Chapter 3

The Judeo-Arabic Heritage

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Introductory Reflections

Nearly forty years ago, I brought my fiancée, who had been born in Morocco and raised in Israel, home to meet my family. I shall never forget the moment when she met my grandmother. My grandmother, whose English, even after fifty years in the United States, was still heavily accented, asked my fiancée, "Does your family speak Jewish?" Not understanding what she meant, my bride-to-be replied, "Of course, we all speak Hebrew. That is the language in Israel." "No, no," my grandmother insisted, "Not *ivres.* Does your family speak Yiddish?" "Ah," exclaimed my fiancée. "No, not Yiddish. We have our own 'Jewish'—Jewish Arabic." My poor grandmother was bewildered. For her, Yiddish (literally "Jewish," but short for *yiddish taytsh,* Judeo-German, or better Judeo-Germanic) was *mameloshn* (mother tongue). It was thought of by Eastern European Jews as essentially "Jewish." In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there were those who actively opposed the revival of Hebrew as a living language for a modern national movement. Although Hebrew was *leshon qodesh* (the holy tongue), it was not the people's language—at least not the language of the Eastern European Jewish masses.[1]

Another personal experience of mine occurred at a bus stop in the Baqᶜa quarter of Jerusalem in the early 1970s, where my wife and I encountered a friend of her mother's. She was an elderly, traditional Moroccan woman. She was easily recognizable even before she spoke by her headscarf, jewelry, and various other cultural cues. My wife introduced me to her, and we chatted in the Judeo-Arabic of Sefrou, their hometown in Morocco. I had, at that time, begun a study of this particular vernacular both in Morocco and Israel.[2] I was delighted by the opportunity to practice my speaking skills, and my wife was clearly delighted to show off her Ashkenazi American husband who could speak their native tongue. A short while later, after the woman departed, I noticed that my wife had tears in her eyes. When I asked her why, she told me that she suddenly remembered how years earlier, when she was a schoolgirl, that if she saw that same woman from a distance, she would walk blocks out of her way to avoid her. This was to avoid embarrassment from having to speak Moroccan Arabic in public because of the strong prejudice against Jews from Muslim countries (so-called *mizrahim,* or Oriental Jews) and especially Moroccan Jews. In the 1950s and early 1960s, it was not at all chic to speak Arabic of any kind in Israel—and certainly not to be Moroccan.

The great irony in these two personal anecdotes is that, amongst all the many Jewish Diaspora languages of post-Talmudic times (Yiddish, Ladino, Shuadit (Judeo-Provençal), Judeo-Persian, Judeo-Greek, Judeo-French, Judeo-Tat, Judeo-Berber, and still others less well known), Judeo-Arabic held a place of special distinction. It had the longest recorded history after Hebrew and Aramaic (from the ninth century to the present).[3] It had the widest geographical diffusion, extending across three continents during the Middle Ages. Furthermore, and even more significantly, it was the medium of expression for one of the foremost periods of Jewish cultural and intellectual creativity.

Judeo-Arabic and Jewish Languages

The existence of Jewish languages was a function of Jewish history. For more than two millennia, Jews lived scattered throughout many lands and cultures. But the transformational effects of their dispersion were mitigated or tempered by their own group cohesion within the far-flung lands in which they lived. They perceived these lands as *galut,* or exile, both spiritually and politically. Wherever they lived, Jews created their own distinct vernaculars that were usually written in Hebrew script and contained considerable amounts of Hebrew/Aramaic vocabulary. These Jewish idioms differed also from their non-Jewish cognates in their pronunciation, grammar, syntax, and lexical choices within the non-Hebrew root vocabulary. The Jews, subconsciously, created and preserved a unique linguistic identity.[4]

Judeo-Arabic may be considered the premier Diaspora language. For most of the last 1400 years, Arabic, in its Jewish form, was spoken by more

Jews than any other language. From the seventh until the end of the seventeenth centuries, the majority of the world's Jews lived in the *Dār al-Islām* (Domain of Islam). Furthermore, Arabic was spoken or used as a cultural language by Jews across a greater geographical expanse than any other language was. In the Middle Ages, Arabic was the Jewish language from Spain (and even to some extent from Provence) all the way to India. Although Yiddish spread to the ends of the earth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as Ashkenazi Jews poured out of eastern Europe to the New World, South Africa, and Australia, it did not sink long-lasting roots and was quickly abandoned by the second and third generations.

