

PROXIMITY AND DISTANCE

MEDIEVAL HEBREW
AND
ARABIC POETRY

by

YOSEF TOBI

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PROXIMITY AND DISTANCE

ÉTUDES SUR LE JUDAÏSME MÉDIÉVAL

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YOSEF TOBI

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BY

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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

To my children:
Zohara, Yannai, Dikla and Renana

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PREFACE

The first steps in Hebrew secular poetry took place around the turn of the ninth century, under the evident impact of contemporary Arabic poetry. By that time the latter had become consolidated as a courtly poetry, in which luxury and pleasure were among the supreme aspects of social life. Nevertheless, this poetry still preserved many of the social and conceptual values by which it was characterized in its early stages in the *jāhiliyya*. Hebrew poetry was then written in accordance with Arabic poetic rules, in terms of content—*jāhili* and courtly, prosody (metre and rhyme), linguistic outlook, and rhetorical texture.

Students of Hebrew poetry who are fairly well acquainted with Arabic poetry have taken note of this link between the two. Such scholars include Sha'ul 'Abdallah Yosef and David Yelin in the first half of the twentieth century. A more systematic study has been conducted by contemporary scholars such as Yehuda Ratzaby, Israel Levin, and Arie Schippers. Indeed, it is simply impossible really to understand medieval Hebrew poetry without examining it against the Arabic poetry by which it was influenced and from which it lavishly borrowed conceptual as well as figurative, poetic, and linguistic values. The impact of the Arabic on the Hebrew poetry was so great that some researchers, incorrectly, define the latter as a poetic school which is distinct from the Arabic school only on account of its Hebrew language.

All the above holds not only for secular poetry. It is also true of another genre created in Hebrew medieval belles-lettres, the *maqāma*; and even Hebrew sacred poetry, originating in the ancient Eretz-Israeli *piyyut* and intended for liturgical-religious use, was not free from the impact of Arabic poetry, although far less than secular Hebrew poetry.

This critical approach, which I explicitly state on the title-page of this book, seemingly does not need to be proved or sustained, although there are scholars who disregard it or belittle and even deny it. Obviously, when approaching a person's creative work to grasp and interpret it, particularly if he is of a time and place so remote from us, we should delve into the roots of its spiritual environment and

investigate the ideological and cultural elements that constituted its world and produced its literary expression. To understand him aright we should encompass as many as possible of the spiritual treasures that fertilized the creator's world. How difficult is this task when the creator is a distinguished intellectual and multi-cultural person, as were the Hebrew poets of Spain! How careful we must be to steer clear of a wrong and superficial interpretation, caused not by the depth of the notion but by the inadequacy of the student, as medieval scholars worded it. The flaw is not of the creator but of the student, who is negligent in his assignment, who approaches it devoid of the proper tools and qualifications.

This approach, then, highlights the link of Hebrew poetry in Spain to Arabic poetry and to the general culture of its environment. However, there is no doubt that medieval Hebrew poetry is not mere imitation, to one degree or another, of Arabic poetry. If it were, the Hebrew poets would not have been able to scale the high literary peaks that rise no lower than those of their Arab colleagues. Nor would the savour of their poetry be preserved to the present day, or find its way even into the heart of poetry lovers brought up on modern poetic concepts.

So the right way to the essence of medieval Hebrew poetry is not only by revealing and describing its ties with Arabic poetry but also—and seemingly even more—by determining the specific characteristics by which it stubbornly distinguished itself from Arabic poetry. That poetry's values were not adopted wholesale and without limit, in complete contrast to the well-known saying of Moshe b. 'Ezra, the most important poet and critic of medieval Hebrew poetry (1055–1138?). They were instead taken selectively and critically.

This innovative critical approach is the central feature of this book, the thread connecting all its chapters regarding the conceptual and figurative genres of medieval Hebrew poetry.

My deep thanks go to all those who afforded me assistance in the composition of this work: my dear friend Prof. Paul B. Fenton, editor of the series *Études sur le Judaïsme médiéval fondée par Georges Vajda* of the Brill Publishing House, Leiden, the Netherlands; Mr. Julian Deahl and Ms. Marcella Mulder of The Brill Publishing House; Mr. Murray Rosovsky, who shouldered the difficult task of translating the book from its original Hebrew version (published in Haifa, 2000); my colleague Prof. Denis Kurzon of the Department of English at

the University of Haifa who read the proofs of the whole book; my young colleagues Mr. Jalāl ‘Abd al-Ghanī of the Department of Arabic at the University of Haifa and Ms. Miryam Goldstein of Ben Zvi Institute, Jerusalem, who read parts of the book. And last but not least, the various authorities of my university who so generously met the large expenses of the preparation of the book in its English version: the Rector, Prof. Aaron Ben Ze’ev; the Dean of Research, Prof. Moshe Zeidner, and the director of Research Authority Mr. Patrick Maestracci; the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Prof. Yossi Ben-Artzi and the Head of Administration of this Faculty, Mr. Aharon Refter.

It is a special pleasure for me to dedicate this book to my children Zohara, Yannai, Dikla and Renana who constitute for me a source of inspiration and satisfaction in my work.

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INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER ONE

RESEARCH ON THE AFFINITY OF HEBREW POETRY TO ARABIC POETRY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

A. The Affinity of Hebrew Poetry to Arabic Poetry in Spain before and after the Expulsion

The medieval Jewish poets wrote mostly in Hebrew, with just a few minor exceptions,¹ yet they were immensely influenced by Arabic poetry. In their initial encounter with it they had indeed tried to keep free of this influence, as is evident from Sa'adia Gaon's Hebrew essay *Ha-Egron* on the theory of composing the *piyyut*, the liturgical poem (the Arabic version of this study is entitled *Kitāb Uṣūl al-Shi'r al-Ibrānī*).² But soon the medieval poets could no longer resist the charm and power of Arabic poetry and they began to adopt its devices, albeit still wanting to retain as much as possible elements of the original Hebrew poetry, the *piyyut*. Such was the manner of the new secular poets writing in Hebrew in the lands of the East.³ The manner of the Hebrew poets of Spain was otherwise, in particular Dunash b. Labraṭ. This poet moved from Abbasid Baghdad to Cordova in Andalusia, and blazed the way for the penetration of the fine qualities of Arabic poetry. Thereafter Hebrew poetry seemed to concede its freedom and become dependent almost entirely on its birth-mother. Every poet sought to surpass himself in imitating the modes of the Arab poets, sensing the inferiority of Hebrew to its Arabic sister; in a contemporary phrase, the *mistress Sarai* as against the *handmaiden Hagar*. This feeling is already apparent in Sa'adia's letters, but it is quite plain in many works of the Jewish poets of Spain, from Dunash b. Labraṭ to Yiṣḥaq b. Sahūla.⁴

When the Hebrew poetry of Spain was just beginning to flower its poets were well aware of the connection with Arabic poetry, as

¹ See Sadan 1996; Ratzaby 1995; Stern 1963.

² See p. 120 below.

³ See chapter 2 below, pp. 34 ff.

⁴ See Allony 1979, pp. 13–30; Allony 1979a, pp. 110–134; also Allony in Ben El'azar 1977, pp. 6–10. See also Ben Ḥisday 1951; Ibn Sahūla 1953.

is clear from the controversy between the pupils of Mōnaḥem b. Saruq and those of Dunash b. Labraṭ. It concerned the new forms introduced by the latter into Hebrew poetry.⁵ At the end of the Classical period the connection was again reflected in Yōhuda Ha-Levi's pointed comments on the flaws in Arabic metre;⁶ even Sa'adia b. Danān, the last of the Hebrew poets of Spain, in his work on Hebrew poetry compared its metres with those of Arabic poetry.⁷ But all the above involved form only—rhyme and metre, not content. Only the writers of the two books on the poetics of Hebrew poetry in the Middle Ages, Moshe b. 'Ezra and El'azar Ha-Bavli, offered their views on rhetorical means (the *badi'*, the doctrine of ornamentation) as well as on the content of the poem.⁸

The limitation of the affinity to metre and rhyme in medieval poetry writing became even stricter after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain because of the consequent decline in knowledge of Arabic and the detachment from Arabic literature generally. A few scholars among the Spanish expellees' descendants did know Arabic and were also familiar with its literature, but these were exceptions and their occupation was not poetry but the Muslims' religious and philosophical texts.⁹ Jewish savants who engaged in Arabic poetry, cited Arabic stanzas in their compositions, and even translated them into Hebrew were very few.¹⁰ A splendid body of scholars of the Spanish expellees and their progeny, of whom researchers are still barely aware, and who have not enjoyed any scholarly attention at all, settled in Tlemcen in Algeria in the sixteenth century. One of them was Abraham Gavison, who possessed extensive knowledge of Arabic and its literature; he wrote his commentaries on biblical texts in this language, translated Arabic poems, and wrote Arabic poetry himself.¹¹ He produced first-rate information about a poet named Abraham b. Zimra, his contemporary, who wrote a metred poem in Arabic on improvisation.¹² Gavison wished to vindicate the use of Arabic

⁵ On the polemic between the students of Mōnaḥem and the students of Dunash see Brody 1937; Yelin 1975a.

⁶ Yōhuda Ha-Levi's comments are cited in his book *The Kuzari*, second essay, §67–78.

⁷ See Neubauer 1865, pp. 5 ff.

⁸ See Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975; Abramson 1967/8; Yahalom 2001, pp. 124 ff.

⁹ See Hacker 1984, pp. 580, 590.

¹⁰ See Tobi/Mar'i.

¹¹ See Gavison 1748, pp. 118b–134a; and compare Tobi (Morocco).

¹² Gavison 1748, pp. 126a.

and adduced evidence for it from the early Jewish scholars in Spain.¹³ And of course, there were the Jewish poets of Yemen, who showed interest in Arabic poetry and were influenced by it, and also translated it into Hebrew.¹⁴

B. *Yaʿaqov Roman, Bibliographer and Poet*

All the foregoing shows that the link of the Jewish poets to Arabic poetry did not entirely cease even after the expulsion from Spain. However, a critical scholarly approach to Arabic literature, rather than a creative one, seems to have first been taken only in the first half of the seventeenth century, in the person of Yaʿaqov Roman (1570–1650). This scholar, a native of Constantinople, visited Basel, where he met the renowned bibliographer Johannes Buxtorf the Younger. Roman’s knowledge of Hebrew, Arabic, and Judeo-Arabic literature was wide-ranging, and he became one of Buxtorf’s most important suppliers of books. In his letters he gave Buxtorf vital information on Judeo-Arabic literary manuscripts, which he owned or which he eagerly sought.¹⁵ These included the Arabic source of al-Ḥarīrī’s *Maqāmāt*, with Alḥarīzī’s translation (‘I set the Hebrew on one page and the Arabic over against it: line juxtaposed to line’)¹⁶ and *Ḥay b. Yaqzān* by Ibn Ṭufayl in the Arabic original with Hebrew translation (‘I set the Arabic in Hebrew script around the Hebrew sheet’).¹⁷ Roman wanted to establish a Hebrew press in Constantinople that would have an Arabic fount too, in order to print Maimonides’

¹³ Ibid., pp. 118b ff.

¹⁴ The first of the translators into Hebrew among the poets of Yemen was David b. Yeshaʿ Ha-Levi, who lived in the second half of the fifteenth century. See Tobī 1990. Also, Zakharya al-Ḍāhīrī translated a great amount from Arabic: *maqāmas* (al-Ḥarīrī) and poems. See Ratzaby 1978; 1998; and also Ratzaby in his introduction to Ḍāhīrī 1965, pp. 18–20. The influence of the poetry of Muslim Yemen in terms of form and language is clearly evident in the poetry of Shalom Shabazī (seventeenth century) and other Jewish poets in Yemen. See recently Piamenta 1984; Semah 1989, p. 241.

¹⁵ On him see Kayserling 1884, pp. 83–95.

¹⁶ Alḥarīzī gave this translation the name *Mahbarot Iliʿel*, and only one copy of it remains in manuscript, copied in Baghdad in 1602 of the Seleucid era (1291).

¹⁷ See his Hebrew letter to Buxtorf dated 14 Shevat 5394 (1634), Kayserling 1884, p. 89. The book of *Ḥay b. Yaqzān* was anonymously translated into Hebrew in the thirteenth century, and Moshe Narboni wrote a commentary to it. See Conrad 1996, p. 281.

Guide to the Perplexed in three columns side by side: the original in Arabic script, the Hebrew translation, and the Latin translation. But the Muslim sages in Constantinople objected to the use of printed Arabic so the project could not be realised.¹⁸ Roman also translated from Arabic to Hebrew. In his bibliography¹⁹ Buxtorf includes Roman's translation of *Kitāb al-Taqrīb wa-al-Tashīl* by Yonah b. Janāḥ, entitled *Sefer Ha-Qeruv Va-Ha-Yishshur*. Roman probably sent him a copy, although this translation has not come down to us.²⁰ Roman was himself a poet and he also compiled an Arabic-Turkish and a Turkish-Arabic dictionary.²¹

A direct reference to poetry appears in Roman's Hebrew book *Mozne Mishqal*, which he describes in a letter to Buxtorf dated 14 Shevat 5394 (1634).²²

I your servant Ya'aqov have composed and authored and put together an essay on the subject of metres in Hebrew poetry that may be accomplished according to the requirements of poetics. They amount to one thousand three hundred and forty-eight kinds. God knows that in this matter I availed of no helper and of no assistant among writers on prosody whose books have come down to us, not in Arabic and not in Hebrew; God's arm has redeemed me and His righteousness has given me the authority.

Here he asserts, and there is no reason to doubt it, that he himself had studied the Arabic books on prosody for what could be gleaned from them on the use of metre in Hebrew poetry. Still, as noted above, Jewish scholars who knew Arabic and engaged in poetics gave their views on questions of form only.

¹⁸ See his Hebrew letter to the above, dated 24 Sivan 5394 (1634), Kayserling 1884, pp. 93–94. On the opposition of the sages of Islam to the use of Arabic print and the other reasons for its late appearance see Oman 1991, p. 795. The *Responsa* of Maimonides were for the first time translated from Arabic into Hebrew in Amsterdam, for the use of the European Jewish communities, by Mordekhay Tamma, a Jewish scholar of Hebron who happened to stay there for a while. The translation, entitled *Pi'er Ha-Dor*, was printed in Amsterdam 1765.

¹⁹ See Buxtorf 1640, p. 180.

²⁰ Remnants of the essay were published by Derenbourg 1880, pp. 268–342.

²¹ See Allony 1945, p. 89.

²² The composition has not survived, but it is mentioned by contemporaries of the author, Yehoshua' Benveniste of the sages of Constantinople, and the younger Buxtorf. On the composition see Allony 1945, pp. 87–104; Allony 1957, pp. 127–130.

C. *The Opinion of Wissenschaft des Judentums Scholars on the Relation of Hebrew Poetry to Arabic Poetry*

Scholarly research on medieval secular poetry began in the frame of Jewish studies only in the nineteenth century, in the work of Delitzsch, Kaempf, and Geiger, but chiefly of Dukes, although the texts at their disposal were very few. The search for texts in manuscript was therefore a major activity, and was conducted zealously by S.D. Luzzatto and Dukes in their various publications.²³ The earliest scholars had already pointed out the link between Hebrew and Arabic poetry, on the basis of the work of Moshe b. 'Ezra, Alḥarīzī, and various writers before and after the expulsion from Spain. Those scholars had dealt principally with questions of form and metre, and expressed reservations about the Arabic influence for various reasons.²⁴

The first to put this question squarely on the agenda of modern research was Shəmu'el David Luzzatto. He did so in a letter to Ya'aqov Goldenthal, with whom he had conducted a correspondence since 1839,²⁵ dated 23 Tevet 5617 (December 1856). Goldenthal (1815–1868), a professor at the University of Vienna from 1846 until his death, was a specialist in rabbinic literature, in Near-Eastern languages, and in general literature. He was deeply immersed in medieval Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic literature, and was indeed the first to publish a Hebrew-language primer on Arabic grammar, entitled *Sefer Ha-Maspig Li-Ydi'at Lashon 'Aravi* (Vienna 1857).

Immediately on publication of the book Luzzatto, whose knowledge of Arabic was very limited, requested Goldenthal to contribute his expertise in this area to an understanding of secular Hebrew poetry. Here are some excerpts from the letter (trans. from Hebrew):

After you start this work, which until today no other person has embarked on, you might be inspired to publish some examples from the Arabs' books, both in prose and in rhyme, with a Hebrew translation and notes; this will be most useful [...] for understanding the poems of our ancestors in Spain and Africa, who wrote their poems on the pattern of the Arabs' poems [...] some of whose rhymes R. Yəhuda

²³ See Schirmann 1970, Introduction, pp. xiv–xvii.

²⁴ Compare Allony 1937.

²⁵ On Luzzatto's question and Goldenthal's answer see Goldenthal 1860. On other letters exchanged between them see Luzzatto 1882/94, by the index, end of vol. II, p. 3.

Ha-Levi and his friends saw, and from which they learned several ways and several notions that are alien to the holy tongue [. . .]. For I, in all my analyses of these poems, was in no way aided by the Arabs' poems, because I have never seen any of them, except for fragments. But if you publish whole poems, translated and annotated, this may well be the key to the further understanding of our ancestors' poems. Yet if reading the Arabic turns out to be of no use for comprehending the poems of Jewry, then I shall know that in their poetry our forefathers did not follow the Arab poets quite as much as I had thought, but from within their hearts they produced and invented many methods that the Arabs were not familiar with.

So Luzzatto, who states here that he had never read Arabic poetry, asks his friend, who is learned in its language, to help him shed light on whether Jewish poetry was indeed influenced by Arabic poetry, which the poets of Spain, for example, Yəhuda Ha-Levi, undoubtedly knew. From this passage, Luzzatto clearly would rather ascertain that Arabic poetry did not exercise a decisive influence on the content of Jewish poetry. This was so despite his having written convincingly as far back as 1823 on the change in Hebrew poetry at the end of the period of the *piyyut*.²⁶

The Hebrew poem died, and the Arabic poem reigned in its stead [. . .]. The work of the Israelites became to resemble the work of all the nations. They too abandoned the paths of the Hebrew poem, and made their poetry by the rules of the Arabic poem, in rhyme and metre.

Thus he perceived, erroneously, Hebrew rhyme, not only metre, as resulting from the influence of the Arabic poetry. But he found this influence extremely positive: he held that it benefited the poem and he dismissed arguments against them.²⁷ Luzzatto's awareness of the effect of Arabic poetry on secular Hebrew poetry in the Middle Ages is also evident from an anthology of Yəhuda Ha-Levi's poems that he published. This was entitled *Bətulat Bat Yəhuda* (Prague 1840). In his commentary on the eulogy *יְהוָה נֹחַ קָדְמוֹ כְּנֹחַ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל*, written in Egypt by Yəhuda Ha-Levi in honour of his friend the judge (*dayyan*) Aharon al-ʿAmmānī, Luzzatto, notes (trans. from Hebrew):²⁸

²⁶ Luzzatto 1881/99, part 3, pp. 39–40.

²⁷ Still, Luzzatto justifies Ha-Levi's arguments concerning metre. See *ibid.*, pp. 45 ff. On the negative attitude of the *Enlightenment* poets in nineteenth-century eastern and central Europe to the Arabic metre see Allony 1937.

²⁸ Luzzatto 1840, p. 100.

The beginning of this poem is magnificent, remote from the forms of poetry current among us today. It is according to the mode of the Arab poets. This poetry is evidence of R. Yəhuda Ha-Levi's boldness in the work of poetry current in his day [. . .]. Now in this poem the poet wishes to sing the praises of a wise man, and he begins with the adulation of the lovely maidens; the connection between the two themes lies (in my opinion) in his stating that the beautiful maidens devour hearts. One should ask, he says, if they must pay for the prey they have ravaged, or if they are exempt because they did it out of revenge for the eyes that were fed of their sight. After noting this uncertainty he says that it is proper to ask for the resolution of uncertainties from this judge, who is the wisest of men.

Luzzatto thus refers to the well-known literary device of the Arabic *qaṣīda*, namely its division into two parts, where the opening (*nasīb* or *tashbīb* in Arabic) concerns the theme of love, which apparently is not the essence of the poem; this is the second part of the *qaṣīda*. The two parts are connected by a special technique, known as the *ḥusn al-takhalluṣ* (splendour of transition). Luzzatto is aware of this usage, with its origin in Arabic poetry and its prevalence in medieval Arabic poetry, but he does not call it by its name, possibly because he does not know the Arabic term.

Luzzatto's interpretation of the poem was perfectly accurate, based on a sound literary sense and willingness to recognise the influence of Arabic poetry, even though he was not quite at home in it. Yet it was vigorously rejected, on moral grounds, by one of the foremost mid-nineteenth-century students of the poetry of Spain. This was Sha'ul Isaac Kaempff, who in addition to his post as a professor at the university also served as the rabbi of the Prague Jewish community. Yosef Yahalom has pointed out that Kaempff found it practically inconceivable that Yəhuda Ha-Levi would employ the love poem with which the above *qaṣīda* opens to praise a *dayyan* of the Alexandran Jewish community; he preferred to see the two parts of the *qaṣīda* as two separate poems of Yəhuda Ha-Levi, united by mistake by a copyist.²⁹ So Kaempff, an orientalist by profession, did not deny the connection with Arabic poetry, but wished to play down

²⁹ See Yahalom 1980, pp. 294–296; Kaempff 1858, p. 227. Sha'ul 'Abdallah Yosef is in no doubt whatsoever about the poem's structure and the erotic content of its first part; he draws attention specifically to the transitional stanza connecting the two parts: 'And this verse is the bridge on which he passed from the theme of lust (*ghazal*) to the rabbi, R. A.' (Rabbi Aharon al-'Ammānī). See Yosef 1923, p. 231.

its supposed influence where there was any kind of clash with what Jewish tradition required.

In his letter replying to Luzzatto, Goldenthal likewise begins with a reservation:

Not only in poetry, but in all intellectual pursuits under their all-embracing term, namely philosophy, our Spanish sages followed the Arab scholars, from whom they learned and whose language they spoke and whose books they read from their youth to their hoary old age. This was the nation among whom they dwelt; they were raised at the feet of their teachers and they flocked to the doors of their schools, just as we today learn from the peoples under whose wing we shelter. Many among us will also pervert their literary usages in imitation of European turns of phrase.

He turned down Luzzatto's specific request for these reasons:

The Jewish poets of Spain without doubt read the Arabic poems and adapted their pattern to Hebrew. Yet I do not need to render any of the Arabs' poems as a model for then there would be no end to it; but it is true that there is nothing of the Spanish Hebrew poems whose source is not in Arabic.

Among instances of such adaptation Goldenthal noted the well-known literary device called in Arabic *tajnīs* (homonym). His words of course indicate a major innovation in research on the secular Hebrew poetry of Spain. For the first time a scholar in both literatures unequivocally pointed out the affinity of this poetry to Arabic poetry, in form (metre and rhyme) but also in content and rhetoric. As intimated above, Goldenthal presumably did not please Luzzatto by showing him the high degree of dependence of the Hebrew on the Arabic poetry. But he must have caused him real consternation by stating that this dependence was not to the benefit of Hebrew poetry:

But you should know, my friend, that for all that, the Hebrew poems cannot possibly be as perfect and pleasing as the Arabic poems. The most charming aspect in the poem, namely the abundance of different words for one subject or the rendering of diverse matters in the same words, is missing in Hebrew because the Hebrew lexicon is very circumscribed while the Arabic is large and plentiful in words and roots. While Ben Ḥairzī [!] made an effort in his *Book of Taḥkāmōnī* to display the quality of Hebrew, he in fact proved his own abilities at assembling various phrases and inventing new notions pleasing to read. But his language is not pure Hebrew, and the vernacular in it from Aramaic and Talmudic language does not beautify rhetoric but attests to the paucity and terseness of the language.

Goldenthal next cites a few stanzas from Yəhuda Ha-Levi's *Dīwān*, beside their Arabic original. He evaluates the original as 'marvellous and a delight to any taste that enjoys the flavours of fine language and of essays perfectly composed'. But the demands of metre and rhyme obliged the Hebrew poet 'to adorn the Hebrew language with an Arabic adornment, against its nature and strange to anyone fluent in the language. On this account the poetry becomes meaningless verbiage, and the vigorous phrases broken bits of chalk'. Goldenthal apparently even ruled out the use of Arabic-style metre and rhyme in Hebrew poetry:

You should likewise be aware that what cause most distress and most ruin to the poem are the metre and rhyme that were lifted from the language of the Ismaelites and have no part in the language of the Israelites, like vines planted in an alien land that cannot produce grapes but become thorns and brambles.

Primarily Goldenthal disallowed Arabic metre, which prevented the Hebrew poet from expressing his lofty thoughts freely. He rejected the notion prevalent in the Middle Ages and the modern period regarding the pleasantness that this metre imparted to the poetry:³⁰

But the poets of Spain thought to beautify with it our holy tongue and to elevate their poems by subjecting the ideas and the phrases under the press of rhyme and metre. They regimented the waves of sublime thoughts, not flying upwards on high. They chopped off the toes of every perfect phrase on a Procrustean bed, which did not allow the legs of the poem to stretch out beyond the crib of metre proffered instead of them.

In concluding his reply, Goldenthal suggested that Luzzatto avoid involvement in secular poetry:

Is it good in your eyes, and would you find pleasure in rhetoric of that sort? Would you say that this is a poem from the sacred poems? No, my friend, I do not see in this rhetoric anything but metric feet and vowels and words and phrases, heaped up in piles, like corpses and cadavers, indiscriminate and disorderly. They have no spirit in them, neither the spirit of fine writing nor the spirit of poetry [. . .]. Even if the holy people assembled, to renew the sacred customs, I would say, cast out from your midst the *piyyutim* and the psalms, whose makers' hands are chained in the coils of metre, reduced to a mass of sores by the metric foot.

³⁰ See, e.g., Sa'adia 1969, pp. 388–389; Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 137.

D. A.S. Yahuda's *Critique of Secular Hebrew Poetry in Spain in Contrast to Arabic poetry*

Goldenthal's comments may or may not have influenced *Wissenschaft des Judentums* scholars to withdraw from Spanish secular Hebrew poetry. But in fact they did, as noted by Schirmann, who offers no reason for it and does not relate it to the negative view of this poetry's value.³¹ In any event, Goldenthal was not the only Jewish orientalist to hold that secular Hebrew poetry was inferior to Arabic poetry. The same view was held by A.S. Yahuda (1877–1951), scion of a Jerusalem family originating in Iraq. In the 1890s he went to Germany to complete his education at the renowned universities there. From his youth Yahuda had acquired comprehensive knowledge of Arabic language and literature, and at the age of 15 he wrote his book *קדמוניות הערבים* (*History of the Arabs*) (Jerusalem 1893/4), chiefly concerning Arabic poetry of the *jāhiliyya*. He also knew the secular poetry of Spain, in keeping with the tradition of his family and community.

Jewry of the East had never ceased showing interest in the secular poetry of the medieval Jewish poets of Spain. All the manuscripts of the *Dīwāns* and the collections of secular poetry were copied in Egypt, in Yemen, in Italy, in Iraq, and in the domains of the Ottoman Empire.³² For the most part this occurred after the expulsion from Spain; two of the most important manuscripts were copied at the beginning of the nineteenth century.³³ The poets of the East, particularly of Iraq, continued to write in the style of Spanish secular poetry, although the work was mainly limited to the genre of eulogies, along with the application of themes from other secular poetic genres.³⁴ The poets and copyists were of course not students of poetry. But knowledge of both Hebrew and Arabic—an intimate knowledge and familiarity with their literatures—allowed the intellectuals of the East, such as Yahuda, and others who will be mentioned later, to evaluate the Hebrew poetry in the setting of the Arabic.

In 1897, while in Frankfurt pursuing his studies, Yahuda corre-

³¹ See Schirmann 1942, p. 475.

³² See Schirmann 1980, pp. 97–98.

³³ See Brody's introduction to Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1935/78, II, pp. 17–20.

³⁴ See, e.g., Ben-Ya'aqov 1969, and especially the poems of Ṣāliḥ Maṣliyyaḥ and his son Nissim in the second half of the eighteenth century.

sponded with the poet Sha'ul Tchernichowsky, living in Odessa, about Arabic poetry. As we know, this poet evinced great interest in Arabic poetry. He expressed the view to Yosef Klausner, and in a letter to Yahuda, that 'our writers do not do well to turn their eyes away from our Arab brothers'.³⁵ Yahuda concurred, adding that there were things to be learned from Arabic poetry about biblical poetry, 'and still more to penetrate into the spirit of Hebrew poetry from the Arab period in Spain'. He apparently wished to influence the poet who, like other Hebrew writers, had reservations about the secular poetry of Spain because of the Arabic metre and because of its 'oriental phraseology', so remote from his European outlook. Yahuda replied that the poetry of Spain was not to the taste of the Hebrew writers because 'they cannot understand all the beauty in it, so wondrous and sublime'. He assures him that with his poetic sense he will understand

the poems of the geniuses of poetry of that time, far better than the commentators who erred greatly because of their lack of knowledge of Arabic language and poetry, which have so influenced our poetry. Even Shemu'el David Luzzatto, the best and most expert of all commentators, was unable to overcome its difficulty and unfamiliarity.³⁶

As already shown, Yahuda was only one of a group of Jerusalemite scholars well immersed in Hebrew as well as Arabic culture whose appreciation of medieval Hebrew poetry was very high. Other members of this group were David Yelin and Yosef Yo'el Rivlin, whom we will mention later. Here the impact of the medieval poetic school on the first steps of modern Hebrew literature in the Land of Israel should be noted as well.³⁷

But this positive assessment of the Hebrew poetry of Spain evaporates entirely when Yahuda compares it with Arabic poetry. Two years later Yahuda published a letter on Hebrew and Arabic poetry to a man whose name was erased in the printing.³⁸ In it Yahuda asserts that the poetry of every nation has to be written according to its own poetic norms, not those of another nation. In this context

³⁵ Yahuda 1946, p. 270. He also had a special interest in the Jews of ancient Arabia, as reflected in his poem *האחרון לבני קרנאזה* (The last of the sons of Qurayza). See Tchernichowsky 1899, pp. 79–81.

³⁶ Yahuda 1946, pp. 276–277.

³⁷ For a comprehensive study regarding this issue see Berlowitz 1998.

³⁸ Yahuda 1899.

he criticises the Hebrew poets of Spain in that they 'were busy far more with the poetry of the Arabs than in the poems of the Hebrews', namely biblical poetry. By contrast, he finds room to praise the Spanish *sacred* poetry:³⁹

But the rest of the poems of our Spanish poets are almost all written in the spirit of Arabic poetry; one new idea whose like is not present in the Arabs' poems can hardly be found! Once I tried to mark in the margins of the Hebrew poems I read the stanzas from the Arabic poems equivalent in concepts and in form of expression, and for almost every Hebrew stanza I came across an equivalent Arabic stanza: not a single new idea did I find! The poems of Alḥarīzī particularly are all *copies* of the Arabic poems (apart from the liturgical poems), with not one original among them. Even R. Yəhuda Ha-Levi inserted into his love poems and nature poems a wealth of Arab notions culled from what was ready-made [...]. Now even if we cannot determine that all the ideas of our Spanish poets are taken from the Arabs, in any event *some* are still taken from them; anyone reading these notions in the Arabic poems will sense that the poems of the Spanish poets are weak compared with the Arabic poems, and are nothing other than a *fair copy*. And anyone reading the poetic or lyrical literature of the Spanish Arabs will realise how paltry our literature is in quantity and quality. The Spanish era was the Golden Age of Arabic poetic literature because at that time Arabic poetry rose to the loftiest heights in its delights and the richness of its ideas.

Yahuda's views did not stop him from research in Hebrew poetry, especially comparing it with its source. He states that as early as 1895 he began to accumulate much material on the ornamentations of poetry and on the equivalences and parallels in the Spanish Jews' poetry and that of the Arabs. He intended to publish his findings as an introduction to the Arabic original of *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-al-Mudhākara* by Moshe b. 'Ezra, which was ready for printing in 1923. For various reasons he did not get round to it. Among his papers was also a scholarly edition of Alḥarīzī's *Taḥkāmōnī* according to eight manuscripts, Moshe b. 'Ezra's *Book of Tarshish* with textual variants and commentary from a manuscript, and Alḥarīzī's *Mahbərōt Iti'el* compared with the Arabic original entitled *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*.⁴⁰

The view of the affinity of Arabic and Jewish poetry seems to have sprung from a somewhat romanticised approach to the com-

³⁹ Ibid., p. 135.

⁴⁰ See Yahuda 1946a, pp. 244–245, in the notes.

mon cultural origins of the two nations. Yahuda is not content to note the connection between Arabic and Hebrew poetry in Spain: he compares Arabic poetry with the poetry of the Bible also, especially on the theme of love in Song of Songs. This approach was adopted by another Jerusalem Jew, the orientalist Yosef Yo'el Rivlin, the son of Yahuda's sister.⁴¹

*E. Sha'ul 'Abdallah Yosef: First of the Interpreters of the
Poetry of Spain according to the badi' Doctrine*

The work of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* scholars in Europe, including Luzzatto, in editing and annotating the Spanish secular poems was generally flawed owing to their lack of knowledge of the Arabic language and Arab culture. This no doubt did nothing to elevate the prestige of the secular poetry. But then this poetry found an eager proponent, namely Sha'ul 'Abdallah Yosef (1849–1906), a merchant, native of Baghdad, who lived most of his life in the Far East (mainly Hong Kong), far from the centres of Jewish studies in Europe.⁴² As an educated man he read the Jewish journals published in Europe such as *Ha-Zofir*, as well as the writings of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* scholars engaged in the secular Hebrew poetry of Spain. The unsatisfactory publications led him to repair what needed repairing in editing and analysis, and to submit his emendations to the editorial boards of the journals and to the scholars themselves. In Yelin's words, in the study of Hebrew poetry in Spain Yosef saw himself superior to the European scholars in two respects:

(a) His knowledge of the life and customs of the Arabs as reflected in their poems, which influenced the Jewish poets of Spain who lived among them and read their work.

(b) His profound knowledge of the *badi'* doctrine, namely the rhetoric and ornamentation of Arabic poetry, a doctrine adopted by the Hebrew poets also; only through this was it possible to grasp what they considered aesthetic.

⁴¹ See Yahuda 1899, pp. 141–143; Rivlin 1965. And see also Seale 1974.

⁴² On him see Yelin 1937; Shemu'el Krauss in Yosef 1923 and Yosef 1926; C.S. Gubbay in Todros 1932/7, pp. i–iv; Ben-Ya'aqov 1985, pp. 386–400.

Yelin nicely defines Yosef's contribution to the development of research into the affinity of Arabic and Hebrew poetry:⁴³

He knew all the ways of ornamentation of Arabic literary writing as rendered in their books on rhetoric, and he knew what were models in the poetry of the Arabs that the poets of Spain imitated. Accordingly, more than others he could perceive the specific intentions of the poets in their work, and what special literary ornament they inserted into each stanza where they were able to do so. What the most brilliant of the commentators, Luzzatto, was obliged through his great intuition to deduce, that 'the Arab poets must certainly have made use of this', was as plain to Sh.Y. [Sha'ul Yosef] as the noonday sun; and what Brody could find through vast reading of the Spanish poets and the collection of diverse examples one by one so as to find the general through the particular, Sh.Y. found before him writ large in all the books of Arabic literary writing; he calls this doctrine 'the new poetry', the *badī'*.

Initially Yosef responded to the publications of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* scholars in Europe with short articles. As noted, he sent his responses to the editorial boards of the journals or to the authors themselves. In 1887 he submitted to *Ha-Zefira* a sharply worded article in reaction to a piece by Dukes on plagiarism, including poems by the poets of Spain. Yosef severely criticised the work of those in Europe engaged in Spanish secular poetry, chiefly because of their unfamiliarity with Arabic language, poetry, and culture. His comments were particularly acerbic, but for the most part they hit the mark and were not always well received.⁴⁴ Those flawed publications led Yosef to deepen his study of Arabic poetry and its doctrine of rhetoric (*badī'*) in order to improve the understanding of secular Hebrew poetry. Eventually, however, through study of the use of *badī'* doctrine and comparison with Arabic poetry, he applied himself to the systematic analysis of two of the most renowned works in Spanish secular poetry:

(a) *Sefer Ha-'Anaq* or *Tarshish*, of Moshe b. Ezra, published by David Ginzburg, Berlin 1886. Yosef published his commentary on this work as a book entitled *Mishbeṣet Ha-Tarshish*.⁴⁵

(b) *The Dīwān* of Yəhuda Ha-Levi, published by Ḥayyim (Heinrich) Brody, Berlin 1894/1901. Yosef published his book *Giv'at Sha'ul* on this work.⁴⁶

⁴³ Yelin 1937, p. lxxxiii.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. li ff.

⁴⁵ See Yosef 1926.

⁴⁶ See Yosef 1923. He may also have written a commentary to the poems of

Yosef's work constitutes a new stage in research of Spanish secular poetry and its link to Arabic poetry. He did not, indeed, do what Luzzatto had wanted, namely translate Arabic poetry into Hebrew to allow those not fluent in the former to gain an impression of it, and to ascertain how far it had influenced Hebrew poetry. Yosef's innovation was his demonstration of this influence by presenting an abundance of Arabic stanzas as the source for the utterances of the Hebrew poets. Furthermore, he showed the wider scope of this influence, exerted not only in form (metre and rhyme) and content but also through the Arabic doctrine of rhetoric (*badīʿ*). This is Yosef's main contribution, and he devotes special chapters to it in his writings.⁴⁷

From that time the influence of Arabic poetry on Hebrew poetry was no longer in doubt. Even those whose work Yosef fiercely criticised did not always reject his criticism, for example, Brody, who in the *Dīwān* concurred with many of Yosef's reservations.⁴⁸

A large contribution to strengthening awareness of the Arabic influence was made by studies of many orientalists, whose interest in Hebrew literature was secondary. An example is Goldziher's work of 1902.⁴⁹

Needless to say, Yosef's attitude to secular Hebrew poetry was highly favourable, in complete contrast to the attitudes of Goldenthal and Yahuda. He considered the effect of the Arabic poetry to be beneficial to secular Hebrew poetry, raising it to its own level. Thus, to understand the Hebrew poetry one had to have knowledge of the world of Arabic poetry. Moreover, in his view not only was the Spanish poetry superior to the contemporary poetry of the *Maskilim* (the *enlightened*), it also excelled the poetry of the Bible.⁵⁰

The books that exerted a powerful influence on our Spanish poets are two: the first is the *Dīwān* of al-Mutanabbī, and the second is *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*. Many have done as Mutanabbī and few as Ḥarīrī and succeeded. Therefore the first has the greater vigour, as it breathed the

Todros Abul'afia whose *Dīwān* was before him. In any event, in his writings he presents many stanzas and passages from Todros's poetry. See Krauss in his introduction to Yosef 1923, pp. xxiv–xxv; Yosef 1926, pp. xiv–xv; Yelin 1937, p. lxxxiii.

⁴⁷ See Yelin 1937, pp. lxxxv–lxxxvi. And see Yosef's essay, *Massa Ba-'Arav*, published in Yelin *ibid.*, pp. xc–xci.

⁴⁸ On the relationship between Yosef and Brody see Yosef 1923, pp. xvii–xxi; Yosef 1926, p. xii; Yelin 1937, pp. lvi–lviii, lxv–lxvi.

⁴⁹ See Goldziher 1902.

⁵⁰ *Massa Ba-'Arav* in Yelin 1937, pp. xci–xciii. His high regard for medieval secular poetry, in contrast to the poetry of his day, he also expressed in his metred poem *לשון המשוררים אכלה ונקלה*, *ibid.*, p. xcvi (reprinted in Ben-Ya'aqov 1969, p. 310).

breath of life into the nostrils of the Hebrew language and it imparted a new spirit into its being. Poets who lived in those days were greatly concerned for our old worn-out language to regain its youth, to enlarge it, to widen it, and to raise it to the degree of the Arabic language whose masters have found no difficulty in delivering a figure of speech and a turn of phrase about anything [. . .]. Mostly the poets use simple language, but its content is replete with fine notions, whose truths the reader, if he has not approached a scholar a lot, cannot fathom, and if he also has not filled his belly with the subtleties of the language and the rules of grammar. [This is] because their composition was done by known rules and implicit allusions, whose meaning is revealed only to those who have learned the two languages and their literature, at least the poetic literature of the Arabs [. . .]. If the former poets were angels, the latter poets were as men. The former knew what was before them, but of the latter each one lost his way and without noticing that they followed tortuous paths [. . .].

Without exaggeration and overstatement I may say that the poets expanded our holy tongue and embellished its idiom more than the words of the prophets, peace be upon them. Even the pious Rabbi Yohuda Ha-Levi reckoned his verses superior to the words of the prophets, when he said in poem 40 of the *Dīwān*, near the end:—
 וְכָל־שׁוֹמְעֵי מַעֲדִים כִּי דִבַּרְתִּי / נְבוּאָה הֵם וְאוֹלָם הֵם שְׂקוּלִים
 ('And all who hear attest that my words / are prophecy—but they are rhymed').

Like Sha'ul 'Abdallah Yosef, David b. Slīmān Şemaḥ, who migrated from Baghdad to Israel in 1949, had no academic degree. But he was widely versed in Hebrew language and literature and was a devotee of medieval Hebrew poetry. From his youth he had been absorbed in this poetry, and had studied the effect on it of Arabic poetry. He was in touch with the leading scholars and he published several articles himself. He was known to have been involved in the contacts that resulted in the acquisition of the most important medieval manuscript of Hebrew poetry, including most of the *Dīwāns* of the Hebrew poets in Spain. The manuscript had been copied in Iraq early in the nineteenth century; eventually it came to be known as MS Schocken 37.⁵¹

⁵¹ On David Şemaḥ and his list of publications see Ben Ya'aqov 1980, pp. 422–425.

תורת השירה הספרדית *Author of*
(Introduction to the Hebrew Poetry of the Spanish Period)

In the first half of the twentieth century research in medieval Hebrew poetry underwent considerable development, mainly through the work of Brody, Davidson, Simḥoni, and Halper (the latter two died in their prime in 1924/5). The prestige of this poetry was also enhanced by the ardent attitude to it of the poet Bialik, which was entirely different from that of Tchernichowsky and other poets.⁵² But all these scholars, apart from Halper, whose untimely death prevented him from accomplishing a great deal, were far from Arabic language and culture, and most of their work was to prepare scholarly editions of the poetry and bibliographies. Therefore, Sha'ul Yosef's criticism of research on medieval poetry could not create much of an effect. Change came with David Yelin (1864–1942). He was a native of Jerusalem and his mother was of Iraqi stock, sister of the father of A.Sh. Yahuda. Yelin was thoroughly acquainted with the way of life, the language, and the culture of the Arabs.⁵³

Even before Yelin read Yosef's work he had shown great interest in the connection between Hebrew and Arabic poetry, especially in rhetoric. As early as 1891 he published an article entitled מליצת ישראל על אדמת ישמעאל (Hebrew poetry on Arab land)⁵⁴ on Jewish poetry in Arabia (Shəmu'el b. 'Adaya; Arabic: al-Samaw'al b. 'Ādiyā) and on several motifs and rhetorical devices used in Arabic poetry. Eight years later he published מליצת ישמעאל בספרות ישראל (Arabic poetry in Hebrew literature),⁵⁵ an article in which he discusses in detail the 'elegant opening' of the *qaṣīda* and the 'splendour of the transition' (*husn al-takhalluṣ*) in Arabic and in Hebrew poetry. In his introduction Yelin stresses the importance of knowledge of the Arab *badī'* doctrine:

Among our scholars there were those who illuminated the words of our Spanish poets, analysts whose penetrating understanding by and large made up for deep knowledge and great erudition in Arabic literature, essential for the clarification of such poems; [. . .] But the various rules

⁵² See Schirmann 1942.

⁵³ On him see Elḥanani 1973. On his importance as a researcher of medieval poetry see the articles of his pupils: Allony 1939; 1967; Verses 1942. See also Haberman 1975; Dan Pagis in his preface to Yelin 1940 (1972²), pp. 7–11.

⁵⁴ See Yelin 1975.

⁵⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 13–29.

of rhetoric, which served as a guideline for our poets to set forth their delightful words, have still not been explained to us by the analysts in detail to the present day, and the *key* is missing.

Now it is over a millennium since the Arabs began writing books signifying and delimiting the shadings and the modes that beautify the poems of their poets; they call this discipline *badīʿ*. When we read these books and all the figures of speech and the instances they give of the words of their poets, it is as if we see ourselves stepping on the ground of the gardens of our poets: these are the flowers that grow in it, these are the buds seen in it, one scene, one appearance, and one rhythm for both.

Yelin thus reveals that from then on he would invest his main efforts in research on medieval Hebrew poetry in rhetoric. He was the first to publish a fine scholarly edition of the work of a Spanish poet, Todros Abū-al-ʿĀfiya (Jerusalem 1932/7), and he wrote many articles on medieval poetry (mainly on the work of Shōmuʿel Ha-Nagid). But his masterwork is his textbook תורת השירה הספרדית (*Introduction to the Hebrew Poetry of the Spanish Period*, Jerusalem 1940), still today considered one of the basic texts in the field; he alone dealt with the rhetoric of medieval secular Hebrew poetry. Yelin drew attention to the Arab *badīʿ* doctrine in Jewish literature, and all who approach Hebrew poetry rely on him for its understanding and interpretation. He did what his predecessor Shaʿul Yosef did not do, namely present an entire systematic doctrine, although the latter's influence on Yelin was undoubtedly profound. Not surprisingly Yelin dedicated his book 'To the memory of the man whose love was the doctrine of Spanish poetry at whose study he laboured night and day, the late Shaʿul 'Abdallah Yosef, of blessed memory'. At the head of the dedication he cites Isaiah 3:10: 'Say to the righteous that it will be well with him for they shall eat the fruit of their doings' (p. 21).

In his preface to the book (pp. 27–31), Brody describes in touching terms the poor state of the understanding of Spanish secular poetry. He confesses that even after study of the writings of earlier scholars such as Dukes, Kaempf, and Luzzatto the highways and byways of that poetry remained out of reach to him and his generation. None of the scholars of those generations could write a book on Spanish Hebrew poetry, principally because it required enormous erudition in Hebrew and Arabic poetry 'and a heart sensitive to the splendour and the beauty in the poetry'. Yelin alone had these qualities. From his first articles published in the 1890s 'every intelligent reader

felt: Dawn has broken! A redeemer has arisen for Hebrew poetry'.

Yelin's book was published only towards the end of his life, two years before he died. However, as he notes at its opening (p. 25), 'My book too, like most of the books of the others, has the school as its birthplace, because *it is the elaboration of lessons at our Hebrew University on the heights of Mount Scopus* [...] of what I began there over forty years ago in my article "Arabic poetry in Hebrew literature"'.⁵⁶

G. *Research on the Affinity in the Last Two Generations*

Yelin served as professor of medieval poetry at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem almost from its establishment, and he taught this subject to many students. But most of them lacked mastery in Arabic and were far from Arabic literature, so only two succeeded him in research on the affinity between Hebrew and Arabic poetry. These are Yōhuda Ratzaby and the late Neḥemya Allony.⁵⁶ Particularly striking is the work of Ratzaby, who in a comprehensive and variegated series of articles reveals for researchers sources and parallels of many motifs that fill the lines of medieval Hebrew poetry; his highly important work in this field still goes on.⁵⁷

But the decisive figure in the development of research on medieval Hebrew poetry after the death of David Yelin is Ḥayyim (Jefim) Schirmann, who succeeded him in his teaching position at the Hebrew University. This outstanding scholar had long been renowned in the academic world. He shaped the form of this research for an entire generation through the actual teaching at the University and training students, and more especially through his many wide-ranging publications. These left hardly any corner of medieval poetry in darkness; chief among them are his five books: *השירה העברית בספרד ובפרובאנס* (*Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence*, Jerusalem & Tel Aviv 1955); *שירים חדשים מן הגניזה* (*New Hebrew Poems from the Genizah*, Jerusalem 1966); *לתולדות השירה והדראמה העברית* (*Studies in the History of Hebrew Poetry and Drama: Studies and Essays*, Jerusalem 1979); *תולדות השירה העברית בספרד המוסלמית* (*The History of Hebrew Poetry in Muslim*

⁵⁶ Most of Allony's articles on medieval poetry were collected in the fourth volume of the six-volume series *Studies in Medieval Philology and Literature*. See Allony 1991.

⁵⁷ For a list of Ratzaby's publications on the relationship of Hebrew and Arabic poetry see Tsur 1991.

Spain, Jerusalem 1996); and תולדות השירה העברית בספרד הנוצרית ובדרום צרפת (*The History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain and Southern France*, Jerusalem 1997).⁵⁸

Schirmann was certainly well aware of the influence of Arabic poetry on the growth of Hebrew poetry in the Middle Ages and on its development for many generations. This is clear from his many studies, including the important introduction to his anthology.⁵⁹ Here we quote just one statement on the genre of the flower poems: 'And one who directly links the birth of the Hebrew flower poetry to the Arabic *nawriyyāt* fashion will not be mistaken'.⁶⁰ Schirmann certainly encouraged his students to study Arabic poetry and Islamic culture,⁶¹ but only one of them (as far as I know) wrote a doctoral thesis under his supervision that examined the connection of Hebrew poetry to Arabic poetry; this was the late Dan Pagis.⁶² Most of Schirmann's writing on this connection concerns the general spirit of Arab culture in Muslim Spain rather than comparisons of text or rhetoric stemming from the *badī'* doctrine.

One could argue that owing to his not being an orientalist by academic training Schirmann did not incline to these aspects of the affinity between the two poetics. Still, his reservations about the Arab *badī'* doctrine and its influence on Hebrew poetry should be noted. He expressed this as early as 1942:⁶³

The poets of Spain were undoubtedly influenced by the Arab doctrine of rhetoric (the 'Ornamentations') and made use of its forms. This doctrine, like most of the disciplines of the Arabs, has a scholastic character. Knowledge of it does not add much to understanding the poems and offers nothing to enhance the Western reader's pleasure. In fact

⁵⁸ The last two books were edited, supplemented, and annotated by Ezra Fleischer, the prominent pupil of Schirmann, using a manuscript left in the latter's bequest. For a critical review of that work see Scheindlin 2000.

⁵⁹ See Schirmann 1955, Introduction, pp. 23–55.

⁶⁰ See Schirmann 1979b, p. 92.

⁶¹ This was attested by one of his first students, Prof. Hillel Barzel of Bar-Ilan University at the Seventh Inter-university Conference on the Study of Hebrew Literature held in Jerusalem in 1990.

⁶² Prof. Pagis wrote his doctoral dissertation on the poetry of Moshe b. 'Ezra and his theory of poetics as they are connected to Arabic poetry and Arab poetics. See Pagis 1970. Note that most of the studies of his pupil, Prof. Israel Levin, are concerned with the comparison of Hebrew and Arabic poetry; he is one of the foremost proponents of the need for comparative research of these two poetics in order to understand Hebrew poetry properly.

⁶³ See Schirmann 1942, p. 480.

it has only theoretical value, so the researcher of Hebrew poetry is better off not being content to accept the Arab definitions of the kinds of 'ornamentations' but to address them with all the requisite criticism. Of course, research on the kinds of ornamentations is not to be confused with research on their actual content: here is one of the most important tasks of expounders of the poems and of those who wish to gain an acquaintance with the poet's external and internal world.

This tendency to minimise the influence of Arabic poetry on Hebrew poetry is also evident in the work of a student of David Yelin who did not specialise in Arabic language and literature; this was Aharon Mirsky of the Hebrew University. In an article Mirsky demonstrates that not everything in the language of medieval Hebrew poetry that was considered influenced by Arabic language is in fact influenced in that way. In such cases ancient roots can be found in the Hebrew layers of language that predate the contact with Arab culture.⁶⁴ Mirsky wanted the same judgement to be applied to other areas common to Hebrew and Arabic poetry.⁶⁵ Mirsky's article was accorded a cold, critical reception by Allony.⁶⁶ I do not know if this caused Mirsky to retract his view; in any event, in his later studies on the poetry of Spain he does not belittle the importance or the effect of Arabic poetry.⁶⁷

In a 1966 article on the problems of research in post-biblical Hebrew poetry,⁶⁸ Schirmann also discusses secular poetry and assesses the success and failure of various scholars. Yet he finds no room for even a single word on the importance of recognising the art of Arabic poetry for understanding Hebrew poetry. On the contrary, he quite explicitly criticises the studies produced until that year on Hebrew poetry. In his view, they all focus on 'borderline areas' of literary research, such as history and philology, while the true aim of the student of poetry should be to analyse the poem as an artistic

⁶⁴ See Mirsky 1952/3.

⁶⁵ See *ibid.*, p. 97.

⁶⁶ See Allony 1959. Incidentally, Allony was inexact in his criticism of the words that Mirsky discussed in his article; nor was there room for his criticism of Shraga Abramson's comments on the sources of Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid in *Ben Qohelet*. Abramson writes expressly: 'Certainly, Arabic literature, and especially the literature of "asceticism", contains the sources closest to his words, and it would be proper to draw parallels from there'. See Abramson's comments in his introduction to Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid 1953, p. 56.

⁶⁷ See, e.g., Mirsky 1971.

⁶⁸ See Schirmann 1979a.

literary creation. He seems to be referring to the Arab *badīʿ* doctrine when he writes⁶⁹ that

From the Middle Ages to the beginning of modern times predominant among us has been the antiquated 'craft of the poem' (מלאכת השיר), which deserves treatment as a separate subject of research (historical, psychological); still, it has not entirely disappeared from the writings of our critics. For several years now in Europe a powerful ferment has been felt in the field of literary criticism. Fairly successful attempts have been made to bridge the generations and to test early works of literature with modern tools. We may hope that we will attain a similar change in values in the sphere of Hebrew poetry, too.

With these sentiments Schirmann represents a new current in criticism of medieval secular Hebrew poetry. Although he himself did not go into this kind of investigation, several contemporary researchers of secular poetry, such as Re'uvén Tsur and Eddy Zemach, belong to the new stream. Our concern is not the general trends of modern criticism of Spanish secular poetry but research of the affinity between Hebrew and Arabic poetry. Still, two of the most renowned scholars, namely Yəhuda Ratzaby, Yelin's pupil, and Israel Levin, Schirmann's pupil, seem mainly preoccupied with this affinity in their extensive work on secular poetry.⁷⁰ As stated earlier, the late Dan Pagis, also Schirmann's pupil, did not steer clear of this field either, although he wanted to integrate into it the modern approach proposed by Schirmann.⁷¹

The medieval Jewish writers on poetics, Moshe b. 'Ezra and El'azar Ha-Bavli, show that the rhetorical means typical of Hebrew poetry have parallels in Arabic poetry. Ratzaby and Levin likewise offer a plethora of parallels in their many studies to prove that the Jewish poets in Spain, certainly the greatest of them working in Andalusia, but also the *maqāma* writers active in the Christian realms, were intimately acquainted with Arabic poetry. They drew on it plentifully,

⁶⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁷⁰ For Ratzaby's studies on this see n. 57 above. For Israel Levin's studies see David 1995. His major work on this question is the comprehensive essay *Mos'il Tashbeš* (Levin 1995). Levin encouraged his students to engage in comparative research of medieval Hebrew and Arabic poetry. See, e.g., 'Ogen 1977 (for an expanded version see 'Ogen 1996); Ishay 1990; Ishay 2001.

⁷¹ This is not the place to discuss the conflict among the different approaches in research on medieval secular Hebrew poetry. Suffice it to refer the reader to several of the important discussions on the subject: Pagis 1970, pp. 25–34; Zemach 1973, pp. 11–21; Tsur 1987, pp. 16–19.

in form and rhetoric but also in motifs and content. This was argued by Goldenthal, Yahuda, and Yosef in earlier generations. Levin devoted his comprehensive essay *Mō'il Tashbeš* to the varied genres prevalent in Hebrew poetry in Spain in comparison with the same genres in Arabic poetry.

Ezra Fleischer has recently expressed some reservations about the sweeping assertion that all the changes that occurred in Hebrew poetry in the tenth century were influenced by the Arabic poetry. Fleischer rightly stresses the unbroken line of influence between Hebrew poetry in the East at the close of the paytanic period and the new Hebrew poetry in Spain.⁷²

Nor does the younger generation of researchers of medieval Hebrew poetry, who teach at Israeli universities, seem to evince much interest in in-depth research of this poetry through comparison with Arabic poetry. It is actually researchers from the field of Arabic poetry who do. Four scholars deserve particular note (listed in alphabetical order): Yosef Sadan of Tel Aviv University;⁷³ the late David Semah of the University of Haifa, who in one of his lectures spoke of the special importance of knowledge of Arabic for understanding medieval Hebrew poetry;⁷⁴ Raymond (Re'uven) Scheindlin of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York;⁷⁵ and Arie Schippers of the University of Amsterdam, who has produced a comprehensive comparative study of genres of Hebrew poetry in Spain as against the Arabic genres, as well as several articles on comparative research of the two poetries.⁷⁶

Among the researchers of medieval Hebrew poetry who have compared it with Arabic poetry, we mention the following. Ross Brann of Cornell University at Ithaca in the United States wrote his doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Raymond Scheindlin.⁷⁷

⁷² See Fleischer 1998, pp. 262 ff. and his articles mentioned in the notes. See also the following chapters in this book.

⁷³ See Sadan 1995; 1996.

⁷⁴ The lecture was delivered at a conference held at University of Haifa in 1995 entitled 'Arabic literature and Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic literature down the generations'. To our great misfortune Prof. Semah died shortly afterwards, before he was able to work his lecture into an article that was to appear in *Ben 'Ever La-'Arav*, vol. I (ed. Yosef Tobi), Tel Aviv 1999. For his articles on the subject see Semah 1983; 1989; 1998.

⁷⁵ See Scheindlin 1991; 1991a; 1994; 1996.

⁷⁶ For a comprehensive study see Schippers 1994. For other studies see Schippers 1982; 1988; 1990; 1990a; 1991.

⁷⁷ See Brann 1991; 1995.

Yosef Dana of the College for Arab Teachers in Haifa conducted his doctoral work under the guidance of Israel Levin. He meticulously compared the discussion of various rhetorical devices listed in the foremost book of poetics of medieval Hebrew poetry, *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-al-Mudhākara* by Moshe b. 'Ezra, with the Arabic books of poetics that Ibn 'Ezra took as his source and that influenced him.⁷⁸ Adena Tanenbaum studied Hebrew philosophical poetry in Spain.⁷⁹ Masha Itzhaki, who works in Paris, was also a student of Israel Levin.⁸⁰ Abraham Lavi analysed Alḥarīzī's translation of *Maqāmāt al-Harīrī*.⁸¹ 'Abd al-Raḥmān Mar'ī in his doctorate, under the supervision of Judith Dishon of Bar-Ilan University, compared Alḥarīzī's *Tahkemoni* with *Maqāmāt al-Harīrī*.⁸² This group also includes the present writer, most of whose work of comparison of medieval Hebrew poetry and Arabic poetry is reflected in this volume.⁸³

Schirmann's new approach as in the foregoing is undoubtedly correct. So is the path followed by scholars such as Eddy Zemach and Re'uven Tsur, who scrutinise medieval Hebrew poetry as art using the contemporary tools of literary criticism. Schirmann is absolutely right about the need to break away from the traditional approach of 'the craft of the poem', which is characteristic of scholarship on Arabic poetry of the Middle Ages and modern times alike. But no serious discourse of the kind Schirmann so warmly recommends seems to be possible before linguistic, historical, and cultural affinities are illustrated. Clearly, every researcher of a particular literary school or of the oeuvre of a particular poet has to be close to the spiritual and cultural worlds of that school or that poet. Otherwise, how can he or she acquire a thorough and profound understanding of the work that has been created in those worlds?⁸⁴ All the Jewish poets

⁷⁸ See Dana 1983.

⁷⁹ See Tanenbaum 2002.

⁸⁰ See Itzhaki 1988.

⁸¹ See Lavi 1979; 1983.

⁸² See Mar'ī 1995. In his post-doctoral work at University of Haifa (1998) Dr. Mar'ī completed a research study with me on Arabic stanzas inserted into medieval Jewish compositions. See Tobi/Mar'ī.

⁸³ Three of my students at University of Haifa wrote Master's theses on comparison of Hebrew and Arabic poetry. See Kayyāl 1991; Sa'ābna 1992; Tarabiyye 1994.

⁸⁴ On this, compare three ways offered by Pagis 1970, pp. 25–34 (and compare above, n. 71) in research on medieval Hebrew poetry and the middle course he recommends for it. Generally, this course runs parallel to our proposal here, namely examination of the poem as an independent work of art, but with consideration of the cultural milieu from which it sprang.

of Spain had deep roots in the world of the Jewish spirit, but also in the world of the Arab-Muslim spirit; and the authors of the *maqāmāt* added to the sources of their culture the world of the European Christian spirit. All in all, no period in the history of Hebrew literature seems to equal the Spanish period with its two phases, the Muslim and the Christian, in which *Hebrew* literature was open to the surrounding culture. Therefore, precisely because of the challenge posed by Schirmann in his article it is worth deepening comparative research of Hebrew and Arabic poetry (and in a different context, that of the *maqāmāt*, also of European-Christian literature). The goal is to reveal the cases where Hebrew poetry rejected the norms of Arabic poetry, or at least changed and moderated them; for in these it proved unique and separate as an independent literary school (this is discussed in several of the following chapters).

Despite all the foregoing, we are very far from the possibility of conducting comparative research of this kind, for two reasons. First, we still have no translations of Arabic poetry into Hebrew, not even of the classical poets, so as to make such a comparison. Only renderings of odd poems, or passages from them, done by researchers of this poetry or by lovers of Arabic poetry, have appeared piecemeal in various Hebrew forums. Second, there is no encouragement of this pursuit in the literature departments at the universities in Israel. To the best of my knowledge Arabic language is not a mandatory subject of study, nor is it recommended to students of medieval Hebrew poetry. Moreover, the departments of Hebrew literature and of Arabic literature do not cooperate to promote comparative research.

The fact is that since Luzzatto's appeal to Goldenthal almost 150 years ago regarding the need for translations of Arabic poetry to aid the understanding of secular Hebrew poetry, not much has been done in the way of training student or researcher in this respect. We still lack translations of Arabic poetry, and the student of Hebrew poetry still lacks instruction in Arabic language and literature.

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PART ONE

THE BEGINNING OF THE CONTACTS IN THE EAST

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CHAPTER TWO

THE ENCOUNTER OF HEBREW AND ARABIC POETRY IN THE EAST IN THE TENTH–TWELFTH CENTURIES

A. *Introduction*

The encounter in the tenth to twelfth centuries was not the first between Hebrew and Arabic poetry, having been preceded by an earlier one in antiquity. Pre-Islamic Arabic poetry has many elements parallel to the poetry of the Bible, and the poetry of the Jews of Arabia during the *jāhiliyya* attests to such an interaction.¹ Our concern, however, is with the acknowledgment by the writers of Hebrew poetry in the Eastern lands of Arabic poetry, after the latter expanded beyond the boundaries of the Arabian Peninsula, and refined its qualities.² This began towards the end of the life of Ha-Qilliri, the foremost of the Eastern *paytanim*, who witnessed the conquest of the Land of Israel by the army of Islam in the 630s.³ The Jews of the East anticipated the army of Islam with great enthusiasm; the founder of this religion believed in one God and fought strongly to reduce idol-worship to

¹ Jewish poetry written in ancient Arabia before Islam has not yet benefited from comprehensive and exhaustive study; it has been almost entirely forgotten down the generations and has disappeared from the mind of the Jewish people. To the best of my knowledge, the only medieval author to revive its memory is the twelfth-century Moshe b. 'Ezra in his book on Hebrew poetry in Spain. See Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 31 (translation from Arabic): 'Even everyone who came from our exile to their land, I mean, of the Arabs, [. . .] their speech was alive and their language sweet and their poetry refined [. . .]. Therefore the poetry burst from their mouths and they hastened towards poetry, for example, Shemu'el b. 'Adaya and al-Rabī' b. Abī al-Ḥuqayq, and others among the people who were counted by the authors of their histories'. On the other hand, this poetry was partially preserved by the editors of the Arabic *diwāns*. See, e.g., Jumahī 1974, pp. 279–295. For an overview of this poetry see Hirschberg 1946, pp. 242–264; Ben-Za'ev 1957, pp. 37–45. On the affinity of early Arabic poetry to the poetry of the Bible see Lyall 1914; Rivlin 1965; Seale 1974. On the Jews of Arabia from antiquity to the advent of Islam see Newby 1988.

² To be precise, the change in quality in Arabic poetry began as early as the mid-seventh century in Mecca and Madīna, with the enrichment of the Arabs through their extensive conquests and their exposure to Persian and Greek culture. On this change, which steadily intensified in the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, see Nicholson 1969, pp. 235 ff.; Gibb 1963, pp. 41–45; Blachère 1952/66, pp. 661 ff.

³ On the dating of Ha-Qilliri see Fleischer 1985a.

ashes; in some Jews it even sparked messianic expectations.⁴ Still, the Arab Muslims' tribal, desert, and martial culture, so rough and raw, was remote from that of the Jews, most of whom lived in towns and villages, engaged in agriculture, and whose spiritual world was an enchanted sphere of midrash and halakha, prayer, and hopes for redemption. The language difference between the Arabic-speaking conquerors and the Aramaic-speaking and Hebrew-hearing subjects prevented direct contact between the knights of Hebrew poetry, then at its zenith, and the poets of Arabia. The latter were dumbfounded by the vision of the urbane sedentary civilisation, previously unknown to them except by vague and distant hearsay. Not surprisingly, for over two centuries Hebrew poetry kept entirely aloof from Arabic poetry—even after Arabic had become the language of speech and communication among the Jews of the East and after they had begun to write in it.⁵ This disregard could not have endured so long were it not for the strength of paytanic writing, in the generation of Ha-Qilliri but also in the generations of his successors, such as Pinḥas b. Ya'aqov of Kāfara, who lived in Tiberias in the second half of the eighth century.⁶

The contact between the two poetries resulted in the influence of the Arabic on the Hebrew, but only after both, as well as the two societies, which formed their milieu, had undergone certain processes that brought them closer. Hebrew paytanic school grew feeble from within, stumbling along the paths of poetry, growing cumbersome and turgid, its creative force dwindling.⁷ For its part, Arabic poetry changed from desert poetry, so strange to the Jews, and became increasingly the poetry of urban people, of kings and courtiers particularly, surrounded by gardens and servants, maidens and chalices. This social change also occurred in wide circles in the Jewish people, most of whom gave up farming for commerce; they became

⁴ See Hirschberg 1946a, pp. 116 ff.; Lewis 1974, p. 203. The political events in the Land of Israel in the early seventh century, its conquest by the Persians, its reconquest by the Byzantines, and the final ouster of the latter by the Muslims left their imprint on the piyyut in the country more than anything else. See below, and also Fleischer 1971.

⁵ On the beginnings of Jewish writing in Arabic see Steinschneider 1902, pp. 13 ff.; Drori 1988, pp. 44 ff. See also Tobi 1994, pp. 110–116.

⁶ On him see Fleischer 1973a.

⁷ On the waning of the robustness of Eastern paytanic school in the later period see Fleischer 1975, pp. 322 ff.; Elizur 1994, pp. 142–144; and see chapter 4 below.

rich and moved closer to the Muslim government and its lifestyle.⁸ So in contrast to what had been common under Persian rule, the courts of the exilarchs in Baghdad assumed a regal aspect, as described by Nathan Ha-Bavli.

Recently a valuable piece of information was revealed indicating that in the second half of the eighth century, not long after the founding of the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad, Jews were already involved in the cultural and social life of the Muslims. The information is given in the well-known book by Ibn Taghribirdī on Egypt, *Al-Nijūm al-Ẓāhira fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhira*, in reference to 156 H (beginning 2 December 772 CE). The author relates that a Jewish poet, not named but said to be the son of the exilarch, was one of a group of ten poets and philologists from the entire religious spectrum of the time—various Muslims, a Magian, a Christian, and even a pagan, who would gather regularly in the city of Basra and read their poems before the company. This information attests to cultural openness, at least in certain circles in the population of Iraq, namely the intellectuals, including poets. This was at the time of the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr (754–775), who founded the city of Baghdad and adopted a policy of acceptance of non-Muslims, taking many of them into his government apparatus. A similar kind of policy by a Muslim ruler in respect of religious minorities is taken as the explanation for the flowering of Hebrew poetry in Spain in the mid-tenth century under the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III. Note that in Baghdad he who joined in this cultural and social activity was not one of the simple folk but the son of the exilarch; in Spain too, Jews mainly of the higher classes to become close to Muslims. Who exactly this Jewish poet was we cannot say; but we can at least conjecture that his father was Zakkay b. Ahuna, who was exilarch from 771 to 773.⁹

This piece of information is even more important in its revelation that two of the participants in these poetry gatherings were al-Khalīl

⁸ On the wealthy Jews of Baghdad, Yosef b. Pinḥas and Aharon b. ‘Amram, who were financiers to the caliph al-Muqtadir, mentioned further on, and on their enormous influence on him and on the life of the Jewish community, see Fischel 1937, pp. 1–44. See also Baron 1965, pp. 131–132; Gil 1966, pp. 25–27; Gil 1980; Grossman 1984, pp. 129–139.

⁹ See Tykocinski 1923, pp. 162, 179. For the entire story see Ibn Taghribirdī 1930, p. 29; and Appendix A at the end of this chapter. On the title *resh galuta* in Arabic literature see Fischel 1938.

and Bashshār b. Burd. The first is deemed the father of Arabic lexicography, author of the famous dictionary *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*. This was the model on which Saʿadia compiled his dictionary *Ha-Egron*, in the alphabetical order of word endings (al-Khalīl used the order of the last radical letter and Saʿadia that of the last syllable in the basic form of the word). But more important for our purposes is the fact that he was the first to analyse and formulate the principles of the Arabic metric system in five circles. The second person, Bashshār b. Burd, was the foremost of the new Arabic poets in the time of the Abbasids, preceding Abū Nuwās and Abū al-ʿAtāhiya, and certainly Abū Tammām and Buḥturī. He is known for his free poetry, on account of which our informer calls him *khalīʿ mājin* (lawless and wild).

Thus the beginning of contact between Arabic poetry and Jewish poets in the Fertile Crescent, excluding the lands in the Arabian Peninsula, goes back at least a century more. Presumably that son of the exilarch wrote his poems in Arabic, otherwise he could hardly have won a place in this body of poets and philologists. This is not surprising: as noted above, Jews produced wide-ranging poetry of considerable literary merit still prior to the rise of Islam. Furthermore, several Muslim poets were of Jewish origin (from Khurāsān), such as Marwān b. Abī Ḥafṣa (b. 105 H, beginning 10 June 723 CE), his father Sulaymān and his grandfather Yaḥyā.¹⁰ Nathan Ha-Bavli also relates that one of the exilarchs, ʿUqba (900–915), sojourned long in the court of the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir (908–932) and customarily wrote blessings and praises of him:¹¹

Now ʿUqba would take the opportunity when the king was there to stand before him and bless him in Arabic speech and pleasant poems. He did that day by day for a year. The king's scribe writes down his poems and his speech-making daily, and he sees that what he says today he doesn't say tomorrow again. He did that for the [whole] year, from beginning to end. After the year was up the scribe said to the king that ʿUqba never repeated anything from the beginning of the year to the end. The king asked him to give him proof of this because he did not believe it. He brought him his copybook and the poems of ʿUqba written in it, and nothing in it appeared twice or thrice.

¹⁰ See Dayf 1966/72, I, p. 298.

¹¹ See Neubauer 1893, p. 79. A fragment from the Arabic original of the essay (see Ben-Sasson 1989, pp. 181–184) does not mention poems but *daʿwā*, or *duʿā*, which are concerned with blessings; still, these blessings might have been written in the form of a poem, as the early translator of the essay understood.

Hence, the first Jewish creative writing in the lands of the Fertile Crescent, written under the influence of Arabic poetry, was not composed in Hebrew but in Arabic. Presumably it was all in the Arabic style, including metre, just like the Jewish poetry of the Arabian Peninsula. From the tenth century onward, apparently in consequence of the intensification of the struggle between the *ʿarabiyya* and the *shuʿūbiyya* movements, but mainly due to the power of Saʿadia, who adopted a clear and unequivocal stand on the side of the *shuʿūbiyya*,¹² Jewish poetry become exclusively Hebrew.

Accordingly, two far-reaching conclusions arise, which we cannot discuss in this framework but only mention:

(a) Arabic metre, based on a quantitative distinction between short and long vowels, was well known to the Jewish poets earlier than Dunash b. Labraṭ.

(b) The avoidance by the Jewish poets of the use of Arabic in their composition, written in the Arabic style until a certain time, did not stem from lack of mastery of Arabic but was for distinctly nationalist reasons.

The famous rebuke by the Karaite Daniel al-Qūmisī directed against the Jews of Babylonia of his day in his commentary to Hosea 8:10–9:1 is appropriate here. He is angered by the participation of certain Jewish circles of the East in the easy life of the upper Muslim classes:¹³

Being among the Gentiles, they began imitating them to do evil and behave with haughtiness and recalcitrance turning their hearts to the

¹² See Allony 1986.

