

40. The language used in what appears to be the first play in Modern Judezmo is analyzed in D. M. Bunis, "Pyesa di Yaakov Avinu kun sus ijus (Bucharest, 1862): The First Judezmo Play?" *Revue des Études Juives* 154, nos. 3–4 (1995): 387–428.

41. For various views on this "question," see D. M. Bunis, "Modernization and the 'Language Question' among the Judezmo-Speaking Sephardim of the Ottoman Empire," in *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries: History and Culture in the Modern Era*, ed. H. E. Goldberg (Bloomington: University of Indiana, 1996), 226–39.

42. Most of Franco's essay is reproduced in D. M. Bunis, *The Judezmo Language* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes, and Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1999), 377–81.

Chapter 5

Literatures of Medieval Sepharad

Jonathan P. Decter

During the first half of the eleventh century, the Jewish poet and philosopher Solomon Ibn Gabirol (c. 1020–c. 1057) decried the decline of Sephardic Jews' knowledge of Hebrew: "Half of them speak Edomese and half of them the language of Qedar that darkens."¹ Ibn Gabirol meant that Jews had neglected Hebrew and knew only the other languages of the Iberian Peninsula: Hispano-Romance, the language of Christians (descendants of the biblical Esau, whose nickname was Edom [Genesis 25:30]), and Arabic, the language of Muslims (descendants of Ishmael, father of Qedar [Genesis 25:13]). Like Muslims and Christians in al-Andalus (Islamic Spain), Jews spoke mainly Arabic and a form of Hispano-Romance.² When Ibn Gabirol identified Arabic as the language of Muslims and Romance as the language of Christians, he was probably referring to the communities in which each language originated, since Muslims, Christians, and Jews all spoke Arabic and Romance in eleventh-century al-Andalus.

In their literary writing, the Jews of al-Andalus used Hebrew, Arabic, and Hispano-Romance to varying degrees. Some authors wrote in more than one language, sometimes even within the same work. During the twelfth century, the centers of Jewish life in the Iberian Peninsula moved from the Islamic south to the kingdoms of the Christian north. In Christian Spain, the dialects of Spanish (descendants of the Romance dialect) gradually emerged as the Jewish vernacular, though Arabic continued to be respected as a language of learning and sophistication for the educated class. Jewish literary works in the dialects of Spanish were rare but significant.

For nearly fifty years, scholars have hailed medieval Iberia as a unique *convivencia* through which Muslims, Christians, and Jews interacted to produce the single entity of Spanish culture.³ Medieval Sephardic writing

testified to the profound influence of non-Jewish culture upon its forms, themes, aesthetics, and worldview. At the same time, the culture of medieval Spain could not have taken form but for the active participation of Jews, Muslims, and Christians.

Al-Andalus

In al-Andalus, as in the rest of the Arabic-speaking world, Arabic was the typical language of Jewish writing for anything but belles lettres. Virtually all Jewish expositions on philosophy, theology, mathematics, and so on, were written in Arabic, usually in Hebrew characters. Such writing was called Judeo-Arabic, though there was often little to distinguish it from the contemporary language of non-Jews.⁴ Letter writing was executed almost exclusively in Judeo-Arabic, though sophisticated letters often included Hebrew or Aramaic quotations from canonical Jewish texts and salutations in a florid Hebrew style.

Hebrew Poetry in al-Andalus

Late tenth-century al-Andalus witnessed a revolution in the composition of Hebrew poetry.⁵ Yet, in order to understand the development and role of Hebrew poetry in medieval Spain, a brief historical review is in order.

The Hebrew Bible contains many poetic sections, including songs such as the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15) and the Song of Deborah (Judges 5), as well as poetic books such as Psalms and Job. Between the fifth and seventh centuries, liturgical poetry (called *piyyut*) for the synagogue service flourished in Byzantine Palestine. Since the poetics of the ancient *piyyut* were complex and opaque, digesting it entailed the recognition of rare vocabulary, foreign words, complex grammatical forms, and a vast repertoire of allusions from Jewish sources.⁶ The Talmud also includes numerous poetic sections.⁷

In tenth-century Islamic Baghdad, a poetic trend was initiated by the head of the Babylonian academy, Sa'adia Gaon. This trend tended toward a more transparent style, relying mainly on biblical vocabulary and diction. Sa'adia composed the first Bible commentary, the first complete prayer book, the first theological treatise, and the first monographs dedicated to discrete legal subjects.⁸ In the field of poetry, Sa'adia may be

credited with composing the first nonliturgical Hebrew poems since the Bible and with introducing medieval philosophical and theological concepts into Hebrew verse. He wrote the *Agron* (Gatherer), also known as *Kitab Usul al-Shi'r al-'Ibrani* (The Book of the Principles of Hebrew Poetry), which was the first book designed as a manual of Hebrew poetics. Sa'adia's verse may be seen as a link between the ancient *piyyut* and the Arabized poetry of the Sephardic school.⁹

Toward the end of the tenth century, a North African student of Sa'adia's named Dunash Ibn Labrat revolutionized Hebrew poetry in al-Andalus. By the time of Dunash's arrival, the province had grown to a cosmopolitan intellectual center with a grand capitol at Cordoba. It was around the so-called courtier Jews that the Hebrew literary culture of al-Andalus took form. The composition of poetry by and for men of power was one of the hallmarks of the medieval Sephardic literary tradition.

Dunash invented a system that made Hebrew poetry sound like Arabic poetry. The Arabic language naturally consisted of vowels of short and long duration, which lent themselves to meters whose rhythms were distinct and memorable. To the medieval Jewish sophisticate, the Hebrew poetry of the Palestinian and Iraqi schools felt arrhythmic. Dunash synthetically imposed a system of long and short vowels on the Hebrew language so that it could mimic the rollicking meters of Arabic. By adding monorhyme, another prosodic requirement of classical Arabic poetry, Dunash's innovation allowed Jews to participate through the medium of their own historical language. The famous scholar, S. D. Goitein, called the Hebrew poetry of the Sephardic School the "acme of Jewish-Arab symbiosis."¹⁰

Virtually all medieval Sephardic poets adopted Dunash's innovation. Moses Ibn Ezra maintained that the finest form of Hebrew poetry was that composed after the Arabic model.¹¹ However, Judah Halevi, Ibn Ezra's younger contemporary, expressed much ambivalence toward the metrical innovation, at times condemning it as the ultimate cultural sell-out.¹²

The choice of Hebrew as a poetic language may be the greatest expression of Jewish self-assertion, even nationalist aspiration, during this period. The Hebrew poems of al-Andalus utilized a high register of the language that sought to emulate the diction and style of biblical Hebrew while suppressing elements that had crept into the language following the Bible's canonization. The composition of literary texts in a refined biblical style was greatly facilitated by concurrent achievements in the study of Hebrew grammar and biblical exegesis.¹³

By adhering to the biblical style, Jewish authors were able to compete with *ʿArabiyya* (Arabism), which asserted the superiority of the Arabic language over other tongues, and the Islamic doctrine *Iʿjaz al-Qurʿan* (The Inimitability of the Qurʿan),¹⁴ which affirmed the rhetorical perfection of the Qurʿan as the revealed word of God. As Ross Brann put it, the Bible came to be regarded as a “Jewish Qurʿan,” a literary model whose emulation signified an assertion of Jewish nationalism even as it testified to the Arabized cultural values of Andalusian Jews.¹⁵ It may be because of the near-obsession with biblical Hebrew as a rhetorical model that examples of belletristic texts by Jewish authors in other languages are relatively rare.

