

Reflections on Jewish Women in Eulogies and Sermons of Ottoman Sages in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries

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Abstract

The article is based on sermons and eulogies delivered by preachers in various Jewish communities throughout the Ottoman Empire in the first 200-250 years following the expulsion from Spain, and the integration of the exiles from the Iberian Peninsula in the Ottoman region. Almost all the sages who were the heads of congregations and served as leaders in prayer, teachers and preachers in synagogues, were of Spanish descent, and their statements reflect the Sephardic influence on the Jews of the empire. Sermons and ethical (*musar*) literature, intended to guide and instruct the public about proper religious, social, and familial behavior, show the ambivalent attitude towards women in general, and the disparity between the rabbinic ideal and rabbinic practice. These sources must be viewed as mostly educational; their authors never challenge the traditional roles of women in society. However, they also encourage their community members to respect exemplary women in their families and social circles. The almost impossible image of the Woman of Valor is the focus. Nevertheless, the commentators also point out the merits of women in general, noting that women played an instrumental role in the Exodus from Egypt and other biblical events, and emphasize that women support Torah study, contribute to synagogues and charities.

Following the expulsion from Spain in 1492, the integration of the exiles from the Iberian Peninsula side by side, and within, Jewish communities in Ottoman lands, was remarkable. Later, Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin became the majority, and their demographic and cultural dominance was noticeable as they became community leaders and rabbis. Most of the sages who were the heads of communities and served as leaders, teachers and preachers were of Spanish descent, and their impact on Ottoman Jewry was felt in every aspect of life.¹ This article is based on sermons and eulogies delivered by preachers, mostly Sephardic, in various communities throughout the Ottoman Empire in the first 200-250 years after the expulsion. In this pre-modern era *halakhic* traditions and moral norms of conservative Jewish communities were still preserved. Rabbinic leadership and influence were prevalent. As of the middle of the eighteenth-century, times have changed: winds of modernization and secularization affected the Ottoman Empire as a whole, and also challenged rabbinic authority in Jewish centers.

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Sermons and ethical (*musar*) literature were intended to guide and instruct the public about proper religious, social, and familial behavior.² While expounding on Halakhic issues, they also referred to the status and character of women. People gathered to listen to public sermons, as described by Rabbi Zacharia Alzahari, who visited Safed in the sixteenth century. He mentioned the many synagogues and academies (*batei midrash*) to which the congregations came to hear preachers, “preaching in different ways.”³ Due to their educational purposes women were not excluded, and part of them at least, could listen to the lectures in the synagogues from their seats at the women's section (*ezrat nashim*).

A significant part of the sermons quoted herewith were delivered as eulogies for notable women, mothers and close female relatives of the speakers, and show the ambivalent attitude towards women in general, and the disparity between the rabbinic ideal and practice. These sources should be viewed as mostly educational; their authors never challenge the traditional roles of women in society. However, they also encourage their community members to respect exemplary women in their families and social circles.⁴

A Woman of Valor

The theme of the Woman of Valor (*Eshet Hayil*, Proverbs 31:11-31), which enumerates the qualities and the duties of the ideal wife and mother, is one of the most popular texts used by preachers regarding women in general and their mothers in particular.⁵ From the Middle Ages on, there are several testimonies to the custom of reciting the verses of Woman of Valor at women's funerals.⁶ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it was customary to deliver a sermon in honor of the deceased woman and her family, and to interpret this popular text in various ways.⁷

In a eulogy for his mother, delivered by the preacher Rabbi Josef Alzayag, one of the sages of Safed in the sixteenth century, he spoke of the proper qualities of an ideal woman: unlike most women, who are brainless, mean, greedy and quarrelsome, ideal women are clever, generous, and display a gentle disposition. His mother, of course, was different than most women, and excelled in her wisdom, modesty, generosity, and genteelness.⁸ The mother of

Rabbi Moshe Almosnino of Salonika, who died in 1575, also differed from other women, as expressed in his eulogy:

I come today to praise her virtues and superiority...by illustrating some verses from "Woman of Valour," in which I will shed light on her qualities, because she was indeed an ideal woman, and all that is written there about the Woman of Valour applies to her in all honesty (Almosnino, *Me'ametz Ko'ah*, Sermon 11, 97a-100a).