¹³ See Qūmisī 1958, pp. 13–14. Qūmisī's comments were also cited by Mann 1931/5, pp. 77–78. Not only from the details of the description, which match the circumstances of the author's day and not Bible times, is it possible to understand that he was referring to his contemporaries, but also from the minute references in his statements to his contemporaries. For example, in a commentary on Haggai 2:16 (Qūmisī 1958, p. 61) he writes: 'And although today in our exile [...] God's sanctuary is desolate and defiled with all manner of defilement, still all Israel go astray in their merchandising to garner silver and gold by falsehood and thievery and swindling and trickery and wine and alcohol and all abomination, and the sigh of exile is not in their heart and they do not mourn for Zion and they are not concerned about it'. The tenth-century Karaite Sahl b. Maṣliyyaḥ in his letter similarly criticises the Jewish leadership and their involvement in the life of the Gentiles. See Pinsker 1860, pp. 31–32. The Karaite sages' polemical words of censure are undoubtedly filled with hyperbole. Nevertheless, the heads of the Jewish exile under the rule of the Abbasid caliphs comported themselves in virtual regality. See Grossman 1984, pp. 75–96. On courtly life among the Jews of Babylonia in the tenth century see also David 1973, pp. 268–271.

king and the ministers. For in their exile with the Gentiles they observed and learned the manners of their kings and their ministers to commit, as they did, homosexuality with Gentiles. They built courtyards and roofed them with cedar and painted with cinnabar. They became accustomed to enjoy joy and merrymaking, and drinking in taverns with shining faces and banquets¹⁴ with big cups and perfumes; women's jewelry and clothes' adornments and shawls; doing business by swindling and trickery and all the habits of the Gentiles; adorning women with the goldsmith's work and a belt made by a Gentile woman; unveiling the women's faces like the uncovered faces of Gentiles; dyeing the hair and having the hair done by a hairdresser by a female Gentile and exposure and all the abominations of the Gentiles. In exile they forgot God, who created them and sustained them and protected them. They did not remember the desolation and built courtyards and palaces and gardens and orchards. They did all this for their gratification in exile. Therefore it is written afterwards: O, Israel shall not rejoice with delight.¹⁵

B. Social and Literary Changes among the Muslims and the Jews

Points of contact of Hebrew and Arabic poetry existed throughout the Abbasid caliphate, from the Land of Israel and Syria in the west to central Asia in the northeast; all this domain formed a single cultural unit, clearly marked by Persian influence. But the principal encounter was in Baghdad, the capital city of the caliphs, who cultivated the courtier-like character of the higher classes in Muslim society. In this cultural domain the new method of Arabic poetry that idolised the *badī'* crystallised (rhetoric, extravagant ornamentation). There the greatest poets resided, from Bashshār b. Burd (d. 784), 'Abbās b. al-Aḥnaf (d. 807), Abū Nuwās (d. 813), Abū al-'Atāhiya

¹⁴ In the original: *tidhkār*. Markon suggested 'Feasts in memory of the dead'. It seems to mean a gathering for a discussion and debate on various subjects (*adab*), akin to the title of Moshe b. 'Ezra's book *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-al-Mudhākara*. Gatherings of this kind were the norm in the higher classes in Muslim society.

¹⁵ As is known, Dunash b. Labraṭ—albeit by then in Cordoba in Spain—included in his famous poem *שָׁחַד לִי / תְּשׁוּבָה לִי* / *תְּשׁוּבָה לִי* words of resignation and serious rebuke to those who participated in the drinking sprees in the courts of the kings and the ministers. His argument was clearly nationalistic, as Qūmisī states, not moral. It does not concern us if his words are just a façade for a drinking poem that he wrote (see Levin 1963, pp. 11–12; Ratzaby 1972, pp. 434–435) or if they are genuinely felt (see Allony 1947, p. 17; Levin 1963, pp. 17–18; Pagis 1976, p. 38; Fleischer 1979, pp. 17–18; Fleischer 1989, p. 225; Schirmann 1955, pp. 32–33). An identical argument similarly formulated, whose burden is opposition to wine-tipping, is found in a lament written by Adonim b. Nissim Ha-Levy (Dunash b. Labraṭ?). See Yahalom 1987, p. 226.

(d. 825), and Abū Tammām (d. 846) to Buḥturī (d. 897) and Ibn al-Rūmī (d. 896); and also the theorists of poetics Jāhiz (d. 869) and Ibn Qutayba (d. 889).¹⁶

The Muslim capital, Baghdad, also became a kind of capital of the Jewish people. In it lived the exilarchs, under the protective wing of the Abbasid caliphs, and they reigned supreme over all the Jewish communities, even those outside the borders of the caliphate. In that domain the spiritual and Torah centres of the people of Israel were then re-planted: the *yeshivot* of Sura and Pumbedita. In any event, Hebrew poetry was ready to open itself to Arabic poetry and its norms only after the latter replaced its desert garb with urban dress. The first Jewish poets who wrote under the influence of the poetry of Arabia did so in direct affinity with the Arabic poetry of the new school, far removed in time and place from the Arabic poetry of the *jāhiliyya*.

Unlike the case in Spain, the influence of Arabic poetry was not sudden. It did not immediately give rise to poems composed wholly in the mode of the Arabic poems, be they *qaṣīdas* or *maqṭūʿas*, such as the poems of Dunash written in the court of Ḥisday b. Shaprut in Cordoba.¹⁷ The assimilation of the usages of Arabic poetry in the East was a lengthy and selective process, broken by interruptions. Prior to Elʿazar Ha-Bavli, who lived in the first half of the thirteenth century, no Hebrew poet in the East wrote in total adherence to the rules of Arabic poetry.¹⁸ In the East a School of Hebrew poetry did come into being that fused elements of early paytanic Hebrew poetry with those borrowed from Arabic poetry. Yet a poet who borrowed of a certain Arabic element was not bound to do the same in all his poems; and what he did certainly did not commit any other contemporary Hebrew poet. Arabic poetry lay open before the Hebrew poets in the East, and they indeed partook of it in full; but in so doing they did not become alienated from, or develop any reservations about the earlier school of Hebrew poetry. Nor was

¹⁶ For all these poets see their entries in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*². Also, Nicholson 1969, pp. 291 ff.; Gibb 1963, pp. 60 ff.; Dayf 1966/72, pp. 201–289. On the *badīʿ* see Khalafallah 1960; Stetkevych 1981. *Kūṭāb al-Badīʿ* by ʿAbdallah b. al-Muʿtazz (861–908), who tries to defend this new method in Arabic rhetoric, appears in the Kratchkovsky edition.

¹⁷ On Dunash's secular poetry see Allony 1947, pp. 38–46; Fleischer 1984a.

¹⁸ See Elʿazar Ha-Bavli 1935; Fischel 1935; Poznanski 1914, pp. 61–78; Yahalom 2001. And cf. Fleischer's comments, 1988, p. 243, n. 97: 'Genuine secular poetry, of the Spanish kind, did not strike roots in the East until very late (the twelfth century) precisely because of the absence of a social infrastructure for its acclimation'.

there a wholesale and sweeping pledge to the values of Arabic poetry. In *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-al-Mudhākara* Moshe b. 'Ezra made his well known comment that if Hebrew poets chose to adopt the poetics of Arabic poetry they must uphold all its rules without any selection or deliberation or personal inclination.¹⁹ But this was not the guiding light of the poets in the East.

C. *Non-liturgical Poetry*

Some landmarks along the way to the absorption of various elements from Arabic poetry by Hebrew poets deserve note. In first place is the very use of poetry not for liturgical purposes, that is, for prayer in the synagogue or in connection with quasi-liturgical events such as a festival meal, a wedding, or mourning.²⁰ Chronologically, according to findings,²¹ the first to start this was Ḥayawayh (Ḥīwī) of Balkh, so called because he hailed from the city of Balkh in the northeast of present-day Afghanistan, or after the name of his dwelling place there. He lived in the mid-ninth century and wrote a polemic on religion in the form of a poem, questioning the nature of the Bible as a divine creation free of all error.²² The very existence of a debate on

¹⁹ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 163: 'But as in poetry particularly we follow in the footsteps of the Arabs, it behoves us to do as they do as much as we can'; *ibid.*, p. 223: 'Poetry is the wisdom of the Arabs, and the Jews follow in their footsteps in this art. [. . .]. We must concur with them according to their existence and our ability, as it is not right that we should follow them in part and not in the rest'.

²⁰ As is known, wedding poems and elegies were written in this style, and fragments of them are preserved in the rabbinic literature, the Talmud and midrashim. See Mirsky 1967. It seems that even the pre-Spain drinking poems published by Pagis 1993, pp. 18–28, should be seen as quasi-liturgical, intended for the Purim feast; of the same kind are the popular poems composed in Italy. See Klar 1974, pp. 104–105; Malachi 1984; Fleischer 1992.

²¹ All the finds we have on the beginnings of contacts between Hebrew poetry in the East and Arabic poetry rest on Genizah sources, which did not become available to scholars before the end of the nineteenth century. Moreover, many texts were not published right until the last generation. Schirmann produced a very important publication of this school, which he calls the 'Eastern School': see Schirmann 1966, pp. 23–146. Ezra Fleischer augmented this with the publication of many poems from the Genizah archives by poets of the East in the transitional generations between *piyyut* and poetry written under the influence of Arabic poetry, and enlightened us with his important series of articles on the beginnings of the Spanish poetry. Nevertheless, as far as I can assess, the Genizah folios still conceal important material on this subject.

²² On him see Rosenthal 1947/8–1948/9; Gutmann 1950; Gil 1966; Fleischer 1982.

the sanctity of the Bible was undoubtedly affected by Muslim thought at the time, in which similar penetrating questions were asked about the sanctity and divinity of the Qur'ān.²³ The polemic, albeit in the domain of religion, is certainly not liturgical. The poem's structure is clearly *paytanic*: four-line verses, lines with simple rhymes of *aaaa/bbbb*, etc., and its language is that of a *piyyut* also.²⁴ By virtue of this poem-like composition a particular genre took shape in Hebrew literature in the tenth century, namely poetic polemic essays. First among these are Sa'adia's responses to Ḥayawayh of Balkh and the works of polemics between Sa'adia and the Karaite sages, primarily Aharon b. Asher (*Essa Mashali*) and Salmon b. Yəruḥam; the polemic poems of a pupil of Ya'aqov b. Shemu'el, a pupil of Sa'adia, and the response to it by the Karaite Sahl b. Mašliyyah; '*The Old Questions*' (השאלות העתיקות) apparently written in Spain; and the compositions of the polemic between Dunash and Mənaḥem and their pupils on language and poetry at the beginning of the Spanish period.²⁵

These poetic works combine a polemic element and a didactic element. Both were apparently common in Arabic poetry, and presumably were not unknown to Jewish writers. As for the polemic element, this refers to the poetic genre called *hijā'* and *tanāquḍ*, poems of reproof and admonition, well known even from the *jāhiliyya* period, and particularly in the work of two Arab poets of the Umayyad times, Jarīr and Farazdaq.²⁶ Incidentally, the sharp expressions

²³ See Peters 1976, pp. 1–3, 397–402; Goldziher 1967, I, p. 60; II, pp. 363–365; Gil 1966, pp. 38 ff. Charges of forgeries in the Qur'ānic text were also laid by the Shī'ites against the Sunnis: on this see, e.g., Goldziher 1967, I, p. 109. For a comparison of Qirqisānī's criticism of the Bible with the criticism of the Qur'ān see Khan 1990. On the controversy over the creation of the Qur'ān see Madelung 1985.

²⁴ On the characteristic strophic structure of the *piyyut* and its language see Fleischer 1975, pp. 62, 121–124.

²⁵ For Ḥayawayh's essay see Fleischer 1982; for Sa'adia's essay see Tobi 1982, I, pp. 43–55; on *Essa Mashali* see Fleischer 1980; on Salmon b. Yəruḥam see Salmon 1934; on the polemic poetry of Ya'aqov b. Shemu'el (of which only isolated lines remain) and the answer of Sahl b. Mašliyyah see Pinsker 1860, p. 113, appendices, pp. 16, 19–27. On the attribution of the poems to Sahl see Mann 1931/5, II, pp. 22–28, 116–120; on '*The Old Questions*' see Fleischer 1967; Henshke 1998. Not all the polemical literary compositions were written in the form of a poem and in rhyme, for example, the polemic essay of an unidentified tenth-century author. Yet his language is lucid, and it already shows clear signs of the linguistic school of Sa'adia as regards taking the biblical level of Hebrew as the desired model. See Mann 1937/8.

²⁶ On the genre of the *hijā'* and the *tanāquḍ* poems see Dayf 1966/72, I, pp. 359 ff.; on Jarīr and Farazdaq see Nicholson 1969, pp. 239 ff.; Blachère 1952/66, pp.

contained in the polemic correspondence of Sa'adia and Aharon b. Meir, the *gaon* of the *yeshiva* in the Land of Israel, and between Sa'adia and the supporters of the exilarch David b. Zakkay and Aharon Sarjādo, to the point of casting aspersions on family pedigree and even foul language—unknown previously in Hebrew literature—are to be ascribed to the influence of the Arabic *hijā'* and *tanāquḍ*.²⁷

D. Didactic Poetry

Arabic poetry of the Abbasid period apparently was also the model for the Hebrew use of the poem form for literary genres that were not strictly lyric poetry. This is the genre known as didactic poetry (*shi'ur ta'limi*), whose first composer was Abbān b. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (d. 815/6), a citizen of Basra in southern Iraq. He was a contemporary of the greatest Abbasid poets, Abū Nuwās, Abū al-'Atāhiya, and Bashshār b. Burd. Among his works of this kind are a poetic version of *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, of about 14,000 stanzas; religious laws of fasting and *zakāt*; a history of Ardashīr and Anūshirwān; a *qaṣīda* on the nature of the human being and the science of logic. All these were written as *urjūza muzdawīja*, namely long poems in the *qaṣīda* structure. However, the rhyme is not the same for all verses but is restricted to the first and second hemistiches of each stanza individually (aa/bb/cc, etc.).²⁸

484–505. Drori 1988, pp. 123–126, esp. p. 125, sees the Arabic criticism literature as the source of influence on the Hebrew criticism literature, and not necessarily the *hijā'* and *tanāquḍ* poems.

²⁷ On the polemic between Sa'adia and Ben Meir see Fleischer 1984, pp. 375–385. There a new passage is published from Sa'adia's *Sefer Ha-Mo'adim* containing a fierce attack against his opponent. On the letter of the people of Sarjādo see Schechter 1908, pp. 57 ff.; Fleischer 1990b, pp. 14–15. Sa'adia assails the circle of his opponents in *Sefer Ha-Galui*: see Tobi 1991a. As is known, Moshe b. 'Ezra had reservations about the *hijā'* poems: see Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, pp. 107–117. Early Islam also had reservations about the *hijā'* genre, mainly in Muhammad's time, although it was permitted for the purpose of a counter-attack against poets who berated the Prophet of Islam. See Shahid 1983, pp. 13, 17. Shahid's article turns on the interpretation of the famous verse in the Poets' *sūra* in the Qur'ān (26:126), in which Muhammad castigates the poets of his day. This verse is cited by Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, pp. 116–117, as an example of censure of the falsity in a poem. Indeed, polemical poems are very rare in Hebrew poetry in Spain, and needless to say, the poets sustained the dignified nature of their poems and did not sully them with foul language and scatology. An exception is Yosef b. Abitor: see Fleischer 1990, pp. 159–165. By contrast, the poets of Provence did not refrain from this kind of writing. See Schirmann 1979, I, pp. 411–418, 428–430.

²⁸ Without doubt, avoidance of an unchangeable repetitive rhyme lies in the

Nissi al-Nahrwānī, Sa'adia's elderly contemporary, was apparently the first to write a didactic poem that is not polemic. This is his work on the science of intercalation, in four-line verses with simple rhyme, *aaaa/bbbb*.²⁹ Sa'adia himself wrote a non-polemical didactic poem, namely *שיר האותיות* (*The Poem on the Letters*), which as Zulay showed is no other than a poetic version of a kind of *barrayta* dealing with matters of the Massorah.³⁰ Not surprisingly, typical of Sa'adia the poem is written in an obviously paytanic strophic structure. Another poet who wrote a didactic poem on intercalation is the tenth- or eleventh-century Adonim b. Nissim Ha-Levi of Fes in

difficulty in a long poem of finding so many words ending in the same rhyme. This genre of *al-shī'r al-ta'limī* is not usually mentioned in books on the history of Arabic poetry. On it, see Ḍayf 1966/72, II, pp. 246–254. On Abbān see *ibid.*, I, pp. 330–334. Apart from Abbān, Ḍayf notes three other poets who wrote in this field: (a) 'Alī b. al-Juhm (d. 863/4), who wrote a *muzdawija* of 300 stanzas on history, in two parts: (1) the beginning of Creation and the history of the prophets, and (2) the history of Islam and the caliphs; (b) Ibn al-Mu'tazz (murdered 908), who wrote an *uḥḍa* of about 400 stanzas on the history of the Abbasid caliph al-Mu'taḍid (d. 901/2); (c) Ibn Durayd (837–933), who often included didactic subjects in his poems, particularly linguistics. The Muslim poets themselves were almost certainly influenced by Persian literature in this domain, in which it was customary to write an epic and scientific compositions in the form of a poem, but this exceeds our concern here. I am indebted to my colleague Prof. Yosef Sadan and to Muḥammad 'Alī, my student at Haifa University, who helped me clarify several details. As von Grunebaum showed, the earliest *muzdawija* in Arabic poetry, as far as he knew, is from about 700. He too concludes, according to the affinity of the works and the writers in this form, that its source is Persian poetry of the Sassanid period, and that it was intended as narrative poetry concerned with history, learning, and so on. See von Grunebaum 1944; Ullmann 1966, pp. 46–59. Fleischer 1990a, pp. 89–90, has pointed out that this form, known in Persian poetry as *mathnavī* (an Arabic word, not Persian!), served for the great poetic words of classical Persian literature. Scholars of Persian poetry note that the *mathnavī* is the earliest poetry form in Persian poetry after the quatrains, usually as narrative. Fragments of the earliest works that have survived of this poetry and are written in *mathnavī* are of fairly late poets—Rudagī (d. 940, versified in this form the Indian work *Kalīla wa-Dimna* and other compositions) and Daqīqī (942–981). Still, the *mathnavī* form is purely Persian, and it has no connection to Arabic poetry. See Ellwell-Sutton 1976, pp. 243–245; Browne 1929, pp. 473–474. Nevertheless, the Jewish poets presumably borrowed the genre of didactic poetry and its structure as *muzdawij* from Arabic poetry. Incidentally, Maimonides mentions didactic poems of the Muslim *mutakallimūn*, whose interest was proof of renewal of the world: 'They were measured in poems and were weighed in nice expressions, and clarity of words was choice for them' (*Guide to the Perplexed* I:74). On Arabic didactic and polemic poems in Spain from the second half of the tenth century on, which in part were written in *uḥḍa* structure, see Marquet 1985, pp. 28–29. The links among works in this genre in three languages, Persian, Arabic, and Hebrew, still await research.

²⁹ See Steinschneider 1856, pp. 41–42.

³⁰ For an incomplete scholarly edition of this poem see Stein 1943; on the quality of the poem see Zulay 1964, pp. 280–283; see also Tobi 1982, I, pp. 41–42.

Morocco. His poem is in lines composed of four hemistiches, but without any rhyme, internal or external, and the influence of Greek-Arab philosophy is evident in its opening.³¹ Another eastern poem of this kind is the משלים (Proverbs) of Sa'īd b. Bābshād, apparently of the late tenth century.³² Also noteworthy are several didactic poems written in the lands of the East, by this time in the classical Arabic metre, in which the influence of the eastern *piyyut* is still noticeable: מוסר השכל (*The Moral of the Wisdom*) written as a perfect Arabic *urjūza*, attributed to Hāye Gaon (939–1038); a poem by Ṣahalal b. Nəthan'el on sundry matters of ספר יצירה (*Book of Creation*), and a poem on the religious laws of ritual slaughter by a Karaite called Mənaḥem.³³

Certainly, the pedagogic nature of the ancient Hebrew *piyyut* is not to be disregarded, especially in view of the insertion of *halakha* into the *piyyutim* constructed on the weekly Torah portion, a factor that most characterises the *piyyutim* of Yannai. The prevalent traditional view since the eighth century was that essentially the *piyyut* was composed only because of the prohibition imposed by the rulers—Byzantine or Persian—on Torah study.³⁴ Note particularly the early paytanic genre called *azharot* in which the 613 commandments are listed, and the long *silluqim* of Ha-Qilliri, which include study material,³⁵ but all these were for a distinctly liturgical purpose, and their

³¹ For the last publication of this poem see Zulay 1951. On the poem and the poet in general see Schirmann 1966, pp. 58–62. Yahalom identifies Adonim b. Nissim Ha-Levi with the well-known poet Dunash b. Labraṭ, but Fleischer flatly rejects this. See Yahalom 1983; Fleischer 1985.

³² See Fleischer 1990a, pp. 87–90.

³³ For the controversy on the attribution of מוסר השכל to Hāye (Brody affirms it, Fleischer denies it), see Fleischer 1990a, p. 30. The poem of Ṣahalal was published by Davidson 1926. See also Baneth 1927/9; Schirmann 1966, p. 58, n. 5. The poem on the laws of ritual slaughter was published by Pinsker 1860, appendices, pp. 55–58, who states that he lived at the time of Sa'adīa but does not adduce proofs. On the didactic poems in the work of Abraham b. 'Ezra see Itshaki 1992; and generally in Hebrew poetry in Spain Fleischer 1990a, p. 90, n. 12. The poets of Yemen also wrote many didactic poems on the rules of slaughter, beginning from the end of the twelfth century or the early thirteenth. See Tobi 1991, pp. 66–67. For a poetic version of Hāye Gaon's *Sefer Ha-Shav'ot* in *urjūza* form by Levi b. Ya'aqov al-Qal'ī see Assaf 1933, pp. 42–70. Assaf (p. 43) conjectures that the author was a contemporary of Maimonides, or a little earlier, and he hailed from Qal'at Ḥammād in Morocco. See also Harkavy 1887, pp. 357, 376, 396, 399. The author of the inscription above the poem uses the original Arabic term: ארנ'וזה [..] משתמלא פי אהכאם אלאימאן [..] רנ'וזה אלאסתאד [..] ('An *urjūza* containing the laws of the oaths [..], written in *urjūza* form by Master [..]') (ibid., p. 44).

³⁴ See Haberman 1970; Rabinowitz 1965.

³⁵ On the *azharot* see Zulay 1966; Tobi 1982, I, pp. 89–108; Tobi 1984. For the *silluqim* of Ha-Qilliri see, e.g., the *silluq* to portion *Sheqalim*: אן ראי'ת וספר'ת וזכר'ת.

didactic themes sprang from the liturgical connection, such as the listing of the commandments in the *azharot* for the Feast of Weeks, the festival of the giving of the Torah. This was not the case with the Arabic didactic poems or with the Hebrew poems influenced by them, whose motifs were decided according to the whim of the poet.

The Karaites were another group that broke away from Rabbanite orthodoxy. They too assisted the departure from the paytanic tradition. Just as they rejected the tradition of the Sages they opposed the *piyyut* and did not include it in their worship. Moshe b. Asher, who lived in Tiberias at the end of the ninth century and was a foremost Karaite grammarian, wrote a poem with no liturgical intent, namely *שיר הנפן* (*Song of the Vine*). It is a song of praise to the protagonists of the Bible and to those who in the Karaite view are the sages; it might have been written as an appendix to a copy of the Bible.³⁶ Note in this context a certain literary genre that has almost escaped scholars' attention in respect of its form. This is *haruzot* (stanzas) in the books of Massorah and grammar of the eighth and ninth centuries, apparently written in Tiberias and thereabouts, for example, in the book *Diqduqe Ha-T'š'amim* by the grammarian Aharon b. Asher. The verses are constructed in the usual paytanic mode, yet the purpose is not paytanic but didactic; the language too already evinces a consolidation of the biblical layer that displaces the paytanic layer.³⁷

³⁶ On the Karaites' objection to *piyyutim* see Mann 1931/5, p. 51, who cites Daniel al-Qūmisī from his commentary to Leviticus on this matter; Scheiber 1948, p. 31. On *שיר הנפן* see Klar 1954, pp. 309–314, and Tobi 1991, pp. 67–68. Eventually the Karaites succumbed to the paytanic tradition and included some Rabbanite *piyyutim* in their prayers; they even wrote *piyyutim* themselves. For a passage from a *piyyut* in a Karaite composition see Abramson 1978; Scheiber 1949. For the *piyyutim* of the Karaites see Pinsker 1860, passim; Zulay 1941; Haberman 1970, pp. 87–91; Nemoy 1971; Drori 1988, pp. 201–202; Fleischer 1990a, pp. 283–288; Ben-Shammai 1995. Most of the Karaite *piyyutim* are still in manuscript.

³⁷ For the text of the rhymes see Baer-Strack 1879; Dotan 1967. The anonymous tenth-century author of the piece on the *shawa* writes the following on the rhymes: דע והבן כי הקדמונים המלמדים ובעלי הקריאה והגינות והשעמים והמסרות ואנשי הדקדוק השתדלו [...] ותקנו לזה השער אשר ביארנו למעלה פיוט מבואר בהרזות בתים בתים יבין במהרה למען הקורא בהם (‘Know and understand that the ancient scholars and masters of the reading and the chanting and the cantillation and the traditions, and the grammarians applied themselves [...] and composed for that chapter that we have expounded above a *piyyut* explained in *stanzas*, *strophe* by *strophe*, so that one reading them will readily understand’ (Levy 1936, p. 14. My emphasis). For a detailed discussion of the *haruzot* in terms of language and literature, see Allony 1988, index, p. 595, entry *הרזות*; Allony 1995, chapters six and seven.

E. *Historiographic Poetry; Laments*

Breaking free of the exclusive connection between poetry and liturgy as the prayer of the public was also expressed in the introduction of the epic element into the *piyyut*. *Piyyutim* were composed describing actual events of the day, or personal *piyyutim* and paytanic secular poems were written, namely poems using the literary structures of the *piyyut*. This does not mean the prosodic elements in the structure of the individual verse but the structure of the entire poem: traditional genres of *piyyut* serving as vehicles for the outpouring of personal experiences of no interest to the public. This innovation may also have been influenced by Arabic poetry, for the early *piyyut* did not address contemporary events but voiced sentiments on the state of the nation in those days, generally through midrashic-allegorical interpretation of Bible books. Sometimes reference to the events of the day was through an apocalypse, for example, a Ninth of Av lament for the slaughter of the Jews in the Land of Israel when the Byzantine emperor Heracles re-conquered it from the Persians (629), and a Ninth of Av *piyyut* of consolation in response, it seems, to the capture of the Land of Israel by the Arabs and the elimination of Byzantine rule.³⁸ A unique exception in this respect is a long *silluq* by Ha-Qilliri depicting in minute detail the events of the Land of Israel at the beginning of the seventh century, between the conquest of the land by the Persians and its re-conquest by the Byzantines.³⁹ Fleischer makes the following thoughtful comment on this *piyyut*.⁴⁰

It has to be said that in all that has reached us so far of the works of the ancient *paytanim* there is no other account of historical events than this for such detail and accuracy. This circumstance is especially surprising in that the stormy history of the Jewish people from the conclusion of the Talmud to the tenth century seems to have bypassed paytanic poetry at a considerable distance, leaving no trace on it. There is no more super-temporal and a-historical literature than the paytanic.

Fleischer adds in a note that 'exceptions are just a few texts whose importance, compared with the huge quantity of regular paytanic matter that has come down to us from this period, is negligible'.⁴¹

³⁸ See Yahalom 1979; Yahalom 1987, pp. 221–223; Fleischer 1987; Lewis 1974.

³⁹ The *silluq* was discovered and published by Fleischer 1985a.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 405.

⁴¹ On the difficulties of giving concrete significance to the events mentioned in the *piyyut* see Yahalom 1979.

The super-temporal and a-historical character of the *piyyut* is certainly imparted to it from the prayer that it replaces, but the undermining and decay of this tradition in the ninth and tenth centuries exposed it to the influence of Arabic poetry in this respect too. It is one of the best known, because since the *jāhiliyya* era the purpose of Arabic poetry had essentially been to describe the wars of the tribes, and while it is not truly epic poetry it is not devoid of epic elements, referring to actual events. That is why Arab scholars used to say, *al-shi'r dīwān al-'arab* ('poetry is the history book of the Arab tribes').⁴² The rise of the hedonistic-courtly poetry of the new regimes in Damascus and Baghdad did not remove the epic component from Arabic poetry, either in the genre of war poems or in the genre of praises.⁴³

Fleischer continues: 'From the tenth century, paytanian references to historical events increased a little, but they remained slight and trailed off later'. The first *piyyutim* of this type are apparently the *yoṣer* and the *qərova* for the eighteen benedictions 'amidah prayer, written in memory of the earthquake that struck Tiberias and other places in the Land of Israel on 23 *Shevat* 4509 (749 CE).⁴⁴ However only from the beginning of the eleventh century do we possess a considerable number of *piyyutim* and secular poems written in obvious detail to commemorate events of the day. The *paytan* Shəmu'el the Third, while still known as Shəmu'el the Fourth (according to his status on the religious court), concluded his letter of 1001 concerning the persecution of the Jews of the Land of Israel with a poem describing the event. It is a quatrain (*aaab/cccb*).⁴⁵ In Egypt Shəmu'el the Third also wrote two *qərovot* and two *səlihot* on the salvation of the Jewish community in Egypt after the onslaught of the Muslims against them on 3 *Shevat* 4772 (31 December 1011).⁴⁶ Just a few years later Yosef b. Abitor wrote his well-known lament on the suffering of the Jews of

⁴² See Gibb 1963, pp. 18–31, esp. p. 30; Nicholson 1969, pp. 71–140.

⁴³ On the Umayyad period see Blachère 1952/66, pp. 580 ff.; on the Abbasid period see Dayf 1966/72, I, pp. 290–369; II, pp. 369–442. And see Hamori 1992, esp. pp. 6–18.

⁴⁴ The two *piyyutim* were published by Zulay 1937a, pp. 153–162. The year of the earthquake was determined by M. Margulies: see Fleischer 1973a, p. 369. Although the *piyyutim* were written in memory of the event in 749, the year of their composition is not clear because their author is known just as 'Shəmu'el' (according to the acrostic signature). Zulay states that 'the pattern and form of the *piyyutim* seem to attest to the time of their composition as roughly between the tenth and the twelfth century'.

⁴⁵ For the publication of this poem see Schirmann 1958. For a determination of the poem's author see Qedar 1973, p. 402; see also Yahalom 1987, pp. 223–224.

⁴⁶ See Zulay 1937a, pp. 163–175.

the Land of Israel at the hands of the Jarrāḥ clan in 1024 and later.⁴⁷ This poem is already written in the Arabic *hazaj* (the Hebrew *marnin*) metre.⁴⁸ A writer called Mōnaḥem b. Yom Tov wrote another secular poem without any liturgical intent, but its structure is the characteristic paytanic ‘*maḥrozet* and *pizmon*’, and its topic is the destruction of that same Jarrah clan by the Fatimids in 1029/30.⁴⁹ Finally we note the poem by Shōlomo Ha-Kohen b. Yosef, grandson of the renowned *gaon* of the Land of Israel, Shōlomo b. Yōhuda (d. 1051), on the rout of the Turkmens in Cairo in 1077.⁵⁰ The poem is written as a song of glory to one of the heads of the Fustāṭ community, Abraham Ha-Kohen b. Yiṣḥaq b. Furāt, and it too is in the *hazaj* metre.

This genre of historical poems, including the קִינּוּת (laments) is noteworthy because it seems to be the fruit of the development of Hebrew poetry in the East in the tenth and eleventh centuries through direct contact with contemporary Arabic poetry, which contained a number of such poems.⁵¹ It should certainly not be seen as the influence of the Hebrew poetry of Spain, for this gave rise to poetry of this genre only in the work of Abraham b. ‘Ezra, in his laments over the deeds of the *muwaḥḥidūn* in southern Spain and North Africa in the 1140s.⁵² Most characteristic is the fact that the poems were written partly as sacred songs with a liturgical purpose and partly as secular, but they possess distinctly paytanic structures, sometimes in quantitative metre. Here too we note Fleischer’s penetrating observation on the poetry of Mōnaḥem b. Yom Tov:⁵³

This conclusion is of great importance for study of the *piyyut* because it attests yet again to the dilemma of the Eastern Jews in the writing of secular poems, and the refusal of many of them, even in the eleventh century, to use the forms of secular poetry devised in Spain.⁵⁴ The poem of Mōnaḥem ben Yom Tov is secular in content and purpose, but paytanic in its forms.

⁴⁷ Published by Schirmann 1940, pp. 27–29, 74. For a dating of the riots about which the lament was written see Goitein 1980; see also Fleischer 1987a, pp. 425–426.

⁴⁸ On the quantitative metre in the work of Ibn Abitur see Fleischer 1990, pp. 177–184.

⁴⁹ Published by Fleischer 1987a.

⁵⁰ Published by Greenstone 1906. And see Yahalom 1987, pp. 227–235.

⁵¹ See Dayf 1966/72, II, pp. 369–442.

⁵² On the lament אֶתְּחַנּוּן רִדְּ עֲלֵי קִפְּרֵי see Kahana 1894, pp. 140–143; on the lament אֶתְּחַנּוּן הַמַּעֲרָב see Schirmann 1940, pp. 33–35. See also Levin 1970, pp. 18–20; Brann 1995.

⁵³ Fleischer 1987a, p. 425.

⁵⁴ It seems that this comment by Fleischer stems from a Hispano-centric view,

F. *Personal Poetry*

Another Eastern innovation akin to the *qinot* is the writing of personal poems in clearly paytanic forms. In Egypt a *paytan* called Abraham Ha-Kohen wrote a *qərova* for the eighteen benedictions ‘*amidah*’ prayer, and other *piyyutim*, about the heartache he suffered in his quarrel with another man in 1024; Yəshu‘a He-Ḥaver b. Nathan, also in Egypt, wrote a *qinah* in the form of a *qərova* on the death of his son Yoshiyyahu in 1026.⁵⁵ The writers undoubtedly did not intend their *piyyutim* to be said as part of congregational prayers, as the congregation had no interest in private distress. Nor can it be surmised, of course, whether they wrote them to be recited by themselves as part of the obligatory individual prayers: the *piyyut* by nature is a prayer of the assembly. But they might have been intended as a voluntary prayer, according to Sa‘adia’s dictum in his prayer-book (translated from the Arabic) that ‘whoever wishes to add an optional prayer will say the ‘*amida*’ benedictions as many times as he likes, because there is no prayer apart from it’.⁵⁶

Loyalty to the tradition of ancient Hebrew poetry in the genre of *qinot*, which is more natural than in other genres, is also reflected in the *qinot* written by poets for the death of their kin or for the death of revered persons. The very writing of such *qinot* is in itself a departure from ancient paytanic writing, yet they too evince fusion of Arabic elements, including metre and figurative motifs, with paytanic elements, such as rhyming quatrains in the form *aaaa/bbbb*, an unreservedly religious mood, and so on.⁵⁷

while by our approach the work of the poets of the East stemmed from their famous loyalty to the ancient Hebrew *paytanic* tradition. See more on this below.

⁵⁵ The poems of Abraham Ha-Kohen were first published by Marmorstein 1913/4; for the correct identification of their author and an emendation of their editing, see Mann 1921; for Yəshu‘a He-Ḥaver see Zulay 1937a, pp. 176–183.

⁵⁶ Sa‘adia 1941, p. 45. Interestingly, Sa‘adia uses what appear to be distinctly Islamic terms as the name for voluntary prayers (*nawāfil*) and for the act of praying (*yataṣṣal*). There is no room here to dilate on Sa‘adia’s use of Islamic terms for Jewish religious things, such as *qur’ān* for *miqra* (Bible), and *imām* for *kohen* (priest).

⁵⁷ Poems of this genre preserved in the Genizah are innumerable. They were even given the name *aftara*. See, e.g., Schirmann 1966, p. 265. For several of them see Mann 1920/2, II, pp. 27–29, 79–80, 255–256; Schirmann 1966, Index, p. 503, entry קִינָה, including, on pp. 77–78, a *qinah* by the Egyptian *paytan* Sahlān b. Abraham of the first half of the eleventh century, on the death of Shəmu‘el the Third; Brody 1937b.

G. Poems of Praise and Poems of Friendship

We can now list in detail several poetry genres that were unacceptable in the ancient Hebrew *piyyut* but were absorbed into the new Hebrew poetry in the countries of the East through direct contact with Arabic poetry. First are the praise poems (*madhī*), a major genre in Arabic poetry. Above we already mentioned שיר הנפן, which is a poem in praise of mighty figures from the past, whose like is encountered only in שיר בשבח אבות עולם (*The Song in Praise of the Fathers of the World*) in Ben Sira.⁵⁸ But from the beginning of the tenth century we have a considerable number of poems in praise of mortals contemporary with and from the same place as the poet. Nissi al-Nahrawānī, one of the sages of Babylonia in the early tenth century, and an important poet, sang the praises of the *dayyan* of the Baghdad community;⁵⁹ later (about 928), Efraim b. Moshe lauded Saʿadia in an epistolary poem of the paytanic type;⁶⁰ Mōnaḥem b. Saruk around the mid-tenth century praises a number of the sages of Spain in three praise poems, which in structure and language are between the *piyyut* and the new secular poetry;⁶¹ at the end of the tenth or in the early eleventh century Abraham Ha-Kohen wrote poems praising Abraham of Baghdad, a member of the wealthy Nəṭīra family; similarly Shəlomo b. Naḥum al-Baradānī, in scanned verse;⁶² Yosef

⁵⁸ On the שיר בשבח אבות עולם see Ben Sira 1959, pp. 360 ff.

⁵⁹ Published by Schirmann 1966, p. 25. Fleischer queries the attribution of this poem to Nissi. See Fleischer 1984, p. 386, n. 36; Fleischer 1988, p. 246, n. 69. And see n. 67 below. On Nissi as a *paytan* see Bernstein 1957.

⁶⁰ Schechter 1908, pp. 57–58. And see n. 67 below.

⁶¹ See on them Fleischer 1988, pp. 248–262. Here we include poems of Mōnaḥem, who as is known worked in Spain and not in the East. The reason is that in many respects the character of his poetry is identical to that of the poets of the East, who wrote independently of Dunash b. Labraṭ, founder of the school of imitation of Arabic poetry. On the nature of Mōnaḥem's secular poetry compare Fleischer 1988, pp. 263–264.

⁶² The poems of praise of Abraham Ha-Kohen have been published by various researchers on the basis of one manuscript of the Genizah, a remnant of the poet's *diwān* whose pages are scattered in various libraries. For the researchers' publications see Fleischer 1988, p. 241, n. 48. Although these poems have crucial importance for the development of secular poetry in the East, so far they have not had the benefit of a fitting scholarly edition or basic research. Fleischer writes about them: 'These poems are of great importance for understanding the development of secular poetry in its beginnings'. The poem of Shəlomo Baradānī was published by Scheiber 1980. He too stresses the importance of the poems of praise of Abraham Ha-Kohen: 'They are of immense value in terms of their form and also content.

b. Abitor, apparently while still in Spain and before migrating to the East (not later than 985), wrote a praise poem in the form of a *piyyut* in honour of Ḥisday b. Shaprut;⁶³ Hāye Gaon (d. 1038) wrote two poems of praise in honour of personalities in Qayrawān, namely Abraham b. Nathan and Yəhuda b. Yosef; and an anonymous poet wrote a poem of praise for Abraham b. Nathan;⁶⁴ ‘Eli b. Yəhezkel Ha-Kohen wrote two *piyyutim* in which he entreats for the salvation of Jewry, but he adds at the end a blessing for the *gaon* of the Land of Israel Shəlomo b. Yəhuda (1025–1051);⁶⁵ he also sounded the praises of the president and gaon of the Land of Israel *yeshiva*, Daniel b. ‘Azarya (1051–1062).⁶⁶

The writers of Hebrew praise poems in that period generally used the initial letters of the lines (acrostic) to spell the names of their subjects, not their own. From the early Hebrew *piyyut* they took the tradition of indicating a name, but they did so in the Arabic manner, namely not to signify the author but the honoured person, sometimes with the addition of a respectful epithet. An example is Efraim b. Moshe’s poem in honour of Sa‘adia, which is inscribed סעדיה בן יושף אור הגולה (Sa‘adia b. Yosef, Light of the Exile).⁶⁷

They make a kind of combination of Classical Arabic poetry with the tradition of the ancient *piyyut*. We shall return to this subject later. On Shəlomo Baradānī and other poets and cantors of this family see Beeri 1995; 2003.

⁶³ See Fleischer 1989, pp. 211–214; 1990, pp. 164–165. For the year of Ibn Abitor’s migration to the East see *ibid.*, p. 134 and n. 38. This poem of Ibn Abitor is included here for the same reason given in n. 61 above regarding the poems of praise of Mənaḥem. Fleischer also writes *ibid.*, pp. 166–167, regarding the character of Ibn Abitor’s secular poems: ‘On this matter Ibn Abitor is firmly on the side of the Hebrew secular poets, already then dispersed in most of the Jewish centres of writing; each of them was active in his place, when the time was ripe, without connection to the Spanish innovations, and they were to sustain their special quality until the middle of the eleventh century’. By contrast, we do not mention here the poet Yiṣḥaq b. Khalfūn, of the generation of Ibn Abitor, even though he wrote several poems in praise of notables in Damascus and Fuṣṭāṭ. This is because he already writes according to the school of Dunash b. Labraṭ, who deliberately imitates Arabic poetry.

⁶⁴ For poems of Hāye see Brody 1937, pp. 27–42; on the poem of an anonymous poet see Mann 1921a, pp. 429–432.

⁶⁵ See Haberman 1963, pp. 191–192.

⁶⁶ See Fleischer 1974; 1984, pp. 385–393.

⁶⁷ Such was the usage of Mənaḥem b. Saruk, Yosef b. Abitor, Abraham Ha-Kohen, ‘Eli b. Yəhezkel Ha-Kohen, and others. On it, see Fleischer 1989, p. 220. On the matter of Sa‘adia’s name in a poem of Efraim b. Moshe see Fleischer 1988, p. 236, n. 32, and p. 246, n. 69. According to this usage, Fleischer (1989, p. 222) rightly states that the name *Hanokh* signified by the first letters of the stanzas in the

None of the poems is written as a complete *qaṣīda*, retaining the properties in prosody, form, and content of the classical Arabic *qaṣīda*, as this took shape as early as the *jāhiliyya*. In language, structure, and forms they are clearly paytanic.⁶⁸ The only exceptions we have are the two praise poems by Hāye Gaon and the one by Shəlomo Baradānī, which while scanned with *yatedot* and *tənu'ot*, in language and subject matter are grounded in the ancient Hebrew *piyyut* and are far removed from the qualities of Arabic poetry. True, the poets of the East began writing praise poems in apparently perfect *qaṣīda* form, namely with meticulous attention to all the formal rules, including the precise Arabic metre. Examples are the songs in praise of the minister 'Adaya al-Qazzāz and his father Mənashshe, holders of important posts in the Fatimid government in Egypt and Syria at the end of the tenth and in the early eleventh century, and those in praise of members of the Tustarī family in the first half of the eleventh century. But they have hardly anything of the courtly air typical of the classic Hebrew praise poems in Spain. All are imbued with an obvious national-religious spirit, even though they tell of the political achievements of the persons in whose honour they are written.⁶⁹ It seems that these poems provided the model for later generations of poets of the East writing poems of praise for Jewish personalities. The perfect Arabic *qaṣīda* first appears only in the poems of Dunash b. Labraṭ, written in Cordoba in honour of Ḥisday b. Shapruṭ. We can say nothing about the 'scanned poems' that Dunash showed to Sa'adia in Baghdad except that they were scanned, because they have not survived. Still, although these praise poems were not written as whole Arabic *qaṣīdas* their writers were well aware of these Arabic poems and their qualities in terms of content and double structure. 'Eli Ha-Kohen calls the poem of praise that he wrote and copied in his own hand for the *Nasi* (President) Daniel b. 'Azarya a *qaṣīda*.⁷⁰

poem *הַכֶּם לְבִן לְאֵל רָם* does not allude to the name of the author but to the name of the son of the subject of the paean, whose name, Moshe, is explicitly given in the lines of the *mustajāb* in the stanzas of the poem. This is Moshe b. Ḥanokh, a well-known scholar, founder of the *yeshiva* at Cordoba at the time of Ḥisday b. Shapruṭ. Incidentally, in accordance with this it is possible that the poem signed *נִסִּי* at the end is not by Nissi al-Nahrawānī, as is generally believed, but was written in his honour. This conforms with the description of the praised person as a Torah scholar and a spiritual leader, namely R. Nissi.

⁶⁸ See, e.g., the *mustajāb* in honour of Moshe b. Ḥanokh, mentioned in the previous note.

⁶⁹ See Mann 1920/2, II, pp. 11–13, 75–77.

⁷⁰ See Fleischer 1974, p. 48; 1984, p. 393, n. 52.

Needless to say, the poets of Eastern Jewry did not write in praise of rulers and ministers, or of courtiers, as was the habit of Arab poets and of the Jewish poets in Spain. Nor do the Eastern praise poems in any way reflect relations between poet and benefactor, for in the East a true Jewish courtly culture never materialised. These poems were in honour of the venerable members of the Jewish community, particularly the spiritual heads, so most of the praise is in the domain of national leadership, study of Torah, and performance of its commandments. Even after the Arabic forms found their place in Hebrew poetry in the East under the influence of the Hebrew poetry in Spain, distinctly courtly poems of praise were not written.⁷¹ Note that the Arabic forms of poetry were not absorbed at all into Hebrew poetry in the East, in total contrast to the poetry of Spain. There the poems were inspired by and portrayed the courtly culture; there are poems of wine (*khamriyyāt*), of love (*ghazaliyyāt*), and of nature (*wasf*). But in the courts of the leaders of the Jewish communities in the Eastern lands and North Africa, such as Baghdad and Qayrawān, no hedonistic spirit prevailed, typical of the courts of the Jewish magnates in Spain who imitated the Muslim courtly culture. After the poetry of Spain became planted in the East this imitation occurred there also.

Another genre, close to the poems of praise, is poems of friendship and parting. A fine example is the poems of ‘Alwān b. Abraham, who apparently lived in Syria at the end of the tenth century, and whose poems were even collected as a *diwān*. This is itself noteworthy as being influenced by Arabic poetry. The following comment by Schirmann on these poems hits the mark:⁷²

For us, the poems of ‘Alwān are among the earliest examples of secular literature that developed in the Eastern countries, without or with hardly any contact with the Spanish school. These poems are not *piyyutim* in their content and purpose, but in their form they are highly similar to sacred poems: they have no rhythm or metre, their vocabulary contains not a little from the language of the paytanists or expressions created according to the pattern of that language; and with the initial letters in the lines of the poem the author signs his name.

⁷¹ Compare Fleischer 1984, pp. 386–387; 1988, pp. 246–247; Tobi 1991, pp. 60 ff.

⁷² Schirmann 1966, p. 53. The fragments of the *diwān* of the poems of ‘Alwān were published by Davidson 1911. Fragments of another copy of the *diwān* and of a *piyyut* by ‘Alwān were published by Schirmann 1966, pp. 56–57. The poem שְׁמֵחַם לְכָבִי לָם by the above Sahlān b. Abraham, published by Zulay in the daily *Ha-Ares* of 3 December 1946, should also be included in the genre of poems of friendship.

H. *Philosophical Poems*

Arabic poetry and literature also influenced Hebrew literature in the transplantation into it of the academic disciplines of ethics and philosophy. After the advent of Islam, Arabic poetry began to be written based on religious values, principally relating to martyrdom in the *jihād* and the preference for spirit over matter. Later, wisdom poetry (*hikma*) and poetry of religious preaching (*waʿz*), rebuke, and asceticism (*zuhd*) were invented. They drew their ideas not only from Islam but also from Greek philosophy, mainly neo-Platonism.⁷³ Thus the intellectual gap between Arabic poetry in this area and Hebrew poetry narrowed, because ancient Hebrew poetry contained a similar paytanic type, the *tokheḥa* (rebuke),⁷⁴ and because neo-Platonic philosophy was also absorbed into Jewish culture; nothing in it essentially clashed with Jewish tradition. Sound evidence of the effect of Arabic religious poetry on wide circles in the Jewish community in Babylonia in the tenth century, not only in the leading social and spiritual elites, is found in *Kitāb al-Manāẓir* (*The Book of Observations*) by Ṭābā b. Ṣalḥūn Abū al-Khayr, a Jewish wool merchant from Mosul (the book was completed in 983).⁷⁵

I was on a journey [. . .] among the Arabs in one of their places and there was a Sufi Muslim man there, who would render some of their poems to a nice tune that moved the soul and encouraged it to longing and joy, and he accompanied this with movements of his body. Excited, I asked one of the hearers what it was that drove him in the recital of his poem, and what was the intention of the composers of the melodies, and did the thing bring about any benefit at all, and if so, what was the benefit? He was unable to answer, and when he saw that I knew something of the answer he asked me about it. I told him briefly some things I had read on the subject in books of the philosophers. And I meant to derive some benefit for myself in this, to consolidate these matters in my soul by going over them.

The Arabic philosophical poems—and also the Hebrew philosophical poems in Spain—were not lacking in fatalistic and nihilistic elements, grounded in the pagan perceptions of the *jāhiliyya*, known in Arabic

⁷³ See Blachère 1952/66, pp. 398–405, 560–568; Dayf 1966/72, I, pp. 399–413; II, pp. 473–485.

⁷⁴ On the *tokheḥa* see Fleischer 1975, Index, p. 524, entry תוכחה; Itshaki 1987.

⁷⁵ See Ben-Shammai 1990, excerpt on pp. 24–25.

poetry as *qadar* or *dahr*,⁷⁶ and in Hebrew poetry as *zəman* (time) or *tevel* (universe). Hebrew poetry in the East was careful to keep clear of all that, even though occasionally it could not refrain from using pagan motifs as rhetorical devices. These poems too were of the structure of the *piyyut*, for example, the *tokheḥa* of Sa'adia mentioned above and the *zuhdiyya* of David b. Ha-Nasi (Land of Israel and Egypt, early eleventh century).⁷⁷ Two other tenth-century poets whose work already betrays the influence of Arab philosophy are Nəḥemya b. Shəlomo b. Heman Ha-Nasi, who lived in Babylonia and the above-mentioned Adonim b. Nissim Ha-Levi of North Africa, in the opening of his poem on intercalation.⁷⁸ A separate genre is the *proverbs*, such as the work of Sa'īd b. Bābshād of the late tenth century, which contains familiar notions from Arabic ethics, for example, *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, which were also taken up by the Arabic *zuhd* poems.⁷⁹

I. *Matters of Form: The Qaṣīda*

The basic structure in Arabic poem is the *qaṣīda*, whose definition contains three formal elements: the division of the poetic unit (the *bayt*) into *ṣadr* (the first hemistich) and *ʿajz* (the second hemistich), which are equal rhythmically, the unchangeable repetitive rhyme (*qāfiya*), and the metre of *watad*, pl. *awtād* and *sabab*, pl. *asbāb*, and an overall structural element: division of the entire poem into two main parts, opening and body, which at first sight are unconnected. Until the time of Dunash, and even later, Hebrew poetry of the East does not exhibit poems constructed wholly on the *qaṣīda* model. By contrast, individual elements—except for metre—are present, but not comprehensively and necessarily. For example, the works of Sa'adia, Mənaḥem b. Saruk, and Elḥanan b. Shəmarya (Egypt, eleventh century) display the long line, as distinct from the short line typical of the early *piyyut*.⁸⁰ But contrary to the *bayt* in the *qaṣīda*,

⁷⁶ On the fatalistic outlook in Arabic poetry see Ringgren 1955. On *time* and *universe* in Hebrew poetry in Spain see Levin 1962. See also chapter 7 below.

⁷⁷ On all the foregoing see chapter 6 below. For a scholarly edition of Sa'adia's *tokheḥa* see Zulay 1964, pp. 63–77; on the *zuhdiyya* of David b. Ha-Nasi see Marcus 1943/4, pp. 54–58.

⁷⁸ See Zulay 1938, p. 200; Zulay 1951, pp. 26 ff.; Katsumata 2002a.

⁷⁹ See Fleischer 1990a, pp. 135 ff.; see also Appendix I at the end of the book.

⁸⁰ See Fleischer 1988, pp. 235–236, 257, n. 81; Fleischer 1990a, p. 92.

the long line in Hebrew poetry does not divide into two rhythmically equal parts, but has a syntactic caesura, necessitated by its very length.

Nor was the repetitive rhyme a fixed element, although it was characteristic of various kinds of *piyyut*, usually those invented in the later Eastern *piyyut*, such as *shəvāḥ*, and also in secular works such as the poems of glory of Nissi and Mənaḥem b. Saruk and the long polemic poem of Shəmarya b. Elḥanan. But apart from repetitive rhyming, later Eastern paytanic poetry and its contemporary secular poetry invented highly variegated forms of rhyming, such as alternate rhyming (*abab*) and *muwashshah*-like rhyming in the *zulats*, *zajal*-like quatrain rhyming, and other rather intricate forms. These are found in the work of Sa'adia and Abraham Ha-Kohen. The principle common to them all is the breaking of the rigid, centuries-old paytanic tradition requiring a uniform rhyme in every stanza. At root this was apparently influenced by the Arabic *musammat*, although Hebrew poetry in the East, precisely because of adherence to strophic, non-uniform structures, created far more diverse forms. As is known, Hebrew secular poetry in Spain took that path, restricting itself to the classic structure of repetitive rhyme, and at a later stage even adding the *muwashshah* form following Arabic poetry.⁸¹

As for exact quantitative metre, based on *yatedot* and *tənu'ot*, and whose essence is the grammatical and rhythmic distinction between the long and the short vowel, Dunash attests that he showed his master Sa'adia (d. 942) poems written in this metre;⁸² he apparently adapted the metres of Arabic poetry to Hebrew poetry while he was still in the East. This conclusion also satisfies the need to explain this adaptation according to Hebrew pronunciation in the East at that time, a subject that merits detailed consideration in itself but is beyond the scope of this book. Yet there is room to reassess Pinsker's assertion that Dunash was not the first or the only one who wrote metred poems in the East at that time, even though this argument was rejected by Brody.⁸³ An attempt was made to document the syl-

⁸¹ On the expansion of the use of unchangeable repetitive rhyme in the new Hebrew poetry written in the tenth century, with or without metre, see Fleischer 1988, pp. 235–237, 257; 1989, p. 218; 1990a, pp. 90–91. On Sa'adia's grasp and definition of rhyme under the Arabic influence, see pp. 142–144 below.

⁸² See Dunash 1866, §105, p. 31. Sa'adia's reaction to the Arabic metre seems to have been lukewarm, if not entirely negative. See Yahalom 1979a, p. 28; Tobi 1982, I, p. 234.

⁸³ See Pinsker 1860, pp. 45 ff.; Brody 1937.

labic metre, based on long vowels only, in the Eastern *proverb* genre. This too is close to the Arabic metre, based on syllables, and not to the paytanic metre, based on syntactic accentuation.⁸⁴

As for the double structure of the *qaṣīda*, lack of space permits consideration of only one poem that upholds this convention with remarkable precision, namely Abraham Ha-Kohen's רִיחֵי הַקֹּהֵן מִהַלֵּל הַתְּשׁוּבָה.⁸⁵ The poem is constructed as rhyming quatrains, not, indeed, in the simple *aaaa* rhyme but *aaab*, *cccb*, etc., which is a new rhyming as against the *piyyut*. The poem's language is paytanic, but it is divided into two parts. Its beginning is a song in praise of wine, including motifs and phrases well known from the *khamriyyāt*. Then, by means of the normative technique of the 'splendour of transition' (*ḥusn al-takhalluṣ*), the poem moves from praise of wine to praise of its subject, one of the heads of the Baghdad Jewish community. Also present here are Arabic rhetorical conventions of hyperbole, but the themes of the adulation concern Torah and the nation, as befits one who is not sunk deep in the world of voluptuous courtly life.

J. *Language of the Bible and Language of the Qur'ān*

The return to the biblical layer of the Hebrew language, in keeping with a purist approach that disqualified Hebrew language later than the Bible, was largely due to Karaite poets for ideological considerations. Here the influence of the linguistic notion in Arabic poetry is evident: the language of the Qur'ān and of ancient Arabic poetry was taken as a model to be copied, even though it was not possible to create work like it because of its divine source (*ʿiṣāz al-qur'ān*). The restoration of the use of biblical language was one of Sa'adia's chief goals in his spiritual and social endeavour, and he was undoubtedly motivated in this by national and religious considerations also. Nevertheless, contrary to the stance of the Karaites, Sa'adia steadfastly refrained from dismissing the language of the paytanists and the method of syllogism (Ar.: *qiyās*; Heb.: *heqqesh*) on which it is based, for he could not agree to the preclusion of a matter so essential to Jewish tradition. Moreover, it was necessary to defend Rabbanite teaching

⁸⁴ See discussion on this matter in Fleischer 1990a, pp. 92–97.

⁸⁵ Published by Scheiber 1968, pp. 252–255. Also the *qaṣīda* of 'Eli in honour of Daniel is of double structure; see Fleischer 1974, pp. 59–60.

from the Karaite attack. Sa'adia's position here deserves a great deal of emphasis, particularly compared with the linguistic approach of his pupil Dunash b. Labraṭ. The latter dismissed the language of the Sages as a whole, and hallowed Bible language. This was identical with the Arab outlook regarding the language of the Qur'ān. Dunash's stance was wholeheartedly adopted by the Jewish poets in Spain.⁸⁶ We may note that several Jewish sages in Babylonia in the tenth century studied the Qur'ān in the original Arabic, and one of them, according to his own testimony, even considered translating it.⁸⁷

The tendency to write in Biblical Hebrew may be likened to a well-known feature of Arabic literature at that time. I refer to the fact that there were Arab writers who wished to go against the notion of *ijāz al-qur'ān*, namely the impossibility of writing according to its pattern. The most famous of such writers are the eighth-century Ibn al-Muqaffā' and the tenth-century al-Ma'arrī. Their deeds were perceived as denial of the divinity of the Qur'ān.⁸⁸ In the first half of

⁸⁶ Various researchers have dealt with this, particularly Allony, Zulay, and Fleischer. For a summary see chapter 4 below on Sa'adia's theory of poetry.

⁸⁷ The sages of Jewry, such as Sa'adia and Hāye Gaon, made use of the Qur'ān linguistically to interpret phrases in the Bible, as transpires from the words of Yehuda b. Bal'am, Moshe b. 'Ezra, and Yosef b. 'Aqnīn. They point this out in their defence of this method in their writings. Ibn Bal'am 1992, pp. 231–232: '[This is presented] testimony from what is given in the Qur'ān [of the Arabs]: It is said of the interpretation of 'Ba'al' that he is an idol' (Goshen-Gottstein [Ibn Bal'am 1992] interpreted this as referring to Sa'adia, but it seems to have been directed to Hāye Gaon); Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 227: 'After citing the Qur'ān of the Arabs, I ignored the calumny spread by the thinkers of our day among the scholars of halakha in our nation. I saw that the leaders of those engaged in halakha and the foremost speakers, R. Sa'adia and R. Hāye, and others among the speakers made use of it openly seeking help with obscurities in the prophecies'. Ibn 'Aqnīn 1964, p. 495, writes in a similar vein about Hāye Gaon: 'And he also made use of the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth*. And like him, R. Sa'adia, his memory for a blessing, had done earlier with his Arabic commentaries'. My colleague Dr. Uri Melammed identified a Qur'ānic verse introduced into Sa'adia's commentary on Isaiah 43:7: **פלא יוכלך אלמנאן מן אלשין אלמחין בל צלצאל כאלפכאר** ('Man is not created of pure mortar but of dry mortar, like an earthen vessel'). See Sa'adia 1994, p. 213. The idea and the phrasing are found in the Qur'ān in several places: 15:26, 28, 33, and closest of all in 55:14: **خلق الانسان من صلصال كالفخار** ('[God] created man from dry mortar like an earthen vessel'). For passages from the Qur'ān in the *Risāla* of Ibn Quraysh see Ibn Quraysh 1984, Index, p. 380, entry **קראן**, and also p. 121. Of course, some Jewish sages occupied themselves in Qur'ān with critical and polemic intent. See Steinschneider 1877, pp. 313–316. The sage who contemplated translating the Qur'ān was the tenth-century author of the polemic essay. See Mann 1937/8, p. 414. For the Qur'ān in medieval Jewish literature see Lazarus-Yaffe 1992, pp. 143–160.

⁸⁸ On *ijāz al-qur'ān* see Boullata 1983; Blachère 1952/66, pp. 230–235; Makhlūf 1973, esp. the Introduction, pp. 17–53 and the ending of the book, pp. 460 ff.;

the tenth century Sa'adia composed two famous *baqqashot* and *prayers* in manifest imitation of biblical language. Apart from these, to the same trend and the same period may be ascribed two series of poems in biblical style of Eastern origin that served for prayers. These poems were discovered in the Genizah, and scholars have made great efforts to determine their time.⁸⁹ Writing prayers in Hebrew is a subject of special note, because from the responses of the *geonim* it transpires that 'all of them are [poems requesting] clemency and supplications which our forefathers, may their memory be blessed, received from the holy *yeshiva* [Sura?], all are in Aramaic [...]. We see that on the days of Fast or of any other affliction they beg in Aramaic. Most of the benedictions in the *Gaonic* writings, either for the individual or for the public, are written in that language'. Even words originally said in Hebrew were customarily translated into Aramaic: 'Still today they are recited in the *yeshiva* in the holy tongue, שומרי שְׁעָרִים, פתחו שְׁעָרִים וְהַשְׁמַע צְעָקַת יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲשׂוּקִים, and they repeat it in Aramaic נְשָׂרֵי תַרְעֵי פִתְחוּ תַרְעֵי וְהַשְׁמַע צוֹחָא דִּישְׂרָאֵל עֲשִׂיק'.

Linguistic purity is also connected to the beauty of the language in its rhetoric, called in Arabic *faṣāḥa* and *balāgha*, which Sa'adia rendered together as the Hebrew term *ṣahot* (lucidity). This in fact is the Arab notion of the *badī'*, which was greatly nurtured in Arabic poetry in the Abbasid period and was also taken up by Hebrew secular poetry in the East. Particularly noteworthy is the expansion of the use of figurative language, very sparse in the *piyyut*, and other rhetorical means in Arabic rhetoric.⁹¹ A marvellous instance of Sa'adia's

Abu Deeb 1990, pp. 360–366. On attempts of Arab authors to write in the style of the Qur'ān see Goldziher 1967, II, pp. 363–365. For an echo of this perception regarding the Bible and Hebrew poetry in the Middle Ages see Ibn 'Aqnīn 1964, pp. 11, 495. On the fierce debate between Ismā'il b. 'Abbād b. al-'Abbās al-Wazīr (nicknamed al-Ṣāhib, born 326 H, 937/8 CE), one of the sages of Islam in Rayy in northern Persia, who tended to *Mu'tazila* views, and the Jewish exilarch in the second half of the tenth century (name unknown) over *iḥjāz al-qur'ān* and the possibility of writing superior to it, see Yāqūt 1991, p. 240, and below, close to n. 97.

⁸⁹ On the *baqqashot* of Sa'adia which were printed in his *siddur*, and on his *prayers*, discovered and printed by Zulay, see Tobi 1982, I, pp. 14–31. On the series of poems in the style of the Bible see Fleischer 1991.

⁹⁰ See Harkavy 1887, §373, pp. 188–189 and p. 372. On the Hebrew/Aramaic diglossia see Drori 1988, pp. 41–43, who states there that Arabic assumed the place of Aramaic following the Arab conquest; this is true, but not in everything—certainly not in the liturgical sphere, because Arabic did not serve as a language of prayer in the synagogues. This subject requires further research.

⁹¹ On these terms see chapter 4 below.

awareness of the need for ornamentation of the poem is found in a couplet from his *shiv'ata* for the Feast of Weeks, which as far as I know has no equal in all the ancient *piyyut*:⁹²

וְהֵן עֲרָבִי יִפְתִּי
וּכְמִשְׁלוֹשׁ עֲשָׂרָה נִפְתִּי
הוֹרִי זָהָב קָרְסָתִי וְשָׁפִיתִי
זָהָב שִׁירִי עַל־מוֹת הַפִּיתִי

I have adorned my prayer
And as with thirteen I have sifted.
I have hung ornaments on poetic beads and smoothed them
With the gold of my poems I have covered them over.

The interpretation of the lines is the following. הֵן עֲרָבִי: a common paytanic figure of speech, meaning 'my prayer', based on Job 41:4. וּכְמִשְׁלוֹשׁ עֲשָׂרָה נִפְתִּי: this alludes to *mishna Menahot* 6:7: The 'omer was sifted in thirteen sieves. The poet means that he was meticulous in his poetry writing, examining it again and again. This indeed is the counsel of the medieval Arab and Hebrew masters of poetics to their poets: to be perfect in their poems, and to sift much from them, before reciting them in public. הוֹרִי זָהָב: according to Song of Songs 1:11: הוֹרִי זָהָב נַעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ עִם נִקְדוֹת הַכֶּסֶף ('We will make you ornaments of gold, studded with silver'). But the poet's intention is metaphor, as he translates there *shamā'īkh* = beads, circles of fruit. קָרְסָתִי: I hung lovely ornaments on them, after the work of the Tabernacle in Exodus 26:7: וְעָשִׂיתָ חֲמִשִּׁים קָרָסִי זָהָב וְחִבְרָתָם אֶת הַיִּרְעָה ('And you shall make fifty clasps of gold, and couple the curtains'). וְשָׁפִיתִי: I smoothed, as the silver-smith does to beautify his work. זָהָב שִׁירִי: a marvellous metaphoric construct. הַפִּיתִי: I covered. Note that with these words Sa'adia refers to the beauty of the poem, to the *badī'*, not to its content, something that is of course not characteristic of the ancient *piyyut*.

K. *Terms from Arabic Poetry in the Essays of the Jewish Scholars in Babylonia in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries*

Most of the foregoing is based on study of the poetry itself, but we do possess some evidence which while not substantial indicates that Jewish scholars in the East knew Arabic poetry—above and beyond knowledge of Arabic language and literature in general. Sa'adia's book of poetics, *Ha-Egron*, in its second, Arabic edition, entitled *Kitāb*

⁹² Sa'adia 1941, p. 189.

Uṣūl al-Shiʿr al-Ibrānī, proves beyond doubt that he knew the Arabic poetics literature, but we cannot enlarge on this here. As regards Arabic metre, we note only that Saʿadia produced an apologia stating that the Hebrew *Book of Metres* (*Kitāb al-Athqāl*) was lost; the pupils of Mənaḥem in their polemic with Dunash also state that Saʿadia was acquainted with Arabic metre but deliberately did not use it.⁹³ Of greatest importance is a passage written by one of Saʿadia's pupils in which he attempts to classify Hebrew poetry down the generations and to periodise it according to purely Arabic criteria and terms, taken from Arabic poetics.⁹⁴ At about the same time Yəhuda b. Quraysh, who lived far to the west, presents in his *Risāla* stanzas from Abū al-ʿAtāhiya called the *zāhid*.⁹⁵

From the second half of the tenth century we possess extremely interesting testimony to a literary debate held in Rayy in northern Persia between the exilarch, whose name is not mentioned, and al-Šāḥib, the above-mentioned important Muslim poet and sage who tended to the views of the *Muʿtazila*.⁹⁶ Al-Šāḥib requested the exilarch's opinion on *ijāz al-qurʾān*. Very wisely the Jew understood that he must not make any incisive comments on the subject, for to do so might cost him his life. But his caution was of no avail, and his words enraged al-Šāḥib. Only when the exilarch flattered him, saying that his literary prowess in his epistles (*rasāʾil*), his poems (*naẓm*), and prose works (*nathr*) was no less than that of the Qurʾān itself, was al-Šāḥib appeased. Still, although he concurred that his poetry was indeed exquisite, he confessed, in his 'bottomless humility', that the Qurʾān possessed its own special quality, and that what a human could create could by no means excel what God created.⁹⁷

Shəmuʿel b. Ḥofni (d. 1013) too was familiar with Arabic poetry and the views of Arab philosophers, and was obviously influenced by Aristotle's *Poetics* and other Greek philosophers regarding the effect of music and metre in the poem on the ear of the listener:⁹⁸

⁹³ For Saʿadia's statements see Saʿadia 1969, pp. 150–151; for the statements of the pupils of Mənaḥem see below, p. 141.

⁹⁴ See below, p. 156.

⁹⁵ See Ibn Quraysh 1984, p. 281.

⁹⁶ On him see Pellat 1990.

⁹⁷ See n. 88 above and Appendix B.

⁹⁸ Ben Ḥofni 1979, p. 239.

אן אלכלאם אללטיף אלמעאני יעמל פי תעדיל אכלאק אלנפס וריאצ'תחא כמא יעמל אלמוסיקין דלך פי אלנפס אלנצ'בייה ודלך באסתעמאל צ'רוב אלנפס ואלאיקאע ואלמעאני אללטיפה אעמל פי בעץ אלנפוס מן אלמוסיקין ודאך כמא יעמל אלשערא בנש'ם כלאמהם וזון אביאת שערדם וכמא יפעל אלכ'טבא אלפצחא אלבלנא (In its manner, refined speech acts for the poise and training of the qualities of the soul, just as music acts in this way on the irascible spirit. This is by means of kinds of melody and musical modes. The refined manner works on some souls more than music: poets achieve this through the rhyming of their words and scanning of their strophes, and lucid orators do so through being eloquent in their speeches. Thus the things become embedded in the soul of those to whom the speech is addressed).

Accordingly,⁹⁹

אבלנ אקואל אלחספד מא חפס' פיהא הד'ה אלמעאני באוואנהא מקפאה בחסב אסתחקאק אלמרת'ה אעני אלד'י יספד עליה בכלאם פצ'ח ונש'ם ניר מחפאות פאדא' כאן כדלך כאן בלינא יחסן מוקעה מן קלוב אלסאמעין [. . .] ואשעאר (Eloquence in eulogies is that in which these matters are observed in their metre, rhymed, in keeping with what is proper for the mourned, that is, for him who is being eulogised, in clear words and in a rhyme that does not change. If it is so, the deed will be a piece of art, and its influence on the hearts of the listeners will be strong [. . .] and the elegies, that is, the poems of eulogy, are many; some are mellifluous and some are grating).

The Karaite sage Sahl b. Mašliyyah in the second half of the tenth century likewise attests in his famous letter that Karaite women in Jerusalem 'lament and eulogise in the holy tongue [Hebrew], in the language of Persia, and in the language of Ishma'el [Arabic]; they teach their daughters keening, and teach each other elegy'.¹⁰⁰

Above we saw that Hāye Gaon (939–1038) made use of the language of the Qur'ān to clarify texts in the Bible; now we may add that he utilised Arabic poetry for the same purpose. Yəhuda b. Bal'am writes in his commentary to Isaiah, in justifying his method of using Arabic to elucidate Bible scriptures: 'I know for sure that in this I am preceded by such illustrious persons as R. Sa'adia Gaon, may the memory of a righteous one be for a blessing, and our master Hāye Gaon, may his memory be for a blessing. I swear that I have seen that he [Hāye Gaon] adduces proof from a love poem

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 395, 397. In the Introduction, *ibid.*, pp. 90–91, Greenbaum assembled the passages referring to poetry and *piyyut* in Ben Ḥofni's commentary.

¹⁰⁰ The letter was published by Harkavy in *Ha-Meliz*, 1879, p. 639. Here the passage is given according to Mann 1931/5, II, p. 272.

on a matter that bothered him; this is written in [the book of] *al-Hāwī*.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, in answer to a question on the statement by R. Yoḥanan in the Talmud that 'R. Meir knew three hundred foxes' fables', Hāye explains that 'these fables have morals and lessons, presented as if spoken by animals'. As an example he cites 'the writing of *Hindawīyyīn* [people of India], called *Kitāb Kalīla wa-Dimna*, in which are found morals and words of wisdom and rhetoric, all as fables of animals'.¹⁰² Presumably, Hāye was acquainted with the Arabic translation of an Indian composition, the work of Ibn al-Muqaffā' (d. 757). Moreover, Yəhuda b. Bal'am in *Kitāb al-Taṣṭīḥ* attests that he knew the book in its Persian version also, a fact of great significance regarding the possibility of the direct effect of Persian literature on Hebrew literature at that time. This is what Ibn Bal'am had to say in his interpretation of the word *שְׁגֶלָה* in Deuteronomy 28:30 (translated from Arabic):¹⁰³ 'Our master Hāye, may his memory be for a blessing, in the book *al-Hāwī*, wrote that [the animal] *שְׁגֶלָה* is in Persian *shegal* (concubine); he found this in the book *Kalīla wa-Dimna* in Persian'.

To summarise: The considerable finds in the Genizah documents regarding secular Hebrew poetry in the East in the period under review indicate its ability to rise to the level of the great Arabic poetry before it. It also attempted to create a synthesis, not rejecting what was available, but not discounting its own self either. Apparently, this was not the way of secular poetry in Spain, which from the outset seems to have trodden paths beaten by the Arab poets. Yet quite a few of the finds we possess, almost all revealed and discussed by Ezra Fleischer, indicate that the secular poetry in Spain too at first blended the old with the new. However, the poetry and the poetics of subsequent generations suppressed this mixed writing and consigned it to oblivion.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ See Ibn Bal'am 1992, p. 231. Ibn 'Aqnīn 1964, pp. 493–495, cites it with a change of language, and he presumably copied it from Ibn Bal'am. Halkin identified the stanza in the poem of Khālid b. Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya.

¹⁰² See Harkavy 1887, no. 362, p. 183.

¹⁰³ Ibn Bal'am 1992, p. 371.