Beyond prosodic features, the Hebrew poetry of al-Andalus was deeply indebted to the Arabic tradition for its thematic material. By the tenth century, Arabic developed a rich and varied poetic tradition, ranging from the desert poetry of the pre-Islamic period (the Jahiliya period) to the urban poetry of the Abbasid and Andalusian periods. Arabic poems on wine and garden description were imitated extensively in secular Hebrew verse. Themes of Arabic love poetry, recast in the language of the Bible (especially the Song of Songs), penetrated secular as well as sacred Hebrew poetry.¹⁶

The most famous theme of Jahiliya poetry was *al-buka* *ʿala al-atlal* (Arabic, “weeping over the ruins”). According to the topos, the poet arrived at the remnants of an abandoned campsite, and began to weep. The sight of the ruins triggered a series of memories that whisked the reader back in time to the idyllic days of the tribe’s presence.¹⁷ Hebrew poets exploited the nostalgic tone of this theme in national and personal poems of exile. The following poem by Moses Ibn Ezra (c. 1055–after 1138) on the subject of Israel’s exile fused the themes of *al-buka* *ʿala al-atlal* and love poetry,

Hurry to the lover’s camp,
Dispersed by Time, a ruin now;
Once the haunt of love’s gazelles,
Wolves’ and lions’ lair today.

From far away I hear Gazelle,
From Edom’s keep and Arab’s cell,
Mourning the lover of her youth,
Sounding lovely, ancient words:
“Fortify me with lovers’ flasks,
Strengthen me with sweets of love.”¹⁸

The Hebrew poet recalls the effacement of the Jewish encampment *par excellence*, the Temple in Jerusalem, where God and Israel once met as “lovers.” Once home to gracious gazelles, the abandoned camp became inhabited with carnivorous animals. In the second part of the poem, the lovesick Gazelle (Israel), caught in the fetters of Edom (Christendom) and amongst the Arabs (indicating Islam), calls out to her lover (God). In the final verse, Israel muses nostalgically through the language of the Song of Songs (2:5), long understood in the Jewish tradition as an allegory of the love between Israel and God.

The Hebrew poetry of al-Andalus also carried the imprint of contemporary philosophical culture. Neoplatonic philosophy was of great interest to the Andalusian poets.¹⁹ Many poems on the soul originated as introductions to the prayer beginning, “The soul of All praises God.” Solomon Ibn Gabirol captured numerous aspects of Neoplatonic soul theory:

For you, like God, have everlasting life,
And He is hidden just as you are hid;
And is your God immaculate and pure?
You too are pure, you too are innocent.
The Mighty One bears the heavens in His arm,
Just as you bear the mortal, speechless clay.
My soul, greet God, your Rock, with gifts of praise,
For nothing has He put on earth like you.
My body, bless your Rock for evermore,
To whom the soul of All sings ever praise.²⁰

The subject of this poem is the soul, taken from her celestial home, now confined within the prison of the body. The soul is bound to the lowly body. The path toward reunification with her celestial abode lies with the sublime soul contemplating her bond with her Creator.

Hebrew poets of al-Andalus also composed “secular poetry” or the “poetry of entertainment”²¹ that reflected the lifestyle of an aristocratic class whose values approximated those of their Muslim contemporaries. The following poem by Samuel ha-Nagid (993–c. 1055) describes a garden:

We went out to the flowerbeds of the garden,
Arranged in it like lines in a scroll . . .
The wine pourer filled a cup with rubies,
And set it on a boat of variegated papyrus.

He sent the cup like a bride in her palanquin
 Over to the drinker, her groom,
 Who drank and returned his cup,
 And addressed the servant as at the start . . .

Like the activity of friends drinking
 In a round garden along a canal,
 There is no activity.²²

This scene was typical of a medieval Arab wine party. The poem strikingly resembled contemporary Arabic garden poetry.²³ Drinking companions consumed wine served by a professional wine pourer. Everything about this garden was round. The canal was round like the heavens that encompassed the sphere of the earth. The flowerbeds were lines in the scroll of the garden. Likewise, the activity in the scene was cyclical. The wine pourer sent the cup over a pool to the drinker who drank and returned the cup to be refilled, a cycle that could continue indefinitely. The feeling of circularity was captured even in the syntax of the concluding verse, which began and ended with the same word ("Like the activity . . . There is no activity"). The overall sense of delight and ease was reinforced by the circularity of poetic space and time.²⁴

The wine pourer, who is rather nondescript in the poem above, frequently played a coquettish and erotic function for the pleasure of the aristocratic drinkers. For example, in a short poem by Samuel ha-Nagid, the (male)²⁵ wine pourer, seeing the wine cup in the drinker's hand, demands, "Drink the blood of grapes from between my lips!"²⁶ Medieval Hebrew (and Arabic) verse treating the erotic may be described best as "poetry of desire" or "poetry of passion" rather than "love poetry." The poems generally did not recount episodes of actual experience, but rather, feelings of unconsummated longing. The following excerpts from a poem by Moses Ibn Ezra illustrated this type of eroticism well,

The wine pourer speaks languidly,
 Though he fells mighty men
 With his soft words.
 His eyes are wide with magic,
 They are beautiful,
 They are sorcerers.

The beloved was almost always unattainable. Even in poems wherein the poetic speaker recounted a seemingly nonfictitious experience, it is debatable whether the poem should be understood as the author's personal experience or as a kind of literary fashion.

Samuel ha-Nagid, vizier of the Berber prince of Granada, Badis Ibn Habbus, was the only Jewish poet to write poems recounting experiences in battle. He boastfully pronounced himself the "David of the Age," for David was known both as a mighty conqueror and as a delicate poet who wrote the Psalms. Solomon Ibn Gabirol emerged as an introspective poet consumed with the philosophical quest, his own genius, and misfortune. He presented himself as a social misfit, shunned by contemporaries for his incendiary personality and sickly appearance. Moses Ibn Ezra, who was forced to flee Muslim Spain after the Almoravid conquest from North Africa (1090), portrayed himself as an isolated prisoner trapped in the culturally barren environment of Christian Spain, the land of his refuge. Judah Halevi composed a series of poems during his famous journey to the Land of Israel that portrayed him as a devout pilgrim imbued with a prophetic spirit.²⁷

Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1164) was the last poet of the "Golden Age" of al-Andalus and a conduit of Judeo-Arabic culture to the Christian world.²⁸ Ibn Ezra commemorated the destruction of cities in al-Andalus in a moving poem,

Woe for calamity has descended upon Spain from the heavens!
 My eyes, my eyes flow with water.
 My eye weeps like an ostrich's for the city of Lucena!
 Without guilt, the Exile dwelled there untroubled,
 Undisturbed for one thousand and seventy years.
 She became like a widow when the day arrived and her people departed. . . .
 For this I weep and strike my hand; lamentation is constantly in my mouth.
 I cannot be silent so I exclaim, "Would that my heart were water!"²⁹

The strophic form of the poem was sustained by concluding each stanza with the word "water." The poet lamented through rituals mentioned in the Bible (weeping like an ostrich, striking the hand, shaving the head) and, referred to the cities of al-Andalus by name, a practice seldom found in earlier poetry.³⁰ The act of naming in this poem served as a means of commemoration, a way of setting the period of al-Andalus

firmly in the past. After Ibn Ezra, Hebrew poetry lay dormant for a generation until it regenerated on the soil of Christian Spain.