As stated by Rabbi Israel Najara, the renowned poet who lived in Safed and Damascus (1550-1625), the title A Woman of Valor includes all its merits,⁹ and all who interpret the verses of Woman of Valor in their sermons and eulogies admire women who adhere to the endorsed values of this hymn. However, very few women are likely to possess all the qualities listed in the Book of Proverbs, as indeed, is written in the first verse: "A woman of valor, who can find? For her price is far beyond pearls" (Prov. 31:11).¹⁰ Therefore, such sermons, delivered in a synagogue or over a woman's grave, show the ambivalence many sages held regarding the female sex. Speaking about women in general, they often referred to females as lightheaded by nature, lacking the mental capacity to understand things and are not emotionally composed. They also stressed their meanness, in contrast to the generosity of *Eshet Hayil*. Some argued that women's role is to serve their husband and sons.¹¹ Rabbi Aharon Hacoen Perahia of Salonika (~1627-1697), and Rabbi Yaakov Khuli of Jerusalem (1689-1732), in the seventeenth century, as well as others, believed that "women's only virtue is to bring forth worthy offspring and righteous and pious sons."¹² Several sages cited the Talmudic saying "A woman is a shapeless lump and concludes a covenant only with him [the husband] who transforms her into a [useful] vessel" (BT Sanhedrin, 22b).¹³ Rabbi Israel Benveniste of Izmir (1644-1719), as well as other scholars, thought that women were created only in order to release men from daily chores, so that they could study the Torah.¹⁴ But, when referring to their own mothers, or close female acquaintances, they described them with great admiration and love. Preachers very often mentioned not only the deceased woman's virtues and obligations, but also her warm and trusting relationship with her husband and sons, their love and appreciation for her.¹⁵ Thus, for instance, Rabbi Israel Najara expressed great pain and sorrow upon his

beloved mother's death. Like others, he invoked the verses of Woman of Valor to describe his mother's special and close relationship with his father, and idealized her five unique qualities, lacking in other women:

1. She was perfect in her virtues, which were appreciated by her husband, and this made them a perfect couple;

2. She was perfect in keeping and saving money, so that her husband completely trusted her, and could rest assured that she would not spend his money and property;

3. She was perfect in performing the expected services for her husband, even though she had maids to help her;

4. She was perfect in doing handworks, such as weaving wool, and was always busy, even at night, when her husband did not need her service (meaning, sexually).

5. And above all, his mother was perfect in her fear of God, and didn't care excessively about outward appearances.¹⁶

Beauty is temporary, says Najara,¹⁷ relating of course, to the final verse of Woman of Valor: "Grace is deceitful and beauty is vain; a God-fearing woman, she should be praised."

Female Beauty

The subject of female beauty, and the onset of change of life and the fading of beauty, occupied many preachers, and they invoked the stories of the biblical matriarchs, such as Rachel, of whom it was said that she was pretty and shapely, of Rebecca, who was good-looking, and Sarah, whose youth - as well as her beauty - were restored to her and she became pregnant when she was ninety years old. It was said of Sarah, who died at the age of 127, that when she was 100, she was as beautiful as if she was twenty; when she was twenty, it was as if she was innocent like a seven-year-old child; and Rabbi Jacob Khuli, in his commentary on the Book of Genesis, writes: "[...] and Sarai was a beauty, despite her old age, and all the queens of the world came to visit her and gaze upon her

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face.”¹⁸ These and other similar descriptions contradict the adage: “Grace is deceitful and beauty is vain.” Why then is the beauty of these women emphasized?

The preacher Rabbi Joseph David of Salonika explains, there are certain women of whom it is said that they were beautiful precisely in order to emphasize their righteousness. It is more difficult for a beautiful woman to cope with the evil inclination, and beautiful women should be praised even more for their piety *despite* temptations.¹⁹ This explanation is based on the emphasis placed in the second half of this biblical verse on the word ‘she.’ It says, “a God-fearing woman, *she* should be praised,” meaning that she is in a minority, one of the few, only *she* and no other. A beautiful *and* God-fearing woman merits praise since, despite being beautiful and subject to temptation, she nevertheless upholds her modesty, and only *she* is a true Woman of Valor. Likewise, one deduces from his words that there is no need to commend a woman who is not especially attractive, even if she is God-fearing, for the temptations that she encounters are not as great as those that the beautiful biblical matriarchs, and their like, had to deal with. The commentators offer other explanations, often quite tortuous, for the expression “beauty is vain,” and Rabbi Joseph David himself, in another sermon, says that if people say that a woman is pretty, it is a sign that they have seen her, and that she is not necessarily modest, for she displays herself to people. In this case, her grace and beauty are no more than deceptions. And if the speakers did not see her with their own eyes – it is a sign that they are lying, for how do they know that she is attractive? Thus – “beauty is vain.”²⁰