Some forms of Judeo-Arabic also spread beyond their original heartlands in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to Iraqi Jewish trading colonies in India, Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, and Shanghai; to Aleppan Jewish enclaves in France, England, and the Americas; and to Yemenite Jewish communities in India and elsewhere.[5] Most importantly, however, Judeo-Arabic was the literary medium for some of the greatest works of the Jewish spirit. This did not include Mizrahi, Sephardi, regional, or temporal works, but contributions that belonged to the common heritage of Judaism and the Jewish people. In the Judeo-Arabic world, many of the key elements of Judaism, as a religious civilization under the constitutional framework of the Talmud, were crystallized, formulated, and systematized. These elements included law, liturgy, philosophy and theology, scriptural exegesis, Hebrew grammar and lexicography, and Hebrew poetry and belles lettres.

Historical Survey of Judeo-Arabic

Early Judeo-Arabic

Before the spread of Islam, the only Jews speaking Arabic were those of the Jewish tribes in Arabia. Their everyday language was apparently similar to that of their Arab neighbors, except for the Hebrew and Aramaic words they used to express specifically Jewish religious and cultural concepts. The Arabs referred to this Judeo-Arabic dialect as *yahūdiyya* (Jewish speech). Some of the Hebrew and Aramaic vocabulary of this early Judeo-Arabic, as well as a number of religious concepts, passed into the speech of the pagan Arabs and, thereafter, into Muslim Arabic.[6] Although the Jews of sixth- and seventh-century Arabia most likely wrote letters and documents in Hebrew characters, they left behind no Judeo-Arabic literature. The only literary art at the time was oral poetry. The poems preserved in later Arabic tradition by Jewish bards from this period, such as al-Samaw'al, were completely devoid of any Jewish content. There seemed to be no continuation between this early Judeo-Arabic and the great Jewish language of the Middle Ages.

Medieval Judeo-Arabic

The Islamic conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries established a domain that stretched from the borders of India and China in the East, to the Atlantic Ocean and the Pyrenees in the West. The majority of Jews living in the world during this time came under Arab rule. The Arabic language became the lingua franca of this vast empire, taking the place of Aramaic and Greek, which served as the international languages of culture and administration throughout much of the Middle East and North Africa previously. As the conquered people adopted Arabic, it underwent a variety of metamorphoses, evolving into Middle Arabic (or rather, Middle Arabic dialects). This simplified form of the language dropped the case endings of the old Arabian dialects, transformed the syntax from a synthetic to an analytical structure, and greatly enriched the vocabulary.[7]

The Jews also adopted the new international language of culture. By the tenth century, it became not only their daily vernacular, but also the language used for most of their written expression. Arabic was used for day-to-day correspondence—as we know from the rich treasure trove of documents called the Cairo Geniza—as well as for religious queries and responsa (Heb., *she'elot u-teshuvot*), documents, biblical exegesis and other textual commentaries, philosophy and theology, and works on Hebrew grammar and lexicography.[8]

For linguistic and psychological reasons, the transition to Arabic for the majority of Jews in the caliphate was presumably not very difficult. Arabic was a Semitic language with many affinities to Hebrew and Aramaic. Furthermore, Islam was a strictly monotheistic religious civilization based on the notion of a divine law that was partially written and partially oral. This was similar, in many respects, to Judaism. Islam, like Judaism, eschewed religious iconography, and did not manifest the kind of hostility toward Judaism that Christianity did. In the Arabic world, in contrast to the Christian world, Jews were not the only subjects not belonging to the

ruling faith. They shared their status with the far more numerous Christians and Zoroastrians. Medieval Islamic civilization was not a totally clerical or feudal one, as medieval Latin Christendom was.

The ninth through twelfth centuries witnessed the Commercial Revolution, the rise of the bourgeoisie, and a revival of Hellenistic science and humanism in the Muslim world. There was a high degree of interconfessional cooperation in the fields of science, philosophy, and commerce, which Islam—like Judaism—held in high esteem. Consequently, there were many aspects of the general emerging Islamic secular culture that Jews found attractive and unthreatening. They could participate in a symbiotic way with cultural commensalism.[9]

Jews normally wrote Arabic in Hebrew characters that were already familiar to them, as they were taught Hebrew from early childhood for religious purposes. Members of the intelligentsia could read Arabic script with at least some degree of proficiency. Some even produced works for a broader audience in the standard Arabic script as well. However, it was not uncommon for Jews to have books by Muslim writers transcribed into Hebrew letters for more convenient reading, according to the Geniza. Although Hebrew and Arabic both belonged to the Semitic family of languages, Arabic has several consonants not found in Hebrew. Judeo-Arabic made up for this by adopting a system of diacritical points in imitation of the Muslim Arabic writing system (for example, the Arabic consonant *dād* was indicated by a dotted *sadī*, and *zā'* by a dotted *tet*). The system was somewhat haphazard, and there were minor deviations among different writers in the transcription of uniquely Arabic sounds into Hebrew (for example, both the Hebrew *gimel* and *ᶜayin* with a mark were used to indicate the Arabic *ghayn*).