Arabic and Romance in Poems by Jews in al-Andalus

Arabic poems by at least eleven Iberian Jewish authors were preserved in Arabic sources such as biographical dictionaries and poetry collections compiled by Muslims.³¹ For example, Ibn Sa'id al-Andalusi contained an entry in his *Banners of the Champions and Standards of the Elite* on the Jewish poet Abu Ayyub Suleiman Ibn al-Mu'allim,

Abu Ayyub the Jew. My father told me that he was employed in the private service of the Commander of the Muslims 'Ali son of Yusuf son of Tashufin. My father also recited to me some verses, which Abu Ayyub had composed about a knife sent by him to his beloved who subsequently abandoned him:

When I sent you that knife, I thought its name was an omen, and indeed the augury and presage came true: the knife signifies that you are inhabiting³² my heart, its cutting signifies rupture and distance.³³

The same author was praised by Moses Ibn Ezra as one "who [performed] sorcery in both the Hebrew and Arabic tongues."³⁴ Arabic poems by Judah al-Harizi and by the poetess Qasmuna also survive.³⁵

A number of Hebrew poems included Arabic in their concluding verses. These poems adhered to a poetic form adopted from Andalusian Arabic literature called the *muwashshah* (Arabic, "girdle poem"),³⁶ a strophic form that utilized variations on the classical scheme of meter and rhyme. Within the corpus of Andalusian Arabic poetry, the concluding verse (called the *kharja*) of the *muwashshah* often switched from classical Arabic to vernacular Arabic. Rather than merely changing registers within a single language, the Hebrew poems actually changed languages. The *kharja* was frequently a quotation placed in the mouth of a character within the poem. For example, in a poem of desire by Judah Halevi, the lovesick suitor pined away as the hard-to-get beloved flirted in a mixture of Hebrew and Arabic,

His song splits my heart,
He sings to ignite my flames of desire,

"Kiss my mouth, love! Let that be enough for you!

Kiss me, kiss me, kiss me on the mouth

And forget, my love, all about your sadness!" (Arabic in italics)³⁷

In 1948, the Arabist S. M. Stern discovered that a number of Hebrew *muwashshahs* concluded not with a *kharja* in Arabic but, rather, in Hispano-Romance.³⁸ These *kharjas* were the earliest traces of Hispano-Romance ever documented. While scholars debated whether or not the Romance *kharjas* represented the surviving remnants of a full-fledged tradition of Romance song,³⁹ the *muwashshah* was an undisputed testimony to the bilingual (or in the case of Jews, trilingual) literary climate of al-Andalus.

Mention should also be made of a highly unconventional bilingual poem by Solomon Ibn Gabirol that opened with an address to the soul, urging her to return to her celestial abode with her Maker,⁴⁰

What is the matter, my soul,⁴¹ that you sit silent like a king in captivity,
Gathering ostrich wings and dragging the hem of sorrow?

How long will your heart mourn, how many tears will you shed?

You have cleaved to sorrow so much that you have hewn out a grave within it!

Wait quietly, my soul, for God! Wait quietly and do not despair!

Stand and keep watch until the Enthroned One looks and beholds you.

Toward the end of the lengthy poem, the poet lamented his fate as a social outcast, yearning to depart from his boorish contemporaries. In a fury of self-pity, the language of the poem switched mid-verse from Hebrew to Arabic while maintaining the same meter and rhyme:

Alas to you, O land of my enemies, now you are forsaken!

I have no portion in you whether you are welcoming or hostile.

It is my heart's desire to depart; when will you, my soul, fulfill your task?

Lo, I am caught among cattle, *Woe for what has befallen me!*

Woe for the people of good fortune who did not understand my purpose!

Woe for I dwell among them and am bound to them!

Woe for the time of my rejection that left me utterly bewildered!

Woe for my home, my desire for it has grown short!

I have remained there alone so that I wish only to depart!

Incivility has replaced my speech! Only God knows my path!

(Arabic in italics)

The shocking switch to Arabic in the final verses offers the reader a rare glimpse of raw emotion. Even Ibn Gabirol, who lamented the Jews' neglect of Hebrew in favor of foreign tongues, found the language of Qedar appropriate for expressing his most personal feelings.

Christian Spain

Beginning with the Reconquista's capture of Islamic Toledo (1085), the Christian North emerged as the new center of Sephardic life.⁴² Abraham Ibn Daud, author of the Hebrew historical narrative *The Book of Tradition* (1161) explained that the transfer of the Jewish population from south to north was divinely ordained,

The rebels (the Almohads) against the Philistine Kingdom (the Almoravids) had crossed the sea to Spain after having spared no remnant of Jews from Tangiers to al-Mahdiya. . . . Some [Jews] were taken captive by the Christians, to whom they willingly indentured themselves. . . . Others fled on foot, naked and barefoot, their feet stumbling upon the mountains of twilight.⁴³

Like many of his contemporaries, Ibn Daud believed that Christian Spain could serve as surrogate soil for replanting Andalusian Jewish leadership and culture.

Christian Spain provided a viable site for Andalusian culture to survive and flourish. Jews played an essential role in the enterprise of translating Arabic texts into Latin (usually translating the Arabic into Castilian orally in the presence of a Christian, who would then translate it into Latin). In Christian Spain and in Provence, Arabic and Judeo-Arabic philosophical and scientific works were translated into Hebrew. New works on these subjects were also written in Hebrew.

Naturally, the reemergence of Hebrew belletristic writing was central to the Jewish cultural renaissance in Christian Spain. The revival of Hebrew belles lettres had been seen by some as an epigonic "Silver Age," a dim reflection of the Golden Age of al-Andalus. In truth, the Hebrew literature of Christian Spain can be merited as a continuation of the tradition of al-Andalus and as an innovative corpus. Hebrew authors wrote volumes of rhymed, metered poetry and many fictional narratives in rhymed prose, a form represented in al-Andalus by only a single text.

Hebrew Poetry

In Christian Spain, the ability to compose poetry continued to be one of the prerequisites of the learned man. Famous Talmudists such as Meir Abulafia and Moses Ben Nahman were skilled in poetic composition. The Hebrew poetics of Christian Spain largely followed those of al-Andalus with respect to genre, theme, and prosody. However, the literary output did not merely ape the conventions of the former era. Todros Halevi Abulafia (1247–after 1298) breathed new vitality into poetry while adhering to the prosodic features of the Andalusian school.⁴⁴ In love poetry, Todros spoke of the frustrated love of the Islamic period, love consummated, and of spiritual love,

Daily she afflicts me with her wandering and gives my eyelids no sleep,
Though I do not think of touching her ever—what is my life worth that I
might touch her?

