

JEWISH STUDIES  
AT THE TURN OF  
THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

*Proceedings of the 6th EAJS Congress*

*Toledo, July 1998*

*Volume I: Biblical, Rabbinical, and Medieval Studies*

EDITED BY

JUDIT TARGARONA BORRÁS

AND

ANGEL SÁENZ-BADILLOS

VOLUME ONE



BRILL  
LEIDEN · BOSTON · KÖLN  
1999

## THREE VIEWS REGARDING THE GENDER OF BIBLICAL NOUNS IN THE WRITINGS OF MEDIEVAL HEBREW GRAMMARIANS

LUBA CHARLAP

Bar-Ilan University, Israel

In this article I would like to present three views regarding the gender of nouns found among some of the grammarians of the Middle Ages. We named these approaches: the accepted grammatical approach, the "systemic-morphemic" approach and the "ungrammatical" approach.

As it is known, in the Hebrew language, each noun—whether the name of a living thing, inanimate object or abstract noun—is defined by gender, "masculine" or "feminine" (or both, in some cases).

It is generally thought that the definition of gender requires a morphological label.<sup>1</sup> The masculine singular has no grammatical sign (morphological label  $\emptyset$ ). The feminine singular is the suffix *kamatz*, *hey*, *taph*, *segol*, *taph*; *patach*, *taph*; *kamatz*, *taph* [*ayala* (doe), *bat* (daughter), *ayelet* (gazelle), *shif'at* (company), *nachalat* (heritage)].<sup>2</sup> The label for the masculine plural noun is the suffix *yod*, *mem* [*elim*], and the label for the feminine plural is the suffix *vav*, *taph* [*eilot*]. This system has been perfectly preserved in the adjectives and participles [*tov*, *tova*, *tovim*, *tovo*], but in the rest of the nouns, as it is well-known, the situation is not at all systematic: among singular nouns are those masculine singular nouns with the suffix *kamatz*, *hey* [*layla*], and feminine nouns with no grammatical indication whatsoever, as in *em* (mother), *aton* (ass, donkey), *even* (stone), *eretx* (land). There are masculine nouns which in the plural end with *vav*, *taph*, such as *avot* (fathers), and the opposite, feminine nouns which in the plural end with *yod*, *mem*, such as *nashim* (women), *pilegshim* (concubines).

It is known that, as early as Rabbinic time, Rabbinic literature devoted considerable attention to the subject of the gender of nouns: both to clarifying the definition of Biblical nouns and to noting differences of gender between Biblical and Rabbinic language. These considerations arose in Talmudic disputes as in the example of the discussion in Bavli *Kidushin* 2, 2, on the gender of *derech* (way, means), following the Mishnaic saying: "A woman is acquired by three means" (see *ibid.*, and see also *Tosafot*, *ibid.*). In the Middle Ages, Hebrew language grammarians also dealt with this subject, heeding these features and attempting to elucidate a method, formulate rules and explain the exceptions.

<sup>1</sup> See Gesenius, W. 1910. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Ed. E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, London 222–224, and see the extensive survey and inter-linguistic comparison by Ch. Rabin, and the meanings of grammatical forms in Biblical and modern language, Jerusalem, 1971, 65–71.

<sup>2</sup> Other more rare suffixes: *kamatz-aleph* (according Aramaic), *segol-bei*, *kamatz-bei* (without the tone), *patach-yod* (*ibid.*, 224).

We have attempted to examine their opinions on this subject. In our research, we found the subject covered by the Andalusian school, from the inception of Andalusian grammar until its twelfth century constituents: Dunash (Rabbi Adonim, Dunash vs. Sa'adia), Yonah Ibn Janach, Moshe Hakkohen Ibn Gikatilia and Abraham Ibn Ezra, and also by later grammarians (some of them "Ashkenazi") that we shall mention later on.

We will begin with the accepted grammatical approach, examining how it is expressed by the medieval grammarians.

### *The Accepted Grammatical Approach*

Grammarians of this school regard defining the gender of nouns as a grammatical phenomenon. As is true of all areas of grammar, there are rules with many exceptions that are inseparable from the rule and from the phenomenon.

