Ephraim Chamiel

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VOLUME 2

CHAPTER FOUR:

EMANCIPATION, THE SPIRITUALIZATION OF REDEMPTION AND THE NEUTRALIZATION OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

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CHAPTER FOUR

Emancipation, the Spiritualization of Redemption, and the Neutralization of the Land of Israel

THE EMANCIPATION

A central modern phenomenon with which the Orthodox rabbis had to struggle was emancipation, which was granted to the Jews in one state after another in Europe. Generally, the Edict of Tolerance issued by the Austrian emperor Joseph II in 1781 is seen as the beginning of Emancipation. The process then gained impetus from the French Revolution, the Napoleonic wars, and the Revolutions of 1848.

Emancipation had important and critical effects on the Jews. The traditional religious scholars of the middle way examined the matter meticulously and found both positive and negative influences. On the one hand, the Jews were exposed to important sources of culture and allowed to engage in new professional fields, enabling them to take part increasingly in social, economic, academic, and political life, and many saw this as the beginning of the messianic age. On the other hand, there was great apprehension that the new openness might entice Jews to lose their bearings and convert, forgetting their uniqueness and special mission.

Indeed, in the wake of Emancipation and Haskala came acculturation and secularization, the desire to integrate into the non-Jewish

world and even to assimilate and blend in. Universalistic and pluralistic ideologies of society and politics developed among the Jews, calling for reform of the Halakha, diminishing Jewish particularism, and rejecting the ideas of a personal messiah and of national redemption in the Land of Israel. These positions sought to spiritualize the idea of redemption and combine it with the redemption of Europe and of humanity, according to the natural, universal religion of reason or purified Christianity, and to neutralize the idea of the Land of Israel as an actual, physical place to which people yearned to return. According to this new approach, Zion was in Europe, and full emancipation among the nations of reason was redemption.

In contrast to the aforementioned influence, which distanced the Land of Israel from the minds of the people, there was also another alternative, bringing it closer, which was also opened up by Emancipation. Jews were now free to move from place to place, and the shifting of awareness to the Land of Israel as a realistic option became possible. Should this possibility be rejected or encouraged? Was it beneficial or dangerous?

Being post-Haskala thinkers, who had internalized important parts of the ideas of the Haskala movement, the modern but traditionally religious men of the middle way embraced equality of rights and universalism, and the neutralization of the Land of Israel. However, they had to consolidate an ideology that would justify Jewish particularism, preserve the Halakha and messianic hopes, and explain the need for Judaism and the role of the Jewish people among the nations in the new situation, and which would resolve the issue of dual loyalty. The status of the Land of Israel as a focus of attraction, at a time when the goods of Europe, both material and spiritual, were available to the Jews in the Diaspora, was therefore a central question that reverberated in the air.

MODELS OF THE RELATION TO THE LAND OF ISRAEL, TO EXILE, AND TO REDEMPTION IN JUDAISM

To understand the attitude toward the Land of Israel in Jewish thought in Europe during the first half of the nineteenth century, I will briefly summarize the positions taken on this subject in the history of this thought. In four articles, Aviezer Ravitzky¹ analyzed the theories on this subject, and these opinions can be laid out as follows:

THE REALISTS: THE LAND OF ISRAEL AS A FOCUS FOR A PHYSICAL ATTRACTION IN HISTORY

1. Those yearning for the homeland

Attraction for the purpose of fulfilling the commandments that can only be performed in the land—the Tosafists of France.

Attraction to the sanctity of the land, a special land in essence, climate, and geography, the only place where there is prophecy and perfection is possible in observing the commandments—Judah Halevi.

Attraction for political actualization—the Land was chosen at the beginning of human and Jewish history as the only place where an independent Jewish monarchy is possible, and where redemption will take place.

The expected future will unfold in three stages. First, the rebirth in the world of a Jewish state according to the Torah; second, the adoption by the nations of belief in the One God; and third, full spiritual and social reform of humanity. Only the third stage is Utopian and meta-historical—Maimonides.

2. Those Fearful of Sanctity

Only a select minority is worthy of living in the Land of Israel—Maharam of Rothenburg [Rabbi Meir ben Baruch of Rothenburg] and Hashla [Isaiah Horowitz, know by the name of his most important book, *Shnei Luḥot Habrit*].