I know that her mouth holds a honeycomb sea while I die of thirst!
It would be enough for me to hear sweet words and behold her lovely form!
If I could hear or behold her, no trouble would remain with me.
With her appearance she revives the dead, with her word she lifts the fallen.
My desire for her is not to delight in the body but only to delight in the soul.⁴⁵

The speaker's desire is spiritual rather than sensual, even if the beloved is unattainable, like the wine pourer in the poem by Moses Ibn Ezra. This poem testifies to the spirit of a new age.⁴⁶

The composition of poetry in the style of the Andalusian school continued into the fifteenth century.⁴⁷ In fact, Hebrew poems survived that were exchanged between members of the so-called Saragossa School (including Don Vidal Benveniste, Solomon da Piera, Solomon Bonafed, and Joseph Ben Lavi) even after some of its members had converted to Christianity.⁴⁸ One dominant structural feature of the poetry of Christian Spain was the use of a "return verse"—the practice of beginning and ending a poem with the same sentence or phrase. The work of critically editing and analyzing this poetic corpus is still incomplete.

Hebrew Fiction

The most conspicuous difference between the Hebrew literary environments of al-Andalus and Christian Spain was the dominance of the

rhymed prose fictional narrative in the latter. The prosodic features of these texts—a loose rhyming prose with rhymed, metered poems interspersed—derived from an eastern Arabic form called the *maqama*. The Arabic *maqama* was invented in tenth-century Nishapur (modern Iran) by Badi^c al-Zaman (the “Wonder of the Age”) al-Hamadhani (d. 1008). He fashioned existing genres into lively fictional narratives revolving around the travels and encounters of two main characters, a narrator and a protagonist rogue. Although plot structure varied from episode to episode, a few elements prevailed in the classical *maqama*: fine rhetoric, the mendacity of the protagonist, the gullibility of the narrator, and the narrator’s ultimate recognition of the protagonist.

Al-Hamadhani’s form was not imitated until the arrival of a collection of *maqamat* by the more rhetorically sophisticated author al-Qasim Ibn ^cAli al-Hariri of Basra (d. 1122). By the twelfth century, al-Hariri’s *maqamat* achieved a canonical status, meriting memorization, public recitation, copious commentaries, and a translation into Hebrew. In al-Andalus, the Arabic *maqama* developed in ways that departed from the Eastern tradition. Some examples abandoned normative elements such as the narrator/protagonist dichotomy, the ruse, or the concluding recognition scene.⁴⁹

Even after the Islamic context faded, the Arabic influence on Jewish culture persisted. However, Hebrew *maqamat* (sometimes called *mahbarot*, compositions in Hebrew) cannot be seen as a curious revival of the Arabic literary form only. Their production is best understood as an outcome of the complex interaction of Hebrew, Arabic, and European literatures in the Iberian Peninsula.

The earliest Hebrew *maqama*, Solomon Ibn Saqbel’s *Asher Son of Judah Spoke*⁵⁰ (first half of twelfth century), was composed in al-Andalus according to the prosodic features of the Arabic *maqama*. It owed much of its thematic content to European notions of courtly love.⁵¹ In the story, Asher was humiliated when he was led to a veiled woman who he believed was his beloved. He lifted the veil and found “a long beard, a face like death and a mouth open wide as a steaming cauldron.”⁵² The bearded man turned out to be a “friend” of Asher’s, a trickster called the “Adulamite” who ensnared Asher in a ruse.⁵³ The story fused the theme of courtly love as emerging in the European tradition and the *maqama*’s penchants for trickery and denouement through recognition.

Joseph Ibn Zabara’s (c. 1150–1209) *Book of Delights* was a cornucopia of tales, proverbs, and scientific teachings set within the frame narrative of an imaginative journey.⁵⁴ The story began when a mysterious stranger,

“Enan Hanatas son of Ornan Hadesh,” and Ibn Zabara began a journey together in which they exchanged knowledge and lodged in various cities, among other activities.⁵⁵ The travelers ultimately alighted in Enan’s city, rife with sin and mischief, where Enan revealed that he was actually a demon. The letters in his name could be reversed to expose his true self: Enan Hasatan son of Ornan Hashed, meaning Enan the Satan son of Ornan the Demon!

Judah Ibn Shabbetai’s (1168–c. 1225) *Gift of Judah the Misogynist*⁵⁶ was a Hebrew parody in which the youth Zerah swore off women to devote himself to the pursuit of wisdom. Central to the group’s identity was the belief in the wanton and nefarious nature of women. Zerah learned misogyny from his father, who was granted a prophetic experience in which an angel spoke,

If (men’s) sins and debts are grave, it is because their wives incline their hearts. . . . Were it not for (the women’s) earrings, the golden calf would not have been made! . . . Abraham, on account of his upright deeds, never had a daughter. . . . Because of whom did Samson’s strength falter? . . .

Behold Pharaoh’s wisdom and consider his insight when he gave wondrous counsel for persecuting the Israelites:

He afflicted them and increased their grief by killing the boys but sparing the girls!⁵⁷

Zerah preached the misogynist cult of celibacy abroad, eliciting a venomous response from women everywhere. The women devised to trick Zerah by exposing him to a beautiful and eloquent maiden and pressing him into marriage before he knew what hit him. Using the ruse of the veil, the beauty Zerah had beheld was switched with a hideous and quarrelsome hag.

A debate immediately ensued among the throng of bystanders as to whether Zerah should be allowed to divorce his wife. The author himself stepped into the narrative and declared the whole thing fiction. Thus, the narrative progresses from a scenario of fictional characters, to one in which fictional and real characters intermingle. Although some have linked the story’s misogynist strains to the “wiles of women” motif of Arabic literature, its inspiration might be located in misogynist European literature and debates over celibacy within the Catholic Church.⁵⁸

Thus, the earliest Hebrew rhymed prose narratives exhibited great innovation with respect to plot development and fictional devices.⁵⁹ Their

variety was striking, considering that the classical *maqama* genre was so conventional and predictable.⁶⁰ However, the tides soon turned in favor of classicism.

Judah al-Harizi's (1165–1225) *Tahkemoni*⁶¹ was the collection of Hebrew *maqamat* most faithful to the Arabic parent literature.⁶² Born in Toledo, al-Harizi began his career as a translator of Arabic and Judeo-Arabic legal, philosophical, and belletristic works into Hebrew.⁶³ Famously, al-Harizi composed a fluid translation of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* commissioned by notables in Provence who had requested a translation in "simple and clear words."⁶⁴

Before undertaking the *Tahkemoni*, al-Harizi composed a rhymed prose Hebrew translation of al-Hariri's Arabic *maqamat*, probably in response to a challenge that their perfection could not be imitated.⁶⁵ In his translation, titled *Mahbarot ʿIttiʿel*,⁶⁶ al-Harizi strived to capture the sense of the original while creating a new work that was belletristic in its own right. Arabic names were changed to biblical names, cities around the Islamic world were replaced with biblical place names, and ironic biblical allusions were used.⁶⁷

Unlike *Mahbarot ʿIttiʿel*, the *Tahkemoni* was the work of an author who left his homeland. Following the classical *maqama* collection of al-Hariri, the *Tahkemoni* was comprised of 50 narratives. The constant movement of characters from place to place imbues the text with the ideal of wanderlust common in *maqama* literature.