The Jews in the medieval Islamic world did not write in the vernacular language they spoke on a daily basis. Instead, they used a literary Middle Arabic—a form of the language between Classical Arabic (the only acceptable medium of expression in Islamic culture) and the local dialects. The medieval Judeo-Arabic literary language varied in style. One style was a Classical Arabic with some Middle Arabic elements (as for example, in works of philosophy, theology, biblical translation, and commentary). Another was a slightly classicized Middle Arabic, bristling with colloquialisms, depending upon the education of the writer and formal or informal nature of the written material (seen, for example, in the personal correspondence by people from all walks of life preserved in the Cairo Geniza).

The rich literary output in medieval Judeo-Arabic was stimulated by the intellectual and spiritual ferment that occurred in the caliphate, beginning in the second half of the eighth century and continuing throughout the ninth and tenth. The first Jewish thinker to take up the challenges posed by the rise of rationalism, free-thinking, and sectarian movements (such as Karaism) was Saᶜadya Gaon (882–942). Saᶜadya was the leading rabbinic scholar of his day. He responded in the language best understood by his fellow Jews—Arabic. Born in Egypt, he became the gaon, or head, of the Sura Academy in Baghdad, and was recognized as one of the highest religious authorities in the Jewish world. He produced a massive body of writings, not only for other scholars, but for educated laymen as well. To resolve the spiritual confusion caused by conflicting claims to truth by different religions, sects, and philosophical schools, he wrote the first exposition of Jewish theology, *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* (Ar., *Kitab al-Amānāt wa 'l-Iᶜtiqādāt*).

To meet the challenges posed by the Karaites' emphasis on the study of the Bible, Saᶜadya translated the Scriptures into Arabic (*al-Tafsār*) and wrote a rational commentary *(al-Ta'wīl)*. His translation was more than a pioneer work. It was a literary milestone that influenced many later Jewish and Christian Arabic Bible translations. His commentary affected many later works of exegesis, including Abraham Ibn Ezra's Hebrew commentary. To facilitate the study of the Bible, Saᶜadya composed the first Hebrew dictionary (Heb., *ha-Agron*), which followed the models of Arabic lexicography and used Arabic as the language of explanation. He also produced the first real siddur, or prayerbook, with accompanying notes and instructions in Arabic (*Jāmiᶜ al-Salawāt*). Saᶜadya was the first scholar to write legal tracts (e.g., *The Book of Inheritance Law*—Ar., *Kitāb al-Mawārith*) and responsa in Arabic.[10]

During this time, a major center of Jewish scholarly activity developed far to the west of Iraq in the North African city of Qayrawan (modern-day Tunisia). The "sages of Qayrawan" were noted in Hebrew literature for their religious and secular learning. The earliest and most famous of these sages was the physician and Neoplatonic philosopher Isaac Israeli (ca. 850–950). Israeli's Arabic works were translated into Hebrew and Latin and studied for centuries in medieval and Renaissance Europe. He was named "the distinguished monarch of medicine." His disciple, Dunash ben Tamim (d. ca. 960), in addition to being a physician and philosopher, was a Hebrew grammarian and philologist. He authored a commentary on the popular mystical treatise, *The Book of Creation* (Heb., *Sefer ha-Yesira*).

In the realm of religious scholarship, many figures were produced. Of these, the most outstanding writer in Judeo-Arabic was Nissim ben Jacob Ibn Shahin (d. 1062). He wrote an important commentary on the Talmud, entitled *The Key to the Locks of the Talmud* (Ar., *Kitāb Miftāh Maghāliq al-Talmūd*). He also produced a book of didactic and entertaining tales, *The Book of Comfort* (Ar., *Kitāb al-Faraj baᶜd al-Shidda*), the first work of its kind in medieval Jewish literature.[11]