^{1 &}quot;'Hatsivi Lakh Tsiunim' Letsion: Gilgulo Shel Ra'ayon," in idem, *Al Da'at Hamaqom* (Jerusalem, 1991), 34-74; "'Kefi Koaḥ Haadam': Yemot Hamashiaḥ Bemishnat Harambam," in ibid., 74-105; "'Shelo Ya'alu Baḥoma": 'Al Rishuman Shel Shlosh Hashevu'ot Betoledot Yisrael," appendix to *Haqets Hamegule Umedinat Yisrael* (Tel Aviv, 1993); "Erets Ḥemda Veḥarada: Hayaḥas Hadu-Erki Leerets-Yisrael Bimqorot Yisrael," in *Erets Yisrael Bahagut Hayehudit Haḥadasha*, ed. idem (Jerusalem, 1998), 1-41. Referred to below respectively as "Tsiunim," "Hamashiaḥ," "Haqets," and "ḥemda."

The land has essential, mystical qualities; it is connected to the divine world and draws influence from it. It is the only place where observing the commandments has essential inner value. It is a religious duty for anyone who is capable of dealing with its sanctity to move there—Nachmanides.

THE UTOPIANS: THE LAND OF ISRAEL IS DISTANT, OUTSIDE OF HISTORY

1. Those Yearning for the Land

Kabbalists and mystics who sever themselves from the land because of fear of sin, awe of its sanctity, and the prohibition against "forcing the end" (the "Three Oaths" of BT Ketubot 111a)—Rabbi Isaac of Acre, Rabbi Ezra and Rabbi Azriel, Ḥasiduti Ashkenaz, Abraham Galante, the Maharal of Prague, the major Hasidic rabbis, Jonathan Eybeschutz.²

These are the references to Ravitzky, according to the date of publication, as listed in the previous note: the Tosafists-1993, 283; 1998, 19. Judah Halevi-1991, 46; 1998, 290. Maimonides—1991, 75-82; 1993, 282; 1998, 21. Maharam—1998, 5. Hashlah—1993, 297; 1998, 7. Nachmanides—1991, 42; 1993, 287. Philo—1998, 15. Meiri—1998, 15. Samuel Jaffe—1993, 292. Emden—1993, 299. Mendelssohn—1993, 301. Isaac of Acre-1998, 15. Rabbi Ezra and Rabbi Azriel-1993, 282. Hasidei Ashkenaz—1993, 284. Galante—1993, 293. Maharal—1991, 61; 1993, 294. The Major Hasidic rabbis—1993, 301; 1998, 15. Evbeschutz—1991, 64; 1993, 300; 1998, 23. On Judah Halevi and Maimonides, see also E. Schweid, Moledet Veerets Ye'uda (Tel Aviv, 1979), 59-78, and on the kabbalists and Nachmanides, 79-82. On the mystical, neutralizing position of the kabbalists versus that of Nachmanides, see M. Idel, "'Al Erets-Yisrael Bamahashava Hamistit Shel Yemei-Habeinayim," in Erets Yisrael Bahagut Hayehudit Biyemei Habeinayim, ed. A Ravitsky et al. (Jerusalem, 1991), 193-215. On the position of Nachmanides versus the neutralizing positions of Rabbi Ezra and Rabbi Azriel, see H. Pedaya, "Erets-Shel-Ruah Veerets Mamash: R. 'Ezra, R. 'Azriel Veharamban," in ibid., 233-90. On the qualities of the Land according to Nachmanides, see Halbertal, Haramban, 173-75, 230-32, 260-65. According to his comprehensive explanation, the Land of Israel possesses a cosmic link with the Divine Presence [Shekhina], and it also possesses its own qualities and essences. As a result, in an ontological, non-voluntary fashion, liberation from the rule of inert nature takes place, and it is in a constant state of hidden miracles, with which the righteous is privileged, and the sinner is punished because of it by being driven out of the land. On the position of Judah Halevi, see also Guttmann, Hapilosofia, 120. On Maimonides's position, see S. Rosenberg, Be'iqvot Hakuzari (Jerusalem, 1991), 252; I. Twersky, "Erets-Yisrael Vegalut Bemishnato Shel

2. The Neutralizers

Philosophers and scholars who strengthened consciousness of exile and Jewish historical passivity.