This is the dominant stream among grammarians of the middle ages. Among those that I examined, this school is represented by Rabbi Adonim (Dunash vs. Rav Sa'adia), Moshe Hakkohen Ibn Gikatilia and Yonah Ibn Janach, while it is implicit in the works of Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra.

Dunash (*Responsa to Rav Sa'adia HaGaon*, 150) commented on the forms of feminine gender which lack the feminine suffix, as in the name *Tzor* (Tyre), found in Ezekiel (26, 4) in a feminine form, and the forms found in both masculine and feminine genders, such as *eretx* (land), *eish* (fire), *pa'am* (time), *seb* (lamb), and forenames *Israel* and *Kobelet*. From the fact that he notes the exceptions in which there are two gender definitions, he seems to think that each noun usually has a specific gender definition.<sup>3</sup>

Rabbi Yonah Ibn Janach wrote comprehensively and in utmost detail about the subject of gender (in four chapters in *Harikma*,<sup>4</sup> 39 (8) to 42 (41). His starting point is the assumption that the masculine gender is the foundation, the basis, and the feminine gender is the addition (*Harikma*, 38 (37), 377). He presented several examples of nouns without feminine suffixes, which appear in both masculine and feminine gender, for example, *eretx* (earth), *eish* (fire), *ruach* (wind, breath), *shemesb* (sun). In his opinion, these nouns are not truly feminine despite their feminine usage; this is the reason they appear also in masculine form (*Harikma*, 39 (38), 385).<sup>5</sup>

As for the plural form—the masculine plural suffix is *yod, mem*. However, if the masculine noun does not describe a living entity, it may also be found in the plural in feminine form with the suffix *vav, tapb*, e.g. *har* (mountain) – *barim, barot, ya'ar* (forest) – *ye'arim, ye'arot* (*Harikma*, 39 (38), 380).<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the

feminine plural suff referring to a pair) (hands), *einayim* (e (*Harikma*, 39 (38), 3

Rabbi Moshe I *Attatbkir U'attanitb* according to the al words, and in Allo aspect (see Allony, 1

The fragments a on a singular femin which he defines as the word *ach* (heart (universe). There ar *ov* (wine-skins – Jo masculine form (Ez 40, 41; Allony, 55). morpheme *yod, mem* also a reconstructio forms (*abalim* [aloe *abalim* and *abalot* is e

Examination of a representative of following Ibn Janac interpretation of La masculine for both also generalizes the feminine form ends at its end, as *ish* ( whereas "the femi (woman) or *esbet y'fi*

Nonetheless, h without the suffix feminine forms. Ex (mouth), *regel* (leg).

(*Harikma*, 387, note and feminine membe

7 Rabbi Moshe Ibn G anthology by P. Koh 1970, 59–66. Ibn I (*Magna'im*, 17, 2). Si Material on the Hist *JQR* n.s. 16, 237 ff. 1 observes, we have c 1949.

8 This quotation and Heidenheim's editio

<sup>3</sup> See also his remarks on grammatical gender incongruency, *ibid.*, paragraph 150.

<sup>4</sup> All the references will be brought from *Sefar Harikma*. Wilensky-Tene edition. Jerusalem 1964.

<sup>5</sup> An additional group of nouns which appear in masculine and feminine forms are the collective nouns, as *tzon* (sheep), *bakar* (cows).

<sup>6</sup> Despite the substantial emphasis Ibn Janach places on the idea that nouns found in both masculine and feminine gender are names of inanimate objects, he also lists (Ibn Janach, *Harikma* 41 [40], p. 387) animals that are designated both masculine and feminine: *gamal* (camel), *chazir* (pig), *arnet* (hare), *dag* (fish), *arbeh* (locust), *tor* (turtledove) and *tzippor* (bird). Wilensky notes

feminine plural suffix is *vav, taph*, but there are feminine plural forms (or plurals referring to a pair) with the suffix *yod, mem*. Examples of this are: *yadayim* (hands), *einayim* (eyes), *pa'amayim* (twice), *raglayim* (legs) or *regalim* (times) (*Harikma*, 39 (38), 380).