¹⁰⁴ This is what happened to Eastern Hebrew linguistics, called Tiberian linguistics, which was also put aside and rejected by the Hebrew linguists in Spain; only in the last generation was it discovered, mainly by virtue of the enterprise of the late Nehemya Allony. As is known, Moshe b. 'Ezra and Alḥarīzī ignored the early *piyyut* in their essays on medieval Hebrew poetry.

Appendix A

In his monumental history of Egypt, *al-Nujūm al-Ẓāhira fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhira*,¹⁰⁵ the historian Ibn Taghribirdī (1409/10–1470) presents, regarding year 156 H (beginning 2 December 772), a piece of information not about Egypt but about the city of Basra. The translation from the Arabic is the following:

Khalaf b. al-Muthannā said: Ten people used to gather together in Basra, unlike any other gathering: al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad, scholar of poetics¹⁰⁶—a Sunni;¹⁰⁷ the *sayyid* Muḥammad al-Ḥimyarī the poet—a Rāfiḍī;¹⁰⁸ Ṣāliḥ b. ‘Abd al-Quddūs—a believer of the Duality faith;¹⁰⁹ Sufyān b. Mujāshī‘—a *Ṣafarī*;¹¹⁰ Bashshār b. Burd—licentious and reprobate;¹¹¹ Ḥammād ‘Ajrad—a heretic;¹¹² the son of the exilarch, the poet—a Jew; Ibn Naẓīr the Christian—a *mutakallim*;¹¹³ ‘Amr, son of al-Mu’ayyad’s sister—a Magian;¹¹⁴ and Ibn Sinān al-Ḥatrānī, the poet—a Ṣabā’ī.¹¹⁵ This group would read poems and stories, and Bashshār used to say, ‘These stanzas of your poem, so-and-so, are better than *sūra* such-and-such’.¹¹⁶ For this witticism, and others like it, Bashshār was accused of heresy.¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁵ See Ibn Taghribirdī 1930, p. 29.

¹⁰⁶ In the source ‘*arūḍ*. On al-Khalīl’s system of ‘*arūḍ*’ see Semah 1977.

¹⁰⁷ Belonging to mainstream orthodox Islam.

¹⁰⁸ A Shī‘ite sect that claimed that ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib merited being Imām and caliph. They were also known as *imāmiyyūn*. On them see Watt 1973, pp. 157–162.

¹⁰⁹ A known faith, Persian in origin.

¹¹⁰ A *khārījī* sect, so called after Ziyād b. al-Aṣfar, or ‘Abdallāh b. Ṣaffār, or on account of their yellow colour (editor’s note). And see Watt 1973, pp. 26–27.

¹¹¹ The foremost poet of his generation (714/5–784/5). Blind from birth. On him see Ḍayf 1966/72, I, pp. 201–220; Schoeler 1990, pp. 276–286.

¹¹² In the source *zindīq*. Possibly a Christian, or also one who dared to question the accepted Muslim faith. See *ibid.*, pp. 185 ff.

¹¹³ A rationalist theologian, who adheres to the *kalām* method, namely proof of religious faith by logical criticism.

¹¹⁴ An adherent of the Persian Zoroastrian religion.

¹¹⁵ The *Ṣābi’a*, star worshippers. Some say that by their claim they are for the way of Noah, peace be upon him. The direction of their prayer is to the north wind at midday (editor’s note).

¹¹⁶ In *Kūtab al-Aghānī*, edition of *Dār al-Kutub* [Cairo], Part III, p. 211: Bashshār heard a maidservant singing one of his poems; he was delighted, and said, She is better [lovelier] than the *sūra* of the resurrection of the dead (editor’s note).

¹¹⁷ The liberal atmosphere that prevailed in the time of al-Manṣūr’s rule was replaced by a more strictly religious mood under his successor al-Mahdī (775–785). On the tragic end of Bashshār, lashed to death at the order of the caliph al-Mahdī, having been accused of heresy (*ẓandaqa*), see Ḍayf 1966/72, I, p. 206.

Appendix B

In the great biographical encyclopaedia of the writers of Islam, *Muḥjam al-Udabā'*, the author Yāqūt presents an episode from the life of Ismā'īl b. 'Abbād b. al-'Abbās b. 'Abbād al-Wazīr, known as al-Ṣāḥib, who lived in northern Persia in the second half of the tenth century. He tells of a debate between al-Ṣāḥib and the Jewish exilarch. The name of the latter is not given, nor the precise year, so I have not been able to determine his identity. Al-Ṣāḥib was a poet and held the views of the *Mu'tazila*, which rejected the accepted notion in orthodox Islam of the eternity of the Qur'ān; in his view the Qur'ān had been created at a certain time.¹¹⁸ The episode, in translation, is the following:

He¹¹⁹ said: A group of people among the residents of Isbahān¹²⁰ said to Ibn 'Abbād: If the Qur'ān had been created, it is possible that it might die, and if the Qur'ān died at the end of Sha'bān, with what would we offer the evening prayer in Ramaḍān?¹²¹

He¹²² said: If the Qur'ān had died, Ramaḍān would die likewise, and [Ramaḍān] would say, I have no life after you, and we would not offer the evening prayers and we could relax.¹²³

Abū Ḥayyān said: Come and hear a more amazing [story] than that. [Ibn 'Abbād] was debating in Ray¹²⁴ with the Jew the exilarch on [the matter of] *ijāz al-qur'ān*. The Jew discussed the matter with him at length, and easily outdid him, pushing him into a corner, so that he [Ibn 'Abbād] lost his temper, and just burned with fury. When [the Jew] realised that he had angered him and got him into a rage, he had recourse to a ruse, hoping to bamboozle him. To make things easy for him after having led him on he said: O, you, al-Ṣāḥib, why should you rage with anger, fume, and be mad? For how will the Qur'ān be in my eyes a paragon and a miracle in its arrangement and composition? For if its arrangement and composition are wondrous, then by your argument the smoothest of tongues have not the ability to write like it, and they must bow down before it. But I have to do right by my soul, and must say what is in my heart. Your letters and

¹¹⁸ See Yāqūt 1991, pp. 240–241.

¹¹⁹ Abū Ḥayyān, a Muslim sage from whom Yāqūt drew much information and many traditions.

¹²⁰ A city in Persia.

¹²¹ Sha'bān is the month before Ramaḍān, the month of fasting when Muslims are mostly at prayer.

¹²² Ibn 'Abbād.

¹²³ Evening prayers: in the Arabic source *tarwīḥāt*, a pun on the phrase for 'we could relax', in the Arabic source *wa-nastarīḥ*. Ibn 'Abbād's answer is satirical.

¹²⁴ A city in northern Persia.

your long and short poems and all that you write, exhibiting in it the skill of improvisation in poetry and prose, all this excels it [the Qurʾān] or closely equals it. In any event, it does not seem to me that it [what you write] falls short of it [the Qurʾān], but surpasses it in any of the forms of speech [poetry] or in any of the qualities of clarity.

Hearing this Ibn ʿAbbād was appeased, his anger faded; he calmed down from his fury and his fit of rage abated. He said: Not so, President;¹²⁵ our speech [poetry] is fine and pure, and indeed has played a great part in the purification of the language and has a significant share of elegant style. However, the Qurʾān has a quality that cannot be discounted and a superiority that cannot be dismissed. And how can one liken a thing created by God in the perfection of beauty and glory to what the slave [mortal man] creates through in toil and drudgery.

He said all this after his anger had ebbed and he was restored to his calm temper and his fire had become ash [his rage had died down]. Then he became suffused within by a feeling of profound contentment, and almighty joy surged over his facial features, because he had learned that his words [his poetry] were comparable to the Qurʾān in the eyes of the Jews and adherents of the other faiths.

One of the poets wrote about Ibn ʿAbbād, disparaging his *ṣajʿ*,¹²⁶ his writing, and his intelligence:¹²⁷

He is called the ruler of rulers / and in truth he is nothing but the heretic of heretics.

The *ṣajʿ* is the *ṣajʿ* of a madman, the writing the writing / of one suffering a chill, and the mind is the mind of an ass.

¹²⁵ In the source: *shaykh*, referring to the Jewish exilarch.

¹²⁶ Rhetorical and rhymed prose.

¹²⁷ The reproof was written because of the brazenness and insolence of comparing the poems of Ibn ʿAbbād to the Qurʾān, an act deemed heresy in orthodox Islam. See also the story of the putting to death of the poet Bashshār b. Burd given in Appendix A above.

CHAPTER THREE

SA'ADIA AND ARABIC POETRY: PHILOSOPHICAL CULTURE AND PHILOSOPHICAL POETRY

A. Introduction: Sa'adia as an Authority on the Affinity with Arab Culture Accepted by the Jewish Sages of Spain and North Africa

Sa'adia is the most important intellectual and literary figure in Jewish history in that he opened all the diverse facets of Jewish culture to the Hellenistic-Eastern cultural world in its medieval Arab Muslim dress. Through him, the Judeo-Arabic language came into use, and content, motifs, and forms from Arabic language and culture became conventional and routinely borrowed. No conflict with Jewish tradition was seen in this. When Yona b. Janāḥ, who lived in Spain in the first half of the eleventh century, noted a parallel in Hebrew to a certain linguistic usage in Arabic, he referred to Sa'adia:¹

The Arabs do likewise. (Their poet versifies in his description of the horse [in battle]: 'They will appear from the haze of dust in a fury with the armour-wearers like dragons'. 'Haze' and 'dust' are united; they are synonyms just as 'earth' and 'dust' are synonyms and have the same meaning among the Hebrew speakers. The usage of the Hebrews when they say אדמת עפר, נוש עפר [a mass of dust, earth of ash] is the usage of the Arabs when they say רהנ' and נבאר [haze and dust]. How wonderful is the harmony between the two languages). I do not mention the custom of the Arabs in this or anything else to support my words, but to ease the way for one who does not know them and to stop him from discarding them when he sees what is common in languages. Every language's custom and usage make it possible for one to produce what is normal in another language. Now I was preceded in this practice by the Fayyūmī,² the late lamented Head of the Yeshiva, in

¹ Ibn Janāḥ 1875, p. 130. Wishing to avoid contending with the translation of an Arabic poetry text, Ibn Tibbon in his Hebrew translation (Ibn Janāḥ 1896, p. 89) omitted the words given here in parentheses in my translation. This is the Judeo-Arabic wording of the Arabic poem: יכ'רנ' מן רהנ' אלנבאר עואבסא באלדארעין כאנהן סעאל'.

² In the original: הפ'יהומי, Sa'adia's nickname, deriving from his hometown of Fayyūm in Upper Egypt, named פ'יהום by the Jews after the biblical town.

his [commentary on] the *Book of Creation* and others, namely he adduced proofs for his words from what the Arabs say.

In the preface to his book *Ha-Riqma* Ibn Janāḥ also cites Sa'adia to justify reliance on Arabic.³ Yəhuda b. Bal'am, who lived in Spain in the second half of the eleventh century, also resorts to Sa'adia when in his commentary to Isaiah 59:13 he introduces a linguistic usage common in Arabic (called *tazwīj*):⁴

Perhaps whoever reads this reliance of mine and its like on Arabic expressions and their use in respect of what is found in the scriptures will condemn me for it; but he should know that this was done before me by the great scholars such as the late R. Sa'adia Gaon and our late master Hāye Gaon.

Ibn Bal'am later adduces proof of his words from Hāye Gaon's work *al-Hāwī*, although he gives no evidence from the writings of Sa'adia. Yosef b. 'Aqnīn, a pupil of Maimonides (second half of the twelfth century), also wrote about Hāye Gaon:⁵

He was helped by the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth*. Before him the late R. Sa'adia did likewise in his Arabic commentaries, and on account of this our late masters said, One who speaks words of wisdom, even of the gentiles, is called a sage and his work must be transmitted.

Baḥye b. Paqūda (second half of the eleventh century) in the preface to his book *Hovot Ha-Lavavot* recommends reading Sa'adia's compositions on ethics and philosophy:⁶

He who is helped in achieving this by studying the books of our master Sa'adia will benefit and will sanctify his spirit, because they illumine knowledge and open ideals and stimulate the dullard and impel the laggard.

Yet some of the sages of Spain opposed or criticised Sa'adia. For example, Abraham b. 'Ezra begins his book *Sefer Moznayim* noting Sa'adia as ראש המדברים בכל מקום (chief of speakers everywhere); and in his commentary to *Qohelet* 5:1 he mentions Sa'adia's two *baqqashot* (Supplications) as exemplars of the proper way of composing *piyyu-*

³ Ibn Janāḥ 1964, p. 19.

⁴ The Arabic original was published by Derenbourg 1892, p. 140, with a French translation.

⁵ Ibn 'Aqnīn 1964, p. 495.

⁶ Ibn Paqūda 1973, p. 42.

tim. However, at times he has no qualms about scathingly rejecting Sa'adia, for example, in the identification of the four rivers of Eden (in the commentary to *Genesis* 2:11):

The Gaon said that פִּישׁוֹן is the יַאֲרֵד [of Egypt] [. . .], but there is no proof that פִּישׁוֹן is יַאֲרֵד [. . .] as it has no tradition. He did the same with families and nations, animals, birds, and stones; perhaps he saw this in a dream, and was somewhat mistaken, as I interpret in its place. If so, let us not rely on his dreams.

Maimonides, too, in the preface to *Sefer Ha-Miṣvot* (the Book of Commandments), took issue with Sa'adia over the number of commandments and the affinity with the *mu'tazilī* doctrine and the ways of the *mutakallimūn* (*Guide to the Perplexed* I:71). However, he writes in general terms, not mentioning Sa'adia expressly, which may perhaps signify Sa'adia's enormous prestige among the sages of Spain.

Genizah discoveries show that Sa'adia was in fact 'chief of speakers' also in Hebrew poetry. We saw in the previous chapter that the new Hebrew poetry of the tenth century, which was open to Arabic poetry and willing to adopt its principles and follow its paths, did not originate in Spain but in the lands of the East, Babylonia and Persia, in the first half of that century. But in essence the Hebrew poetry of the East was not courtly poetry, so it assumed the courtly elements of Arabic poetry only with great caution, according to Jewish social needs, hence its use was limited and relatively very late. Sa'adia was not only among the greatest *paytanim*, a neo-classicist who wished to restore grandeur to the realm of the *piyyut*. He was also the first of the Jewish *paytanim* who opened this genre to the surrounding civilization, which in that age was a mixture of the cultures of Greece, Persia, and India in Arab-Islamic dress. This aspect of Sa'adia's poetry is our concern here.

Sa'adia was well versed in Arabic poetry, as attested by his book on poetics entitled *Ha-Egron* (Arabic: *Kitāb Uṣūl al-Shi'r al-Ibrānī*: The Elements of the Hebrew Poetry).⁷ He also used poetry for non-liturgical purposes, as in polemic writings *Responses to Ḥayawayh of Balkh* and *Essa Mashali*.⁸ He was not willing to write secular poetry proper, the kind that did not stem from distinctly religious contexts: the synagogue, solitary prayer, or religious controversy. However, his

⁷ See Sa'adia 1969, pp. 74 ff.

⁸ On them see Tobī 1982, I, pp. 44–55.

objection to purely secular poetry, and to some extent also to adopting formal and metrical usages from Arabic poetry, did not prevent him from inserting into his lyrical work, including that intended for the synagogue, philosophical subjects arising from Arab culture and poetry. A striking example is an entire essay based on neo-Platonic thought in the *mu'tazilī-kalāmī* form of the sages of Islam; this is *al-Mukhtār fī al-Amānāt wa-al-I'tiqādāt* (The Chosen in Beliefs and Opinions) (henceforward *Beliefs*).

B. Arabic and Hebrew Philosophical Poetry in the Middle Ages

Philosophy is one of the pillars of the new medieval Hebrew poetry, secular and sacred.⁹ But the philosophy is entirely different in kind in these two clearly-differentiated forms of poetry. In the secular form, as particularly expressed in *Ben Qohelet* by Shāmu'el Ha-Nagid and in the work of Moshe b. 'Ezra, philosophical poetry is based on the pagan *jāhiliyya* perception, the notion of Time as a superior force, which treats humans at a whim and not according to some measure of justice. It toys with those subject to its dominion and cannot be approached by prayer or entreaty. The idea of the superior force in early Arabic poetry, which passed thence to Muslim secular poetry and to the new Hebrew secular poetry, was no doubt influenced by the social and political reality, by the image of the flesh-and-blood rulers in the eyes of tribal society and poets of *jāhili* Arabia. This philosophical poetry is clearly nihilist, a poetry of despair, offering no escape or hope. Its extreme conclusions are negation of life and total asceticism, at times to the point of annulment of any human ethical value. This poetry centres on death only, without treating life after death, what a human may expect in Paradise or hell. That is, there is no reward and punishment, there is no penance.¹⁰

This mood suffuses the poems of the Arab poet Abū al-'Atāhiya (748–828).¹¹ These are at root clearly religious poems, and on that account the poet was accused by his contemporaries of a tendency to philosophy and of heresy in that he makes no mention of resurrection of the dead, or of reward and punishment in Paradise and

⁹ And cf. chapter 6 below.

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of this subject see chapter 7 below.

¹¹ On Abū al-'Atāhiya and philosophy see Theophanov 1998.

hell, but only of death.¹² His *ḏiḡwān* contains a short poem of two verses in which he disparages Paradise, and for that he was charged with heresy.¹³ But this is a false accusation, for in several of his poems he refers specifically to Paradise,¹⁴ and in another short, two-stanza poem he states (p. 405),

نَعْمَرُ الدُّنْيَا، وَمَا الدُّنْيَا / سِوَا لَنَا دَارُ إِقَامَةٍ
إِنَّمَا الْغَبْطَةُ وَالْحَسْبُ / رَوْحُهُ فِي يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ

We may live long on earth but for us earth is not a dwelling-place
There is no well-being nor melancholy except on Resurrection Day.

He evidently rejects the worth of this world as against the world to come, in which the resurrection of the dead will take place. This criticism levelled against him calls to mind the reasoning of those who wished to exclude the book of *Qohelet* from the biblical canon (*Vayyiqra Rabba* 28:1). Still, the grim displeasure with human life sometimes assumes a clearly nihilistic tone, as in another two-verses poem (p. 398), in which the poet casts doubt on the advantage of life over death:¹⁵

سَاكِنِي الْأَحْدَاثِ أَنْتُمْ / مِثْلُنَا بِالْأَمْسِ كُنْتُمْ
لَيْتَ شَعْرِي مَا صَنَعْتُمْ / أُرْبِحْتُمْ أَمْ خَسَرْتُمْ

You dwellers of the grave were like us before
If only I knew what you have done. Have you gained or lost?

As distinct from secular philosophical poetry, the religious-liturgical philosophical poetry was free of Jewish national constraints, of the well-worn subject of exile and redemption, which had wholly occupied the early Eastern *piyyut*. This poetry concerned the believer as such, regardless of his particular religion, and the relationship between him and his God. True, there was evident preaching of asceticism and distancing oneself from the pleasures of this world, but this was in an entirely different setting from the asceticism preached in the secular philosophical poetry. The religious kind, lodged in a neo-Platonic *mutazilī* philosophy, was by no means poetry of despair but poetry of those who believed that life in this world was nothing but a passage

¹² See Introduction to the *ḏiḡwān*: Abū al-ʿAtāhiya 1964, p. 7, according to *Kitāb al-Aghānī*.

¹³ Abū al-ʿAtāhiya 1964, p. 234: كَأَنَّ عَتَابَهُ.

¹⁴ See e.g. *ibid.*, pp. 332–33: أَصْبَحَ هَذَا النَّاسَ.

¹⁵ On nihilism (عدمية) in Abū al-ʿAtāhiya's perception see Sharaf al-Dīn 1985, pp. 162–163.

to the next, that the role of the soul trapped in the body on earth was to prepare sustenance for the journey towards true, eternal spiritual life.¹⁶ Preparing sustenance for the way is a frequent notion in the poems of Abū al-ʿAtāhiya also;¹⁷ perhaps there is no essential difference between secular and religious philosophical poetry except in emphasis: the one stresses nihilism, the other mortification. As we shall see, Saʿadia does make literary use of nihilist materials, but is careful to conclude with an orthodox religious approach. This is in contrast to Abū al-ʿAtāhiya, who emphasizes nihilism. The Jewish poets in Spain gave expression to nihilism in their secular philosophical poetry, while the religious-liturgical philosophical poetry was imbued with the orthodox spirit.¹⁸

These trends of philosophical poetry, secular and religious, do not originate in Hebrew poetry but in Arabic.¹⁹ I do not refer to Arabic poetry of the beginning of the Islamic era, which as early as Muḥammad's generation absorbed religious elements, as rightly observed by von Grunebaum and Francesco Gabrieli,²⁰ but to the new Arabic religious poetry, from the time of the first Abbasid caliphs in the second half of the eighth century. This poetry assumed a purely *zuhd* (ascetic) nature from the school of Abū al-ʿAtāhiya and Abū Nuwās (762–814).²¹ Coincidental with the creation of *zuhd* poetry, Sufi poetry arose in Arabic, also urging abstention from the life of this world. But it highlighted the mystical experience, love of God, the special role and status of the soul, and absolute trust in God. The first Sufi poets included a woman, Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya of Basra (d. 801); one of the most famous of them is al-Ḥallāj (executed 921).²² While *zuhd* and *zuhdiyyāt*, insofar as they did not disregard the world to come and the concept of reward and punishment, were welcomed by orthodoxy and the ruling power, Sufism and its poetry were perceived as heresy.

¹⁶ Cf. Ratzaby 1991, pp. 340–341.

¹⁷ E.g. Abū al-ʿAtāhiya 1964, p. 333/2: *تَرَوَدْتُ لِلْمَوْتِ زَادًا، فَقَدْ / نَادَى مُنَادِي: الرَّحِيلَ، الرَّحِيلَ* (I have equipped myself for Death, as it made its proclamations: Behold, Wanderer, behold, Wanderer).

¹⁸ See Mirsky 1992.

¹⁹ Cf. Allony 1959a.

²⁰ See von Grunebaum 1940, p. 29; Gabrieli 1973, p. 50.

²¹ On the Arabic ascetic poetry (*zuhdiyyāt*) see Hamori 1990. On Abū al-ʿAtāhiya see Ringgren 1955, pp. 158–167; Guillaume 1960; Schoeler 1990, pp. 286–290. On Abū Nuwās see Wagner 1960; 1965, pp. 110–133. On the ascetic poems of Abū Nuwās see Abū Nuwās 1958/88, II, pp. 157–175.

²² See Massignon 1955; Smith 1928.

The religious trends in Arabic poetry were not based on the orthodox Islamic tradition from the school of Muḥammad and his companions but on the new philosophical thought, which was in essence neo-Platonic; but nor were they free of Christian and Persian influences, and still more Indian. One of the most evident literary expressions of this thought is *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Letters of the Brethren of Purity), a collection of 52 letters concerning all the spheres of knowledge of those times out of an overall conception of being in its entirety. Scholars believe that the letters were written in the second half of the tenth century.²³

These trends of Arabic poetry made their mark on Hebrew poetry already in the East, especially on Sa'adia's *paytanic* work. The philosophical background that gave rise to the Arabic poetry became a Jewish legacy too in the first half of the tenth century. Out of it subsequently arose Hebrew philosophical poetry. Joseph Weiss at the First Conference on Jewish Studies held in Jerusalem in 1947, regarding the growth of Hebrew secular poetry in Spain, defined it as 'a courtly culture and courtly poetry';²⁴ we may paraphrase this, for our concern here, as a philosophical culture and philosophical poetry. Only this approach can explain the flowering of Hebrew philosophical poetry, which rests not on original Hebrew philosophy, on the Jewish national problem, but on universal thought shared by non-Jews.²⁵

C. *Pre-Sa'adia Forerunners*

As in many other domains, Sa'adia was the first Jewish writer to pave the way in philosophy, especially in his book *Beliefs*.²⁶ But he was not the only one, and apparently not the first to write philosophical poetry. He was preceded by his aged contemporary, Nissi al-Nahrawānī. Apart from Nissi's song of praise noted above, Schirmann

²³ See Netton 1982, pp. 1–8.

²⁴ See Weiss 1952. In a paper recently read in one of the annual meetings of the Inter-university Conference on the Study of Hebrew Literature I raised some reservations about the definition of Hebrew secular poetry in Spain as 'courtly'.

²⁵ On the engagement of Jews of the Eastern lands in the ninth century in philosophy see Gutmann 1963, pp. 49–61; Neumark 1921, pp. 106–128; Tishbi/Dan 1971, pp. 3–5.

²⁶ See Gutmann 1963, pp. 62–73; Tishbi/Dan 1971, pp. 7 ff. Here I use Rosenblatt's translation of Sa'adia (Sa'adia 1948).

published another of his poems, **אָנוֹשׁ כְּהַצִּיר נִהָבָא**.²⁷ The poem in manuscript from the Genizah is called *shəvāh* (praise), and to the best of my knowledge researchers of *piyyut* have still not been able to decipher fully the meaning of this term.²⁸ In any event, in content the *piyyut* is of the *tokheḥa* (rebuke) genre, well known from the ancient poetic school, and it concerns the nothingness of man.²⁹ But Nissi's locutions in his *piyyut* are difficult, and in fact somewhat repulsive, when he describes man's worthlessness and what happens to his body at birth and at death:

שָׂפָה סְרוּחָה שִׁפְתַּי נִלְמוּ / יִסְרָה וַיִּבְאִישׁ בְּצֵאת רוּחַ מִמּוֹ [. . .]
פָּנָיו כְּהַשְׁתַּנּוֹת וּבְהִתְקַלְקַל יָפִיו / צוּחוּ יוֹמָר וַיִּגְדֵּל בְּכִיו
קִבְרוֹ בְּהִיּוֹת קֶץ מֵאִיו / רוֹאִיו יֹאמְרוּ: אֵיזִ?

A stinking drop is the drop of his body; he stinks and rots when the spirit leaves it

When his face changes and his beauty becomes ugly, his cry is changed and his wailing increases

His grave being the end of his desires, those who see him will say, Where is he?

Another *piyyut* of his, **הַתּוֹכְסִי הַתּוֹרֶחַ בְּעִדּוֹתָם נִנְעוּ**,³⁰ is given over entirely to a fierce condemnation of the *paytan*'s 'community' on all its levels, including the religious leadership, which the poet chooses to censure at the start of the *piyyut*. Some of its lines are the following:

עֲדָתִי בְּעִינֶיהָ זָכָה וְנָאָה / עֲתוּחָה מְעֻשִׂיָּה וְלֹא רוּחָצָה מִצּוֹאָה
שָׂאת וּסְפָחַת וּבְהִרַת מִמָּאָה / סְפֹת הָרִיחַ אֵת הַצִּמְאָה [. . .]
לְאַסּוֹף וּלְכַנּוֹס הָמִינוּ / לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקוֹת סְמִינוּ
בְּנִמְיוֹת אֲכֻרִיּוֹת נָמִינוּ / כְּסֻדּוֹם הָיִינוּ, לַעֲמוּדָה דָּמִינוּ
יָחַד הַדּוֹר כִּגְלוֹ סָכַל / יוֹעֵץ וְחָכֵם וְנִבּוֹן וְנָכַל
שָׁפַל וְעִקָּר טוֹרֵף מֵאֵכָל / טָרֵף — אָדָם אָכַל [. . .]
זָמַר כְּנוֹרוֹת וְנָכַל לְדָרוֹשׁ / זָנוּת וַיִּין וְתִירוֹשׁ

My community considers itself pure and pleasant, its deeds twisted it and it is not washed clean of excrement

Plague, disease and the pox, the unintentional sin is added to the intentional

We hustled to collect and to gather, we pulled the wool over our eyes, avoiding good deeds

²⁷ Schirmann 1966, p. 26.

²⁸ See Fleischer 1975, Index, p. 523, entry שבח.

²⁹ On the *tokheḥa* see Fleischer 1975, pp. 95–96. Early *tokhehot* are presented by Brody/Wiener 1923, pp. 19–24.

³⁰ Schirmann 1966, pp. 27–28.

We gulped like cruel martens, we became like Sodom, we resembled
 Gomorra
 The generation as a whole is stupid, counsellor, sage, wise man, and
 villain
 Lay and priest tear to pieces prey—they eat the human being
 Calling for fiddles and lyre, adultery and wine and must.

Such devastating social criticism is not found anywhere in the Hebrew *piyyut* before this. Nissi's 'community' is not the Baghdad Jewish community of his day, nor is it the Jewish people as a whole. It is all of humankind, obviously including his own people and place. His words seem to be founded on the approach of the Sufis and the ascetics, who wished to portray the negative aspect of the life of the human, racing for material things.

D. *The Connection of Sa'adia's Theoretical and Poetic Work*

Sa'adia's *paytanic* writing has two main divisions. One is neo-classical, following the ancient *paytanists*, primarily El'azar Ha-Qilliri, in content, language, and form. It contains principally the series of *yošərot* for the Sabbaths throughout the year, the *shiv'atot* for the festivals of Weeks and Tabernacles, including the *piyyutim* known as *azharot* and the *geshems*, and the *səlihot*.³¹ The second division is new; in it Sa'adia made innovations in all matters detailed in the foregoing sections. It includes a *tokheħa* for the Day of Atonement לְיָמֵינוּ בְּחַרְדֵּי, the first *piyyut* of the series בְּרַכֵּי יְהוָה, the two *baqqashot* (one for the Sabbath and festivals and one for fast days), and several prayers, although the authorship of these is not entirely certain.³² This is not the place to analyse the innovations in matters of form and language;³³ in general, there is coordination between innovation in form and language in a certain work and innovation in content. That is, where the *paytan* innovated in content as against the usual content in the poetry of the ancient school, he saw fit to innovate also in form and language. All these innovations were influenced in one way or another by Arabic poetry and culture.

³¹ *yošərot*, *shiv'atot*, *azharot*, *geshem*, and *səlihot* are different kinds of liturgical hymns.

³² On the various types of *piyyutim* in Sa'adia's work see Tobi 1982, I, pp. 14–205.

³³ On this see chapter 4 below.

One innovation in content is the introduction of philosophical elements, also expressed in Sa'adia's writings on ethical philosophy, chiefly in *Beliefs*. These elements are well known from Arabic ethics, from the school of the adherents of *zuhd* and Sufism. The ascetic-philosophical element as a link between the philosophical essay and Sa'adia's *paytanic* writing in its second division becomes quite clear from what he has to say there (V:5, pp. 221–222) on penitence:

Now I have no fears, so far as the majority of our people are concerned, in regard to their being remiss in their fulfillment of any of the conditions of repentance [. . .]. For I believe that at the time when they fast and pray, they sincerely mean to abandon their sinful way and experience remorse and seek God's pardon. It seems to me, however, that they are [really] resolved to lapse back into sin.

So I ask myself: "What device is there for eradicating from men's hearts the thought of lapsing back into sin?" My answer is: "Thinking up reasons for holding this world in contempt." Let a person remind himself of his condition of impotence, misery, exertion, and disillusionment, of his eventual death and the decomposition of the parts of his body, of the vermin and the putrefaction that are destined for him, of the accounting he will have to give for his conduct and the torments to which he will be subjected and whatever appertains to any of these matters. The result of such reflection would be contempt for this world [. . .].

It was precisely for the above-mentioned considerations that I find that the sages of Israel introduced the custom of reciting on the Day of Atonement such liturgical selections as [אָתָּה מְבִין שְׂרָעֵפִי לֵב] "Thou discernest the thoughts of the heart," [אֵל אִם תָּבוֹא בְּתוֹכָהוֹן] "O God, if Thou comest with rebukes," [אֲדוֹן כָּל פֹּעַל] "Lord of all that is done," and the like.

Above all, this connection is present in אִם לִפִּי בְּהִרְרָךְ,³⁴ the *tokheḥa* for the Day of Atonement mentioned above. In composing it, Sa'adia engaged in the 'Propagation of words of abstention', and precisely in the manner detailed there. Undeniably, several of the ideas in Sa'adia's *tokheḥa* are already found in the early Hebrew *tokhehot*, especially in לֵב אֲנֹשׁ מִזֶּה יִזְכֶּה and אָתָּה מְבִין שְׂרָעֵפִי לֵב.³⁵ However, Sa'adia portrayed human life, from the moment of birth until death, in its negative aspect only, without any escape and without any hope. The linguistic

³⁴ The excerpts are from Zulay's edition 1964, pp. 63–77, which is the most accurate.

³⁵ See Tobi 1982, I, pp. 35–36.

expression is extremely crude, often to the point of revulsion and disgust, as in the manner of the Muslim ascetics and as we saw above in the *piyyutim* of Nissi:

גוש באוש גלמהו / זרמת תעב מקפהו
 כשבלול אם יפס / גם שמש לא ראה לא ידע [...] .
 ולעת תבקע כרסו / ויוורה הפרש על פניו
 כאומרת: הא לך שושה / כל גול שנתת בי

His body is a stinking clod, his corpse is made of abominated emission
 of semen

He is like a melting slug, even sun he did not see, did not know

And when his belly is cleft and the dung is strewn on his face

It is as if (the belly) says: Here, you idiot, is all the loot you stored
 with me.

So far did Sa'adia go in the negative depiction of human life, with annoying, disconcerting, and insistent probing of human agony, all aimed at bringing about abstinence, that at times it bordered on nihilism, on absolute despair.

E. *Motifs Common to Sa'adia and the Arab Poets*

1. *The impossibility of knowing the terminus of life (ajal)*

Man desperately pursues wealth and material pleasures throughout his life, as Nissi likewise insisted in precise detail; but man's desire to become wise cannot be fulfilled either. In particular, he cannot know the day of his death (p. 66):

דעת ידרוש כל ימיו / והיא רחוקה רחוקה מכניו
 מדת ימיו וחדלו / נשגבה, לא יוכל לה

He asks for wisdom all his life, but it is very remote

The length of his life and world is lofty, he cannot reach it.

Abū al-ʿAtāhiya also notes that he does not know his death-day, but from a different angle (p. 239):

أرى الخلق يمضي واحداً بعد واحدٍ / فإني لئني أدري متى أنا ماضٍ

I see creatures vanish one by one, would that I knew when I shall
 vanish.

The question of the appointed end of life is much deliberated in Arab and Jewish medieval philosophical literature. Sa'adia too engaged

in it in *Beliefs* (VI:6). But only God knows the *ajal*; it is not known to men.³⁶

2. *Begetting children*

Even the begetting and upbringing of children do not involve, according to Sa'adia in the *tokheḥa*, joy and happiness (p. 70):

לְחֹנֶנָה לֹא רֹב יִלְדָיו / יֵשׁ מֵהֶם לְאַבְנֶת חֶרֶב
וּמֵהֶם לְשִׁכּוֹל וְאַלְמָנוֹן / לְדִיק יִנָּע בָּם וַיִּשְׁפַּח
לְהָלִים יִדְאֵן לְבוֹ / לְשֹׁמֵר סְמִיחָם יַעֲסֻקָא
פֶּן יֵרַע הָבֵן וַיִּתְפַּרֵץ / מוֹמֵי הַבַּת פֶּן תִּחְוֶלֶל

The plenty of his children cause him only grief, some of them doomed to a sword flash

Others, to bereavement and widowhood, he labours for and cherishes them in vain

His heart is worried because of their illness, he is busy watching their potions

Lest the son be wicked and a robber, [he watches] the daughter's flaws lest she will be defiled.

This motif of the curse inherent in raising children is found in the Arabic *zuhd* poetry, for example, the famous poem of Abū al-ʿAtāhiya, which opens thus (p. 46):

لِدُوا لِلْمَوْتِ، وَابْنُوا لِلْخَرَابِ / فَكُلُّكُمْ يَصِيرُ إِلَى تَبَابٍ

Beget for death and build for destruction, as all of you will be led to annihilation.³⁷

Similarly, in another poem on death Abū al-ʿAtāhiya states (p. 224):

لِلْمَوْتِ مَا تَلَدُ الْأَقْوَامُ كُلَّهُمْ / وَلِلْبَلَى كُلِّ مَا بَنُوا، وَمَا غَرَسُوا

To death is doomed all which men have begot, and to annihilation all that they have built and planted.

³⁶ See Kaufmann 1962, pp. 1–10: ‘The *responsum* of R. Hāye Gaon on the question of prior knowledge of God and the matter of the length of Adam’s life (*ajal*)’. Weil-Schwarz 1979, pp. 43–47. On *ajal* in pre-Islamic Arab culture see Ringgren 1955, pp. 89 ff.

³⁷ For the translation of the entire poem see Nicholson 1969, pp. 299–300. And cf. Allony 1946, pp. 75–76.

3. *The futility of the pursuit of wealth*

Ratzaby has pointed out³⁸ the parallel in Arabic literature to Sa'adia's words in the *tokheḥa* on the sins of the rich man and the poor man (p. 65):

כְּעוֹט יִבְעוּט כְּשֶׁבַעְחוּ / וְעַת כִּי יִרְעֵב וְחִקְצָף

When he is satiated, he shall rebel and when he is hungry he shall be angry.

Soon after this line Sa'adia condemns man for his obsession with enlarging his wealth and not being content with little:

בֵּית בְּבִית הוּא מְנִיעַ / וְיָדָיו אֶרְבַּע אַמּוֹת אֶחָדָת קֶבֶר

He builds his house against his neighbour's house, although he needs only four yards for a grave.

Naturally, the subject of being content with little recurs frequently in Arabic ascetic poetry, among others in the poems of Abū al-'Atāhiya. In one of his poems he censures a person who accumulates riches for his heirs (p. 262):

أَمَّا بَيْوتُكَ فِي الدُّنْيَا فَوَاسِعَةٌ / فَلَيْتَ قَبْرُكَ بَعْدَ الْمَوْتِ يَتَسَعُ [...]
 يَا جَامِعَ الْمَالِ فِي الدُّنْيَا لَوَارِثِهِ / هَلْ أَنْتَ بِالْمَالِ بَعْدَ الْمَوْتِ تَنْتَفِعُ

True, your dwellings on earth are spacious and may your grave after death be large [...]

O gatherer of properties on earth for his heir, will you be able to benefit yourself from properties after death?

Sa'adia also reminds the human being that there is no benefit from accumulating wealth:

קְבוּצַת חוֹן מַה־יִסְכֵּן לּוֹ / וּמַה־יִתְרוֹן לּוֹ בְּכֹל עֲמָלָהּ

How will he benefit by accumulating fortune? What advantage will he get by all his deeds?

4. *The futility of the wish for greatness*

Man aims to scale peaks in his life, but this is nothing but pride, and after it there is nothing but death (pp. 65–66):

³⁸ Ratzaby 1991, p. 343.

נאנות לבו תשיא־הו / להתנשא על בִּמְתוֹ עב
ועל כל חי יתְהַרֵר / וּפְתַע נִקְשׁ וְנוֹאֵשׁ
נִבְהָ אָפּוּ בִל יִדְרוֹשׁ / הוּא וְאָפֶס עוֹד מִלְכוּ
אֶךְ אֵל שְׂאוֹל יוֹרֵד / בְּדִי עֶפֶר לְמוֹצָק

His heart's haughtiness will trick him to climb onto the clouds' stage
He is arrogant toward all human beings, but in a moment he is trapped
and desperate

He does not heed his pride, but his counsel is vain

He shall be pushed down to Hell to become dust in the soil.

In this style Abū al-ʿAtāhiya writes in a poem (p. 14):

תִּרְקֵן מִן הַדְּבִיָּא אֶלִי אֵי גֵאִיָּה / סִמּוֹתִּי אֵלֶיהָ פֶּלְמַנַּיָּא וְרֵאָהָ

Arise above the world, to any goal to which to aspire, death is after it.

5. *The uncertain status of the leader*

In his exhaustive and profound essay on Saʿadia's communal activity, the historian Salo Baron³⁹ finds in several of his *piyyutim*, such as the second *baqqasha* and the lament יְנוּדְהִי אֲשֶׁר יְנוּדְהִי⁴⁰ an expression of his spiritual distress, or in Baron's term, melancholy, arising from this activity. I very much doubt that this is accurate with respect to those *piyyutim*. By contrast, it is clear that in *Sefer Ha-Galuy*⁴¹ Saʿadia expresses his heartfelt emotions following the polemic with the Exilarch David b. Zakkay and his group. Furthermore, in the *tokheha* בְּהִרְרָךְ לִפְנֵי אִם Saʿadia devotes an entire stanza to the status of the leader in society (p. 70):

בְּחֶרֶב חֶדֶה יְלוּפֵשׁ / אִם הַמִּצָּא יְדוֹ מִמִּשְׁלֵת
לְרִצּוֹת עֲבָדָיו וְהַמְרָעִית / וְלֹא יִגִּיעַ רִצּוֹנָם סֵלָה
בְּתַרְוָהוּ כָּל צֶדֶד נִיקָף / בְּלִי עוֹן יְרֻצוֹן מְרוֹץ
בְּמָה בְּנַפְשׁוֹ יִשְׁמֵר / לִוְלִי יִשְׁךְ שׁוֹמֵר כָּל יְצוֹר
בְּסֶרְסוֹר בֵּין אֵל לָעָם / לַעֲשׂוֹת רִצּוֹנוֹ הוֹפֵקֵד
נִתַּר גְּרוֹנוֹ מִלִּזְעוֹק / נִתַּר מִפְּחוּז מִלְצָרוֹף
בְּמָה וְכֵלָה וְגִלְךָ / לְבַל יִקְשְׁרוּ עֲלָיו קֶשֶׁר
וּבְהִרְרָךְ עֵין שְׁטָפוֹ שְׁטָף / אִי כְבוֹדוֹ וּגְבוּרָתוֹ

He shall be honed as a sharpened sword, if he could acquire the power
To appease his servants and entourage, but he will never accomplish
their wishes

³⁹ Baron 1943, pp. 69–74.

⁴⁰ Saʿadia 1941, pp. 69, 412.

⁴¹ See Tobi 1991a, pp. 58 ff.

They surrounded him on all sides and he was encircled, though he is
 blameless, they will hound him
 How much could he protect himself, if not for Your guarding every
 creature
 He is like a messenger between God and the people, he was appointed
 to carry out His will
 His throat is too drained to cry, his bellows are too hot to refine
 How worn out must he be to act to prevent their plot against him?
 In a trice a flood washes him away, where are his honour and strength?

As is his custom, in the tenth essay in *Beliefs* (X:12) Sa'adia expands on the negative aspects of the love of power also. But in the *tokheḥa* the troubles of the leader are the impossibility of satisfying the wishes of those seemingly subject to his will, their treachery, his inability to fulfil his mission, and finally his fall. In *Beliefs* the negative aspects derive mainly from the leader's arrogance and his dereliction of his duties (pp. 388–390):

I feel compelled, furthermore, to note down some of the injurious consequences of haughtiness and the love of dominion which they overlook. One of these is that when a person becomes haughty and conceited about his importance, he oversteps the bounds of his rank, and lords it over his fellowmen both near and far, and regards himself as unique among men, and looks down upon the opinion of everyone else [. . .]. Moreover, he rejects what the elders have learned by experience [. . .].

The result is that he makes a failure of his worldly affairs, and whatever success he may reap therein he attributes to his own cunning and power and management and judgment [. . .].

Such an attitude would cause him to fall into every conceivable kind of danger, because of his confidence that his cleverness would extricate him therefrom, but that is precisely what caused him to stumble [. . .].

Again, once a person is successful in attaining dominion and sovereignty, individuals who are envious of him make their appearance from the air, as it were, and his enemies become numerous, although he has done them no wrong, as Scripture says: *Without my fault, they run and prepare themselves* [. . .]. In fact, as soon as it seems to them that he is about to attain to leadership, they become eager to slay him [. . .]. He therefore never eats any food except that which is sealed and never drinks any beverage except that which has been watched, and he feels as though he were in the position of one that is seated underneath the edge of a sword.

The more balanced and wide-reaching statements in *Beliefs* relate to the status of the king in Arab-Muslim society in the Abbasid era in Baghdad, known to Sa'adia first-hand. By contrast, the *tokheḥa*, in which Sa'adia presents the thanklessness of the leader's role, appears

to express his problems at the head of the Jewish community in Baghdad and the quarrels with David b. Zakkay, his family, and his entourage. This reached the point of Sa'adia's being physically beaten and having his life threatened.

What Sa'adia has to say in *Beliefs* and the *tokheḥa* may be compared with Abū al-ʿAtāhiya's reflections on leadership, according to his experience as the poet of several of the Abbasid caliphs, primarily Harūn al-Rashīd. Fear that the leader will stray from the straight and narrow on his elevation to power voiced by Sa'adia, is also a concern of Abū al-ʿAtāhiya in a poem in which he condemns the pursuit of money (p. 348):

أأخي، مَنْ عَشِقَ الرَّئَاسَةَ، خَفْتُ أَنْ / يَطْغَى وَيُحْدِثَ بَدْعَةً وَضَلَالًا

O brother, who may desire leadership, I feared lest he stray and brings about perversion and vanity.

In another short poem Abū al-ʿAtāhiya calls the love of power a disease (p. 446):

حُبُّ الرِّئَاسَةِ دَاءٌ يَخْلُقُ الدُّنْيَا / وَيَجْعَلُ الْحُبَّ حَرَمًا لِلْمُحِبِّينَا
يَنْفِي الْحَقَائِقَ وَالْأَرْحَامَ يَقْطَعُهَا / فَلَا مَرْوَةَ يُتَّقَى لَا، وَلَا دِينَا

Love of leadership is sickness that destroys the world, it makes love a place forbidden to lovers

It destroys truth and assistance to near ones, it will not allow nobility, nor justice either.

The Arab poet also writes about the corruption of the qualities of the leaders in a short poem (p. 231):⁴²

اللَّهُ يَحْفَظُ لَا الْحِرَاسَةَ / وَلَرَبَّمَا تَخْطِي الْفِرَاسَةَ
طَلَبُ الرِّئَاسَةِ مَا عَلَّمَ / سَتَ تَفَاقَمْتُ فِيهِ النَّفَاسَةَ
وَالنَّاسُ يُخْبِطُ بَعْضُهُمْ / بَعْضًا عَلَى طَلَبِ الرِّئَاسَةِ

God is the guardian, not the watch and for the majority understanding is misled

By the request of the leadership, as you knew, it corrupts the worth of value

And people strike each other, at the request of the leadership.

⁴² On the vehement criticism of people who tended to asceticism (*zuhd*) in Spain against the rulers, their despotism, and their treachery, see Marin 1992, pp. 86 ff.

He also writes about the treachery of the leader's men (p. 447):

ما النَّاسُ إِلَّا لكَثِيرِ الْمَالِ أَوْ / مُسَلِّطٍ مَا دَامَ فِي سُلْطَانِهِ
فَإِذَا الزَّمَانُ رَمَى الْفَتَى بَعْلَمَةً / كَانَ التَّقَاتُ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَعْوَانِهِ

No men arise except to aggrandize possessions, or for the ruler as long as he is in power
And if Time brings down the generous one in catastrophe, among his helpers will be those who bind him.

6. *Snapping the cord as an image for death*

On the basis of the famous verse *Qohelet* 12:6, 'Before the silver cord is snapped', Sa'adia portrays the moment of death (p. 79): *عَوِظِدْ حَبْلُ فَحَفَا* (his silver cord was cut). But severing the cord as a depiction of the moment of death is often found in Abū al-'Atāhiya's poems, such as the one (p. 70) in which he turns to the *barzakh* (see below, p. xxx):

كَمْ فِيكَ تَمَنَّى كَانَ يُوَصِّلُ حَبْلُهُ / قَدْ صَارَ بَعْدُ وَحْبَلُهُ مَبْتُوتٌ

How much is there in you from those whose cords were connected, and existed afterwards while their cords were cut.

Also (p. 262):

وَكُلُّ نَاصِرٍ دُنْيَا سَوْفَ تَخْذُلُهُ / وَكُلُّ حَبْلٍ عَلَيْهَا سَوْفَ يَنْقَطَعُ

Every support of Earth will be abandoned by her and every cord upon it will be cut through.

Similarly (p. 263)

سَتَصْبَحُ يَوْمًا مَا مِنْ النَّاسِ كَلِّهِمْ / وَحَبْلُكَ مَبْتُوتُ الْقَوَى مُتَقَطَّعٌ

One day will come to you which comes to all men and your cord's strength will be ended, severed.

With a slight modification we find (p. 325):

وَلَقَدْ رَأَيْتُ عُرَى الْحَيَاةِ تَخْرُمْتُ / وَلَقَدْ تَصَدَّى الْوَارِثُونَ لِمَالِي

I have seen the loops of life and behold they are frayed and the heirs already reckon up my possessions.

7. *Depiction of the body's decay*

Particularly gruesome in the *tokheha* לִפִּי בְהֶרֶךְ is the depiction of the body's disfigurements before and after death (p. 7):

סם יאכלהו כצמר / עש יבלהו ורקבון [. . .]
 פגרו הֶרֶךְ וְהַעֲנֹן / אֲשֶׁר כָּל יָמָיו יַעֲזֹרֶהוּ
 הוֹבֵס וְנִשְׁחַת פִּשְׁחָת / וַנִּפְשׁוּ עָלָיו אוֹכֵלָת
 פָּנָיו לְבוּשׁוֹ מִי יִנְלָה / רִיחֹו מִי יוֹכֵל לְהַרִית

Moth shall eat him as if he is wool, Grubs and rot will destroy him [. . .]
 His soft and ample corpse, that petted him all his days,
 Is crushed and ruined in Hell and his soul mourns over him
 Who will remove his clothes, who can stand his stench?

Abū Nuwās writes in the same vein (I, p. 302):

دَبَّ فِيَّ الْفَنَاءُ سَفْلاً وَعَلَوْ / وَأَرَانِي أَمُوتَ عَضُوا عَضُوا
 لَيْسَ مِنْ سَاعَةٍ مَضَتْ بِي إِلَّا / نَقَصْتَنِي بِمَرَّهَا بِي جَزُوا

Death slithers upon me beneath and above and I see myself dead,
 organ by organ
 Not a moment will pass me by without my missing, as it overtakes
 me, a part.

Abū al-‘Atāhiya describes the bodies of the dead in graves (p. 77):

زُرْتُ الْقُبُورَ قُبُورَ أَهْلِ الْمَلِكِ فِي الْـ / سَدَنِيَا، وَأَهْلِ الرَّعِي فِي الشَّهَوَاتِ
 كَانُوا مَمْلُوكًا مَأْكُلًا وَمَشَارِبَ / وَمَلَابِسَ وَرَوَائِحَ عَطْرَاتِ
 فَإِذَا بِأَجْسَادٍ غُرِينَ مِنَ الْكِسَا / وَبَأُوجِهِ فِي التُّرْبِ مَنْعِفَاتِ
 لَمْ تَبْقَ مِنْهَا الْأَرْضُ غَيْرُ جَمَاجِمٍ / بَيَضُ تَلُوحَ وَأَعْظَمُ نَخْرَاتِ

I have visited the graves, the graves of people of power in the world
 and people of pleasure in luxury
 There were kings of food and beverages and garments and scents of
 perfumes
 Now naked bodies without garments and faces smeared with grime in
 the earth
 The soil has left nothing of them except skulls gleaming white and
 rotted bones.

Also (p. 28):

أَهْلَ الْقُبُورِ مَحَا التُّرَابُ وَجُوهَكُمْ / أَهْلَ الْقُبُورِ تَغَيَّرَتْ تِلْكَ الْحُلَى

Denizens of the graves, dust has obliterated your visages, dwellers of
 the pits, the form of those jewels has become distorted.

At the beginning of the *tokheḥa* Sa'adia portrays man as a vessel of clay (p. 65):

אם לפי בחרך צורנו / באדם הזה הדל
בחר המעלה הוא / ומה שמץ דבר נשמע בו
אם לפי בנינו ורקמו / בחרש מן החומר לזקח

If according to your choice, Our Lord, of this poor human being
He is of the esteemed and what thing of disgrace might be heard
about him

If according to his construction and design, he is like a potsherd made
of clay.

A similar notion is present in Abū al-ʿAtāhiya's poem (p. 55):

من ترابٍ خلقت لا شك فيه / وغداً أنت صائرٌ للتراب
كيف تلهو وأنت في حمأة الطيب / من وتمشي وأنت ذو إعجاب

You were created of dust, no doubt, tomorrow you shall go to the dust
How you do not pay attention while you are in the filth of the mud,
you shall go while boasting.

8. *Life as a journey to death*

Ratzaby has pointed out⁴³ that the depiction of life in Sa'adia's *tokheḥa*, especially in illness and old age, is like a journey to death (p. 72):

סע מסע אחר מסע / אל ארץ עיפתה כמו אופל
שלף נצא בבוא יומו / מכל יש ונענוג ונשחוק

He travelled a journey after journey to a land of obscurity like darkness
He aged and in his day he left behind him all property, pleasure and
power.

So Sa'adia was influenced by Arabic poetry, and by the writing of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, the first of the Sufis. To this may be added stanzas of the Arab poets; here is Abū Nuwās (II, p. 159):

أرى كل حيٍّ هالكاً وابن هالك / وذا نسبٍ في إلهالكين عريقٍ
فقلّ لقريب الدار أنك ظاعنٌ / إلى منزلٍ نائيٍ الحِلِّ سحيقٍ

I have seen every living thing and behold it is mortal and a mortal's
son and the person of renown is planted among the mortals

Say to the one near his home: You are going on a journey to a house
whose place is far off, out of the way.

⁴³ Ratzaby 1991, pp. 345–347.

Similarly, Abū al-ʿAtāhiya writes (p. 181):

النَّاسُ فِي هَذِهِ الدُّنْيَا عَلَى سَفَرٍ / وَعَنْ قَرِيبٍ بِهِمْ مَا يَنْقُضِي السَّفَرَ

People in this world are on a journey and soon their journey will end.

9. *Life as a cup filled with drink*

Saʿadia portrays life as drinking of a cup with a bitter beverage (p. 73):

عَلَيْهِ نَهَضْنَا حَيْرِي / حَبَلِي مَوْتِ وَأَيُّمُونِي
شَتَا كَسَ مَرَّ نِيَمِي / تَرَشِيهِ يَنْرَمُ بِمَقْدَرِي

His pains took control of him, death's agonies and terrors
He swallowed a bitter cup and drained it, he slavered, gnawing its fragments.

This image is very frequent in Arabic poetry. In the chapter on death, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi writes⁴⁴ that the finest stanza on death among the *jāhiliyya* poets is that of Umayya b. Abī al-Ṣalt, a religious poet contemporary with Muḥammad:⁴⁵

يُوشِكُ مَنْ قَرَّ مِنْ مَنِيَّتِهِ / فِي بَعْضِ غَرَاتِهِ يُوَافِقُهَا
مَنْ لَمْ يَمُتْ عِبْطَةً يَمُتْ هَرَمًا / لِلْمَوْتِ كَأْسُ الْمَرَا ذَائِقُهَا

One who flees from his death will approach, in one moment of inattention he will be called to it
He who does not die in the prime of life will die in old age, death has a cup and a man will taste of it.

This motif is common in the poems of Abū al-ʿAtāhiya (p. 59):

الْمَوْتُ حَوْضٌ لَا مَحَالَةَ دُونَهُ / مَرٌّ مَذَاقُهُ كَرِيهُ مُشْرَبُهُ

Death is a pool from which there is no escape, its taste is bitter, its blend hateful.

And (p. 80):

كَأَنَّكَ فِي أَهْلِكَ قَدْ أَتَيْتَا / وَفِي الْجِيرَانِ وَيْحَكَ قَدْ نُعَيْتَا
كَأَنَّكَ كُنْتَ بَيْنَهُمْ غَرِيبًا / بِكَأْسِ الْمَوْتِ صَرَفًا قَدْ سُقَيْتَا

⁴⁴ Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi 1928, p. 122.

⁴⁵ On him see Nicholson 1969, pp. 150; Hirschberg 1946, pp. 211–240; Borg 1998; 2001.

As if to your family you have been led and among your neighbours,
 woe to you, your death is announced
 As if you were a stranger among them, in the cup of death, unmixed,
 you have been drunk.

And (p. 424):

ما أقرب الموتَ مِنَّا / تجاوزَ اللهَ عَنَّا
 كأنَّهُ قد سقانا / بكأسِهِ حيثُ كُنَّا

How close is death to us, God forgive us
 As if he has let us drink in its cup wherever we may be.

And (p. 228):

تديرُ يدُ الدُّنيا الرَّدَى بينَ أهلِها / كأنَّهُم شربُ قَعودٍ على كأسٍ

A hand turns the evil Earth around among its dwellers as if they are
 a company of toppers sitting over a glass.

A similar theme is found in rabbinic writing (*Ketubbot* 8b):

Our weary brethren, who are disconsolate because of this grief [...].
 This exists for ever, it is a course since the six days of Genesis. Many
 have drunk it, many shall drink it. The drinking of late comers is just
 like the drinking of the early ones.

Also in an ancient *piyyut*, apparently from the Land of Israel.⁴⁶

וּבְהַכְמִיתְךָ שְׁמִיתָ הַמָּוֶת כּוֹס קְזוּנִים לְכָל

And with your wisdom you made Death a cup poured for all.

Presumably, however, particularly as indicated by the title *marthiya* for Sa'adia's *tokheḥa*, he was acquainted with the image from Arabic poetry too.

10. *Man's grieving for himself*

For the most part the *tokheḥa* does not preach repentance but presents the tribulations of life, until man himself is disgusted by his wealth, his life, and his world. Sa'adia had reason to call the *piyyut* in one of its lines קִינָה (a lament), and in consequence the copyists applied to it the Arabic *marthiya*.⁴⁷ Sa'adia advised a person to grieve for

⁴⁶ Present in Jewish-Yemenite prayer books. See Tobi 1982a, p. 321, no. 685.

⁴⁷ See Tobi 1982, I, p. 32.

himself, long before the eulogizers came to express sorrow for him at his deathbed, before he died; this was the convention in the genre of 'the poet's lament for himself'.⁴⁸ These are the lines (pp. 74–75):

קִינָה הִיא וְקִינָהָ / בְּנֵי הָאָדָם עַל נַפְשֹׁתָם
מִפְּרָם יִסְפְּדוּן חֲסוּפִדִּים / יִקְדְּמוּ מִרְוֹת בְּמֶרְכָּבִי
קִיא צוֹאָה בֶּנְ עוֹלָמָם / קִינָה לֹא עַל כְּבוֹדָהּ
קָמַל טוֹב וְהַחֲפִיר / קְדוּרָתָהּ כָּל תַּחֲלוּכִיו
קִנְיָן הַחֹרֵר יִמָּאֵס נֶכֶד / אֵף כִּי אֲסוּר וּמְנוּעַ
קְבוּצָת הוֹן מִחֲסִידָיו / וּמִחֲתָנָיו לֹא בְּכָל עֲמִלָּהּ
קְשׁוּנָהּ בְּעֵינֶיהָ אֲנִי / לְמִי רֹב אֱלֹהִים הֲלֹא לָנוּ
מִאֲסָנוּ עוֹלָמָנוּ, מִאֲסָנוּהוּ / מִאֲנָה לְנֹעַ נַפְשָׁנוּ

It is a lament and human beings wail it for themselves

Before the mourners mourn they precede banquets with bitter crying
Dripping vomit is the food of their world, shame is cast on its honour
Its well-being has dried up and become dark, all its accesses are gloomy
A human being is disgusted at a permitted property, to say naught of
what is forbidden and banned

How will he benefit by accumulating a fortune? What advantage will
he have in all his deeds?

We have made ourselves small in our own eyes, for whom is all this,
if not ourselves?

We sully our world, we sully it, our soul refuses to touch it.

A direct call of this kind on a person to grieve for himself is also known from Abū al-ʿAtāhiya. He concludes his poem *خانك الطرف الطموح / أيها القلب الجموح* (The greedy look has betrayed you, O you, the outpouring heart) with these two lines (pp. 116–177):

نُحْ عَلَى نَفْسِكَ يَا / مَسْكِينُ، إِنْ كُنْتَ تَنُوحُ
لَسْتُ بِالْبَاقِي وَلَوْ عَمَّ / رَتْ مَا عَمَّرَ نوحُ

Mourn for yourself, O wretch, if you were to grieve
You do not exist, and even if you lived the life of Noah.

11. *An address to the soul*

The series of *piyyutim* entitled *בְּרַכִּי נַפְשִׁי*⁴⁹ reflect the general neo-Platonic perception that God's greatness is manifest in his works in the macrocosm and in the microcosm. The first *piyyut* concerns the

⁴⁸ On this issue see Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi 1928, pp. 158–162; Levin 1973, pp. 81–88.

⁴⁹ Zulauf 1964, pp. 111–141.

microcosm, namely, a man's soul; the second concerns God, his qualities and his attributes; the third to the tenth *piyyutim* address God's works in the macrocosm, the great world. The first *piyyut* in the series is the first in the genre of 'soul poems' in medieval Hebrew poetry, and the poets of Spain followed its path almost without exception. This genre treats of the human soul as against the body; it is thus a universal subject, free of any connection to the Jewish national theme of exile and redemption. It has its particular linguistic expression, using the singular for the soul, rather than the plural, which normally meant for the nation; so it is in the *tokheha* **אָם לִפִּי בְּתוֹכָהָ**. Yet the Arab poets anticipated Sa'adia with soul poems, which include an appeal to the soul to repent. The following is one such poem from the *diwān* of Abū al-ʿAtāhiya (p. 426) in which he addresses the errant soul:

يا نفس، أمتى توفكينا / حتى متى لا ترعونا
 حتى متى لا تقلعي — سن، وتسمعين وتبصرينا
 أصبحت أطول من مضي / أملاً، وأضعفهم يقينا
 وليأتين، عليك، ما / أفنى القرون الأولينا
 يا نفس، طال تمسكي / بعري المنى حيناً، فحيناً
 يا نفس الا تصلحي / فتشبهى بالصالحينا
 وتفكري فيما أفو / ل، لغل قلبك أن يلينا
 أين الألى جمعوا، وكا / نوا، للحوادث آميننا
 أفناهم الأجل المط — ل على الخلائق أجمعينا
 فإذا مساكنهم، وما / جمعوا، لقوم آخرينا

O soul, how false are you, till when will you not repent?
 Till when will you not turn back and listen and understand?
 You have been profligate among those who raised up their ambition
 and the weakest among those in respect of truth
 Over you will pass what destroyed the first generations
 O soul, long has been your grasp of the cushions of ambitions, for
 ages and ages
 O soul, you have nothing to do but to mend your ways and to be
 like the pious ones
 And utter what I state, perhaps your heart will soften
 Where are those who gathered and were peaceful with the chances
 of time?
 They are destroyed by the end approaching the creatures together
 And here are their dwelling places and those who gathered for another
 people.

12. *The sinning soul*

The soul to which Abū al-ʿAtāhiya appeals is not immune to the tendency to sin and to self-indulgence; this also shown in the first *piyyut* in the בְּרַכִּי נַפְשִׁי series, based on the Platonic concept of the dichotomy of the soul and the body in which it is imprisoned. This concept took hold in the Arabic poems of asceticism, and in the letters of *Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*.⁵⁰ At the beginning of the *piyyut* the soul is indeed described as a spiritual entity akin in its qualities to God, but in the second part it is presented as a corporeal entity, vulnerable to the perils of disease and want (p. 113):

בְּרַכִּי מְמוֹחֶצֶת בְּתַחֲלוּאִים רָעִים וּבִמְזוֹר תְּלִיָּה מְשׁוּעָה [...] .
 בְּרַכִּי נוֹדְדֶת לְאֹי וְרוֹעֶבֶת לְלֶהֱם וְצוּמָאֵת לַמָּוֶם [...] .
 בְּרַכִּי עוֹנָה וּמוֹעֵלֶת וּמוֹסַפֶּת עַל הַפְּאֻתֶיהָ רוֹעַ מַעֲשֶׂה [...] .
 בְּרַכִּי פְחוּדָה וְאֵנוּחָה, כִּי תִמְצָאֶנָּה אוֹתָךְ רְעוּת וְצָרוֹת

Bless you, afflicted by grave diseases, who cries out for the remedy
 for her illness

Bless you, wandering for a home, hungry for bread and thirsty for
 water

Bless you, sinner and traitor, and increasing her fault with wicked deeds
 Bless you, frightened and sighing, as you are caught by evil and mis-
 fortune.

These material terms used in respect of the soul apparently originate in the Sufi notion of the nether soul, that is, the appetitive soul with appetites and desires, and in this sense not remote from the body.⁵¹ In Saʿadia's words in *Beliefs*, in the discussion of the soul (VI:3, p. 241), Hebrew has five names for the soul: *nefesh*, *ruʾah*, *nashama*, *hayya*, and *yahida*. The first three match the three powers found in the soul: discernment, appetite, and anger. The last two signify the qualities similar to the Creator: eternally alive, and with nothing comparable in all world. Saʿadia expands on the nature of the forces of appetite and anger in *Beliefs* (X:2, pp. 360–361):

The appetitive, the impulsive, and the cognitive. As for the appetitive faculty, it is that whereby a human being entertains the desire for food and drink and sexual intercourse and for seeing beautiful sights and smelling fragrant odors and for wearing garments that are soft to the touch. The impulsive faculty is that which renders a person coura-

⁵⁰ Netton 1982, p. 16.

⁵¹ Cf. Nicholson 1975, pp. 34–40; Nicholson 1921, p. 119.

geous and bold, and endows him with zeal for leadership and championing the common weal, and makes him vindictive and vainglorious, and other such things.

In **לפי בְּהִרְךָ אִם** Sa'adia again mentions these powers and describes the evils attacking man as a result of them. They are shown as wholly negative, with no mention of the positive in them, such as help to others. This suits the purpose of the *tokheḥa*, which is intended for the Day of Atonement. The following are several of its lines reflecting this concept of the nether soul and its adverse effect on man (pp. 65–69):

נִם בְּלִילָה לֹא שָׁכַב לְבוֹ / כִּי כָל יָמָיו מְכָאֹב וְכַעַס [. . .]
 נֶאֱזוּת לְבוֹ תִּשְׁאֲדוּ / לְהִתְנַשֵּׂא עַל בְּמַחֲי עֵב
 הוֹרָה גְּדוּלָּה עָלָיו / תֵּאֱזוּת מֵאֲכַל לֶחֶמוֹ [. . .]
 זַעַף אָפוֹ וְחִמְמוֹ / אוֹיְבָיו אוֹרְבֵּי חֵמָה [. . .]
 זְנוּת יָקָח לְבוֹ / וְחִכְמָתוֹ בּוֹלְעָה כִּי יַעֲנֹב [. . .]
 שְׂמוּנָה קִנְאָתוֹ בְּחוּבוֹ / בְּרֵאוּתוֹ מוֹכָה לְגִילָיו [. . .]
 יַגִּיד מְרוֹן בְּשָׁלוֹם / וְלֹא בִיד יִשְׁקִיט רִיב [. . .]
 יִהְיֶה פֶּעֶסוֹ כְּפֹתָה / תִּנְמָאָהּ מִשְׁמָמָה לְמוֹתָת [. . .]
 יִחַד מְנָא וּמְקוּנָא יַעֲבֹדוּן / וְכָל קִנְאָתָם יִהְיוּן הֶבֶל

Even at nights he does not fall asleep as all his days are pain and anger
 His heart's haughtiness shall trick him to climb onto the clouds' heights
 A strong distress afflicts him, a passion to eat his food
 The fury of his anger and rage, his foes ambush him
 Adultery traps his heart and his wisdom is nullified when he dallies
 with a woman
 His jealousy is hidden in him when he perceives his contemporaries'
 prosperity
 He wages vicious against peace, he does not settle a quarrel
 His anger shall kill him for a fool, hatred dispatches him to murder
 The envier and the envied will be lost together, all their envy will be
 annulled.

The philosophical poems of Ibn Gabirol in Spain do not treat the soul in this way. In them the soul is entirely spiritual, and the difference was noted by Zulay.⁵²

13. *The likening of the soul to a bird*

In **לפי בְּהִרְךָ אִם** Sa'adia likens the human soul, drawn to and snared by sin, to a bird that falls into a trap (p. 68):

⁵² Zulay 1964, p. 102.

זנות יקח לבו / וחקמתו בולעה כי יעגב [...] .
כצפור אל פח ירוץ / נפשו הוקרה יצוד

Adultery traps his heart and his wisdom is nullified when he dallies
with a woman

He scurries like a bird into a trap, which hunts his precious soul.

A simile of this kind is found in the poetry of Abū al-ʿAtāhiya (p. 447):

وللتفس طيرٌ ينتفضن إلى الهوى / بأجنحةٍ قوي إليه، فسكنها

The soul has a bird fluttering to desire on wings, desiring it, and it
sinks into it.

Likening the soul to a bird was developed in Arabic literature into an entire work, *Risālat al-Ṭayr* (The Epistle of the Birds), by Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037), which Eliyahu Ha-Kohen translated into Hebrew in 1276 under the title *Megillat Ha-ʿOfer*.⁵³ This image is repeated in the *tokheḥa* in the account of its fate after death (p. 73):

פחה נפשו אל מעונה / לצועע אשר יצעחו [...] .
גם זו רעה חולה / כי נותרה כצפור נודדת

His soul flew to her dwelling, to the couch which she prepared
This is another harsh evil, she remained like a wandering bird.

14. *The attributes of God*

The question of God's attributes is a central issue in medieval philosophical literature. So as not to impair the concept of the unity of God, the neo-Platonic *mu'tazilīs* tended to disfavour the ascription of attributes to God. Sa'adia, influenced by them, limited the number of permitted attributes of God to three: living, omnipotent, and wise. But these too are just a single unity, and their multiplicity derives from the inadequacy of language. These qualities in God have no connection with the human qualities defined by the same words:⁵⁴

We have been informed by our Lord, magnified and exalted be He, through the pronouncements of His prophets that He is one, living, omnipotent, and omniscient, that there is nothing that resembles Him, and that He does not resemble any of His works [...].

⁵³ See Levin 1988; Malakhi 1986; Yahalom 1995a, pp. 141–144. On the simile of bird/soul in Hebrew liturgical poetry in Spain see Ratzaby 1991, pp. 350–351.

⁵⁴ Sa'adia 1948 II:1, 4, pp. 94, 102.

For it is not to be imagined that the Eternal, blessed and exalted be He, possesses several distinct attributes. All these attributes are rather implied in His being a Creator. It was only our need to transmit it that impelled us to formulate this concept in three expressions, since we did not find in existing speech an expression that would embrace all of the ideas [. . .].

In the event, again, that someone thinks that the possession of these attributes by God implies mutability [in His essence]—I mean [the possibility of] the existence of one without the other—let me explain how unsound such a view would appear upon correct scrutiny. For change and mutation appertain only to material substances and accidents. The Creator of such bodies and accidents, however, is above all change and mutation.

The description of God is clearly universal, without any national-historical reference. Sa'adiah's lines about God in the first *baqqasha* are based on these ideas:⁵⁵

אין ערוך אליך מכל דמות / ואין שוה לך בכל המונה / ואין כמוך בכל הנמצאים /
ומפלעדיך אין אלהים / ישך מאז ואין שני לך / ומעולם אתה ואין אחר עמך /
מענה אלהי קדם ואין זר עמך / אלהים תיים אתה ומספר ימים אין לך / ומשך
החכמה אתה ולא נועצת אתכם ובינך / ומפיך הדעת והחבונה ולא מורה הורך /
והעשר והכבוד מלפניך ולא לקחתם במתה / ואתה מושל בכל ומלכותך מאתה
לא קבלתה / ובידך פת ונבורה ולא קניתם מעת / כי נבורתך ונאותך לא תדל
לעד / והכמתך וחבונתך לא תחסר ולא תחסר / ומלכותך לא תחלוף כי היא
מלכות כל עולמים / ועוזך וכבודך לא ישתנו עד עולמי עד.

There is no image to whom You can be compared. There is no figure who is equal to You. None in all creatures resembles You. There is no god except you. You have existed forever and there is no God second to You. You are eternal and no one is with You. You are the primeval God in Your residence and no foreign thing is with You. You are the *living* God and Your days cannot be counted. You are the source of *wisdom* and You did not take advice from a sage to make You wise. Mind and reason stem from Your mouth and no teacher taught You. Richness and honour are in Your presence and You did not take them as a present. You dominate all and You did not receive Your domination from another. There is in Your hand *power* and *strength* and You did not get them at any time. Since Your strength and pride shall never diminish. Your wisdom and understanding shall not *increase* or *decrease*. Your dominion shall never *vanish* since it is eternal dominion. Your courage and honour shall *never change to eternity*.

⁵⁵ Sa'adiah 1941, pp. 47–48.

The second *baqqasha* is worded similarly:⁵⁶

וְכָל אֲחֵר שֶׁהוּא זִוְלָתְךָ נִצְרָה הוּא יִתְדָשׁ / וְאִיךָ יִדְמָה לָךְ וְאַתָּה יִצְרָתוֹ / אִם
יִעֲרַךְ לָךְ וְאַתָּה בְּרֵאתוֹ

Everyone except of You is created and new. How it may resemble
You after You created it? Or how it may be compared to You after
You made it?