Like the Arabic *maqama*, the *Tahkemoni* used profound language and humorous scenarios. Al-Harizi stated that he wrote the book in order to ennoble the Hebrew language, which had "declined appallingly"⁶⁸ in his day, and to "demonstrate the power of the Holy Tongue to the Holy Nation."⁶⁹ Al-Harizi claimed that his book was entirely original, "I took nothing from the book of the Ishmaelite (al-Hariri)."⁷⁰ However, it is well known among modern scholars that the author borrowed liberally from al-Hamadani, al-Hariri, and other Arabic sources.⁷¹

Throughout the *Tahkemoni*, al-Harizi undertook many literary feats: the inclusion of an epistle that when read forward was panegyric but when read backward was invective,⁷² a trilingual poem (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic) in a single rhyme and meter,⁷³ and a *maqama* with two speeches structured so that every word in the first speech included the letter "resh" but every word in the second omitted the same letter.⁷⁴

The *Tahkemoni* was remarkable for its ironic exploitation of traditional texts. David Segal translated one episode:

Lo, the cantor entered and took his honoured seat, and in tones dulcet sweet began the daily blessings, as is meet. According to the practice of our nation, he begged God's lumination, thundering, *Make the words of Thy Torah pheasant in our mouth, rather than pleasant in our mouth; and May the Lord flavour you and grant you peas, instead of May the Lord favour you and grant you peace.* In the next section of the service, his zeal mounting, he made errors beyond counting. For *It is our duty to bless and hallow Thy name* he said *It is our duty to blast and hollow Thy name; for Exalt the Lord our God,* he said, *Assault the Lord our God; for Praise the Lord O my soul,* he said *Prize the Lard, O my soul; for Thine, O Lord is the greatness and the power,* he said *Thine, O Lord, is the gratings and the flour; for Thou rulest over all,* he said *Thou droolest over all.*⁷⁵

Although the scene was intended to be humorous, its setting in a real city of the Islamic East, Mosul of Iraq, suggested that al-Harizi, the wanderer, may have found Jewish learning lacking in the lands of his journey. Al-Harizi spent his final years composing Arabic poetry in honor of Muslim patrons⁷⁶ and left an account of his Eastern journeys in Arabic rhymed prose.⁷⁷

Al-Harizi's attempt to restore luster to the Hebrew language was well received in the thirteenth century. In Christian Spain, the *Tahkemoni* was followed by several original works in rhymed prose. Even more than the Hebrew *maqamat* that predate the *Tahkemoni*, these narratives reveal affinities for the burgeoning literary traditions of Europe.⁷⁸ Hebrew authors in Italy, Egypt, Yemen, Turkey, and Greece continued to utilize rhymed prose for centuries to come.⁷⁹

Spanish

Neither Latin nor the dialects of vernacular Spanish played a role in the Jewish culture of Christian Spain comparable to the role of Arabic in al-Andalus. There were no Latin literary compositions by medieval Spanish Jews.⁸⁰ Only rarely did Jewish authors compose works in the dialects of Spanish. An example of a Catalan text of Jewish authorship was the *Refutation of Christian Dogmas*⁸¹ by Hasdai Crescas (1340–c. 1410). This non-belletristic work was intended to challenge the abundant polemical literature aimed at the conversion of Jews to Catholicism by persuasion. The only example of a belletristic work by a Jew in Castilian was the

Proverbios Morales by Santob de Carrión (d. after 1345), also known as Shem Tov Ibn Arduziel. Santob identified himself as a Jew in a self-deprecating tone,

Many a sword of good and fine steel comes from a torn sheath, and it is from the worm that fine silk is made. . . . For being born on the thornbush, the rose is certainly not worth less, nor is good wine if taken from the lesser branches of the vine. Nor is a hawk worth less, if born in a poor nest; nor are good proverbs [of less value] if spoken by a Jew.⁸²

Many of the book's teachings derive from other European proverb collections, though numerous examples clearly emanate from Jewish sources. For example, Santob's proverb "In truth, the world subsists through three things: justice, truth, and peace, which comes from these" (lines 1369–72) was an almost verbatim quotation of Rabban Shimon Ben Gamliel's statement in the Mishnah, "By three things is the world maintained: by justice, by truth and by peace" (Abot 1:18).⁸³ Other elements of the book may be traced to Arabic sources.⁸⁴ For these reasons, Américo Castro characterized the *Proverbios Morales* as an essential Jewish contribution to Spanish literature and hence Spanish civilization.⁸⁵

The fifteenth century saw the first glimmerings of Judeo-Spanish, which became a normative language of Sephardic writing after the Expulsion. Although a complete Ladino⁸⁶ Bible did not appear until the sixteenth century, fragments survive of earlier translation attempts. Some of the earliest Judeo-Spanish compositions were translations of classic Jewish texts such as *The Sayings of the Fathers*, Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*, and a simplified prayer book for women. Other samples included original beltristic compositions such as the *Poem of Joseph* and a bilingual Hebrew-Spanish love poem.⁸⁷ Judeo-Spanish ballads among Jews in medieval Spain remained a part of the Sephardic oral tradition after the Expulsion down to the modern period.⁸⁸

Conclusion

The literature of medieval Sephardic Jews in Hebrew, Arabic, Hispano-Romance, and Spanish elucidate the complex cultural environment of medieval Iberia. Through these texts, the modern reader could explore the

degree of permeability between Jewish and non-Jewish culture. In al-Andalus and in Christian Spain, Hebrew retained premier status as the language of literature, demonstrating the impulse to maintain community and fortify identity. At the same time, Jewish writings in other languages and the influence of non-Jewish literature on Hebrew writing indicate the high degree of Jewish acculturation and the Jewish role in the formation of Spanish culture.

Following the Expulsion, Sephardic Jews carried many of the traditions developed in the medieval period with them. Liturgical compositions by Judah Halevi, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, and others adorned Sephardic liturgy throughout the Diaspora. A canon of Sephardic intellectual culture developed around Judeo-Spanish translations of classic works from the medieval period. In the peninsula and beyond, *conversos* composed works in Spanish that point to Jewish origins, testifying to the ongoing Jewish component in the development of Spanish culture.