Others explain that the phrase refers to women who adorn themselves with jewelry, and are not naturally beautiful, therefore their beauty is deceitful. The same applies to women who use makeup and adorn their faces to look prettier. It is false beauty because the moment the makeup wears off, their charm and beauty disappear. On the other hand, there are righteous women who were endowed by the Almighty with “a thread of grace” (*hut shel hen*), even if they are not especially beautiful, in order that they will be loved by their husbands. The preachers in this case distinguish between God-given beauty, and human-made beauty.²¹

Rabbi Eliyahu Hacoen (~1645-1729), in his sermons and his book of ethics, deals with the subject and has quite a few explanations for the verse. He even gives advice to men who desire a woman solely for her beauty; these men should visualize how the beautiful woman whom they desire will look in old age, when the wrinkles multiply, and her face looks like a monkey's face. They might change their mind then. On the other hand, a man whose wife has grown old and whose face changed, should imagine her as she looked in her youth. This way – by remembering her previous beauty - she will not look as bad in his eyes, and he will not turn to other women.²²

Women and Heavenly Life

Another subject regularly raised by the preaching scholars concerns the right of women to the afterlife. Since women are exempt from many commandments and from Torah study, it seems they cannot attain the perfection necessary to be granted a place in heaven. Women's instrumental role in the Exodus from Egypt is mentioned in order to draw attention to women's merits and rights.²³ And another Talmudic saying is quoted frequently: “Greater is the promise made by the Holy One, blessed be He, to the women than to the men, as it is said “Complacent women, rise, harken to my voice, confident daughters, bend your ears to my speech (Isaiah 32:9)”²⁴ Rav Hiyya, in the third century CE, explained this extraordinary promise by saying that women merit rights by making sure that their children go to the synagogue to learn Scriptures, and their husbands go to the house of study (*beth hamidrash*) to learn Mishnah (BT *Berachot*, 17a). However, this Talmudic paragraph raised many debates among sixteenth and seventeenth centuries scholars. Rabbi Moshe Amarillo of Salonika, for instance, did not agree with Rav Hiyya's commentary. He felt that this was excessive, that by no means did women deserve more than men, and voiced his reservations: the virtues of righteous women are great, and indeed it was said that their promise was greater than a man's,

but that they should be *worthier* than the scholar himself, we have not heard of this... If she is credited with the studies of her husband and her sons, she has a part together *with* her husband, not above him!²⁵

Likely, the words of Rabbi Moshe Amarillo convey the feelings of many of his colleagues who try, in different ways, to justify Talmudic and biblical expressions that grant a type of equal rights to women. This equation does not appear to be common, and certainly does not apply to all women. Indeed, among the questions raised was why the Talmudic saying referred to women in general, for not all women were privileged to have husbands and sons who studied Torah. And what about women who never married? Were they promised as well? Are they worthy – if at all – of an afterlife? Here too there are many commentaries. Rabbi Haim Angel explains that if they do not have husbands and sons who study Torah, it is enough that they worry and regret this, and say to themselves: if only I had sons and a husband who study, so that through them I would deserve the afterlife! Thus, by their good intentions, they deserve a reward that is greater than that of men.²⁶