Rabbi Moshe Ibn Gikatilia devoted an entire book to this subject: *Kitab Attahkir U'attanith*<sup>7</sup> is organized as a dictionary, with the words arranged according to the alphabet (not according to roots). It includes only Biblical words, and in Allony's opinion, only those words that contain an exceptional aspect (see Allony, *Sinai* 24, 1949, 36).

The fragments available today seem to indicate that Ibn Gikatilia comments on a singular feminine that lacks the final feminine morpheme, as in *ozen* (ear), which he defines as feminine by usage rather than form. He relates similarly to the word *ach* (hearth - Jer 36,22) as well and to *shemesh* (sun), *shen* (tooth), *tevel* (universe). There are masculine plural words with the morpheme *vav, taph*, as in *ov* (wine-skins - Job 32, 19; Allony, 47); or *shulchan* (table), which appears in masculine form (Ez 41,22), while the plural appears in feminine gender (Ezekiel 40, 41; Allony, 55). The opposite also occurs: feminine plural words with the morpheme *yod, mem*, such as *even* (stone), and *l'eina* (fig) (Allony, 62). There is also a reconstruction of one singular form while the plural is found in two forms (*abalim* [aloe-wood trees], in which the reconstructed singular form of *abalim* and *abalot* is *abala*—Allony, 46).

Examination of Ibn Ezra's treatment of the subject indicates he is definitely a representative of the accepted grammatical approach. Ibn Ezra, apparently following Ibn Janach, thought that the masculine singular form is the basis (his interpretation of Lev 11, 3: "It is the way of the holy language to employ the masculine for both genders, as the feminine is included in the masculine"). He also generalizes that the masculine singular form lacks a suffix, and that the feminine form ends with *hei* or *taph*: "The masculine singular comes with no sign at its end, as *ish* (man), and *geber* (man) and *eved* (slave)" (*Mozna'im*,<sup>8</sup> 33, 1), whereas "the feminine sign at the end (of a word) is *hei* or *taph*, as in *isha* (woman) or *esbet y'fat to'ar* (a beautiful woman)" (*Mozna'im*, 34, 1).

Nonetheless, he finds several groups of exceptions: (1) Biblical nouns without the suffixes *hei* or *taph*, which are found in both masculine and feminine forms. Examples are: *aron* (ark), *eish* (fire), *bayit* (house), *yad* (hand), *peh* (mouth), *regel* (leg), *ruach* (wind, breath), *shemesh* (sun), *l'hom* (void) (*Tzachot*, 35,

(*Harikma*, 387, note 10), that Ibn Janach refers to the species, which includes both the masculine and feminine members of the species.

<sup>7</sup> Rabbi Moshe Ibn Gikatilia, *Kitab Attahkir W'attanith*. Surviving fragments are published in an anthology by P. Kokovzov (ed. N. Allony) *From Medieval Hebrew Linguistic Publications*, Jerusalem 1970, 59-66. Ibn Ezra calls it *Sefer Z'charim U'nekevot* (The Book of Males and Females) (*Mozna'im*, 17, 2). Sections of the book were translated into English by Poznanski, S. "New Material on the History of Hebrew-Arabic Philology During the Tenth to Twelfth Centuries." *JQR* n.s. 16, 237 ff. They were translated into Hebrew by Allony, N. 1949. *Sinai* 24, 34-67. As he observes, we have only a tenth of this book. The material that follows is taken from Allony 1949.

<sup>8</sup> This quotation and also all the references in this article are brought from *Mozna'im*. Wolf Heidenheim's edition. The references from *Tzachot* are from Lippmann's edition.