NOTES

1. Solomon Ibn Gabirol, *Shirei ha-Hol shel Shelomo Ibn Gabirol*, ed. H. Brody and J. Schirmann (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1974), 169, l. 8.
2. Consuelo López-Morillas, "Language," in *The Literature of al-Andalus*, ed. María Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, and Michael Sells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 46–50; David J. Wasserstein, "The Language Situation in al-Andalus," in *Studies on the Muwashshah and the Kharja (Proceedings of the Exeter International Colloquium)*, ed. Alan Jones and Richard Hitchcock (Reading, England: Ithaca, 1991), 1–15. See for information on language in al-Andalus.
3. Américo Castro, *The Structure of Spanish History*, trans. Edmund L. King (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954). On the history and limitations of the term "*convivencia*," see Thomas F. Glick, "Convivencia: An Introductory Note," in *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain*, ed. Vivian B. Mann, Thomas F. Glick, and Jerilynn D. Dodds (New York: Jewish Museum, 1992), 1–9; Thomas F. Glick and Oriol Pi-Sunyer, "Acculturation as an Explanatory Concept in Spanish History," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 11 (1969): 136–54.
4. Joshua Blau, *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic: A Study of the Origins of Neo-Arabic and Middle Arabic*, 3d rev. ed. (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1999). Judeo-Arabic texts vary regarding their adherence to the rules of classical Arabic, often incorporate elements of colloquial usage, include Hebrew

and Aramaic terms specific to Jewish subjects, and exhibit grammatical peculiarities such as "hypercorrection" (i.e., making grammatical errors as a result of "trying too hard" to follow grammatical rules). See Blau's work.

5. The most extensive textbooks on the history of Hebrew poetry in Muslim and Christian Spain are the two volumes by Jefim Schirmann, *Toledot ha-Shirah ha-^cIvrit bi-Sefarad ha-Muslemim*, ed., supplemented, and annotated by Ezra Fleischer (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1995); and idem, *Toledot ha-Shirah ha-^cIvrit bi-Sefarad ha-Notzrit u-ve-Derom Tzarfat*, ed., supplemented, and annotated by Ezra Fleischer (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1997). Extensive information and bibliography on the periods and authors discussed in this essay can be found in these volumes.

6. Ezra Fleischer, *Shirat ha-Qodesh ha-^cIvrit bi-Yemei ha-Beinayim* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975).

7. Aaron Mirsky, *Ha-Piyyut: Hitpathuto be-Eretz Yisra'el u-va-Golah* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990). For examples in English translation, see T. Carmi, *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York: Penguin, 1981), 190–94.

8. On Sa'adia Gaon in general, see Robert Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 235–332.

9. Yosef Tobi, "Sa'adia Gaon, Poet-Paytan: The Connecting Link between the Ancient Piyyut and Hebrew Arabised Poetry in Spain," in *Israel and Ishmael: Studies in Muslim-Jewish Relations*, ed. Tudor Parfitt (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), 59–77.

10. *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts through the Ages* (New York: Schocken, 1964), 155–66. For an evaluation of Goitein's concept of "symbiosis," see Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

11. A. S. Halkin, ed., *Kitab al-Muhadara wa'l-Mudhakara* (Jerusalem: Mekitzei Nirdamim, 1975); See also Raymond P. Scheindlin, "Rabbi Moses Ibn Ezra on the Legitimacy of Poetry," *Medievalia et Humanistica* n.s. 7 (1976): 101–15.

12. Ross Brann, *The Compunctious Poet: Cultural Ambiguity and Hebrew Poetry in Muslim Spain* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 95ff. Also, it should be kept in mind that Dunash's innovation was not utilized in every poem of the Sephardic School. Liturgical poems exist in three metrical forms: those that are composed in the style of the ancient piyyut, those that follow the Arabic system, and those that strike a compromise between the two systems. Particularly when adorning sections of the liturgy whose form was standardized in the ancient piyyut, the medieval poet would defer to the age-old protocols of traditional form.

13. Ángel Sáenz Badillos, "Hebrew Philology in Sefarad: the State of the Question," in *Hebrew Scholarship and the Medieval World*, ed. Nicholas de Lange (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 38–59. See for a synopsis.

14. The phrase derives from Qur'an 90:18.

15. Brann, *The Compunctious Poet*, 25.

16. Raymond P. Scheindlin, *Wine, Women, and Death: Medieval Hebrew Poems on the Good Life* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1986). See for information on wine and love poetry.

17. Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasib* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). See for information on the development of this and other themes.

18. Raymond P. Scheindlin, *The Gazelle: Medieval Hebrew Poems on God, Israel, and the Soul* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 65. Selections reprinted from *The Gazelle*, © 1990, by Raymond Scheindlin, published by The Jewish Publication Society with the permission of the publisher, The Jewish Publication Society. Throughout this essay, I point the reader to some of the fine English translations of medieval Hebrew verse. Unless indicated otherwise, all translations are my own. Other English translations of poems by Moses Ibn Ezra may be found in *Selected Poems of Moses Ibn Ezra*, trans. Solomon Solis-Cohen (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1945).

19. Colette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 57–112; Lenn E. Goodman, ed., *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992). See for information on Jewish Neoplatonism.

20. Scheindlin, *The Gazelle*, 203. See also Solomon Ibn Gabirol, *Selected Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol*, trans. Peter Cole (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

21. Tova Rosen and Eli Yassif, "The Study of Hebrew Literature in the Middle Ages: Major Trends and Goals," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. Martin Goodman, Jeremy Cohen, and David Sorkin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 241–94. The enterprise of segregating "sacred" from "secular" verse is a modern construction of limited use since numerous poems do not fit neatly into one category or the other. "Secular" poems often assume a religious worldview while "sacred" poems do not always assume a liturgical context. On the history of the field, see the recent essay by Rosen and Yassif.

22. Samuel Ha-Nagid, *Diwan (Ben Tehillim)*, ed. Dov Jarden (Jerusalem: Hebrew Union College, 1966), 283, poem 132.

23. Scheindlin, *Wine, Women, and Death*, 19–33.

24. On roundness in poetry, see Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (New York: Orion, 1964), chap. 10. See also the comments by Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd*, 180–81.

25. Jefim Schirmann, "The Ephebe in Medieval Hebrew Poetry," *Sefarad* 15 (1955): 55–68; Nehemiah Allony, "Ha-Tzvi ve-ha-Gamal be-Shirat Sefarad," *Otzar Yehudei Sefarad* 4 (1961): 16–42; Norman Roth, "'Deal Gently with the Young Man': Love of Boys in Medieval Hebrew Poetry from Spain," *Speculum* 57 (1982): 20–51. The homoerotic aspect of medieval Hebrew poetry has been the subject of

considerable discussion in scholarly and popular publications. The works by Schirmann, Allony, and Roth serve as examples.

26. Ha-Nagid, *Diwan*, 305. See translations in Scheindlin, *Wine, Women, and Death*, 69; Samuel Ha-Nagid, *Selected Poems by Shmuel HaNagid*, trans. Peter Cole (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 15.

27. On Judah Halevi, see Ross Brann, "Judah Halevi," in *The Literature of al-Andalus*, ed. Menocal, Scheindlin, and Sells, 265–81. For samples of Halevi's poetry in English, see *Selected Poems of Jehudah Halevi*, trans. Nina Salaman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1924; repr. 1974).