The preachers also pondered over the reason for the biblical phrases “complacent women” and “confident daughters.” Rabbi Hayim Angel explains that the word women is not the same as daughters (*banot*). In the case of a married woman, it is enough that she tells, or hints to her husband to attend the *Beit Midrash*; he will certainly comply, for he is a sensible person. Whereas the word daughters or girls refers to young women or mothers of young sons, who make greater efforts to guide their sons and lead them to the Talmud Torah, despite the fact that they might not wish to study, or pray. Hence, married women, insofar as their husbands are concerned, can be complacent about their life after death, while, in the case of unmarried daughters or young mothers, they are not complacent, but they are confident that in the future their sons will obey them and choose the right path.²⁷ That said, it is only by following the ideal model of A Woman of Valor, serving their husbands and enabling them and their sons to study Torah in this world, that women can ensure a place in the world to come. And women did support their sons' education, as described by Rabbi Moshe Almosnino in his eulogy to his mother:

All that I learned and accomplished in Torah studies was due to her, her intercession and her agility...because while I was small, so many temptations to the many pleasures of the flesh presented themselves...and she, in her splendid supervision and remarkable grace, directed me to engage in the study of Torah, and I owe her a great debt for this.²⁸

Conclusion

While it is true that the almost impossible image of the Woman of Valor is the focus, the commentators also point out the merits of women in general. Many spoke of the feebleness of their bodies and minds, but at the same time they mentioned relevant biblical extraordinary women and events, and emphasized that women support Torah study, help their husbands, contribute to synagogues and charities, and eventually earn rights and future reward.

Evidently, the preacher, using his direct interaction with his listeners, is not only trying to strengthen their faith and impart knowledge, but is teaching proper moral conduct through examples from biblical sources and through examples of the deeds of the women that he is praising. It is noteworthy that all the women that were honored with eulogies and sermons were “mothers of;” they were extolled for being the wife or the widow of, or the daughter of, or even: “a vessel that the important rabbi [so and so] used.”²⁹ All the women that the sages eulogized, and whose deeds they extolled, were distinguished women, daughters of rabbinical families or wealthy men, and they are all noted for their support of the men in their families and for their many charitable deeds, which are often presented in detail.³⁰ Undoubtedly, some of the sermons were pre-ordered by a relative. And it is well noted that only women from respectable and prosperous families could maintain their modesty, guide their sons' education, donate money and support scholars. But, the virtues of the women under discussion serve as an example to all the women in the community, as well as to the husbands and sons listening to the sermons, who are expected to honor their women at home and in public.

Furthermore, most preachers agree that the main role of women, even the highly esteemed, is to ensure that their husbands and sons are free to study Torah. This means that they are charged with many practical responsibilities -- on top of running the household, they must cope with the economic aspects of family life, providing a livelihood, savings, allocation of resources, engaging in various crafts, and other chores – which are mentioned

in A Woman of Valor.³¹ Besides, the hymn also stresses their loyalty to their husbands, which is not to be taken for granted. This loyalty meant that the husband could trust his wife not to deceive him and not to conceal or squander his money. Accordingly, control of the household and the family resources create, to a certain extent, mutual dependency between the husband and wife. Although the honor of the wife and her status depend on her husband and his family, and her concern for him and their children, the husband depends on his wife's loyalty and the knowledge that she will not squander his money. And, if a man was fortunate to find such an ideal woman, he will enjoy longevity.³²

Despite the need for biblical examples and the demand for almost impossible standards on women, the sermons are mostly positive in their treatment of women. The efforts made by women to ensure that their husbands and sons could study were greatly appreciated, and many sons extolled their mothers' support and contribution to their education in their sermons.³³

The words of Rabbi Aaron Hacoheh Perahia, in a eulogy delivered at the death of Mrs. Gentila, the mother of the sage Joseph Hacoheh of Salonika in 1663, aptly conclude this essay:

We see that they [women] were only exempt from all these [commandments] in order to aspire and to be essential to men's perfection ... They raise our sons and save us from sin ... and without them no man will lift a hand or a foot to achieve perfection ... there is no one worthier of such perfection than women! (Perahia, *Bigdei Kehuna*, Sermon 26, 76a)

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Notes:

¹ For some general literature on the subject, see Abitbol, Michel, Yom-Tov Assis, and Galit Hasan-Rokem, eds., *Hispano-Jewish Civilization after 1492* (Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim, 1997); Assis, Yom Tov, “The Jewish World after the Expulsion: From Destruction to Revival,” in Yom Tov Assis and Raquel Ibáñez-Sperber, eds., *Hispania Judaica Bulletin* 8 (2011): 5-17; Benbassa, Esther, and Aron Rodrigue, eds., *Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, Fourteenth to Twentieth Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Levi, Avigdor, *The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1992); Rozen, Minna, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul: The Formative Years, 1453-1566* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2002); Rodrigue, Aron, “The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire,” in Elie Kedourie, ed., *Spain and the Jews* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 162-188; Beinart, Haim, ed., *The Sephardi Legacy* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1992); Lehmann, Matthias B., *Ladino Rabbinic Literature and Ottoman Sephardic Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005); Hacker, Joseph, “The intellectual activity of the Jews of the Ottoman Empire during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in Isadore Twersky and Bernard Septimus, eds., *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MASS and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1987), 96-135; idem, “The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth Century,” in Haim Beinart, ed., *The Sephardi Legacy* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1992), 109-133; Ben-Nach, Yaron, *Jews in the Realm of the Sultans: Ottoman Jewish Society in the Seventeenth Century* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); idem, “Urban Encounters: The Muslim-Jewish Case in the Ottoman Empire,” in Eyal Ginio, and Elie Podeh, eds., *The Ottoman Middle East: Studies in Honor of Amnon Cohen* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 177-197; Ray, Jonathan, *After Expulsion: 1492 and the Making of Sephardic Jewry* (New York and London: NYU Press, 2013); Bornstein-Makovetsky, Leah, “Patterns of the Jewish Family: Characteristics of the Jewish Family in the Communities of Morea and Epirus in the Sixteenth Century,” in Daniel Panzac, ed., *Histoire Economique et Sociale de L' Empire ottoman et de la Turquie 1326-1960* (Paris: Peeters, 1995), 323-329; David, Avraham, “On Jewish Society in Egypt after the Expulsion from Spain,” in Michel Abitbol, Yom-Tov Assis and Galit Hasan-Rokem, eds., *Hispano-Jewish Civilization after 1492* (Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim, 1997), 59-77.

² Saperstein, Mark, *Jewish Preaching 1200-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Lehmann, *Ladino*; Regev, Shaul, *Oral and Written Sermons in the Middle Ages* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass Ltd., 2010); idem, “Introduction,” in Israel Najara, *Miqve Israel*, ed. Shaul Regev (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2004), 38-47 (also for more references).

³ Al-Dahri, Zacharia, *Seffer Hammusar*, ed. Yehuda Ratzaby (Jerusalem: Merkaz Ben Zvi, 1965), Chapter 6, 116. See also Hacohen, Eliyahu, *Shevet Musar* (Istanbul, 1712), Chapter 27, 86a, 87a.

⁴ For references on Jewish families and women's status during the period, see Rozen, *A History*, 99-196; idem, *The Jewish Community of Jerusalem in the Seventeenth Century* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1984), 239-251; Lamdan, Ruth, *A Separate People: Jewish Women in Palestine, Syria and Egypt in the Sixteenth Century* (Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill, 2000); idem, "Jewish Polygamy in Palestine and Egypt in the Generations following the Expulsion from Spain," in *Daniel Carpi Jubilee Volume*, eds. Dina Porat et al. (Tel-Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1996), 873-89; Bornstein-Makovetsky, Leah, *A City of Sages and Merchants: The Community of Aleppo during the Years 1492-1800* (Israel: Ariel University, 2012), 215-256; Littman, Michael, "The Jewish Family in Egypt," in *The Jews in Ottoman Egypt*, ed. Jacob M. Landau (Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim, 1988), 217-244; Rivlin, Bracha, "The History of the Jewish Family in Greece in the 16th-17th Centuries," in *Hispano-Jewish Civilization after 1492*, eds. Michel Abitbul et al. (Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim, 1997), 79-104.

⁵ Levine, Yael, *Sermons on the theme of Woman of Valour*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Bar Ilan University (Ramat Gan, 1992), esp. 157-165; Levine, Yael, "Eshet Hayil", in Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, eds., *Encyclopedia Judaica* 2nd ed., vol. 6 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 505; Regev, Shaul, "Woman of Valour: Women's Image and Status in the Jewish Philosophy of the Sixteenth Century," in *Mahbarot Liyehudit, Studies Presented to Prof. Judith Dishon*, eds. Ephraim Hazan and Shmuel Refael (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2012), 265-288; Lamdan, Ruth, "Mothers and Children as Seen by Sixteenth-Century Rabbis in the Ottoman Empire," in *Sephardi Family Life in the Early Modern Diaspora*, ed. Julia R. Lieberman (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 81-82; Weinstein, Roni, "Abraham Yagel Galico's Commentary on Woman of Valor: Commenting on Women, Family and Civility," in *Tov Elem: Essays in honor of Robert Bonfil*, eds. Elisheva Baumgarten et al., 118-121 (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2011).