2);<sup>9</sup> (2) Nouns without the suffix *bei* or *taph* which are feminine in gender. Examples are: *even* (stone), *shegal* (concubine) (*Mozna'im*, 34, 2);<sup>10</sup> and an adjective: *mitz'ar* (small) (the interpretation of Gen 19, 20).<sup>11</sup>

As for the plural forms, Ibn Ezra establishes that the masculine plural is usually found with the suffix *yod, mem* (*Mozna'im*, 34, 1), and the feminine plural with the suffix *vav, taph* (*Mozna'im*, 34, 1), but there are three exceptions to this rule in his view: (1) Masculine forms which appear in the plural with the suffix *vav, taph*: *luach* (tablet), *luchoi*; (2) Feminine forms found in the plural with the suffix *yod, mem*: *isha-nashim* (woman-women), *pilegesh-pilagshim* (concubine[s]) (*Tzachot* 35, 2); (3) Forms that are found with the suffix *yod, mem* and with the suffix *vav, taph*: *n'fashim, n'fashot*<sup>12</sup> (souls) (*Tzachot*, 35, 2); *z'ro'ot, z'ro'im* (arms) (*Mozna'im*, 34, 1).

And what is the normative gender usage for nouns in his time, or in our time?—Ibn Ezra determines "This is the rule: the nouns vary, and no man has license to say anything other than that which is found" (*Mozna'im*, 34, 2); that is to say, we should adhere to the Biblical gender definition.

It appears that Ibn Ezra follows in Ibn Janach's footsteps, although there are some differences between the two: (a) Ibn Ezra ignores Ibn Janach's emphasis and his stipulations that only undetermined nouns and those of unverified feminine gender may be used as both masculine and feminine; (b) Thus, Ibn Janach expands the number of exceptions and presents categories of exceptions that Ibn Ezra does not recognize: names of animals that are both masculine and feminine, forenames which are also both genders, other nouns which are interpreted as feminine. These categories are not found in Ibn Ezra; perhaps for lack of writing material or perhaps because he did not agree.

### *The Systemic-Morphemic Approach*

According to the "systemic-morphemic" approach the system of nouns in the historical Hebrew of the Bible was symmetrical, with four facets:

<sup>9</sup> See also a partial list in *Mozna'im* 33, 2, and see *Tzachot*, 35, 2, the critique by Rav Sa'adia HaGaon, who interprets the verse in the first book of Samuel, 4, 17: "Vaaron HaElokim nilkacha" as referring to "teivat aron HaElokim nilkacha"; Ibn Ezra remarks: "There is no need" (for the word *teivat*). Other examples are found in his Bible commentaries—see *ot* (sign) (Gen 9, 12), *gan* (garden) (Gen 2, 15), *lechem* (bread) (Gen 49, 20) and more.

<sup>10</sup> In *Tzachot* 35, 2, Ibn Ezra provides examples of forenames—Abigail, Avinoam—which do not have the feminine suffix, but are feminine.

<sup>11</sup> Ibn Ezra does not remark on nouns with the suffix *bei* or *taph* which are masculine in gender, except forenames—see *Tzachot* 35, 2: "And there is the name of a man in the feminine gender form, as Samlah of Mastekah (Gen 36, 35)." We found such a comment about the forename Ohalibama (Gen 36,40). See also Ibn Ezra's arguments in *Tzachot* 19, 2, against Ibn Janach, who interpreted the word *ahila* ("deed") (Psal 66, 5) as an adjective *ahil* with the addition of *bei*. Ibn Ezra thinks this is feminine gender. Ibn Ezra remarks also on the feminine gender nouns with double feminine suffixes *-at -ah* "The *aleph* is connected to the *tav* as in *yeshu'ata olata*" (*Mozna'im* 34, 1).

<sup>12</sup> The form *nefesh* (soul) is found in the plural as *n'fashim* and *n'fashot* both in one verse (Ezek 13, 20). See *Tzachot* 35, 2, where Ibn Ezra negates the possibility that the forms *amarim-amarot* belong to this category.

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masculine singular with no suffix [ø]—masculine plural with suffix *yod, mem*  
 feminine singular with suffix *hei; taph* (etc.)—feminine plural with suffix *vav, taph*

This approach presents a complete system, in which the final morpheme is the gender indicator (= the gender label). For this reason we called this approach "systemic-morphemic."