The description of God in the second *piyyut* of the series בְּרָכִי נַפְשִׁי accords with the ‘poems of unity’ based on clear philosophical concepts, with significant differences between the qualities seemingly shared by the Creator and his creatures. But poems of unity of this style, which describe God in distinctly philosophical terms, are already found in the work of Abū al-‘Atāhiya. His poems, however, are short, while Sa‘adia broadens the canvas mainly owing to the requirement of *paytanic* composition for poems with lines exhausting the entire Hebrew alphabet in its order. The following are two poems of Abū al-‘Atāhiya:⁵⁷

جَلَّ رَبُّ أَحَاطَ بِالأَشْيَاءِ / أَحَدٌ، مَا جَدُّ، بِغَيْرِ خَفَاءِ
جَلَّ عَنْ مِثْلِهِ لَهُ وَنَظِيرٌ / وَتَعَالَى حَقًّا عَلَى الْقِرْنَاءِ
عَالَمِ السَّرِّ، كَاشَفُ الضَّرِّ، يَغْفُو / عَنْ قُبُوحِ الأَفْعَالِ يَوْمَ الْجَزَاءِ
مَا عَلَى بَابِهِ حِجَابٌ وَلَكِنْ / هُوَ مِنْ خَلْقِهِ سَمِيعُ الدَّعَاءِ
لَدُنْهُ أَيْهَا الْغَفُولِ وَبَادِر / تَحْظُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ بَنِيْلُ الْعَطَاءِ

God, may he be elevated, knows all one, revered, open
He is above all similar and likened to Him, He in truth rises over all
equals
He knows the secret, removes distress, forgives evil deeds on the day
of retribution
No curtain is on His door, but He hears the prayers of his creatures
Will you, sleeper, adhere to Him, and hurry to win His grace with
the gaining of the gift?

فَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي هُوَ دَائِمٌ / أَبَدًا وَلَيْسَ لِمَا سِوَاهُ دَوَامٌ
وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي لَجَلَّاهُ / وَلَحْلَمَهُ تَتَصَاعَّرُ الأَحْلَامُ
وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي هُوَ لَمْ يَزَلْ / لَا تَسْتَقِلُّ بِعِلْمِهِ الإِفْهَامُ
سُبْحَانَهُ مَلِكٌ تَعَالَى جَدُّهُ / وَلَوْجْهَهُ الإِجْلَالُ وَالْإِكْرَامُ

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 64.

⁵⁷ Abū al-‘Atāhiya 1964, pp. 16, 397.

Praise be to God, who exists forever and there is no eternity other than him
 Praise be to God, against whose glory and against whose understanding scholars are small in their own eyes
 Praise be to God, who will not pass on, the senses will not grasp his wisdom
 May the King be praised, whose greatness rises up and to him glory and magnificence.

F. *Parallel Philosophical Motifs in Sa'adia's Piyyutim and in His Beliefs*

1. *The Divine Presence (shekhina) as light*

Sa'adia describes the Divine Presence, which connects God to man, as a quality of shining light that no light is like. The first line of the *azharot* is:⁵⁸

אֲנִי אֵשׁ אוֹכֵלָה וְנוֹהֶרֶת מִכָּל הַנוֹהָרוֹת

I am a devouring fire, and shining above all things that shine.

There is nothing new in the phrase *אֵשׁ אוֹכֵלָה* (devouring fire), which is from Exodus 24:17: *וּמִרְאֵה כְבוֹד ה' כְּאֵשׁ אוֹכֵלָת* (the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire). This is not the case with the phrase *וְנוֹהֶרֶת מִכָּל הַנוֹהָרוֹת* (shining above all things that shine), whose source is clearly philosophical. These are Sa'adia's words when he considers personification in the Bible:⁵⁹

Our answer to this objection [of the throne and a shape a man upon it, in Ezek. 1] is that this form was something [specially] created. Similarly the throne and the firmament, as well as its bearers, were all of them produced for the first time by the Creator out of fire for the purpose of assuring His prophet that it was *He* that had revealed His word to him [...]. It is a form nobler even than [that of] the angels, magnificent in character, resplendent with light, which is called *the glory of the Lord* [...]. Sometimes, however, this specially created being consists of light without the form of a person. It was, therefore, an honor that God had conferred on His prophet by allowing him to hear the oracle from the mouth of a majestic form created out of fire that was called *the glory of the Lord*, as we have explained.

⁵⁸ Sa'adia 1941, p. 191.

⁵⁹ Sa'adia 1948 II:10, pp. 121–122.

What further proves the correctness of our thesis is the statement of the prophet concerning this form: *And He said unto me: 'Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak with thee'* (Ezek. 2:1). Now it is inconceivable that this interlocutor was the master of the universe, because the Torah says that the Creator has never spoken to anyone without an intermediary except to our *teacher Moses* alone. That is the import of its statement, *and there hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face* (Deut. 34:10). As for the rest of the prophets, however, it was only the angels that addressed them.

The idea of divine revelation as light recurs in the fourth *piyyut* of the *פְּרָכִי נֶפֶשׁ* series.⁶⁰

וּפְתַח דְּבָרֶיךָ יְאִיר עַל הָר סִינַי עַל כָּל דָּבָר וְדָבָר, אוֹרָה מִלֵּא כָּל הָעוֹלָם, שְׁלִימָה
הֵנָּה מְרֻבֶּתֶם לֹא יוּכַל הָעוֹלָם לְהַחֲזִיקֶם עַד בְּלוֹעַ אוֹרָה לְאוֹרָה מִפְּנֵי אִמָּה

The commencement of Your words lights up Mount Sinai with each word, a comprehensive light all over the world

Moreover, the world is not able to hold them because of their abundance, unless a light swallows a light because of dread.

Zulay comments on these two lines, 'I have not learned its source'. However, Sa'adia's discussion in *Beliefs* of the connection between God and human beings can help clarify his words in the *piyyut*.⁶¹

God has a special light which He creates and makes manifest to His prophets in order that they may infer therefrom that it is a prophetic communication emanating from God that they hear. When one of them sees this light, he says: "I have seen *the glory of the Lord*." Often, however, he would say simply: "I have seen God," by way of ellipsis. Thou knowest also that about *Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel* (Exod. 24:9) Scripture says at first, *And they saw the God of Israel* (Exod. 24:10). This is explained afterwards as follows: *And the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount* (Exod. 24:17). However, when they beheld this light, they were unable to look upon it on account of its power and brilliance. Indeed whoever looked upon it incurred the disintegration of his entire makeup and the flight of his spirit from his body [. . .].

Moses, accordingly, asked his master to give him the strength to look upon this light. The latter, however, answered him that the first rays of this light were so powerful that he would be unable to view them clearly with his naked eyes, lest he perish. He would rather cover him up with a cloud or the like until the first rays of this light have passed, because the greatest strength of every radiant body is con-

⁶⁰ Zulay 1964, p. 123.

⁶¹ Sa'adia 1948 II:12, pp. 130-131.

tained in its initial approach [. . .]. When, then, the first portion of the light had passed, God removed from Moses the thing that had covered him, so that he might be able to look at the back of the light [. . .]. As for the Creator Himself, however, there is no means whereby anybody might see Him. Aye, that is in the realm of the impossible.

Not only do the above two lines from the *piyyutim* of נִפְשִׁי בְּרָכִי refer to light; in fact, all the entire third and fourth *piyyutim* of the series both concern light, be it as God's world on high or as his way of acting in this world. All this is according to Sa'adia's perception of the divine essence and the ways of its connection with the material worlds, which rejects any measure of materiality in the perception of God. Sa'adia does introduce into these two *piyyutim* intimations of Bible verses and sayings of the Sages on light, but he elevates the simple physical sense to the abstract, quasi-allegorical, sense.

2. *Overtones of polemics in philosophical matters*

Sa'adia was renowned as a keen polemicist. He devotes entire essays to argumentation with Ḥayawayh of Balkh and with the Karaites, and *Beliefs* itself is for the most part polemical. Likewise, his *paytanic* writing is not free of a tendency to disputation.

a. *The unity of God.* At the opening of one his Hosanna *piyyutim* Sa'adia states:⁶²

אֵין אֵל אֶחָד וּמִבֵּישׁ אֲוִמְרֵי שְׁנַיִם

Please, one God who shames those who say there are two.

This phrase reflects a debate with the followers of dualism, which was still a vital force in Sa'adia's day, especially in light of its closeness to the believers in the Persian religion; this is also expressed in *Beliefs*:⁶³

The fifth theory is that of him who asserts the existence of two eternal creators. Those that profess it are, may God guide thee aright, more senseless than all those previously mentioned. They, namely, deny the possibility that two opposing acts could originate from one author, [merely] for the reason that, [as] they maintain, they had never seen anything like it.

Starting out from this conclusion of theirs, they declare: "We see that all things contain elements of good and evil, and harm and benefit. The

⁶² Sa'adia 1941, p. 247.

⁶³ Sa'adia 1948 I:3, pp. 58-59.

good that is in them is, therefore, necessarily derived from a principle that is entirely good, whilst the evil that is in them is derived from a principle that is entirely evil.”

b. *God does not conceal himself behind clouds.* In the seventh *piyyut* of the *בְּרָכִי נִפְשִׁי* series, whose subject is clouds, Sa‘adia comes out against a certain opinion:⁶⁴

שָׁנָא יִדְבְּרוּ הָאוֹמְרִים עֲבִים סִתָּר לוֹ, הַיִּסְתִּיר הַנִּבְרָא אֶת בּוֹרְאוֹ וּמַצִּיבוֹ?

Untruth is the utterance of those who say that clouds are a curtain in front of Him. Can the creature cover his creator and maker?

The holders of this view are the Zoroastrians; moreover, it was already included in a reservation about the Bible by the ninth-century bishop Putius of Constantinople.⁶⁵

c. *The world newly made.* In the opening of the second *piyyut* of the *בְּרָכִי נִפְשִׁי* series Sa‘adia takes issue with those who argue for the pre-existence of the world.⁶⁶

שָׁכַל הָעוֹשִׂים יֵשׁ מִיֵּשׁ יַעֲשֶׂיוּ, וְאַתָּה תַעֲשֶׂה יֵשׁ מִבְּלִימָה

All inventors make a being from a being, but You make a being from nothing.

Sa‘adia devotes the first essay of his scholarly book to the question of invention:⁶⁷

Our Lord, exalted be He, made it known to us that all things were created and that He had created them out of nothing.

d. *The soul is created.* In the first *piyyut* of the *בְּרָכִי נִפְשִׁי* series Sa‘adia confronts the soul with God:⁶⁸

בְּרָכִי בְּרוּאָה, וְקֵץ לַיָּמֶיךָ וְעֵתִים מְזוּמָנִים
אֶת בּוֹרְאָה תַּכְּלִית וְאֵין לוֹ תַּכְּלִית וְלֹא מִסְפֵּר שָׁנִים

Bless you created soul whose days have an end and time is limited,
God is the creator of all and its maker, who has no end and no number of years.

⁶⁴ Zulay 1964, p. 132.

⁶⁵ Rosenthal 1946, p. 29, Question 28.

⁶⁶ Zulay 1964, p. 122.

⁶⁷ Sa‘adia 1948 I:1, p. 40.

⁶⁸ Zulay 1964, p. 111.

The subject of the imprisonment of the soul in the body was already mentioned, but no less significant is the term 'created' (בְּרִיאָה) applied to the soul. Zulai is undoubtedly right: 'It goes without saying that it would never have occurred to a Qillirian *paytan* to say that the soul is created (בְּרִיאָה); what does this mean? Not so the medieval Jewish philosopher, who disputes the view of the gentile scholars as to the nature of the soul.'⁶⁹ Emphasis on the difference between the soul and God is not naive, and seems somewhat surprising, as we would expect a philosopher influenced by neo-Platonism and the *Mu'tazila* to highlight precisely the spiritual and eternal side of the soul as against the material body. This would be especially so in the context of the *piyyut* from which these two lines are taken. In it Sa'adia compares the soul to the Creator according to what had earlier been propounded by the Talmudic sages in *Berakhot* 10a and in *Devarim Rabba* 2:37:

These five בְּרִכֵּי נֶפֶשׁ, compared with what did David say them? He did not say them, but compared God and the soul. Just as God overflows the whole world, so the soul overflows the whole body; and similarly, God feeds the whole world, the soul feeds the whole body; God is pure, the soul is pure; God reside in inner rooms, the soul resides in inner rooms; God carries His world, the soul carries the body; God is unique, the soul is unique.

However, if we analyze Sa'adia's view of the soul, which expressly takes a stand against the Platonic view in this regard, his words in the *piyyut* become crystal clear. Sa'adia wished to diverge from the Platonic view that there is something spiritual or pre-existent apart from God. Therefore, he tended to assert that the soul is not entirely incorporeal, but is a thing subject to chance, hence it has something of the material in it.⁷⁰ This is his text in his philosophy book:⁷¹

So far as the nature of the soul is concerned, is that it is created. This view accords with my previous demonstration that all things existing in the world have been created and that it would be wrong to ascribe eternity to aught except the Creator.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 201. Zulai also presents there the words of David al-Muqammiš on the subject of the soul, which is 'created and made'. For al-Muqammiš' view see Stroumsa 1989, *maqāla* 15, pp. 272 ff.

⁷⁰ Efros 1965, pp. 159–163. And see Zulai 1964, p. 101.

⁷¹ Sa'adia 1948 VI:3, p. 241.

e. *Darkness is not created.* Another matter much discussed in medieval philosophical literature concerns the quality of darkness: is it created, or is it nothing other than the absence of light? Jewish philosophers, Sa'adia in the first place, held that darkness is not created:⁷²

This thing to which these proponents of dualism adhere so firmly—I mean [what they call the principle of] *darkness*—is not a principle opposed to that of light, but merely the absence of light [. . .].

As for the ascription of the creation of light and darkness to God, that was due only to the desire to offset the reprehensible theory of the Dualists. That is why Scripture asserts that God is *the former of light and creator of darkness*.

In the Arabic edition of *Sefer Ha-Galui* Sa'adia writes:⁷³

True, light changes darkness until it becomes light and completely nullifies that darkness. This was my proof that darkness is not a contradictory element of light, but is absence of light.

This question too has echoes in several of Sa'adia's *piyyutim*. In them he stresses that the chaos before Creation was nothing but the condition of absence of light, namely darkness; out of it was created light, which is the start of the act of Creation. In the fourth *piyyut* of בְּרֵכִי נַפְשִׁי we find:⁷⁴

רֵאשִׁוֹנָה בְּבִחִיּוֹת נִיא וּבְחִיתָהוּתָהּ בְּחֹשֶׁךְ עֲצִימָה
קִרְצָתָהּ אֹרֶךְ מִן הַמַּחֲשָׁךְ וְהָאֵר עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹמָה

First, when Earth was chaos and while in chaos it was in deep darkness
You created light of the darkness and it lit up all over the abyss.

In בְּאֶרְכֵי יוֹדוּהוּ,⁷⁵ a liturgical composition for the Day of Atonement (*sefer 'avoda*), are the lines

בְּאֶרֶץ תְּהוֹהוּ וַיִּכְחֲדוּהוּ / וַיֵּאֵר אֹרֶךְ וַיִּרָץ

There was chaos in Earth and He annihilated it, He lit light and crushed it [the chaos].

Similarly in the *sefer 'avoda* אֱלֹהִים יָהּ מִקְדָּם:⁷⁶

בָּקַע אֹרֶךְ מִבְּלִיָּמָה

He drew light out of nothingness.

⁷² Ibid., I:3, pp. 64, 66.

⁷³ Harkavy 1892, p. 182.

⁷⁴ Zulay 1964, p. 122.

⁷⁵ Sa'adia 1941, p. 281.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 410.

f. *Four elements*. In one of his Hosannas Sa'adia writes:⁷⁷

הַיּוֹצֵר בְּעוֹלָמוֹ אַרְבַּע יסודות

He who creates in his world four elements.

This is seemingly a straightforward statement, referring to the Aristotelian notion of the four elements of which the world is composed: air, wind, water, and earth, and their properties: heat, cold, moisture, and dryness. But the emphasis in this statement lies in the word *הַיּוֹצֵר*, according to what Sa'adia write in rejection of the opinions of anyone who disputes the Jewish belief regarding the creation of the world:⁷⁸

The seventh theory is that of him who professes as the origin of things the four elements of nature and matter (*hylē*). The proponents of this theory are more senseless than all those previously mentioned.

Here he refers to those who argued that a primordial substance existed, namely formless matter, from which the four elements were made.

g. *Sacrifices*. This subject occupied Jewish philosophers at that time. Ḥayawayh of Balkh negated the offering of sacrifices on the argument that God had no need of them and that the deed involved cruelty.⁷⁹ The Karaite Salmon b. Yəruḥam took issue with Ḥayawayh,⁸⁰ and Sa'adia discusses the matter as well. First he rejects the argument of cruelty, and then deliberates on God's need of sacrifices:⁸¹

Sixthly, someone might express surprise at the *construction of the Tabernacle*, saying, "What need has the Creator for a tent, and a curtain, and lamps, that give light, and sounds of music, and the offering of incense, and fragrant odors, and gifts of grain and wine, and oil and fruits, and other such things?" Our answer hereunto, and we invoke God's assistance herein, is that all these are forms of devotion not at all prompted by necessity. For reason has long since decided that God does not require anything, but that all things, rather, have need of God.

God's sole aim [in issuing the above-mentioned injunctions] was that His servants indicate their submissiveness to Him by [presenting to Him] the best that they possessed, and the best that they possess is meat and wine and music and incense and grain and oil and things that are pleasant. Of this, however, they were to bring only a little bit, in accordance with their capacity. He, on the other hand, would

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 248.

⁷⁸ Sa'adia 1948 I:3, p. 69.

⁷⁹ Poznanski 1908, pp. 121–122.

⁸⁰ Zucker 1984, pp. 13, 23–24.

⁸¹ Sa'adia 1948 III:10, pp. 176–177.

recompense them amply in accordance with His ability [...]. He would also deliver them from misfortunes, as no one outside of Him could protect them, because of their obedience. Thus Scripture says: *Offer unto God the sacrifice of thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High; and call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt honour Me* (Ps. 50:14, 15).

An obvious echo of Sa'adia's approach here is found in *emet* (or *zulat*) from the *yošer*⁸² on the Bible portion *Šav*:⁸³

אֱמֶת הַכֹּהֵן הַפָּצְתִי וְלֹא זָבַח לַהֲעֵמִיד [...] .
 וְמוֹרֶת עֲצַת לְבָנוֹן אֵין הִי תִבְעָרָה בְּעֶלְף
 תֵּיֵת כָּל סִבְיָיו אֵין הִי עוֹלָה לְצֶלֶף [...] .
 כִּי לִי כָל תִּיתּוֹ יַעַר בְּהִמּוֹת בְּהַרְרֵי אֶלְף:
 יֵלֵךְ שְׁעִשׂוּעִים בְּרִצּוֹתֵי לִכְבְּדִי
 כִּבְשׁ שָׁחַר וְעָרֵב צוּיִתִּי לְעֶרֶךְ נִגְדִי
 לְאַשְׁמַת כָּל יוֹם וְיוֹם אֲדִיחַ מִיָּדֵי
 יָדַעְתִּי כָל עוֹף הָרִים וְיוֹז שְׂדֵי עֲמָדִי:
 מָרַד וַיִּתְּבֹלֵל וַיִּחַמְּאוּ לֵב פּוֹחֵה
 נִגְיוֹתָיו מֵאַסְתִּי וְשִׁירוֹ בְּאֶזֶן לֹא יֵאָחַז
 סִבּוֹתֵי וְנִמְתִּי מִה בָּצַע בְּמִנְיָ וּמִקְשִׁיר וַחֲוָהָה
 הַאוֹכֵל בָּשָׂר אֲבִירִים וְדָם עֲתוּדִים אֲשַׁתָּה:

True, I requested piousness, not to bring sacrifices [...]

The foliage of Lebanon's trees is not sufficient for a light to burn

The animals of its surrounding are not enough for sprinkling [their blood
 on the altar] [...]

Because all the animals in the forest, the beasts on the high mountains
 are mine.

When I wanted my favoured son to honour me

I commanded him to bring me a sheep every morn and eve

To cleanse everyday the sin of my beloved

I knew all the mountain fowl and the earth's insects are in my possession.

He rebelled and assimilated, his sin is a silly heart

I despised his melodies and his songs shall not be heard in ears

I turned and said: What benefit is in the one who lifts, burns incense
 and rakes?

Will I eat oxen's meat or drink rams' blood?

⁸² *Emet*, *zulat*, and *yošer* are different liturgical poems.

⁸³ Tobi 1982, II, pp. 27–28.

3. *Man is the foremost work of creation*

In one of his *dibberin* cycles, a *piyyut* intended for the festival of *Shavu'ot* (Weeks), Sa'adia writes:⁸⁴

לא תרצח מְרוּקָם בְּצֶלֶם דְּמוּתִי [. . .]
 לא תרצח סֶלַע אֲשֶׁר בְּכַפִּי הִצַּבְתִּי [. . .]
 לא תרצח שָׂחַל אֲשֶׁר עַל נִיא נָטַעְתִּי [. . .]
 לא תרצח תְּבֵנִית אֲשֶׁר הִכַּל לְמַעַנּוֹ פָּעַלְתִּי

Do not murder him who is formed in the image of my figure [. . .]
 Do not murder a rock, which I hewed with my palm [. . .]
 Do not murder a plant, which I planted on earth [. . .]
 Do not murder a form, which I created all for his sake.

Similarly, in the opening of the *tokheha* לִפִּי בְּתוֹרָה, cited above:

If according to your choice, Our Lord, of this poor human being
 He is of the esteemed and what thing of disgrace might be heard
 about him.

These statements match what is said in *Beliefs*, that the human being is the jewel in the crown of Creation, and also its purpose:⁸⁵

We see that the creatures are many in number, nevertheless, we need not be confused in regard to which of them constitutes the goal of creation [. . .]. We find that the goal is man.

We note that the earth and the water are both inanimate, whereas we find that the beasts are irrational. Hence only man is left, which gives us the certainty that he must unquestionably have been the intended purpose of creation.

Our Lord has informed us through His prophets that man has been shown preference by Him above all His creatures.

4. *Five kinds of creatures*

In another Hosannas Sa'adia says:⁸⁶

הַקּוֹנֶה בְּעוֹלָמוֹ קִנְיָנִים חֲמִשָּׁה

He who creates in his world five created things.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Sa'adia 1941, pp. 386–387.

⁸⁵ Sa'adia 1948, IV: Preface, pp. 180–181.

⁸⁶ Sa'adia 1941, p. 249.

⁸⁷ The Hebrew words קִנְיָנִים and הַקּוֹנֶה are to be understood as 'creates, created things'. This is in keeping with Sa'adia's comment on *Proverbs* 8:22: ה' קִנְיָ רִאשִׁית דְּרָכֵי: 'The Lord created me at the beginning of his work), the word קִנְיָ concerns creation'. Accordingly, he translated there: 'אֱלֹהִים אֲבִי' (God created me). See Sa'adia 1948, II:6, p. 107; II:11 p. 126.

These five possessions originate in Sa'adia's philosophical view of the division of all existing things into five categories, or elements.⁸⁸

All existing things are namely divided into five principal groups: minerals, vegetables, animals, astral bodies, and angels.

5. *The cloud as a sign of prophecy*

In *Beliefs* Sa'adia has this to say about prophecy.⁸⁹

I also considered the question of how the prophet could be sure that the message that he heard came from God before ascribing it to his Lord in the presence of his people, and I arrived at the conclusion that this was effected by means of some sign that would appear to him at the beginning of the colloquy and remain until its termination. This sign could take the form of a pillar of fire or a pillar of cloud or a light that did not emanate from the ordinary luminaries. When, then, the prophet saw such a sign, he was certain that the message came from God.

Often the people, too, would see it, as did the followers of Moses. When, namely, he would leave them to betake himself to the scene of the revelation, they would stand up and look into the air and note that it was free from any cloud and their eyes would be fixed on Moses. Then as Moses would arrive at the scene of the revelation, a thin cloud would descend in the shape of a pillar and tarry until God had spoken to Moses, whereupon it would go up again. Then Moses would return to them [...].

When he would come back to them, therefore, bringing his message, they would say: "Thou hast spoke truly. We noticed how clear the atmosphere was before thy arrival at the scene of the revelation and how the pillar of cloud made its descent at the time of thy arrival there. Also the time of its sojourn corresponded to the time which it took for thee to hear this communication which thou hast delivered unto us."

Yes, I find that even where in the account given of a certain prophet in one place it is not explicitly stated that God revealed Himself to him in a pillar of *cloud*, it is made clear about him in another book of the Scriptures that He did thus reveal Himself to him. Thus Samuel is included with Moses and Aaron in one passage of Scripture, which says of them all: *Moses and Aaron among His priests, and Samuel . . . He spoke unto them in the pillar of cloud* (Ps. 99:6,7). Since, then, I have found such a thing to hold true for Samuel, there can be no doubt about it but that the same would apply to many other prophets.

⁸⁸ Sa'adia 1948 2:9, p. 113.

⁸⁹ Ibid. III:5, pp. 151–152.

In the *yosher* for *shabbath de-fur'anuta* Sa'adia writes:⁹⁰

מי כמוֹכָה שׁוֹמֵחַ עָלֵי הַזִּיּוֹךְ עֲנַת עֶרְפֵּל

Who is like you in spreading over your prophets a cloud of mist?

In the *azharot* entitled אֲשֶׁר אִזְכָּרָה אֶת הַלָּשׁוֹן the language is difficult:⁹¹

וְלִהְיוֹת עֲנֵנִי וְאַחֲרֵי רַבִּים תִּלְךְ

And on behalf of the lifting of His cloud and you shall adhere to the majority.

Davidson writes, 'This text is hard to explain', and suggests amending it. However, Zucker's explanation⁹² seems correct according to the citation above from *Beliefs*. That is, after the cloud lifts, after the termination of the prophecy and unmediated divine guidance to Israel, the people must adhere to the majority opinion of the sages. The link between the cloud and prophecy arises also from the seventh *piyyut* in the אֶת הַלָּשׁוֹן series, which is devoted to cloud:⁹³

וְעֶרְפֵּל לְאוֹמִים יָכַס וּמִמֶּנּוּ דִּבֶּר בְּסִין / לִמְעַן יֵרָאוּ הַדְּבָרוֹת קְדוֹת מִן הָאֵשׁ בּוֹ

Mist covered the tribes and through it He spoke in Sinai, so the commandments shall be seen drilled out from the fire there.

6. *Reward and punishment in this world*

Sa'adia concludes the verses on the letter *resh* in the *tokheha* אֵם לִפִּי with the traditional subject of reward and punishment. He holds that indeed there is reward in this world, yet it is no more than a fraction of the reward in the world to come. That is, what is ordained in the Torah regarding reward in this world must be upheld, but a man may not expect material reward, which is only a part of the spiritual reward that will come entirely in the world to come. From this a conclusion emerges not only regarding the suffering of the just. Clearly, spirit has the advantage over matter, in the role of the spiritual soul on earth as the guide and master of the corporeal body. This is what he writes on the subject:⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Tobi 1982, II, p. 80.

⁹¹ Sa'adia 1941, p. 192.

⁹² Zucker 1984, pp. 453–454.

⁹³ Zulay 1964, p. 130.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 76.

רֹאֵה נָא פְּרִי תוֹרָה וְיִוָּשֶׁר / בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה לְשֵׁם טוֹב
עַל אֶחָת כַּמָּה כְּפָלָיו בְּעָתִיד / כִּי דוּגְמָה הוּא לְשֹׁכֵר טוֹב

Watch! The reward of Torah and rightness in this world is for good reputation

Its multiplicity shall be in the future, because it is only a sample for good reward.

Sa'adia enunciates this idea in *Beliefs* also:⁹⁵

Notwithstanding this, however, God does not leave His servants entirely without reward in this world for virtuous conduct and without punishment for iniquities. For such requitals serve as a sign and an example of the total compensation which is reserved for the time when a summary account is made of the deeds of God's servants.

Similar notions appear in his response to Ḥayawayh of Balkh:⁹⁶

שְׂכָרָם זֶה מִקְצָתוֹ בְּהַ זֶה כֹּל לְקֵץ

Their reward, a little of it is here, but all is at the End.

This question seems to have exercised other sages. For example, this is what the Karaite Daniel al-Qūmisī, Sa'adia's opponent, has to say:⁹⁷

A human being's mind instructs that he has a protector and guard as the Scripture says (Job 19:26): *I see God from my own flesh*. There is also retribution in this world, as might be perceived by eyes, such as earthquakes and consumption [...]. In order to acknowledge that there is requital for all deeds, yet not for every deed there are immediate requitals [...]. That is to prove that there is another world where there is requital for all deeds.

7. *The intermediary period between death and reward*

In *לְפִי בְּהָרִיךְ אִם* Sa'adia writes of the fate of the soul after departing the body:⁹⁸

פָּחָה נַפְשׁוֹ אֶל מַעֲוָה / לִיצוּעַ אֲשֶׁר יִצְעָתוּ
בְּצִוּוֹר הַחַיִּים אִם זָכָה / וְהִמְרָשְׁתָּ בְּכֶךְ הַקָּלַע
פּוֹתְרָה מִתּוֹךְ גִּדְּנָה / וְכָל שָׁכֵן מֵאֵת הָרַע
גַּם זֶה רָעָה חוֹלָה / כִּי נִוְתָּרָה כְּצִפּוֹר נִוְדָּרָה

⁹⁵ Sa'adia 1948, V:1, pp. 208–209; and cf. *ibid.*, IX:1, p. 326.

⁹⁶ Schirmann 1966, p. 39.

⁹⁷ Zucker 1984, pp. 173–174.

⁹⁸ Zulay 1964, pp. 73–74.

פָּנָרוּ הָרֶךְ וְהַעֲנוּן / אֲשֶׁר כָּל יָמָיו יְעוֹדְדָהּ
 הוֹכֵם וְנִשְׁחַת בְּשַׁחַת / וְנִפְשׁוֹ עָלָיו אוֹבְלָת
 פָּנִי לְבוֹשׁוֹ מִי יִגְלֶה / רִיחוֹ מִי יוֹכַל לְהַרִית
 פְּקִיד וְנִתּוֹן בְּאִשְׁמֻנוֹ / עַד עֵת מִתֵּן הַחֶשְׁבּוֹן

His soul flew to her dwelling to the couch which she prepared
 If he won eternal life and the wicked gained hell
 She is separated from her scabbard, all the more from a brother or
 a friend

This is another harsh evil, she remained like a wandering bird
 His soft and ample corpse, that petted him all his days
 It crushed and spoilt in Hell and his soul mourns over him
 Who will remove his clothes, who can stand his stench?
 He is deposited and placed in his tomb till the time of accounting.

On the face of it all seems clear, except for the sentences "she remained like a wandering bird" and "till the time of accounting". But the meaning of the subject-matter as a whole becomes plain from what Sa'adia writes in *Beliefs* on the question, 'What will happen to the soul at the time of separation from the body?' His answer is⁹⁹

That it [the soul] is stored up until the time of retribution [...].

The place, however, where the pure souls are kept is up on high, while that of the turbid is down below [...]. It agrees also with the remark of our early teachers: *The souls of the righteous are stored beneath the throne of glory whilst those of the wicked wander about in the world* (Šab. 152b). This and similar distinctions constitute the difference between them.

During the first period after its separation from the body, however, the soul exists for a while without a fixed abode until the body has decomposed; that is to say, until its parts have disintegrated. It consequently experiences during this period much misery, occasioned by its knowledge of the worms and the vermin and the like that pass through the body, just as a person would be pained by the knowledge that a house in which he used to live is in ruins and that thorns and thistles grown in it [...].

It is with reference to that that our early teachers say: *Vermin are as painful to the dead as needle to the flesh of a living person* (Šab. 152a). They base this remark on the statement of Scripture: *But his flesh grieveth for him, and his soul mourneth over him* (Job 14:22). That is what I understand is called *the judgment of the grave or the chastisement of the grave*.

Next let me say that the duration of its existence apart from the body extends until the time when all the souls, the creation of which has been decreed by the wisdom of the Creator, have been collected; that is to say, until the end of the existence of this world. When, then,

⁹⁹ Sa'adia 1948 VI:7, pp. 257-258.

their number has become full and they have been collected, the souls and their respective bodies will be united again [. . .] whereupon God will recompense them according to their deserts.

This notion of an interim period between the soul's separation from the body and the time of reward, which is the time of resurrection of the dead, is also found in Arabic poetry, and is known as *barzakh*. An example is Abū al-ʿAtāyih's poem on human beings:¹⁰⁰

تُفْنِيهِمُ الدُّنْيَا بَوْشَكَ زَوَالِهَا / فَجَمِيعُهُمْ يَغْرُورُهَا مَبْهُوتٌ
وَبِحَسَبِ مَنْ يَسْمُو إِلَى الشَّهَوَاتِ مَا / يَكْفِيهِ مِنْ شَهَوَاتِهِ وَيَقُوتُ
يَا بَرْزَخَ الْمَوْتَى الَّذِي نَزَلُوا بِهِ / فَهَمْ رَقُودٌ فِي ثَرَاهُ خَفُوتُ
كَمْ فِيكَ تَمَنَّى كَانَ يُوَصِّلُ حَبْلُهُ / قَدْ صَارَ بَعْدُ وَحْبَلُهُ مَبْتُوتُ

Earth will destroy them with the speed of its rotation and all are amazed because of her seductions

As much as he strives towards passions, the passions shall not suffice or maintain him

Oh purgatory of the dead people, their residence, they are asleep, silent in its soil

How many stay in you of those whose cord was connected and then they passed and their cord was disconnected.

Also in another poem:¹⁰¹

فَأَوْشِكَ عَمَّا قَلِيلٍ أَكُونُ / مِنَ الْمَوْتِ، فِي الْبَرْزَخِ الْأَبْعَدِ

I'll hasten to where I soon shall be, death, at the remote purgatory.

Likewise in yet another poem, in which Abū al-ʿAtāhiya describes what happens to the bones of the dead in graves:¹⁰²

قَدْ أَصْبَحُوا فِي بَرْزَخٍ / وَمَحَلَّةٍ مَتْرَاحِيَةٍ

Here they were placed in purgatory, in a dwelling of relief.

8. Anger as a force driving man

In the second *piyyut* in the **יְהוָה יִפְתֹּחַ** series Saʿadia details the differences between God and man, in qualities that at first glance seem shared. One of the verses reads:¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Abū al-ʿAtāhiya 1964, p. 70.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 130.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 485.

¹⁰³ Zulay 1964, p. 119.

גְּדֹלַת מֶאֶד מְכֹל הַגִּבּוֹרִים
 כִּי כֹלֵם הָאֵף מְעוֹרֵר אֶת גִּבּוֹרֵתָם
 וְאַתָּה נֹעֵר בָּאֵף וְכֹבֵשׁ וְכָל עֲוֹנוֹת עַמְּךָ וְחַטָּאוֹתָם
 יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי גְּדֹלַת מֶאֶד

You are greater than all heroes
 Because anger provokes the heroism of all of them
 You rebuke anger and subdue it and all Your people's sins and trans-
 gressions
 Lord my God, You are greater.

To understand the statement that *anger* stimulates heroism in human beings we may read what Sa'adia says in *Beliefs* on the three forces in the soul. One of these is¹⁰⁴

The impulsive faculty [. . .] which renders a person courageous and bold, and endows him with zeal for leadership and championing the common weal, and makes him vindictive and vainglorious, and other such things.

G. Sa'adia's Uniqueness as Distinct from the Arab Poets

1. Absolute asceticism, denial of freedom of will, and negation of life

All the foregoing passages from Sa'adia's *tokheḥa* לְפִי בְּהִרְךָ contain absolute negation of life and extreme asceticism that characterized certain circles among the Muslim philosophers, which he himself rejected in *Beliefs* (X:4, pp. 365–366):

I say that there are first of all people who entertain the opinion that man should lead a life of asceticism in this world, wander off into the mountains, and give himself up to weeping, melancholy, and mourning over this earthly existence. "What compels us to adopt this view," they say, "is the fact that this world is only a transient abode, whose denizens are in constant flux, never permanent." No matter how happy or serene a person may be in it, his fortune changes quickly with the result that his gladness turns to sorrow, his glory into humiliation, and his well-being into misery [. . .].

The person who strives zealously to become wise in it is overwhelmed by his folly. He that makes an effort to purify himself succumbs to his impurity [. . .].

Now I considered carefully their allegations and found them to be for the most part correct, except that they go to impossible extremes in abandoning the amenities of civilized existence.

¹⁰⁴ Sa'adia 1948 X:2, pp. 360–361.

These comments of Sa'adia are parallel to those of the Muslim ascetics as expressed in the poems of Abū al-'Atāhiya and other Arab poets such as Abū al-'Alā al-Ma'arrī (973–1058: later than Sa'adia).¹⁰⁵ On the face of it, Sa'adia did not reject the negative view of life as he also depicted it in his poetic *tokheḥa*, either. Brody, who first discovered the *tokheḥa* in the Genizah manuscripts, and Zulay, its last redactor,¹⁰⁶ both pointed out that the poem's content draws on the tenth essay of *Beliefs*, and in fact is nothing other than a poetic version of the ideas set forth there. Yet the two works are also markedly different. In the philosophical study Sa'adia singles out thirteen extreme modes of behavior. Some have argued that their multiplicity is good, as they bring well-being and pleasure to one who lives by them. They are abstinence, eating and drinking, sexual intercourse, desire, accumulation of wealth, sons, inhabiting the world, long life, dominion, revenge, wisdom, service of God, and rest for the soul. For methodological and dialectic purposes Sa'adia sets forth the arguments both for and against each of these ways of life. In the end he achieves a balance between the positive and the negative in each mode. This is in accord with the Aristotelian principle of the Golden Mean, that moral perfection in manners and deeds is the intermediate way. Sa'adia's final conclusion is this (*Beliefs* X:17, p. 399):

It has, then, become clear [. . .] that whoever believes in the preoccupation with any of the thirteen types [of human endeavor] that have been enumerated is mistaken in his view, not right in it, by reason of the fact that he demands exclusive devotion to the said activity, rejecting the association of any other with it. The consequence is that he deviates from the road leading to his goal and that he fails to attain the object of his desire [. . .]. The only proper type of conduct consists of the combination of all these classes of activities.

On the other hand, however, it is not right to select [equal] parts from each of the above-mentioned thirteen categories; one should rather take from each type of activity the suitable proportion, as dictated by science and religious law.

From the *tokheḥa*, by contrast, it is quite clear that complete abstinence is the desirable way. As a creative artist Sa'adia allowed himself to exaggerate in presenting the negative aspect of life, being influenced by Arabic literature. Moreover, the presentation of things in an extreme manner has a didactic and educational goal, namely to prevent the penitent from falling back into sin. Still, Sa'adia must

¹⁰⁵ On Abū al-'Alā al-Ma'arrī see Nicholson 1921, pp. 43 ff.; 'Abd al-Raḥmān 1990.

¹⁰⁶ See Brody 1912/3, pp. 84–85; Zulay 1964, p. 46.

not lead the Jewish worshipper in the synagogue on the Day of Atonement to utter despair of life and complete distancing from existence in this world. Such a conclusion does not conform to Jewish tradition, wherein the existence of the human race is the first commandment imposed on a man. He therefore sees fit to retain the religious connection, the belief in a just and merciful God who acts on the principle of reward and punishment. He dispels the desperation liable to grow out of his fearsome depictions, by closing the *tokheḥa* with three stanzas whose content is traditional: God's mercies and the forgiveness he grants to sinners. But in addition, he is at pains to end every second stanza throughout the entire poem with a religious and moral refrain, which connects man to his God (p. 65):

יִזְכֹּר זֹאת יְיָבוֹשׁ / וְלִפְנֵי עוֹשָׁיו יִכְנַע

Let him remember this and be ashamed, let him submit before his Maker.

In the last stanzas of the *tokheḥa*, in which Sa'adia breaks free from Arab influence as regards negation of human life, and returns to the traditional perception of God as forgiver and absolver, the *paytan* writes in the plural, as representative of the entire community praying in the synagogue. The slightness of human worth in all aspects does not lead to despair, for indeed (pp. 75–77),

רְבוּ עוֹנוֹתֵינוּ עַד לְמֵאֵד

Our sins multiply greatly,

but

מִהֶם רְבוּ רַחֲמֶיךָ [. . .]
תַּעֲנִיתֵנוּ תְּהֵא כַּפָּרֵנוּ / וְתִשְׁנוּק נַפְשֵׁנוּ לְמַחְלָה לָּהּ
תִּרְצֶה תְּשׁוּבָתֵנוּ לְחַיִּים / וּמִבְּנֵי הָעוֹלָם הַבֶּא תְּשִׁימֵנוּ

Your mercies outnumber them [. . .]

Our fast will be our atonement and the strangling of our soul a pardon for it

May You accept our repentance for life and place us among the residents of next world.

This idea, that God's mercies outnumber man's transgressions, is also the theme of a short poem by Abū Nuwās (II, p. 173):

يَا رَبِّ، إِنْ عَظُمَتْ ذُنُوبِي كَثْرَةً / فَلَقَدْ عَلِمْتُ بِأَنْ عَفْوُكَ أَعْظَمُ
إِنْ كَانَ لَا يَرْجُوكَ إِلَّا مُحْسِنٌ / فَبِمَنْ يَلُودُ وَيَسْتَجِيرُ الْمَجْرَمُ
أَدْعُوكَ رَبِّي، كَمَا أَمَرْتُ، تَضَرَّعًا / فَإِذَا رَدَدْتَ يَدِي، فَمِنْ ذَا يَرْحَمُ
مَا لِي إِلَيْكَ وَسِيلَةٌ إِلَّا الرَّجَا / وَجَمِيلُ عَفْوِكَ تَمَّ أَلَيَّ مُسْلِمُ

God, true, my transgressions are many to a great extent, but I know that your pardon outnumbers them
 If only the righteous will expect you, where will the transgressor find refuge and shelter?
 I pray to you, God, in accord with your command, with supplication, and if you reject my hand, who will be merciful?
 I have no way to you, except by hope and the grace of your pardon, by which I am saved.

Brody in his aforementioned article also considered the language of the *tokhefa*, expressing the nothingness of man, as well as examples in the second *baqqasha* intended for fast days, including, presumably, the Day of Atonement. This accords with Sa'adia's explicit statement about preaching abstinence precisely on that day. Some of the phrases in this *baqqasha*, after presentation of the greatness of God, are the following:¹⁰⁷

הן אלה קצות דרכיך וזכרתי ונבהלתי, ועוד קטונתי בעיני ונדכאתי ושפלתי, כי מה האדם להתיצב לפניך, ואנוש מה כמו לעמוד נגדך, ותחלת יסודו מן העפר, ובעודנו חי בעפר מדורו, ואחרי מותו אל עפר ישוב, ובמה יתנאה או יעז. אם בנבורה אכן חלש הוא בחיותו חמים ואף כי בחלותו ודיונון והאנחה שוברים כמו, והצרות והמצוקות נותשות נכרות. ואם בחכמה הגה הוא נבער מדעת, גלמו וחזריו לא ידע, שבתו וקומו, ארצו ורבעו ונומו, רעבו ושבעו, וחליו ומותו, ונס מה ילד יום ומה יהיה למחר לא יבין, על כן מלא לבו פחד ועצבון [. . .]. וככלי נמאס כן נבזיתי בעיני נפשי, וכנבד אֲשֶׁר הוֹשֵׁב בְּשֶׁחַת וְתִעֲבוּהוּ שְׁלֵמוֹתָיו, וכמו בעון חוללתי מראשית, על כן בושתי פני כסתי.

Indeed I remembered these small parts of Your deeds and I am terrified by them. Moreover, I underrate myself, I am depressed and laid low. For what is a human being, to stand before You; what is a man's strength, to present himself before You? For the start of his creation is earth. When he is still alive his residence is on the earth, and after his death he returns to earth, so why should he be proud or powerful? In strength, in fact he is weak when healthy, let alone when he is ill, when distress and sighing break his power and misfortune and troubles uproot his strength. In wisdom, he is in fact senseless, he does not know his body and its inner parts, his resting and rising up, his walking, lying and sleeping, his hunger and satiety, his sickness and death. He does not know either what will be in the end of his day and what is expected tomorrow. Therefore his heart is dreadful and sorrowful [. . .]. I detest myself as a detestable vessel, like a man who was dipped in the grave and his cloths abominate him, as if with a sin I was conceived from my first days. That is why my shame covers me up.

¹⁰⁷ Sa'adia 1941, pp. 66 ff.

Despite the hyperbolic renderings of the nothingness of man, Sa'adia does not go so far as to deny the human's freedom of will, as do the Arab poets still trained in the idea of predestination of the *jāhiliyya* era. This was a serious issue discussed by the sages of Islam, and the accepted view was that there was no causality in nature, and an outlook entertaining free will was heresy in Islam.¹⁰⁸ Here are two stanzas of Abū al-ʿAtāhiya on this subject (p. 177):

تَوَكَّلْ عَلَى الرَّحْمَانِ فِي كُلِّ حَاجَةٍ / أُرِدْتُ، فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يَقْضِي وَيَقْدِرُ
مَتَى مَا يُرِيدُ ذُو الْعَرْشِ أَمْرًا بَعْدَهُ / يُصْبَهُ، وَمَا لِلْعَبْدِ مَا يَتَخَيَّرُ

Trust the Merciful in everything you wish, since God decrees and is able

When he who sits on the throne wishes anything of his servant, he shall achieve it, and the servant has no choice.

There is another essential difference between Sa'adia's *tokheḥa* and the Arabic *zuhdiyyāt*. The principal theme that the Arab poets bewail in these poems is death, referring only little to social, ethical, and spiritual subjects. Their main complaint is about death lying in wait for every man, the impossibility of eluding it, and the fact that every single moment in a man's life is nothing but progress towards it. This attitude is rooted in ancient *jāhiliyya* poetry, in the idea of fatalism, destiny that cannot be altered.¹⁰⁹ By contrast, Sa'adia constructs his *piyyut* out of the complex of human life in all its facets, in none of which is there anything to impart joy to the human. Not the frustration stemming from the inability to escape death troubles the *paytan*, but the nothingness of man in the course of his life; the evil inclination that draws him to immoral deeds; the worthlessness of accumulation of wealth, and the impossibility of escaping its pursuit; the covetousness, lying, and deceit that underlie human relations; physical ailments from the moment of birth until death; disappointments that beset a person at every stage of his life: birth, youth, adulthood, fatherhood, middle age, and old age; and all that this entails.

In this way Sa'adia could rise above the benumbing subject of death, recurrent in the Arabic poems of abstinence with hardly any variety or innovation. It is especially evident in those of Abū al-ʿAtāhiya, known for the paucity of their language and the insubstantiality of

¹⁰⁸ See Goldziher 1981, pp. 111–115, 163–164.

¹⁰⁹ See Ringgren 1955, pp. 5 ff.

their rhetorical fabric.¹¹⁰ This contrasts with the work of the Abbasid poets and others, such as his contemporary Abū Nuwās and the later Abū Tammām. Sa‘adia’s *tokheḥa* displays perfect harmony of the well-defined philosophical and ethical concepts formulated in *Beliefs* with poetic expression remarkable for the beauty of its language and rhetoric. This *tokheḥa* was a favourite of Jewish congregations in the middle ages, as is evident from many copies that have survived in the Cairo Genizah, as distinct from other parts of Sa‘adia’s oeuvre; also from the fact that at least two translations and commentaries to it have been composed. One of these, by Yiṣḥaq Ha-Səfaradi, is literal and functional (a translation and commentary); the other, by an anonymous author, is philosophical (a commentary only?).¹¹¹

2. *Love of God*

This subject, which is ubiquitous in Arabic religious poetry, was not taken up by Sa‘adia in his *paytanic* composition. This is worth noting mainly in light of the fact that the Jewish poets in Spain treated it profusely in their poems.¹¹² The theme was primarily developed by the Sufi poets,¹¹³ not those from the orthodox current of Islam such as Abū al-‘Atāhiya and Abū Nuwās. Sa‘adia discusses the subject of desire (*‘ishq* in Arabic), as distinct from ‘sexual intercourse’, which is the subject of the following section, namely the seventh chapter of the tenth essay of *Beliefs*. It is the fourth of thirteen sections concerning thirteen different modes of behavior. Sa‘adia opens with the argument of the proponents of desire (pp. 374–377):

There are, namely, people who entertain the view that human conduct is best regulated by being geared to some dominant love. This, they believe, has the effect of giving subtlety to the spirit and of refining the temperament to the point where the soul becomes something gossamerlike because of its refinement.

The process [they aver] is one of an extremely delicate character, attributable to the influence of nature. A substance, originating in the look of the eye, is poured into the heart. A desire is thereupon aroused

¹¹⁰ See Introduction to Abū al-‘Atāhiya 1964, p. 6; Nicholson 1969, pp. 296–297; Ringgren 1955, p. 159.

¹¹¹ See Tobī 1998.

¹¹² See Levin 1971; Ratzaby 1991, pp. 352–359, 377–381; Scheindlin 1991, pp. 137 ff.

¹¹³ See mainly the works of Nicholson: 1921a; 1975; Arberry 1987, pp. 218ff.; Nurbakhsh 1980.

which is further strengthened and intensified by the addition of their elements until it is firmly established [. . .].

From this point they proceed further yet, making a duty of man's surrendering himself to his passion. They assert, namely, that this is only a means of testing the servants of God, so that by being taught submissiveness to love, they might learn how to humble themselves before their master and serve Him.

Now the advocates of all that has been mentioned above are really thoughtless and without intelligence. I, therefore, deem it proper in this chapter, first of all, effectively to refute the spurious doctrines propounded by them. After that, I shall demonstrate the very opposite of the theories to which they cling to be true.

I say, then, that so far as the thing they ascribe to our Lord, magnified and exalted be He, is concerned, it is inconceivable that He should use as a means of trial something that has been prohibited by Him [. . .].

This emotional state, therefore, has its appropriate place only in the relationship between husband and wife. They should be affectionate to each other for the sake of the maintenance of the world.

As George Vajda has shown,¹¹⁴ here Sa'adia was influenced by the Arabic composition entitled *Kitāb al-Zahra* by Muḥammad b. Dāwūd b. 'Alī al-Iṣfahānī (d. 907), who belonged to the Zāhirī stream in Islam. This stream rejects the ascription of hidden meanings (*bāṭin*) to the Qur'ānic verses and commandments. This author dismisses the concept of 'love of God' that was current among ninth-century Muslim mystics. It transpires that the Sufis believed that the love of God in older mystics might be strengthened by their gazing at the comely facial features of novice monks. In *Beliefs*, therefore, Sa'adia wholly rejects the connection held by the Sufis to exist between desire and love of God. In the same vein he eschews introducing phrases intimating love of God in his poetry. As stated, the Jewish poets of Spain did otherwise, as did, needless to say, the sixteenth-century kabbalist poets of the Safed school, foremost among them El'azar Azikri, composer of the *piyyut* יִרְדָּן נִפְיּוּת.

Sa'adia's negative attitude to 'love of God' matches his objection to mysticism and the use of terms of personification for God, especially in view of the fierce criticism levelled by the Karaites at the Rabbanites on this matter. In his translations and commentaries to the Bible, Sa'adia interprets the terms of personification by means of the *ta'wīl*.¹¹⁵ In *Beliefs*, II:10 he carefully explains these terms. In

¹¹⁴ Vajda 1932; 1974.

¹¹⁵ On the *ta'wīl* in Sa'adia see Zucker 1984, pp. 38 ff.; Tobi (*ta'wīl*).

the *ofan* poems in his *yošerot* the mystic element is very slight, in contrast to the norm in this kind of classical *piyyut*.¹¹⁶ And he indeed interprets *Song of Songs* as an allegory, yet not in the usual way in the middle ages as love between the soul and its God but as love between the People of Israel and the God of Israel, in keeping with the midrashic rendering of this biblical book.¹¹⁷

H. Conclusion

Sa'adia was not alone among the tenth-century poets of the East in referring in his work to philosophical subjects influenced by the *zuhd* and Sufism of the Arabs. His contemporary Yehuda b. Quraysh, who lived on westernmost edge of North Africa, cited in his famous *Risāla* two stanzas of Abū al-ʿAtāhiya, whom he nicknamed *al-zāhid* (the Ascetic) because his poems were known by the name *zuhdiyyāt*.¹¹⁸ David b. Ha-Nasi, another innovative poet of Babylonian origin, but who was also in the Land of Israel and in Egypt, and was active in the early eleventh century,¹¹⁹ wrote a poem entitled *zuhdiyya* in the manuscript. Its theme is abstinence, akin to the poems of asceticism of Abū al-ʿAtāhiya, although like Sa'adia he took care to end the poem in the conciliatory manner arising from the Jewish tradition.¹²⁰ The influence of Arabic literature on Hebrew poetry in those times was transmitted, among other ways, through the letters of *Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*, as attested by the *proverbs* of Saʿīd b. Bābshād Ha-Kohen, who lived at the end of the tenth century.¹²¹

No claim is made here that in his *paytanic* works Sa'adia was influenced directly by Arabic poetry, contemporary with him or earlier, even though no grounds exist for the argument that he was unacquainted with Arabic poetry. More precisely, the direct influence came from the Muslim academic philosophical literature, which was an inseparable part of the world of the Arab poets. In that age of

¹¹⁶ See Tobi 1982, I, p. 173.

¹¹⁷ See Ratzaby 1962; Qāfiḥ 1962, pp. 9 ff.

¹¹⁸ See Ibn Quraysh 1984, p. 281; Bargès edition, pp. 79, 120–121; Katz edition, p. 137; Vajda 1954, p. 386. The poem from which the two stanzas are taken was published in his *ḏiwān* on p. 204.

¹¹⁹ For the time of this poet see Fleischer 1990a, p. 59, n. 8.

¹²⁰ Published by Marcus 1943/4, pp. 54–58.

¹²¹ See Fleischer 1990a, pp. 135 ff. and Appendix One below.

the rise of the value of philosophy in the cultural world of the people of the East, particularly neo-Platonic philosophy imbued with Christian, Persian, and Jewish elements, poetry too became open to the themes of this philosophy. The first to engage in it, as was common in those generations, were the Arab poets, who were then followed by the Jewish poets.

Because Sa'adia avoided, apparently deliberately and knowingly, treading the paths of Arabic poetry in its formal and prosodic aspects, it is not easy to detect his connection with Arabic poetry in terms of language and content. But he was undoubtedly exposed to Arabic ascetic, academic, and poetic literature. This is clearly evident in his philosophical work *Beliefs*, in which Arabic terms such as *dunyā* (this world, the lower world, as distinct from the world to come) and *zuhd* (asceticism) carry exactly the senses conveyed in the Arabic literature.

Sa'adia's central place in this respect arose from his being at the forefront, the pioneer blazing the trail for those who followed. Just as he was the first to contend with contemporary philosophy with its own tools, so was he the first to open the gates of *paytanut* to new subjects and ways of expression taken from the world of the Arab philosophers and poets. However, Sa'adia, here as in other areas of his writing, was an independent author. What seems to be imitation is no other than a new independent construction, which does not hesitate to take from anything it encounters, blending it in and absorbing it, and presenting an original work as a result. In this Sa'adia differs from the Jewish poets in Spain, whose subjection to the values of Arabic poetry and culture is famous. They, more than drawing from Sa'adia's well in poetry, took the path of his pupil Dunash b. Labraṭ. Neḥemya Allony has denoted this difference with the terms *shu'ūbiyya* and *'arabiyya*.¹²² In philosophy too, the poets of Spain differed from Sa'adia in their attachment to Arabic poetry. However, our concern is not with that but with Sa'adia's philosophical poetry; nor is it with Spanish philosophical poetry, a subject to be deliberated separately later.

In this chapter we did not address two polemic philosophical compositions by Sa'adia written in the form of poetry: *Responses to Ḥayawayh of Balkh*, who asked questions on the Bible, and *Essa Māshali*, which is a debate with the Karaites over their doctrine. The essence of both works is not poetry; rather, they are a kind of didactic poem,

¹²² Allony 1979a.

namely academic material set in the form of poetry, as was common in the Middle Ages. Nor have we studied in detail all the parallels between the tenth essay in *Beliefs* and the *tokheḥa* אֵם לְפִי בְּהִרְדָּךְ, which in many aspects may be seen as a poetic rendering of his ideas.

As stated, the *tokheḥa*, the series בְּרָכִי נַפְשִׁי, and the two *baqqashot* are the main *paytanic* works in which Sa'adia introduces philosophical concepts. Yet by no means do they represent a systematic philosophical doctrine: first and foremost these writings were intended for prayer, for an emotional and experiential context, not a scholarly one. Of course, this is plain also from the purely literary design, incomparably more so than in the two above-mentioned polemical essays, but this is not the place to expand on that. Well kept too is the character of the *paytanic* works, whose philosophical ideas arise in them only as extraneous matter, not as the core. Not surprisingly, Sa'adia succeeded in preserving the special qualitative nature of these three compositions. The *tokheḥa* is a work of ethics with an air of melancholy, in which the effect of the poetry of abstinence of the school of Abū al-'Atāhiya and Abū Nuwās is conspicuous. בְּרָכִי נַפְשִׁי is a series of hymns meant to show God's greatness over the entire universe, with the use of scientific philosophical perceptions (albeit with midrashic materials too), a harbinger of *Keter Malkhut* by Shlomo b. Gabirol a century later; and the two *baqqashot* are prayers, one for days of joy and one for days of sorrow and fasting.

This is Sa'adia's greatness: his turbulent and variegated personality had many facets. We have not touched on this, but dealt only with him as poet and philosopher, both of which aspects merge into a certain unity in his *paytanic* work.

CHAPTER FOUR

SA'ADIA'S POETICS: OLD WINE IN A NEW BOTTLE

A. *Introduction*

Sa'adia and his poetry and thought on poetry entered the world at the time of the decline and fall of the Eastern *paytanic* literature, after the work of the great names among its creators in the classical period. The foremost of these had been Yose b. Yose, Yannay, El'azar Ha-Qilliri, and Pinḥas. Sa'adia may well have looked back at the glorious past of Hebrew *paytanut* and compared it with the effete and jejune *paytanic* writing of his own day. The latter was too weak either to bear the weight of the centuries-old *paytanic* tradition or to match the innovations of the highly esteemed Arabic poetry. Like Moshe b. 'Ezra in Spain over two centuries later, in his book *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-al-Mudhākara*, Sa'adia in the East in the first half of the tenth century embarked on the systemisation of the poetics of Hebrew literature of the classical period, including guidance and instruction for the poet in writing poetry.

However, Sa'adia distinctly differed from Ibn 'Ezra in two aspects. First, Ibn 'Ezra wrote his work on Hebrew poetics towards the end of his life, for in his youth, at the end of the eleventh century, he was still immersed in that very classical period. Sa'adia, by contrast, appeared after the classical age of the Eastern *piyyut*. As a young man, in 902, he wrote the first version of the book *Ha-Egron*, in which he summarised his views on Hebrew poetry. Thereafter his pen never rested from its engagement in Hebrew poetics, not only as formulated in the second version of *Ha-Egron* but in his works of philology, commentary, and philosophy. Furthermore, Sa'adia harnessed his own liturgical and poetic writing generally to the dissemination of his notions on poetics, not through a lyrical rendering of theoretical rules, but through writing poetry deliberately and knowingly according to the poetic principles that seemed right to him.

Secondly, Ibn 'Ezra compared the Hebrew poetry of his day with the Arabic poetry that had inspired it, taking it as a model for excellent writing that was to be imitated and whose paths were to be

followed. But Sa'adia spurned the ways and means of the Hebrew *piyyut* of recent generations and of his own times. Ibn 'Ezra's course is summed up in his famous words in chapter eight of his poetic work, whose concern is 'to guide you on the best way in the craft of Hebrew poetry according to the Arabic rule':¹

But since in poetry especially we follow in the footsteps of the Arabs, we are bound to do as they do as far as we able [. . .]. As I have already said above, that poetry is the wisdom of the Arabs, and that the Jews follow them in this art, I will not draw attention to the words of the one² who denies the significance of these devices as part of the theory of rhetoric, and speaks of the slight need to do as they do according to reality and ability. This is because the Arabs concurred on them, and also made them vehicles for their writing and equipment for their versifying, until through displaying them in their poems they become pleasing in their eyes, and in their absence they became dull and ugly, even if they are not provable but conventional. We must agree with them in these matters, according to their reality and our ability, as it is not right that we should follow them in some things and not in the rest.

Porphirius of Tyre, the author of the *Introduction to the Work of Philosophy*, writes that crafts are performable only with their equipment and tools. Their performers present them through the names of the tools and the equipment, and when ignorant people see them there, they look like something ridiculous and worthy of scorn.

Sa'adia, by contrast, wished to reject the influence of Arabic poetry, in its forms and content, and in its treatment of language. Although he introduced the philosophical element into his poetry, in the manner of the Arab poets, he eschewed writing in the style of the courtly Arabic poetry (chapter 3 above). Yet from our knowledge of his familiarity with Arabic literature generally, including works on Arabic poetics, we must conclude that he was acquainted with this poetry (see below). Furthermore, in his locale Hebrew secular poetry was written under the influence of Arabic poetry. For example, Sa'adia's own pupil, Dunash b. Labraṭ, in about the middle of the tenth century moved to Cordoba in Spain, where he became the foremost

¹ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, pp. 163, 223–225.

² The object of Ibn 'Ezra's comment here is not clear. Halkin, *ibid.*, p. 82, surmises that it is the pupils of Mōnaḥem, who took a stand against the introduction of the Arabic metre into Hebrew poetry, and he even mentions the statement of Yəhuda Ha-Levi in the *Kuzari* on the subject. But between the lines of Ibn 'Ezra it is evident that the arguments of 'the one who denies' actually referred to the *badī'*, the Arab doctrine of rhetorical ornamentation, and not to metre.

innovator of Hebrew secular poetry under the influence of Arabic poetry. Recent research on Hebrew poetry based on the Genizah documents increasingly substantiates the opinion that Hebrew secular poetry in the Middle Ages under the influence of Arabic poetry originated in the East in the tenth century quite independently of the Spanish secular poetry; it may even have been in the ninth century (chapter 2 above). In his writing—the theory and the poetry—Sa'adia clearly aims to revive an ancient neglected and forgotten tradition. He wishes to return to the classical *piyyut*—as he saw it—in language, in liturgical genres, and in *paytanic* structures. In no way is his writing a direct development of the ninth-century eastern Hebrew *piyyut*, but an extraordinary and revolutionary attempt to halt the development, or more exactly the decline, of Hebrew poetry. In several places in his essays Sa'adia rightly expresses admiration for the works of the earliest *paytanists* and reservations about the later ones. He heaps extravagant praise on Ha-Qilliri and even writes *paytanic* works in obvious and deliberate imitation of him, almost to the point of plagiarism by today's standards.³ Such an approach is discernible also in his Arabic preface to *Ha-Egdon*, in his examples of excellent poetry:⁴

Where I have seen fit to adduce for it examples from the work of the early poets, Yose b. Yose, Yannay, Ela'zar, Yehoshua^c and Pinḥas, I have done so. But the words of the poets nearer to us [in time] I do not cite, except to praise the writing of anyone whose words merit it.⁵

In general, Sa'adia aimed to write the rules and ways of ancient Hebrew *paytanut* not as a researcher of the genre but with a deliberate and stated didactic intention, directed at the poets of his day who had grown apart from the ancient tradition. Sa'adia's work was unprecedented in Jewish literature, even though he sets out a clearly formulated poetics binding on poets throughout the age of the early *piyyut*; it simply had not been committed to writing. Isolated rules were in fact written down by the earliest poets. For example, as far back as the prayers two factors were considered obligatory, based

³ See Tobi 1982, I, p. 231 and n. 15 on p. 390, and also pp. 62 ff.

⁴ See Allony 1969, p. 155.

⁵ His negative view of the later Eastern *piyyut* also contains the kernel of Sa'adia's refusal to include *piyyutim* in his prayer-book, except as necessitated by minimal consideration of the prevalent customs in his time and place; and what he did include was nothing more than the ancient works, or his own, written as a good example of *piyyutim* according to the correct poetic rules. See Tobi 1995.

on an evident feeling for the aesthetic: one was that a blessing adjacent to another (ברכה הסמוכה להברחה) may not open with *Barukh*; the other was, 'Next to the closing is like the closing' (סמוך להחתימה) (מעין החתימה). From prayer these rules passed to the *piyyut*, which in essence is a prayer, and in it they again acquired literary-aesthetic force.⁶ We also find in a midrash (*Qohelet Rabba* 1:33) a distinction regarding the manner in which the *paytanim* used the acrostic: 'This *paytan*, when he writes a *piyyut* according to the alphabet, at times he uses all the letters and at times he omits some'.

Sa'adia, then, set down the poetics of the ancient *piyyut*, which was entirely free of Arabic poetics even though this had been its fellow citizen from the mid-seventh century on.⁷ Nevertheless, Arabic poetics greatly influenced Sa'adia's writing. This is evident first in the very existence of a theoretical discussion of poetry, but also in the particular elements that constitute it. In this Sa'adia almost entirely followed Arabic poetics. He took from Arabic literature the vessel of poetics and filled it with distinctly Jewish-Hebrew content. He undoubtedly wished to defend the honour of Hebrew poetry before Arabic poetry. He did the same in respect of Hebrew language in his commentaries. His successors, especially Shəmu'el b. Ḥofni and Hāye Gaon, did likewise in respect of the Jewish *halakha* in their codices.

B. Sa'adia's Writings on Poetics

As far as we know, Sa'adia was the first author in Jewish literature to deliberate on the rules of poetry as artistic writing with its three foundations: form, language, and content. A detailed discussion of this is found in two of his works, the book *Ha-Egron*⁸ and the book *Ha-Galui*.⁹ But in several of his other compositions also—*A Commentary*

⁶ Cf. Jawitz 1910, pp. 2–3, 11–13; Fleischer 1975, pp. 25, 60, etc.

⁷ Cf. Fleischer 1979, p. 16.

⁸ Passages from the book that survived and were discovered by various researchers were published together in an edition by Allony (Sa'adia 1969). For our purposes the important parts are mainly the prefaces to this composition: the preface to the Hebrew edition, which is the first version of the book, written in 902, when Sa'adia was aged 20; and the preface to the Arabic edition, written 20 years later. This work was written specifically for the needs of poets, as arises from Sa'adia's statement in his Arabic preface and from the title of the Arabic version: *Kūāb Uṣūl al-Shi'r al-Ibrānī* (A Book of Elements of Hebrew Poetry). Allony commented at length on Sa'adia's poetics in *Ha-Egron* in his edition, pp. 75–85; and cf. Goldenberg 1973.

⁹ This work too, which has not come down to us in full, was written in two versions: the Hebrew, the first, which is divided into verses and given cantillation

on *Sefer Yəsirah*,¹⁰ his commentaries on books of the Bible,¹¹ *Kutub al-Lugha*,¹² and *Beliefs and Opinions*¹³—he expresses his views on poetry, especially its language element. To all these must be added the passage from the Cambridge manuscript (T-S.8K12), produced by Sa'adia's school, which discusses aspects of prose and rhymed prose.¹⁴

marks, like the Bible books; and the Arabic version, the second, which is a translation of and commentary on the Hebrew. Sa'adia wrote the book primarily as self-defence in his controversy with the exilarch David b. Zakkay and his chief supporter Aharon b. Sarjādo, but also as an example of a good Hebrew style written in the biblical idiom, in keeping with Sa'adia's approach. He prepared the Arabic version in response to his opponents' outrage on his daring to write a work modelled on the Bible, that is, with division into verses and the use of cantillation. The introduction to this work, with its Hebrew translation, was published by Harkavy 1892, pp. 149 ff. See especially pp. 152 ff. Sa'adia's theory may be grasped from the Sa'adia's Arabic commentary on his composition, where he explains his usages of language as set out in the Hebrew version. See, e.g., the passage published by Harkavy 1892, pp. 186–189, in which Sa'adia sets out his method of deriving verbs from nouns, a masculine noun from a feminine noun, use of metaphor, and so on, and also the passage published by Stern 1955, pp. 146–147. On the work as a whole see Tobī 1991a.

¹⁰ Sa'adia 1972; on matters of poetry and language see, e.g., pp. 49, 132.

¹¹ Not all his commentaries to the Bible books have survived. The commentaries to Psalms (1966), Proverbs (1976), Job (1973), Daniel (1981), and the five *Megillot* (1962) were published by R. Yosef Qāfiḥ. And cf. Klein 1977/8. Passages from the commentary to Isaiah were published by Joseph and Hartwig Derenbourg, Paris 1896, and by Yəhuda Ratzaby (Sa'adia 1994). On the commentary to Genesis, portions *Bəreshit-Toldot*, see Zucker 1984; 1959. The commentary to the book of Exodus was published recently by Ratzaby (Jerusalem 1998). Cf. also Qāfiḥ 1963, who presents, among others, passages from Sa'adia's commentary to the Pentateuch. Various passages from Sa'adia's commentaries have been published by different scholars, but we shall not detail them here. See Kasher-Mandelbaum 1959, pp. 98–100, 114, 119. Regarding the commentary to *Qohelet* published by Qāfiḥ 1962, Sh. Pines has pointed out that it is not by Sa'adia but by Yiṣḥaq b. Ghiyāth. See Pines 1964. We note three places in Sa'adia's commentary to the Bible books that are of importance for us: at the beginning of the commentary to the Pentateuch he presents a theoretical discussion on biblical style in matters such as syntax and metaphor; his preface to Isaiah (Ben-Shammai 1991) functions as well as a general introduction to *Prophets*, including an significant discussion on *majāz* (metaphoric expressions); and in Psalms (Qāfiḥ edition 1966, pp. 18 ff.) he details the parts of speech.

¹² Passages from it have been published by various scholars, especially Skoss. For a complete publication of the passages that have survived see Dotan 1997. Important for our purposes, for example, is the second section of the essay, *ibid.*, pp. 318 ff. Passages from it were published by Harkavy 1908, in which Sa'adia deals with the ways of embellishing the language (*tafkḥīm*).

¹³ In the second article Sa'adia discusses borrowed expressions in the Bible (pp. 118–120 in Sa'adia edition 1948).

¹⁴ First published by Schechter, *JQR* 14 (1907), pp. 504–506 (= Schechter 1908, pp. 135–137), with a German translation and notes by Bacher, *ibid.*, pp. 742–744. Allony regarded it as Sa'adia's composition, an 'epilogue' to the Hebrew edition (Sa'adia 1969, pp. 386–389, and Allony's discussion on it in the introduction, pp. 79–85, 127–128). But scholars have criticised his attributing it to Sa'adia: Goldenberg 1973, pp. 120–121; Fleischer 1977a, p. 72, ns. 16–17.

Obviously, Sa'adia's discussions of a certain matter in various places in his writing may be compared, as may the content of Dunash's critique in his *Criticism on Sa'adia*.¹⁵ Similarly, language matters in Sa'adia's system cannot be considered separately from his views of poetry. The language he discusses is mostly poets' language. In his *Commentary on Sefer Yashirah* (end of chapter five, p. 132) he says this on the omission of defective letters from the root: 'In the words of the *paytanim* [in the original *al-shu'arā'*, namely 'the poets'] they say דָּ instead of דִּ, and write down עֵ instead of עִ, and also שֵּ instead of שִּ; and many more instances like this'. Furthermore, Sa'adia as we know was greatly influenced by Arabic language scholarship, which flourished in its association with Arabic poetry.¹⁶ Allony¹⁷ likens Sa'adia's classification of parts of speech in his Arabic preface to *Ha-Egron*, and in his preface to the commentary to Psalms, to the classification by the Muslim author Tha'lab (830–904) in his book *Qawā'id al-Shi'r* (Elements of Poetry). Both writers devise their classifications as part of their study of poetry.

C. Language and Poetry

Scholarship in Arabic poetry developed in the second half of the ninth century, at the start of the Abbasid dynasty (750 CE onwards). In its wake the traditional disciplines of Islamic religion and Arab history began to flourish (*al-'ulūm al-naqliyya* or *al-shar'iyya*). These arose from the problems found in the interpretation of the Qur'ān in that period of Arabisation, namely the entry of many non-Arab peoples into the territories of the Arab-Muslim nation and the per-

¹⁵ The book was published by Schroeter (Dunash 1866) from a manuscript in very poor edition, without any real discussion of issues arising from the text as to Sa'adia's theory on matters of language and poetry, nor on Dunash's theory on these matters. Also missing are glossaries for the words discussed in the books, which could have facilitated its use. In the course of the present work I drew up a detailed glossary of words and terms arising from the composition, both for comparison with Sa'adia's usages in his *paytanic* work and his Hebrew compositions, and for comparison with his system of language and of poetry in his various works. The errors in the copying of Dunash's critique were pointed out by Abraham b. 'Ezra at the end of his book *Sifat Yeter* (Ibn 'Ezra 1895). On the attribution of the composition to Dunash b. Labraṭ see Badillos 1991; Oshri 1988, pp. 26–29.

¹⁶ Cf., e.g., Nicholson 1969, pp. 282–283.

¹⁷ Sa'adia 1969, pp. 76–77.

manent settlement of Arab tribal people in the lands of the Fertile Crescent and the Iranian countries. The consolidation of the religious elements in the Abbasid caliphate deepened preoccupation with the Islamic sacred texts. For perfect understanding of them it was necessary to resort to the original Arabic language and culture in the Arabian Peninsula, where the Qur'ān and Islam had originated. Arab Muslims therefore began to research ancient Arabic poetry, to systematise it as an authoritative source for understanding the Qur'ān. This required study of poetry in general, not only its linguistic element. The work of the early poets who lived before Islam (*shu'arā' al-jāhiliyya*) and also of those coeval with Muḥammad (*mukhaḍramūn*) thus came to be greatly admired. The poetry of poets born and living after the advent of Islam (*islāmiyyūn* or *mutaqaddimūn*) was accordingly held in lower esteem. Only at the end of the eighth century, after the study of Arabic poetry had discarded the religious-linguistic connection, did a tendency develop to rebel against the classical features of Arabic poetry of the *jāhiliyya*, particularly against the exclusive reign of the *qaṣīda*. Thus, the Abbasid poet Abū Nuwās (d. approximately 814) cast aside the obligatory norm of including the motif of *aṭlāl* in the opening (*nasīb*) of the *qaṣīda*. The poets of that age also revived the *maqṭū'āt*, namely the short poems, and began to write in the new highly embellished style (*badī'*) under the influence of Persian poetry. The Arabic works on poetics, the first of which is *Kitāb al-Shi'r wa-al-Shu'arā'* (The Book of Poetry and Poets) by Ibn Qutayba (828–889), contain arguments in favour of the new poetry and on the need to criticise poetry according to aesthetic evaluations alone, without any connection to its time and place. Some eleventh-century essays even express the superiority of the later poetry to the earlier.¹⁸ These developments were to some extent associated with the religious/political struggle between the descendants of the Arab tribes and those of the non-Arab peoples who had converted to Islam regarding the superiority of Arab culture (*'arabiyya*) to that of other peoples (*shū'ubiyya*).¹⁹

Sa'adia, who was certainly aware of these various tendencies in the spiritual world of the Arab-Muslim culture, wished to preserve the status of Hebrew language and Jewish culture. In particular he wanted to demonstrate the richness of Hebrew, despite its deterioration

¹⁸ On all this see Nicholson 1969, pp. 285 ff.; Cantarino 1975, pp. 9–26.