⁶ Levine, *Sermons*, 157-165.

⁷ See, for instance, Hazan, Rafael Joseph, *Ma'arkhei Lev* (Salonika, 1821), Sermon 88, 202b; Almosnino, Moses, *Me'ametz Ko'ah* (Venice, 1588), Sermon 11, 99b-107a; Sermon 27, 215b-216a; Najara, Israel, *Miqve Israel* (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2004), Sermon 38, 576-90; Nahmias, Eliezer, *Hon Rav* (Salonika, 1777), First Sermon on the Book of Ruth, 176a-178a.

⁸ Amsterdam, Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana. Ms. 1807 C 29, pp. 361b-362a (quoted in Lamdan, *A Separate People*, 13; idem., "Mothers and Children," 77).

⁹ Najara, *Miqve Israel*, Sermon 38, 579. See also Almosnino, *Me'ametz Ko'ah*, Sermon 11, 99b-100a.

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- ¹⁰ On the rarity of women of valor see, for instance, David, Joseph, *Yikra Deshakhvei* (Salonika, 1774), Sermons 37, 38.
- ¹¹ Hacoen, Eliyahu, *Midrash Eliyahu* (Tshernovitch, 1864), Sermon 10, 60a, 63b; Sermon 11, 66a-68a; Matalon, Yaakov, *She'erit Yaakov* (Salonika, 1697), Sermon 6, 34b; Hazan, *Ma'arkhei Lev*, Sermon 18, 36a-b; Benveniste, Israel, *Beit Israel* (Istanbul, 1677), Sermon 48, 99a; Benveniste, Yehoshua, *Oznei Yehoshua* (Istanbul, 1677), Sermon 66, 107a; Haviv, Moshe, *Derashot Maharam Haviv* (Jerusalem, 1999), Sermon on the Portion *Vayerah*, 33-4.
- ¹² Perahia, Aharon Hacoen, *Bigdei Kehuna* (Salonika, 1753), Sermon 26, 76a; Khuli, Jacob, *Me'am Loez* (Jerusalem, 1967), 95-96. See also Meyuhas Ginio, Alisa, "The Perception of Jewish Women in Rabbi Ya'akov Khuli's *Me'am Lo'ez*," *Journal of Sefardic Studies* no. 1 (2013). <http://sefarad-studies.org/contents.html>
- ¹³ Ben Zimra, David, *She'elot uteshuvot* (Warsaw, 1882), vol. 3, no. 408 [1251]. See also Perahia, *Bigdei Kehuna*, Sermon 24, 70a.
- ¹⁴ Benveniste Israel, *Beit Israel*, 89b. See also Almosnino, *Me'amez Ko'ah*, Sermon 3, 21b-22a; Sermon 11, 104b; Hacoen, *Midrash Eliyahu*, chapter 10, 63b; Regev, *Woman of Valour*, 282-283. On women's stereotypes in Eastern European literature see Rosman, Moshe, "Stereotypes and Prejudices about Early Modern Women," in *A Touch of Grace... Presented to Chava Turniansky*, eds. Israel Bartal et al. (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2013), 351-358.
- ¹⁵ Lamdan, "Mothers and Children," 81-83.
- ¹⁶ Najara, *Miqve Israel*, Sermon 23. Likewise, a sermon by Refael Yossef Hazan (end of 18th century) about his mother (*Ma'arkhei Lev*, Sermon 18), and upon the passing of his beloved wife (Sermon 27).
- ¹⁷ Najara, *Miqve Israel*, Sermon 38, 582.
- ¹⁸ Khuli, *Me'am Loez*, Portion *Lekh Lekha*, 16:1-5, 321.
- ¹⁹ David, *Yikra Deshakhvei*, Sermon 45; Hacoen, *Midrash Eliyahu*, Sermon 11, 69a-b. See also Benveniste Israel, *Beit Israel*, Sermon 47, 97b.
- ²⁰ David, *Yikra Deshakhvei*, Sermon 87, 170a. Also, Sermon 74.
- ²¹ Angel, Hayim, *Sipur Hahayim* (Salonika, 1761), Sermon 9, 15b. "A thread of grace was drawn about her" is mentioned in the Talmud relating to Esther (BT, *Megila*, 13a). See also: Haviv, *Derashot Maharam Haviv*, Second Sermon on the Portion Nasoh, 354; Hacoen, *Midrash Eliyahu*, Sermon 10, 61a; Sermon 11, 65a.

