למהר שלל [שופ' ה:יט; ישע' ח:א]. [21] ויעף אלי אחד מן השרפים בגאותו וגאונו ועברתו [ישע' ו:ו; טז:ו], אחד מן השרים, הושיב במארב [6א] חֲצֵרִים [תהל׳ י:ח], רוכבים על סוסים ורומי קשת בחצים מורים [עפ"י תהל' עח:ט], ויחפשוני. ויביאוני בכבלי ברזל אל בית הכלא מבצרי מעוזיו, בית גאים יסח ה' [משלי טו:כה].

[22]תחזנה עיני, או אזנַי תשמענה שמוע, ישלח בְּמִשְׁמַנָּיו רזון ותחת כבודו יְקֹד יקוד כקדוח אש [עפ"י ישע' י:טז; סד:א], ובערה ואין מכבה, עד עולם תוקד [ירמ' יז:ד]. תַעְלֹוזְנָה כִלְיוֹתָי יִשְׂמַח לִבִּי [עפ״י משלי כג:טו-טז], ועיני תדמע דמוע [עפ"י ירמ' יג:יז].

[23] וישימו עלי שרי מסים נוגשים אצים [עפ״י שמות ה:יג]. קשרו חבל בראשי, ושני גזירי עצים שמו תחתיו, ויאסרוני ויענוני בהם עד אשר נשבר. וישימו עֲבות חדש תחתיו, נשקע בבשרי וחֻבַּר עד תתי כל אשר יושת עלי פדיון נפשי [עפ"י שמות כא:ל].

[24] ועוד שנית, כי תקום פעמַיִם צרה כמכבירה [ירמ' ד:לא]. לטובה נתכונתי, לא לִבִּי הָלַךְ אנה ואנה, כי אם לדבר מִצְוֺת. ובשובי, אשר לא ערב לי רב יהודה, נפשי מִקְּרָב לִי פָּדָה [עפ"י תהל' נה:יט]. ויהי בדרך, פריצי גוים מצאוני, צוֹד צָדוּנִי [איכה ג:נב], הלמוני הִמְּמוּנִי, הִכּוּנִי פצָעוּני, ויביאוני הרחק מאד מאדם העיר [יהושע ג:טז]. ויאסרוני בַנְחֻשְׁתַּיִם, וישליכוני באחת הבורות, והבור רֵק אין בו מים [ברא' לז:כד]. וידו אבן בי [איכה ג:נג], למען אשר לא אראה אור כי יהל [עפ"י איוב לא:כו], ואמשש כעִוֵּר באפלה [עפ"י דבר' כח:כט]. נתנו חִתִּיתָם עלי לשבור מתלעותי [עפ"י איוב כט:יז]. קצתי בחיי, ונפשי בָּחֲלָה [עפ״י זכר׳ יא:ח]. אבחר מות מחיים, ולִבָּתִּי אמולה [עפ"י יחז' טז:ל]. ואתן להם כל אשר לי כופר נפשי וגופי.

[25] ונשאר אני נָעוּר וָרֵק [נחמ׳ ה:יג] כימי עולם וכשנים קדמוניות בימי חָרְפִּי. וָאֱהִי נגוע כל היום [תהל׳ עג:יד] נבהל כאיש נדהם [ירמ׳ יד:ט], שומם ונאלם, כאיש אשר לא שומע [תהל׳ לח:טו] ולא יפתח פיו, כגבר אשר עברו יין [ירמ׳ כג:ט] – שלם בגופו וּבָרִיא אוּלָם [תהל' עג:יד; לח:טו; ירמ' יד:ט; כג:ט; ישע' נג:ז; תהל׳ עג:ד].

[26] וכי ידעתי מאז הספר הזה, קראתי בו והנאני. ותשב רוחי [6ב] בקרבי, ואתנחם מרגזי ומעצבי, ישמח לבי גם אני [משלי כג:טו]. ואעתיקהו ללשון עברי ללעוזות [צ״ל: לַלּוֹעֲזוֹת; עפ״י משנה, מגילה ב:א] בלעז, ונקרא שמו 'בואיסי מנחמה'. ואני קראתיו 'מנחם משיב נפשי' [עפ"י איכה א:טז], כי בו מצאתי אוֹן לי, צורי למחלתי, והַשְקֵט למכָּתִי, ומרגוע ל‎זֵַעֲוָתִי. מצורף להיות בסוף הספר דברי תורה.