¹⁹ See Allony 1979a, pp. 85–110.

since the exile of the people of Israel from their land and the ending of the prophecy. His chief concern was the potential danger to the Jewish faith when the Qur'ān was elevated as a divine masterpiece of language, that no man had the power to imitate (*i'jāz al-qur'ān*). Such a position was liable to undermine the status of the Bible as divine revelation and as the source of the Jewish religion. He mainly feared a severance of the linguistic tie to the Bible and the problems in understanding it that could be anticipated. Therefore he saw, for the first time in Jewish literature, a need to produce a literary translation and an interpretation of the Bible. This would bring it closer to the broader strata of the Jewish people, among whom the use of Arabic was steadily spreading. But for that very reason he also saw a need to restore to use the biblical layer of the Hebrew language in all spheres of literary writing, but especially poetry. As he states,²⁰ he discerned

that many Jews are not versed in the purity of our simple language, let alone its difficult words, and when they speak, many of the words are with mistakes, and when they write poems most of the ancient elements are rarely present, while the neglected ones [of those elements] are more. It is the same with rhymed stanzas, to the extent that the Bible itself has for them become like an arcane text and a strange composition.²¹

By Sa'adia's day writing in Hebrew was limited almost entirely to poetry, as Arabic had become widespread for other kinds of writing. Therefore Sa'adia concentrated on poetry in order to reinforce the status of Hebrew. But another factor operated here also, namely the Arabs' particular pride in their language, especially their poetry and its unique prosody. This was primeval Arabic writing that had emerged from the Arabian Peninsula. It had not grown up under the influence of foreign cultures, and the Arabs saw reflected in it all their history, culture, and tradition. Accordingly, analogous to the preoccupation with Arabic poetry, and in order to contend with it spiritually and culturally, Sa'adia promoted Hebrew poetry. Again, under the influence of Arab philology, he focused on the biblical layer of the language, but also on the ancient *paytanic* works, whose authors he assiduously named, more than did with the later *paytanim*. These he named only when he believed that their 'words merit it'.

²⁰ Sa'adia 1969, pp. 151–153.

²¹ See also Allony 1979a.

Thus, of all the later *paytanim* Sa'adia saw fit to record only Nissi al-Nahrawānī, most probably because of Nissi's evident tendency to incorporate biblical elements into his poetry.²²

Yet Sa'adia did not propose to disqualify the use of later elements of the language in Hebrew poetry, even those influenced by Aramaic and other languages, either in vocabulary or in form. As for vocabulary, in *Ha-Egron* he suggested words for the use of the poets from the Bible, for this was his main intention in the restoration of the biblical element to poetry, but also from post-biblical literature. N. Allony gives the statistics of the origin of words in the fragments of *Ha-Egron* that have come down to us. He calculates that about eighty percent of them originate in the Bible and about twenty percent in the rabbinic literature.²³ In Sa'adia's view, all Hebrew words are proper for use in poetry and literary writing generally. What is present in the Bible is just a part of Hebrew's linguistic treasury; moreover, some things in the Bible cannot be understood at all without the assistance of the rabbinic language. These ideas, set down by Sa'adia in his preface to *Kitāb al-Ṣab'īn Lafẓa al-Mufrada* (The Book of the Seventy Unique Words),²⁴ are apparently directed against the Karaites,²⁵ but they do furnish support for our position on Sa'adia's view of the Hebrew language as a whole. He states in the preface that the Hebrew-language knowledge of the transmitters of the Mishna and the Talmud was greater than that of ensuing generations. They were nearer to the time of the prophets, and they conversed with their pupils in words that were difficult for anyone who did not wish to study their writings. In form too Sa'adia followed the Sages and the *paytanim*, in that he did not hold as sacrosanct the principle of three root letters. He considered the consonants present in all the forms derived from the root (except for defective letters), and also permitted and praised the coining of new words by syllogism, even though they were not present in the Bible.²⁶ Sa'adia took the same approach to the poetry that he himself wrote²⁷ and to his Bible commentary.²⁸

²² On him see Bernstein 1957; Sa'adia 1969, by the index, p. 522; Schirmann 1966, pp. 23–28.

²³ Sa'adia 1969, pp. 63–75.

²⁴ Allony 1958, pp. 14–16.

²⁵ Cf. Klar 1954, pp. 260 ff.

²⁶ For details see Tobi 1982, I, pp. 242–244. On the link of the *paytanim* through their language system to the rabbinic *midrashim*, see Mirsky 1966.

²⁷ See Tobi, 1982, I, pp. 270–277.

²⁸ See Tobi 1984.

Principal element in Sa'adia's linguistic method is syllogism, as scholars have already noted.²⁹ In his view one may, and even should, create new forms from any root, as verb inflections and noun patterns, on the models of forms accepted and found in other roots. The *paytanists* did so, and so did Sa'adia in his literary writing. The scholars of Spain did not do so, as noted by Moshe b. 'Ezra. The latter took to task not only Shlomo b. Gabirol for creating verbs from nouns (שִׁפָּה from מִיִּשְׁפָּה and מְשֻׁדָּה from שֹׁדֵם), criticising him sharply on other matters too, but also Shemu'el Ha-Nagid, whom he generally praised highly.³⁰ Ibn 'Ezra would allow only syllogism of a verb from a verb, and this too only within the constraints of metre and rhyme:³¹

Since poetry is stubborn and rhyming is inevitable, the leading scholars of our nation were lenient to infer new nouns in paradigms, which exist in other nouns. They practised them as they practised the verbs, which are inferred from their likes. But syllogism of nouns exists in Hebrew only in tradition, as is the custom in Arabic, since the noun specifies a certain thing, not anything else [. . .]. Thus, if you find any of the roots, which might be inflected only in נפעל or הפעיל or פעול, inflect it only as you find it.

Abraham b. 'Ezra argued likewise.³² These criticisms too derive from Dunash's *Criticism* of Sa'adia, stating that a noun could not be inferred from a noun, but only a verb from a verb.³³

The different approaches of Sa'adia and the scholars of Spain on this matter reflect the difference in principle between the two chief schools of Arabic philology mentioned above, Basra and Kufa. Scholars of the former, who upheld the idea of syllogism (*qiyās*) in respect of philosophy and studies of religion, upheld it similarly in respect of language study. But they stressed the element of logic in the development of language, and therefore allowed the creation of new words

²⁹ Zulay 1964, pp. 19 ff.; Fleischer 1965, pp. 392 ff.; Goldenberg 1973, pp. 129 ff.

³⁰ On Ibn Gabirol: Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 209, without stating his name, and on Ha-Nagid, pp. 63–65: 'Those who envied him and rejected him attacked him, from his own generation and those who came later [. . .] and because of his syllogism from some of the traditional nouns'.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 203–205.

³² See *Sefer Sahut*, G.H. Lipmann edition, Fürth 1827, p. 23b. Abraham b. 'Ezra even prohibited syllogism from 'strange' forms of verbs, e.g., from the form וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה.

³³ Dunash 1866, §95 (pp. 24–25), on the word פֶּרֶשׁוֹנָה (Judges 3:23), which Sa'adia interpreted from the root פֶּרַשׁ. See also §105 (p. 31) and §108 (p. 33), in which Dunash also criticised Sa'adia for his linguistic syllogism.

only in normal forms, and not in strange and unusual forms, or those not found in the conventional sources, such as the Qur'ān and poetry. The Kufans, however, maintained the notion of imitation (*taqlīd*), in respect of philosophy and religion studies, taking a conservative approach. But in language they actually expanded the field of creative writing, by permitting the invention of new forms according to a given form, even if it was strange and unusual, whatever its sources, including the vernacular, because they did not recognise an accepted logical norm. The scholars of Baghdad wished to compromise. One of their important representatives is Ibn Qutayba, who in grammar was an adherent of the normative Basran school but in Arabic philology generally, and in poetry especially, followed the Kufans. Sa'adia seems to have followed Ibn Qutayba's course, for in *Kitāb al-Luġha* he lays down the conservative normative approach, dealing with biblical language only. In his other theoretical studies, such as *Ha-Galui* and *Ha-Egron*, and in his *paytanic* work, he presents the more liberal approach. A separate examination is needed of whether Ibn Qutayba directly influenced Sa'adia, as he influenced Moshe b. 'Ezra, through his essay *Kitāb al-Shi'r wa-al-Shu'arā'*, along with other Arab authors.³⁴

The Karaites, like the Basrans, rejected the concept of syllogism in language, rejecting all sources written after the Bible. An example is *The Song of the Vine* (שִׁיר הַנֶּפֶץ) by Moshe b. Asher, father of the famous Massorete Aharon b. Asher, who lived at the end of the

³⁴ Particulars of the controversy between the two schools (*ikhtilāf al-baṣriyyīn wa-al-kūfiyyīn*) were summarised by Abū al-Barakāt 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Anbārī (d. 1181) in his book *al-Anṣāf*; and Abū al-Baqā' al-'Akbarī (d. Baghdad 1219) in his book *al-Tabayīn*. One hundred and two points of difference are briefly recorded in an Arabic passage published by Weil 1913, pp. 109–105. See Shin'ar 1974, pp. 58–60. On the problems of syllogism in Arabic lexicography see Kopf 1976, pp. 89–114. From the Arab lexicographers and the philologists it emerges clearly that they customarily created new forms by way of analogy, to revel in the power of expression of the Arabic language and to enrich it, even where these forms were superfluous for practical use. They were nothing but 'the product of linguistic acrobatics, and arose principally from the philological rivalry that existed between the caliphs and great personages of the kingdom and in professional debates and discussions frequently held among various scholars and between a pupil and his master'. Kopf 1976, pp. 109, 114. Even Sa'adia followed this course, not only in his works of theory but also in his *paytanic* work, in his attempt to defend the glory of Hebrew against Arabic. Typical is his remark in his commentary to Exodus 7:16 on the words עָרָה כָּהֵן. He gives ten synonyms in Hebrew with this meaning, in order to prove the richness of the Hebrew language as against Arabic, in which, he states, there is only one phrase, *ilā al-'ān*. The passage was published by Harkavy 1900.

ninth century. This poem is based entirely on the Bible, in language and locutions as well as in concepts.³⁵ Karaite scholars, such as Daniel al-Qumīṣī, who lived in the late ninth and early tenth century, came out against the *piyyutim* and their language.³⁶ At most they permitted saying *piyyutim* as an addition to the obligatory prayers, composed of Bible verses, especially from Psalms, and not the version set down by the Sages.³⁷ Sa'adia, an opponent of the Karaites, was closer to the system of the Kufan scholars. He inclined to negate syllogism in Bible interpretation that the Karaites allowed themselves,³⁸ but to affirm it in respect of language, so as not to invalidate the prayers composed by the Sages and the *paytanic* works, especially the earliest. Yet as regards the theory of grammar proper, as is evident from his essay *Kutub al-Lughā*, Sa'adia accepted the Basrans' system in the same way as Ibn Qutayba.³⁹

The poets of Spain were entirely different in respect of language. They adopted the Basran-Karaite approach, which negates syllogism in language and the use of layers of post-biblical language. They submitted totally to the Arab-Islamic notion that only the language of the holy scripture—the Qur'ān—and the poetry written before it were worthy to serve as a model for imitation.⁴⁰ True, the poets of

³⁵ The poem was published by Klar 1954, pp. 310–311. On the *piyyutim* of the Karaites in general see Haberman 1970, I, pp. 84–95.

³⁶ See Mann 1921/2a, p. 474: 'When Jews gathered on fast days and the Day of Atonement, they recited many things, a *piyyut* that no one wanted, and not psalms from the book of Psalms'. He refers to the *mizmorim* of the book of Psalms, which constituted the main part of the Karaites' service. This was in keeping with their view that one should pray with what was in the Bible and not with what was composed by rabbis after the Bible, whether defined as prayer or as *piyyut*. And cf. the verses of one of the last of the Karaite sages, Abraham Firkovich, in 1838, against Ha-Qilliri: הַקְלִיר קוֹלָר בְּצוֹאָרוֹ / שִׁירָיו מִה נִמְאָסוּ פְסוּלִים כְּמֶרֶק פְּנוּלִים, אֵת הָאֵל דִּבְרָיו נִאֲלָהוּ הַבְּעִסוּ / כֶּרֶת וְזִלְי לְשׁוֹן קוֹרֵשׁ / דִּבְרָיו נִאֲלָהוּ (A chain around the neck of Ha-Qilliri, his poems are abhorrent / repugnant as broth made of putrefaction, they angered God / he cut the sprig of the holy tongue, his words are a contamination). Haberman, 1970, I, pp. 87–88.

³⁷ See, e.g., the essay *Adderet Eliyyahu* by Eliyyahu Bashayzi (d. 1490), Jerusalem 1966, folio 97a–b, entry הַפְּלָה, chapter 5 on the quality of prayer, its language, and its stipulations: 'Some of them say to pray with the words of the prophets, an obligatory prayer and *piyyutim* within it, as directed to each one and this is correct'.

³⁸ On the negation of syllogism in Bible commentary in Sa'adia's compositions see Zucker 1972; 1984, pp. 188–192; and cf. Tobi 1984; Qāfīḥ 1982, pp. 248–250.

³⁹ See Tobi 1982, I, p. 244.

⁴⁰ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 53, writes that one may also be helped by the language of the Mishna, 'which is pure Hebrew speech, and if it slightly contradicts some of the grammatical rules, one must rely on its transmitters because their time was very close to the language [of the Bible]' (and cf. Yəhuda Ha-Levi, *Kuzari* III:

Spain also aimed to defend Hebrew, which had been a 'high-born lady' (נְבִירָה) and was now a 'handmaiden' (שַׁפְּזָה), and this was the only language in which they wrote their poems. But Sa'adia, who had also to defend the Jewish faith against the dangers lurking from Karaism and Islam, and even from the spirit of heresy such as that of Ḥayawayh of Balkh, could not reject the use of the language layer in which the rabbinic literature and all that had been added to it, such as the liturgy and the ancient *piyyut*, had been transmitted.

Sa'adia's intention was thus to restore correct speech in Hebrew, and alongside it fine writing, in poetry or other kinds of literature. By contrast, the Spanish Jews discussed Hebrew and the renewal of its biblical style in the context of literary and aesthetic theory and of Bible commentary. Therefore, they dismissed the *piyyut* in principle and precluded its usages in language. As stated, Dunash in his *Criticism* of his master Sa'adia fiercely attacked the interpretations of certain words in the Bible in which Sa'adia followed his *paytanic* method, ignoring the presence or absence of one or other root letter in the word. Dunash was followed by the foremost linguists in Spain: Yəhuda Ḥayyūj, who developed and formulated for the first time the classical system of grammar, and determined that all the Hebrew roots are trilateral; then Yona b. Janāḥ in his *Kitāb al-Luma'* and his dictionary *Uṣūl*, the first Hebrew dictionary based on classical grammar.

In general Sa'adia affirmed the integration of all Hebrew language layers and forms in poetry, emphasising specially the language of the Bible because of its neglect by the later *paytanists*, and he approved the method of syllogism in language. All this was for a twofold aim: first, to defend the dignity of Hebrew and the Bible books in the face of the Arabs' boasting about their language; second, to come out against

67). But he has serious reservations about what is not in the Bible, and this of course is the general tenor of Ibn 'Ezra's attitude to language. Note that this was not the view of the Jewish sages who were not poets in Spain, such as Maimonides, who actually did write in the language of the Sages and not in that of the Bible. See Maimonides' defence of Mishna language against the attack of the philologists of Spain in opening his commentary to Mishna *Tərumot*: 'As the essence of every language goes back to what the speakers of that language said and what was heard from them, and these undoubtedly were Hebrews in their land, that is, the Land of Israel [...] and in this manner shall be your answer to anyone among the language innovators who thinks that the language of the Mishna is not pure and they [the Sages] made up verbs that were incorrect in some word or other'. And cf. Halkin 1963, pp. 245–248.

the Karaites, who rejected anything written after the Bible. Although Sa'adia contributed greatly to the revival of the biblical style, he differed from the people of Spain in that he had no intention of negating the *paytanic* style; his purpose was to uphold both styles together, for the grandeur and richness of the Hebrew language.⁴¹

1. Sa'adia's View of the Hebrew Root and Verb

Here we shall not go into the controversial question for modern scholars as to whether a multiple root system had existed, namely roots of one, two, or three letters, or whether the trilateral system had always existed.⁴² For our purposes it seems clear that Sa'adia recognised the system of trilateral roots, as evident from the third section of his *Kutub al-Lugha*, on inflection, and also from the second section in this work, on embellishment and omission. Here he explains the dropping of defective letters in the root, for example, ל as the first root letter in future tense, and its compensation by means of the *dagesh*, as is usual with trilateral verbs.⁴³ But on the other hand, in the same section he gives other examples of dropping letters from certain words in the Bible, such as קורִים—קוראים or שריִת—שארית, without giving a grammatical explanation for it. But he notes the feature as one of omission, according to the Massoretes' system of grammar. All this is in *Kutub al-Lugha*, whose purpose is to formulate the rules of biblical language, and examples of it are given in that essay.⁴⁴ This is not the case in his treatment of the language of

⁴¹ See Fleischer 1965, pp. 384–387; 392–393; Goldenberg 1973, pp. 129–130.

⁴² See Sa'adia 1969, pp. 51–54; there was in fact a multiple root system, and this is described in *Ha-Egron*; and Goldenberg's critique 1973, pp. 275–284. See also Goldenberg 1972, especially pp. 1609–1616, which concerns the language of the *piyyut* and Sa'adia's language, and also Allony's response 1974, pp. 202–224. To Allony's list of proofs of the existence of a multiple root system and of Sa'adia's theory in this matter should be added a passage from his commentary to portion *Bəreshit*, whose translation was published by Qāfih 1963, pp. 170–174. On p. 171 there Sa'adia writes: 'I translated וְשָׁעַל in the sense of *qubūl* (acceptance), since these two letters [שע] wherever they were said, have in our language seven meanings' (and cf. Zucker 1984, p. 307); later he enumerates the seven meanings of similar roots containing the letters שע, without consideration of the change from root to root, according to the trilateral root system. The roots are שַׁע (meaning 1), שַׁעָה (meanings 2,3,4,5), and שַׁעַע (meanings 6,7). In a study to be published in the forthcoming Prof. Aharon Dotan Jubilee Volume I have assembled all the passages in Sa'adia's biblical commentaries in which he lists different meanings of biliteral and trilateral roots or of nouns in the same way.

⁴³ See Dotan 1997, p. 322.

⁴⁴ And cf. Goldenberg 1979, p. 85.

the *paytanists*, whose system he had no intention of disqualifying. For example, in explaining the locution *וַיָּצַר בּוֹ* (*Sefer Yəšira* 5:1) he writes:

The intention here is *וַיָּצַר בּוֹ*, but the ך was dropped in the manner of all the abbreviations in the Bible, just as one says *נִהְיָ נֶעְבֹּר הַלְוָצִים* [instead of *וַיָּהְיָ נֶעְבֹּר הַלְוָצִים*]. And in the Mishna it is said, *וּכְשֶׁהָיָה הָיָה הַמִּזִּיק לְשָׁלֵם* [instead of *וַיְהִי הַמִּזִּיק לְשָׁלֵם*]. And in the language of the *payyatanim* [original *wa-fi qawl al-shu'arā*] they say *רָד* instead of *יָרַד*, and set down *עָץ* instead of *יָעַץ*, as well as *רָשׁ* instead of *יָרָשׁ*, and many more like this.

Sa'adia did not consider the way of the *paytanists* a method based on a particular treatment of this or that letter of the verb. It was a conventional way of abbreviation; and not necessarily just with defective letters, as emerges expressly from the continuation of his statement above: 'And also in the language of the Arabs they say "*yā ṣāḥ*" instead of "*yā ṣāḥib*". And they say "*fa-in yak*" instead of "*fa-in yakun*".' Needless to say, as we shall see later, in his *paytanic* work Sa'adia made great use of *paytanic* forms of this kind.

In his linguistic system Sa'adia was indeed not consistent in his treatment of the root, and was far from the classicism and purism characteristic of the philologists and poets of Spain, beginning with his pupil Dunash b. Labraṭ. This was because he did not wish to dismiss out of hand the Sages' method in their interpretation of scriptures or the *paytanists* in their *piyyutim*, who did not strictly base themselves on the system of the triliteral root. Typically, Sa'adia wrote many of his commentaries on the scriptures in complete disregard of the triliteral root and the rules of normative grammar; and on that account he was roundly criticised by his pupil Dunash in his *Criticism*.⁴⁵

Characteristically too, in his own *piyyutim* Sa'adia did not obey the linguistic rule that he laid down in the third section of *Kutub al-Lughā*. This was that verbs could only be augmented by the letters

⁴⁵ See, e.g., §14 (p. 5) on the subject of *בָּנָה* (Genesis 30:11), which Sa'adia interprets as *בָּנָה בָּרָה* (the say came). Dunash responds: 'Since he made *הָיָה* from *הָיָה* he should also make from *צָלַל*, meaning rescue, *צָלַל*, and likewise from *פָּלַל* [. . .]. An interpretation of this kind may not be accepted in the language of the Hebrews, all the more in the words of God'. Also in §18 (p. 6) on *וּבְלִי אֶסֶדִּיךָ מִדָּם* (Psalms 16:4). Sa'adia interpreted *דָּם* in this phrase as *דָּמִים* with the dropping of the ך, and Dunash replied: 'When he derived *מִדָּם* from *מִדָּמִים* one might equally derive *מִדָּם* from *מִדָּמִים* and *מִדָּם* from *מִדָּמִים*, etc.' Sa'adia's ambivalence regarding the language is intimated by statements in his name by Abraham b. Ezra in his book *Səfat Yeter*, pp. 13–14, where he dismisses Dunash's criticism of Sa'adia: 'We find as well that the Gaon said in many places in his books: Although the grammatical precision of the language is not found in the words of the first ones, we rely on them, and forgo our view, which is unimportant against their opinion'.

ה-ו-ה out of the letters ש מ ל כ ו ב ה, and that one may not say, for example, בְּשִׁמְעָתִי.⁴⁶ But in his *piyyutim*, as we shall see below, many forms are found such as בְּקָרָא, which is a distinctly *paytanic* form.⁴⁷

D. *The Purpose of Poetry and Knowledge of Poetics*

The scholars of Islam took an ambivalent approach to poetry. On the one hand, it was valued as an important linguistic source for understanding the Qurʾān, as already noted; on the other hand, it was dismissed because Muḥammad, the prophet of Islam, was dubious about poets. This stemmed chiefly from his fear of being regarded as one of the poets possessed by an alien spirit. Opposition to the new Arabic poetry intensified in the Abbasid period because of its extreme secularity, reflected mainly in the themes of wine and love, which Islam proscribed. Religious poetry, such as the poems of abstinence (*zuhdiyyāt*) of Abū al-ʿAtāhiya at the end of the eighth century, was very sparse.⁴⁸ But opposition grew also for reasons of logic and morals: this poetry's language was laden with much metaphoric ornamentation, it was remote from the real expression as 'truth', and it displayed extravagant hyperbole. Throughout the ages the view of the Qurʾān as poetry, or the search for the qualities of poetry in it, was fiercely attacked, despite its inimitable literary perfection and beauty.⁴⁹

Such tension is entirely absent from Saʿadia's poetic thought. The main reason is that he concerned with sacred, not secular poetry. Since the destruction of the Second Temple, possibly even earlier, all poetry had had a religious purpose: as liturgy for the synagogue and other, semi-religious, social frameworks, such as elegies for the deceased and wedding songs.⁵⁰ Saʿadia therefore engaged in poetics under the influence of his occupation with this subject in Arabic literature, but the material that he used for this activity was poetry

⁴⁶ Dotan 1997, p. 346.

⁴⁷ And see Goldenberg 1973, pp. 84–85; 1979, p. 96, that this usage is characteristic of Saʿadia in his youth, when he was influenced by the *piyyut*; years later, when he wrote *Kutub al-Lugha*, he no longer permitted himself to use this form. I doubt this distinction.

⁴⁸ See von Grunebaum 1940.

⁴⁹ On all this cf. Cantarino 1975, pp. 27–40.

⁵⁰ See Mirsky 1967. On the few purely secular poems before the mid-tenth century, see above, pp. 44 ff.; Pagis 1977.

with a specific purpose, namely prayer. The poetic output of Sa'adia himself was for a particular purpose, but he expanded the range of this purpose beyond purely liturgical composition, for example, poems for teaching and polemical poems, and even poems for prayer by the individual to his God.⁵¹ In any event, his poetry was still not appropriate as a vehicle for the expression of the experiences and feelings of the individual and the public beyond the framework of their relation to God. That is, poetry had no independent right to exist, and its purpose was to serve particular needs outside itself, and not to suit the desires and longings of the poet. One cannot deduce from this that there were no lyric passages in Sa'adia's *paytanic* work, which exceeded any framework of place, time, and faith, but which do express the finer feelings of the individual in himself, such as in his wonderful *tokheḥa* אִם לִפִּי בְּהִרְדָּה. Even the conventional *piyyutim*, such as the *yoṣərot* for the Sabbath, contain lyric passages in the description of the relationship of God with the people of Israel. But in the last analysis poetry is an instrument, albeit sublime and revered, and possessing manifold usages. Here, then, Sa'adia made no innovations as against the writers of the ancient *piyyut*. The aesthetics of the poetic work is not an essential part of the work itself. It does not constitute it or determine content and immanent development, but is based on the language and form of the poetry, on the two ends of its lines (as we shall discuss later—the acrostic and the rhyme), and on its ornamentation.

Aesthetic pleasure from poetic writing and its influence on the soul were still not the subject matter of Sa'adia's thinking on poetics. The moral-utilitarian aspect of knowledge of poetics was the essence, as stated in his Hebrew preface to *Ha-Egron* after he set out the rules of poetry in detail:⁵²

⁵¹ See Tobi 1982, I, pp. 14–57. On this subject Sa'adia's position was not entirely an innovation. Didactic poems were already found integrated into the great *paytanic* compositions of the first *paytanim*, especially in *seder 'avodah*, *azharot*, *tal* and *geshem* (different kinds of *piyyutim*). Also, the first polemical composition written in the form of a poem was the work of Ḥayawayh of Balkh, who lived about a generation before Sa'adia. The latter actually replied to him writing in imitation of his literary form. See Fleischer 1982. Poems for solitary prayer already existed in the work Nissi al-Nahrawānī, the elderly contemporary of Sa'adia; and cf. on all this above, pp. 40 ff.

⁵² Sa'adia 1969, pp. 162–163.

אלה הקנות השיר וכל החידות. ענף כל נוע מהם אלפים לרב לכל משכילי
 עם, כי מבקשי ה' יבינו כל. תקרו זאת בני ישראל, דרשו דבר ה', שאלו נא
 לדור ראשון והבנו נא לספר אבותינו, להבין מליצת הקדש, דברי בני אלים ואמרי
 החזיונים. קדוש ישראל הוא צום ורוחו הכינם, כי המה וראונו את חקיו. עינינו
 תפתחנה, אזנינו תפתחנה ולבבנו יבין ושכנו ורפא לו. אז נבין דעת אלהינו ורוח
 חנו ישפך עלינו, כי נשיר שירו ונהללה עז, נפלאותיו נשיתה עד עולמי עד.

These are the rules of poetry and all moral writings. A branch of each of them is a myriad, for the nation's scholars, as the seekers of God shall understand everything. Search it, Children of Israel, and prepare yourselves for to our forefathers' book, to understand the sacred language, the words of the angels and the utterance of the prophets. The God of Israel commanded them and his spirit conceived them, for they shall teach us his laws. Our eyes shall open and our ears shall unlock, our heart shall comprehend and we shall repent and it shall be cured. Then we shall comprehend our God's knowledge and He shall pour on us His spirit of grace, for we shall sing His song and praise His strength, we shall recite His wonders to eternity.

So the purpose of knowing poetics was to understand the Bible, God's word to his people Israel through the rhetoric of the prophets, more precisely, profoundly, and perfectly. It was to facilitate people's knowledge of God and comprehension of his quality, so that they might praise him in the proper manner.

Sa'adia's view of the connection between poetics and the Bible, that is, the need for a literary examination of the Bible and of the rules of poetics in order to understand it, was one of the tenets of his interpretation of the biblical books. Sa'adia does not suggest a method of biblical interpretation only at the opening of this commentary.⁵³ In many places in his various academic commentaries and essays, such as the *Commentary to Sefer Yəširah*, *Beliefs and Opinions*, and *Sefer Ha-Galui*, he also inserts detailed notes on the poetics of the Bible books. Here are several examples.

1. *Biblical parallelism*. In his *Commentary to Sefer Yəširah*, 4:8, Sa'adia discusses its essence:⁵⁴

It is the custom of the holy texts and of the texts of the Sages to set two or more things together, and to make phrases out of them. Then the first phrase serves the second and the second serves the first [...].

⁵³ See Zucker 1959, pp. 165 ff.; and cf. Tobi 1984.

⁵⁴ Similarly, he writes in his commentary to *Proverbs* 1:8: it is 'the way of the Hebrews'.

Thus the saying of the Wise: שָׁמַע בְּנֵי מוֹסֵר אֲבִיךָ וְאֵל תַּשֵּׁשׁ תוֹרַת אָמֶךָ [Proverbs 1:10], obliges both מוֹסֵר אֲבִיךָ and תוֹרַת אָמֶךָ. The same occurs in artistic works.

Sa'adia's statement that this method of parallelism is 'a usage of the holy texts and of the texts of the Sages', or 'the way of the Hebrews', has deliberate and special significance. It is meant to disparage Arabic poetry, in which full parallelism and complementary parallelism are extremely rare, while the contrastive parallel, which has special chapters in the Arabic *badī'* books, is very common.⁵⁵ Full and complementary parallelisms are also common in the pre-classical Hebrew *piyyut*.⁵⁶

2. *The various kinds of metaphor.* Above we noted that Sa'adia pondered the relationship between metaphor and real meaning, and that in the Arabic version of *Ha-Galui* he explains the usage of the word צֶדֶד, meaning wool, by metonymy. The following passage is from his commentary to *Psalms* 5:4, וְאֶצְפָּה בֶּקֶר אֶעֱרֹךְ לָךְ תְּשֻׁמָּה:

When he says בֶּקֶר אֶעֱרֹךְ לָךְ he does not mean in the morning or in the evening, but the separate parts of time. Sometimes the language uses one on them instead of all: for example, when he says אֵל תְּשַׁאף (Job 36:20), it means all nights.

Here, then, we have a definition of the figure of speech known as *synecdoche*.

3. *The parable.* In his commentary to *Proverbs* 1:6, לְהַבִּין מָשָׁל וּמִלִּיצָה, הַדְּבָרִי הַחֲמִים וְהִידְרָתָם, Sa'adia distinguishes, by his method, the four kinds of parable, as found in the books of the Bible. The division among the kinds of parable is according to the relationship of the fable and the moral, and according to the possibility of existence of the fable as a real experience in itself. Sa'adia defines the parable in these words: 'The art of approximation, in which the mind approximates to nature what is far from it'.

Certainly, as noted above, the very preoccupation with poetics was stimulated in Sa'adia by Arabic literature, as was also his engaging

⁵⁵ Yelin 1940, pp. 252 ff. Moshe b. 'Ezra notes in section 6 'parallelism' (*muqābala*) as one of the twenty figures of the poem that he enumerates in chapter 8. See Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, pp. 244–247. He writes expressly: 'The purpose of this chapter is *contrastive parallelism* in a poem' (emphasis added).

⁵⁶ Fleischer 1975, pp. 99–100.

in this study for understanding the Bible. But in Islam engagement in poetics had developed in the generation prior to Sa'adia, in particular in the essay of Ibn Qutayba, in order to extol poetry itself, without the need for interpreting the Qur'an. This was not the case with Sa'adia. In terms of the common categorisation of thinking in Greek philosophy, Sa'adia remained clearly a neo-Platonist in his approach to poetry, as he was also in other areas of his thinking. Spiegel's comments on the Platonic perception apply equally well to that of Sa'adia:⁵⁷

Catharsis is no other than purification of the soul from the passions of lust and the desires of the sense, and this catharsis is not achieved except by philosophical contemplation, while the mimetic art satisfies the lost parts of the soul, and it is not to be allowed room in the proper state, and of all the poetic work only the songs of praise to God and the beings on high may be retained [...]. In this system (of a hierarchy) there is nothing higher than the ontological truth, grasped through contemplation of the mind and the instruments of its thought, and there is no possession worthy of the name happiness and grandeur except knowledge of the truth of reality close to the world of this truth, which is a world of ideas purified of images of false feelings. This goal determines the nature of Platonic ethics, and this has the right to dominate in aesthetics, to straighten its path and to lay out before it the permitted and the forbidden according to the measure of the supreme goal, and on no account may aesthetics be exempted from the control of ethics, just as the leadership of the soul may not be handed over to the wild senses and the guidance of understanding to fanciful imagination.

Hebrew poetry acquired its independent status only with the growth of secular poetry in Spain. Even then it was with considerable hesitation, especially regarding the themes of wine and love, particularly male homosexuality. Still, it became free from submission to religious ethics and from the need to serve as liturgy. In fact, secular poetry became the chief thing. When towards the end of his life Moshe b. 'Ezra began writing the history of Hebrew poetry in Spain he ignored sacred poetry entirely, mainly, indeed, because this poetry did not obey the rules of Arabic poetry, especially in metre and rhyme. From this disregard, and from the few comments he did make on sacred poetry in Spain,⁵⁸ it is evident that this poetry was not valued as true literary production, to be judged by the rules of

⁵⁷ Spiegel 1972, p. 133.

⁵⁸ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 61.

poetics. Moreover, academic and didactic matter, unconnected to prayer or to feeling, was introduced into it. The Aristotelian idea, naturally in its Arab hue, of the mimetic quality of literary creation and its refining influence on the human soul was absorbed only by the poetics of secular poetry in Spain.⁵⁹ This concept, with which Sa'adia was not yet acquainted through Aristotle's writings translated and annotated by the sages of Islam, is what made it possible for secular poetry to become prevalent among the Jews in Spain.

Sa'adia's views on the quality and aims of poetry were by no means rejected. Many Jewish scholars continued to adhere to them not only in the East but also in Spain, especially the circles of the Torah scholars. Maimonides himself, who was greatly influenced by Aristotle, regarded metaphor in writing chiefly a means to convey the divine message, where the literal meaning of the words could not be grasped.⁶⁰ A later author, of the seventeenth century, Yehoshua' Benveniste, was one of the last to study the poetics of medieval Hebrew poetry. His comment is typical: 'In the end, all the addresses that you make in your poems will be towards God always, [poems] that praise the name of God, whom grandeur befits. There shall not be any alien [poems] among you'.⁶¹

E. *The Definition of Poetry*

Sa'adia was the first of the Jewish scholars to deal with poetry through critical study of the art of the poem. He has not left us a precise definition of poetry. But the fragments of his prefaces to *Ha-Egron* make it clear that for him the chief aspect of a poem is not its rhythmic prosodic elements, which mark off the line in a poem and distinguish it formally from prose. It is the poem's content and its linguistic texture. Not that he overlooked the formal elements, but

⁵⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 119, excerpts from Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (murdered 950) on the division of the sciences. Fārābī, a contemporary of Sa'adia, is the first Arab writer to be influenced by Aristotle's *Poetics*, especially in his short essay *Maqāla fī Qawānīn Šinā'at al-Ši'r*. For an English translation of this work see Cantarino 1975, pp. 110–116. The *Poetics* was first translated into Arabic by Abū Bishr Matā Ibn Yūnus al-Qunnā'ī (d. 940) before 932, from the Syrian version. See Cantarino 1975, p. 66, and see below, pp. 323 ff.

⁶⁰ See, e.g., the end of his opening to *Guide to the Perplexed*.

⁶¹ *Pereq Bo-Shir*, Ms. Montefiore 119, folio 14b (Tobi 1988, p. 30).

these were not crucial. Nevertheless, a development in his poetic thinking might have occurred, as we shall ascertain next.

In the fragments of the Hebrew preface, namely to the first edition of the composition, all that remains is a discussion of rhyme in a poem. But from the Arabic preface, namely to the second edition, it transpires that in the first edition he treated not only rhyme, which is the end of the poetic line, but also its beginning, the acrostic. It is not clear if there was also a comprehensive discussion of the acrostic. In any event, Sa'adia compiled two dictionaries for the use of poets: the first in alphabetical order of the first letter of the words for the purpose of the acrostic, and the second in alphabetical order of the last syllable for the purpose of the rhyme.⁶² Hence, Sa'adia considers both these elements essential in the formal definition of the poem. This is also reflected in a statement in the Arabic preface: 'These are the middle [elements] that are the poem itself, and the two ends are nothing but guards for them'.⁶³ The two ends are the acrostic and the rhyme.

This idea of definition of the poem according to its formal elements is Arab in origin, although the poetic content is different. In the pre-Aristotelian Arabic poetics this definition of the poem was the usual one: a scanned and rhymed speech or writing bearing a certain expression, as stated by Qudāma b. Ja'far (d. 902), author of the essay *Naqd al-Shi'r* (Poetry Criticism).⁶⁴ Sa'adia's formal definition therefore originates from Arabic poetics, but he adds the element of the acrostic and omits metre. The acrostic is one of the earliest and most common formal elements in Hebrew poetry. It goes back to the Bible period in Psalms, in the dirges of Lamentations, and in the song *אֶשֶׁת תָּלַל* in Proverbs 31; in the literature of the Sages the *piyyutim* are known by the title *Alfabetin*, certainly because of the acrostic, which was a permanent or almost permanent feature in them.⁶⁵ This element is entirely unknown in Arabic poetry.

1. *Metre*

Sa'adia was fully acquainted with Arabic metre, but he considered it unsuitable for Hebrew, because through the metre it became flawed.

⁶² Cf. Tobī 1982, I, p. 388, n. 10a.

⁶³ Sa'adia 1969, p. 155.

⁶⁴ See the English translation of his comments by Cantarino 1975, p. 120.

⁶⁵ See Schirmann 1979, I, p. 21.

But he seems to have greatly appreciated Arabic metre, being precise and quantitative, as distinct from the accents metre in the Hebrew *piyyut*. Therefore, he chose entirely to disregard metre in the *piyyut* not only in the definition of poetry but also in the scholarly discussion of it. He does not mention it at all in his Arabic preface when he enumerates the three elements of the poetic line: its beginning (the acrostic), its middle, and its end (the rhyme). Of course, he did not write poetry in Arabic metres and was in no way influenced by them, although in other details of the rhythmic-prosodic element of the poem his poetic oeuvre does betray some influence of Arabic poetry, as will be outlined later.

We can only rely on external sources close to his time. One of these is the passage by a writer of his school, who finds metre only in the poetry of Yannay (partial) and of Ha-Qilliri (complete), and certainly in the poetry of contemporary and later *paytanim*. The poetry of Yose b. Yose is exceptional, in that neither metre nor rhyme is mentioned. The fact that this writer overlooks the metre in the poetry of Yose b. Yose is highly problematic, because precisely this poetry, like the Hebrew poetry that preceded it, usually called 'the Hebrew poetry of the Talmud period', has clear and defined metre. This poses no problems for identification and definition of its regularity, as against the many difficulties involved in clarifying metre in the work of Yannay and Ha-Qilliri.⁶⁶ E. Fleischer notes that in fact the metre in pre-classical *paytanic* writing is not exact, and the poetic rhythm in the *paytanic* line should rather be termed its tempo.⁶⁷ This is because writers of the pre-classical *paytanut*, which was still unrhymed, scanned the words, but did not count them all; or one word with at least three syllables was given two accents. This metre was preserved in principle also in classical *paytanut*, especially from the work of Ha-Qilliri onwards. But in this writing all the heavily accentuated words in the line were carefully counted, and equal status was given to each of them, even though several means existed of combining words, which the poets used freely. This is partly found as early as the poetry of Yannay. Thus, the statement by the writer of Sa'adia's school on the presence of metre in the *piyyutim* of the early

⁶⁶ On the metre in this poetry, the so-called the accents metre (משקל ההשמעות), see Mirsky 1967, pp. 174 ff.; Mirsky 1977, pp. 47 ff.; Fleischer 1977a, p. 72.

⁶⁷ Mirsky 1967 writes on the *metre* (משקל) of this poetry, while in the printed edition of the *piyyutim* by Yose b. Yose of 1977 he does not use this term at all, but the term *tempo* (מקצב).

poets was well founded.⁶⁸ On the other hand, we learn that Sa'adia—if his opinions of *paytanut* are truly reflected in this document—was immersed in aspects of original Hebrew *paytanut* even regarding his perception of metre. This is metre based on a certain number of accents in the poetic line so that its link with the content is not impaired. The syllabic or quantitative metre, which entered Hebrew poetry under the influence of Arabic poetry, damages this connection, and in fact severs it completely. This, it appears, was the opinion of Sa'adia, when his pupil Dunash b. Labraṭ, the innovator of Arabic quantitative metre in Hebrew poetry, showed him his poems written in this metre. Sa'adia's response was, 'Nothing like it has been seen among the Jewish nation'.⁶⁹ As we shall see below, in his own work Sa'adia retained the essence of metre in its original Hebrew style, although he certainly knew Arabic poetry and its metrical rules.

We noted that the metrical system recorded in the words of the above writer is the original Hebrew system. However, his way of defining the importance of metre and its effect on the listener is considerably influenced by the Arabic:

They say that the test [of metre] is by the taste, as it is said: 'Does the ear not try words as the palate tastes food?' (Job 12:11). This means, the tying of matters⁷⁰ of the lines to prevent their separation. And if they are separated from each other the poem⁷¹ will limp and will be worthless.

Thus, if there is a change in the metre from line to line, the unity of the poem will be damaged and its effect on the listener will be spoiled. A similar position is adopted by Jewish authors from Spain, who were influenced by Arabic poetry, for example, Moshe b. 'Ezra⁷² and Yəhuda Ha-Levi.⁷³

⁶⁸ All this material is based on Fleischer 1977a, pp. 73–78.

⁶⁹ Dunash 1866, §105, p. 31. And cf. Stern 1870, p. 27, n. 10; Yahalom 1979a, p. 28.

⁷⁰ In the original *mā'ānī*; Allony understood this phrase as referring to the content of the poems, even though in Arabic poetry and in Hebrew poetry of Spain the subject is the metre. But Fleischer 1977a, pp. 78 ff., pointed out that it indeed refers to metre, and not to the poems' content.

⁷¹ In the original *al-qawl*; Allony translates פַּרְסָה (the stanza), and shifts the sense to a different issue, which conforms to Arabic quantitative metre.

⁷² See the excerpts cited by Allony (Sa'adia 1969, p. 112) from *Shirat Israel*, the translation of *Kitāb al-Muḥādara wa-al-Mudhākara* by Ben-Zion Halper (Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975). Ibn 'Ezra uses the same verse from Job cited by Sa'adia. And cf. the passages from Arab authors, especially Ibn Rashīq in his work *al-Umda*, which Halkin presents in Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 137. See also Ibn Rashīq on this subject in English translation in Cantarino 1975, pp. 141 ff.

⁷³ See his essay on metre published by Brody 1930, and by Schirmann 1946. It

The second source is the statements of the pupils of Mōnaḥem b. Sarūq in their polemic with Dunash b. Labraṭ, who, as noted, introduced Arabic metre into Hebrew poetry:⁷⁴

Now how can you say that the Arabs' metre is right in the Hebrew language [. . .]. We can know this and study the wise men of the generations who were before us, the makers of rhyme, with whose poems the world is filled, and we shall not find a poem in the Arab metre of any of them. For the late R. Sa'adia has many poems and many rhymed verses that are not scanned in the Arab metre. At that time you were his youngest pupil with perfect intellect, but referring to Arabic and its metres you were not wiser than your greatest teacher. If he had seen that it was possible to put the Arab metre into Hebrew he would have done so before you, and you would not have done so before him. But he knew that this thing was not good and not correct to do lest the language be corrupted and its *qamaṣes* and *pataḥs* and its accents and grammar be eliminated. If we had not been exiled from our land, and all our language had been in our hands as in past times when we dwelt in safety in peaceful domains, then we would have found all the fine points of our language and the kinds of its formulations. And we would know its metre and would have pondered its limits, because the language of every nation has its metre and its grammar. But it was lost from our hands because great was the transgression, and it has disappeared from us because the guilt is great from the day we fell into exile, and having been capacious it was cut down and hidden, and is lacking. And had God not worked a miracle in the eyes of his people, the existing remnant would be lost and destroyed.

These words, although not those of Sa'adia himself, certainly express his opinion about the decline of the Hebrew language since the exile and the termination of the prophecy. We find similar words in his Arabic preface to *Ha-Egron*,⁷⁵ that 'many scholars'⁷⁶ state that much

is interesting that Yōhuda Ha-Levi, in his wish to deny the importance of Arabic precise quantitative metre, writes that the melodies of songs have no need for metre. As proof he cites Psalm 137. This metre is important for poems declaimed in the manner of the Arabs' poems (*inshādiyya*), as these are intended mainly to influence the ear, and not to sustain the connection between the poem's content and its melody. See *Kūzari* II:70. And cf. Allony 1944, pp. 5–6; 1974a, pp. 7–12. This serves to strengthen the impression of the influence of the Arab notion of metre and the manner of its definition by the writer of the passage from Sa'adia's school.

⁷⁴ Stern 1870, pp. 27–28. Incidentally, all the attempts to ascribe to Sa'adia's scanned verses in the Arab-Spanish mode are groundless. See Delitzsch 1837, pp. 41, 137; Harkavy 1892, pp. 26–27, 146, 196; Simḥoni 1921, p. 163; Bialik 1934; Brody 1937.

⁷⁵ Sa'adia 1969, p. 151.

⁷⁶ In the Judeo-Arabic original תלמידי, which Allony translates 'pupils'. It seems to me that the sense of the word here is 'scholars', 'sages', as was usual in the Middle Ages.

knowledge of tradition and of syllogism has been lost to most of them, and the book of metres and the wisdom of the elements⁷⁷ and their like has gone from the people'. These statements reinforce what was written above, that Sa'adia's disregard in his poetics of metre was not by chance, and even if he appreciated the precise quantitative metre in Arabic poetry, he did not see fit to transfer it to Hebrew poetry.

2. *Rhyme*

Sa'adia's thoughts on rhyme are given at the end of the Hebrew preface to *Ha-Egron*, in the part that has survived in a single manuscript (T-S K7/78, *Ha-Egron*, pp. 161–162), although the opening is lost. This is the text, without the lost first sentence:

Then all the wise poets do not set in their rhymes [words like] בְּקִירוֹ / עִירוֹ and the like, for the last letter is not an element (יִסוּד). Then if they wished, they would compose that way in their poems: בְּתִירוֹ / קְתִירוֹ, בְּנִירוֹ / עְנִירוֹ, also with the other eight [elements]: / הוֹפְכֶת / מְמַלְכֶת / מְשַׁבֵּחַ.

According to Allony's interpretation of Sa'adia's text, he means that in every pair of rhyming words, eight elements are involved, these being two consonants and two vowels that are repeated in the two rhyming words.⁷⁸ Clearly, this definition of proper rhyme was not

⁷⁷ See in the sources cited by Allony (Sa'adia 1969, pp. 14–15), indicating that the reference is to books dealing with poetic metres and rhetoric.

⁷⁸ I tend not to accept the view of Yahalom 1971 that Sa'adia negated rhyming with possessive suffixes, e.g., בְּקִירוֹ / עִירוֹ, and that the 'eight others' in Sa'adia's statement are the two rhyming letters in a quatrain, or another combination of letters in a quatrain, or some other combination of letters in a triplet. Yahalom bases his explanation of Sa'adia's rejection of the rhyme בְּקִירוֹ / עִירוֹ on the argument that 'the last letter is not an element'. But Sa'adia disallows such a rhyme not because of the possessive suffix. He does so because the letter ך of the suffix is identical with the vowel *holam*, so there are only four elements in the two rhyming words בְּקִירוֹ / עִירוֹ—the letter ך twice and the *holam* vowel as well. As I showed in my dissertation on Sa'adia's poetry (Tobi 1982, I, p. 253), in his *paytanic* writing he rhymes possessive suffixes a great deal. By the word יִסוּד (element) here, Sa'adia does not mean one letter of the root letters of the rhyming words, but an elementary letter of the rhyming; otherwise, why does he accept the rhyme הוֹפְכֶת / מְמַלְכֶת, in which there is the letter ך, which is not a radical either? It is also clear that Sa'adia regarded vowels in the realisation of a word as not of lesser value than consonants. This emerges from his discussion of vowels in chapter 5 of *Kutub al-Lughah* (Dotan 1997, pp. 442 ff.) and from his *Commentary to Sefer Yasira* (Sa'adia 1972) II:2, pp. 74–75. *Ha-Egron* too is no other than a wordlist of nouns in elementary forms, in which

adopted from an examination of Arabic poetry, which just required equality of one consonant and its vowel.⁷⁹ Scholars of Hebrew poetry have shown that rhyming in Arabic is simpler than in Hebrew. In the former the poet makes do with equality of one consonant coming at the end of the rhymed word in an open or closed syllable, and its vowel is determined by virtue of the final pointing and can change according to the poet's needs. In Hebrew there is no final pointing, and the poet has to create the rhyme either with an open syllable, whose vowel cannot be changed at will, or with a closed syllable, in which he has to manipulate the two consonants for the requirements of the rhyme.⁸⁰ Sa'adia was thus far more stringent than the norm in Arabic poetry because the source of his rhyming is in the ancient Hebrew *piyyut*. He did not consider rhyme merely the formal matter of equalisation of final syllables at the end of the poetic lines, but word plays, such as homonyms.⁸¹ Nor could these word plays be based on the equalisation of one consonant only, as in Arabic poetry. Yet ancient Hebrew *paytanut* also exhibits development in the use of the rhyme from the first of the rhymers, Yannay, to the late *paytanists* such as the eighth-century Pinḥas: from homonyms to simple rhyming syllables, of the kind found in Hebrew poetry in Spain, influenced by Arabic poetry.⁸² But Sa'adia, as the first author in Jewish literature to deal systematically with Hebrew poetics, had

the vowels have status, and not a wordlist of roots, as Goldenberg 1973, pp. 275 ff., made clear. Incidentally, it is hard to accept Yahalom's explanation that Sa'adia was concerned here with problems of rhyming in a quatrain or triplet, for in that case with the rhyme עִירֹ / בְּקִירֹ he would have to say that he was dealing with a couplet. Goldenberg (1973, pp. 86–87) states as well that Sa'adia negated in principle rhyming that was not based on the root letters alone. The poetics of Arabic poetry regarded more liberal rhyming, based on possessive suffixes, as not desirable. In Goldenberg's view, by the words 'eight others' Sa'adia did not mean eight letters and vowels, as Allony believes, or just eight letters, as Yahalom believes, that participate in the rhyme, but the eight personal pronouns remaining from the ten persons after third person singular and plural are dropped. But this interpretation has no support in the text of *Ha-Egron*, as 'eight others' is associated with the rhyming of מְשֻׁכָּחַ / הוֹפְכָּחַ / מְמַלְכָּח, namely nouns that do not need personal pronouns.

⁷⁹ See Drori 1980.

⁸⁰ Yelin 1940, p. 12; Mirsky 1969, p. 151. In addition, the craft of the Arab poets was easier also because in their language there are only three vowels (*fatha*, *kasra*, and *damma*), while in Hebrew there are five (*pataḥ-games*, *segol-ṣeri*, *hiriq*, *ḥolam*, *shuruq-qubbus*).

⁸¹ Cf. Mirsky 1958; Yahalom 1971; Hrushovski 1971, p. 738; Fleischer 1973, pp. 71–81.

⁸² Fleischer 1975, p. 121.

to provide a formal, precise definition for a good rhyme,⁸³ according to the norm in poetics. The inclination to exact and lucid formulations no doubt originates in the Arab-Islamic culture, influenced by the Greek. However, he did not follow that course through study of Arabic poetry, which did not serve as his model, but through study of the ancient Hebrew *piyyut*. Its rhyme was far richer and more meaningful than the formal rhyme of Arabic poetry.⁸⁴

F. Form and Content

Arabic poetics down the generations has regarded form, not content, as the essence of the poem. The poem was defined in terms of the form, and its originality was not determined according to the idea it expressed but according to the manner of its expression.⁸⁵ This outlook extended to Hebrew poetry and poetics in Spain.⁸⁶ The discussion in Arabic poetics of the relation between form and content began in the second half of the ninth century, in *Kitāb al-Shī'r wa-al-Shu'arā'* by Ibn Qutayba. He dwelt on the importance of both in poetry criticism, without diminishing the supremacy of the formal element in the definition of the poem.⁸⁷ Arab authors, mainly philosophers and not scholars of Arabic poetry proper, began only from the tenth century onwards, after Aristotle's *Poetics* had been trans-

⁸³ I am not convinced by Allony's comments (Sa'adia 1969, pp. 114–115) that Sa'adia's rhyming rules underlie the determination of the types of rhyme in the writings of an author at the end of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, namely David b. Yahyā in the book *Shekel Ha-Qodesh*. These are passable rhyme (תרו עובר), proper rhyme (תרו ראו), and praised rhyme (תרו משובח). It seems that the problematics around the type of rhyme originates in the framework of its use in Hebrew poetry influenced by Arabic poetry.

⁸⁴ This inclination reinforces our claim above that it is not the fact of the possessive suffix in the rhyme עירו / בקרו that makes it unacceptable, but the absence of two consonants whereby the rhyming words could approach so closely as to become homonyms. Incidentally, the formalist tendency in Arabic rhyme, hence also in rhyme in Hebrew poetry in Spain, undoubtedly stems from the fact that a single common rhyme (תרו מברית) served for the many verses of a long *qasida*. Likewise, not enough words able to form homonyms can possibly exist. Regarding Sa'adia's theory of rhyme as evinced in his own *piyyutim*, we note here that he favoured homonymous rhyme, and this was one of his goals in *Ha-Eguron*; this subject will be further clarified later in this book.

⁸⁵ See Cantarino 1975, pp. 41 ff.

⁸⁶ See Pagis 1970, pp. 101–115.

⁸⁷ Cantarino 1975, p. 47.

lated into Arabic, to define poetry stressing its mimetic element, according to Aristotle's famous definition. Although generally they did not tend entirely to eliminate the basis of form in the poem, namely metre and rhyme, they asserted that content, not form, was the chief thing.⁸⁸ The clearest expression of this approach is found in the writing of the Jewish convert to Islam Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, a contemporary of Maimonides (second half of the twelfth century), in his *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*.⁸⁹

In our time poetry is [held to be] poetry because of an accidental form [subsisting] in the words and the meaning, namely the metre and the rhymes. In our time [a composition] that has not a metre defined in a book of prosody and the requisite rhyme is not called poetry except, by God, in an equivocal manner as a piece of counterfeit money may be called a *ḍinār* and a dead individual a man. This is a widespread and [generally] agreed upon [opinion] within the Arabic, the Persian and the Turkish languages. On the other hand, among the ancient nations, the Greeks, the Hebrews and the Syrians, no poetry was transmitted from their ancestors that was ordered according to the metres of prosody, but [only poetry] whose order has a greater resemblance to prose and which has no rhymes that agree.

Later on Baghdādī gives the Aristotelian definition of poetry, and states that its primary condition is that it should be *mukhayyila* (stimulating to the imagination). This definition penetrated the poetics of Moshe b. 'Ezra also, via the compositions of al-Fārābī,⁹⁰ although it did not influence the poetry itself.

As noted, according to the Hebrew tradition, Sa'adia preferred content to form, as he regarded the middle section of the poetic line, situated between the acrostic and the rhyme, as the 'essence of the poem, and the two ends are nothing but guards for them' (the middle elements). Sa'adia even informs us that he intends to add to the second edition, after two vocabularies prepared for the benefit of the acrostic and the rhyme in the second edition, a discussion of the middle elements.⁹¹ No remnant of this discussion has come down to us. In any event, the change from the first edition to the second, reflected not only in the treatment of questions of form, may stem

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 63–69.

⁸⁹ Ḥaidarabād 1938, vol. III, pp. 276–277. For the English translation see Pines 1960, p. 130.

⁹⁰ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, pp. 118–119.

⁹¹ Sa'adia 1969, p. 155.

from a change in Sa'adia's poetic thought. This could have been influenced by Aristotelian notions of poetry present in Arabic literature as early as the ninth century, even before the translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* into Arabic.⁹² But Sa'adia dealt with the essence of lyrical poetry, namely prayer to God. So like the Arab poets and largely also the Arab prosodists and philosophers, he does not recognise any work of epic poetry or any tragedy, which Aristotle referred to in his discussion of mimesis. He addresses the poem's content in respect of language and rhetoric, and not of actual literature in Aristotle's sense. This is due to the influence of Arabic literature, chiefly *Qawā'id al-Shi'r* (Principles of Poetry) by Abū al-'Abbās Yaḥyā Tha'lab (830–904), who was the foremost scholar of the Kufan school in his day.⁹³ Sa'adia accordingly speaks of three 'elements' in the poem in terms of its content: sentence types, the attribute, and the simile.

As for sentence types, Sa'adia notes in the Arabic preface to *Ha-Egron* that they are five in number: statement, question, narrative, imperative, and request. The details of these divisions are found in his preface to the Commentary to Psalms. Although in principle these divisions of speech are not actually connected to poetry but originate in the theory of language, Arabic literature, as already noted, conventionally opens the discussion of poetry criticism with a consideration of the sentence types.⁹⁴ Presumably, Sa'adia took this path in *Ha-Egron* in respect of poetry, apparently by giving examples from the *piyyutim* of the ancients.⁹⁵ He did so in his preface to the Commentary to Psalms, which elucidates each one of these sentence types in connection to the Bible and he exemplifies it with biblical verses.

The kinds of attributes (Arabic *na't*, *nu'ūt*) are the description of a thing in its four aspects: its essence, its form, its action, and its feel.

⁹² See Cantarino 1975, p. 66.

⁹³ See Sa'adia 1969, p. 77. And see p. 126 above: Sa'adia permitted syllogism in language, following the Kufan philologists.

⁹⁴ See Sa'adia 1969, pp. 76–77, where Allony adduces evidence of this from Tha'lab's essay *Qawā'id al-Shi'r*. He also cites many parallels from sages later than Sa'adia such as Dunash, Ibn Janāḥ, Yehuda Ha-Levi, Shelomo b. Farḥūn, and *Maḥberet Ha-Tijān*, but none of them necessarily in connection with poetry. As Allony notes, the effect of Arabic on Hebrew literature in this subject was considerable from as early as the mid-eighth century, in a Karaite list of terms (Korngrin Memorial Volume, Tel Aviv 1964, p. 325 = Allony 1988, p. 108).

⁹⁵ As mentioned above (p. 119), in the Arabic preface to *Ha-Egron* Sa'adia writes that he refers to the first poets for examples of what he considers correct, while of the later poets he only cites those 'whose words merit it'.

In his preface to *Ha-Egron* Sa'adia does not clarify them, nor are parallels to them found in his other works. It is hard to imagine that Sa'adia's discussion of this subject was exclusively linguistic; he may well have not only given examples from *paytanic* works but also explained the poets' intentions in their use of one or another of the kinds of attributes in describing a certain thing. Some evidence of this may be adduced from his comments in the Arabic version of *Ha-Galui*, when explaining several of his usages of language in the Hebrew version of this essay:⁹⁶

I depicted wool in its metonymy and said וְהַצֵּנֶר תִּלְבָּשׁ according to the biblical expression: בֵּינֵן תִּלְבֹּן וְצֶמֶר צֹהַר.

Although Sa'adia does not deal here with true metaphors, but only with metonymy, the literary connection is clearly quite firm.

By contrast, in the third element Sa'adia refers to verbs and nouns in a poem, carrying metaphorical meaning. Sa'adia's definition of simile is distinctly literary-linguistic (*imtithāl*) and not religious-interpretative (*majāz*, metaphor), which is his usual term in biblical commentary. This term is primarily meant to solve problems arising from biblical verses that cannot be understood from the plain text, particularly in respect of expressions of the personification of God. This is a clear-cut theological problem, but explicitly also in respect of simple matters of language and content.⁹⁷ The term *imtithāl* in this context is therefore literary, the parallel of the terms *isti'āra* and *tash-bīh*. It is usually found in Arabic books of poetics, but occasionally, as in the essay *Naqd al-Shi'r* of Qudāma b. Ja'far, it is called *tamthīl*, and this is what Sa'adia calls it, too.⁹⁸ From a comparison with what he says in *Ha-Galui* and elsewhere, Sa'adia regarded image not only as a literary ornament to embellish the language but as a means for clarifying the expression and the intention; this is in keeping with his notion of *purity of language*.

⁹⁶ Harkavy 1892, pp. 188–189.

⁹⁷ See Sa'adia at the opening of his *tafsīr* to Genesis (Zucker 1984, pp. 191–195); and see Zucker's Introduction there, pp. 42 ff. See also Tobi 1982, I, pp. 236–239. Ibn 'Ezra in his *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-al-Mudhākara* (1975, p. 227, chapter on metaphor), wishing to vindicate the use of metaphor, cites as evidence 'Rabbi Sa'adia and R. Hāye and others of the *mutakallimīn* who were helped thereby when they sought aid in laying open the esoteric in the prophecies'.

⁹⁸ See Halkin in Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 257, note to line 10. And see von Grunebaum 1950, p. 15 and n. 123 there.

G. *Purity of Language*: צְהוּת הַלָּשׁוֹן

In his various writings, Saʿadia wished to guide speakers and writers of Hebrew, particularly the poets, to apply צְהוּת הַלָּשׁוֹן (purity, namely precision and beauty of language). This expression, which is a translation of the Arabic *faṣāḥa*, includes in Saʿadia's usage the sense of the Arabic *balāgha* also, namely precision in language grammatically, but also figures of speech and an abundance of tropes and figurative embellishments. His model for beauty of language, of course, is the Bible.⁹⁹ When Saʿadia mourns the decline of the Hebrew language, he does not refer only to the scant use of biblical language and the dwindling of the Hebrew vocabulary, but also to the fact that the modes of figurative usage have been lost. This is what he has to say on the matter in his preface to *Ha-Galui*:¹⁰⁰

Because I have seen it, that long since, Arabic and Aramaic have overwhelmed it. Furthermore, what is worse is that they have caused it to forget its pure tongue and its rhetorical phrases [original: *luḡhatuhā al-faṣīḥ wa-kalāmuhā al-badīʿ*].

Above we noted Saʿadia's comments in his Arabic preface to *Ha-Egbron* that not only are the expressions of rhetoric in the language lost to the Hebrews because of the exile, but also the books of rhetoric. In any event, the use of the Arabic term *badīʿ* cited above from *Ha-Galui* gives added significance, especially when it is adjacent to the term *faṣīḥ* and in a language context. Without doubt, Saʿadia uses this expression in its Arabic literary sense, namely the theory of rhetorical ornamentation.

Saʿadia was apparently influenced by the literary developments in the Abbasid empire in the generations that preceded him: alongside poetry, artistic prose had existed in its various forms—speeches, sermons, letters, and even academic essays.¹⁰¹ The zenith of this development was the *maqāma*, whose first budding is evident as early as the first half of the tenth century. At that time the literary development of artistic prose was considered no less than that of poetry.

⁹⁹ For details see Saʿadia 1969, pp. 26–30; and Tobi 1982, I, pp. 239–241.

¹⁰⁰ Harkavy 1892, pp. 154–156.

¹⁰¹ Among the best-known names in this field were ʿAbd Allah b. al-Muqaffaʿ, translator of *Kalīla wa-Dimna* into Arabic (d. 757), and al-Jāhīz, a Basran (d. 869), considered the genius of Arabic prose. On artistic Arabic prose in this period see Baneth 1978, pp. 338 ff.; and also Sadan 1975, pp. 15–17.

As for poetry itself, since the rise of the dynasty of 'Abbās to power (750), and more particularly in the ninth century, a new style of Arabic poetry began to develop, replete with fine language and rhetorical flourishes. But this stimulated the opposition of those who in rhetoric adhered to the classical texts, especially the Qur'ān. This style was given the name *badī'*: its proponents regarded it as something original, new, and worthy of appreciation; its critics saw it as a negative innovation, in keeping with the meaning of this term in the religious context. At the end of the ninth century (887/8) 'Abd Allah b. al-Mu'tazz, an important Abbasid poet (murdered 908), wrote his work *Kitāb al-Badī'*. His goal was a new style rich in rhetorical ornaments, in contrast to classical Arabic poetry. His purpose, as he writes expressly in the preface to his essay, is to prove that the tropes and the rhetorical devices are not a recent invention but are present in classical literature and even in the Qur'ān.¹⁰² This book, one of the first to treat Arabic poetics and the theory of rhetoric in Arabic literature, does not in fact concern the theory of ornamentation of poetry. The author understands *badī'* as a term of rhetoric, suitable for poetry and prose alike. In fact, he writes nothing on the nature of poetry similar to what we find in the writings of later Arab authors who were influenced by Greek philosophers.¹⁰³

So Sa'adia was influenced by Ibn al-Mu'tazz in his use of the term *badī'*, which belongs to purity of language, but his intention was the opposite. While the Arab scholar of poetics wanted to vindicate the use of *badī'* by proving its use in the Qur'ān, Sa'adia wished to instil the rhetorical means present in the Bible into the Hebrew written in his day. He meant not only poetry, but literary writing of other types, for like Ibn al-Mu'tazz his interest was rhetoric, not poetry. Hence it becomes clear why Sa'adia did not borrow rhetorical devices from Arabic poetry but from the Bible exclusively—even though some of them are found in Arabic poetry. This would have been entirely the reverse of his aim of arguing for the superiority of the Bible and the Hebrew language to the Qur'ān and Arabic.

Sa'adia justified the use of metaphorical language chiefly because of the meaning of its content and its preference in stating matters in plain language, and therefore he adopted that same method of reasoning in philosophical and interpretive works to metaphorical

¹⁰² See Cantarino 1975, p. 53; von Grunebaum 1950, pp. 1–3.

¹⁰³ See Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1935, p. 1.

language. His writings do not contain aesthetic praises of metaphor, like those, for example, in the books of Moshe b. 'Ezra¹⁰⁴ and Arab writers.¹⁰⁵ There might have been something of the sort in the missing passage of the Arabic version of *Ha-Egron*. But the subject of purity of language certainly encompasses not only the linguistic aspect, that is, precision in grammar and syntax, but also the beauty of the language and its adornment with rhetorical embellishments, including figures of speech: various forms of imagery, and word plays.

Sa'adia did not relate the term *purity of language* just to poetry, or to artistic literary production in general. His approach being nationalist—concern for the inferior status of Hebrew to Arabic in his time,¹⁰⁶ he advocated purity of language not in only poetry but in all writing. In fact, he demonstrated purity of language not in poetry but in a polemical prose composition, namely *Ha-Galui*. He undoubtedly wished to set an example in the style of biblical writing, a fine model against the Arabs' claim of the sublimity of the Qur'ān (*iḥzāz al-qur'ān*). To drive home the point Sa'adia also divided the Bible-style text into verses and added cantillation marks. He did likewise in his *Sefer Ha-Mo'adim*, which is basically a halakhic work. This same reasoning underlies his writing letters in rhetorical style with many elements of purity of language.¹⁰⁷

That Sa'adia understood purity of language in the broad sense is also clear from his discussion of its importance in three compositions of different kinds, as noted in his Arabic preface to *Ha-Galui*.¹⁰⁸ First is *Ha-Egron*, which indeed is *Kitāb Uṣūl al-Shi'r al-Ibrānī* (A Book of the Elements of the Hebrew Poetry). The main subject here, we recall, is formal aspects of the poem, the acrostic and the rhyme.

¹⁰⁴ See pp. 275–280 below.

¹⁰⁵ See, e.g., Cantarino 1975, pp. 132 ff., translation from Ibn Sīnā's *Kitāb al-Shi'r* on the emotional influence of metaphoric language.

¹⁰⁶ See Sa'adia 1969, Hebrew preface to *Ha-Egron*, pp. 40–44/158–159; Arabic preface, pp. 33–39/150–152; Arabic preface to *Ha-Galui*: Harkavy 1892, pp. 154–157. On Sa'adia's national purpose in *Ha-Egron* see Allony 1973.

¹⁰⁷ Goldenberg is mistaken in writing that Sa'adia perceived the notion of purity of language only in its grammatical sense. See Goldenberg 1972, p. 1614; Goldenberg 1973, pp. 121–124. Her words are self-contradictory: fine language certainly is not a matter of correct language, and linguistic embellishments such as homonymy and adorned words are not a matter of standard language. Furthermore, Sa'adia refers to poetry not only in *Ha-Egron*, which was intended mainly for poets, as Goldenberg rightly notes, but also in *Ha-Galui*, which is by no means a work meant just for poets. True, rhyme and metre and the acrostic do not come under the heading 'purity of language', but the language of poetry is not to be excluded from it.

¹⁰⁸ Harkavy 1892, pp. 154–157.

Yet Sa'adia did not treat even these except when he became aware of 'the nation's forgetting the Hebrew language'. Later in his preface to *Ha-Galui* he writes, 'I have clarified in it the advantages of the poem and of well-written prose'. So there is no discussion in it of the nature of poetry; instead Sa'adia wants to show the importance of purity of language and its advantages for poetry. The second essay is *Kutub al-Lugha*, about which he states in the above preface: 'Just as I explained much of this [matters of purity] also in *Twelve Parts*¹⁰⁹ which I wrote to teach the grammar of the Hebrews' language'. Finally, there is *Ha-Galui*, which is an example of writing pure language that is not poetry: 'I did it as a candle illuminating, so that one may see by it and also do and study it in the series of texts and their contents'.

To conclude, in his various essays, including *Ha-Egron*, Sa'adia does not deal with the nature of poetry, but with its prosodic aspects and with its theory of rhetoric, as does Ibn al-Mu'tazz in his essay. The latter's purpose, as he states in his preface, is to prove that the artistic devices of tropes and figures of speech are not the product of later literary development but are present in classical poetry and even in the Qur'ān. Sa'adia likewise intends to prove the presence of similar rhetorical means in the Bible. He urges their renewal and their use in contemporary poetry and even prose.

Sa'adia practised what he preached. In his poetic work he was not content with abundant use of words from the Bible but imitated its rhetorical devices, too. In his Arabic commentary to the Hebrew version of *Ha-Galui* he explains linguistic and rhetorical usages in reference to their appearance in the Bible.¹¹⁰ This becomes clear from a comparison of his poetic work with his commentary to the Bible, which is replete with rhetorical elucidations.¹¹¹

To understand Sa'adia's uniqueness as against the Hebrew poets in Spain who succeeded him, one should note the total adherence of the latter to Arabic literature even in the theory of rhetorical ornamentation. This is attested by Moshe b. 'Ezra in chapter 8 of his composition *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-al-Mudhākara*, in which he describes twenty rhetorical devices prevalent in Arabic poetry, and also quotes verses

¹⁰⁹ This is how Sa'adia entitles this essay, after its twelve parts.

¹¹⁰ See Tobi 1982, I, p. 247; Tobi 1991a.

¹¹¹ For details of several rhetorical devices, biblical for the most part, which Sa'adia recommends and uses, see below. Yet there is still room and need for a painstaking review of his commentary to the Bible, a part of which is still in manuscript, to encompass this subject.

from poems exemplifying Arabic and Hebrew poetry.¹¹² True, Ibn 'Ezra, like Ibn al-Mu'tazz, gives examples of rhetorical means from the classical and sacred texts, but rather than meaning to praise the Bible wishes to justify their use in contemporary poetry. This is what he says about the use of metaphor as ornamentation:¹¹³

Every sensible person of our times who rejects this metaphor undoubtedly belittles what is certain and what he sees with his own eyes and abandons his foremost path. For the metaphor is most evident in the books of the prophecy, and is not to be counted quickly [because of its many occurrences] and there is no wrong in it. Moreover one should not work without it. Because of this understanding and the great knowledge of it, the Arab poets imitated it, considering its presence in the books of the prophecy.

We have already noted Ibn 'Ezra's recommendation that one should use all accepted devices in Arabic poetry, because 'poetry is the wisdom of the Arabs and the Jews follow them in this art'.