Within history there are physical or spiritual substitutes for the Land of Israel: a person's body or intelligence, his present location, the community, *Kneset Yisrael* [the Jewish collective], the Torah, the human spirit, or the world. The spiritual substitute for the Land of Israel makes it possible to achieve religious fulfillment and moral and religious perfection even outside of the Land of Israel. Those who take this view are likely to refer to the Three Oaths, and they seek to strengthen Jewish life in the Diaspora and to encourage communities in difficult times or to maintain their achievements—Philo, Meiri, Samuel Jaffe, Jacob Emden, Mendelssohn.³

Below I show how the modern religious thinkers fit into this model.

EXILE AS THE JEWISH MISSION TO THE NATIONS

The idea of the mission or destiny of the Jewish people being the reason for the exile and part of God's plan in history is not a new one. In the early nineteenth century, after the French Revolution and the

Harambam," in Erets Yisrael Bahagut Hayehudit Biyemei Habeinayim, 90-123; A. Funkenstein, Tadmit Vetoda'a Historit Bayahadut Uvisvivata Hatarbutit (Tel Aviv, 1991), 103-56. On the mission according to Judah Halevi and the parable of the grain, see Rosenberg, Hakuzari, 87-88. On Judah Halevi's attitude toward the special merit of the Land and the people and the attitude toward exile and living in actual Zion, see ibid., 317-320. On the meaning of exile and Jewish passivity and activism in the course of history, see Funkenstein, Tadmit, 232-42. Compare the opinions on Maimonides and Nachmanides mentioned above to that of M. Z. Nehorai, "Erets-Yisrael Betoratam Shel Harambam Veharamban," in Erets Yisrael Bahagut Hayehudit Biyemei Habeinayim, 123-38, and on Judah Halevi, to the opinion of Y. Silman, "Artsiuta Shel Erets-Yisrael Besefer Hakuzari," in Erets Yisrael Bahagut Hayehudit Biyemei Habeinayim, 77-90. Naturally the model presented here is general and does not go into the nuances between the various positions. A different model is offered by Schwartz, Hara'ayon, regarding the medieval thinkers. He distinguishes between the apocalyptic messianism of Sa'adia Gaon (28-38) and the personal, naturalistic messianism of Maimonides (69-89). Judah Halevi (55-69) is one of those who led the process from the Geonim to Maimonides, and there are motives of both kinds of messianism in his work.

On the neutralizing philosophers, see Ravitzky, *Hagets*, 292, 299, 301; "Hemda," 15.

beginning of Emancipation, when it seemed as if, finally, humanity had truly embraced ethical monotheism and progress was clearly emerging, the idea moved to the center of the arena. However, this idea had already existed among medieval thinkers:

Judah Halevi

In the Kuzari 4:23, the Rabbi says:

God has a secret and wise design concerning us, which should be compared to the wisdom hidden in the seed which falls into the ground, where it undergoes an external transformation into earth, water and dirt, without leaving a trace for him who looks down upon it. It is, however, the seed itself which transforms earth and water into its own substance, carries it from one stage to another, until it refines the elements and transfers them into something like itself, casting off husks, leaves, etc., and allowing the pure core to appear, capable of bearing the Divine Influence. The original seed produced the tree bearing fruit resembling that from which it had been produced. In the same manner, so it is with the religion of Moses. All the religions that have come after it are, in truth, being transformed to be like it, even though outwardly they reject it. These religions [Christianity and Islam] are thus only a preparation for the awaited Messiah who is the fruit. And all of them, when they acknowledge this, will come to be his fruit, and the tree will be one. Then they will exalt the root. Then they will revere the origin which they formerly dispersed, as we have observed concerning the words: "Behold My servant prospers."

