Rabbi Menahem de Lonzano (d.1611)

It is not known when and where Rabbi Menahem ben Judah de Lonzano was born. Probably in Turkey or Italy. But we do know that at avery young age he settled in Yerushalayim (Jerusalem).
Rabbi Lonzano had a very difficult life. He lost both his father and mother at a very young age, and throughout his entire life he was haunted by poverty and sickness . He was paralyzed in both feet and with the sight of one eye entirely lost. He still was a great Talmudist, a poet and a distinguished grammarian.
Or Tora is perhaps his most famous work. This book is about the Masoretic Biblical text. This deserves a brief explanation. The Sefer Tora, the Torah scroll, is written without vowels and without *te'amim* (punctuation marks). The Humashim, the printed books of Tora from which we study and follow the Torah reading, include the vowels, te'amim, etc. This is the Masoretic text. Many times there are small variations in the vowels and te'amim, almost irrelevant for beginners but very significant for the expert readers, teachers, rabbis and for those who publish Tora books. In this important work, "The Light of the Tora" rabbi Lonzano goes thru the text of the Pentateuch and clarifies the right Masoretic version. Rabbi Lonzano follows a rigorous method of comparing our texts with old Biblical texts, some of them -he says- were more than 600 years old, to arrive to the most precise version of the Masoretic text.
Another important book he wrote is the *ma'arikh*, a book that clarifies obscure words found in classic Rabbinic texts . The famous Rabbi Hida wrote about this book: "Rabbi Menahem de Lonzano elucidated many unclear words in the Talmud Yerushalmi and the Zohar in a rather scientific way… because he was an expert in the Greek, Arabic and Turkish language… I saw that while many rabbis interpreted those words according to their context, rabbi Lonzano clarified these words based on his solid knowledge [of philology] and the impressive collection of old books and manuscripts which preserved the most accurate version of these words."

Rabbi De Lonzano died in 1611 and is buried in Har haZetim, Mt Olives Cemetery, Jerusalem.

Click here to download sefer OR TORA (Amsterdam, 1659).

Click here to download sefer MA'ARIKH (Leipzig, Germany, 1853).