[27] כי בו אִזֵּן ותקן וחקר [עפ״י קהלת יב:ט] החכם הפילוסוף הנזכר: נשא ונתן אם ידיעת השם יכריח האפשר, או תניחהו [את האפשר] על עומדו, והיה האדם בעל בחירה בו – אשר הוא יסוד שורש ועקר. והרחיב הַדִּבּוּר בזה מאד מכל אשר היו לפניו ואחריו שראיתי דבריהם. ובחתימת דבריו מזהיר על התפלה והתְּחִנָּה ובקשת הרחמים מהשם ית', והריחו ביראת ה' [ישע' יא:ג].

[28] והלכתי בעקבות המחבר והמעתיק המפרש קצת רמזיו, להעתיק אות באות, תיבה בתיבה, כל אשר לא תשתנה צורת הענין ותפסד טעם [= מובן] הדבר. ובקצת מקו[מות] אני שומר הטעמים, לא המלות, לשמור מאד הבנת הענין והוראת הדרוש.

[29] והעתקתי שֵם 'פורטו״נה׳ – המורֶה בדבריו על 'המערכת המזל וההזדמן', להיות לאדם טובות או רעות מדומות לא אמתיות – ׳שׂערה׳, כי הוא שם עצמי לתענוגי האדם וטובותיו ולצערו ויגונותיו הבאות לאדם בלי סבה וטעם. ובפרט השם הזה נכון ונאות לנוטל מזה ונותן לזה, כי כן תעשה השׂערה אשר אין לה מעצמותה דבר. וזה הוא אצלי אמרו: "ויען ה' את איוב מן הסערה" [איוב לח:א], כלו[מר], שהציל אותו מרעת הסערה. וַיֵּעָתֶר לוֹ ו[י]רפאהו [צ"ל וירצהו(?), עפ"י איוב לג:כו], רצוני – מן המערכת ההזדמן והמזל אשר מסרו לו, והוא השטן, כאומרם: "הוא שטן הוא יצר הרע, הוא מלאך המות" [בבא בתרא טז ע"א], רחמנא ליצלן.

**Commentary**

[§ 1] The word *ki-shmo* appears twice. Perhaps the meaning is that the name of the author is similar to the name of the work: *The Book of Boethius* (*Sefer Bo’iysi*).

[§ 4] *Pasyoni*: Pheasant. The term appears in the Talmud. See *Kidushim* 31a. Rashi comments: “A bird that is important and fat, a type of quail that came down in the desert”. And see Jastrow, Marcus. *A Dictionary of the Tergumim; The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, Vol II. London: 1903), 1194–1195.

[§ 6] *mi‛ut rabim shnayim* (*lit.* a smallest plural, two): The smallest unit of the plural form is two.

*Ke-ma’amar yermiya* (*lit.* as Jeramiah said): The Talmudic sages attributed the authorship of the Book of Lamentations to the prophet Jeremiah.

[§ 7] *‛arom hu’ ya‛erim*: Rashi on 1 Samuel, 23:22:

מי שאמר "ערום יערים הוא" - מתנהג הוא בערמה, היום כאן ולמחר במקום אחר כדי שלא יודע מקומו

One who says *‛arom ya‛arim hu’*: he behaves cunningly—today he is here and tomorrow elsewhere, so that no one will know where he is.

*yesukuho ṣe’elim*: Gersonides on Job 40:22:

יהיו לו האילנות לסוכה, ויהיה לו צל

The trees will provide him shelter and he will have shade.

*beney ’adam gam beney ’ish*: according to *Meṣudat Ṣiyon*, the term *beney ’adam* refers to the masses while *beney ’ish* refers to the greatest among them.

In this paragraph, the author emphasizes that the stars and their motions have not changed since the day they were created and, as a result, their relative positions have also remained constant. *Kevodam*: their magnitude. See Klatzkin, *Thesaurus*, vol. II, p. 62.

[§ 8] On *neṭi‛at qishu’im*, see *Sanhedrin* 68a.

*ṣifṣufey ‛ofot* (lit. bird chirps): A technique of fortune-telling, often practiced by sages who are close to Kabbalah. See, for example, Naḥmanides on Deuteronomy 18:10. Maimonides prohibited the use of the technique of bird chirps (Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Idolatry*, 11:4):

אין מנחשין כעכו"ם [נ״א: כגויים]. שנאמר [ויקרא יט:כו]: ׳לא תנחשו׳. כיצד הוא הנחש? [...] וכן אלו ששומעים צפצוף העוף ואומרים: ׳יהיה כך ולא יהיה כך'; 'טוב לעשות דבר פלוני ורע לעשות דבר פלוני'. [...] וכן כל כיוצא בדברים האלו הכל אסור.