Maimonides

In *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Melakhim, the end of chapter 11 (in the uncensored Venice and Amsterdam editions), Maimonides explains who the Messiah is and speaks of two false messiahs who nevertheless were chosen by Providence to spread the principles of Judaism in the world: Jesus and Muhammad. Jesus was executed by a rabbinical court after causing the loss of Jewish lives and the dispersal of Jews and misleading the world, as if the Torah had been replaced and one should worship a different god:

Nevertheless, the thoughts of the Creator of the world are not within the power of man to comprehend, for His ways are not our ways, nor are His thoughts, our thoughts. Ultimately, all the deeds of Jesus of Nazareth and that Ishmaelite who arose after him will only serve to prepare the way for Mashiach's coming and the improvement of the entire world, motivating the nations to serve God together as Tzephaniah 3:9 states: "I will transform the peoples to a purer language that they all will call upon the name of God and serve Him with one purpose." How will this come about? The entire world has already become filled with the mention of Mashiach. Torah, and mitzvot. These matters have been spread to the furthermost islands to many stubborn-hearted nations. They discuss these matters and the mitzvot of the Torah, saying: "These mitzvot were true, but were already negated in the present age and are not applicable for all time." Others say: "These mitzvot contain secret matters and are not to be understood to their external [literal] meaning. The Mashiach has already come and revealed these secrets." When the true Messianic king will arise and prove successful, his position becoming exalted and uplifted, they will all return and realize that their ancestors endowed them with a false heritage and their prophets and ancestors caused them to err.

[Trans. Rabbi Eliyahu Touger, available online: http://www.chabad.org/library/article__cdo/aid/682956/jewish/mishneh-torah.htm]

Nachmanides

In his sermon "Torat Hashem Temima" [The Torah of God is Perfect], which he gave following the Barcelona Dispute, Nachmanides used the words of Maimonides to clarify his position on this subject and copied them almost verbatim, except for the sentence, "the improvement of the entire world, motivating the nations to serve God together," and the quotation from Zephaniah 3:9. He apparently omitted these because it seemed excessive to him to share the worship of God with other religions, and he preferred Maimonides's following remarks, which clearly imply that they are erroneous.

MENDELSSOHN'S POSITION

Mendelssohn's views stand in the background of nineteenth-century trends in Judaism. His point of departure was philosophical, rationalist,

and universalist, according to which, by means of reason, which was the common property of all human beings, it was possible to reach the eternal metaphysical truths that every person needed in order to attain happiness and moral and intellectual perfection. The man who maintained this position was a proud, religious Jew, who observed the commandments and believed in the revelation to the Jewish people and in their messianic hopes, and he had to struggle with two cardinal questions, which are raised in his writing. These questions preoccupied all the Jewish thinkers of the nineteenth century.

The first question, raised in his *Jerusalem*,⁴ is: how can Mendelssohn, if indeed this is his view, continue to believe in Revelation, for which there was no need? Alternatively, "If, therefore, mankind must be corrupt and miserable without revelation, why has the far greater part of mankind lived without *true revelation* from time immemorial?"⁵ Mendelssohn answers this question as follows:

I believe that Judaism knows of no revealed religion in the sense in which Christians understand this term. The Israelites possess a divine *legislation*—laws, commandments, ordinances, rules of life, instruction in the will of God as to how they should conduct themselves in order to attain temporal and eternal felicity. Propositions and prescriptions of this kind were revealed to them by Moses in a miraculous and supernatural manner, but no doctrinal opinions, no saving truths, no universal propositions of reason.⁶

Here Mendelssohn makes the famous distinction between eternal metaphysical truths, whose source is in the divine intelligence, or God's will, and founded on reason, and temporary historical truths that are connected to time and place, and based on the senses, experience, and reliable tradition. The powers of human reason are sufficient to prove the eternal truths demanded for human happiness. What was conveyed to the Jews on Mount Sinai were particular historical truths for the Jewish people regarding their removal from Egypt by God, who had

⁴ See Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, trans. Allan Arkush (Hanover, 1983), 89-100, 126-28.

⁵ Ibid., 94

⁶ Ibid., 89-90.

made a covenant with them, and a practical legal constitution to be observed in their land to assure their success. These truths were ratified with signs and wonders. These laws, founded upon eternal truths, recall and summon everyone to these truths, but are not supposed to teach or prove them. The Jewish people cannot free itself from the covenant and the constitution except "if it pleases the Supreme Lawgiver to make known to us His will on this matter, to make it known in as clear a voice, in as public a manner, and as far beyond all doubt and ambiguity as He did when He gave the law itself."