In Muslim Iberia ("al-Andalus" in Arabic and "Sepharad" in Hebrew) medieval Judeo-Arabic literary culture reached its apogee. Under the patronage of Jewish courtiers, such as Ḥasday Ibn Shaprut (905–75) and Samuel ha-Nagid Ibn Naghrela (993–1056), Jewish scholars and men of letters produced works on Hebrew grammar, lexicography, prosody, and philosophy in Judeo-Arabic. Jonah Ibn Janaḥ (fl. first half of the eleventh century), for example, wrote what became the most influential grammar of the Hebrew language for centuries to come, *The Book of Variegated Flower-Beds* (Ar., *Kitāb al-Lumaᶜ*). He also completed a dictionary of biblical Hebrew, *The Book of Roots* (Ar., *Kitāb al-Usūl*). Moses Ibn Ezra (ca. 1055–after 1135) produced the first and most comprehensive study on the art of Hebrew rhetoric and poetry from the Middle Ages, *The Book of Conversation and Discussion* (Ar., *Kitāb al-Muhādara wa'l- Mudhākara*).[12] Solomon Ibn Gabirol (ca. 1027–57), who was known to the schoolmen of Christian Europe as Avicebron, wrote a widely read Neoplatonic treatise, *The Source of Life.* Though the Arabic original was lost, it lived on in its Latin translation as *Fons vitae.* One of the most popular works of mystical and ethical devotion in later Judaism, *The Duties of the Heart* (Ar., *Kitāb al-Hidāya ilā Fara'id al-Qulūb*), was originally written in Arabic in Spain by Baḥya Ibn Paquda (fl. second half of the eleventh century).[13] Also written in Judeo-Arabic was the classic apologetic for traditional faith against philosophical rationalism, Judah ha-Levi's *The Kuzari* (Ar., *Kitāb al-Khazarī*). This dramatic dialogue, together with ha-Levi's cycle of poems known as the "Songs of Zion," became a chief inspirational work of proto-Zionism.[14]

The Arabic-speaking Jews of Sepharad produced a rich, new Hebrew poetry that used the rhymes, meters, and many of the themes of Classical Arabic poetry. In addition to sublime religious poetry, Jewish poets such as Dunash ben Labrat, Moses Ibn Ezra, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, and Judah ha-Levi, wrote panegyrics to Jewish courtiers and poems celebrating such traditionally un-Jewish subjects as carousing, nature, and love, including poems with homoerotic themes.[15] Poetry was the one genre that was

almost exclusively in Hebrew. Contrary to the suggestions of some scholars, this was not due to the fact that the Jewish poets did not have a sufficient command of Classical Arabic or that they were not sufficiently imbued with the Arabic cultural ideal of *al-ᶜarabiyya* (there were some Jewish poets such as Samuel and Joseph Ibn Naghrela and Ibn Sahl al-Isrā'īlī who wrote elegant Arabic verse). Instead, it was because they had so thoroughly absorbed the values of Arab society. Poetry in Islamic civilization was the ultimate national art form. Hence, Jews cultivated Hebrew poetry as a national response to prove that the language of their scripture and national heritage was in no way inferior to the language of the Koran and the Arab poets.[16]

Although the Hebrew poetry of medieval Iberia was written according to Arabic stylistic models, one ought not to consider it merely to be an epigone literature. The Sephardi poets wrote inspired liturgical poems as an ornament to synagogue worship and other religious occasions. This was a genre that had no parallel in the Arabic poetic canon.

Sepharad's Judeo-Arabic tradition continued outside of Iberia after the Almohads snuffed out open Jewish life in the Muslim parts of Spain. In Egypt, Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), who saw himself as an Andalusian and upholder of its intellectual heritage, wrote all his works, with the exception of his law code, in Arabic. His medical and scientific treatises, which were aimed at a general audience, were composed in the standard form of the language. But his voluminous responsa, commentary to the Mishna, and great philosophical oeuvre, *The Guide of the Perplexed* (Ar., *Dalālat al-Hā'irīn*), were all in Judeo-Arabic. His son and successor as Nagid of the Egyptian Jewish community, Abraham Maimonides (1186–1237), continued the intellectual tradition, composing his great work of mystical pietism *The Complete Guide for Servants of God* (Ar., *Kifāyat al-ᶜĀbidīn*) in Judeo-Arabic. The next generations of the Maimonides family also continued to write in the Judeo-Arabic tradition.[17]

Modern Judeo-Arabic

Around the late fifteenth century, medieval Judeo-Arabic began to give way to modern Judeo-Arabic, or rather, to modern varieties of Judeo-Arabic. The main universal characteristic of the many heterogeneous forms of these modern varieties was their colloquial nature. Arabic society was always a diglossic one, with very different written and spoken forms of the language. This was true for Jews in the Middle Ages as well. However,

Jews began writing in a language that was much closer to the vernaculars they spoke.