I encountered this view for the first time through Ibn Ezra's dissent from it in his interpretation of Genesis, *Another Method*, 1, 14, in the discussion of the word *m'orot*:

*m'orot* – masculine gender, witness the use of *sb'nei* ("and G-d made the two great lights") and *bag'dohim* ("the great ones") [in continuation of verse 16]. The *tav* is used for plurals of masculine gender, as in *avot* (fathers), and *mem* for feminine gender, as in *nashim* (women), *pilegshim* (concubines). And to infer the use of *m'komah* from *m'komot* (places) is incorrect.

He expresses himself more sharply in Ex 1, 14, in relation to the word *uvilevenim* (and with bricks):

The names of objects will be used only as found, as the singular of *mo'edot* is *mo'ed* (appointed time) rather than *mo'edab*. Whoever thinks himself clever and infers that the plural of *makom* (place) is *m'komim* and infers from *m'komot* the singular *mekamah* will perhaps perceive wisely that, if from *bechor* he derives *bechorim*, *l'makeh mitzruyim b'bechoreihem* ("Who smote the first-born of Egypt") (Psalms 135, 10), note *u'bechorot bakarcha* ("and the firstlings of thy herd") (Deuteronomy 14, 23), thus the singular would be *bechorah*, and also the singular of *levenim* (bricks) is not *leven* but rather *levenah*.

In both of these instances, Ibn Ezra refers to an unidentified opinion, according to which there was an ancient system of four nouns: *makom* – *m'komim*, *m'komah* – *m'komot*. From this, the Biblical text retained only *makom* and *m'komot*. Ibn Ezra does not accept this thesis. We do not know who Ibn Ezra refers to as "the person who considers himself clever," but from the presence of the refutation, we learn that this view exists.<sup>15</sup> It seems to me that this approach arose because relatively numerous exceptions exist in the Biblical gender system (and perhaps the approach was also influenced by the many exceptions found in post-Biblical Hebrew sources). In other words, this approach seems to us to be another interpretation of the existing situation. Instead of assuming that there is a rule with exceptions, a different understanding evolved: reality was regarded according to a diachronic approach, in which a broader historical substructure was presumed to underlie what remains in the Bible.

Advocates of this approach apparently believed that "language is broader than the Book"; in other words, that the linguistic substructure of Biblical Hebrew was more extensive than the Biblical text itself. Unlike others, however, they allowed themselves to reach practical conclusions from this perception and

<sup>15</sup> Prof. G. Khan commented that, based on his research in the *Diqduq* of Yusuf Ibn Nuh, it is possible that this theory has origins in the East. He found that in his text Ibn Nuh frequently analyses plurals with the ending *-ot* but a singular without *-ah*, as having a theoretical base in *-ah* (see his article about the morphological theories of Ibn Nuh in *Journal of Semitic Studies* 43, 1998, 265-286). I thank Prof. Khan for his comment.

to assume additional grammatical usage with no basis in the Biblical text. Echoes of this "liberal" approach may be found in grammatical literature (not in relation to this subject). For example, as Menahem expressed himself against Yehuda Ibn Koreish, who interpreted *Ivchat-charev* (Ez 21, 20) as *Ib'at*, which is derived from *b'atab* (terror), whereby Ibn Koreish coined a word that does not exist in the literature. Menahem writes:

Those who would interpret, know that the entire language is not found in the book of our law, and if our language were complete, all the weak words would be found and we would be able to obtain them in all their breadth. They are not found because they have disappeared. Are they, therefore, an invention added to the holy language, expanding the short and making many of the few. If so, this must not be until a breath from above (G-d) infuses us. (*Machberet*, 12).

That is to say, he thinks that, although language is more extensive than the "Book," the "Book" is all that is available to the linguist. Students of Menahem said similar things when they rebutted Dunash (see Students of Menahem, *Responsa*, 25-28, and see also Ibn-Ezra comment in this subject in *Safa brura*, 4,2).

It thus appears that the proponents of the "diachronic-liberal" mode may be suspected of adhering to the systemic-morphemic approach. In any case, Ibn Ezra serves as a witness to the existence of the latter approach.