The second question is that of the dual loyalty of the Jews in the Diaspora, both to the law of the state where they are subjects and to the law of the Torah, in which they believe. Mendelssohn gives Jesus's answer to this question:

Adapt yourselves to the morals and the constitution of the land to which you have been removed; but hold fast to the religion of your fathers too. Bear both burdens as well as you can! It is true that on the one hand the burden of civil life is made heavier for you because of the religion to which you remain faithful, and, on the other hand, the climate and the times make the observance of your religious laws in some respects more irksome than they are. Nevertheless persevere; remain unflinchingly at the post which Providence assigned to you, and endure everything that happens to you as your lawgiver foretold long ago.⁸

However, the question is deeper. Mendelssohn relates to the questions raised by Professor Johann David Michaelis, who doubted that it was possible for the enemies of Christianity to be enlightened humans, but was prepared to consider according certain rights to the Jews. He also relates to the liberal German intellectual Christian Dohm, who proposed in his book *Ueber die Bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden* [On the Civil Improvement of the Jews] changing the attitude of the authorities toward them, to recognize them as human beings and to allow them to become citizens, so that they could improve their morality and their physical condition and contribute to society. As impediments he

⁷ Ibid., 133.

⁸ Ibid.

presented, on the one hand, the poor status of the Jews and their low ethical level—for in Dohm's opinion they were cheaters and thieves—and, on the other hand, the contradiction between the loyalty to the state demanded of a German citizen and the aspiration of the Jews to return to the Land of Israel and establish their own sovereign state there.

Regarding the first problem, Mendelssohn counsels caution making comparisons with the rest of the citizens, both because one must take into account the more serious ethical sins of which the Jews are not guilty, and because the comparison must be made only between merchants and peddlers, and not with the entire population. Moreover, one must remember that the Jew chooses this profession because of poverty and need and not by free will. Indeed, among the Jews there are many receivers of stolen goods, but most of them change their ways as soon as they have made enough money to purchase the right of protection.⁹

Regarding the contradiction of dual loyalty, Mendelssohn writes:

The hoped-for return to Palestine, which troubles Herr M. [Michaelis] so much, has no influence on our conduct as citizens. This is confirmed by experience wherever Jews are tolerated. In part, human nature accounts for it—only the enthusiast would not love the soil on which he thrives. And he who holds contradictory religious opinions reserves them for church and prayer. In part, also, the precaution of our sages accounts for it—the Talmud forbids us even to think of a return [to Palestine] by force [i.e., to attempt Redemption through human effort]. Without the miracles and signs mentioned in the Scripture, we must not take the smallest step in the direction of forcing a return and a restoration of our nation. The Sages expressed this prohibition in a somewhat mystical yet captivating way, using the verses from the Song of Songs (Song of Songs, 2:7 and 3:5): I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, By the gazelles, and by the hinds of the field, That you stir not up, nor awake love, Till it please.10

⁹ Cited in Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds., *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History* (Oxford, 1995), 48. On the attitudes of Dohm and Michaelis and Mendelssohn's response, see Katz, *Hayetsia*, 61-72, 92-95.

¹⁰ Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, The Jew in the Modern World, 48-49. Interestingly, in 1770 Mendelssohn corresponded with the Baron von Lynar, who presented himself

Settling in the Land of Israel is a matter for the end of days. It is utopian and miraculous, neutralized and thus removed from real history, and its place in the present time is only in synagogues and not in the real world. In the real world, the Three Oaths remain in force, forbidding any active measure to bring on the end and achieve actual settlement in the Land of Israel.¹¹