It is forbidden to practice soothsaying as idolaters do, as [Leviticus 19:26] states: “Do not act as a soothsayer”. What is meant by a soothsayer? [...] Similarly, [this category includes] those who hear the chirping of a bird and say: This will happen or this will not happen; it is beneficial to do this or it is detrimental to do this […] and the things of the like, all this is forbidden.[[21]](#footnote-21)

*Siḥat deqalim*: See Talmud, Sukkah 28a. Rashi admitted that he did not know the meaning of the phrase, but other scholars proposed that the expression refers to metaphysical truths. See the Hebrew entry for *siḥat deqalim* in Wikipedia (consulted in January 2025).

*‛Eṣim va-’avanim*: The verse in 1 Kings 5:13 does not mention the stones, but see, for example, Lamentations Rabbah 4:14.

[§ 10] The usage of Proverbs 13:20 appears to be word play on the verse.

[§ 13] *ruaḥ sheqer niskho*: the use of this phrase should be understood in the context of Jeremiah 51:17. Rashi explains *niskho* as deriving from the word “mask”. The letter *nun* in the second occurrence of *niskho* in the sentence has been added based on conjecture.

[§ 14] *ba‛iyam ruḥo*: According to Rashi (e.g., Commentary on Numbers 21:11), *‛iyim* means ruins.

[§ 16] *se‛arah* (with the Hebrew letter *sin*): Benvenist uses this term to translate the term *fortuna*. See § 29.

[§ 18] In this paragraph, Benvenist describes the massacre of 1391. First-hand testimonies from survivors of this massacre in Barcelona are extremely rare. Ḥasdai Crescas’ son was murdered in the same event.

[§ 20] *Don Martin*: Martin, King of Aragon, who inherited the Crown from his brother Juan I – King of Aragon during the Massacre of 1391, which were described by Benvenist above. Martin died in 1410, about twenty years after the Massacre of 1391. With Martin’s death, Aragon entered a period of interregnum, following disputes over the identity of the heir.

[§ 21] *yisaḥ*: meaning “will destroy”.

[§ 23] *nogshim ’aṣim* (Exodus 5:13): Oppressors who exhibit particularly great motivation in fulfilling their duties.

[§ 24] *Rav Yehudah*: In Genesis 43:8–9, Judah (son of Jacob) guaranteed to his father that he would return Benjamin from Egypt. However, this sentence in the prologue may be interpreted as a certain Rabbi Judah guaranteeing the ransom of Benvenist. See Einbinder, “Prison Prologues,” 146.

[§ 25] *na‛ur va-req*: meaning “without possessions” (according to Rashi).

[§ 26] *le-lo‛azot be-la‛az*: *la‛az* is a foreign language, meaning a language that is not Hebrew. *lo‛ez* refers to a foreigner who does not speak Hebrew. For example, the Mishnah states that the Book of Esther may be read by someone who does not understand Hebrew in a foreign language (*le-lo‛azot be-la‛az*) (Mishnah, *Megilah*, II:1).

*Menaḥem mashiv nafshi*: *lit.* *The Consoler Who Revives My Soul*, derived from the Book of Lamentations 1:16.

*ze‛avati*: *ze‛avah* where the letters are transposed with *zeva‛ah*: a frightening and shocking event.

[§ 28] Here Benvenist indicates that he translated the work into Hebrew not from the original Latin, but from a translation of the book, and that the translator interwove ‘hints’ into the translation—that is to say, explanations and interpretations.

[§ 29] The terms *se‛arah* (with *sin*) and *se‛arah* (with *sameḥ*) are interchangeable, and Benvenist identifies them as such. He explains his choice to use this term for translating *fortuna*.