²² Hacothen, *Midrash Eliyahu*, Sermon 10, 60a-b; idem, *Shevet Musar*, Chapter 4, 12a (see cit.

Lehmann, Ladino, 123); Chapter 16, 52a.

²³ Referring to the words of Rabbi Akiva: “By the merit of righteous women of the generation, our forefathers were redeemed from Egypt” (BT, *Sotah*, 11b). For instance: Hacothen, *Midrash Eliyahu*, Sermon 11, 70a; Perahia, *Bigdei Kehuna*, Sermon 26; Amarillo Shelomo, *Pnei Shelomo* (Salonika, 1717), Sermon 24, 46a-47b.

²⁴ BT, *Berakhot*, 17a. For instance: Hazan, *Ma’arkhei Lev*, Sermon 18, 36a-b, 38b. Almosnino, *Me’ametz Ko’ah*, Sermon 11, 99a.

²⁵ Amarillo Moshe, *Yad Moshe* (Salonika, 1752), Second Sermon on the Portion of *Lekh Lekha*, 8a-9b. See also Perahia, *Bigdei Kehuna*, Sermon 32, 96b-97a: “at most we can say that they are equal in their rewards in the world to come, but to say that their rewards will be greater than that of men – that is strange;” *Derashot Rabbanei Mitsrayim*, ed. Yehiel Buhbut (Jerusalem: Otzrot Hageonim, 2000), 18-20.

²⁶ Angel, *Sipur Hahayim*, Sermon 9, 14a.

²⁷ Ibid., 14b.

²⁸ Almosnino, *Me’ametz Ko’ah*, Sermon 11, 97a (cited Lamdan, “Mothers and children,” 81-82).

²⁹ Perahia, *Bigdei Kehuna*, Sermon 23, 68a; Sermon 24, 70a (see ref. 13 above).

³⁰ For example, the book of sermons and eulogies of Rabbi Yossef David of Salonika, includes 130 sermons, 37 of which are devoted to women, many of whom are relatives and close acquaintances. Only one, the righteous Mrs. Mazal Tov, is mentioned with no reference to any member of her family (*Yikra Deshakhvei*, Sermon 77, 156b). This is manifested not only in sermons and eulogies but also in gravestone inscriptions (which are not dealt here). Suffice it to state that out of thousands of inscriptions in the cemetery of Salonika, between the years 1500-1750, only 210 headstones for women were found, and of these, only 6 make no mention of a male family member (and there are 4 more headstones of converts who seemed to have no family in the Jewish community). The inscriptions were published by Emmanuel, Isaac S., *Precious Stones of the Jews of Salonica*, vol 1 (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1963).

³¹ On Jewish women’s participation in economic life see, Lamdan Ruth, “Jewish Women as Providers in the Generations following the Expulsion from Spain,” *Nashim* 13 (Spring 2007); idem, *A Separate People*, 114-126. Most women who were doing business outside their home were of middle and lower classes.

³² As concluded by Rabbi Eliezer Nahmias (*Hon Rav*, First Sermon on the Book of Ruth, 176a-178a).

³³ Perahia, *Bigdei Kehuna*, Sermon 26 (also Perahia's Sermon 24); Eliyau de Vidas, *Reshit Hokhma* (Venice, 1579), 294b; Hazan, *Ma'arkhei Lev*, Sermon 18; David, *Yikra Deshakhvei*, Sermons 35, 38; Shemuel Ben Siid, *Ner Hashem* (Jerusalem, 2014), 279, 584; Benvenist Israel, *Beit Israel*, Sermons 35, 36.