The shift from Middle Arabic to modern communal dialect forms resulted, in part, from the increased social isolation of the Jews of the Arab world. At the end of the Middle Ages, they lived within restrictive ghetto-like quarters, such as the *mellāh* and the *hārat al-Yahūd.*[18] This isolation was never hermetic. Jews interacted with Muslims on many levels in the economic and commercial sphere, buying, selling, and providing various services to each other. However, socially, intellectually, and psychologically, Jewish isolation was almost total. The shift from the literary medieval written language to more vernacular forms of Judeo-Arabic also represented an overall decline in the general level of education throughout the Islamic world. The ability to write in Classical Arabic, for example, seriously deteriorated among Muslims during this period. It was only revived with the *Nahda* (Awakening) movement led by Syrian and Lebanese Christians during the second half of the nineteenth century. The *Nahda,* however, held little appeal for the vast majority of Arabic-speaking Jews in modern times who at that point did not identify with Arab culture, much less with Arab nationalism.[19]

A third factor that might have contributed to the decline of the universal medieval literary form of Judeo-Arabic was the mass influx of Sephardi refugees to the major population centers of the Islamic world. The Iberian exiles came from Christian Spain and Portugal. Their forefathers had given up the Arabic culture of al-Andalus centuries earlier. The Sephardi rabbinical elite that became dominant in many of the Arabic-speaking lands used Hebrew as their primary language of literary expression.

Until a generation ago, most surveys of the Judeo-Arabic cultural heritage ended here. This was due to a classicist bias that viewed the intellectual, spiritual, and artistic work of the late Middle Ages and early modern times in the Islamic world as essentially decadent. Not untypical was the judgment expressed by a distinguished scholar in his article in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* surveying Judeo-Arabic literature. He concluded by dismissing everything written after the fifteenth century as follows: "[I]t must be admitted that there is little value in these works, most of which are liturgical, exegetic, or translations of Hebrew pietistic works."[20] This dismissive judgment was grossly subjective and untrue. Modern Judeo-Arabic continued to be the medium of a rich and varied cultural heritage, some of whose roots went well back into the Middle Ages.

There always existed, alongside the Arabic high culture, a vibrant popular culture. During the Middle Ages, very little "vulgar" literature, such as folk poetry and prose for mass entertainment, was preserved in writing. The *Thousand and One Nights* was perhaps the best-known exception and is now widely considered a classic of world literature. The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa continued to create and consume a popular literature in Judeo-Arabic that was not merely of ethnographic or linguistic interest, but could be truly appreciated for its own sake and judged on its own terms. Both men and women from Morocco in the West to Yemen in the East composed a variety of poetic genres (ranging from the literary *qaṣīda* to the folk *muwwāl* and *ᶜarobī*) in Judeo-Arabic. Some of this poetry was written, and some was entirely oral. Even illiterate women could compose sophisticated Judeo-Arabic poetry and compete in singing duels comparable to such contests as the medieval Arab *naqā'id* or the Provençal troubadour *tensons.*[21]

Most works of rabbinical high culture were written in Hebrew. However, throughout the Arabic-speaking world and all Diaspora Jewish societies, a living tradition of highly literal calque translations of religious texts, such as the Bible, the Mishna, and the Haggada existed. They were translated into the local vernacular used both for teaching young students and for the edification of adults with limited knowledge of Hebrew. These translations were known most commonly as *sharh,* but also as *tafsīr* and *maqshiyya.* There were also scriptural commentaries written in Arabic in the style of the *sharh.* Rabbi Raphael Berdugo (1747–1821) of Meknes, Morocco, known as "The Angel Raphael" (Heb., *ha-mal'akh Refa'el*), authored one such commentary, *Leshon Limmudim.*[22]

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Judeo-Arabic newspapers and periodicals began to appear in the Middle East and North Africa. They even appeared outside of the region in Bombay and Calcutta, where there were substantial colonies of Iraqi Jewish merchants. These works were never as numerous as the thousands of such journals in Yiddish in Europe or the hundreds in Ladino in Turkey and the Balkans. However, the Judeo-Arabic newspapers and magazines served a similar function to their Yiddish and Ladino counterparts as vectors of modernization. They not only conveyed local and world news, but also discussed specifically Jewish issues such as Zionism, secularism, westernization, and anti-Semitism. They serialized and adapted modern European novels and short stories, such as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Dumas's *The Count of*

Monte Cristo. Tunisia had, by far, the largest number and the greatest variety of Judeo-Arabic periodicals of any country.