H. *The Special Style of the Written Work*

Three of the aims of *Ha-Galui* concern the theory of language and poetry; Sa'adia states in the preface:¹¹⁴

The first of them will teach purity of Hebrew speech to the nation because I have seen it, that long since, Arabic and Aramaic have overwhelmed it. Furthermore, what is worse is that they have caused the nation to forget its pure tongue and its rhetorical phrases. And the second will teach the nation the composing of phrases and the combination of words. I have done it for an illumination in whose light they will go and they will be awakened by it in the composition of their sermons and their poems. And the third will teach it the combinations [Arabic original *ḍummāl*], because the knowledge of any language will not be complete except with combinations that assemble it in the essay, piece by piece, through which the intended content is made clear. Otherwise it will be flawed and different, as I have elucidated these three matters in the book of the Hebrew poem.¹¹⁵

¹¹² For a comparison of Ibn 'Ezra and his Arabic sources on this matter, see Dana 1983, pp. 21–33; see also Yelin 1940.

¹¹³ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 225; and see Dana 1983, pp. 115–116.

¹¹⁴ Harkavy 1892, pp. 154–157; Sa'adia 1969, pp. 26–28.

¹¹⁵ The reference is to *Ha-Egron*, apparently in the lost additions to the Arabic version, in which he deals with the theory of poetry, as he states in the preface to this version.

Sa'adia's first purpose, then, relates to the language: the need to integrate the biblical layer into contemporary writing and the need to be exact with language grammatically—*faṣāḥa* in the Arabic expression. Second, he wishes to demonstrate rhetorical language, combinations of words and expressions, as required for writing literary prose (sermons) and poetry, namely the theory of rhetoric—*balāgha* in Arabic. Third, he wants to propound the special meaning of words that in combination express a certain notion whose content changes if the word order is changed.

This discussion of the meaning arising from a certain arrangement of words in a syntactical unit or line of poetry is an innovation in Arabic as well as Jewish literature. The first Arab author to put forward similar ideas was 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 1078). In his book *Dalā'il al-I'jāz* he severely criticises the basic assumption in Arab criticism that in the analysis of a linguistic expression (*kalām*) one must distinguish only between the content (*ma'nā*) and the words (*lafẓ*), which are its clothing. Jurjānī also noted word order (*naẓm* or *tartīb*) and the particular linguistic mould (*ṣūra*) arising from this order, where any change entailed a change in meaning (*ma'nā*). In his opinion, only the ignorance of the critics

misguided them and led them astray [. . .] and made them adhere to things that the mind cannot abide. This was when they were not intelligent enough to comprehend the subject of form [*ṣūra*]. They established for themselves a basic assumption and built on a principle, stating that there was nothing but the content and the words of the language [*ma'nā wa-lafẓ*] and no third thing [*ṣūra*].

Jurjānī, who discusses this subject in connection with plagiarism, asserts that the essence and uniqueness of a written work lies in the way of expression, in the style (*uslūb*) deriving from the form, and not in the words and the rhetoric.¹¹⁶ Ibn Khaldūn, the famous historian (d. 1405), wrote similarly in his account of the special 'style' of poetry:¹¹⁷

It is not used to express the basis (upon which) the meaning (of a statement rests). That is the task of the vowel endings. It is also not used for perfect expression of the idea resulting from the particular word combination used. That is the task of eloquence and style (*bayān*).

¹¹⁶ All the foregoing on Jurjānī is according to Levin 1980.

¹¹⁷ Ibn Khaldūn 1958, III, pp. 375–6.

[. . .]. [Poetical method] is used to refer to a mental form for metrical word combinations which is universal in the sense of conforming with any particular word combination. This form is abstracted by the mind from the most prominent individual word combinations and given a place in the imagination comparable to a mold or loom. Word combinations that the Arabs consider sound, in the sense of having the (correct) vowel endings and the (proper) style, are then selected and packed by (the mind) into (that form), just as the builder does with the mold, or the weaver with the loom. Eventually, the mold is sufficiently widened to admit the word combinations that fully express what one wants to express.

Ibn Khaldūn adds¹¹⁸ that without knowledge of ‘methods’ there would be no complete composition, even if its author has taken pains over the grammar, the figures of speech, and the metre. To acquire this knowledge there is but one single way: to learn by heart the words of the Arabs of old in prose and poetry.¹¹⁹

Sa‘adia’s statement that knowledge of the language will be incomplete without knowledge of the *ḍummāt*, the language combinations that constitute the special style in which the intention of the content inheres, is thus in line with Ibn Khaldūn. In his discussion both in *Ha-Egron* and in *Ha-Galui*, which he wrote as a model of fine writing, one assumes that Sa‘adia regarded the *ḍummāt* as the essence of the writing, which determines its distinctiveness in that the speaker expresses his intention through them. Both Sa‘adia and Jurjānī seem to have been influenced by Aristotelian notions on the language of poetic writing, where the essence of the ‘style of speech’ is the pattern of the words in their forms and their combinations, and in the order of their arrangement.¹²⁰ Sa‘adia uses the term *ḍummāt* elsewhere in his writing—in his commentary to the books of the Bible. But there he argues that for an understanding of the Bible one has to be careful with ‘the understanding of the words according to their [correct] composition, in such a way that all the words will be linked in their interpretation, linked in their reading, without interruption between them. Nor in the interpretation may one connect words that are separated’.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 381.

¹¹⁹ Cf. al-Aṣma‘ī, the eighth-century Baghdadi philologist, cited by Ibn Rashīq in *Kūṭāb al-‘Umda*. Cantarino 1975, pp. 55–56.

¹²⁰ Spiegel 1972, p. 29.

¹²¹ Zucker 1984, p. 193. See the term *ḍummāt* in its Arabic original on p. 19. Among the rhetorical measures acceptable in the tenth century in Bible exegesis this was called סידור שנהלך (*naẓm* or *tartīb*) that is divided).

So in Bible exegesis the term *dummāt* refers to the logical-hermeneutic-syntactical issue associated with the tension between the reading according to the Massoretic cantillation marks and the logical meaning arising from the interpretation. It does not refer to the meaning that arises from the combination of the individual words.¹²²

I. *Types of Literature*

In the Genizah fragment mentioned earlier, which apparently was written by a person from Sa'adia's school,¹²³ there is a classification of types of literature in Hebrew. Although it was not authored by Sa'adia himself¹²⁴ it seems to be of interest for our discussion here in view of its approach to the literature of Arabic poetics. This fragment has already been analysed,¹²⁵ but we intend only to add two details indicating the Arabic influence.

1. *Prose or poetry: which is preferable?*

This question hung over the world of Arab literati in the middle ages. The first to deal with it systematically was the renowned Arab philologist al-Mubarrad (826–898), author of the dictionary *al-Kāmil*. In a written reply to a question he was asked, what is finer (*ablagh*), the rhetoric of the poem (*balāghat al-shi'r*) or the rhetoric of prose (*al-khuṭab wa-al-kalām al-manthūr wa-al-saj'*), he stated that in principle the essentials of poetry are found in a poem as well as in prose. They are unity of the idea in the piece, selection of the words, and beauty of the composition of the words. However, the poet is more praiseworthy (*aḥmad*) because he augments the rhetoric of prose with metre and rhyme.¹²⁶ This view has been current in Islam throughout the ages, although certain writers prefer prose for various reasons.

An echo of this question is found in our fragment. Its author also prefers poetry to prose on similar grounds: 'The second part is lyrical prose, and this is more dignified than the first part [prose] because

¹²² Likewise in his Commentary to Proverbs 25:11 (Qāfiḥ edition 1962, p. 199).

¹²³ See Sa'adia 1969, pp. 386–389.

¹²⁴ See Tobi 1982, I, p. 388, n. 7.

¹²⁵ Sa'adia 1969 in the Introduction, pp. 79–85.

¹²⁶ For the publication of the Arabic original of the letter see von Grunebaum 1941; for an English translation see Cantarino 1975, pp. 103–108.

it requires strength of excellence and additional keenness'.¹²⁷ Since this writer does not deal with poetry in quantitative metre at all, it is not the absence of metre that distinguishes the first part—prose—from the second part—lyrical prose. By contrast, Mubarrad, like all the other Arab authors, and in their wake also Moshe b. 'Ezra in *Kitāb al-Muḥādḍara wa-al-Mudhākara*, differentiate prose, including rhyming prose, from metred poetry. This difference, or course, is due to the different subject matter of each of the writers.

2. *The division into types*

The basic definition of the poetic work in Sa'adia's theory emerges from his comments in the Arabic preface to *Ha-Egron* in his discussion of poets' utilisation of the first version of the work (pp. 153–155):

It became clear to me several years after the appearance of the book that it is necessary for the learners, even though I assembled for them the beginning and ending elements of poems, that I show them aspects of the middle [elements], which will help them in the themes themselves on which they would compose their poems [so] I have added these also to the book. These are the middle [elements], being the essence of the poem, and the two ends are nothing other than guards for them; although of many kinds, the principles and essence of the matter are three elements. One of them is the sentence types in which all people speak, being statement, question, narrative, imperative, and request, as I shall elucidate [below]; the second element is the kinds of attributes, which are limited to four kinds, namely the thing itself, the form, the action, or the feel, as I shall clarify all these; and the third element is the kinds of image, and they are similar to these two kinds except that the former are taken from what is found in a thing that one imagines and the latter are taken from what is present in the thing that one likens to it.

By the 'beginning and ending elements' Sa'adia means the acrostic at the start of the lines of the poem and the rhyme at their ends, and as stated above, he wrote the two parts of *Ha-Egron* on these. The first part is arranged according to beginnings of words for the acrostic, and the second part is arranged according to word endings

¹²⁷ 'Excellence' is rendered in the Judeo-Arabic original: תְּמִיזָה, namely תְּמִיזָה. This seems to me the proper translation, a qualitative and intellectual matter, not as Allony rendered it תְּמִיזָה, a technical talent for using metre and rhyme; *tamayyuz*, from the fifth conjugation, not the second.

Nevertheless, Sa'adia fought for the Jewish tradition against Islamic influences and culture, and especially came out in defence of the honour of the Bible and the Hebrew language in face of the claim of supremacy of the Qur'ān and Arabic. Therefore, he could not ignore the existence of artistic Hebrew writing devoid of both rhyme and acrostic, and even of defined and bounded poetic lines, such as the ethical proverbs of Shim'on b. Sira and El'azar b. 'Iray. This writing by no means meets the definition of poetry, but it is certainly finer than ordinary prose. Therefore, to teach the 'purity of the holy tongue', 'composition of language and assembly of its rhetoric phrases', and 'composition of rhetoric phrases' he wrote *Ha-Galui* in imitation of biblical literature. It is divided into verses, marked with cantillation, and replete with rhetorical devices. In Sa'adia's words, he did as various authors before him had done after the closing of the biblical canon, starting from Ben Sira and Ben 'Iray (in Aramaic!)

¹²⁸ This does not mean the last letter of the word or even the last letter of the root, but the last syllable of the word, which is to the benefit to the poets when they rhyme. This is how one should judge from the few fragments of the second part of *Ha-Egron* that have survived with the *Hassagot* (Reservations) of Mevasser (Sa'adia 1969, pp. 381–383): *הַלֵּל־הַלֵּל־הַלֵּל־הַלֵּל־הַלֵּל*. In research literature it was customary to note the influence of the Arabic dictionaries, which are arranged according to the last letter of the roots of words, e.g., *al-Qāmūs*, *Lisān al-'Arab*, *al-Shāhīh*, and *Kitāb al-Ayn*, as if they were intended to help poets find rhymes. See, e.g., Yelin 1940, p. 10; Sa'adia 1969, pp. 25–26. But this has been rejected by researchers of Arabic and Hebrew lexicography because nothing in these dictionaries can help poets wishing to rhyme by whole repeated syllables, and in Arabic poetry also by words equal in metre (number of *awṭād* and *asbāb*, and their order). See Kopf 1970, pp. 115–116; also Goldenberg 1973, pp. 85–86. If there is any connection between Arabic lexicographers and Sa'adia on this subject, we may recall two authors of his generation: Qudāma b. Ja'far, whose *Jawāhīr al-Alfāz* was written expressly to aid writers of rhymed prose; and the philologist (as distinct from philosopher) Abū Ibrāhīm al-Fārābī (d. 961), author of *Dirwān al-Adab*, a dictionary arranged according to categories of morphology, derivatives, and noun forms for the benefit of poets. See Kopf 1970, p. 115, n. 73.

and ending with his contemporaries of Qayrawān. He did likewise in his *Sefer Ha-Mo'adim* and in his Hebrew preface to *Ha-Egbron*.

The anonymous writer from Sa'adia's school who composed the fragment noted above also discusses artistic poetry and prose literature together, distinguishing it from academic prose literature, which is not artistic. He classifies this writing into seven genres: the first five are of poetry and the last two are of artistic prose. Poetry is that which has defined and delimited stanzas, and its various genres are determined according to its rhyme and metre. In listing these genres, the author of the passage goes from the simple to the complex, namely from the genre akin to prose to the most excellent genre of poetry. In Arabic he calls the first genre *ḥaṭṭ* (sermons); he states, 'they are formed of stanzas but without rhyme'. As an example he gives the poetry of Yose b. Yose. He names the second genre *ḥanū* in Arabic; this, he asserts, is not real poetry although rhyme occasionally is present in it. He gives no examples of this from the Hebrew writing of his day but from biblical verses, probably to show that rhyme is implanted in Hebrew literature, and that its roots go right back to the Bible. Yet he is obviously influenced by the classification of Arabic poetry because he feels obliged to name this genre of poetry, even though it is not found as a class in late Hebrew poetry and he has to give examples from the Bible.¹²⁹ The third genre is the *ṣan'ē*, 'which is scanned and rhymed', but the metre is not constant—sometimes it is present and sometimes not. The poetry of Yannay is cited as an example of this genre. Two important issues arise from this definition: the first is the importance of the element of consistent rhyming in the poem, as against the casual rhyming in the *ḥanū*; the second is the introduction of the element of metre in the poem, which Sa'adia does not consider at all in the fragments of his works that have survived.

None of these three genres—*ḥaṭṭ*, *ḥanū*, and *ṣan'ē*—was considered

¹²⁹ It seems erroneous to say that he does not cite examples from Hebrew writing of his own time for fear of mistaking the chronological order of genres of the poetry exemplified, starting from Yose b. Yose, followed by Yannay, and ending with Ha-Qilliri and Sa'adia (*rās al-matība*), because the examples from the Bible disturb the chronological order. Even the sixth genre, exemplified by excerpts from Ben Sira and Ben 'Iray, is not in its correct chronological place. But see Allony in Sa'adia 1969, pp. 84–85, who holds that the author of this passage, influenced by the critics of Arabic poetry, 'also classified our poets *into periods*' (emphasis added). It seems to me that the classification is by genre, not by chronology.

¹³⁰ *Sajʿ* and *raǧaz* were present in ancient Arabic poetry, but after Arabic metre was invented, the definition as poetry was disallowed for any work not written in Arabic quantitative metre. This, as stated, was Moshe b. ʿEzra's position in his response to the fourth question in *Kūṭab al-Muḥāḍara wa-al-Mudhākara*: although Job, Proverbs, and Psalms are outside the definition of prose, they are not poetry proper because they have neither metre nor rhyme, according to the Arabs' requirement. The *khutab* are not a formal definition of a literary genre, but a definition of content: the sermons of the caliphs and their commissioners, and thereafter of the imams and the preachers in the mosques, which were composed in rhymed prose, are *sajʿ*. This development began in Islam from the middle of the ninth century and peaked at the end of the tenth century, to the point that in no speech could the element of rhyme conceivably be missed out. Note too that the definitions of *sajʿ* and *raǧaz* by the author of our passage do not conform to what is accepted in the Arabic tradition, namely *sajʿ* predates *raǧaz*, and in formal terms it displays nothing but the element of rhyme, so it is rhymed prose. True, the rhyme can appear more than twice. By contrast, *raǧaz* is characterised not by rhyming, *a-b/a-b*, which is a regular rhyme as against *sajʿ*, but by the element of metre in it, which is entirely absent in *sajʿ*. See Ibn Khaldūn 1958, III, pp. 368–369; Nicholson 1969, pp. 74–77; Gibb 1963, pp. 14; Baneth 1978, pp. 338–339. All the above goes still farther to discredit the attempt to regard this classification as chronological (see previous note).

¹³² For a discussion of metre see above.

¹³³ Harkavy 1892, pp. 109–110, pointed out that that time and again Sa'adia mentions Ha-Qilliri and his poetry in a tone of great adulation. Instances are the Arabic preface to *Ha-Egron* (Sa'adia 1969, p. 155); the *Commentary to Sefer Yaśrah* (Sa'adia 1972, p. 49); an excerpt given by Qirqisānī 1939/43, III, p. 609: 'And one proof from the text בְּרַבְּי אֱלֹהִים הוּא מְפָקֵד וּשְׁפָאֵל (Bless God in the congregations, the Lord from the fountain of Israel. Psalms 68:27): this refers to the sages of Israel who wrote and published many praises and exaltations of the Lord, such as Yannay and Ela'zar and Pinḥas and others'. Likewise an excerpt from his commentary to Early Prophets noted by Abraham b. Shelomo of Yemen (Ms. Jewish Theological Seminary New York, [Mic. 1102] folio 263b, according to Cohen 1943, p. 116): 'We find in a lament among the excellent poets, אִם תִּשְׁמְרֵנָהּ זֶה לָנוּ תִּנִּי אֵת, and perhaps it comes to your mind that the poet Ela'zar said this from his heart, know that we find that the Torah spoke of it clearly long since', etc. On the major influence of Ha-Qilliri's work on Sa'adia's *paytanic* writing see Tobi 1982, I, pp. 62 ff.

by the method of 'insertion of lines in the poem', even though it undoubtedly has rhyme and metre, as in the case of Ha-Qilliri's *piyyutim*. The author is referring to a poem constructed of stanzas into which are inserted several biblical verses, and the stanza itself concerns matters of *halakha*. He states that Sa'adia (*rās al-matība*) and other scholars too, who are unknown to us, composed *piyyutim* of the type described here. The reference is most certainly to Sa'adia's *azharot*, contained in his *shiv'ata* for the Feast of Weeks (*Shavu'ot*), אָזְחָרֹת, אֵשׁ אֶזְכָּרָהּ. The beginnings of the first and third lines in each of their stanzas are words from biblical framing verses, while the fourth line in each stanza is a biblical verse.¹³⁴

The writer moves on to a description of the two last genres of artistic literary composition, which are prose, not poetry. Their special nature seems to lie in their literary language, the rhetoric, which separates them from ordinary prose. The first (sixth) genre is the literature of ethics and morals, for example, the books of Ben Sira and Ben 'Iray, whose distinctiveness, according to Sa'adia in the Arabic preface to *Ha-Galui*, is their division into verses and their cantillation signs, in a manner that affords them a certain rhythm. The last genre is 'composition of speech plainly' (תַּאֲלִיף אֶלְכֻלָּאִים פִּי) (תַּפְסִיר). This apparently refers to well-written prose essays or letters but without a rhythmic division.

In sum, even though Sa'adia, and following him this writer of his school, clearly distinguish poetry from artistic prose, rhymed or unrhymed; they do not assign purity of language and the use of rhetorical means to poetry alone, but make them obligatory for artistic prose also.

The anonymous writer of the passage thus classifies the genres of Hebrew literature under the influence of a similar classification in Arabic literature. This is a classification of literary forms according to their generic development but it is not identical with the chronology of the poets themselves, as Allony wished to assert, that is, the poet's time relative to the time of Muḥammad and the Islamic empires.¹³⁵ Of the seven genres listed, only the first four are influenced by the Arabic literary division; the last three have no parallels in this literature. The adherence of the writer of the passage to the for-

¹³⁴ Allony suggested that the reference is to the *azharot* (Sa'adia 1969, p. 84 and p. 389, n. 26), although he noted that it could be to *Essa Mëshaly* (p. 84).

¹³⁵ Sa'adia 1969, p. 83.

mulaic number seven in fixing the kinds of 'lyrical prose' arises from reasons that are not clear.

In Arabic literature five stages are usually differentiated in the development of the composition of texts (*ta'rif al-kalām*). The first stage is the combination of letters into words; the second is the combination of words into sentences: this is the prose (*al-manthūr min al-kalām*) spoken by human beings. The next stage signifies the beginning of the development of literature, with the distinctly formal features of rhythm, rhyme, and metre. This approach is of course highly formalistic, according to the Arab tradition, which sees form as the basic element in literary definition. The third stage is speech, divided into sections according to rhythm (*manzūm*), but still without use of formal devices, as the rhythm is determined by the content of the words. Rhyming is added in the fourth stage, when the sections are also marked off by similar sounds at their endings—rhymes, which in ancient Arabic literature are far freer than in classical poetry. This stage is called *saġ'*. The definition of this stage is somewhat confused in Arabic literature. At times *saġ'* is defined as rhyming prose, without the rhythmic component in it. The introduction of the rhythmic element, which is not uniform and not regular, and far from the precision of the classical Arabic metres, creates a genre called *raġaz*, named after this primal iambic metre. The fifth stage is poetry (*shi'r*), in which are present metre and rhyme according to known and mandatory rules.

The third stage, *manzūm*, was common, according Arab authors, in two genres of literary works: sermons (*khutba*, plural *khutab*) delivered to the people on various occasions, especially in mosques, and written epistles (*risāla*, plural *rasā'il*). The fourth stage—*saġ'* and *raġaz*—characterise ancient Arabic writing, particularly words of prophesiers and seers (*kāhin*, plural *kahana*, *kuhān*). The fifth stage of course is typical of the *qaṣīdas*, the work of poets. For obvious theological reasons the Arab authors took care not to classify the Qur'ān by any of these stages; yet they note that all the stages, and even classical metres, can be found in it, but naturally not whole *qaṣīdas*.¹³⁶

The classification in the passage under discussion seems to rest on the same criteria of rhythm, rhyme, and metre. But in fact this passage reflects vacillation between being influenced by Arabic poetics

¹³⁶ On all this see Suyūṭī 1951, pp. 120 ff. (translation of a passage: Cantarino 1975, pp. 41–42); Suyūṭī 1951a, pp. 98 ff.; Ibn Khaldūn 1958, III, pp. 368–369.

and rejecting it. The writer tries to classify Hebrew literature according to Arab criteria, but this is largely a failure because in fact the various genres (apart from the second) are indistinguishable by their metre. Quite the contrary: in the poetry of Yose b. Yose the 'sermons' genre accords with the writer's classification, and the metre is more distinctive and precise than in the poetry of Yannay and Ha-Qilliri. The writer, like other medieval Jewish authors, is overawed by the meticulous quantitative Arabic metre, and therefore ascribes to Ha-Qilliri, the poet admired by his teacher Sa'adia, the writing of poems in metre, and he considers his work the high point of development of the *piyyut*. The importance of metre for him is also evident from the relatively long discussion he devotes to it. But in his censure of it one finds his praise. That is, his perception of metre is not formal, as is usual in Arabic poetry, hence also in Hebrew secular poetry in Spain, where the chief thing in the metre is its musical aspect, and any flaw in it grates on the listener's ear.¹³⁷ In his words, metre is essential for the content of the poem, for its proper comprehension: 'The tying of contents of the lines to prevent their separation. And if they are separated from each other the poem will drag and be worthless'. This statement links up with that of Sa'adia cited above on the subject of the *dummāt* (combinations) of the poem, which impart to it its special significance. Still, he regards metre as something separate from the content itself, although it has to be matched to this content. In this context the writer misses an opportunity to extol the rhythm of biblical poetry, determined by the content itself, so that the rhythm, hence the division into hemistiches, constitutes a fundamental part of the poem.

J. *Metaphor*

In rhetoric, tropes, namely various kinds of imagery and metaphor, occupied a considerable place in the Arab theory of *badī'* and also in Sa'adia's poetics. The Arab prosodists distinguished the thing in itself from metaphor, or the subject from its dress (*muhkam* or *haqīqa* as against *majāz*). The absence of substantive meaning of the metaphor according to the Arab perception, with which the Hebrew poets of

¹³⁷ See Sa'adia 1969, p. 388, n. 25.

Spain concurred, is expressed strongly by Moshe b. 'Ezra at the beginning of the chapter on metaphor:¹³⁸

This subject is one of the most excellent in the pillars of writing and one of the sweetest among the praises of prose and poetry. Poetry is built on one rhyming letter and on metre, which of necessity has to be introduced; and of its syllables, some are short and some are more weighty in their metre. Hence the poet is unable to put a syllable in its place because of the difference in metre. So he will put in its stead something that signifies it, in which the structure that he has chosen will be preserved.

Here then we have a technical reason: metaphor is used owing to the constraints of metre and rhyme. Only afterwards does Ibn 'Ezra praise the beauty of metaphor, which the poet is bound to uphold and which the prose writer applied to adorn his work.¹³⁹ Because of the gap between the thing in itself and the metaphor a question arose in Arabic literature of the relationship between them, famously formulated as 'The best of the poem is its lie' (*ajmal al-shi'r kadhuhu*). This denotes the superiority of real expression (*muḥkam*) to metaphoric (*majāz*) in clarity of language and expression of the idea, but on the other hand it establishes the superiority of metaphoric speech in beauty. One should therefore not be over-enthusiastic in one's use of metaphor, which may impede understanding.¹⁴⁰

Sa'adia sets out to discuss metaphor from the theological and philosophical standpoint. He ascribes the existence of biblical expressions of personification in respect of God to the need to convey to human beings a certain notion in language comprehensible to them, and to the impossibility of expression in any other way.¹⁴¹ Elsewhere in his theoretical and interpretative writings Sa'adia refers to metaphorical language in terms of its content, namely the need to use metaphor

¹³⁸ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, pp. 224, and see Halkin's note to line 97: he did not find a source for Ibn 'Ezra's remarks in Arabic literature.

¹³⁹ See also in detail Pagis 1970, pp. 40–44.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Ibn 'Ezra, op. cit.: 'Metaphor is of the most beautiful for the purpose of the two mentioned genres (poetry and prose). Although the plain is basically more veritable, and metaphor is an addition, in the end it [the metaphor] is a plating of adornment. So, when the poem is plated with metaphoric garb and bedecks itself with the attire of a figurative expressions and allusions, the embroidery of its silk becomes more beautiful and its dullness turns finer'. And see Pagis 1970, pp. 44–50.

¹⁴¹ See his preface to the *Commentary to Sefer Yasirah* (Sa'adia 1972); Tobi 1982, I, p. 237. This is also the view of Maimonides in his opening to *Guide to the Perplexed*.

instead of the thing in itself in order to state an idea with greater lucidity. The metaphor enriches the power of expression of the language. It is not a lie intended to beautify, but actually to clarify.¹⁴² Arabic poetics was concerned with secular poetry, particularly poems of praise and admonition, of wine and love, which left room for outright lies; such poems were condemned by Muḥammad himself. But Sa'adia is concerned with sacred poetry, and this helps explain why he treats metaphor *per se* more sympathetically, as well as approving its beauty. Indeed, in his poetic works he uses metaphoric language far more liberally than was usual in the ancient *piyyut*, although never so much as the poets of Spain.¹⁴³

Sa'adia has recourse to the subject of metaphor in his *Commentary to Sefer Yeṣirah*, 4:1, where he explains the different attributes of God: חַי הָעוֹלָמִים, נִכּוֹן כְּסֵאוֹ מְאֹד, קְרוֹן שְׁמוֹ (p. 106). These are intended to make possible thought on God's eternal presence 'in the approximation of the allegory and not by way of personification'. *Sefer Yeṣirah* is basically conducts a philosophical inquiry, intended to remove personification from God. This inquiry underlies another discussion, more extensive and problematic, on phrases of personification in the Bible referring to God. Again, Sa'adia interprets them in various places in his writings as allegory and metaphor. This clearly touches on the third element that he considers in *Ha-Egron*, namely kinds of image. From that composition we have no statement by him on the subject, only the following in his Arabic preface:

The third element is the kinds of image, and they are similar to these two kinds except that the former are taken from what is found in a thing that one imagines and the latter are taken from what is present in the thing that one likens to it.¹⁴⁴

The definition of the image or the metaphoric name appears here, for the first time in Jewish literature, in a clearly literary context; other definitions like it are found in medieval philological and prosodic literature, for example, the essays of Yona b. Janāḥ and Moshe b. 'Ezra.¹⁴⁵ Apart from the literary context, Sa'adia discusses the

¹⁴² See Tobi 1982, I, pp. 236–239, 249.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 266–267.

¹⁴⁴ The reference is to the parts of speech and adjectives. See p. 146 above.

¹⁴⁵ Ibn Janāḥ 1964, chapter 28 (27): 'On what is said in the word and the intention is something else'; Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, chapter 8, 'The first section is on the adornments of poetry, and it is the chapter of metaphor'.

metaphoric name in philosophy in various places in his writings, when the metaphoric name is just a metaphor for another name or subject, which it is impossible to denote by its simple name or to express its intention. Sa'adia goes into this question so as to eliminate any simple perception of expressions in the Bible that personify God. Here is what he writes in his *Commentary to Sefer Yeširah* (Preface, pp. 25–26):

So scholars are not permitted to ponder all these matters, and the questioners may not seek their descriptions, and the allegorists may not make allegory of them. If the teacher has to tell his pupil one of his [God's] attributes, the way is that he should choose his words by transparent hints and obvious parables, and he should anticipate his listeners so that they do not take his expressions as real and understand them literally. This was the way of the prophets. When they came to inform humans of Divine matters and among the usual words did not find any that could instruct them in the purpose, and they had nothing at their disposal except two things, either they would invent names or they would borrow names. If they had invented names for each one of the Divine matters, men would not have understood those names and would not have understood those issues, and everything would have been incomprehensible to them. Therefore, they saw fit to borrow the crude words made up by man and his progeny for the crude things that are created, and through them they explained the matters of the Creator, so that the plain meaning of the words would be known.

A broader exposition of the subject in its philosophical context is found in the second article of *Beliefs* (2:8, pp. 111 ff.). In this discussion, which incidentally contains a rejection of the Christian belief in the divine origin of Jesus, Sa'adia proposes to eliminate the simple meaning of expressions of personification in reference to God in the Bible. At the end of this discussion (pp. 117–120) he considers metaphoric language not necessarily in connection with God:

Thus we know that it is really of the nature and the peculiarity of language thus to extend and transfer meanings and employ figures of speech. Such an extension of meaning is employed by the language of Scriptures when it says that heavens speaks: *The heavens declare the glory of God* (Ps. 19:2); and the sea talks: *For the sea hath spoken, the stronghold of the sea, saying* (Isa. 23:4) [. . .] that the mountain speak: *The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing* (Isa. 55:12) [. . .].

Now if someone were to ask, 'But what advantage is there in this extension of meaning that is practiced by language and that is calculated only to throw us into doubt? Would it not have done better if it had restricted itself to expressions of unequivocal meaning and thus

have enabled us to dispense with the burden of discovering the correct interpretation?" my answer would be that, if language were to restrict itself to just one term, its employment would be very much curtailed and it would be impossible to express by means of it any more than a small portion of what we aim to convey. It therefore preferred rather to extend its use of words so as to transmit every meaning, relying for the correct interpretation upon reason and acquaintance with the texts of Scripture and with history. Were we, in our effort to give an account of God, to make use only of expressions that are literally true, it would be necessary for us to desist from speaking of Him as one that hears and sees and pities and wills to the point where there would be nothing left for us to affirm except the fact of His existence [. . .].

We find that expressions similar to these are used in speaking of inanimate things which cannot properly be said to possess any of these organs. We find, namely, that in the language of Scripture twelve such terms are applied to earth and water. The first of them is *head*—*Nor the head of the dust of the world* (Prov. 8:26). [Another is] *eye*, as in the statement of Scripture: *And they shall cover the eye of the earth* (Exod. 10:5). [A third is] *ear*, as in the statement of the Scripture: *And give ear, Oh earth* (Isa. 1:2) [. . .].

Thus we find that the language of the Scripture employing these expressions is speaking of things, which, according to the testimony of our senses, possess none of these organs, on which account they must all be construed as merely figures of speech [*majāzāt*]. It must, therefore, do the same for whatever our reason testifies possesses none of these organs. In that case, too, these expressions can be only figures of speech. He, therefore, who alleges that the language of Scripture uses words only in their material sense, must find these twelve organs for us in the earth and the water.

Now just as the above-mentioned terms for the organs of the body [when applied to God] are used only figuratively, so also are all acts connected with these organs. [This would hold true where such words are addressed to God] as *incline Thine ear, open Thine eyes, stretch forth Thy hand*, and the like. The same thing would also apply to the special functions ascribed to these organs, [as when it is asserted of God] that *He hears and sees and speaks and thinks* and the like. Each one of these has an interpretation other than its literal sense.

So the allegoric/metaphoric interpretation of certain expressions arises not only from the wish to eliminate personification of God, but also from clear recognition that this is the way of the language. Metaphors are present in it not only in respect of God. In the both respects the influence of Islamic culture is considerable. The *Muʿtazila* followers, who greatly influenced Saʿadia, fiercely attacked the Orthodox in Islam, who interpreted literally the terms of personification regard-

ing God.¹⁴⁶ The sages of Islam adopted what they called the theory of *bayān*—rhetoric, whose purpose was to interpret expressions whose plain meaning the mind and the tradition could not accept by way of metaphor (*majāz*).¹⁴⁷ This was applied, albeit not exclusively, to expressions of the personification of God in the Qur'ān. Sa'adia comments similarly in his preface to the Commentary to the Torah:¹⁴⁸

It is as well for every intelligent person always to grasp the book of the Torah according to the plain meaning of the words [. . .]. But when he sees that if he leaves the language as the plain meaning of the words, this brings to mind one of these four things I have stated, then he should know that that phrase is not to be taken literally, but it has a word or more that are metaphorical.

In two places in his *Commentary to Sefer Vəširah* Sa'adia also deals with the relation between the thing in itself and the metaphor. In his preface to the *Commentary* (p. 26) he writes that the personifying word in respect of God is nothing 'but a borrowing and an abstraction, but in truth and to be exact there is nothing like Him and nothing will be like His deeds, as they said אֵין כְּמוֹךְ בְּאֱלֹהִים ה' וְאֵין כְּמַעֲשֶׂיךָ' (There is nothing like You among the gods, Lord, and there is nothing like Your deeds').¹⁴⁹ That is, there is no absolute identity between the thing in itself and the metaphor. In one place (2:3, p. 80), when Sa'adia explains the metaphor הִכֵּל קֹדֶשׁ, referring to the middle letter among the seven double letters (בְּנִדְכַפְרֶת) he states that this metaphor (original Judeo-Arabic מִחֵל) was chosen because it signifies the quality of centrality.

Sa'adia, then, favours metaphor, as it enriches the expressive power of the language. He himself, in his writing the Hebrew *Ha-Galui* as a paradigmatic essay for purity of language, uses metaphor a great

¹⁴⁶ See Goldziher 1981, pp. 92–94. On the *Mu'tazila* and Sa'adia see Neumark 1921, pp. 112–114.

¹⁴⁷ See, e.g., Ibn Khaldūn 1958, III, pp. 332–339. In Arabic literature, metaphor is discussed in essays on language as well as on poetics. The discussion is rooted in Aristotle's *Poetics*, chapter 21, which contains a discourse on metaphor in the framework of a linguistic deliberation, although the examples are cited from belles-lettres. See also Mehren 1853, pp. 40–42; *ibid.*, Arabic part, pp. 6–46.

¹⁴⁸ Qāfih 1963, p. 162; Zucker 1984, p. 191.

¹⁴⁹ The *mu'tazilis* referred to a similar verse in the Qur'ān (42: 9–11) in their rejection of the personification of God: 'Nothing is like Him; He is the one who hears and sees'. See Goldziher 1981, p. 92.

deal, and says so expressly in the Arabic version of the work. This is how he explains the metaphors *גֵּר בְּנֶפֶשׁ מְלַחֶכֶת בְּנֶחֱלֶת*, גֵּר for wisdom:¹⁵⁰

הַמִּוִּנְהָה בְּנֶפֶשׁ כְּבֹנֶק אֵוֶר בְּרוּחַ יוֹם וָלַיְלָה
שׁוֹמֵה בְּנֶפֶשׁ מְלַחֶכֶת בְּנֶחֱלֶת
חֲתוּר מִחֶבֶא לִבִּי כְּנֵר

Its image in breathing is like flash of light in a clear day's wind
Placed in the soul, flames in an ember
It looks for my heart's hiding-place like a candle.

K. Sa'adia's *Rhetorical Devices*

Next we consider several of the principal rhetorical devices presented by Sa'adia in his theoretical works,¹⁵¹ all of them figures of speech built on certain syntactical structures and on various forms of paronomasia, as distinct from tropes, which are metaphors of different kinds.

1. *Homonyms*

In his *Commentary to Sefer Yāsirah*, 1:1 (pp. 49–50) Sa'adia discusses the expression *סֵפֶר וְסֵפֶר וְסֵפִיר* as follows:

We say more: why did the author of the essay not say *וְסֵפִיר*, and why did he put *סֵפֶר*, which is one of the kinds of thought, instead of thought in all? We then answer, that he did it only to compare the three nouns in the expression *סֵפֶר וְסֵפֶר וְסֵפִיר* in pronunciation and utterance. The Sages constantly did that. The beginning of it was in the prophecy books *פָּתַח וּפָתַח וּפָתַח עֲלֵיךְ יוֹשֵׁב הָאָרֶץ*. He picked three words similar in pronunciation. We have something like that in the Sages' writings: *בְּשִׁלּוּשָׁה דְּבָרִים אֶדָם נִכָּר בְּכֹסוֹ בְּכִיסוֹ וּבְכַעְסוֹ*. Likewise in the *paytan* writings, El'azar said: *לְסוּכְכִי לְמוֹסְכִי לְהַסִּיכִי בְּנִסִּיכִת קְדוּשָׁה*.¹⁵² We also always write in our epistles:¹⁵³ *שְׂבָחֵי שְׁלוֹם וְחֻבְשֵׁי בְרָכוֹת וְחֻשְׁבֵּי*

¹⁵⁰ The passage from the Arabic version was preserved with the *Reservations* of Mevasser concerning Sa'adia (Harkavy 1892, pp. 180–183).

¹⁵¹ The basic assumption is that purity of language necessitates precision in grammar and syntax. The subjects discussed here are linguistic ones that have a bearing on the language of artistic writing in poetry or in prose.

¹⁵² From Ha-Qilliri's *kadushta* *כִּפִּי בְּנִקְיוֹן אֶרְבֵּין* for the morning prayer of second day of Feast of Tabernacles in the Ashkenazi rite, *Mahzor Qgrovot* of Heidenheim, p. 68a. The formulation there is: *לְסוּכְכִי לְמִסְכִּי לְנִסְכִּי בְּנִסִּיכִת קְדוּשָׁה*.

¹⁵³ It seems that here Sa'adia cites himself, although locutions of this kind are not found in his letters that are known to us, and whose openings have survived. In any event, in his letter to Efraim b. Yehuda, published by Mann 1931/5, I, pp.

הַנֶּצִי שְׁלוֹם וְהַצִּי or: מִבְּסִחֵי שְׁלוֹם וּמִבְּהֵט בְּרָכוֹת וּמִשִּׁחֵי הַכְּמוּזוֹת or: תְּבוּנוֹת
הַנֶּצִי שְׁלוֹם וְהַצִּי, or all such similar phrases.¹⁵⁴

True, Sa'adia does not signify this explicitly, but clearly he regards the use of homonyms as a matter of aesthetics, even though it involves departure from the simple and lucid language. Presumably, he perceives homonymy as part of purity of language, as perhaps may be gathered from what Moshe b. 'Ezra has to say about this rhetorical means: 'It is willingly acceptable in the eyes of most masters of language because it is one of the means of rhetoric'.¹⁵⁵ Sa'adia's recommendation to poets to use homonyms may be deduced from the fact that in *Ha-Egbron* over ninety full homonyms are presented, and many more of different kinds.¹⁵⁶

2. Interpretation of personal names

This rhetorical device, which Yelin calls בתורת כללי שם העצם הפרטי (a personal name used in a common way or as a verb),¹⁵⁷ was known in Arabic literature by the term *al-ishṭiqāq*, although it is not mentioned in many books of *badī'*. Its purpose is to say something about a person either by praise or by censure, according to the meaning of his name in common usage. Sa'adia discusses this

72–73, we find these homonyms in the opening: אֶפְנִי שְׁלוֹם וְצַפְנִי בְּרָכוֹת וְסַפְנִי תְּבוּנוֹת. On homonyms in his *paytanic* writing see Tobi 1982, I, pp. 259–261.

¹⁵⁴ מִבְּסִחֵי: in Sa'adia's *Commentary to Sefer Yāširah*, Paris 1891, Lambert reads מִבְּסִחֵי, while in Qāfih's opinion, 1963, it should be left as it is, and understood from the phrase רַצְפָּה בָּהֵט (Esther 1:6). Qāfih seems to be right, for we find that from this word Sa'adia derives the verb הִתְבַּהֵט in his book *Ha-Galui*, as he states explicitly in his elucidation of the Arabic version of the work. See Harkavy 1892, p. 188. Sa'adia interpreted the word in the sense of the Arabic *raṣīfa*, well-ordered and lucid blessings. And cf. Abramson 1965, p. 165 and n. 42. הַנֶּצִי: From the phrase הִנֵּץ הַתְּבוּנָה, which is an infinitive. This reinforces Goldenberg's statement, 1973, p. 280, that in Sa'adia's system the infinitive precedes the root in the inflection of verbs or nouns, as in the system of the Basran scholars, as transpires from the aforementioned book by al-Anbārī (n. 34), question 28. Lambert read נִצְחֵי, while Abramson, op. cit., read הַנֶּצִי, and interpreted it from the term הוֹצֵץ. Qāfih retained the form הַנֶּצִי and interpreted it: 'Peace will flower and shine for him'.

¹⁵⁵ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 239. In the original *al-faṣāḥa*, which perhaps is better translated הצהרה [purity] as Halper rendered it.

¹⁵⁶ Goldenberg 1973, pp. 135–136. Goldenberg (ibid., pp. 123–124), rejected, without grounds, Zulay's statement 1964, p. 21, that words similar in sound should properly enter poetry by way of purity of language. On the objection of Ibn 'Ezra to the use of like-sounding words under the influence of Arab criticism, see Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 161.

¹⁵⁷ Yelin 1940, p. 274.

meaning in his commentary to *Ha-Galui*,¹⁵⁸ when he replies to his opponents' censure of his calling his enemies vile names only slightly different from their personal names. Examples are David (b. Zakkay) which becomes יָדוּד (he will flee); Khalaf (the Arabic name of Aharon b. Sarjādo) becomes מָת כָּלֵב (dead dog); Mūsā becomes מֵאוֹסָה אָמוֹ (his mother is loathsome); Ḥananya becomes אֲנִיָּה (from the term אֲנִיָּוָה, sorrow and grief); Yishai becomes יִשַׁי מוֹת.¹⁵⁹ In his defence Sa'adia argues that this is the way of Hebrew, and in his words (translated from Arabic), 'These derivations are among the mysteries of the language'. He gives evidence from the Bible, be it of praise, for example, יְהוֹשֻׁעַ—הוֹשֵׁעַ (father of a throng), אֲבִרָהָם—אֲבָרָם (redeemed by God), or of censure, for example, הָפַרַע—פָּרַעַה (covered in evil), בֵּית אֶזָּן—בֵּית אֵל (house of iniquity), עֵזָה (Gaza)—עֲזוּבָה (will be desolate), עֲקָרוֹן—תִּיעָקֵר (will be uprooted), and the like.

Another kind of etymological legend is that called *al-ittifāq* in Arabic, namely chance matching. This figure of speech is not realised through homonymy, that is, saying something about someone according to the meaning of his name, but through use of a personal name in a common way, unconnected to the personality of the person called by that name. The personal noun, of course, may also be the name of a nation, a city, a country, and so on. Sa'adia does not find it necessary to discuss this etymological interpretation. But from the mention of over 110 personal names in the passages of *Ha-Egron* that have survived one may conclude that they were intended for use according to their common literal meaning, or by synecdoche, that is, the whole of the thing expressed by a part of it.¹⁶⁰ Many of these personal names appear in *Ha-Egron* adjacent to similar and even identical words, most probably in order to suggest homonyms to the novice poet.

As we shall see later, Sa'adia followed this method of etymological interpretation in his *piyyutim*, and the poets of Spain might have observed this and done likewise. An example is Shēmuel Ha-Nagid in his poem לְבָבִי בְּקִרְבִּי חָם וְעֵינַי מְדַמְעֵת / לְמַעַן אֲנִי נִכְסָף לְחַמַּת וּמִיַּפְעָה and לְבָבִי בְּקִרְבִּי חָם וְעֵינַי מְדַמְעֵת / לְמַעַן אֲנִי נִכְסָף לְחַמַּת וּמִיַּפְעָה are faraway places in the Land of Israel, among the fortified cities in the inheritance of the tribes of Naftali and Re'uven (Joshua 19:35; 13:18). Here by synecdoche they refer to all of the

¹⁵⁸ Harkavy 1892, pp. 166–169.

¹⁵⁹ According to his Commentary to Psalms 55:16.

¹⁶⁰ Goldenberg 1973, pp. 130–131; cf. Sa'adia 1969, pp. 53–54.

Land of Israel, but their literal sense is also exploited: the first in order to create homonymy with the word **אֶרֶץ** at the opening of the verse, and both to describe a land that is full of warmth (**חֹם**) and splendour (**רִפְעָה**).

3. *Neologisms*

Above we described Sa'adia's method for creating new words, in which he followed the *paytanists* and the Kufan philologists. This is evident not only in his own creative writing of *piyyutim*, but also in his explanation for his linguistic inventions in the Arabic version of *Ha-Galui*. He says that all of them are through imitation, but in diverse ways:¹⁶¹

I start with the grammar of the words. I derived the word **תַּחֲבֹהֶט** from what is said [Esther 1:6]: **עַל רִצְפַּת בֵּהֶט וְשֵׁשׁ** [derivation of a verb from a noun] [...] from **וַיִּקְלְחוּ** from [Isaiah 51:6]: **גָּלְחוּ** (*gal* conjugation from *nif'al* conjugation) [...] and I derived **לָעֵן** from **לָעִנָּה** as is the custom to derive a masculine form from the feminine. I also wrote **תַּנְמוּל** instead of **נְמוּל** with emphasis by the **ת** [in the original: **וְהָיוּ חֲרוּ**. **בְּחִפְזֵי חֲרוּ** Derivation of a noun from certain root according to the form of a noun in another root],¹⁶² and **הָבִי** with the meaning of **נִחַקֵּא** in the construct state, as you say [Deuteronomy 33:24]: **יְהִי רָצִי אֲהִי** [as aforementioned].

4. *Augmentation (tafkhūm)*

Sa'adia discusses the linguistic aspect of augmentation in the chapter 2 of his book *Kutub al-Lugha*, entitled **אֶלְתַּפְכִּים וְאֶלְאֲחִצָּאֵר** (Augmentation and Omission), and in chapter 9, entitled **אֶלְוֹאִיד וְאֶלְלוֹאִהֶק** (Augments and Suffixes).¹⁶³ Our concern is not with the second chapter, which refers to Hebrew roots in which two of the three letters are the same. Sometimes these are inflected by the double letter being dropped and sometimes by its being expressed twice; occasionally they are inflected like quadriliteral roots.¹⁶⁴ Chapter 9 is

¹⁶¹ Harkavy 1892, pp. 186–188.

¹⁶² Harkavy 1892, p. 188, commented, 'It is surprising that he did not cite as evidence the word **תַּנְמִילֹהִי** (Psalms 116: 12).

¹⁶³ Dotan 1997, pp. 318 ff. (chapter 2); Skoss 1955, pp. 45 ff. (chapter 9).

¹⁶⁴ True, at times Sa'adia coins verbs in his *piyyutim* like quadriliterals, by omitting a defective letter from the root (**דִּרְךְ הַקִּיצֹר**) and doubling the other two letters, e.g., **סַדְסַד** from **יָסַד** (see Goldenberg 1973, p. 283) or the addition of one letter to the root identical to one of its letters, where the two other letters are identical,

more important; in it he considers the letters ה-ו-י, which are added to words usually at the end, and thus embellish the word and strengthen its impression. Examples are, הַקְשִׁיכָה, לְהַקְדָּה, הַמְוֹדָה; לְמַעַנְיוֹ, בְּנוֹ, כְּסָמוֹ; הַחֹשְׁבִי, הַמְנַבִּיחַ, אֵלֵי, עָדִי; אֶהְיֶה (אֶהְיֶה), כְּהֶחָכֵם (כְּהֶחָכֵם), יִדְהוֹ (יִדְהוֹ).¹⁶⁵

5. Writing in biblical language and style, especially the rare forms

As already noted, in his Arabic preface to *Ha-Egron* Sa'adia voices his dismay that in their work poets hardly used 'the ancient elements',¹⁶⁶ 'to the extent that the Bible itself has become a mysterious text and an unknown composition to them'. Accordingly, Sa'adia introduces various words into *Ha-Egron* originating in the Bible. As stated earlier, scholars have noted how in his scholarly writings and in his *paytanic* works he lays stress on biblical language to display the richness and beauty of Hebrew and the many possibilities inherent in it for literary writing. Sa'adia's way here is essentially twofold: one course is the use of the biblical lexicon, including rare and strange forms; the other is the use of biblical syntax, especially irregular forms that diverge from the accepted rules of language. He discusses these two approaches in his Arabic commentary to *Ha-Galui*:

I wrote בְּרִי יָצִיעַ instead of אֵל, as I have explained in Job that this word occurs eight times in the Bible.¹⁶⁷ One of them is בְּרִי שׁוֹפֵר [Job 39:25] [. . .] פִּיחַ instead of עֶשֶׂן,¹⁶⁸ from his say פִּיחַ הַכֶּבֶשֶׂן [Exodus 9:10] [rare words] [. . .]. I said יִתֵּר אֶחָיו instead of יִתֵּר אֶחֶיהֶם, namely singular instead of plural, like: בְּפִיו יִדְרְכוּ וּבְקִרְבָּם יִתְלָלוּ [Psalms 62:5]

such as שֹׁשֶׁנ from שֹׁשֶׁן (Zulay 1964, p. 131/16) or כִּבְכָּב from כִּבְכָּב (ibid., p. 173/26). Incidentally, by the first method Sa'adia explains the word יִתְאֲוִשֵׁשׁ (Isaiah 46:8) in the sense of יִתְאֲשֶׁשׁ (despair). See chapter 2 of *Kutub al-Lughah*, Dotan 1997, p. 320. Allony 1974, p. 215, regards *tafkhum* and *ikhtishar* as terms taken from the theory of poetics and rhetoric. While this is possible, we do not find that Sa'adia states expressly—at least not in respect of the second term—that they are connected with the rhetoric of poetry.

¹⁶⁵ The last examples are taken from Dunash 1866, §110 (p. 37).

¹⁶⁶ In the original אֵלֵינוּ אֲלֹהֵינוּ. Allony translates מִסִּדּוֹת הַקְדְּמוֹנִים (from the foundations of the ancients), and is not accurate; Harkavy 1892, p. 44, translates אֵלֵינוּ אֲלֹהֵינוּ (the ancient pillars [elements and rules]).

¹⁶⁷ In his commentary to Job 17:16: בְּרִי שֶׁאֵל תִּרְדֶּנָּה: 'I have explained בְּרִי שֶׁאֵל to the Sheol, for there are eight phrases in the Bible, as I have previously explained them all'. Thereupon he lists the eight phrases, and he does likewise in his commentary to Job 11:3.

¹⁶⁸ Likewise in *yoser* for Sabbath of *shemini* (Zulay 1964, p. 150/14): יִרְדֵּי פִידוֹ מִן הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְהַיָּעֵד.

instead of *יִכְרְכוּ בְפִיהֶם* and the like. I also said *שֶׁם מִסְתַּר וְאֵין שֶׁם* expression similar to what is said: *חֹרֶיָה וְאֵין שֶׁם* [Isaiah 34:12] [...].¹⁶⁹ I have added after I said: *הַמְסָכִים עַל יְדוֹ לְעֹרֶת דָּהּ—וְלִחְיֵי הָרָאָשִׁים*,¹⁷⁰ since they did not like them for that reason. In the same way you find particularisation¹⁷¹ in many places in the Bible, like *לִישָׁכָאֵל אֱלֹהִים* and a condition was added: *לְבָרִי לְבָרִי* [Psalms 73:1],¹⁷² *תְּהִי נָא אֲנֹכִי קִשְׁבָּת אֶל תְּפִלַּת עַבְדְּךָ וְאֶל תְּפִלַּת עַבְדְּךָ, הַחֹפְצִים לִירְאָה אֶת שְׁמֶךָ* [Nehemiah 1:11], and the like.

Sa'adia uses linguistic irregularities, particularly in a composition meant to serve as a model for purity of language, namely *Ha-Galui*; still more he uses unique words or words that he has invented through syllogism from unique words in the same composition, for example, *נִלְקָהֶת, אֲבִדוֹנָה, תִּיּוֹשָׁשׁ*.¹⁷³ From all this, and from his *paytanic* work, as we shall see, it emerges that he perceives purity of language not necessarily to mean clear and simple language. Rather it is language that has literary richness and a wealth of poetic and rhetorical devices whose very nature impedes understanding of the text.¹⁷⁴ The fact that Sa'adia added to the Arabic version of *Ha-Galui* a glossary and

¹⁶⁹ Up to here, according to Harkavy 1892, p. 188; hereafter according to Stern 1955, pp. 139–140.

¹⁷⁰ The words: Stern put a question mark after this word; singular instead of plural seems to me correct here, in keeping with Sa'adia's way in imitating the Bible style.

¹⁷¹ In Stern's translation *הַפִּירוּשׁ* (detailing).

¹⁷² There Sa'adia translated: *אֵין אֱלֹהָה נִזְאָד עָלַי בְּנֵי אִסְרָאֵל כִּאֲצָה אִנְקִיא אֶלְקָלֵב* (especially for the pure-hearted).

¹⁷³ The words are taken from the passage published by Chapira 1914, pp. 3–6, and the continuation is in the passage published by Schechter 1908, pp. 4–7.

¹⁷⁴ Goldenberg 1973, pp. 121–124 claims that Sa'adia as a critic 'rejected fuzziness of language and praised clarity of expression' just on the basis of the Arabic preface to *Ha-Galui* and from the distinction she makes between *faṣāḥa* and *balāgha*, in keeping with what was acceptable among most Arab critics of language and poetry. But Allony 1974, p. 215, rejected her evaluation, since in early medieval language theory the boundaries had not yet been laid down clearly and absolutely between the theory of language and the theory of poetry. Sa'adia wrote in his Arabic preface: 'and the third [of the three last subjects in *Ha-Galui*] will teach it [the Jewish nation] how to compose fine texts, because the knowledge of any language will not be complete except with good phrases assembled in the essay, piece by piece, so that the intention of the contents is made clear'. By this he does not mean to keep away from the use of unique words; on the contrary, his aim is to encourage the use of unique words and neologisms by syllogism and recourse to unusual forms in the lexicon and in syntax. This use should be known correctly and applied properly, for otherwise, as Sa'adia writes in further on, the language 'will be corrupted and will be distorted'. He connects this explicitly with the subject of poetry: 'as I illuminated the three matters in the book of the Hebrew poem' (*Ha-Egron*). And indeed, in the Arabic preface to *Ha-Egron* Sa'adia voices his regret that 'many Jews are not versed in the purity of our simple language, let alone its difficult words'.

explanations of the rhetorical devices in it so as to make it accessible to all strengthens this assertion. In this respect Sa'adia was as far as possible from the attitude of the poets of Spain. This transpires from the criticism levelled by Abraham b. 'Ezra at the ancient paytanic school in his commentary to *Qohelet* 5:1, from Alḥarīzī's comments in chapter 18 of *Tahkemoni*,¹⁷⁵ and particularly from what Moshe b. 'Ezra has to say in *Kitāb al-Muḥādara wa-al-Mudhākara*: 'The best in poems is what talented people are pleased with, and the ordinary people understand. If your language is simple it doesn't need explanation, and if it's understandable, exposition is unnecessary'.¹⁷⁶ Zulay's comment on Sa'adia's linguistic perception, which he applied fully in his creative writing, seems very sound:¹⁷⁷

The entire Bible, all that is written in the Bible, as odd and as strange as the language may be, is not only proper for use but goes before, and is preferable to, any other expression, and one who uses it speaks 'purely'. The Bible has no bizarre or superfluous or irregular wording; on the contrary, in every irregularity its measure of purity is the highest and one should prefer its use and perform according to its pattern.

To conclude, the sages of Jewry in the tenth century, Sa'adia in the lead, began to engage in commentary on the parts in the Bible that are not halakhic and legal. To do so they applied measures of rhetoric. These measures are summarised in the composition *ל"ב מידות* (Thirty-two Measures), the work of Shəmu'el b. Ḥofni, one of the last of the *geonim* of Sura, who relied heavily on Sa'adia's writings in his commentaries to the Bible. The new research tools of the sages of Jewry at that time were much influenced by Arabic literature, not only in respect of the use of rhetorical terms but also in the research approach itself.¹⁷⁸ Broadly, there is an affinity between the engage-

¹⁷⁵ 'The fourth condition: The poet's poems have to be easy to understand / and all are comprehensible to the intelligent'. Alḥarīzī 1952, p. 188. Alḥarīzī's conditions for the poem were formulated under the influence of Arab poetry critics. See, e.g., Marzūqī 1951, pp. 9–11; and a later Arab writer, Ibn Khaldūn 1958, III, pp. 385: '(The poet) should also keep away, as much as he can, from involved word combinations. He should try to use only those whose meaning can be understood more quickly than the (individual) words they contain'. This is based on *Kitāb al-'Umda* by Ibn Rashīq. And see chapter 11 below.

¹⁷⁶ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 155. This does not contradict the integration of the various images within a poem, which Ibn 'Ezra regarded as the essence; but this question cannot be gone into here.

¹⁷⁷ Zulay 1964, p. 19. Sa'adia's simple language in his two famous *baqqashot*, which Abraham b. 'Ezra singles out for praise, is not a subject for this study.

¹⁷⁸ For the subject as a whole cf. Zucker 1954; Zucker 1959, pp. 229 ff.; Zucker 1984, pp. 35 ff.; Ben Ḥofni 1979, pp. 93 ff.

ment in Bible exegesis by the new method and Sa'adia's view of poetry and its language.

But nowhere in his scholarly writings does Sa'adia discuss the aesthetic aspect of the poem and its purifying effect on the reader, in the manner long present in the works of Plato and Aristotle in respect of mimesis and catharsis,¹⁷⁹ or in the essays of the Arab prosodists.¹⁸⁰ In one place, the tenth article in *Beliefs*, Sa'adia does touch on the aesthetic-emotional aspect of the human soul, yearning for 'passion', but his approach is to negate it entirely.¹⁸¹ In fact, there is no room in Sa'adia's philosophical concept for aesthetic and emotional aspects, which are not of the mind. He finds the beauty of poetry chiefly in its formal aspects: rhyme, metre, and acrostic, and still more in its linguistic aspects: various plays on words and richness of language. The Hebrew poets of Spain moved far away from Sa'adia, beginning with the generation of Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid; they were not content with the external intellectual facets of poetry, but turned their attention no less to the essence of poetry as it affected the human soul.

In that same era, and closely connected to the new method of Bible commentary, the poetics of Hebrew poetry also began to flourish under the obvious influence of Arabic poetics. Here too Sa'adia was the first Jewish writer to engage in it. But because no Hebrew poetry had yet been written under the influence of Arabic poetry, Sa'adia naturally turned to the ancient *piyyut*. Hence, that new bottle of poetics, which uses Arabic linguistic, rhetorical, and literary terms, became filled with decidedly old Jewish-Hebrew content, sometimes to the point of admirable controversy with Arab thought. When the new secular poetry grew up in Spain as a Hebrew branch of Arabic poetry, the poetics similarly changed, and the poets of Spain accepted the rules of Arabic poetics.

¹⁷⁹ See Spiegel 1972, pp. 54 ff., 95 ff.

¹⁸⁰ E.g., in *Tawq al-Hamāma* by Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba (994–1064), a contemporary of Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid and his enemy. On his attacks on Judaism and Shəmu'el see Adang 1996, index, p. 310, entry 'Ibn Ḥazm'.

¹⁸¹ Sa'adia 1948, pp. 373–375; and cf. Neumark 1921, p. 383, note.

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PART TWO

HEBREW SECULAR POETRY IN SPAIN

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CHAPTER FIVE

HEBREW POETRY AND ARABIC POETRY IN SPAIN: SIMILARITY AND DISTINCTIVENESS

A. *Introduction*

The genius of a writer, like the genius of a work of art, does not lie in what he shares with others of his school or in how he was influenced by what went before him. His genius is actually what singles him out from the others, including those who were his model. This notion applies to the relation of the Hebrew poetry of Spain to Arabic poetry, that of the East or of Spain itself. For more than two generations medieval Hebrew poetry has benefited from fine scholarship, albeit, I venture to suggest, not enough, revealing the ways in which Arabic poetry influenced Hebrew poetry in various fields: structure, prosody, language, rhetoric, and even content.¹ Still, little attention has been paid to a lucid exposition of the unique nature of the Hebrew poetry of Spain, in which its genius and that of its poets may be shown. This genius undoubtedly exists, even if—and perhaps precisely when—Hebrew poetry is compared with Arabic poetry, its master. Perusal of these two bodies of poetry leads to the definite conclusion that the Hebrew poetry coexists with the Arabic, and indeed equals it. By this I do not mean simply that the nature poems of Moshe b. ‘Ezra are on a par with the nature poems of Ibn Khafāja, or that the *Ben Qohelet* epigrams of Shəmu’el Ha-Nagid are a match for the ethical poems of Abū al-‘Atāhiya; likewise that the Hebrew poems of love and of wine do not fall short of the Arabic, the Hebrew *muwashshaḥs* (שִׁירֵי מוֹשָׁח) poems are no less than the Arabic *muwashshaḥs*; and so on. I refer to what goes beyond form, language, and rhetoric, namely the artistic dimension outside the limits of space and time, which all these parameters serve as vehicles.

The foregoing applies mainly to Hebrew secular poetry in Spain, which deserves discussion not only for its overall affinity with Arabic

¹ See chapter 1 above, pp. 3 ff.

poetry, but also for its special tie with Arabic poetry in Spain, which its poets and creators knew directly. This tie exerted decisive influence on the special nature of Hebrew secular poetry in Spain, in contrast to the East. Several features common to Arabic and Hebrew poetry can even be discerned in Spain, intensifying the need to examine the effect of the one on the other.

It was noted in chapter two that the beginning of medieval Hebrew poetry, which quite justifiably has become known as the poetry of Spain, was not in Spain. It was in the lands of the East: Persia and Babylonia, and in particular the metropolis Baghdad, the centre of Jewish culture in the glorious days of the *geonim*, and of Arab culture in the splendid era of the Abbasid caliphs. These beginnings were not in the mid-tenth century, at the court of the Jewish grand vizier Ḥisday b. Shaprut, who served the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III in his capital Cordoba. They were in the very heart of Baghdadi Jewish society at the turn of the ninth century, in the polemical writing of the Karaites and the Rabbanites and in the songs of praise penned by poets in honour of the heads of the community.

The influence of Arabic poetry worked in Hebrew poetry's various elements: form, language, content, essence. Not all these clustered in one poem, but they appeared separately or partially in one poem or another. The last and most revolutionary element from Arabic poetry to penetrate Hebrew seems to have been quantitative metre, which distinguishes short and long vowels. This was in the work of Dunash b. Labraṭ, certainly before 942, the year of the death of Sa‘adia, to whom the young poet showed off his poems written in this metre, and whose opinion he sought. So the one who symbolises more than anything the crystallisation of Hebrew poetry under the influence of Arabic poetry, and the one who introduced the element of quantitative metre, was this same Dunash, educated and brought up in Baghdad, not in the West. However, the poems that Dunash showed to Sa‘adia have not come down to us, so it is not clear if they were already written wholly in the pattern of the Arabic *qaṣīda*. We know of no Hebrew *qaṣīdas* of this kind other than those of Dunash, written at the court of Ḥisdai b. Shaprut in Cordoba where he arrived after the middle of the tenth century and became the vizier's poet and protégé.

Neḥemya Allony² thus is right to state that geographically the

² Allony 1991, pp. 37–38.

poetry of Spain dominated all the lands under the rule of Islam, and even some under the Christians, such as Italy and Provence, but the term 'poetry of Spain' is not to be taken in the narrow but in the broad sense. It means Hebrew poetry in all those countries whose authors followed in the footsteps of the poets of Spain, that is, the Spanish school. Note that already in the middle ages this style of Hebrew poetry was actually ascribed to Spain, as transpires also from a letter from Maimonides, who lived in Egypt, to Yəhonatan Ha-Kohen of Lunel, expressing reservations about poetry and apologising for the little that he had written in this style:³

All these words and ways [. . .] in my eyes are not right: the way of poetesses and the poets, these being ways some of which are not paved, words of riddles and fables. The little that we used them and their subject matter is because they are the way of all our friends before. All our brothers the people of Spain adopt it. Our Sages said: if you go to a town, behave according to its customs. Things ought to be restored to what they were before.

Before discussing the subject itself we shall consider briefly Arabic poetry in Spain and its relation to Arabic poetry in the East.

B. *The Relation of Arabic Poetry in Spain to Arabic Poetry in the East*

Arabic poetry in Spain, or the poetry of Andalusia, is recognised as a special branch in Arabic poetry, first created and developed only after Arabic poetry in the East reached its zenith. This was at the end of the eighth and during the ninth century at the courts of the Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd and his descendants. Among the most famous of the Abbasid poets were 'Abbās b. al-Aḥnaf, Bashshār b. Burd, Abū Nuwās, Abū al-'Atāhiya, Abū Tammām, and Buḥturī. Mutanabbī, generally regarded as the greatest of the Arab poets, or the last of the great ones, died in 965. The Arabic poetry of Spain

³ Maimonides 1958/89, III, p. 56. On Maimonides' reserved attitude to poetry see Schirrmann 1935. The two lines in one of the manuscripts at the top of the letter of Yəhonatan to Maimonides, 1958/89, p. 49, are in fact a short poem in the classical structure of two verses. It has the rhyme ִי (including the first hemistich of the first verse according to the rules of 'embellishment of the opening'), and the catalectic *kāmil* metre; Marx 1926 published the lines in the form of a poem, p. 329, n. 30. For verses of a poem in Arabic metre whose prosody escaped the notice of redactors, see Ratzaby 1983.

took its first steps only in the second half of the ninth century, in the work of Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi, author of *‘Iqd al-Farīd* (860–940). The first important Spanish poet, Ibn Hānī⁴ of Seville, was active only from the mid-tenth century (d. 973). However, the poetry of Andalusia developed its own special features in form, content, and language. At least some of these have parallels in the Hebrew poetry of Spain, as we shall see later.

So these two schools came into being after Arabic poetry in the East had reached its peak. It means that it happened after its classical period, in which its literary norms, especially the theory of *badī‘* from the school of the Abbasid poets under the influence of Persian culture, was over. The Arabic poetry of Spain certainly rested on the Arabic poetry of the East, adopted its conventions, and followed paths already paved by the Eastern poets. The singer and instrumentalist Ziryāb, protégé of the ruler ‘Abd al-Raḥmān II, became famous. He left the East for Spain in 832, and his contribution to the development of music and the art of poetry in Andalusia was enormous. Moreover, the great Andalusian poets were nicknamed after the towering poets of the East to signify their illustriousness, for example, Ibn Hānī⁵, known as the ‘Mutanabbī of the Maghreb’, and Ibn Zaydūn (d. 1171), the ‘Buḥturī of the Maghreb’.

Hebrew poetry in Spain also felt indebted to the Arabic poetry in the East. This is attested by the crushing victory of Dunash b. Labraṭ, a product of Baghdad, over all his opponents from the school of Mōnaḥem b. Sarūq, a native of Tortosa in Spain, who took a negative view of the qualities of Arabic poetry. The migrant poet from the East determined for generations the norms of Hebrew poetry in Spain in language, form, rhetoric, and content. In the absence of an Eastern Hebrew poet whose work would serve as a paradigm for excellent poetry, the poets of Spain likened to Dunash anyone among them they wished to praise; Ibn Gabirol and Moshe b. al-Taqāna did so in the first half of the eleventh century.⁴ To the best of my knowledge, Dunash was the only poet of Spain who served as such a model: Shəmu’el Ha-Nagid, Ibn Gabirol, Moshe b. ‘Ezra, and Yehuda Ha-Levi did not.

This commitment to Eastern Arabic poetry and its conventions

⁴ See Schirmann 1955, I, p. 204 (Ibn Gabirol) and p. 287 (Ibn al-Taqāna).

was not only upheld in practice, it also had a formal expression. In his well-known book *Ṭawq al-Ḥamāma* (the Ring of the Dove), Ibn Ḥazm in the first half of the eleventh century criticised the hyperbole in Arabic love poems. Nevertheless, he himself wrote in that way, 'so as not to depart from the custom of the poets and the manner in which they use their materials'.⁵ Moshe b. 'Ezra states directly: 'Because in poetry particularly we go in the way of the Arabs, we are bound to do as they do as much as we can'.⁶

Yet at a certain stage Andalusian Arab poets wished to prove that their work was in no way inferior to the Arabic poetry of the East, and even excelled it. The group that took this position included several young poets of Cordoba, among them Ibn Shuhayd (992–1035) and Ibn Ḥazm. Spanish national pride was also reflected in the anthologies *Kitāb al-Ḥadā'iq* (the Book of Gardens) by al-Jiānī (d. 970), *al-Dhakhīra* by Ibn Bassām (1069–1148), and *Qalā'id al-Iqyān wa-Maḥāsīn al-ʿĀyān* (the Necklaces of Pure Gold and the Merits of the Nobles) and *Maṭmaḥ* (Ambition) by Ibn Khāqān (d. 1134 or 1141). Moshe b. 'Ezra did likewise in *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-al-Mudhākara*, in which he totally ignores Hebrew poetry outside Spain, and even asserts the superiority of the poets of Spain to poets abroad.

Although Arabic poetry influenced Hebrew poetry in the East as in the West, there was a great difference in the degree and nature. The new school of Hebrew secular poetry in the East continued to develop, beautifully combining ancient elements from the Eastern *piyyut* with new elements drawn from Arabic poetry. But the new Hebrew secular poetry of Spain felt no obligation to the early Eastern *paytanic* tradition, and rested entirely on the Arabic poetic norms. Only from the middle of the eleventh century did Hebrew poetry in Spain begin to affect Hebrew poetry in the East, and draw the latter to itself, and to Arabic poetry. This was by virtue of the spiritual, social, and political prestige of the Jewish centre in Spain in the Golden Age.

⁵ See Ibn Ḥazm 1953, pp. 280–281.

⁶ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, pp. 163, 223.

C. Periodisation of Arabic Poetry and Hebrew Poetry in Spain

The historians of Arabic poetry in Spain⁷ divide it into secondary periods parallel to the historical division: (i) under the Umayyad emirate and caliphate (756–1020); (ii) under the twenty-three party kingdoms (*mulūk al-ṭawāʾif*) after the disintegration of the Umayyad caliphate, the most important being Cordoba, Seville, Granada, Toledo, and Saragossa (1020–1095); (iii) under the *Murābiṭūn* (1095–1149); (iv) under the *Muwahhidūn* (1149–1248); (v) the period of Granada, the last outpost of Islam in Spain (1248–1492).

In the first period the poetry of Andalusia took its initial steps. Ibn Hānī' and Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi are the only poets worth noting in terms of the literary and artistic value of their work. The major activity, also in respect of the value of the poetry, was in the second period, with the appearance of the two great Arab Andalusian poets. These are Ibn Zaydūn of Cordoba (1003–1071), renowned for his love poems to Wallāda, daughter of the Umayyad caliph al-Mustakfi; and al-Mu'tamid, the tragic king of Seville, dethroned by the *Murābiṭūn* and ending his life in prison in Morocco (1040–1095). The latter became famous for his poems of yearning and wandering which he wrote in prison, in which he gave vent to the bitterness of his fate and his longing for his days of glory in the great metropolis of Seville.⁸ This was the time of the multi-talented Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba (994–1064), who in his youth wrote poetry and whose most important literary work is *Ṭawq al-Ḥamāma* mentioned above. This is a lengthy monograph on the subject of love and its expression in belles-lettres. In this period many kings and ministers entertained poets and scientists at their courts, and became their patrons. In those courts, and in the gardens surrounding them, banquets and competitions of famous poets were held. This was the Golden Age of Andalusian poetry.

The third period began with the invasion by the *Murābiṭūn* from North Africa, first at the instigation of several of the petty kingdoms, to withstand the gathering force of the Christian king Alfonso VI, and then for the purpose of naked political power. These events caused a massive decline in the status of Andalusian poetry. It was

⁷ Among the important works on this subject are Nykl 1946; Monroe 1973; 1974; 'Abbās 1985.

⁸ On his poetry see Scheindlin 1974.

not just on account of the indolence of many of the kings' courts, but also the religious zealotry of the *murābiṭ* rulers, Yūsuf b. Tāshifīn and his son 'Alī, who took a baleful view of the sensuous secular poetry. Nevertheless, the power of Andalusian poetry stood fast enough to develop the *muwashshah* and *zajal* poems, whose beginnings were still at the end of the first period. The greatest of the writers of the *muwashshah* was the physician Ibn Zuhīr (1110–1198), a native of Seville, while the greatest of the *zajal* poets was Ibn Quzmān (1087–1159). In these poems a different aspect of Andalusian poetry is revealed, diverging somewhat from the conventions of the East, and showing innovation in form, content, and language, under the influence of the local Christian culture.

The fourth period was marked by the strengthening of the philosophy of the school of Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn Rushd, who were close to the Muslim government and held secular poetry in a negative light. This government itself, held by the *muwahhidi* sect, tended toward religion and mysticism, whose attitude was positive to science and literature but not secular poetry. Of course, occupation with poetry did not cease entirely even in the Granada period, not until the final expulsion of the Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula. Yet in the same period Arabic poetry and Islamic writing in the East were undergoing a process of rapid dissolution and decline.