### *The Ungrammatical Approach*

The third approach, the "ungrammatical" approach, was expressed in the Middle Ages by the words: "Anything which has no breath of life, masculinize and feminize it." This formulation appeared in its present form in the book by Rabbi Samuel Archivolti, *Arugat Habosem* (Chapter 7, book 22; 19, 2), (written approximately 1600). The sentence appears in other, earlier, sources as well, with minor changes of formulation, such as in Profiat Duran's *Ma'aseh Eifod* (finished about 1403), in the *Responsa* of Rabbi David ibn Abi Zimra (Radbaz) (written approximately 1500), in the book *Mikneh Avram* by Rabbi Abraham de Balmes (printed 1523), and in other places. The meaning of this quote is: names of inanimate, non-living objects may be used with masculine or feminine gender, as you wish. This sentence relies on the many exceptions in the Bible (as the exceptions cited by the Andalusian grammarians) and it is appropriate to the realities of medieval language, when Hebrew was not a spoken language and gender definitions were utterly useless.

According to this approach, rules and exceptions do not exist in the Bible; rather, there are no rules. Gender is freely interchanged and its usage in the text is coincidental. For this reason, we called the approach "ungrammatical."

Much has previously been written about attempts to identify the author of the sentence and his origin, as well as the manifestations of the approach in the Middle Ages. We will mention principally Y. Reifmann,<sup>14</sup> M. Wilensky,<sup>15</sup> N.

<sup>14</sup> "Various Remarks." (Hebr.) *Bet Talmud*, 1, 1881, 188-189.

<sup>15</sup> "Studies in Language and Literature." (Hebr.) Jerusalem, 1978, 116-119.

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Allony,<sup>16</sup> and most recently, E. Goldenberg.<sup>17</sup> Goldenberg endowed us with a comprehensive and precise article which examines all her predecessors' opinions and introduces new sources, showing the evolution of the method and of the sentence in medieval literature, with illustrative data. Thanks to these works, we are exempt from presenting the various opinions and examining them.

For the sake of the discussion, however, we will note that Goldenberg thinks (coinciding with our own additional examinations and interpretations of Ibn Ezra's known works, in project *Responsa* and other computerized projects),<sup>18</sup> that this saying is neither Ibn Ezra's, nor found in other earlier Hebrew sources.

Goldenberg provided an innovation when she found a parallel version to this sentence in an Arabic language grammar devoted especially to the language of Arabic poetry, written by a grammarian by the name of Elkazaz (who lived in Kairowan, 1029) who himself relied on earlier Arabic linguistic sources. It seems, then, that this understanding came from Arabic grammar and penetrated the Hebrew. As we said, however, we do not know who was the first Hebrew grammarian who formulated this sentence, that appears in the work of Radbaz and others grammarians from his time.

As Reifman said before (but did not explain), Goldenberg expressed the thought that this epigram may have a basis in the discussion by Rabbi Yonah Ibn Janach of feminine gender nouns appearing in masculine and feminine forms. This epigram is connected to the aforementioned deliberation of Ibn Janach, who said that some nouns are not truly feminine, as translated: "In that which has no feminine essence" and also, "that which has no womb" (*Harikma*, 39 (38), 385), and these appear in masculine gender as well. Actually, in our opinion (as in that of Wilensky—see 118, note 6), Ibn Janach did not intend to support the ungrammatical approach when he expressed these ideas, as Goldenberg thought (*ibid*, 194). Ibn Janach tried only to explain the nouns that had double gender (as *shemesh* (sun), *ruach* (wind)—see *Harikma*, 385–386—and explained away the double gender of these nouns by claiming that their feminine gender was immaterial. However, his words may have been taken out of context, and perhaps they are the seed that generated the ungrammatical approach found in later grammatical literature.

Despite the fact that Ibn Ezra is not the author of the sentence, Goldenberg believes (*ibid*, 194–195) that it would have been compatible with Ibn Ezra, from the standpoint of both style and content. In this way, she explains the persistence of the attribution of the sentence to him by various sources. At this point, we would like to join Wilensky (117) and to disagree with Goldenberg. We shall add evidence which supports Wilensky's opinions negating the possibility that Ibn Ezra held this view:

<sup>16</sup> "Anything which has no breath of life, masculinize and feminize it—a Grammatical Epigram Attributed to Ra'ba." (Hebr.) *L'ishonenu* 16, 1948, 29–33.