as an anonymous admirer, and he asked Mendelssohn's opinion about the idea of establishing a Jewish state in the Land of Israel. Mendelssohn rejected the proposal with cautious diplomatic courtesy—without entering into a theological or ideological dispute—with practical arguments regarding character traits that the Jews had acquired during thousands of years of exile and suffering, giving rise to a passivity and lack of energy, the dispersal of the Jews and the lack of unity among them, and the huge investment that would be required, and the political situation that was necessary but impossible. See "Letter to 'a Man of Rank'" in Moses Mendelssohn: Writings on Judaism, Christianity, and the Bible, ed. M. Gottlieb (Waltham, MA, 2011), 37-38. On Mendelssohn's a priori neutralizing approach, on the one hand, and on his response to the baron's proposal, on the other, see Ravitzky, Hagets, 24-25. Ravitzky does not decide what Mendelssohn's "real" attitude was, but in any event he presents it as an ideology of passivity. While it is possible that Mendelssohn's answer to the arguments of the Gentiles was apologetic, in my opinion his answer to the baron showed cautious, practical diplomacy, appropriate to a practical proposal from a practical man. Mendelssohn's reply to Michaelis is ideological, and represents his deep opinion, which was passive from the start. W. Z. Harvey, "Moshe Mendelssohn 'Al Erets-Yisrael," in Erets Yisrael Bahagut Hayehudit Ba'et Hehadasha, ed. A Ravitzky (Jerusalem, 1998), 301-12, presents both positions in detail and reaches the logical conclusion that his real opinion was practical and not neutralizing. The argument is that in a polemical situation you are likely to employ apologetics. In my opinion, it is difficult to accuse Mendelssohn, the straight-laced rationalist, of such apologetics. Another source on the subject, which Harvey himself cites on 309-10, is his commentary, Habeur, on Lev. 26:39, which fits in with the neutralizing position of awaiting a miracle. Harvey himself explains this passage in that way. Interestingly, Harvey regards the printing of Mendelssohn's paraphrase of "Tsion Halo Tishali" ["Zion, Will You Not Ask," a hymn by Judah Halevi] in a prospectus for *Habeur*, as a demonstration of Mendelssohn's practical position that the final step of rehabilitating the nation within history will be the establishment of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel. M. R. Niehoff, "Targumo Shel Moshe Mendelssohn Le'Tsion Halo Tishali' Shel R. Yehuda Halevi," in Erets Yisrael Bahagut Hayehudit Ba'et Hehadasha, 313-25, analyzes the paraphrase in detail and in depth, proving that the absolute neutralization of the Land of Israel is conspicuous throughout the poem. Harvey himself, who seems to disagree with Niehoff (and me), drew Niehoff's attention to the poem and reviewed her article before it was published. See also Katz, Hayetsia, 66, who tends toward neutralization.

11 This fits in with Ravitzky's model regarding the Three Oaths as a seismograph, according to which every time real traces of the land emerge, the oaths appear (see

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first time that the motif of the three oaths emerges from the inner Jewish dialogue between those in favor of immigration and those opposed to it, and serves as an argument for Jewish loyalty in a dispute with non-Jews. Mendelssohn concludes his remarks by advocating the universal principle of separation of religion and state: "I think, moreover, the laws should not take into account personal convictions at all. Laws should take their inevitable course, proscribing whatever is not beneficial to the general good. When personal convictions conflict with the laws it is up to the individual to resolve this problem on his own. If then the fatherland is to be defended, everybody who is called upon to do so must comply. In such cases, men usually know how to modify their convictions and to adjust them to their civic duty." ¹²

Because reason is a constant factor, which does not change in the course of history, Mendelssohn does not accept Lessing's position regarding progress and the education of mankind throughout history. Lessing's view enables him to argue that Christianity succeeded Judaism and therefore is superior to it and represents an advanced stage in the education of mankind. Mendelssohn rejects the thesis of progress, so he can deny this argument.¹³ According to him, examination of human history refutes the theory:

Progress is for the individual man, who is destined by Providence to spend part of his eternity here on earth. Everyone goes through life in his own way.... But it does not seem to have been the purpose of Providence that mankind as a whole advance steadily here below and perfect itself in the course of time. This, at least, is not so well settled nor by any means so necessary for the vindication of God's Providence as one is in the habit of thinking.... As far as the human race as a whole is concerned, you will find no steady progress in its development that brings it ever closer to perfection. Rather do we see the human race in its totality slightly oscillate; it never took a few steps forward without soon afterwards, and with redoubled speed, sliding

Haqets, 280). Of course, Chajes, Hirsch, and Luzzatto, who also bring up the argument about the oaths, also fit into this model.

¹² Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, The Jew in the Modern World, 49.

¹³ See E. Schweid, Bein Ortodogsia Lehumanism Dati (Jerusalem, 1977), 136-38; Feiner, Haskala, 67-68.

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