After World War I, Judeo-Arabic journals increasingly gave way to French publications from Morocco to Egypt due to the tremendous educational influence of the Alliance Israélite Universelle schools and the impact of French colonial rule in the Maghrebi countries. In Iraq and Lebanon, where modern Arabic culture made its strongest impression upon Jews, Jewish newspapers were published in Modern Standard Arabic beginning in the 1920s. A few Judeo-Arabic periodicals, however, continued to be published in Morocco, Tunisia, and Libya until the mass exodus from these countries following the establishment of the State of Israel. Several Judeo-Arabic periodicals were published in the new homeland to serve the new immigrants in the early years following their arrival.[23]

Modern Judeo-Arabic never became a major medium for original belletristic expression. Most world-class Middle Eastern and North African Jewish novelists, such as Naïm Kattan from Iraq and Albert Memmi from Tunisia, wrote their books in French. A number of important Jewish writers in Iraq, such as Anwar Sha'ul, Murad Michael, and Shalom Darwish, wrote in Modern Standard Arabic. One or two continued writing in Arabic even after immigrating to Israel.[24] There were a few Judeo-Arabic plays and novels published, mainly in Tunisia, by intellectuals such as Eliezer Farhi and Jacob Chemla. However, Modern Judeo-Arabic did serve to introduce Arabic-speaking Jews to western literary genres in translation. In addition to French and English novels, plays, and short stories, some of the new Hebrew fiction of the Haskala movement in Europe was translated into Judeo-Arabic. For example, Avraham Mapu's Zionist novel *Ahavat Siyyon* (*The Love of Zion*) appeared in Judeo-Arabic in Tunis in 1890 as *al-Hubb wa'l-Watan* (*Love and Homeland*).

Only a handful of Jews remain in the Arab world today. The overwhelming majority of Jews from Arab lands and their descendants live in Israel and France, while others reside in large communities in Canada, the United States, and elsewhere. Like Yiddish and Ladino, Judeo-Arabic is a dying language. But the Judeo-Arabic cultural heritage is anything but moribund. Judeo-Arabic words and expressions entered into modern Israeli Hebrew to no less—and perhaps to a greater extent—than Yiddishisms penetrated into American English. More importantly, Judeo-Arabic lives on in a myriad of ways through the maintenance of traditional practices, the ever-increasing scholarly study of Judeo-Arabic language, literature, and history, particularly in Israel and France, but also in North America, and through the popular interpretations and translations of Judeo-Arabic wit and wisdom.

NOTES

1. On the competition between proponents of Hebrew and Yiddish, see Max Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language,* trans. Shlomo Noble (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 286–99.

2. Norman A. Stillman, *The Language and Culture of the Jews of Sefrou, Morocco: An Ethnolinguistic Study.* Journal of Semitic Studies Monograph, no. 11 (Manchester, England: University of Manchester Press, 1988).

3. See Joshua Blau, *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic: A Study in the Origins of Middle Arabic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

4. As Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson has observed, "once an initially alien language gained acceptance, it became not only a vehicle of Jewish cultural and religious creativity, but also gradually became converted into a specifically Jewish idiom and a mark of Jewish identity that even formed barriers to later assimilation." See Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, "Assimilation: Antiquity and the Middle Ages," *Encyclopaedia Judaica,* vol. 3, cols. 771–72.

5. Concerning the Iraqi Diaspora, see Abraham Ben-Jacob, *Babylonian Jewry in Diaspora* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Kiriath-Sepher, 1985). On the Aleppan Diaspora, see Walter P. Zenner, *A Global Community: The Jews from Aleppo, Syria* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000); also Joseph A. D. Sutton, *Magic Carpet: Aleppo-in-Flatbush: The Story of a Unique Ethnic Jewish Community* (New York: Thayer-Jacoby, 1979).

6. Concerning *yahūdiyya,* which I would designate as proto-Judeo-Arabic, see Gordon D. Newby, "Observations about an Early Judaeo-Arabic," in *Jewish Quarterly Review,* n.s. 61 (1970): 212–21; also Charles Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* (New York: Jewish Institute of Religion Press, 1933), 47–53. The two major studies on loanwords in old Arabic are Siegmund Fraenkel, *Die aramäischen Fremdwörter im Arabischen* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 1886); and A. Jeffrey, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Baroda, India: Oriental Institute, 1938).

7. The standard work on the evolution of Middle Arabic is Johann Fück, *ʿArabīya: Recherches sur l'histoire de la langue et du style arabe,* trans. Claude Denizeau (Paris: Marcel Didier, 1955); and for Judeo-Arabic, Joshua Blau, *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic: A Study in the Origins of Middle Arabic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

8. The Cairo Geniza is the name given to a unique cache of nearly a quarter of a million discarded papers and documents dating from the Middle Ages to early modern times, primarily in Hebrew script, that were deposited according to Jewish practice in a storage room attached to the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Fustat (Old

Cairo). The Geniza is the most important single source for medieval Judeo-Arabic literary and nonliterary materials as well as the most important primary source for Jewish life in the Islamic High Middle Ages. For the story of the discovery of this treasure trove and a general description of its contents, see Stefan C. Reif, *A Jewish Archive from Old Cairo: The History of Cambridge University's Genizah Collection* (Richmond, England: Curzon, 2000).