Many parallels to this division may be found in the periodisation of Hebrew poetry in Spain. From recent discoveries of Ezra Fleischer in the work of Mōnaḥem b. Sarūq,⁹ it becomes increasingly evident that as early as the first half of the tenth century, before the arrival in Cordoba of Dunash from the East, Hebrew poetry in Spain was taking its first steps under the influence of Arabic poetry. In any event, the tenth century, the time of the first two generations of Hebrew poets of Spain according to Moshe b. 'Ezra's chronological division, witnessed the consolidation of the poetry. Research has found that Ḥisday b. Shaprut, the vizier of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III, assumed the role filled by the Umayyad rulers in Cordoba—'Abd al-Raḥmān II, 'Abd al-Raḥmān III, and Ḥakam II—in making their capital a spiritual and literary centre no less than the centre in Baghdad.

But the great flowering of the Hebrew poetry of Spain was only in the third generation, that of Shōmu'el Ha-Nagid and Ibn Gabirol, in the first half of the eleventh century, coinciding with the first part

⁹ See Fleischer 1988.

of the party kingdoms period. The second half of this century, right to its end, was likewise marked by great poets, such as Iṣḥaq b. Ghiyāth, about whose secular poetry we possess very little information, and of course the young poets of the time, Moshe b. ʿEzra and Yəhuda Ha-Levi, remarkable for their literary prowess from the very start of their career. The eleventh century is thus the Golden Age of Hebrew as well as Arabic poetry in Spain. Presumably, the reality and the cultural-spiritual environment were common to both these bodies of poetry, and influenced them equally.

The conquest of Andalusia by the *Murābiṭūn* struck the Jewish communities hard, being close to the courts of the party kingdoms. The Jewish community in Granada, which was the most important one and had succeeded in recovering amazingly well after the slaughter unleashed there by the Muslim mob in 1066, slipped from its grandeur entirely, after being taken by Yūsuf b. Tāshifīn in 1091. The last of its Hebrew poets, Moshe b. ʿEzra, abandoned it forever, and the city is not mentioned again in poetry—only in the poems of the exiled poet yearning for פְּרֶמֶץ, the city of his birth and the place of his spiritual nurturing. True, like the Andalusian poetry, Hebrew poetry did not disappear in the *Murābiṭūn* period either. It continued to exist in the Christian kingdoms, mainly by virtue of the literary tradition and education to which the Arab-Islamic spiritual world continued to be faithful. This was the time of the major work of Yəhuda Ha-Levi, deemed the greatest of the Hebrew poets of Spain. But towards the close of this period, at the end of the 1130s, Moshe b. ʿEzra sensed that the poetry of Spain was approaching its quietus. He summarised it in *Kiṭāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-al-Mudhākara*. Furthermore, the two fellow poets were not averse to expressing a negative opinion of the qualities of Arabic poetry, Ibn ʿEzra in his book just mentioned and Yəhuda Ha-Levi in his book *The Kuzari*, although in fact they continued to write in the manner of the Arab poets.

Under *Muwahḥidī* rule, which caused a steep decline in the status of the poetry of Andalusia, Hebrew secular poetry was also gravely harmed and disappeared almost entirely. Again, this was not only owing to the collapse of the courtly system, in which and for which Hebrew secular poetry grew up, but also to the negative attitude to poetry generally taken by the Jewish philosophers of the age, principally Maimonides. Even his adherents who were themselves poets, such as Yaʿaqov b. Elʿazar at the end of the twelfth century and Shem Tov Falaquera in the middle of the thirteenth, fulminated against poetry in contrast to philosophy.

The parallel development of Arabic and Hebrew poetry in Spain is not surprising. Every spiritual work reflects social, political, and cultural life of its surroundings. Jewish philosophy was under the influence of its Arab sister, and developed features parallel to her; suffice it to mention Maimonides' link with his contemporaries Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn Rushd.

D. Hedonism and Aesthetics in Arabic Poetry: Abbasid and Andalusian

The transformation of the Arabs into a sedentary urban society, which occurred in the middle of the seventh century, caused a major normative change in their spiritual world. However, it amounted to a veritable revolution only in the mid-eighth century, when the centre of the caliphate moved to Baghdad, which was Persian in its culture and artistic traditions. The words I cite here of one of greatest scholars of Arabic literature of the last generation, A.G. Arberry, hit the mark. They are from his introduction to the English translation of *Ṭawq al-Ḥamāma* by Ibn Ḥazm, the great Spanish Muslim scholar:¹⁰

Persians and Greeks together persuaded the austere and somewhat joyless Arabs that concubinage could be æsthetic and intellectual as a well as a physical pleasure.¹¹

He goes on to say that although bodily pleasure in poems is known in ancient Arabic poetry, Islam convinced the Arabs that that pleasure was inferior to spiritual enjoyment, and that the great reversal in outlook took place under the influence of Persian culture.

Poetry too was bound up in this revolution. Many Muslim poets and prosodists—Muslims, and not Arabs, for many of the writers in Arabic literature thereafter were Persians who converted to Islam, or whose parents had done so—take a stand against the harsh desert norms of Arabic poetry. The respected status of the Persians in academic disciplines, including Arabic poetry, is analysed by Ibn Khaldūn, the Tunisian scholar considered the first sociologist, in his famous *Muqaddima*, which also has an explanation for the Arabs' avoidance of academic pursuits:¹²

¹⁰ Ibn Ḥazm 1953, pp. 11–12.

¹¹ As is known, one of the clearest expressions of this perception in classical Greek literature is Plato's *Feast*.

¹² Nicholson 1969, p. 278; cf. Ibn Khaldūn 1958, III, p. 314.

Amidst all this intellectual activity the Arabs, who had recently emerged from a nomadic life, found the exercise of military and administration command too engrossing to give them leisure for literary avocations which have always been disdained by a ruling cast. They left such studies to the Persians and the mixed race (*al-muwalladūn*), which sprang from intermarriage of the conquerors with the conquered.

The eighth-century poet Bashshār b. Burd (d. 783), of noble Persian lineage and executed for heresy by the Abbasid caliph al-Mahdī, already preferred the poetic motifs of the urbane city culture to those of the Bedouins' wretched life.¹³ The poets' irritation was particularly acute at their being bound by the *nasīb* in the classical *qaṣīda* (the artificial opening, seemingly separate from the body of the *qaṣīda*), and at the rule obliging them to open the poem with weeping over the vestiges (*aṭlāl*). For example, Abū Nuwās, one of the greatest Arab poets of all ages (of Persian origin; d. 814) criticised these conventions for the *qaṣīda* opening and invented a special mode for the start of the poem, which Wagner, the scholar of Arabic poetry, terms 'anti-*aṭlāl*'.¹⁴ The famous Arab writer al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868) although stating that he had no intention of belittling the quality of the *jāhiliyya* poets and their successors, called them 'rough Bedouins who never knew a life of refinement or the pleasures of this world'. Their similes also, such as the likening of a woman to a cow, were coarse and came from the sphere of desert nature.¹⁵ Ibn Rashīq (d. 1070), author of *al-Umda*, an important essay on poetics, declared that every ancient poet was new in his generation, and opposed the conventions of the *qaṣīda* opening, more particularly the city-dwelling poets who included in it, as in the pre-Islamic *qaṣīdas*, an imaginary tale about a journey of a camel, which never existed.¹⁶ Tha'ālibī (d. 1038) for his part asserted flatly that the poets who were active after the rise of Islam surpassed the *jāhili* poets in softness and grace in their works, and that the poets of his generation were the best of all.¹⁷

Not all the poets preferred the new poetry to the old. Ibn Qutayba, although Persian in origin (d. 899), attacked the modern poets because, instead of using motifs of the desert in their poetry they would take

¹³ Sadan 1976, p. 133.

¹⁴ Wagner 1965, pp. 234–265, especially p. 247; Sadan 1976, pp. 126, 132; Schippers 1994, pp. 85, 182, 185.

¹⁵ According to Sadan 1976, pp. 120, 133.

¹⁶ Ibn Rashīq 1934, I, pp. 90–93, chapter 13: 'On the Ancients and the Moderns'. See Nicholson 1969, p. 288; Sadan 1976, p. 134; Levin 1980a, p. 20.

¹⁷ Nicholson 1969, p. 288.

genteel urban themes.¹⁸ Yet he rejected the preference for the ancient poem just because of its being ancient, and the denigration of the later poem just because of its being later.¹⁹ These attitudes of poets and critics echo the wide-ranging controversy raging in the Muslim world at that time between the proponents of the *ʿArabiyya* school, which gave normative preference to the Arab culture, and adherents of the *Shuʿūbiyya* school, which gave normative preference to the cultures of the different peoples that had assumed Islam, such as the Persians and the Berbers.²⁰ This debate made an appearance in the field of poetry also: a preference for original Arabic poetry from the *jāhiliyya* epoch with its various literary qualities, particularly its content and rhetorical texture, as opposed to the new Arabic poetry. Among other locations this argument inhered in the metaphorical conflict between milk and wine. Milk, camel's milk, represented the archaic culture, which kept far away from material pleasures, and not for religious reasons of abstinence and so on, but as part of the *jāhili murāʿa* (manliness). Wine represented the urban culture, pleasure-bent even at the price of violating the commandments of Islam that forbid wine-drinking.²¹ A fine expression of this is found in some of Abū Nuwās' poems:²²

دع الأطلال تُنسفها الجنوبُ / وتُبلي عهدَ جدِّها الخطوبُ
 وخلِّ لراكبِ الوُجاءِ أرضاً / تحبُّ بها النجبةُ والنجيبُ
 بلادٌ نبتُها عُشْرٌ وطلحُ / وأكثرُ صيدها ضَبْعٌ وذيبُ
 ولا تأخذُ عن الأعرابِ لهوًّا / ولا عيشاً فعيثُهم جديبُ
 ذرِ الألبانِ يشرُّها رِجالُ / رقيقُ العيشِ عندهم خصيبُ
 إذا راب الحليبُ فُيِّلَ عليه / ولا تخرُجْ فما في ذاك حُوبُ
 فأطيبُ منه صافيةٌ شمولُ / يطوفُ بكأسها ساقُ أديبُ [...]
 فذاك العيشُ لا حَيَمَ البوادي / وذاك العيشُ لا اللَّبنُ الحليبُ
 فأين البدوُ من إِيوانِ كِسرى / وأين من الميادين الزروبُ

¹⁸ See Sadan 1976, p. 133 and n. 12 on p. 120.

¹⁹ Nicholson 1969, p. 287; Monroe 1973, p. 128, n. 13.

²⁰ On these two political and spiritual movements in the Muslim world and their effect on the outlook of Hebrew poets from Saʿadia in the East to Yaʿaqov b. Elʿazar in the West, see Allony 1991, pp. 11–70. See also Sadan 1976, p. 133; Schippers 1994, p. 85.

²¹ Sadan 1976, pp. 124–127; Schippers 1994, pp. 119–121.

²² Abū Nuwās 1958/88, IV, pp. 43–46. For other poems with the same criticism of the old life-style in the desert and the poems about it see *ibid.*, pp. 293 (no. 253), 319 (no. 275), 345–346 (nos. 303–304), 350–351 (no. 307), 410 (no. 387).

Leave the vestiges to the wind to ruin them and calamities shall afflict
 their days of importance
 Abandon the wilderness for the camels' riders on the earth, a noble
 camel and a she-camel amble over it
 A land producing thorns and thistles, the greater part of its hunt is a
 hyena or a wolf
 Do not take from the Arabs any entertainment or bread, as their
 bread is dry
 Scatter the milk drunk by men. Their thin bread is bountiful for them
 If you have doubt about the milk, then piss on it, so no a wicked
 tongue will utter slander about that
 Pure and fresh wine is better than it, a young and courteous waiter
 walks around with a cup full of it [...]
 This is life, not the Bedouins' tents; this is life, not sour milk or milk
 How far are the Bedouins from palaces of the ancient Persians; how
 far are they from the carpeted fields.

The Spanish Ibn Ḥazm also notes the style of the poets who censure those who lament the remnants of the camp and praise those who give themselves over to pleasures.²³

As intimated above, another element in the complex of the polemic was the rhetorical aspect. The critics of Arabic poetry were divided between supporters of the old *jāhili*-Qur'ānic style, in which *ma'nā* (content) took precedence over *lafẓ* (word), and supporters of the new style, the *badī'*, in which preference went to the *lafẓ*.²⁴ Generations of critics debated the issue, the one side presenting as preferable the poetry of Abū Tammām (d. 846), who wrote in the new *badī'* style, hedonistic and polished, with a penchant for rhetorical weightiness, the other upholding the poetry of his pupil Buḥturī (d. 897), who wrote in the early style.²⁵ Many medieval Arab prosodists engaged in this question regarding the rules of *'amūd al-shi'r* (conditions of poetry), for example, al-Āmidī in his book *al-Muwāzana bayn Abū Tammām wa-al-Buḥturī*.²⁶

Such was the world of Arabic poetry in the lands of the East when poetry began to develop in Andalusia in the first half of the ninth century. In essence this poetry set out to prove that it was not inferior to the Eastern poetry, but very soon it began to forge its own paths. Of Ibn Shuhayd (992–1035), one of the most important

²³ Ibn Ḥazm 1953, pp. 216–217.

²⁴ For a discussion of this issue see, e.g., Ibn Rashīq 1934, I, pp. 124–128.

²⁵ On this matter see Ibn Khaldūn 1958 III, pp. 398–400.

²⁶ See Ajami 1981; and chapter 11 below.

critics of the new Arabic poetry in Spain, Monroe wrote, that 'he was one of a group of young Cordovan aesthetes who were attempting to create a more authentic Andalusian literature that would not only equal, but even surpass that of the East'.²⁷ We should bear in mind that the component of the pure Arabs in the Muslim population in Spain was extremely small, and the *shu'ūbi* tendency was very strong there.²⁸ Moreover, the origin of most of the ruling dynasties in the petty kingdoms in Spain after the break-up of the western Umayyad caliphate in 1020 was not Arab but Berber. Not a few of the greatest writers were of course descendants of Christians who had converted to Islam; at home they spoke Romanesque and outside Arabic, in which they wrote their poems.²⁹

All researchers of Arabic poetry in Andalusia have pointed out, as anyone who reads it may, that although in principle it rested on the Arabic poetry of the East and also contained the knightly warrior element, it in fact developed and innovated in the courtly and aesthetic domain. Love and nature are the themes that distinguish it from the poetry of the East. It is delicate through and through, far from the roughness of the Eastern Arabic poetry not only in the poems of war and heroism but in the poems of love and drinking also. Here we quote Nicholson:³⁰

Perhaps the most interesting features of Spanish-Arabian poetry are the tenderly romantic feeling which not infrequently appears in the love-songs, a feeling that sometimes anticipates the attitude of mediæval chivalry; and in the second place an almost modern sensibility to the beauties of nature. On account of these characteristics the poems in question appeal to many European readers who do not easily enter into the spirit of the *Mu'allaqāt* or the odes of Mutanabbī.

Most significant is Nykl's judgement of Ibn Khafāja (1058–1139), who from his youth wrote poems of nature and love, and when he was over sixty he began to write *zuhd* (abstinence) poems:³¹

Nearly all of Ibn Hafāja's poems are permeated by a thoroughly Andalusian *sensibilité* and could never have been written by an Eastern poet.

²⁷ See Monroe 1973, p. 138.

²⁸ See Monroe 1970; and Wasserstein 1985, pp. 163–246, especially pp. 169–173.

²⁹ See Wasserstein 1985, pp. 186–187, 237–239; Monroe 1974, p. 7.

³⁰ Nicholson 1969, p. 416. Similar things are stated by other researchers such as Monroe, Nykl, and Pérès.

³¹ Nykl 1946, p. 228. On the poetry of Ibn Khafāja see Nowaihi 1993.

The debt of the Andalusian Arabic poetry to the norms of early Arabic poetry is minuscule, undoubtedly because of the distance in space, in addition to the cultural and ethnic remoteness. Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi, the Andalusian poet and literary critic (860–940) who in his opinions leaned heavily on the Eastern critic Ibn Qutayba, did not conceal, in his essay *al-‘Iqd al-Farīd*, his predilection for the modern poets.³² In his view they sometimes actually excelled the ancient ones.³³ The renowned Ibn Ḥazm in his book *Ṭawq al-Ḥamāma* twice refers to the love stories and poems of the desert-dwelling Bedouin, each time wholly negatively. At the end of his preface to the work he writes bluntly: their way is not our way; and in the chapter ‘on revelation of the secret of love’ he relates that he read in some Bedouin source that the wives of Bedouin are not satisfied or persuaded of a man’s love for them unless he has revealed the matter publicly.³⁴ Ibn Ḥazm voices his astonishment at this habit, on account of the practice in the Arabic and Hebrew love poems in Spain, one of whose central motifs is keeping love secret and downplaying it.³⁵ Not surprisingly, then, Andalusian aesthetics refers to beauty, gentleness, pleasure, tenderness, and polish in content and in language. Indeed, many of the researchers of the Arabic poetry of Spain have stated explicitly that it is more delicate than that of the East.³⁶

In their literary perception, the Arab poets and prosodists in Spain characteristically applied their powers more to the courtly kinds of poetry than to the martial kinds written in the *jāhili* style. Classical and aristocratic aesthetics was the main foundation for the evaluation of poetry in Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi’s *al-‘Iqd al-Farīd* and in Ibn Shuhayd’s *Risāla*.³⁷ Ibn Ḥazm devoted his *Ṭawq al-Ḥamāma* to the subject of love, while Ḥimyarī (1026–1048), a native of Seville, wrote a special composition dedicated to *nawriyyāt* (flower poems): *Kitāb al-*

³² On him see Monroe 1973, pp. 125–138.

³³ Monroe 1973, p. 128.

³⁴ Ibn Ḥazm 1953, pp. 18, 86.

³⁵ See, e.g., Pagis in Ibn ‘Ezra Moshe 1935/78, III, p. 286, column 2. Schippers 1994, in the chapter on love poems, for some reason omitted this central motif in Arabic and Hebrew love poems. Even Ratzaby, in his article on love in the poems of Ha-Nagid, did not present parallels to the subject of secrecy of love even though it is found in the poems of Ha-Nagid. See, e.g., Shamu’el Ha-Nagid 1966, nos. 192, 198*, 202, 203.

³⁶ See e.g. Pérès 1937, pp. 40–50.

³⁷ Monroe 1971.

Badī' fī Wasf al-Rabī'.³⁸ As Nykl points out, although the genre of flower poems was developed in the East owing to the importance of spring for the nomadic tribes, it cannot be compared to the blooming Andalusian spring.³⁹ In any event, in his anthology Ḥimyarī collected verses of Andalusian poets only.

E. The Response of Hebrew Poetry to Arabic Poetry in Spain

Hebrew poetry in Spain did not begin to flourish in reaction to the appearance of Arabic poetry in the East, for the first acquaintance with it was no earlier than in the middle of the eighth century, after the conquest of Spain by the Arabs was complete. Hebrew poetry in Spain does seem to have responded with quite remarkable alacrity to the emergence of new genres in Andalusian poetry, in content as well as in form. This response, which we may call a controlled reaction, is what imparted to Hebrew poetry in Spain its special qualities which earned it its respected and preferred place above poetic works written in other countries under the influence of Arabic poetry.

The marked tendency of the Hebrew poetry of Spain to aesthetics should therefore be seen not only as a result of the Jews' remoteness from military occupations and acts of heroism but also as a result of the influence of Andalusian poetry. Moreover, Hebrew secular poetry in Spain was mainly the work of the aristocratic layer, and the poets themselves were almost exclusively scions of noble Jewish families in Spain. This is in accordance with Andalusia's poetry and its poets, in contrast to Arabic poetry in the East, which did not cut its ties with its source in Bedouin society of the time of ignorance. As for the genre of flower poems, Ratzaby tends to link the beginning of Hebrew poetry in Spain in the work of Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid and Ibn Gabirol to the flowering of this genre in Andalusian poetry, as attested by Ḥimyarī's anthology.⁴⁰ The extreme application

³⁸ See Ḥimyarī 1940. Monroe 1973, p. 138 n. 41. Ḥimyarī, who also was filled with Spanish national pride, expressed his view explicitly that in the *wasf* poetry the poets of Spain excelled the poets of the East, and as is known this was principally aesthetic poetry.

³⁹ Nykl 1946, p. 124.

⁴⁰ Ratzaby 1986, pp. 373–379. On Hebrew flower poetry in Spain see also Schirmann 1979b; Itzhaki 1988. On Arabic flower poetry in Spain see Shak'a 1975, pp. 247–365; Shalabī 1977, pp. 108–146; Raḥīm 1986.

of the aesthetic approach in Hebrew poetry in Spain is in the work of Moshe b. 'Ezra, in particular his book *Ha-'Anaq*, which is wholly an expression of the special courtly atmosphere in Andalusia.

1. *The poetry of Spain as hedonistic and aesthetic poetry*

Various scholars, primarily researchers of literature such as Joseph Weiss, Binyamin Klar, and Ḥayyim Schirmann, and historians such as Eliyahu Ashtor,⁴¹ have pointed out that the distinctive social, political, and economic life in Spain reserved a respectable place for members of the religious minorities. This ran counter to the spirit of Islam's laws of discrimination and humiliation, and it paved the way to the formation of Jewish social strata that took part in the court life of the Muslim rulers and even conducted their own courtly life following the Muslims' example. No more fitting definition of this has yet been offered than that of Weiss: a courtly culture and a courtly poetry. This kind of reality did not exist in Baghdad or Qayrawān, even though in these cities many Jewish notables were close to the Muslim rulers. Weiss well distinguishes the knightly warrior element in Arabic poetry, which is entirely absent from the Hebrew poetry of Spain (except in the poetry of Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid), from the courtly aesthetic component. The latter is the essence of Hebrew secular poetry in Spain in the classical period from the mid-tenth to the mid-twelfth century. These are Weiss's words in his brilliant article on the poetry of Spain:⁴²

Of the two components of the structure of Arab culture that served as a model—the knightly-martial on the one hand and the aesthetic-courteous on the other, which run counter to each other in meaning and content, only the one was received into the Jewish courtly world, the courteous. This fact merits attention in an examination of the special nature of this courtly world because its immediate exemplar, courtly culture and society in Arab Spain, was built on a harmonious balance of these two components.

Researchers have also turned their attention to the effect of Arab poetry on questions of form and content, following the path of the late

⁴¹ Weiss 1952, pp. 396–398; Klar 1954a, pp. 91 ff; Schirmann 1955, II, General Introduction, pp. 25–26; Schirmann 1997, pp. 99 ff.; Ashtor 1960/66, pp. 103 ff., pp. 152 ff., and pp. 173 ff.

⁴² Weiss 1952, p. 398, is right about the components of Arab culture as a whole, but errs somewhat regarding Andalusian poetry. See above on this subject.

David Yelin, which was continued by Israel Levin and Yəhuda Ratzaby of our own generation.

From several literary testimonies it transpires that banquets were a feature of the courts of noble Jews in the capital cities of the Muslim kingdoms in Spain, such as Cordoba, capital of the Umayyad caliphate, and Granada, capital of the Zīrī dynasty of the Berber Ṣanhāja tribe. One such testimony is provided by the copyist of the poem *אֶל הַיָּשָׁן* וְאֹמֵר, written by Dunash b. Labraṭ:⁴³

Another poem by the late Ben Labraṭ is about the kinds of drink in the evening and in the morning, and about persisting with them. In a light metre to the accompaniment of musical instruments, it is about the sound of water canals and the strains of strings and the chirping of birds on the bough and the scent of all kinds of perfumes—all this he described at a feast of Ḥisday the Spaniard, peace be upon him.

Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid in his poem *יְהוֹסֵף יָט לֵבב אָבִיו בְּמִלְכָּה* also depicts the sumptuous wine-fest arranged for his delectation by his son Yəhosef, on a 'round lawn surrounded all about by a circular canal':⁴⁴

וַיֵּצְאוּ אֵלַי גִּנַּת עֲרוּגוֹת / עֲרוּכוֹת כְּהַ כְּמוֹ טוּרֵי מִנְלָה [. . .]
וַיִּשְׁכְּנוּ בְּצֵל רִמּוֹן וְעֶרְמוֹן / בְּאַרְמוֹן, לֹא בְּצֵל אֶלֶן וְאַלְהָה
וַתְּחַתְּנוּ לְמַצְעוֹת עֶשְׂבִּים / וְהָעֵלִים לְמַעַלָּה רֹאשׁ הַחֲלָה
וְהַמִּשְׁקָה יִמְלֵא כּוֹס בְּאַדָּם / וַיֵּשִׁים עַל כָּלִי נִמְאָה מִטְלָה
וְאֵל שׁוֹתָה כְּמוֹ הֶתֶן יִשְׁלַח / עָלַי מִים בְּאַפְרִיזִין כִּכְלָה
וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְאֵל כּוֹסִיו יִשְׁכְּבוּ / וְאֵל מִשְׁקָה אֲזִי שָׁב בְּתַחֲלָה
וְלֹא יִינַע בְּחֹשֶׁיט יָד לְשׁוֹתָה / וְלֹא־אִמֵּר לוֹ: שְׁתַּחֲוֶה, אֵין הַמִּלְכָּה
פְּלִיאָה הִיא וּמִרְאִיתָה גְדוּלָּה / וּמִי לֹא שָׁר כְּזֹאת, לֹא שָׁר גְּדוּלָּה
וּכְפֻעֵלֶת שָׁתָה אֲחִים בְּכֶדֶר / עָלַי יִכַּל בְּנִגְהָ — אֵין פֻּעֵלָה

And we went out to the garden beds arranged like rows in a scroll [. . .]
And we sat in the shade of the pomegranate and chestnut trees, as if
in a castle and avoided the terebinth and oak
While underneath us the grasses made our beds and the leaves were
the covering above our heads.
Then the cup-bearer filled our goblets with red wine and placed them
on multi-colored vessels made of bulrushes
Which he sent to the drinker who, like a bridegroom awaited the
arrival of his bride's litter upon the waters.

⁴³ Allony 1947, p. 64; Schirmann 1955, I, p. 34. The poem is Hebrew, but the inscription (the preceding words)—as usual in *dīwāns* of Hebrew medieval poems—is in Arabic.

⁴⁴ Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, pp. 283–284; Schirmann op. cit., pp. 160–161. The English translation is of Weinberger 1973, pp. 66–67.

And they drank and returned the empty goblets to the cup-bearer who refilled them as before.

The latter did not touch with his hand the one who drank, nor say to him, "Here, drink!" There was no tumult.

It was wonderful and a sight to behold, one failing to witness this has not seen excellence.

For there is nothing that surpasses friends drinking in an alcove overlaid with garden growth.

At times the wine banquets were the reason or the setting for the eruption of a quarrel between good friends, such as that between Yiṣḥaq b. Khalfūn and Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid. At one of these banquets Ha-Nagid said things that were construed as offensive by the other, and thus caused a cooling in the relations between them. Ha-Nagid writes of this in a poem of apology, *הַיֵּשׁ עָשׂוּךְ כְּבוֹדָהּ מִכְּאָבוֹ* whose inscription by his son Yəhosef Ha-Nagid reads:⁴⁵

There was between him and R. Iṣḥaq b. Khalfūn a dispute over a wine feast, and there was cause for a great separation, and my master my father, God favour him, wrote to him this.

In the body of the poem Ha-Nagid apologises:

וְאֵיךְ תִּפְטֹר לְרַעְךָ מֵאִמְרוֹ / עָלֵי יָנ — וְהוּא לֹא בֵן חֶשְׁבֹּ

And how do you bear a grudge to your friend for what he said on wine—while he did not mean it.

From sundry evidence it emerges that the higher classes in Jewish society lived a life of luxury in the manner of high Muslim society, and their poets gave expression to this in the secular poetry. Yəhosef writes the following in the inscriptions to two *wasf* poems of his father, Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid:⁴⁶

This is another poem by him about a fountain of water in his house. The water that spouted from its top cascaded down like a dome upon the alabaster and *shesh* paving. They placed the candles in the dome—the dome was outside them—and a wax-candle on its top.

This is another poem by him about the device in his house from which water streams, and there are pipes that shoot out the water on all sides and in all directions.

⁴⁵ Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, pp. 174–177; Mirsky 1961, pp. 159–162.

⁴⁶ Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, p. 273: *הַכְּבִּילָה בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא נִטְוָה; אִמְרוֹ לִי מִה אֲבִיקָה עַל מְנוּרָה*.

Famous too is the palace of Yəhosef Ha-Nagid, which stands to this day in Granada, in which his father and he served as viziers. Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid himself describes one of the wine-feasts that he held, to which he invited 'sages, innocent elders, righteous lads, nice looking and young in years', certainly all of his own faith. All the invitees, who poured large volumes of wine down their throats, fell into a deep sleep towards evening, and did not awaken until the morning hour, when he himself came to rouse them. On this Ha-Nagid writes:⁴⁷

הַכִּינוּתִי מְקוֹם מְשֻׁהָה [. . .]
 אֲנִי בָאוּ אֵלַי מִצַּעַ מִשְׁבֵּץ / בְּאַרְבָּעֵן וּמִכְלֹלִים רְקוּמִים
 וְאֵל בָּלִים וְאֵל מִיָּנִי מְנָדִים / בִּיד שׁוּעִים כְּמוֹתָנוּ עֲרָמִים
 עָלַי מִטַּע אֲהֵלִים — עַל עֲנָפָיו / בְּנֵי חוֹר שׁוֹחֲקִים יָחַד וְהוּמִים [. . .]
 וַיִּשְׁכְּנוּ כְּמוֹשֵׁב טוֹב, וְאִין בּוֹ / כְּבֹד לֵב, וְהַפִּיקְנוּ זָמִמִּים
 וַשְׁלַחְתִּי לָבֵן יוֹבֵל וּמַחֵר / בְּכִנּוּרֵי וּמִנְיֹו הַשְּׁלָמִים [. . .]
 וְקִרְאתִי בְנֵי בֵיתִי וְקָמוּ / לָבֵן שׁוֹרֵק וְנֹכַד הַכְּרָמִים [. . .]
 שְׁלַחוּהוּ עָלַי פִּיהֶם בְּמוֹרֵד / וְעֵלָה הוּא לְרֹאשׁ שָׂרִים וְרָמִים
 וְהַשְׁכִּיבֵם לַעֵת עֶרֶב, כְּאֵלֹו / בְּמִקְבֶּכֶת בִּיד יַעַל הַלּוּמִים
 הַקִּימוּתִים לַעֵת בֶּקֶר, וְאִין בָּם / אֲשֶׁר יָקוּם וְרֹאשָׁם לֹא מְרִימִים

I prepared a place for festivities [. . .]

Thus they approached their couches of purple, weave and magnificent embroidery

And the vessels of the wine and various delicacies were in the hands of nobles, wise as we.

Upon the plants of aloe-trees, even its branches young turtle-doves played noisily together [. . .]

There we were in a good disposition with no anxiety as we carried out our plans

I sent for the musician and he came in a hurry with his violin and his gaily decorated lyre [. . .]

And called to my household that they come to drink of the produce of choice vines and the posterity of the vineyards [. . .]

They sent the wine coursing downward into their mouths and it got the upper hand over princes and nobles

Then they lay down toward evening as if beaten down by the sledge hammer of Ya'el

I awakened them in the morning and there was no one who could stand up or lift his head.

We learn from the poems of Ha-Nagid and from the letters of Yəhuda Ha-Levi that the Jews of Spain imitated courtly Muslim

⁴⁷ Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, pp. 280–283; *הַתְּרַע אֵת פְּעָלֵי לְהַכְמִים*; Schirrmann 1955, I, pp. 158–160.

society in holding poets' tournaments. The *Dīwān* of Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid contains short *wasf* poems, written by himself and other poets—one poem in Arabic!—and the subject of all of them is the apple.⁴⁸ For his part, Yəhuda Ha-Levi tells in his letter to Moshe b. 'Ezra of his encounter with the circle of Jewish poets who held a competition in poetry, and of his success:⁴⁹

But Fate swore that it should not destroy [...] and it wrapped me with poems of friendship, and satiated me with wine of love. Then I satiated wanderings and I wisely thought to play with the goblets, [in the company of] poets of fine poetry. They challenged me, saying: We started and you shall complete [...]. When I saw that the verses were too difficult for me [...]. I tricked them [...] and I set them up a poem of different themes.

For all that, not a single piece of evidence is found in all the testimony in the poetry that in Jewish intellectual circles, in which and for which secular poetry was created, banquets were held that violated the Jewish tradition of observing the rules of decorum, or that members of both sexes attended them. The courtly poems treating themes of nature, wine, and the luxuries and pleasures of life undoubtedly reflect the life of high society in the Jewish communities in Spain. But the courtly love poems, whether written about the desired (the roe) or the desirer (the buck), in no way reflect reality but are writing in imitation. This is not the place to expand on that subject. In any event, assertions that the love poems, even those addressed to males, reflect real life are to be dismissed.⁵⁰

The above phrase 'not a single piece of evidence' is true for the classical period only. In Christian times the work of Todros Abū al-Āfiya, a courtier of the wise king Alfonso X at the end of the thirteenth century, contains explicit phrases representing the act of love as a real deed, and not just a literary expression. In some verses of his poem *בְּאַהֲבַת נַעֲרָה אֵין חֵטָא וְאִשְׁמָה* (In the love of a girl there is no sin or guilt) he counts the sexual treasures of the Muslim girl as against those of the Christian girl.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, pp. 274–287.

⁴⁹ Abramson 1970, pp. 405–406.

⁵⁰ Schirmann 1955a; Allony 1961; Zemach-Moked 1988; Schippers 1994, pp. 174–175.

⁵¹ Todros 1932/7, IIa, p. 130; Schirmann, 1955, II, pp. 434–435.

הָכִי אֵל בַּת אָדָם אֵין חֵן, וְאֵלֹ / תִּכְסּ מָשִׁי וְתִלְבֵּשׁ שֵׁשׁ וְרִקְמָה
 וְלֹא יִקַּח וְנִתְּתָה לָב, הָכִי הִיא / פְּתִיית בִּגְדוֹת, כֹּל יִדְעָה מֶה
 אָכַל כָּל בַּת עֶרֶב חֵן לָהּ וַיִּפִּי / מִלְּבָב לָב וּמִסִּיר כָּל מְהוּמָה
 יוֹם הַמַּעֲשֶׂה הַנָּעִם, וּבִגְדוֹת / תְּבוּנָה לָהּ, וּבִזְמָה מְזֻמָּה

Indeed, a Christian girl has no charm, even if she wraps herself in silk and wears *shesh* and embroidery
 Her harlotry doesn't attract, for she is a simpleton in coquetry, she doesn't know how
 But every Arab girl has charm and beauty, which attracts and dispels all trouble
 She is sweet on the day of the deed, and in harlotry she is wise and she understands lechery.

Graphic expressions such as these are nowhere found in the classical period, not even in the *muwashshahāt* of Moshe b. 'Ezra. Certainly, the bold and unbridled *muwashshahāt*, both Hebrew and Arabic, were fairly common in Jewish society in the East and the West. This transpires from the *responsa* and the writings of Hāye Gaon, Maimonides, his son Abraham, and Shəmu'el b. 'Eli, who wanted to proscribe the singing of 'poems of lust' (שִׁירֵי עֲנָבִים) at Jewish celebrations.⁵² But this is not enough to determine that the *muwashshahāt* and love poems generally reflect a corresponding reality.

The only conclusion that can be reached is that the pursuit of pleasure and the aesthetic, the inclination to the beautiful and the positive, and by contrast keeping a distance from the ugly, the negative, and the wretched—this was the supreme value in the Hebrew secular poetry in Spain. It arose from nowhere but the Andalusian Arabic poetry, which developed, fortified, and refined tendencies aiming at the aesthetic, whose beginnings in Eastern Arabic poetry were in the Abbasid era.⁵³ The positive attitude to the aesthetic, as long as it did not impair what tradition and morals demanded, even seems to have characterised the Jewish philosophers in the medieval Arab-Muslim cultural domain, for example, Abraham, the son of Maimonides in his book *Kīfāyat al-ʿAbidin*.⁵⁴

⁵² Lewin 1934; Maimonides 1958/89, II, pp. 398–400; idem, *Commentary to the Mishnah, Avot* 1:17; Abraham Maimonides 1965, p. 161; idem 1927/38, II, p. 344; Fenton 1980.

⁵³ Research on Andalusian Arabic poetry is extremely ramified. We note here only some of the important works: Pérès 1937; Nykl 1946; Monroe 1974; 'Abbās 1960; 'Abbās 1985.

⁵⁴ See Abraham Maimonides 1965, p. 165.

2. Andalusian formal innovations in Hebrew poetry in Spain

The speedy response of Hebrew poetry in Spain to Andalusian Arabic poetry was also expressed in matters of form. The foremost of these is in the *muwashshaḥāt*. Traditionally this genre is said to have been invented in the poetry of Andalusia by Muqaddam b. Mu'āfā al-Qabrī who lived at the court of the Emir 'Abd Allah (888–912). But the *muwashshaḥ* flourished only later, in the work of al-Qazzāz, the poet of al-Mu'taṣim, ruler of Almeria (1051–1091), and of Ibn Zuhri of Seville, who lived in the twelfth century.⁵⁵ Hebrew *muwashshaḥāt* were first written by Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid and Ibn Gabirol at the first half of the eleventh century, but we do not find them on a large scale except in the poetry of Yəhuda Ha-Levi in the first half of the twelfth century.⁵⁶ Likewise the Hebrew *zajal* in the poetry of Yəhuda Ha-Levi was undoubtedly written under the influence of the *zajal* of Ibn Quzmān, also of the first half of the twelfth century.⁵⁷

The Hebrew *maqāma* too has several parallel features to the Andalusian *maqāma*. Here I note only one, namely the change in structure from a wide-ranging composition, such as the *maqāma* books of Hamadhānī and Ḥarīrī, to the monographic *risāla*, treating one subject only and diverging far from the Eastern norms of the *maqāma*.⁵⁸ Only one general composition of Arabic *maqāmas* was written in Spain, *Maqāmāt al-Saraqustī*.⁵⁹ The authors of the Hebrew *maqāmas* in Spain of course took motifs from, and sometimes indeed elaborated on Andalusian *maqāmas*, naturally under the influence of the Eastern *maqāmas*. This refers not only to the elaboration of the *Rooster Maqāma* of Abū Ḥiṣṣ 'Umar b. al-Shahīd, one of the court poets of the aforementioned al-Mu'taṣim, but also to the *maqāmas* written for the controversy between cities or objects, and so on.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ The following are a few of the many publications on the Arabic *muwashshaḥ* in Spain: Stern 1953; Stern 1974; Jones 1988; Jones-Hitchcock 1991; Einbinder 1991; Álvarez 1994; Rikābī 1966.

⁵⁶ On this subject many studies have been published, of which we note two: Fleischer 1991a; Rosen-Moked 1985.

⁵⁷ On the poems of Ibn Quzmān see Nykl 1946, pp. 266–301; Abu Haidar 2001, pp. 31–85. To the best of my knowledge, to date no thorough research work has been conducted on the Hebrew *zajal* poems.

⁵⁸ On the Arabic *maqāma* in Andalusia see Nemah 1974; De la Granja 1976; Outmani 1994; Monroe 2002.

⁵⁹ The composition was hidden in manuscript for centuries, and published only recently, in Rabat 1995. For an English translation and a comprehensive introduction on the genre of the *maqāma*, see Monroe 2002.

⁶⁰ On the *Rooster Maqāma* see Stern 1946.

F. *The Distinctiveness of the Hebrew Poetry of Spain
as against the Arabic Poetry*

Despite the absorption of conventions from the Arabic courtly poetry, Hebrew poetry in Spain was able to fashion its own special character, quite distinct from Arabic poetry. Formal matters, which are not of the essence in determining the status of poetry in Jewry, such as the purist approach in language, the rhetorical burden in the linguistic texture, and the prosodic elements—all these were well absorbed into Hebrew poetry. But in content Hebrew poetry did not take from Arabic poetry without classification and selection. In general the Jewish poets toned down the sensual and hyperbolic descriptions in Arabic poetry on themes of wine, love, adulation of benefactors, and expressions of censure and calumny.⁶¹ The war poems of Ha-Nagid also, written apparently in hardened style and with the cruel *jāhili* motifs, are softened by the very introduction into them of the religious element.⁶²

As for linguistic usages, Hebrew poetry in Spain in the classical period differs from the Andalusian Arabic poetry. True, in the exclusive use itself of the biblical layer Hebrew poetry was influenced by the linguistic concept in Arabic poetics. But the realisation of this concept was far more painstaking in the Hebrew poetry of Spain than in the Arabic poetry, which, some argue, was not little influenced by the Arabic vernacular.⁶³

Another important principal difference between Hebrew and Arabic poetry in Spain should be noted. Some of the most important of the Arab poets, such as Ibn Zaydūn and Ibn Ḥazm, elevated their love of women to the degree of spiritual love. They inserted into their poems Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical notions, which were found, among other sources, in the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*.⁶⁴ Spiritual love of this kind was not present in Hebrew poetry in Spain, although the motif of the allegorical love between the people of Israel and their God, or between the soul and the mind, was abundant. We find spiritual love, and the exaltation of the woman

⁶¹ For reservations on writing this kind of poems see Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, pp. 107–117. On these subjects in Arabic poetry see van Gelder 1988.

⁶² On the war poems see Levin 1980a, pp. 40–77, in particular pp. 59 ff.; Schippers 1994, pp. 257–289; Tobi 2003. And see below, p. 230.

⁶³ On Arabic language in Spain see Wasserstein 1985, pp. 166–167.

⁶⁴ See Monroe 1973, pp. 145–154; Monroe 1974, pp. 17 ff. and pp. 170–175.

to the divine level, only in the Christian period of the Hebrew poetry of Spain, from the end of the twelfth century. Instances are found in the ספר המשלים (Book of Fables) of Ya'akov b. El'azar and in the poems of Todros Abulafia, apparently influenced by the troubadour poetry. Other examples exist in the Hebrew poetry of Italy, starting with 'Immanuel of Rome at the end of the thirteenth century under the influence of Dante Alighieri.⁶⁵ This circumstance at first sight is puzzling: from the foregoing we would expect that of all people the Hebrew secular poets in Spain would settle the problem of how to handle the subject of love, which is contrary to the Jewish tradition, by raising it to the spiritual level. Yet the puzzle seemingly can be explained. Because all the Hebrew poets' writing on the theme of love was nothing other than literary imitation, they would not have recourse to a philosophical interpretation of the act of love that might serve to justify it, such as Ibn Ḥazm's assertion in *Kitāb al-Akhlāq wa-al-Siyar*, cited by Monroe.⁶⁶ According to this, physical love is the embodiment, albeit imperfect, of the divine order.⁶⁷

One of the most important signs of the certain—yet highly significant—degree of independence of Hebrew poetry from Arabic poetry is the Hebrew poets' freeing themselves from the *nasīb* in the *qaṣīda*. Only in a limited number of Hebrew *qaṣīdas* does the poet open with motifs taken from the *jāhili nasīb*. For the most part the double structure of the *qaṣīda* is indeed properly upheld—the opening and the body, connected by the transition verse. But the Hebrew poet feels himself wholly unbound in his choice of opening theme, and quite naturally it is taken from the courtly culture. A fair number of openings in Hebrew *qaṣīdas* are on the themes of wine, nature, and love, and at times even on other subjects, which are not from the courtly culture.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ See Pagis 1976, p. 166; Schirmann 1962; 'Immanuel 1957, pp. 34.

⁶⁶ Monroe 1973, p. 148, n. 74. And cf. Ibn Ḥazm 1953, pp. 23 ff.

⁶⁷ In this framework we cannot discuss the problem, which still has not been resolved in research of medieval Hebrew poetry: the assertion of Shamu'el Ha-Nagid and his son Yehosef that the love poems included in Ha-Nagid's *Dīwān* (1966) refer to the love between the God of Israel and his people.

⁶⁸ On the Hebrew *qaṣīda* as against the Eastern Arabic and the Andalusian *qaṣīda* see Levin 1980a, pp. 21–39; Schippers 1994, pp. 104 ff.; Pagis 1970, pp. 157 ff.; Scheindlin 1996.

The leaning to the courtly aesthetic, and the aversion to the *jāhili* desert style, grew constantly more marked in Andalusian poetry. In Hebrew poetry in Spain the latter tendency became even more evident under the influence of the surrounding Arabic poetry and because of its remoteness from martial desert life. Moshe b. 'Ezra's adage in his poetics, that Hebrew poets must follow the footsteps of the Arabs, was certainly not stated in respect of their early poets but of their later ones, from the milieu of Abū Nuwās, Ibn al-Mu'tazz, Ḥimyarī, and Ibn Ḥazm.

Our aim here has been to indicate that the aesthetic and hedonistic element of Hebrew poetry in Spain, more than reflecting the life of a narrow social stratum of Jewish courtly life, as Weiss stressed in his renowned article, is a reflection of the influence of Andalusian Arabic poetry, of which this was its foundation and essence. Proof of this is that the hedonistic and aesthetic norms of the Hebrew poetry of Spain were not limited to courtly society, but were shared by other strata of Jewish society in Spain, and even by communities abroad, in which no Jewish courtier class existed. I would even say that the wish to write excellent Hebrew poetry in Spain, with the development of a negative attitude to the early Eastern *piyyut*, may be seen as parallel to the 'national trend' of the poets of Muslim Andalusia.

In general, the linguistic strictness of Hebrew courtly poetry in Spain, its relative mildness, and its other means of refinement, together established in it the status of the positively and pleasantly aesthetic as the supreme value. This feature is unique to this poetry, and is not found in Hebrew poetry in any other country, except as a pale imitation. Thus we come full circle to our opening, asserting the favoured status of Hebrew poetry in Spain above Hebrew poetry in other lands, and on the other hand the similarity to, and the distinction from, Arabic poetry in Spain.

About one area of influence we could say nothing at all, and this is the influence most difficult to prove. It concerns the connection between the work of the Hebrew poets in Spain and that of the Arab Andalusian poets, even though the Hebrew poets were undoubtedly familiar with Andalusian poetry and even though they were at times in direct contact with its creators. Such connections are difficult to prove, among other things because the Hebrew poetry of Spain contains many conventional motifs that were abundant in the Eastern Arabic poetry also. In any event, as intimated above, a comparison

between the prison poems of al-Mu'tamid, king of Seville, and the wandering and plaintive poems of Moshe b. 'Ezra evinces many similar features, which make it possible to speak in terms of the influence of the Arab poet on the Jewish poet.

Comparative research on the direct influences of Andalusian poets on Hebrew poets in Spain is obviously required, and perhaps this should be seen as one of the chief tasks for scholarship in medieval Hebrew poetry. It means expropriating comparative research from generalised treatment of both Hebrew and Andalusian poetry to assist in determining the distinctiveness of the Hebrew poet in the Middle Ages beyond the conventional view. This is nothing but camouflage for the failed poet and a styer in the eye of the slothful researcher.

CHAPTER SIX

PHILOSOPHY IN MEDIEVAL HEBREW AND ARABIC POETRY IN SPAIN

In the last chapter we dealt with the similarity and distinctiveness of Hebrew and Arabic poetry in Spain. We now compare *Hebrew* philosophical poetry with *Arabic* philosophical poetry in that country. The similarity between them seems evident, but it will only serve as a backdrop to highlight their *distinctiveness*. Here our concern is with Hebrew poetry only when it was in direct contact with Arabic poetry, namely from the mid-tenth to the mid-twelfth century. Accordingly, in Arabic poetry too our interest is with the parallel period, or more precisely the Umayyad period (756–1020), the *mulūk al-ṭawāʾif* (1020–1095), and the *Murābiṭūn* (1095–1149). We shall not treat the age of the *Muwahhidūn* (1149–1248), when the genre under discussion developed from the *zuhd* to Sufi poetry.¹

A. Arabic Philosophical Poetry in Spain

A curiosity worth noting is that Western researchers of Arabic poetry in Spain, such as Pérès, Monroe, and Nykl,² hardly refer in their wide-ranging monographs to the genre of philosophical poetry; a short discussion in Pérès' book (pp. 451 ff.) is the exception. By contrast, these scholars discuss in depth the hedonistic character of Arabic Andalusian poetry, its affinity with the natural landscape and cultivated gardens, with the courtly atmosphere, and so on.³ Yet, the Spanish researcher Garcia Gómez has turned his attention to this genre of poetry, and has also published the poems of al-Ilbīrī (mid-eleventh century). The latter is notorious for his anti-Semitic poem, in which he incites the Muslims against the Jews in Granada, and their leader Yəhosef b. Shəmuʿel Ha-Nagid; ultimately this sparked

¹ These two terms are explained later.

² Pérès 1937; Monroe 1974; Nykl 1946.

³ Pérès 1937, pp. 161–218; Monroe 1974, pp. 38–39; Nykl 1946, pp. 123–129.

the riots of 1066.⁴ Arab scholars of the poetry of Andalusia have done more, for example, Shak'a, Shalabī (both in Cairo), and Rikābī (Damascus), whose general books on the Arabic poetry of Spain devote chapters specially to the philosophical poetry, and cite several poems of this genre.⁵

All the above researchers—Arab and Western—concur that the poetry of Spain is remarkable for its hyperbole, in contrast to the Eastern Arabic poetry, particularly as regards its hedonism. This applies to the poems of love and wine, but also to the poems of nature, which describe the tended gardens. These poems did not first come into being in the work of the poets of Spain (see, e.g., *al-Badī' fī Waṣf al-Rabī'* by the Spanish poet Ḥimyarī) but as early as the work of the Eastern poet Ṣanawbarī.⁶ The hyperbole became even more marked in the time of the caliph 'Abd al-Raḥmān III (al-Nāṣir), whose long reign (912–961) was notable for the enormous surge of building and fortification of the western Umayyad caliphate, as against the eastern Abbasid caliphate.

However, as the Arab researchers point out, in a natural reaction to the hedonistic, pleasure-bent courtly ambience of Muslim society in Spain, and especially to the autocracy of Muslim rule, trends critical of the regime began to develop. Their proponents were many figures known by various titles (usually *zuhhād*) who wished to distance themselves from the rulers and from all things connected to that despised society and behaviour. These persons were so numerous that several biographical lexicons of the well-known kind in Arabic literature were compiled about them.⁷ These tendencies found expression also in poems, which negate the *dunyā* (Earth, this world) and the scramble for its luxuries. These poems were called *zuhd*, that is, retirement from the life of this world. In principle (see later) they were written in the manner of the Eastern *zuhd* poems that had preceded them, mainly those of Abū al-'Atāhiya and Abū Nuwās. For example, the *zāhid* poet al-Mughīlī (d. 974/5) concludes one of his short poems with an apparent reference to the energetic building activity of his contemporary the caliph 'Abd al-Raḥmān III.⁸

⁴ García Gómez 1974, pp. 73–116.

⁵ Shak'a 1975, pp. 51–68; Shalabī 1977, pp. 502–510; Rikābī 1966, pp. 116–119.

⁶ Compare with what is stated above, p. 192. On Ṣanawbarī see Schoeler 1974, pp. 273–341 (for an English translation of a selection of his poems see Ṣanawbarī 1976).

⁷ For all that is stated here see Homerin 1991; see also Marín 1992.

⁸ Shak'a 1975, p. 58.

وأين الملوك وأشياهم / وديانهم أدبرت عنهم
فهذي القبور بهم عمرت / وتلك القبور خلّت منهم

Where are the kings and their entourages, or has the Earth turned its back on them?

Here are these graves in which they have settled and those palaces are emptied of them!

Apart from this genre of *protest* poems, to use the modern term, another genre of *zuhd* poem came into being, which may be called poems of *compunction*.⁹ These were usually written by poets in their old age, in retrospect, with some expression of regret about the love poems, the pleasure poems, or in general poetry that overstepped the bounds of religion and morality (*mukaffirāt*). Among the first to write in this style is the famous poet and anthologist Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi (860–940), renowned for his anthology *al-‘Iqd al-Farīd*. Here is the translation of one of his poems, known as *mumahhiṣāt* (correcting, purifying, expunging defects):¹⁰

يا قادراً ليس يعفو حين يقتدر / ولا يُقضى له من عيشة وطُرُ
عَيْنٍ بقلبك إن العين غافلة / عن الحقيقة واعلم أنّها سَفُرُ
سوداء تزفر من غبط إذا سَعَرَتْ / للظالمين فلا تُبقي ولا تَدُرُ
لو لم يكن لك غير الموت مَوْعِظَةٌ / لكان فيه عن اللذات مُرَدَجَرُ
أنت المَقُولُ له ما قلت مُبْتَدِئاً: / هَلَا ابْتَكُرْتَ لِيْنِ أَنْتَ مُبْتَكِرُ

O you who repent not while still you may, what do you expect, with grey hair on your head?

Consult your heart; the eye, forsooth, is neglectful of the real nature of things

Remember: Hell, black, roaring angrily, appears before the sinners’ eyes, unsparing, merciless!

If nothing but death were there to warn you, it would suffice to make you beware of pleasures

You are the one I meant when first I said: Was it not you that started to prepare your departure?

Yet some poets wrote their philosophical poems using motifs taken from the secular hedonistic poetry. A fine example is from the greatest of the poets of nature in Arabic poetry in Spain, Ibn Khafāja, known

⁹ This genre constitutes the basis of Brann 1991; see also Abū Zayd 1994, pp. 164–272.

¹⁰ Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi 2000, p. 152 (English translation Nykl 1946, pp. 41–42). On the poet’s *mumahhiṣāt* see Ibid., pp. 27–28.

as *al-ġannān* (1058/9–1138). The anthologist Ibn Khāqān says of him that at the age of sixty he reached the conclusion that his occupation with poetry in his youth had been worthless, and he lamented the life he had lived.¹¹ The following is one of his philosophical poems, whose similarity to the poems of Moshe b. ʿEzra is considerable:

ألا ساجل دموعي يا غمام / وطارحني بشجوك يا حمام
فقد وفيتها ستين حولا / وناديتني ورائي هل أمام؟
وكننت ومن لباناتي لبيتي / هناك ومن مراضعي المدام
يطالعنا الصباح ببطن حزوى / فيعرفنا وينكرنا الظلام
وكان به البشام مراح أنس / فماذا بعدنا فعل البشام؟
فيا شرخ الشباب ألا لقاء / يُبل به على برج أوام
ويا ظل الشباب وكننت تئدي / على أفياء سرحتك السلام

O gentle raincloud, pour out my sad tears now. O dove, converse with about your sorrow

I have just completed sixty years of living, and they called out from behind me: Is there a future?

Among my whilom pastimes there was *Lubaynā*, and sparkling wine was one of my dear nurses

Morning was searching for us in *Baṭn Ḥuzwa*, and knew us not, but night's darkness knew us

Bašām-trees were my companions of pleasure. What has become of them after my departure?

Youth is gone: will there be ever a meeting to refresh by it the pain of parching thirst?

O shade of youth, you were so blissful, upon your shady *sarḥa*-tree my hearty greeting!¹²

Ibn Khafāja's *Mountain poem*, in which he depicts a lofty mountain that the poet reaches and with which he holds a kind of dialogue, is one of the most famous and beautiful in the Arabic poetry of Spain. It is written in the best of the *badīʿ* style.¹³ Yet the poem is wholly philosophical, replete with metaphor and allegory. Its main theme is death, presented in human form, before whom the poet stands beaten down and fearful. However, in the course of the poem he undergoes a catharsis, because the mountain itself, solid and eter-

¹¹ Ibn Khāqān 1989, pp. 740–741 (English translation Nykl 1946, p. 229).

¹² *Lubaynā*—a fictitious name; *Baṭn Ḥuzwa*—the poet's dwelling in Alcira; *Bašām*—an odoriferous kind of tree; *sarḥa*—a great tree (Nykl 1946, p. 312).

¹³ Nowaihi 1993 discusses this in detail.

nal, undergoes the experience of death—not, indeed its own, but that of its friends, described as living figures, and it expresses its agony in a monologue of nine stanzas.

Keeping distant from the ruling circles and giving the mind over to death are clearly preached in the *zuhdiyyāt* (*zuhd* poems) of Abū al-‘Atāhiya and Abū Nuwās; these themes are already taken up in the *tokheḥa* of Sa‘adia.¹⁴ But the two Abbasid poets were an inseparable part of that ruling society, frequenting the caliphs’ courts and enjoying their favours. Arab sources explain their turn to writing *zuhdiyyāt* by a particular event that occurred in their lives, and some Arab researchers, such as Farāwī and ‘Aqqād, question the sincerity of their poems. This poetry was certainly not an expression of the social protest movement against the rule. This was not the case with the Spanish *zuhdiyyāt* poets. Their work reflected an obvious religious and social outlook, which did not always accord with traditional Islam, voicing criticism of the rule and preaching a life of abstinence.

Irrefutable evidence of this is the great difference between the poets of Spain and the poets of the East in their attitude to death. Abū al-‘Atāhiya and Abū Nuwās wrote from a sense of dread of approaching death, death that was inevitable. In terms arousing revulsion and disgust they describe the open graves and the physical changes that take place in the corpses of the deceased. They emphasise the negative aspect of death, and their poems are filled with a rabidly nihilistic spirit (*‘adamiyya*) whose roots go back to the pagan *jāhiliyya*. For that reason some criticised them harshly. But when the Andalusian poets give a reminder of death they do so out of a reverently religious philosophical, seemingly rationalistic outlook. This was the usual way mainly among the neo-Platonic *Mu‘tazila* circles, and it is clearly reflected in the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* (*Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’*). This outlook negates the material life of this world, and extols the sublime spiritual life, on the face of it paradoxically—precisely at the time of death and without any fear of it. According to this well-known view, the role of man on earth is not to luxuriate in pleasures but to prepare himself for eternal life. This is what the al-Ilbīrī, mentioned above, says in one of his poems:¹⁵

¹⁴ See pp. 73 ff. above.

¹⁵ Shalabi 1977, p. 508.

فيا إخواني مهما شهدتم جنازاتي / فقوموا لربي واسألوا نجاتي
 وجدوا ابتهاالا في الدعاء وأخلصوا / لعل إلهي يقبل الدعوات
 وقولوا جميلا إن علمتم خلافة / واغضوا على ما كان من هفواتي
 ولا تضيفني بالذي أنا أهله / فأشقى وحلوني بخير صفات

O my brethren, when you see my burial, stand up in front of my
 God and beg of him to redeem me
 Utter convincing supplications in your prayer and purify yourselves,
 maybe my God accept the prayers
 Say right if you know its opposite and close your eyes to seeing my
 unintentional sins
 Do not depict me with what I am not to oppress me, and do right
 with me without attributes.

Most of the philosophical poems of the Arab poets are short (*maqṭūʿas*), although there are some long ones, like *qaṣīdas*. Examples are the three poems of Ibn Ḥazm (d. 864), at the end of his *Ṭawq al-Ḥamāma*, which is a monograph on love and love poems. Several of al-Ilbīrī's poems are also of this kind.

The religious tendency in the philosophical poems grew constantly more rigorous under the pious rule of the *Muwahhīdūn*, and scholars of Arabic poetry in Spain clearly differentiate between *zuhd* poems and *taṣawwuf* poems. The *zuhd* poems treat life and death, the worthlessness of man, the need to keep distant from *al-dunyā* (Earth, the world), and man's role to prepare himself provisions in readiness for *al-aākhirā* (the world to come). Generally they are written in the language of *ḥaqīqa* (realism), almost entirely free of the constraints of the *badīʿ*. The Sufi poems are different, dealing with love of God, making much use of metaphors and locutions of the secular love poems; they are written by way of allusion and allegory, for example, the famous religious love poem by Yəhuda Ha-Levi, מִשָּׁן מְעוֹן, הַשֵּׁשֶׁת־הַיְּהוּדִי.¹⁶ To a large extent, here is a transition from seemingly rationalistic and open philosophy to esoteric mysticism.

B. Hebrew Philosophical Poetry in Spain

The influence of the Arabic *zuhdiyyāt* on Hebrew poetry began in the East, and of course did not cease with the rise of Hebrew poetry in Spain. It is evident in poems such as אֵל הַדִּינִי כְּמַעְלִי by

¹⁶ See Levin 1971.

Yiṣḥaq b. Mar Sha'ul, and פני הבל קצנאזר המצורע by Yiṣḥaq b. Khalfūn. But the genre of philosophical poems really began to flourish only in the third generation, with Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid. From the very start of writing in this genre in Hebrew poetry a barrier arose between its two kinds: *secular* and *sacred* philosophical poems. This distinction is principally one of *content*, while in *form* both kinds were written as *maqṭū'*as in the classical structure. The secular poems were usually in entire collections: *Ben Qohelet* by Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid and the chapter *dhamm al-dunyā* in the *Dīwān* of Moshe b. 'Ezra and the eighth chapter of his *Ha-'Anaq*.

The Hebrew *secular* philosophical poems are written in the *zuhdiyyāt* style of Abū al-'Atāhiya and Abū Nuwās. Their approach is pessimistic, denying the value of life, with excessive use of the idea of *ubi sunt?* ('Where are they?'). This approach is based on the pagan determinist and fatalistic outlook, characteristic of Arab culture and its poetry in the *jāhili* period, as Ringgren and Rosenthal have convincingly shown.¹⁷ In these poems there is certainly a fundamental clash of principle with Jewish tradition. That tradition does not tolerate determinism, which utterly negates the idea of reward and punishment, a tenet of Judaism which cannot exist without. This contradiction is perhaps even more acute than that caused by the love poems, which undermine only one of Judaism's moral commandments. Maimonides had reason to oppose the determinists, who in their *books* and *poems* included the idea that the evil in the world exceeds the good.¹⁸ This is not the proper place to expand on this matter, and we must be content with the general resolution to the contradiction, valid for love poems as well as poems of other kinds. In secular poetry, the Jewish poets of Spain allowed themselves to write what did not conform to their tradition. By and large they did not regard secular poetry as a means of expressing their views but as a means of proving their literary talent and the ability of Hebrew to create in the Arab style. In the work of the Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid and Ibn Gabirol some poems defined as secular poetry can be found, and indeed they are not poems of an obviously religious character. But their essence is prayer to God, and they are not philosophical poems in the *zuhdiyyāt* style of the Arab poets of Spain.¹⁹

¹⁷ See Ringgren 1955; Rosenthal 1983.

¹⁸ See *Guide to the Perplexed*, III:12.

¹⁹ For these poems see Yahalom 1995.

In any event, in all three collections of philosophical poems mentioned above, and in poems of this kind by other poets, convention is quite evident, and there is no qualitative conceptual innovation. This is so even though in terms of their literary and conceptual design they are not inferior to the *zuhdiyyāt* of Abū Nuwās and Abū al-‘Atāhiya; they may even excel them, for example, in the depictions of the horror of the graves and the cadavers of the dead. What is certain is that work in this style in Hebrew poetry in Spain supersedes that in Arabic poetry in Spain, in which convention is also obvious, in terms of both scope and level. This is because, as we saw above, Arabic poetry in Spain reduced its writing in the style of the Eastern *zuhdiyyāt*.

By contrast, in Hebrew poetry in Spain we do not find philosophical poems in which the poet shows compunction (*mumahhiṣāt*) for writing love poems (*mukaffirāt*) in his youth, as we do in the Arabic poetry of Spain. However, compunction for the very engagement in secular poems is present in the non-poetic work of the Hebrew poets of Spain, as intimated earlier.²⁰ True, the motif of old age is fairly common in this poetry, but it is about regret for the life that has been lived, without any moral or religious conclusions.²¹ Perhaps here too lies the reason for the slight use by the Jewish poets of Spain of their secular poetry as a means of authentic experiential expression.

As for the change that occurred in the Arabic *zuhd* poetry in Spain as against that of the East, namely the transition from the determinist to the rationalist philosophical perception, did such a change occur in Hebrew poetry too? The answer is bound up with the existence of Hebrew religious poetry possessing a liturgical purpose, which has no equivalent in Arabic religious poetry. Arabic religious poems were never used in religious assemblies until the development of the Sufi poetry, and then too only in the esoteric *ṭarīqas* (orders) in the thirteenth century, not in the framework of formal worship. In any event, religious Arabic poetry in Spain was sincere, not conventional, arising out of a setting of social criticism against the regime. Its parallel is Hebrew *sacred* philosophical poetry intended for the synagogue.

The *sacred* philosophical poems seem to continue the *tokhehot* known from the ancient *piyyut*. However, as early as the *tokheḥa* of Sa‘adia,

²⁰ The allegorical interpretation given by Shāmu‘el Ha-Nagid in the poem שְׁבִי נָעִים to his love poems is not of concern here; nor are the famous words of remorse of Moshe b. ‘Ezra in *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-al-Mudhākara*.

²¹ See Ratzaby 1979.

and also in several Eastern *piyyutim*, such as that of David b. Ha-Nasi at the beginning of the eleventh century, the influence of the *zuhdiyyāt* is evident.²² Yet these *piyyutim* were not written as *maqṭūʿas* but in strophic structures typical of the ancient *piyyut*. Moreover, the motifs known from the *zuhdiyyāt* of Abū Nuwās and Abū al-ʿAtāhiya, present in the this kind of *piyyutim*, do not overshadow the main purpose of these *piyyutim*, which does not contradict Jewish tradition; in fact they are nothing other than an ornamentation of content, and not a qualitative idea.

A fundamental change occurred in the liturgical philosophical poetry in Spain, in that it rid itself entirely of the pessimistic elements originating in pagan concepts, and based itself wholly on the above philosophical ideas. The first of the *piyyutim* of this kind is אֱלֹהֵי אֵל הָרִיבִּי כְמַעֲלִי noted above, dating to the last third of the tenth century. However, *conceptual* innovation is combined with *formal* innovation, namely for the first time in Hebrew literature a sacred poem is written in the classical structure of an Arabic poem, and not as a *maqṭūʿa* but as a *qaṣīda*; this refers to the length of the poem. Shəmuʿel Ha-Nagid, who also absorbed the conceptual innovation in the philosophical poems, did not go as far as his predecessor, for in his poems the relation between the individual and God is bound up with the relation between the people of Israel and their God. In part these poems are not written in a classical structure but in strophic structures.²³

Religious philosophical poetry reached its zenith in the work of Ibn Gabirol. This refers to his *rashuyot*,²⁴ which marvellously fuse conceptual novelty with novelty in form and type. The poetic discussion is between man as an individual—not necessarily one of the people of Israel—and the universal God—not the God of Israel. It is conducted in a new type of *piyyut*, the *rashut*, and in a new poetic structure, the *maqṭūʿa*. This type enthralled most of the *paytanim* of Spain, especially Moshe b. ʿEzra, Yəhuda Ha-Levi, Levi b. al-Tabbān, and Abraham b. Ezra, who worked wonders with it in a way hardly inferior to that of its first inventor.²⁵

²² See p. 114 above.

²³ See Shəmuʿel Ha-Nagid 1966, pp. 317–328; Levin 1963, pp. 182–187.

²⁴ A kind of liturgical poems.

²⁵ On the *rashut* poems of these *paytanim* see Fleischer 1975, pp. 395 ff.; Breuer 1993, pp. 42, 309 ff.; Hazan 1986, p. 38; Ibn al-Tabbān 1968, pp. 51 ff.; Ibn ʿEzra Abraham 1976/80, I, pp. 25–58.

C. Hebrew and Arabic Philosophical Poetry Compared

Such impressive heights reached by Hebrew religious philosophical poetry were not attained by Arabic poetry in Spain. The reason for this may be threefold: first, the Arab poets could not break free from the determinist perceptions, whose force in poetry had been formidable as far back as the *jāhiliyya*. Second, orthodox Islam too, of the *ash'arī* milieu, ultimately sanctioned determinist perceptions in its relentless persecution of the abhorred *mu'tazilis*, and even denounced them as heretics to be put to death. Third, Arabic philosophical poetry in Spain had a social and political background: criticism of the regime, and to a certain extent this placed it in the domain of enlisted writing. By contrast, the Hebrew *rashuyot* poetry was unadulterated and refined, free of any binding social call, and had nothing to do with any external factor but only with pure philosophical thought.

A feature common to all the religious poetry in Spain, Arabic and Hebrew, liturgical and non-liturgical, is that it does not submit to the requirements of the *badi'* or make much use of figures of speech, especially metaphor. Linguistic acrobatics are not its forte, and it prefers to say what it has to say in *ḥaqīqa* language; not 'the best of the poem is its falsehood', but its sincere speech.

Still, the *rashuyot* too are written in keeping with conventional ideas from the neo-Platonic school. Anyone in search of the special genius of a given poet will in the end turn to certain works in that poet's secular poetry, as we saw, for example, in Ibn Khafāja's allegorical *Mountain poem*. Elsewhere I have discussed the philosophical poems of Ibn Gabirol, whose concern is not the conventional notion of censure of this world and its enticements, and the imposition of spirit over matter, but precisely a complaint against God for preventing man from attaining to Him.²⁶ These poems end on a fairly pessimistic note, in complete contrast to the air of reconciliation of the liturgical poems, the outstanding example being *Keter Malkhut*.

A good reflection of the above is the philosophical poem פְּנֵי הַכֵּל פְּנֵי הַמְצִיאוֹת by Yiṣḥaq b. Khalfūn. In 1020 the aging poet sent his short work to his young friend Shəmu'el b. Yosef, later Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid, to hearten him after he had been dismissed from his position and two of his relatives had been killed. The poet uses the well-

²⁶ Tobi 1990b.

known *jāhili* motif of תבל (Earth), *dunyā*, the seemingly uncontrollable female demonic power, and all her malicious acts against person, she, her own children, and her loved ones, in the best style of the *zuhdiyyāt*. But the Jewish poet, on account of both his artistic background and the aim of the poem, overturns things: what תבל did to men, Shəmu'el will do to her. For example, a common theme in the philosophical poems is that תבל eats her children out of cruelty. This of course means that human beings eventually die and are buried in the ground. But in this poem Shəmu'el is to kill the children of תבל and restore them to her womb: בן הביאם ברחם הרחבה העמוקה (so put them back into her deep, wide womb), a phrase alluding to the biblical depiction of *gehinnom* as interpreted by the Sages.²⁷ Although it seems that the reversal is made throughout the poem (which is not long: eight verses in all), the closing verse comes as a complete surprise when the poet introduces the only true supreme power according to Jewish tradition, that is, God: הרוג אותם במו / ואל ערב ללא תדר עלוקה (Kill them, either secretly or in the open, God is your pledge that you will not go down to hell). Thus a death blow is dealt to the dominant pagan notion of the existence of an uncontrollable demonic power. The greatness of Ibn Khalfūn is his skill at taking up major motifs from Arabic philosophical poetry and blending them into his poem. Yet these serve him only as an anvil to strike in order to express strong belief in the God of Israel and in absolute justice, at precisely the most distressful time for his young friend.

The same principle is applied by Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid himself in the poem הנמצא ברעי, written in 1054. He was then aged sixty-one, two years before he died. As usual in *qasīdas*, the poem is constructed of successive sections alternating in tone between bleakness and hoping for good, according to their Arab or Jewish origin. The sixth, concluding, section (verses 37–42) begins indeed with an expression of regret, although not for the decomposition of matter, הצורה היפהפה (the lovely body), but for spiritual imperfection, for the sins he committed in his life. So here too is an obviously Jewish religious perception. But fear of death, even if it stems from the traditional Jewish notion, is not to the poet's taste as an ending to the poem. He elects to close his poem in an atmosphere of utter reconciliation, in perfect

²⁷ For the various references see *Dictionary* of Eli'ezer Ben-Yehuda, entry רחם.

and calm philosophical thought, that occupation with Torah, a theme known as well from other poems of the Nagid,²⁸ will sustain him at the time of judgement in the World to Come. So much so, that not only does he no longer fear death, but is even happy at its approach: וְאֶשְׁמַח בְּצֵאתִי אֶל כְּבוֹד אֵל לְאֶסְפְּנִי / וְאֶשְׁמַח בְּהֵאָסְפִי יְרֵחִי וְאוֹרוֹתַי (And I will rejoice when God comes in his glory to take me and be happy when my moon and lights will be gathered in). The poet's genius thus allows him to integrate into his poem the best of the Arab motifs in philosophical poems concerned with fearsome death; but these do not enter his act of faith except to strengthen the powerful impression of pure faith.²⁹ As is known, this is also his way in several other genres of secular poetry.³⁰

²⁸ See e.g. the poem אֵלֹהִים עִזּוּ, Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, pp. 9/74–75 (English translation, Weinberger 1973, p. 25): וְהוֹרֵתִי אֲשֶׁר תְּחִיל וְתִלָּד // וְהוֹרֵתִי יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי הִלִּיכְתִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמַעַן כִּי הִלִּיכְתִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל // וְהוֹרֵתִי אֲשֶׁר תְּחִיל וְתִלָּד (Because I walk in a straight path // Or because of my learning which travailed and gave birth at a time when the knowledge on the 'learned' is barren); and also the poem רָאֵה הַיּוֹם בְּצִרְתִּי, *ibid.*, p. 15/10 (Weinberger 1973, p. 34): וְאִם אֵינִי כְּרָאִי אֶצְלֶךָ / עֲשֵׂה לְבִנִּי וְהוֹרֵתִי (And if in your judgment I am not worthy, then do it for my son and my Torah!).

²⁹ For a detailed analysis of the poem see the next chapter.