<sup>17</sup> In her article "Studies of Language and Correct Hebrew in the Middle Ages." (Hebr.) *L'ishonenu* 54, 1990, 190–216.

<sup>18</sup> I wish to thank my friend, Dr. G. Birenbaum, who performed the search in the Hebrew Language Academy Resources at my request.

a) Ibn Ezra does not write of free interchange of gender definitions of nouns. On the contrary, he presents rules and exceptions in his writings. In his essays and in his interpretations of Ex 1, 4, he writes: "It is known that the *tav* is the usual mark of feminine gender, and the *mem* is the mark of masculine."

b) The exceptions that Ibn Ezra illustrates are not those without breath of life. At least one example is provided by Ibn Ezra of a feminine gender noun with the breath of life: *shegal*—which is a feminine form without the mark *hei* or *tav* (*Mozna'im*, 33, 2).

c) Ibn Ezra's considerable concern with problems of grammatical congruency proves that he believes in gender definition of the Biblical noun. When the definition does not coincide with the grammar of the sentence, he intervenes and "completes" phrases or words to define the gender properly as it is usually ascribed. So, for example, he interprets the word *shabbat* in the verse: *olat shabbat b'shabbato* (Num 28, 10): *b'shabbato*—"Everyone that keepeth the sabbath day from profaning it" (Isa 56, 6)—Ibn Ezra adds the word *yom*, attempting to avoid ascribing a double gender definition to the word *shabbat* (which is clearly feminine in form).<sup>19</sup>

And furthermore, when he accepts double gender definitions in his interpretations (Goldenberg cites the following: *ot* (sign), *shemen* (oil), *gan* (garden), etc.), it does not mean he ignores the problem of incongruency. Only someone very disturbed by the gender exceptions would be willing to devote so much effort to "intervening" and attempting to resolve the problems of these troublesome verses.

In short, until we discover which of the early grammarians of the Hebrew language is the source of the authentic sentence, we will not know who of the Hebrew grammarians declared the epigram. In any case, as my predecessors have shown, the roots of the method that these words represent will be found in Ibn Janach's work, although his intention is different. And, in my humble opinion, this method has no connection to Ibn Ezra.

### Summary

We have presented three approaches to the understanding of gender definition of Biblical nouns. Those in the mainstream, Dunash vs. Rav Sa'adia Gaon, Ibn Janach, Ibn Gikatilia and Ibn Ezra, laid the foundations for the conventional approach to scientific grammar utilized today—a grammatical system built upon the rule and its many exceptions. The great contribution of Ibn Ezra was his

<sup>19</sup> In this solution (the composition-interpretive solution) he treats *ritzpab* (floor), *sh'eilab* (question) (which are clearly morphologically feminine in gender) and also *yom* (day), *'am* (people) (which are definitely masculine gender morphologically), in the same fashion—see Charlap, L. 1995. *Innovation and Tradition in Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra's Grammar according to his Grammatical Writings and to his Bible Exegesis*. (Hebr.) Doctoral Thesis, Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, 286–287. Regarding his rejection of the interpretation of Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon to the verse "Vaaron ILaElokim milkacha" (1Sam 4, 17), which suggests "completing" the word *zivat* (*Tzachot* 35,2) (See above note 7; cited by Goldenberg, 195) —true, it is difficult to understand why he rejected Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon's interpretation in this case, when he himself utilizes it in his interpretations. However, this case is not enough to determine that he opposes the method of completion.

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clarification of the principle that each noun has a gender definition (masculine, feminine or both genders) attributed to it by its appearance in the Biblical text. We have seen that Ibn Ezra rejected the second approach we discussed, the systemic-morphemic, and he cannot belong to the "ungrammatical" school. He does not designate noun gender on the basis of its suffix, and does not hold that there is free interchange. These approaches had some standing among medieval grammarians, and echoes of the third approach, the "ungrammatical," are even found in the writings of later grammarians and in literature relating to Jewish law almost until our time.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> As we found it in *Chatam Sofer Responsa* (the 19<sup>th</sup> century), part 4, *Even Ha'ezer*, Siman *mem*.