9. This notion is developed in Norman A. Stillman, "The Commensality of Islamic and Jewish Civilizations," in *Middle Eastern Lectures,* vol. 2 (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies and Tel-Aviv University, 1997), 81–94.

10. The standard biographical and bibliographical study on Saᶜadya which is now woefully outdated is Henry Malter, *Saadia Gaon: His Life and Works* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1921; reprint, New York: Hermon, 1969). For a bibliography—also not up to date—of additional scholarship on Saᶜadya, see Aron Freimann, "Saadia Bibliography: 1920–1942," in *Saadia Anniversary Volume: Texts and Studies,* vol. 2 (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1943), 327–38. Most of Saᶜadya's surviving writings, both complete and in fragments, were published in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His great theological work has been translated twice into English: a complete translation by Samuel Rosenblatt, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948); and an abridged, but better annotated translation by Alexander Altmann, *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* (Oxford, England: East and West Library, 1946).

11. The best work on Qayrawan and its sages is Menahem Ben Sasson, *The Emergence of the Local Jewish Community in the Muslim World: Qayrawan, 800–1057* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1996). Readers of English must still have recourse to H. Z. [J. W.] Hirschberg, *A History of the Jews in North Africa,* vol. 1 (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 1974), 298–361. For Isaac Israeli, see Alexander Altmann and S. M. Stern, *Isaac Israeli: A Neo-Platonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958). For Ibn Shahin, see Nissim Ben Jacob Ibn Shahin, *An Elegant Composition Concerning Relief after Adversity,* trans. William M. Brinner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

12. Regrettably, this important work has never been translated into English. However, there is a very good Spanish translation Moše Ibn ᶜEzra, *Kitab al-Muhadara wal-Mudakara,* vol. 2, *Traducción,* trans. Montserrat Abumalham Mas (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas, 1986).

13. This work came to have great popularity among Jews north of the Pyrenees after its translation into Hebrew, and there have been numerous translations into western languages in modern times. The best English translation from the original Arabic is *The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart,* trans. Menahem Mansoor (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973).

14. This work too has enjoyed numerous editions in its Hebrew translation and has also been translated several times into English. See, e.g., *Judah Hallevi's Kitab al Khazari,* trans. Hartwig Hirschfeld (London: Routledge; and New York: Dutton, 1905).

15. For important studies of medieval Andalusian poetry, see Ross Brann, *The Compunctious Poet: Cultural Ambiguity and Hebrew Poetry in Muslim Spain* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); and Raymond P. Scheindlin, *Wine, Women, and Death: Medieval Hebrew Poems of the Good Life* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1986); and idem, *The Gazelle: Medieval Hebrew Poems on God, Israel, and the Soul* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991). How to interpret the subject of homoeroticism in this poetry has been the subject of fierce debate. Some scholars, such as Nehemia Allony have argued the theme is merely an artistic exercise in imitation of Arab models, whereas others, such as Jefim Schirmann, have taken the position that it reflects a social reality. See Nehemia Allony, "The 'Zevi' (Nasib) in the Hebrew Poetry in Spain," *Sefarad* 23, fascicle 2 (1963): 311–21; and Jefim Schirmann, "The Ephebe in Medieval Hebrew Poetry," *Sefarad* 15, fascicle 1 (1955): 55–68. For a good survey of some of the corroborating literature on pederasty, see Norman Roth, "Deal Gently with the Young Man: Love of Boys in Medieval Hebrew Poetry of Spain," *Speculum* 57, no. 1 (1982): 20–51.

16. The position that the Jews possessed neither the cultural enthusiasm nor educational formation to write Arabic poetry is taken by Joshua Blau, "Medieval Judeo-Arabic," in *Jewish Languages: Theme and Variations,* ed. Herbert H. Paper (Cambridge, MA: Association for Jewish Studies, 1978), 123–24. I counter this argument in my "Response," in ibid., 138–39; and in more detail in Norman A. Stillman, "Aspects of Jewish Life in Islamic Spain," in *Aspects of Jewish Culture in the Middle Ages,* ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), 62–66. For Jewish poets who wrote Classical Arabic verse, see S. M. Stern, "Arabic Poems by Spanish-Hebrew Poets," in *Romanica et Occidentalia: Études dédiées à la mémoire de Hiram Peri (Pflaum),* ed. Moshé Lazar (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1963), 254–63.