1. Jessica Vance Roitman, Professor of Jewish Studies at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, writes: “I remember being surprised by the term ‘egodocument’ when I first came to the Netherlands to work on my PhD in History at Leiden University back in the early 2000s. I had not ever heard it before. […] My ignorance of the term may speak to my own disciplinary training in the United States. The term is not widely known in the British and American academic worlds. However, it also says something about the pervasiveness of the term in the Netherlands.” Roitman, Jessica Vance. Review of *Egodocuments in Dutch Jewish History. Emotions, Imaginations, Perceptions, Egos, Characteristics*. In Michman, Dan (ed.). *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 135.4 (2022): 465–466; Baggerman, Arianne and Rudolf Dekker. “Egodocuments and the Study of the History of Culture.” In *Inquiries into History and Philosophy – Festschrift for Elazar Weinreb*, edited by Amir Horovitz et al. (eds.), 245–262 [in Hebrew]. Raanana: The Open University, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. On Presser, see Rutz, Andreas, Stefan Elit, and Stephan Kraft. “Hyperlink on Jacques Presser.” *Zeitenblicke* 1 (2002), No. 2 [20.12.2002]. URL: <http://www.zeitenblicke.historicum.net/2002/02/dekker/hyperlink1.html>; Dekker, Rudolf. “Jacques Presser’s Heritage: Egodocuments in the Study of History.” *Memoria y Civilizacion* 5 (2002): 13–37; Baggerman, Arianne and Rudolf Dekker. “Jacques Presser, Egodocuments and the Personal Turn in Historiography.” *European Journal of Life Writing* 7 (2018): 90–110; Roitman, review of Michman (ed.), *Egodocuments in Dutch Jewish History*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Mascuch, Michael, Rudolf Dekker and Arianne Baggerman. “Egodocuments and History: A Short Account of the *Longue Durée*.” *The Historian* 78 (2016): 11–56, on p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In leiding op: “Heinrich Heine, Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten, een bloemlezing uit zijn poëzie, bijeengebracht en ingeleid door dr. J. Presser. Verschijnt deze maand ter gelegenheid van de sterfdag van de dichter, op 17 februari 1856,” bij Daamen N.V., Den Haag en De Sikkel, Antwerpen” = Maatstaf. Jaargang 3 (1955–1956), pp. 817-846, at p. 843. Quoted from Raat, G.F.H. “J. Presser.” In *Kritisch lexicon van de moderne Nederlandstalige literatuur* (1980-2015). Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1980, s.v. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Baggerman and Dekker, “Jacques Presser,” 99. See also Presser, Jacques, “Memoires als geschiedbron.” In M.C. Brands et al., eds. Uit het werk van J. Presser. Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polak and Van Gennep, 1969, 238–295. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. On the medieval reception of *Consolation*, see Hoenen, Maarten J.F.M. and Lodi Nauta, eds., *Boethius in the Middle Ages: Latin and Vernacular Traditions of the Consolation Philosophiae*. Leiden: Brill, 1997, preface, vii-viii; Ziino, Francesca. “Some Vernacular Versions of Boethius’s *De Consolatione Philosophiae* in Medieval Spain: Notes on their Relationship with the Commentary Tradition.” *Carmina Philosophiae* 7 (1998): 37–65, n. 1–2. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Zonta, Mauro. “Le Origini Letterarie e Filosofiche delle Versioni Ebraiche del *De Consolatione Philosophiae* di Boezio.” In *Boethius Christianus? Transformationen der Consolatio Philosophiae in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, edited by Reinhold F. Glei et al., 397–429. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. It appears that Pere Saplana’s translation was incomplete, and that Ginebreda’s revision gained more popularity than the original translation. On the Catalan translation and its revision, see Zinno, “Some Vernacular Versions,” 39–40. Ginebreda’s translation was published in *Libre de consolació de Philosophia lo qual féa en latí lo gloriós doctor Boeci*, ed. Bartomeu Muntaner. Barcelona, 1877. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Peter IV of Aragon was the father of John I (who succeeded his father on the throne) and of Martin, who in turn succeeded his brother John I. As we shall see, some of the events alluded to by Benvenist followed Martin’s death. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Boezio De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. by Sierra, Sergio Joseph. Jerusalem: Istituto di Studi Ebraici Scuola Rabbinica S.H. Margulies-Disegni Torino, 1967. (Azaria’s prologue is on pp. 27–28). Passages from Azaria’s prologue were published in Neubauer, Adolf. “Bonafoux Bonfil Astruc de Perpignan.” *Revue des* études *juives*, 5 (1882): 41–46. See also Gorlach, Marina, Jeffrey H. Taylor, and Leslie A. Taylor, “The Hebrew Translation of the ‘Consolatio Philosophiae.’” *Carmina Philosophiae* 15 (2006): 89–109. (The latter article primarily studies Bonafoux’s translation; the short remarks on Benvenist’s are mostly inaccurate). Passages from the first book of the *Consolation* (I.1–3) were translated into modern Hebrew by Yehuda Liebes in 2001. See Liebes, Yehuda. “The Triumph of the Spirit.” *Alpayim* 21 (2000): 215–223. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See Einbinder, Susan. “Prison Prologues: Jewish Prison Writing from Late Medieval Aragon and Provence.” *The Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 38.2 (2012): 137–158, on pp. 144–147, 151–152. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The two manuscripts are: (a) St. Petersburg: Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, the Russian Academy of Sciences, MS B 18 (Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jerusalem [= IMHM]: F 52946(; (b) Vatican, Vatican Apostolic Library, MS Neofiti 8 (F 616). (henceforth MS P and MS V, respectively). Benvenist’s prologue appears only in MS P, fols. 3r–6v. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. In MS P, the first of the three remaining prologues appears on fols. 7r–8v (= MS V, fols. 71v–73r); the second, a discussion of the “seven names” attributed to Boethius followed by the book’s Table of Contents, is on fols. 8v–14v (= MS V, fols. 73r–78v); and the third is on fols. 14r–16r (= MS V, fols. 78v–80r). The Catalan version is available online in the following link: https://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/libre-de-consolacio-de-philosophia-transladat-en-romanc-catalanesch-estampat-novament-amb-la-moral-0/html/ff38742a-82b1-11df-acc7-002185ce6064\_2.html [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. This term in frequent used by astrologically inclined authors (e.g. Gersonides). See Klatzkin, Jakob. *Thesaurus philosophicus*. Berlin: Eshkol, 1928, vol. 2, p. 241. Benvenist uses this term to translate the word *fortuna* as found in the Catalan translation of Boethius’ text. As he explains later, he will use a different, biblical term—*se‘arah*—to translate *fortuna*. See §29 in the edition of his text. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. On the name “Benvenist” and members of this family, see below, n. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. On the Massacre of 1391, see Baer, Yitzhak. *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (Heb.). Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1965, pp. 284–292. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Benvenist states that there were ten contenders, without specifying any names [§20]. Scholarly literature usually refers to only six such contenders: Jaume of Urgell (Martin’s brother-in-law, and also the great-grandson of Alfonso IV of Aragon, Martin’s grandfather); Frederick of Luna (Martin’s illegitimate grandchild); Louis of Anjou (grandchild of John I); Ferdinand of Castile (Martin’s nephew); Alfonso I of Gandia; and, after Alfonso’s death, his brother John of Ribagorza (both grandsons of James II of Aragon, Martin’s great-grandfather). For a short survey of the interregnum period, see Bisson, T.N.. *Medieval Crown of Aragon*. Oxford: Clarendon 1986 133–136; F. Ruiz, Teofilio. *Spain’s Centuries of Crisis: 1300–1474*. Malden: Blackwell, 2007, 76–78. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Gottheil, Richard, Meyer Kayserling and Isaac Broydé. “Benvenist.” *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901–1906, vol. 3, 38–41. One member of the family, also called Samuel Benvenist (active in the mid-fourteenth century and possibly the grandfather of the Samuel Benvenist discussed in this paper), served as a physician at the court of King Peter of Aragon. In their entry on “Benvenist”, Gottheil, Kayserling and Broydé hypothesize that this Samuel Benvenist was the translator of Boethius’ *Consolation*. However, according to their entry, this Samuel resided in Tarragona in 1322, which predates the Hebrew translation of Boethius by 90 years. This latter Samuel is likely to be the translator (from Latin) of Maimonides’ *Sefer ha-Qatzeret*; see Steinschneider, Moritz. *Die Hebraeischen Uebersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher*. Berlin: 1893, §481(5), pp. 767-768; Muntner, Suessman, ed*., Maimonides, Medical Works* (Hebrew), I: *The Book on Asthma*, Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1940, “Introduction”, p. 9 (the translation is dated to ca. 1320). We are familiar with yet another famous member of the family, known as Benvenist de la Cavalleria, who was a contemporary with Samuel Benvenist’s lifetime, and served at the royal courts of King Peter IV, King John I, and King Martin I. On Benvenist de la Cavalleria and his work at the royal court, see Baer,. *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain,* 262–263. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. On the relevance of the concept of trauma to historical writing, see e.g. Turner, Wendy J. and Christina Lee, eds. *Trauma in Medieval Society*. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Presser, Jacques. *Ashes in the Wind: The Destruction of Dutch Jewry*. trans. Arnold Pomerans. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988, xiii; Raat, “J. Presser”, p. VIII. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, trans. by Eliyahu Touger. Jerusalem, Moznaim Pub. c1986-c2007. Consulted from Sefaria website. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)