28. Leon Weinberger, *Twilight of a Golden Age: Selected Poems of Abraham Ibn Ezra* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997). Translations of some poems by Abraham Ibn Ezra can be found there.

29. Israel Levin, *Yalqut Avraham Ibn Ezra* (in Hebrew) (Haifa, Israel: Keren Yisrael Matz, 1985), 101–3.

30. Aviva Doron, "Arim ba-Shirah ha-Ivrit bi-Sefarad," in *Sefer Yisra'el Levin*, ed. Tova Rosen and Reuven Tzur (Tel Aviv: 1994), vol. 1, 69–78.

31. Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Al-Maqqari al-Tilimsani, *Nafh al-Tib Min Ghush al-Andalus al-Ratib*, ed. Ihsan 'Abbas (Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab Al-'Arabi, 1968), vol. 3, 522–30; see also Ross Brann, "The Arabized Jews," in *The Literature of al-Andalus*, ed. Menocal, Scheindlin, and Sells, 436.

32. The words "knife" (*sikkin*) and "inhabiting" (*sukna*) are both derived from the same root (*skn*).

33. S. M. Stern, trans., "Arabic Poems by Spanish Hebrew Poets," in *Romanica et Occidentalia à La Mémoire de Hiram Peri*, ed. M. Lazar (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1963), 258.

34. Halkin, *Kitab al-Muhadara wa'l-Mudhakara*, 78.

35. On Qasmuna, see María Ángeles Gallego García, "Approaches to the Study of Muslim and Jewish Women in the Medieval Iberian Peninsula: The Poetess Qasmuna bat Isma'il," *Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos* 48 (1999): 63–75, Sección de Hebreo.

36. On the *muwashshah*, see Tova Rosen, "The Muwashshah," in *The Literature of al-Andalus*, ed. Menocal, Scheindlin, and Sells, 165–89; on the Hebrew *muwashshah*, idem, *Le-Ezor Shir: 'Al Shirat ha-Ezor ha-'Ivrit bi-Yemei ha-Beinayim* (Haifa, Israel: Hotsa' At Sefarim Sel Universitat Haifa, 1985). See also María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987).

37. Jefim Schirmann, *Ha-Shirah ha-'Ivrit bi-Sefarad u-ve-Provans* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, DVIR, 1954–56), vol. 1, 442. Hereafter referred to as HHSP.

38. S. M. Stern, "Les vers finaux en espagnol dans les muwashshahs hispano-hebraïques: Une contribution à l'histoire du muwashshah et à l'étude du vieux dialecte espagnol 'mozarabe,'" *Al-Andalus* 13 (1978): 299–346.

39. See, for example, the discussion in Otto Zwartjes, *Love Songs from al-*

Andalus: History, Structure, and Meaning of the Kharja (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 1997); James T. Monroe, "Zajal and Muwashshah: Hispano-Arabic Poetry and the Romance Tradition," in *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 1992), 398–419.

40. HHSP, vol. 1, 210–12.

41. Literally, "only one." Cf. Psalm 22:21.

42. On this period in general, see Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition: The Career and Controversies of Ramah* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

43. Gerson D. Cohen, *Sefer ha-Qabbalah: The Book of Tradition by Abraham Ibn Daud: A Critical Edition with Translation and Notes* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1967), 70–71, Hebrew section.

44. On Todros Halevi Abulafia, see Brann, *The Compunctious Poet*, 143–57; Ángel Sáenz Badillos, "Hebrew Invective Poetry: The Debate between Todros Abulafia and Phinehas Halevi," *Prooftexts* 16 (1996): 49–73; Aviva Doron, *Meshorer be-Hatzar ha-Melekh: Todros Halevi Abulafia—Shirah 'Ivrit bi-Sefarad ha-Notzrit* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1989).

45. Todros Halevi Abulafia, *Gan ha-Meshalim ve-ha-Hidot*, ed. David Yellin (Jerusalem: Weiss, 1934), vol. 2, 1 [714], 124–25; HHSP, vol. 2, 435–47, ll. 15–21.

46. HHSP, vol. 2, 434–35; translation in Brann, *The Compunctious Poet*, 145.

47. This area of poetry has not been studied sufficiently. See Raymond P. Scheindlin, "Secular Poetry in Fifteenth-Century Spain," in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World: 1391–1648*, ed. Benjamin R. Gampel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 25–37.

48. Schirmann, *Toledot . . . ha-Muslemmit*, 588–93.

49. Further on the *maqama* in Spain, see Rina Drory, "The Maqama," in *The Literature of al-Andalus*, ed. Menocal, Scheindlin, and Sells, 83–92; H. Nemah, "Andalusian Maqamat," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 5 (1974): 83–92. The most classical of Arabic *maqama* collections from al-Andalus is that by Abu al-Tahir Muhammad Ibn Yusuf al-Saraqusti, *Al-Maqamat al-Luzumiyah*, trans. James T. Monroe (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2002).

50. The Hebrew text *Ne'um Asher Ben Yehudah* may be found in HHSP, vol. 2, 554–65; for an English translation, see Raymond P. Scheindlin, trans., "Asher in the Harem," in *Rabbinic Fantasies: Imaginative Narratives from Classical Hebrew Literature*, ed. David Stern and Mark J. Mirsky (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 253–67.

51. Raymond P. Scheindlin, "Fawns of the Palace, Fawns of the Field," *Prooftexts* 6 (1986): 189–203.

52. Scheindlin, "Asher in the Harem," 263.

53. It is possible that this story was originally one in a series of *maqamat* wherein Asher and the Adulamite are constant characters. This would be consistent with the classical *maqama* form. One fragment has been discovered with the

same opening phrase, "Asher Son of Judah spoke," but is too sketchy to allow for solid conclusions. See, however, Ezra Fleischer, "Inyanei Piyyut ve-Shirah," in *Meh qarei Sifrut Mugashim le-Shim'on Halkin*, ed. Ezra Fleischer (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1973), 193–204, which argues for single authorship based on stylistic elements.

54. Hebrew text, *Sefer Sha'ashu'im le-Rav Yosef Ben Meir Ibn Zabara*, ed. Israel Davidson (Berlin: Eshkol, 1925); English translation, *The Book of Delight by Joseph Ben Meir Ibn Zabara*, trans. Moses Hadas with an introduction by Merriam Sherwood (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932).

55. Merriam Sherwood compares stories in *The Book of Delight* with European folktales. See Hadas, *The Book of Delight*, 3–43.

56. Selections are published in HHSP, vol. 2, 67–86; the complete Hebrew text can be found in the dissertation of Matti Huss, "Minhat Yehudah," "Ezrat ha-Nashim," ve-'Ein Mishpat'—Mahadurot Mada'iyot bi-Leviyat Mavo', Hilufe'i Girsat'ot, Meqorot u-Ferushim" (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1991), vol. 2. A partial English translation is "The Misogynist," trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin, in Scheindlin, *Rabbinic Fantasies*, 269–94. On misogyny (and other themes) in medieval Hebrew literature, see the recent book by Tova Rosen, *Unveiling Eve: Reading Gender in Medieval Hebrew Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

57. HHSP, vol. 2, 71–72; Huss, "Minhat Yehudah," vol. 2, 5–6.

58. Huss, "Minhat Yehudah," 54ff.

59. On fictional devices, see Matti Huss, "Lo' Haya ve-Lo' Nivra': 'Iyyun Mashveh me-Ma'amad ha-Bidayon ba-Maqama ha-'Ivrit ve-ha-'Aravit," in *Meh qarei Yerushalayim be-Sifrut 'Ivrit* 18 (2001): 58–104.