17. Although Maimonides lived in Spain only in his youth, he always saw himself as an Andalusian and a follower of the Sephardi tradition. He frequently uses such phrases as "among us in Sepharad" (Ar., *ᶜindanā fi 'l-Andalus*). See Joshua Blau, "Maimonides, Al-Andalus, and the Influence of the Spanish-Arabic Dialect on His Language," in *New Horizons in Sephardic Studies,* ed. Yedida K. Stillman and George K. Zucker (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 203–10. Though written initially in Judeo-Arabic, Maimonides' philosophical magnum opus was probably transcribed also into standard Arabic. It was also translated into Hebrew and Latin and became known to Christian theologians such as Aquinas. See Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed,* trans. Shlomo Pines, with an introductory essay by Leo Strauss (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); and for a partial translation of *Highways to Perfection,* see Abraham Maimonides, *The Highways to Perfection of Abraham Maimonides,* trans. Samuel

Rosenblatt, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927), vol. 2 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1938).

18. Concerning this social decline and stress, see Norman A. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1979), 64–94, 255–323.

19. For some exceptional Jews who were attracted to modern Arabic language and literature, see Sasson Somekh, "Lost Voices: Jewish Authors in Modern Arabic Literature," in *Jews among Arabs: Contacts and Boundaries,* ed. Mark R. Cohen and Abraham L. Udovitch (Darwin, 1989), 9–20; also Norman A. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 32–34, 228–30.

20. Abraham S. Halkin, "Judeo-Arabic Literature," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), cols. 410–23 (quote is from the final paragraph).

21. For women's Judeo-Arabic poetry from Morocco, including an example of a poetic duel, see Norman A. Stillman and Yedida K. Stillman, "The Art of a Moroccan Folk Poetess," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 128, no. 1 (1978): 65–89.

22. For the *sharh* tradition in Morocco, see Stillman, *The Language and Culture of the Jews of Sefrou,* 137–39; for Egypt, see Benjamin Hary, "Egyptian Judeo-Arabic *Sharh*—Bridging the Cultures of Hebrew and Arabic," in *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication, and Interaction: Essays in Honor of William M. Brinner,* ed. Benjamin H. Hary, Fred Astren, and John L. Hayes (Boston: Brill, 2000), 395–407.

23. A history of Judeo-Arabic journalism remains a major desideratum, and the few short surveys are primarily in Hebrew and French. Some of these journals are discussed in Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times,* 69, 77, 86–87, 104, 318–19 and passim. For a catalogue of North African Jewish periodicals, many in Judeo-Arabic, see Robert Attal, *Periodiques juifs d'Afrique du Nord* (Jerusalem: Institut Ben-Zvi, 1980). For an excellent sociohistorical study on Yiddish and Ladino journalism, see Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

24. Nancy Berg, *Exile from Exile: Israeli Writers from Iraq* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996). Some of these writers were pioneers in the development of modern Iraqi literature.

Chapter 4

Judeo-Spanish Culture in Medieval and Modern Times

David M. Bunis

Before the Expulsion of 1492

Throughout the Diaspora, new Jewish "subcultures" have arisen in response to changes in the social and cultural interaction of Jewish groups and their non-Jewish neighbors. Sometimes this occurred when Jews migrated to a new land, as in the case of Jews from Italy and France who settled in medieval Germany where they created the foundations of the Yiddish culture of Ashkenazi Jewry. Later, when Ashkenazim migrated from Germany to Slavic lands, the unique subculture they created through the syncretism of elements of ancient Hebrew and medieval Romance and German origins was further enriched through contact with the cultures of Slavic peoples, and still later, with the cultures of western Europe. At other times, new Jewish cultures were created when Jews residing in a particular area became highly influenced by the arrival of a group foreign to the area.

Of the Jewish people's diverse subculture groups—Yiddish, Judeo-Aramaic, Judeo-Persian, Judeo-Arabic, Judeo-Italian, and others—the Spanish or Sephardic Jews were especially interesting. Much of Yiddish culture in Europe is connected with Jewish migration and resettlement, all of it within the Christian world. This led to interaction with neighbors who all spoke Indo-European languages and shared certain basic elements of culture and belief. The traditional Judeo-Arabic culture of North African Jews developed essentially through interaction with the culture and belief system introduced there in the late seventh century by Arabic-speaking Muslim conquerors. Thus, the elements of Yiddish culture, which may be linked to the interaction between the Ashkenazim and their non-Jewish