60. On variety, see Dan Pagis, "Variety in Medieval Rhymed Narratives," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 27 (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1978), 79–98.

61. The book's title derives from the name of the father of one of King David's warriors in II Samuel 23:8; the root of the name (*hkm*) implies "wisdom."

62. Hebrew text, see Judah al-Harizi, *Tahkemoni*, ed. Y. Toporovsky (Tel Aviv: 1952). For a fine literary translation in English rhymed prose, see Judah Alharizi, *The Book of Tahkemoni: Jewish Tales from Medieval Spain*, trans. and explicated by David Simha Segal (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001). There is also a literal translation by V. E. Reichert, *The Tahkemoni of Judah Alharizi: An English Translation*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: R. H. Cohen's Press, 1965–73).

63. A complete list of al-Harizi's translations can be found in Rina Drory, "Literary Contacts and Where to Find Them: On Arabic Literary Models in Medieval Jewish Culture," *Poetics Today* 14, no. 2 (1993): 277–302.

64. Moshe Ben Maimon, *Moreh ha-Nevukhim be-Tirgumo Shel Rabbi Yehuda al-Harizi* (Jerusalem: Mosad Ha-Rav Kook, 1953). The earlier translation of the *Guide* by Samuel Ibn Tibbon (produced in collaboration with Maimonides himself) may have been too cumbersome for some readers in Provence.

65. Al-Harizi explains this as the motive of the undertaking in the *Tahkemoni*, chap. 1.

66. Al-Hariri, *Mahbarot 'Itti'el*, trans. Judah al-Harizi, ed. Yitzhaq Peretz (Tel Aviv: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1955). The narrator 'Itti'el is named for a wise man in Proverbs 30:1.

67. Jefim Schirmann, *Die hebräische Übersetzung der Maqamen des Hariri* (Frankfurt: J. Kauffmann, 1930); Abraham Lavi, "A Comparative Study of al-Hariri's Maqamat and Their Hebrew Translation by al-Harizi" (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979).

68. Al-Harizi, *Tahkemoni*, ed. Toporovsky, 8.

69. *Ibid.*, 12

70. *Ibid.*, 14

71. The literature on the sources of the *Tahkemoni* is quite vast. For a convenient summary, see the dissertation by 'Abd al-Rahman Mar'i, "Hashpa'at Maqamot al-Hariri 'al Mahbarot Tahkemoni" (Tel Aviv: Bar Ilan University, 1995).

72. Al-Harizi, *The Book of Tahkemoni*, 8.

73. *Ibid.*, 11. This is re-created in Segal's translation with a trilingual poem by Dr. Leo Franc Holford-Stevens in English, French, and Latin.

74. *Ibid.*, 11. Segal recreates this effect by including and omitting the letter "o."

75. Al-Harizi, *The Book of Tahkemoni*, trans. Segal, 216–17.

76. The Arabic poems are included in Joseph Sadan, "Rabi Yehudah al-Harizi ke-Tzomet Tarbuti," *Pe'amim* 68 (1996): 52–61.

77. Joseph Yahalom and Joshua Blau, *Mas'ei Yehudah* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2002), 91–167.

78. At the same time, it is believed that aspects of medieval Spanish prose writing are indebted to *maqama* literature, though Arabic is generally considered a more immediate influence than Hebrew.

79. Pagis, "Variety in Medieval Rhymed Narratives."

80. However, Petrus Alfonsi (formerly Moses Sefardi), a famous Jewish convert to Catholicism, incorporated many maxims, proverbs, and folktales of Hebrew (and Arabic) origin in his celebrated *Disciplina clericalis*. See Lourdes María Álvarez, "Petrus Alfonsi" in *The Literature of al-Andalus*, ed. Menocal, Scheindlin, and Sells, 282–91 and bibliography therein.

81. The text survives in the Hebrew translation of Joseph Ben Shem Tov; the work has been translated into English by Daniel J. Lasker, *The Refutation of the Christian Principles* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

82. T. A. Perry, *The Moral Proverbs of Santob de Carrión: Jewish Wisdom in Christian Spain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 19–20, ll. 169–89. Perry argues that the "rose among thorns" motif is intended to alert Jewish readers of a Jewish-Christian polemic.

83. *Ibid.*, 96.

84. *Ibid.*, 79–80, where a passage is traced to a poem by al-Mu²tamid Ibn ^cAbbad of Seville, perhaps through the Hebrew translation of Rabbi Meir Abulafia.

85. Castro, *The Structure of Spanish History*, 551–57, 572–76. Castro especially credits Santob for introducing “intimate reality” into Spanish literature.

86. A register of Judeo-Spanish used in the translation of Hebrew texts that mimics the syntax of Hebrew. “Ladino” is often used more casually to refer to other registers of Judeo-Spanish.

87. On Judeo-Spanish texts in the fifteenth century, see Moshe Lazar, *Sefarad in My Heart: A Ladino Reader* (Lancaster, CA: Labyrinthos, 1999): vii–viii.

88. On the Sephardi ballad (and other Judeo-Spanish forms), see Samuel G. Armistead, Joseph H. Silverman, and Israel J. Katz, *Folk Literature of the Sephardic Jews*, 5 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971–1994).

Chapter 6

Medieval Sephardic-Oriental Jewish Bible Exegesis

The Contributions of Saadia Gaon and Abraham ibn Ezra

Isaac Kalimi

Introduction

In medieval times the Jewish Bible exegesis flourished in a variety of locations of the Jewish Diaspora, namely in Northern France, Provence, Spain, and the Middle East. During this period, Judaism interacted closely with Christianity and Islam. This interaction saved Judaism from becoming fossilized and nonproductive, and forced it to search for new horizons in Holy Scripture interpretations. Indeed, the disputes between Jews and non-Jews (especially Christians and Moslems) concerning a variety of theological issues in general and exegetical methods of the Hebrew Bible in particular, motivated many Jewish scholars to study the Bible for its own merit. They attempted to search and interpret the Scriptures by new methods that were profoundly different from that of the classical rabbis in Talmudic and Midrashic literature. Moreover, disputes among several internal Jewish groups, such as those between rabbinic Judaism and the Karaites, pushed—particularly the Sephardic Jewish scholars—to search for new directions in biblical studies and interpretation.

Jewish scholars under the Islamic realm were surrounded by the rich and well-developed Arabic language and philology. Thus, they were influenced and encouraged to develop their own literary languages, above all Hebrew. Here the Quran’s interpretative methods and techniques were utilized for explanation of the Jewish Bible. Likewise, as the Arab interpreters attempted to harmonize between Greek philosophy and the