³⁰ See chapters seven and eight below.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MEDIEVAL HEBREW SECULAR POETRY: PAGAN IDEAS *VERSUS* THE TENETS OF JUDAISM

A. Introduction

Over two centuries passed from the first encounter of the *paytanim* of Jewry in the great centres of the Land of Israel, Babylonia, North Africa, and Spain with Arab culture in consequence of the Muslim conquests until they bowed—perhaps involuntarily—to the influence of Arabic poetry. The poets were at first hesitant, but after about two generations, when the new Hebrew poetry had become well founded in Spain in the first half of the eleventh century, they eagerly submitted to the foreign influence and overstepped every boundary and constraint.¹ Yet acceptance of the new style in Hebrew poetry involved some crises. One of these concerned *form*, mainly quantitative metre, as attested by the fierce polemic between Mōnaḥem b. Sarūq with his pupils and Dunash b. Labraṭ with his.² Another concerned *content*, as evinced by the apology of Shōmu’el Ha-Nagid and his son Yōhosef Ha-Nagid, the editor of his poems, for the love poems.³ But criticism of the secular poetry in Spain persisted throughout its existence, even though we have no real evidence except towards the end of its age. This is the severe censure by Yōhuda Ha-Levi in his book *Ha-Kuzari* (c. 1140) of quantitative metre, and Maimonides’ statements in several places in his writings, such as the *Commentary to Pirke Avot* and *Guide to the Perplexed* (second half of the twelfth century) on secular poetry and on poetry and its ways in general.⁴ Note

¹ See above, chapter 2; Schirmann 1996, pp. 13–30.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 99–143.

³ Opinions differ on this subject, e.g., Allony 1961; Ratzaby 1970, pp. 146–147; Ratzaby 1973; Segal 1972; Yahalom 1995, pp. 28–30; Schirmann 1996, pp. 245–246: ‘Ha-Nagid, in one of his poems, and Yōhosef his son, in the introduction preceding the *diwān*, try to convince readers that these are in no way the usual love poems but works of allegorical import. Although what they say hardly convinces us’ etc. Huss 1995 tends to Schirmann’s opinion.

⁴ This issue deserves meticulous and extensive treatment. Here we note several studies only: for criticism by the *dayyan* Baḥye b. Paqūda, of Saragossa, who lived

that in Muslim society too, poetry and the dissolute atmosphere in which it was immersed drew censure.⁵

In the Jewish world opposition to secular poetry arose from its clash with the traditional way of life, especially regarding the laxity and hedonism that saturated it. Above all, the themes of love and passion, including homosexuality, became commonplace in the second generation of the poetry of Spain (Yiṣḥaq b. Mar Sha'ul in the last quarter of the tenth century).⁶ The spirit of hedonism and the obsession with wine-drinking and unbridled sexual activity, including adultery, intensified in the Abbasid period owing to the acquisition of enormous wealth by the ruling power and the higher classes. But this atmosphere had also characterised the early Arabic poetry of pagan society, as transpires from the *jāhili* poet al-A'shā.⁷

in the second half of the eleventh century, on courtly society and its poetry, see Safran 1979; for criticism by Yehuda Ha-Levi on the use of Arabic metre in Hebrew poetry, see Allony 1941; Schirmann 1996, pp. 443–445; on Maimonides' negative view of poetry see Schirmann 1935.

⁵ We mention here only the *Risāla* by Jāḥiẓ on the singing girls and the legal verdicts of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) and other sages of Islam on listening to music. See Jāḥiẓ 1980; Jawziyya 1983; Jawziyya 1991; Abū Zayd 1994; Homerin 1991 (including Ghazālī's attitude to poetry); van Gelder 1988. Opinions for and against poetry in the Islamic tradition are presented by Ismā'īl b. Muḥammad al-Ḥasanī al-Tālibī in part two of his book *Simṭ al-La'al fī Shu'arā' al-Āl*. See Ṣafādī 1995, pp. 18 ff. For the views of Ibn Ḥazm and Ibn Rashīq on praiseworthy poetry and contemptible poetry see Ratzaby 1975, pp. 311–315.

⁶ See Schirmann 1996, p. 146, and *ibid.*, ns. 15–16. Incidentally, following Schirmann 1979c (and cf. his article *צבי מודה נוסח השכ"א*, *Ha-Ares*, 8 Av 1961), modern research has engaged in the question of homosexuality in medieval Hebrew poetry. The fierce debate, unlike that over any other research subject in this poetry, was joined by many scholars. See Allony 1961 (and cf. his article *הצבי באנטולוניה לשירה ספרד*, *Ha-Ares* 1 Av 1961, p. 13; 15 Av 1961, p. 13); Segal 1972; Pagis 1970, p. 271; Pagis 1991, pp. 64–68; Pagis 1993b; Fleischer 1983; Zemach-Moked 1983; Roth 1982; Ratzaby 1973. The researchers are divided, but all—it seems to me—address primarily an issue of great concern for the present generation: homosexuality and same-sex partnerships. They ignore almost entirely the form of free love expressed in the *ghazal* poems (poetry of passion), namely sexual relations between a man and a woman who is not his wife; this too is contrary to the code of traditional Jewish behaviour. Our interest is not in this question, but my firm understanding is that the *ghazal* poems on the hart, whether this is to be understood at face value or not, do not express homosexual relations between two adult males, still less a same-sex partnership. They refer to the love of youths only, that is, the love of a man of good social and economic standing for an obscure young man.

⁷ Nicholson 1969, pp. 123–125, 135–136.

B. *Free Will and Predestination*

A far more essential contradiction to Jewish tradition arising in the secular poetry in Spain is predestination. Various shades of opinion existed in Judaism on this subject, especially in times of direct contact with foreign religions and their influence. The biblical principle is expressed in Moses' words in his last speech to the Children of Israel before his death (Deuteronomy 30:15, 19): 'See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil [...] therefore choose life'. It is also present in the prophecy of Ezekiel (18:4–6): 'The soul that sins shall die. If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right [...] he is righteous and he shall surely live.' This principle constitutes the moral underpinning of Judaism and upholds the notion of reward and punishment and man's responsibility for his fate. True, uncertainties arose even in the time of the Bible, such as Jeremiah's penetrating questions (12:1), 'Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?' The entire book of Job is like an agonising human story. But these very doubts indicate that the questioners' philosophical perception has no room for the idea of predestination.⁸ When the influence of the pagan religions of Persia and Greece intensified in the Second Temple era Rabbi 'Aqiva seemingly saw fit to recognise the idea of predestination, but without this even slightly undermining the moral essence of Judaism (*Avot* 3:15): 'All is foreseen and freedom is given.'⁹ Greek philosophy entered the gates of Judaism in the tenth century through Arab culture, if we disregard the influence of Greece on the Sages. But this influence only reinforced what was accepted in Jewish tradition on the issue, since Jewish thinkers at that time were impressed by the *mu'tazilī* current in philosophy. Its adherents were known as *ahl al-tawhīd wa-al-'adl*, meaning the people of the absolute unity and justice of God.¹⁰ In our context, absolute justice meant

⁸ On the idea free will as against predetermination in the Bible see Halpern 1961, I, pp. 111–119; *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, III, Jerusalem 1958, pp. 53–55, entry 'Freedom of choice' (Hebrew); Farrelli 1964, pp. 39–46. On the idea of predetermination in the Dead Sea Scrolls, especially the *Scroll of the Hodayot*, in the Qumran literature, see Licht 1957, pp. 27–38; Lange 1995; Merrill 1975.

⁹ On the views of the Sages on predetermination and free choice, see Urbach 1975, pp. 255–285.

¹⁰ On the *Mu'tazila* and its conflict with the *Ash'ariyya* on free will and predetermination see Goldziher 1981, pp. 76 ff. For a lengthy discussion on divine providence and free will see Maimonides, *Guide to the Perplexed*, III:17 ff.

that God acted with absolute justice towards man, whose destiny was therefore in his own hands. The same circles also rejected the assertion that every person's *ajal*, namely end of life, was determined in advance; rather, this was a fixed according to one's moral behaviour, acting like preventive medicine.¹¹

*C. Predestination in Pre-Islamic Arab Society,
in Islam, and in Arabic Poetry*

This foregoing forms the background to the contradiction arising from a central idea in the early Arabic poetry of the *jāhili* period, which went on to infuse Arabic poetry under Islam, hence also Hebrew poetry. This is *qadar* or *qadā'*, and in Hebrew זמן (Time). The Swedish scholar Ringgren devoted an entire book to this question, and much of what is written here about the *jāhili* era and its poetry rests on it.¹² According to the concept of *fatalistic pre-determinism*, one cannot change one's impending fate. This fate determines principally the time of a person's death, but also the course of his arduous life, in which the good is often nothing but an illusion, the rude awakening from which is very bitter. Naturally, the conclusion from this is profoundly negative. In the words of the *jāhili* poetess al-Khansā', 'There is no good thing in life, be it ever so joyful, and nothing will stand against Time'.¹³ Ringgren asserts that the poets of early Arabia inserted this motif into three contexts: dirges on the death of a relative or friend, the *nasīb* (opening of the *qaṣīda*) in addressing the destructive action of Time as the agent of Fate, and the section of self-praising, in which the poet brags about the steadfastness of his tribe in times of trouble and their contempt for death. The willingness of the tribe's warriors to go into battle in the face of death therefore stems not only from the eternal glory they will win on that account, but also from the belief that fate, fixed in advance, in any case cannot be changed. Another important motif for our discussion, even though it does not necessarily and directly emerge from the pagan background of that society, is cruelty towards the vanquished, a ubiquitous theme in early Arabic poetry.¹⁴

¹¹ See Weil & Schwarz 1979.

¹² Ringgren 1955; see also Shin'ar 1979, pp. 93–95.

¹³ Ringgren 1955, p. 33.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 6. Examples from Arabic poetry and the war poems of Shāmu'el Ha-

This perception of Time among the Arabs in the *jāhili* period had parallels in the ancient Iranian and Greek religions. Some researchers of Islam speak expressly about the effect of the Iranian concept of the daughters of *Ẓurān* 'uncreated Time' or the god of Fate, on the pre-Islamic Arab notion. Others see in them identical concepts stemming from another source.¹⁵ In ancient Greek religion the well-known *moira*, the death sentence, is one that even the gods cannot escape. Urbach describes this idea as follows:¹⁶

In the Greek religion, as it is reflected in the poems of Homer, the gods are clearly not omnipotent. There are bounds to the sphere of their dominion [. . .]. The boundary is *death*. There is no god that can revive the dead. Even a goddess is unable to save her beloved from death, if the *Moira*—the decree of death—has decided it. We are familiar with the saying found already in Herodotus, that the power of the gods cannot withstand fate and necessity [. . .]. Fate is essentially negative. From it stems death, calamity, annihilation [. . .]. The gods differ from men only in knowing what the *Moira* determined. Now *Moira* is not a personality; it is the law that transcends everything and determines each one's fate, that is death and collapse. Death is outside the sphere of the dominion of the gods, which are a part of life. This conception implicitly raised the problem that was also formulated in the fifth century by Euripides, the author of the tragedies: If there exists something like Fate, the gods are superfluous; and if the gods are dominant, then Fate is of no consequence.¹⁷ In truth, the boundaries become blurred, and when the godhead, or any god, is spoken of in general terms, the reference to Destiny or Fate—in effect to 'the course of events in the world', and the term 'god' is only 'an abstraction devoid of personality'.

Nagid and a discussion on them are given in Levin 1995, I, pp. 53 ff.; and cf. Goren 1970, p. 16.

¹⁵ See Ringgren 1955, pp. 41–46; Shin'ar 1979, p. 95, and *ibid.*, 93–95 on fatalism in ancient Arab culture. For scholars' opinions on the effect of the fatalistic perception in the doctrines of ancient Greece and ancient Iran on the Qumran literature, see Ringgren 1963 (index, p. 308, entry 'Predestination'); Merrill 1975, pp. 13–14.

¹⁶ Urbach 1975, pp. 82–83. Grintz 1969, p. 69, writes similarly about *moira*-fate in ancient Greek culture: 'The belief and ancient history (of Herodotus) and Greek tragedy all place it as the dominant element over all, and that prevails despite all, despite the deeds of men and gods and their thoughts'. On *moira* in the culture of ancient Greece, in literature and philosophy, see Greene 1968; Dillon 1992.

¹⁷ Such a statement is not found in the tragedies of Euripides. Perhaps Urbach was referring to the words of Hecuba: 'The gods have power, and over them reigns its source, the law of absolute truth. The world is balanced on that law, from it the gods take life' (Euripides 1998, p. 116). On the subjection of Zeus to Fate see Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* (Greene 1942, p. 55). For a sharp satire on the weakness of the gods in the face of fate see Lucian 1968, pp. 59 ff.

By contrast, says Urbach, 'The religion of Israel included, *ab initio*, death in the capacity and power of God'.

In Arabic poetry, Fate is usually presented as a real persona, with sons and daughters and other relatives, all of whom act to the detriment of man. One of the commonest expressions of this personification is *banāt al-zaman* ('Time's daughters') referring of course to the troubled times. Ringgren rightly notes that it is hard not to place the source of the expression in the mythological concept of the early Arabs in which *Allah* had three daughters, one of whom was called *Manāt*.¹⁸ This is the word that serves in Arabic poetry, with many others, to express the concept of death as man's portion. The name *Manāt* is known as the epithet for the goddess of destiny in the pantheon of the Nabataeans from the first centuries of the current era. It is parallel to *Tyche*, the name of the goddess of destiny in the Greek pantheon.¹⁹ Almost certainly, the motif of destiny present in ancient Arabic poetry was influenced by Greek pagan culture, but it also reflects a religious and philosophical perception that prevailed in the ancient Near East in Bible times. This is borne out by the Hebrew etymological parallel *manat*, found in the Psalms and meaning fate.²⁰

Ringgren also adduces evidence that the expression *the days' daughters* is known from ancient Persian mythology, which undoubtedly exerted an influence on neighbouring Arabia. The very concept of Time as Fate's agent arises from Persian influence, and its image is presented in the two cultures with the same characters: it separates friends, trifles with man, causes decay and death, no one can escape it, nothing can withstand it, it is treacherous and tyrannical. In fact, the pre-Islamic image of *Allah* is generally identical to that of fate. This accords with what is stated by Bukhārī, a sage of Islam famous for his *Ṣaḥīḥ* (collection of *ḥadīths*, oral traditions in Islam) in the name of the Prophet Muḥammad: 'Allah said, Man offends him, in his accusation against Time: I am Time'.²¹ To sum up, here is what Nicholson says about early Arab society and its poetry:²²

¹⁸ Ringgren 1955, p. 41. And see Nicholson 1969, p. 135; Shin'ar 1979, pp. 87–88.

¹⁹ See Glueck 1965, p. 395; Negev 1983, p. 231.

²⁰ Such as Psalms 16:5: *ה' חֵלֶקִי וְחֵלֶקִי יְהוָה חֵלֶקִי וְחֵלֶקִי* (God is the portion of my part and my cup. You sustain my destiny). This question deserves additional in-depth study.

²¹ Ringgren 1955, p. 48.

²² Nicholson 1969, p. 135.

Religion had so little influence on the lives of the Pre-islamic Arabs that we cannot expect to find much trace of it in their property. They believed vaguely in the supreme God, Allah, and more definitely in his three daughters—al-Lât, Manât, and al-‘Uzzá—who were venerated all over Arabia and whose intercession was graciously accepted by Allah. There were also numerous idols enjoying high favour while they continued to bring good luck to their worshippers. Of real piety the ordinary Bedouin knew nothing. He felt no call to pray to his gods, although he often found them convenient to swear by.

These notions of supreme power in the world did not pass away with the appearance of Islam. Fatalism was an important element in the faith of the Companions of the Prophet, and many of the qualities and descriptions of Fate were transferred to the Islamic Allah. Ringgren believes that Arab paganism was fairly robust at the time when Muḥammad fought it, and tribal humanism continued to exist in poetry for at least a century after the rise of Islam.²³ In any event, the fatalistic perception infiltrated the Qur’ān and the religion of Islam, too. This is expressed particularly in the *ḥadīth*, which leaves no opening for the possibility of free will, even though the Qur’ān is equivocal on the subject.²⁴ Later, under the influence of Greek philosophy the idea of the absolute justice of God became consolidated among number of the sages of Islam (the *Mu‘tazila*), and as a necessary rider also the negation of fatalism and predestination. When this occurred the contrary, orthodox perception intensified, as represented by the *ash‘arī* stream.²⁵ This perception is well evident not only in the purely secular Arabic poetry, composed as the continuation of the *jāhili* poetry, but also in religious philosophical poetry from the school of Abū al-‘Atāhiya and Abū Nuwās around the beginning of the ninth century.²⁶

The hedonism in *jāhili* poetry and the pessimism in Islamic philosophical poetry are, so to speak, two sides of the same coin, namely denial of any value to life, arising out of fatalism and predestination.

²³ See Ringgren 1955, p. 60, and cf. Murad 1991; Watt 1948; 1973, pp. 88–90.

²⁴ Guillaume 1949/50, p. 775.

²⁵ See Goldziher 1981, pp. 80 ff., 94 ff. For a profound discussion of free choice in the *maqāmas* of Hamadhānī see Monroe 1983, pp. 47–63. See also Scheindlin 1993.

²⁶ See above, pp. 68 ff. On pessimism in the poems of Mutanabbī (tenth century) arising mainly from frustration with the non-realisation of personal ambitions see Daher 1957. Perhaps there is room for a comparison between him and Ibn Gabirol, who did not succeed in realising his goals either, albeit not in the field of political power like Mutanabbī, but in the spiritual domain. See Tobi 1990b.

Both answer the question *ubi sunt?* (Where are they?), but the one concludes with *carpe diem* (seize the day), the other with annihilation of what there is (nihilism, *‘adamiyya*), to the point of withdrawal from the life of this world (*zuhd*). Beside this we find in Arabic poetry also the principle of *memento mori* (Remember death, or in *Qohelet’s* words (12:1) **זָכֹר אֶת בּוֹרְאֶךָ**, Remember your Creator). Underlying this is the religious belief in the God of justice, reward and punishment, which, if they do not come in this world may be expected in the world to come.²⁷

D. Predestination and Free Will in Hebrew Poetry in Spain

Hebrew poetry in the East, which was temperate and more critical than Hebrew poetry in Spain in adopting linguistic, formal, and content elements from Arabic poetry, absorbed from the foregoing only the question ‘Where are they?’ and *‘adamiyya*. But the answer and the conclusion are clearly religious, and fully accord with Jewish tradition: ‘Remember your Creator’. The pessimistic mood pressing down on the account of human life is nothing but a rhetorical and literary cover, while the essence is the certain possibility of repentance before the merciful God. This was the way of *paytanim* such as Sa’adia and David b. Ha-Nasi in *piyyutin* composed for the Day of Atonement, the day of forgiveness and penitence in Jewish tradition.²⁸ By contrast, the Hebrew secular poetry in Spain holds forth with enormous freedom and little discretion on all the above subjects. Many scholars, such as the late Goldziher, Sha’ul ‘Abdallah Yosef, Abraham Shalom Yahuda, David Yelin, and David Semah, and of our generation Yohuda Ratzaby, Israel Levin, and Ari Schippers, have in their important studies detailed the abundance of *ma’ānī* (ideas) that Hebrew poetry in Spain borrowed from Arabic poetry,²⁹ including those of concern to us here.³⁰ In this chapter it is not my intention to expand on these ideas, but through them to present the poets’ diversity in their borrowing, and the changeable manner of borrowing in the different genres of poetry.

²⁷ On all the above see Roth 1978; Von Grunebaum 1940, pp. 28–29; 1981, p. 133.

²⁸ P. 114 above.

²⁹ See chapter one above.

³⁰ See Levin 1962; Pagis 1970, pp. 225–244; Ratzaby 1974; Elizur 1995.

E. *Shāmu'el Ha-Nagid*

Moshe b. 'Ezra long ago observed that Ha-Nagid's poetry went much further in borrowing from the poetry of the Arabs than did his predecessors. Modern researchers such as Yelin and Ratzaby have pursued this line closely with regard to metre and courtly poetry (love and wine). Levin and others have done so in the genres of war poems and laments, where Arab ideas are clearly evident.³¹ The apparent contradiction of Jewish tradition arising from all of them is thorniest in the poetry of Shāmu'el Ha-Nagid. Of all the Jewish poets in Spain he is the figure most identified with Jewish religion; he was the head of the *yeshiva*, he debated on questions of *halakha*, and he was the chief of the Jewish communities in that country.³² As for the hedonism and license in his courtly poetry, especially the love poems—whether for a girl or for a boy, he himself explains them in the poem *נָכְרִי יָעִים* and so does his son Yəhosef in the preface to the *Dīwān*. Everything is written as allegory for the congregation of Israel. As stated, some researchers accepted these explanations, while most were not entirely convinced, although this is not our concern here.³³ What is of concern to us is to set forth Pagis's brilliant analysis of several of Ha-Nagid's wine poems. According to Pagis, 'the special hedonistic conclusion' of these poems does not 'rebel against morality or ignore it, but justifies itself as a way of morality by virtue

³¹ See Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, pp. 61–63; Yelin 1940, pp. 23, 107 ff.; Ratzaby 1970; Ratzaby 1972; Levin 1963, pp. 73–106; Levin 1968; Levin 1995, I, pp. 40 ff.; III, pp. 13 ff.

³² Most of the Jewish poets in Spain did in fact belong to the noble families, and were also central spiritual figures in the life of Jewry, such as the philosophers Ibn Gabirol and Yəhuda Ha-Levi. Some of them also fulfilled evidently religious roles, such as Yiṣḥaq b. Ghiyāth, who was head of the *yeshiva* at Lucena in the second half of the eleventh century (on him see Katz 1995) and his two pupils Yosef b. Sahl, who was a *dayyan* in Córdoba from 1113 to 1124, and Yosef b. Ṣaddīq, who was also a *dayyan* in Córdoba from 1138 to 1149 (on both see Schirrmann 1996, pp. 483–495). Still, Ha-Nagid is distinguished from the others for his central position in the Jewish communities throughout Spain and beyond. The social profile of the Arab poets was entirely different: most of them did not belong to the Arab aristocratic circles, and were even Persian in origin. They certainly had no leading positions in religious and spiritual life, but were considered by the clerics heretics who offended against the commandments of Islam. Some were put to death on that account (on the tension between Arabic poetry and the religion of Islam see n. 5 above).

³³ See n. 3 above. For Moshe b. 'Ezra's defence of his love poems, even when they apparently are in violation of the religious commandments, see Pagis 1970, pp. 273, 276; Pagis 1993b. And cf. Jāhīz 1980.

of itself. Therefore, the pleasures do not come after despair of what is transient, but out of certainty of what exists'.³⁴ Still, some comment is required on the notions of heroism and cruelty in his war poems, arising from his fatalistic approach, on the nihilistic pessimism in several of his personal poems and the laments, and also on the question 'Where are they?' and the response of *'adamiyya* in most of the poems of *Ben Qohelet*. All these themes are borrowed from Arabic poetry and are fundamentally contrary to Jewish tradition.

E1. *The war poems of Shamu'el Ha-Nagid*

Although the war poems do not have a liturgical purpose, they were written out of the profoundest religious feeling. These poems, like the personal poems begging for wisdom by Ibn Gabirol, the poems of Zion and the sea by Yehuda Ha-Levi, and many more poems by other poets, show that the distinction between secular and sacred poetry in medieval Hebrew poetry is vacuous, unless the distinction is considered entirely functional in essence and significance. This distorted grasp of the two main sections of Hebrew poetry in Spain, namely courtly and hedonistic secular poetry, and national religious sacred poetry, blurs the aspect and distinctiveness of the work of every poet, secular or sacred. It becomes even less distinct when the conventions in the norms of Hebrew poetry in Spain are considered. The convention, usually taken from Arabic poetry, is nothing more than a vessel into which the authentic and unique spiritual expressions of each poet are poured.³⁵ All these devices, borrowed from ancient pagan Arab culture, which are found in the war poems and the laments, are merely kinds of ornaments that the poet saw fit to append to his poems. This in itself is a matter of the highest cultural import. This judgement arises easily from the divisional structure of the *qaṣīdas* in these genres, as we shall see below.

The larger part of Ha-Nagid's war poems are constructed in the well-known classical early Arab structure, the long multi-theme *qaṣīda*. It has many dozens of stanzas, and on account of its length it is separated into divisions.³⁶ Ha-Nagid, however, imparts special signi-

³⁴ See Pagis 1993a, p. 49. Sufi poetry attempts to reconcile praise of wine and erotic motifs with Islam. See Maimonides 1958/89, II, p. 399; Kraemer 1992, p. 68.

³⁵ On the problems of perceiving Ha-Nagid's poems in terms of the conventional distinctions between secular and sacred poetry see Yahalom 1995.

³⁶ On the multi-theme divisional structure of the Arabic *qaṣīda* see van Gelder 1982; on the same in the Hebrew *qaṣīda* see Pagis 1968; Pagis 1970, pp. 131–145.

ficance to this divisional structure, which is a natural tendency in the war poem. An example is the most famous and important war poem by Ha-Nagid, which opens with the words **אֵלֹהֵי עַוְן יִשְׂרָאֵל קָנֹחַ**. It was written on the occasion of Ha-Nagid's triumph on behalf of the king of Granada in 1038 in a battle near Alfuate against the army of the king of Almeria.³⁷ The poem is sectioned into six divisions:

1. Verses 1–11 A paean and thanksgiving to God
2. Verses 12–51 The personal and political background and the declaration of war by the king of Almeria.
3. Verses 52–68 An account of the battle
4. Verses 69–94 Ha-Nagid's appeal to God in prayer
5. Verses 95–136 An account of the victory
6. Verses 137–149 Thanks to God and publication of the miracle

This division is characteristic of other war poems by Ha-Nagid constructed as *qaṣīdas*. The third and fifth divisions are well known from the Arabic war poems, and indeed are designed according to them, including the three main motifs: (a) fatalistic pre-determinist belief underlying willingness to commit the soul to death in battle; (b) a detailed description of the weapons and the action during the battle; (c) cruelty to the enemy, even defeated and routed, and desecration of the bodies of the slain. The literary account of the battle (theme b) presents no difficulty. The scene was presumably similar to that described in the war poems of Arab poets, such as al-Mutanabbī in the East in the second half of the tenth century and Ibn Hānī' al-Andalusī (937–972) who lived at the court of the Fāṭimī caliph al-Mu'izz in Cairo.³⁸ By contrast, great difficulty arises from the fatalistic belief and the portrayal of brutality towards the foe (themes a and c). These are manifestly contrary to the fundamental tenet of Judaism on free will discussed above, and to the quality of mercy even towards the enemy after his submission, which was characteristic of Jewish tradition. True, the Bible has instances of extreme cruelty and desecration against the defeated enemy, such as the deeds

³⁷ Contained in Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, pp. 4–14; Schirmann 1955, I, pp. 85–92; for an English translation see Weinberger 1973, pp. 21–28. For a similar detailed analysis of this poem and its counterpart (שְׁמוּעַל הַנָּגִיד), see Itzhaki 1986, pp. 13–46. See also Levin 1995, I, pp. 42 ff.

³⁸ On the influence in this respect of the ancient Arabic war poem and the war poems of Mutanabbī on Ha-Nagid's poems see Ḥayyaṭ 1966; Levin 1968, pp. 348–363; Schippers 1994, pp. 231–241. On Mutanabbī see Hamori 1990a; on Ibn Hānī' see Nāḥi 1962, pp. 115–120, 231–240.

of King David against the Philistines (2 Samuel 8:1–2) and the custom of dipping the shoe and the sword or spear in the enemy's blood (Numbers 24:5; 1 Kings 2:5; Psalms 68:24).³⁹ But these represent an ancient Hebrew reality, which is certainly far from typifying the Jewish spirit in the time of Shāmu'el Ha-Nagid. Ibn Gabirol in his work *Tiqqun Middot Ha-Nefesh* (in the original Judeo-Arabic: *Kitāb Iṣlāḥ al-Akhlāq*) takes a different position; in contrast to all the other traits, seemingly negative, whose use is vindicated in certain circumstances, he does not justify this one in almost any circumstances:⁴⁰

I do not justify that trait of seeking revenge in the just and righteous people or in nobles [. . .]. Indeed that trait results from *the desire for vengeance against the enemy*. It is nothing when a person with that trait uses it for that purpose, but it is not seemly that a wise person will go so far to wreak vengeance on his enemy, since it is not proper or right [. . .]. The proof that that trait does not exist except in the wicked person is His phrase וְרַחֲמֵי הַשְּׁעִים אֶזְכֵּר [Proverbs 12:10].

To resolve this problem we must study the other divisions in the poem. These distinguish this and Ha-Nagid's other war poems from the usual Arab pattern, and they reveal the unconventional spirit of their creator. The first division, which fulfils the function of the *nasīb* in the classical Arab *qaṣīda*,⁴¹ is utilised by Ha-Nagid—in this poem and in other war poems—for the nationalist theme. It may be a poem of thanksgiving to God for having helped his masters in their wars against their enemies, the enemies of the kingdom of Granada, in which he served as vizier,⁴² or it may be a poem of longing for Zion.⁴³ The second division, which generally has no parallel in the Arabic war poems,⁴⁴ is seemingly informative and documentary, since

³⁹ For this motif in Ha-Nagid's poems see Levin 1968, p. 349. And cf. pp. 251–252 below.

⁴⁰ Ibn Gabirol 1951, pp. 66–67. My emphasis.

⁴¹ In fact, not in all the Arabic war poems does the opening constitute an erotic love poem. Openings concerned with love are found in the war poems of the *jāhili* poet Ibn al-Tufayl. See Levin 1968, pp. 362–363. In the Abbasid and the Andalusian war poems the opening poems are very short, and for the most part are encomiums for the king or the warriors. See Schippers 1994, pp. 222–223; it is the same in the poems of Ibn Hānī?

⁴² The vizier in medieval Arab kingdoms was in a way equivalent to the prime minister in modern governance, holding the highest authority after the king himself.

⁴³ On the openings of Ha-Nagid's poems whose content is longing for Zion see Allony 1971; 1982. For the themes of the openings in Ha-Nagid's war poems see Levin 1995, I, pp. 63–66.

⁴⁴ For example, Ibn Hānī? does not give a detailed description of the political measures that preceded the war described in his poems, but at times he expands

it contains precise details of the background to the war that the particular poem deals with. That aspect is important not so much in literary composition as in showing the personal connection between the wars of various rulers against the king of Granada and the war of the Muslims against Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid, the president, of the Jews, who occupies the high office of vizier in the kingdom of Granada. More than Ha-Nagid sees himself the messenger of his king Ḥābūs (or his son Bādīs) he sees himself the messenger of his Jewish community in Granada and throughout Muslim Andalusia. It is quite clear to him that his fall would bring great calamity down on the entire community. He was actually proved right ten years after his death, with the fall of his son Yəhosef Ha-Nagid, who also served as vizier in the kingdom of Granada. This division of the poem is therefore a faithful expression of the insecure and dangerous position of the Jews in their exile, even when they were led by a figure wielding great influence and power. In all Ha-Nagid's war poems there is no expression of identification with the Muslim king of Granada, nor is there any word of praise directed at this king. These poems thereby differ from those of the Arab poets, who sing the praises of their lords. Mutanabbī does it for Sayf al-Dawla of the dynasty of the Banū Ḥamdān in northern Syria, and Ibn Hānī² does it for the Fāṭimī caliph al-Mu'izz in Egypt.

Beyond this, the poem intimates that the war of Ibn 'Abbās, viceroy to Zuhayr king of Almeria, is not a war against Ha-Nagid but against the God of Israel. This is what Ha-Nagid writes (verse 31) regarding a vituperative and threatening letter from Ibn 'Abbās to the king of Granada about the exalted position of the Jewish minister: 'I was indignant and God was angry and his face like a fire was kindled in rage against him'.⁴⁵ Moreover, in the transitional passage to the third division, the account of the battle, the poet reacts to the resolve of 'his adversary' Ibn 'Abbās to fight him, saying that God opposed him: 'Even as the foe arose the Rock stood up against

on the background to the war, such as in the poem *انظلم ان شطنا بوارق لمجا*. Verses 25–32 of this poem tell the circumstances of Ibn Wāsūl's rebellion in Sijilmassa against the Fāṭimī caliph al-Mu'izz. This rebel assumed the title *amīr al-mu'minīn*, and called on the people to recognise the authority of the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad. See Ibn Hānī² 1994, pp. 77–82; Nāḥī 1962, p. 88. And *ibid.*, pp. 75–89, on the relationship between the poems of Ibn Hānī² and the historical and political events. And see Tobi 2003.

⁴⁵ Weinberger 1973, p. 23.

him, and how can a creature survive when the Rock is his opponent?⁴⁶

The fourth division, which follows the description of the battle order and the battle itself, namely Ha-Nagid's appeal to God, certainly has no like in the Arabic war *qaṣīdas*. Those poems originated in the early *jāhili* heroic poetry (*hamāsa*), in which no place existed for a god operating according to the measure of justice and who could be entreated through prayer for forgiveness. Human destiny was pre-determined by an arbitrary supreme power, Time (Ar.: *zaman* or *zamān*; Heb.: זמן). The introduction of the monotheistic religious element is purely Jewish. It is accompanied by the personal element, the promise given by God to the poet in his youth in a prophetic revelation: 'When you pass over dangerous waters, I will be with you, rivers will not drown you on the day that your foe approaches [...] // When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned'.⁴⁷ The evidently Jewish nature of this division of the poem is expressed not only in prayer to God. It is also reflected in the allusions to biblical historical events (the victory of Baraq and Dəborah over Sisəra) and evocation of the virtue of the Patriarchs. There is an emotional and assertive appeal to the fathers of the nation that they advocate on his behalf before God. The rights of children who have not sinned are mentioned, as is the bitter complaint uttered by the ministering angels when the soul of R. 'Aqiva, one of the Ten Martyrs, departed: 'Is this Torah and is this its reward?'⁴⁸

Trust in God, whose source is both in prophetic 'tidings' and in the virtue of children, the Patriarchs, and the Torah, dispels fear of the demonic power of Time, ancient master of destiny. In other words, Jewish faith frees the poet from the terror inherent in the

⁴⁶ Op. cit., p. 24.

⁴⁷ These two verses (5, 7) are taken from the poem יום צד ומצוק (Weinberger 1973, p. 72), which describes the prophetic vision in which the lad Shəmu'el was given these 'tidings' by the angels Michael and Gabriel. See Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, p. 3. Ha-Nagid refers to this promise in the poem אֶלֶוֶה עוֹ (verses 88–89) and many more times in his other war poems, such as רֹאשׁ הַיּוֹם בְּצִרְתִּי (verses 4–6); הָלֵךְ הַעֵשׂ (3–4, 64–65); שְׁעָרָה מִנִּי (10, 19). See Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, pp. 15, 16, 31.

⁴⁸ אֶלֶוֶה עוֹ, verse 87. In verse 86 the poet mentions his son Yəhosef, aged three when the poem was written: 'For if it does not please You to have mercy upon Yəhosef, your young one, when will salvation be revealed?' Reliance on the virtue of infants who have not sinned was a very common motif in ancient litanies. See, e.g., 'Amram Gaon 1972, p. 156. For the virtue of the patriarchs as a central motif in the Sages' perception and in the ancient Jewish liturgy, see Urbach 1975, pp. 496–510. For an appeal to the patriarchs to supplicate before God, see *Petiḥata de-Ekha Rabbati*, 24. On the sentence 'Is this Torah and is this its reward?' see *Berakhot* 61b.

pagan concept. Here lies the distinctiveness of Ha-Nagid's war poems. This is the great difference between the Jewish perception as set forth by the Sages, and by which Ha-Nagid undoubtedly felt bound, and the pagan perception, albeit in the ancient Iranian and Greek context, which perhaps influenced the poetry of *jāhili* Arabia.

This subject serves as a convenient bridge to the fifth division, the account of the victory. This description is based on materials typical of the Arabic heroic poems, including the motifs of cruelty and brutality, as Levin and Schippers have illumined so clearly.⁴⁹ But the reason for the victory is not the doughtiness of the warriors, as is usual in Arabic heroic poems down the generations, but God himself.⁵⁰ He responds to the poet's appeal: 'And the Lord heard my prayer when I called like a woman in labour, like one who brings forth her first child in anguish // And he blew upon them as on the day of the Sea of Reeds and they were destroyed by his storm and he showed them the power' (אלה עזר, 95–96). These two verses serve as a passage to the division of bravery, by way of the 'transition' technique (*takhalluṣ*) used in the passage from the opening poem in the *qaṣīda* to the body of the poem.⁵¹

The absence from this division of the warriors' boasting of their exploits is not merely because of the two transition verses at its beginning, but also because of the verses at the end of the poem. Ha-Nagid again ascribes his victories to God's intervention: 'And God fulfilled the word of my father to his tribe' (verse 128); he himself takes no pleasure in this victory except by virtue of his adherence to the Torah: 'Even as I took hold of the Testimony for its value to me is greater than all others' (verse 126). Of particular importance is a short secondary division of five verses (132–136) at the end, in which Ha-Nagid expresses his faith that the end of justice is to triumph, and that one should trust in divine justice even when it seems that the evil one has lifted his head. This firm belief is parallel to the basic belief in the Psalms, on account of which part of

⁴⁹ See Levin 1968, pp. 358 ff.; 1995, I, pp. 53 ff.; Schippers 1994, pp. 234 ff. For accounts of the terrors of war and the desecration of the bodies of the defeated enemy in the poems of Ibn Hānī see, e.g., the poem اقوا المحصب من هاد ومن هيد which describes the war of the Fāṭimīs against the Byzantines in 965, verses 33–40, Ibn Hānī 1994, pp. 99–105; the poem بسرا وجناح الليل اقمم افتخ verses 26–27, *ibid.*, pp. 83–89; the poem لا ما شاءت الاقدار verses 34–36, *ibid.*, pp. 181–187.

⁵⁰ Cf. Tobi 2003, a comparison between Ha-Nagid's war poems and the war poems of the Andalusian poet Ibn Darrāj al-Qaṣṭallī (958–1030).

⁵¹ Pagis 1968, pp. 54 ff.

the *Dīwān* containing Ha-Nagid's war poems is called *Ben Tehillim*. It also matches the extreme *mu'tazili* perception that there are no acts of evil in the world that are not corrected.⁵²

God's dominant and impressive presence in the poem, which is contrary to the entire pagan perception expressed in the Arabic heroic poetry, reappears at the beginning of the last division. The conventional purpose of this division in Arabic poetry is for the poet to boast of his own bravery or that of his tribe and his king. In his poem Ha-Nagid does not intend to sing his own praises much, nor those of humankind in general, but to praise God: 'To the Lord who has done great things I will expand in song' (verse 137). 'Therefore my brethren give forth with hymns to the eternal God' (verse 143). He can thus give this division the nationalist character of a poem of thanksgiving to God, to be said on a special festival day in celebration of the victory in the synagogues throughout the Jewish world. The following is the poem's structure by its divisions and their character:

<i>Division</i>	<i>Content of division</i>	<i>Character</i>
1-2	Paeon and thanksgiving to God Personal and political background	Jewish
3	Account of the battle	Arab
4	Prayer to God	Jewish
5	Account of the victory	Arab
6	Thanks to God and announcement of the miracle	Jewish

The divisional structure is certainly borrowed from the classical Arabic *qaṣīda*, as is the subject matter of the second and fourth divisions. But to neutralise the pagan flavour in them, and to give the poem a particular Jewish character, Ha-Nagid inserted them among three patently Jewish divisions, and also took pains to present clearly Jewish expressions at the beginning and end of the two Arab divisions. Together, all these factors deflect the character of the poem from paganism to Judaism, and serve to unify its divisions.

The above analysis runs counter to a convention in research on medieval Arabic and Hebrew poetry that has no foundation. The poetics literature on medieval Arabic poetry was generally incapable

⁵² Levin 1995, I, p. 48, refers to these five verses, but in his opinion 'they continue, in their special way to scorn and deride the vanquished', and in content they are close to 'the wisdom of the ancient Arabic *qaṣīdas*'. I do not concur with this conclusion.

of going beyond examination of the individual verse in the *qaṣīda*, and the only unifying factors it detected in this genre were formal, namely metre and rhyme. This notion is also deep-seated in modern researchers of Arabic and Hebrew poetry, who treat the metaphor of the poem, interlaced into the poetry itself, like the craft of threading beads onto a necklace, where they seem to be unconnected in content and essence.⁵³ Only in the last generation have Western scholars deliberated on the integrative factors of the poem, which grant it firm conceptual unity.⁵⁴

E2. *Study of a philosophical poem by Shāmu'el Ha-Nagid*

Another poem by Ha-Nagid composed in the divisional structure of the classical Arabic *qaṣīda* is *מֶרְכָּבִי לְמָרוֹתֵי*.⁵⁵ It was written in 1054, when the poet was aged 61, according to the inscription by his son Yōhosef, editor of *Ben Tehillim* (translated from Arabic): 'He, God honour him, was inflicted by decline of strength and body, because of old age, during the war that took place in the summer of the year 814 [1054]. He said this poem, complaining'. The divisions of the poem are the following:

1. Verses 1–15	Lament by the poet for himself
2. Verses 16–19	Expression of hope in resurrection of the dead
3. Verses 20–24	The poet's complaint about the bearing of his body to burial
4. Verses 25–29	Justification of the divine judgement
5. Verses 30–36	Description of the terrors of the human body at the time of its death and at the time of its burial
6. Verses 37–42	Man's judgement after his death and expression of hope for his absolution

⁵³ See, e.g., Pagis in Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1935/78, III, p. 155, entry *Shira*; Kattānī 1966, pp. 112–113, no. 205–206. This conception of the Arabic *qaṣīda* is known as the molecular structure, a term coined by the Polish scholar Tadeusz Kowalski, and following him the German-American scholar von Grunebaum. And see Heinrichs 1969, pp. 20–32.

⁵⁴ To this subject van Gelder 1982 devoted a special study. See also Monroe 1983; Scheindlin 1974; Hamori 1974, pp. 101–118; Pagis 1968; 1970, pp. 116–150; Feldman 1988; Itzhaki 1990; Segal 1979 (regarding three war poems by Shāmu'el Ha-Nagid). On Sa'adia's unique perception of the style of literary writing beyond *faṣāḥa* and *balāgha* (precision and beauty in language) see p. 154 above.

⁵⁵ Shāmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966 (*Dīwān*) pp. 121–124 (English translation, Weinberger 1973, pp. 79–82). The poem is also in Shāmu'el Ha-Nagid 1953 (*Ben Qohelet*), pp. 53–56, no. 137, and see below on *Ben Qohelet*.

This poem too clashes with Jewish tradition in several parts, namely the first, third, and fifth divisions. They project the pessimistic mood that sees the human body as the chief thing, of which nothing will remain after it has rotted in the grave. This is in total disregard for the soul, the spiritual part of man, a part of God on high, which possesses true existence, and which may expect eternal life. In this respect these divisions of the poem draw on the pagan *jāhili* culture, which was ignorant of the idea of reward and punishment and the life of the world to come. This culture, which does not and cannot find succour in existence after death, inspires the heavy atmosphere of melancholic gloom at a time when various manifestations of weakening of his body make it clear to a man that his end is nigh.⁵⁶ One loses one's self-confidence entirely, sees everything in a negative light, and condemns every act done to one or in one. His aging causes the poet to despair of life, and he wishes to reach its end: 'And if I do not return to my young life, take a spade and begin to prepare my grave' (verse 7). Here is a kind of notion of suicide, a thing absolutely forbidden in Jewish tradition, namely a man may not bring his death closer, not even slightly. The supreme power that rules this first division in the poem is Time, which because of its perfidious nature cannot be trusted:⁵⁷ 'And after the heavens have shut up the bright clouds of my young years, will the dew of youth come down to rest upon my vital powers?' (verse 4).

The second division opens with a question about knowledge of the day of death, and its continuation is actually a poem written from a positive religious Jewish perspective. The poet hopes that he will have rest in the grave and that after a certain time⁵⁸ he will win resurrection. This idea is hinted in a portrayal of the fall of dew, which deserves more comment. A common theme in the dirges in Arabic *jāhili* poetry is the blessing of rainfall on the grave, to water it and to cause vegetation to grow out of it. Levin believes

⁵⁶ See Ratzaby 1979.

⁵⁷ On this quality of Time, compare the wonderful verse, formulated by the generalised philosophical sentence of Yiṣḥaq b. Khalfūn, Ha-Nagid's aged friend, in the poem *הַבְּנוֹת הָאֶרֶץ תִּבְּרֶנּוּ*: 'פֶּנִּי הַכֵּל כְּצִוָּאָהּ הַמְצֹרֶת': 'Children of the Earth will always betray you, as does the Earth herself in time of anguish and distress' (for the complete version and translation see below, pp. 285–286).

⁵⁸ It is known in Islamic literature, and also in Sa'adia's book *Beliefs*, as *barzakh* (p. 106 above).

that the origin of this blessing is 'the desire to mark the place of burial of the dear departed, so that his grave will not be swallowed up by the desert landscape until it is not known where it is', but 'in the Muslim dirge, from the start there is a tendency to inherit the ancient pagan element of the blessing of real-rain on the grave rather than the religious element of the rain-of-God's-mercy on the grave'.⁵⁹ Yelin, in the chapter *הרעיונות המיוחדים* (Special ideas) in his book *תורת השירה הספרדית* (*Introduction to the Hebrew Poetry of the Spanish Period*), goes farther in his interpretation of this idea in *jāhili* poetry. He states that the usual prayer at the end of the lament of the Arab poets for rainfall on the graves of the dead so as to water them was intended 'to refresh the interred body, until it was restored to life'.⁶⁰ But this interpretation is obviously anachronistic, and rests on concepts that reached the Arabs after Islam. This is the firm conclusion of Shin'ar: 'Indeed, according to the evidence of the poetry the prevalent opinion among the Arabs was that death puts a end to everything, and after it there is nothing. The Qur'ān affirms this evidence, and comes out against heretics who ridicule the idea of resurrection of the 'dry bones' and life in the world to come, and who see it as foolishness and quibbling'.⁶¹ This idea is also taken up by Hebrew poetry in Spain, but naturally it acquires the clear significance of resurrection of the dead, in keeping with Jewish tradition.⁶²

So in the first division of this poem Ha-Nagid unfolds the *jāhili* motif of the fall of dew on the grave, in a Jewish manner intimating the resurrection of the dead. But he subjects this awakening to Time, and introduces it in a rhetorical question whose answer is negative. That is, Time is not to be trusted; it is a demonic, arbitrary power that never works to man's benefit. Rejection of the possibility of resurrection of the dead by Time in the first division becomes in the

⁵⁹ See Levin 1973, pp. 144–145. He too gives there examples of *jāhili* verses containing this idea. See also Ratzaby 1975, pp. 352–353.

⁶⁰ Yelin 1940, pp. 31–32.

⁶¹ See Shin'ar 1979, pp. 98–99, and *ibid.*, pp. 96–103 for a detailed discussion of the customs of burial, mourning, and eulogising the dead among the Arabs in the *jāhili* period. For an eleventh-century Andalusian Arab poet called Ibn Yanaq, who comes close to negating the idea of resurrection in the framework of philosophical poetry, see Pères 1937, p. 455.

⁶² On the use of this notion in the ending of the Hebrew lament in Spain see Yelin 1940, p. 32; Levin 1973, pp. 154–155; 1995, II, pp. 66, 70, 77–78, 93–94; Pagis 1970, pp. 218–219; Ratzaby 1975, p. 353.

second division hope and faith that in fact the poet will enjoy the resurrection of the dead. Now it is not by virtue of the pagan Time, but by virtue of **אל אלהים** (the Lord God), who is utterly contrasted to it in essence. He is good and filled with loving-kindness, and serves as protection for man: 'Then will the Lord God heal my bruises // [. . .] Thus will God allow me in his goodness and mercy, for while yet I live, I have put my trust in the Lord, even my hopes' (verses 18, 20). Note however that in this division Ha-Nagid does not echo Hellenistic views on the contrast between body and soul, or on the soul's desire to be free of the body, which acts as its prison. Such views do not accord with Jewish tradition and are not found in the Bible or the Talmud, but only in medieval Jewish ethics literature, and also in Jewish-Spanish liturgical poetry and in the personal secular poems of Ibn Gabirol.⁶³ It is otherwise in the last division, where, as we shall see, Ha-Nagid rejoices in the separation of the body from the soul. The idea of resurrection of the dead signifies the reunification of body and soul according to the ancient Jewish religion, but the medieval philosophers found it very difficult.⁶⁴

The poet's complete spiritual collapse in the first division causes him in the third division to ponder and to denounce even the normal burial customs in Jewish tradition. He does not understand why his relatives and friends are in a hurry to carry him off for burial, overlooking the custom of not letting the deceased's body lie out of respect for it (verse 22). He does not comprehend why his corpse is wrapped in a winding-sheet or why it is purified in water, ignoring the fact that this is done out of respect for the dead (verse 23–24). He goes still farther in the fifth division, in bewailing what is in store for his body when it decays and disintegrates in the grave. The cynical account of the handling of the body by the deceased's relatives while preparing it for burial, and the accompanying grisly descriptions of it rotting in the grave, arise again in another of Ha-Nagid's poems contained in *Ben Qohelet*, **בְּכֹחַ מָוֶת נְבוֹרָה, הִתְחַיָּה בֶּךְ** (Will you

⁶³ On the concept of resurrection in the Bible and in Talmudic literature, compared with the relationship of the body and the soul in Greek philosophy, see Urbach 1975, pp. 652–653. On the Jewish-Spanish liturgical poems that express the wish of the soul to separate from the body see Tanenbaum 2002; Levin 1973, pp. 63–76; Mirsky 1992, pp. 282–287. On the soul in Ibn Gabirol's secular poems see Tobl 1990b. For Arabic sources of the poems of rebuke of the soul see Goldziher 1913.

⁶⁴ See Teicher 1944; Maimonides 1981, 197 ff.

have power when death comes⁶⁵). But in this poem he adds the sarcastic motif of his relatives' looking forward to his death-day so that they can share out his property: 'They will arise in the morning early to divide your possessions and their wailing will be turned into song' (verse 9).⁶⁶ In all these subjects Ha-Nagid draws on the tradition of the Arabic nihilistic *zuhd* poetry ('*adamiyya*'), which saw no point to life; this appears in a sub-genre of the lament known in Arab books of poetics as *rithā' al-shā'ir 'alā nafsīhi* (the lament of the poet for himself).⁶⁶

Ha-Nagid was not the first to present these *zuhdī* motifs into Hebrew poetry; he was preceded by Nissi al-Nahrwānī and by Sa'adia in the first half of the tenth century in Baghdad.⁶⁷ However, just as these two poets were at pains to reconcile their liturgical poems containing pagan motifs with Jewish tradition, so was Ha-Nagid in the poem הַנְּמִצָּא בְּרֵעִי. He applied a technique already familiar to us in the poem אֶלֶיָּה עָלוּ. Here too he inserts the pagan divisions among the optimistic divisions drawing on elements of Jewish tradition. These are belief in resurrection of the dead (second division) and justification of the divine judgement of death and recognition of God's deeds of absolute justice (fourth division). Also, man will stand trial after death and can hope for absolute acquittal by the elimination of fear of death. Paradoxical joy is expressed in readiness for meeting God after death: 'And I will rejoice when God comes in his glory to take me, and be happy when my moon and lights will be gathered in' (last verse of the sixth division). This optimistic conclusion is characteristic of the liturgical *tokhehot*, and it recurs at the end of Sa'adia's *tokheha* לִפִּי בְּהֶרֶץ אֱלֹהִים and at the end of Ibn Gabirol's *Keter Malkhut*.⁶⁸ What unifies the second, fourth, and sixth divisions is not only their content, which accords with Jewish tradition, but also God's revered status in each of them.

⁶⁵ Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid 1953, pp. 50–51, no. 133 (English translation, Weinberger 1973, pp. 128–129).

⁶⁶ See Levin 1973, pp. 81–88; 1995, II, pp. 125–127. Levin discusses Ha-Nagid's above two poems in detail, and also presents a poem of the type 'a lament of the poet for himself' in the writing of Moshe b. 'Ezra, אֶתִּי בְּקִבְרִי, which contains motifs parallel to those in Ha-Nagid's poems. And see pp. 85, 215, above.

⁶⁷ See pp. 72 ff. above.

⁶⁸ See pp. 109 ff. above; Schirmann 1955, I, p. 285.

This poem too may be set out to highlight its interwoven sources:

<i>Division</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Character</i>
1	The poet's lament for himself	Arab
2	Resurrection and trust in God	Jewish
3	Cynical account of burial	Arab
4	Justification of divine judgement	Jewish
5	Description of the horror of the rotting body	Arab
6	Standing trial and hope for acquittal	Jewish

We conclude our discussion on this subject with another poem by Ha-Nagid, *יְדִידוֹתָי בְּחוֹךְ לִבִּי יִצְחָק*.⁶⁹ It was written as a reply to the poem *פָּנֵי חֵבֶל כְּצִוָּאָר חֲמִצּוֹרֶעַ*, sent to him by his friend the poet Yishʿaq b. Khalfūn in 1020, after Ha-Nagid was dismissed from his position and two of his relatives were murdered because of his enemies' hatred of him. In his desire to comfort Ha-Nagid, Ibn Khalfūn curses 'the sons of Earth', namely the enemies and enviers of Ha-Nagid, and incites him to take heavy revenge on them, to the point of their actual physical elimination. He even assures him that he will not be punished for this by God: 'Kill them either secretly or in the open, God is your pledge that you will not go down to Hell'.⁷⁰ Ha-Nagid, steeped in Jewish tradition, cannot take the way of vengeance suggested to him by his aged friend, not even against those who have betrayed him and caused his removal from office and the murder of his relatives. This is so despite the fact that the motifs of execration, revenge, and cruelty towards the enemy are ever present in Arabic heroic poetry, which represents ancient Arab culture. In his reply to Ibn Khalfūn Ha-Nagid begins by placating him and with the expression of love and friendship, but he unequivocally rejects his counsel, in regard to both word and deed. He has no intention of treating his foes in the way of the avenger and the grudge-bearer; he justifies the verdict upon himself and commits the judgement of his adversaries to Heaven (verses 15, 18):

יִשְׁלַח אֱלֹהֵי אִישִׁים וְכֹרֶתָם / אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח עָלַי נָסִי עֲזָקָה [...]
 וְאַצְדִּיק, עַל אֲשֶׁר בָּא, אֵל אֱמוּנָה [...]

⁶⁹ Shāmuʿel Ha-Nagid 1966, pp. 191–192.
⁷⁰ For the complete version and translation and an analysis of this poem see pp. 285–286 below.

God shall send upon the people you mentioned what he sent upon
those who fled from 'Azeqa⁷¹ [. . .]
And I shall justify God of faith regarding what has happened to me [. . .]

As stated above, Ha-Nagid's philosophical path in harmony with the Jewish faith is not unique to his war poems and the laments, but is also characteristic of other poems and motifs in his work, such as the poems of self-praise. These poems borrow abundantly from Arabic poetry, but Ha-Nagid, possessed of an original and independent creative spirit, fashions the borrowed notions in his own way, which is indebted principally to the spiritual and normative world of Judaism.

E3. *Shemu'el Ha-Nagid's philosophy in Ben Qohelet*

The question of pessimism and nihilism is more complex in the philosophical poems in *Ben Qohelet*, which seem to ignore the steadfast principles of Judaism regarding reward and punishment, repentance, and the world to come. The *Ben Qohelet* poems are all short, *maqṭū'āt*, and they concern one matter only: despair and rejection of what exists. The few poems scattered through the book, mainly at the beginning and at the end,⁷² in which the poet writes as a believer who trusts in God and his justice, were perhaps intended to temper and keep some distance from alien opinions. But this does not feel right, for the number of these poems is indeed very small compared with the number of poems in the work as a whole; and each poem has to be discussed in itself, unconnected to some other poem located far from it in the book. Ha-Nagid suffered the vicissitudes of life from the time he was obliged to leave Cordoba, the city of his birth. Even in his heyday as vizier at the court of the kings of Granada he never really came to enjoy serenity. All this served to plunge him often into a mood of despair and grim thoughts about the worth of man and the justice prevalent in the world. As a true artist, despite his being bound by the Jewish faith, he did not recoil from expressing what was in his heart.⁷³

⁷¹ Alludes to the content of Joshua 10:11, that God hurled great stones down from heaven onto the kings of the Emori, who fled before the Israelites as far as the city of 'Azeqa.

⁷² See Pagis 1970, p. 236, and similarly in the eighth chapter of the book *Ha-'Anaq* by Moshe b. 'Ezra, devoted entirely to the subject of 'abstinence and the belief in God and the memory of the dead and the injuries'. See Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1935/78, II, pp. 374–386. For the adjustment in *Ben Qohelet* of the pagan perception of Time to Jewish tradition see Elizur 1995.

⁷³ On *Ben Qohelet* see Levin 1963, pp. 163–181.

F. Moshe b. 'Ezra

What was stated about Ha-Nagid regarding his poems of passion and wine is certainly not applicable to the other poets who succeeded him, as those poems had by then become routine in Jewish literature. For example, the poet Yosef b. Ṣaddiq, who as noted served as *dayyan* in Cordoba from 1138 to 1149, in the *kharja* of the *muwashshah* אֵין דִּי לְהִילִי לְהִילִי negates the love of men but not the love of women. Yet several of his finest *muwashshahs* are directed precisely to the עוֹפֵר (buck).⁷⁴ Nevertheless, one cannot deny the phenomenon of the *compunctious poet*, namely one who in old age or in consequence of a certain event in his life voices regret over poems he has written, especially those in which he exceeded the bounds of morality and religion.⁷⁵ This feature is known in Arabic poetry, such as that of Abū Nuwas and Ibn Khafāja, and also in Hebrew poetry, such as that of Moshe b. 'Ezra, in respect of his poems of satire and of love. However, writing on the themes of love and wine should not be regarded as the expression of an actual social reality of a life of free love, with men or with women, or as the poet's identification with what is expressed in the poems. It is an imitation of certain Arabic genres, whose literary and linguistic achievements won the admiration of the Jewish poets; that is all.

These remarks also apply to the motif of זמן (Time) which is abundant in the work of the various poets. But they do not apply in the case of Moshe b. 'Ezra. In his poems of complaint and philosophy this motif is very frequent.⁷⁶ Note that the genre of complaint poems is known in Hebrew poetry primarily from the work of this poet,⁷⁷ and apart from Ha-Nagid he alone wrote philosophical poems in the style of the Arabic philosophical poems, that is, poems that respond to the question 'Ubi sunt?' (Where are they?), with a nihilist pessimistic

⁷⁴ For the poem אֵין דִּי לְהִילִי לְהִילִי see Ibn Ṣaddiq 1982, pp. 43–44. For love poems on the hart see *ibid.*, pp. 45 ff. See also the editor's comments, *ibid.*, p. 14.

⁷⁵ See Brann 1991, and cf. p. 212 above.

⁷⁶ The use of the motif of Time can vary according to the kind of poem in which it is integrated. For example, in the poems of praise Time serves the praised person and obeys him. This was noted by Pagis 1970, p. 50.

⁷⁷ Complaint poems were also written by Ibn Gabirol and Todros Abū al-ʿĀfiya. On the genre of complaint in Hebrew poetry in Spain see Levin 1995, I, pp. 209–267. On those of Moshe b. 'Ezra see Pagis 1970, pp. 281–309; Levin 1966; 1995, I, pp. 249 ff.: 'Moshe b. 'Ezra wrote many complaint poems, perhaps more than any other Hebrew poet in Spain'.

answer whose burden is the nothingness of man.⁷⁸ The life that Ibn 'Ezra lived, namely in exile in Christian Spain for close to fifty years, far from his family and the cradle of his culture, caused him to view life as a whole as the image of his own life. He viewed it with the jaundiced and despairing eye of one who could not live at peace, in perfect faith that the God of Justice administered the world with loving-kindness and mercy. Still, this was only in his words spoken as a private individual, as a secular poet, and not as a *paytan* serving as the representative of Israel before their God. The liturgical philosophical poems of Ibn 'Ezra and of the *paytanim* of Spain, just like the *piyyutim* of Sa'adia and David b. Ha-Nasi, entirely accord with Jewish tradition. The spirit that inspires them is that same spirit of 'Remember your Creator', of the supplication for forgiveness, of appeasement, of hope and trust in God; and all this, whether the speaker is the universal individual or the Jewish-nationalist individual.⁷⁹

G. *The Satire on Time in the Poetry of Yehuda Ha-Levi*

Yehuda Ha-Levi wrought a major innovation in his treatment of זמן in his well-known short poem:⁸⁰

עבדִי זמן עבדִי עבדים הם / עבד אֲדֹנִי הוא לְבַד חֲפֹשׁ
עַל כֵּן בִּבְקֶשׁ כָּל אֲנוֹשׁ חֲלָקוֹ / חֲלָקִי אֲדֹנִי אֲמַרְהָ נַפְשִׁי

The slaves of Time are the slaves of a slave, only the slave of the Lord is free

Therefore, while other men seek their portion, 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul.

This poem has attracted the attention of various scholars. Shulamit Elizur sees it as an expression of the division between innocent believers and those rushing headlong after the material pleasures that Time offers, and who thereby become 'slaves of a slave', namely

⁷⁸ For the philosophical poems in general, including those of Moshe b. 'Ezra, see Levin 1995, III, pp. 215–217; Pagis 1970, pp. 225–248, and also pp. 205 ff. above. For the formulation הֵּן (where?) in poems see Allony 1959a; Roth 1978.

⁷⁹ Jewish liturgical poetry in Spain has been only slightly researched in this respect. For the most comprehensive study, which seeks to demonstrate the influence of *Hovot Ha-Lavot* by Bahye b. Paquda on the *paytanim* of Spain, see Mirsky 1992 (but cf. Appendix 2, p. 356 below). See also Klausner 1926, pp. 34–44; Dana 1990; Heinemann 1950; Scheindlin 1994; Levin 1970, pp. 47–100; 1971.

⁸⁰ Original and translation in Carmi 1981, p. 347.

‘their service is absolute bondage’. The phrase ‘slaves of a slave’ signifies slavery by hyperbole. By contrast, ‘as for a servant of the Lord, not only is his service not slavery, but by oxymoron only he wins true freedom’.⁸¹ Yet beyond this interpretation the poem apparently should be seen also as a cutting satire against Time, namely against him who is lord of the world according to the pagan perceptions of the Arab *jāhili* milieu: Time is itself a slave, therefore so is anyone who submits to Time’s dominion. Everyone who believes in fate and predestination becomes a vassal of a slave. This slave is subject to the true Lord of the world, namely the Creator according to the Jewish concept.

This satire by Yəhuda Ha-Levi about the king who is nothing but a slave is already known from the satires of second-century CE Roman author Lucian, who wrote in Greek and lived in Samosata on the River Euphrates. In one of his satires, translated as *Zeus Catechised*, Ciniscus ridicules Zeus, the father of the gods, that even he is subject to the rule of Fortune and Destiny.⁸² A satire against a god who cannot direct himself and needs someone to guide him is already found in the prophet Isaiah (46:7): ‘They lift it on their shoulders, they carry it, they set it in its place and it stands there; it cannot move from its place. If one cries to it, it does not answer or save him from his trouble’. In general, Isaiah the seventh-century BCE Jerusalemite, Lucian the second-century CE Syrian, and Yəhuda Ha-Levi of twelfth-century CE Jew of Spain—all scorn those whom their contemporaries consider gods standing above all, while they are nothing but slaves.

H. *The Motif of Time in Hebrew Poetry in Fourteenth-Century Spain*

In the Hebrew Andalusian laments, the motif of Time in its pagan *jāhili* aspects is retained. But with the passage of time the motif became absorbed into Jewish tradition. In the later Hebrew poetry of Spain it is no more than a literary theme, presented with the metaphoric significance of an emissary who fulfils God’s command

⁸¹ Elizur 1995, p. 42.

⁸² For the Greek original and an English translation of the satire see Lucian 1968, pp. 60–87; and see the satire following it, *Zeus Rants*, pp. 81–169.

on earth.⁸³ Many other themes underwent a similar process in Hebrew poetry in the Christian period in Spain, by now remote from the courtly ambience and from Arabic poetry. Examples are the poems by Shāmu'el b. Sasson (see below) in praise of wine and the beloved, and which in fact refer to wisdom and Torah.⁸⁴

The motif of Time in this period is prominent in the poems of two of the most important poets of this era: Shāmu'el b. Sasson, active in the first half of the fourteenth century,⁸⁵ and Shəlomo Da Piera, active in the second half of that century and in the early fifteenth.⁸⁶ Censure of Time and against its tribulations and harm is a central theme in many of Ben Sasson's poems.⁸⁷ However, the poet always expresses his certainty that in the end God will appear and will impose on the world the justice that has become undermined by Time. Here are two examples of his poems:⁸⁸

לִבִּי נֶעְצַב עַל הַחֲלָאוֹת / וְנִחַעַטָּף בְּבִגְדֵי הַקִּנְאוֹת
 בְּהִישּׁוֹ מִיָּחָסִים חֲרָדִים / חֲרָדִים הַזֶּמֶן מִבֵּית הַנְּאוֹת
 עֲטִירַת לְבָשׁוֹ שְׂחָה לְעֶפֶר / לְקַחוּהָ וְכֵלִים בְּצִבְאוֹת [...] .
 וְחִמִּיד יַעֲשֶׂה כָּל זֶה זֶמֶן רָע / בְּמַעֲלָיו אֲשֶׁר פָּעַל שְׁנִיאוֹת [...] .
 זֶמֶן חָשָׁךְ נִתְיֹבוֹת הַנְּשִׂאִים / בְּאוֹפָנָם אֲשֶׁר יָשְׁבוּ וְכִסְאוֹת [...] .
 וְלִחֵב לְהִטָּה אוֹתָם וְאִבְדּוּ / לְמִקְרֵי הַזֶּמֶן הִיוּ תְּשׁוּאוֹת
 וְחִמִּיד יַעֲלֶה לֵב לְאֱלֹהִים / וְנִפְשׁוֹתָם לֹאֵל צוּעֲקוֹת וְקוֹרְאוֹת
 וְאֵין עֲצָה לְכָל חֲסָדֵי אֱלֹהִים / לְצַעֲקָתָם וְאֵם לִזְמַן נְבוּאוֹת
 וְאֵין יְהוֹי כְּקִדְמוֹתָם בְּנוֹאֵל / אֲשֶׁר יָבוֹא וַיִּקְרַב קִץ פְּלָאוֹת
 יִיחַס הַנְּשִׂאִים לְאֻבוֹתָם / בְּנָסִים יַעֲשֶׂה מוֹפֵת וְנָם אוֹת
 מִיָּחָסִים אֲזִי יַעֲטֹ פֶּאֶרָם / בְּקִנְיַת צוּר אֱלֹהֵי הַצִּבְאוֹת

My heart is sad because of the hardships and it has wrapped itself
 in the attire of jealousy

⁸³ Already in Hebrew poetry in the classical period, such as the works of Ha-Nagid, Moshe b. 'Ezra, and Yehuda Ha-Levi, we sometimes find that God is the ruler of Time. And see Elizur 1995, pp. 34–37.

⁸⁴ See Brann-Badillos-Targarona 1996, p. 103.

⁸⁵ For a critical edition of his poetry see Ibn Sasson 1962. On him see also Schirmann 1997, pp. 555–562; Brann-Badillos-Targarona 1996.

⁸⁶ For a critical edition of his poetry see Da Piera 1943. On him see also Schirmann 1997, pp. 580–600. The following discussion in respect of this poet is mainly based on a research study on the poet Shalomo Da Piera by Dr. Tirza Vardi of Beer Sheva University. I am deeply indebted to her for generously allowing me to read several chapters of this work before its completion and for her permission to cite from it here.

⁸⁷ See Ibn Sasson 1962, pp. 22 ff.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 38–40, no. 15, verses 1–3, 7, 17, 19–24; pp. 59–62, no. 25, verses 49–50.

When looking at distinguished people who are anxious, whom Time
 has removed from the house of joy
 The crown they wore is cast down to the ground, hosts of villains
 plunder it [...]
 Wicked Time always does all of that by the wicked deeds it com-
 mitted [...]
 Time darkened the routes of princes on the chariots they sat in, even
 on the thrones [...]
 Fire burned them and they were destroyed, they became wreckage
 through Time's events
 They always raise their heart to God and their souls cry and shout
 to the Lord
 There is no advice to abrogate God's grace because of their prayers,
 even at the time of prophecies
 They shall be then as they were formerly, through a saviour who shall
 come and bring close the miraculous End
 He shall link the princes to their fathers by miracles that he shall per-
 form, even wonders and signs
 Distinguished people shall then assume their glory because of the zeal
 of the Rock, the Lord of Hosts.

הַשֹּׁכֵר הָזֶמֶן קִרְנֵי אֲוִילִים / וְנָתַן בָּם יָקָרִים וְאַצִּילִים [...] .
 מִהֲרָה צִוֵּר יִשְׁלַם בָּם גְּמוּלָם / בִּיעֵן כָּל עֲוִיָּהֶם פְּלִילִים
 וַיִּזְכְּרוּ גְדִיבָמוֹ לְטוֹבָה / בַּעֲוֹנֹת אֵל אֱלֹהֵי מַחֲלָלִים

Did Time hire the horns of the fools and butt with them the dear
 and the noble people? [...]
 Soon the Rock shall give them their deserts for all their sins are
 criminal
 And their generous people shall be mentioned in favour by the help
 of God, Lord of the praises.

Da Piera likewise did not follow the path of the Jewish poets of the classical period in regard to Time. His *Dīwān* does contain poems in which Time is perceived in the usual way as an arbitrary power in control of the world, but in many poems he presents an original notion, stemming from a moral religious viewpoint. In this poems Time does not operate according to its whim, but as a vessel in the hand of God, who punishes man for his sins. He says that 'one of the best and distinguished friends in his poetry and stanzas complained about Time, which had hurt him and twisted his path, so much so that he almost dared to utter grave words in the ears of God and human beings'. In response Da Piera dedicated to him the poem לְכָה דֹדִי לְכָה סוּרָה:⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Da Piera 1943, p. 95, no. 102, verses 15–18.

בִּיעֵן כִּי זָמַן נִחְשֵׁב בְּיַד אֵל / כְּמוֹ מַשׂוֹר אֲשֶׁר הוֹךְ יָד מִנִּיפּוֹ
וְלֹא יִנְסוֹר עַדִּי נִצַּח נִצְחִים / וְלֹא יִשְׁמֹר לְעַד זַעַמוֹ וְקִצְפוֹ
וְהוּא יִשְׁקִיט וְיִשְׁבִּית שְׂאוֹנוֹ / בְּשׂוֹא גְלִי הַמוֹן יָמָיו וְזַעַפּוֹ
וְעוֹד יִשְׁפִיעַ אֲשֶׁר הָרִים וְהַעֲפִיל / וְעוֹד יִשִּׁיר אֲשֶׁר הִסִּיר צַעֲפּוֹ

Since Time is considered in the hand of God as a saw in the hand of him who lifts it
He shall not bear a grudge until the end of eternity and shall not keep forever his wrath and fury
He shall calm and appease its tumult while the rising of the waves of the mass of his seas and his anger
It then shall be gracious with whom it raised and lifted and then shall straighten him whose veil it removed.

Similarly, in one of his laments he presents the acts of kindness and justice as a remedy and an irrefutable counter to the intolerable acts perpetrated by Time.⁹⁰

עַל הַזָּמַן אֲשֶׁפוֹךְ מְרִי שִׁחִי, אֲשֶׁר / עֲצוֹר בַּעֲצֻמוֹתַי כְּאֵשׁ בִּקְרוֹתַי
כְּמִהָ בְּחוֹךְ סִפְרוֹ לְטוֹבָה נִזְכְּרוֹ / רָעִים, וְטוֹבִים נִשְׁכְּחוּ שְׂכוֹת
עַל כְּמִתִּי עַב הָעֵלָה גִּלּוֹי, וְהֵם / צוּהָ בְּמַעֲמָקֵי שְׂאוֹל לְגִדּוֹת [. .]
עַל אֶף זָמַן נִפְשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל הָעֵלָה / שְׂחָק, וְרִית פְּעֵלָה נִיחּוֹת
לֹא מֵת גְּבִיר, אוֹלָם בְּחַיּוֹ הָעֵלָה / וְכַחֲתִי שְׁלָמִים בּוֹבּוֹל לְזִבּוֹת [. .]
שְׁעָרֵי זָמַן אִם נִנְעִלוּ לִי, שְׁעָרֵי / צָדֵק לִפְנֵי נִפְתְּחוּ פָחוֹת

I pour the bitterness of my prayer on Time, which is stored in my bones like a fire while hotly burning
How many wicked are favourably registered in his book while righteous ones are completely forgotten
He placed the crooked above the level of clouds, and the honest he doomed to be deported to the depth of Hell [. .]
In spite of Time the soul of the righteous shall rise unto the heavens, and the smell of her deed is fragrant
The noble is not dead, but has been raised alive to sacrifice a peace offering in the skies [. .]
Although the gates of Time were closed in his face, the gates of justice are indeed open for him.

So the realm of Time is therefore not all-embracing, as the dead person succeeds in making the transition from the world of matter, in which Time rules, to the world of spiritual truth, in which Divine justice rules. This gracious religious consolation is entirely different from the solace in the lament of Moshe b. 'Ezra *ימים פָּצְעוּ*. Here the poet intimates to the mourners that together with the harsh reality of the ravages of Time its pleasant benefits also exist, and in this

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 72–74, no. 74, verses 5–8, 40–41, 47.

they may be comforted.⁹¹ It also differs wholly from the consolation found in Yəhuda Ha-Levi's lament **שְׁאֵלֹנִי הִתִּירָא רַע וְיִמְנָךְ**. This deals with increasing indifference to Time, with its good and its evil, and not with the existence of a true spiritual reality, which is linked to the name of God and which eradicates the very existence of Time and its effect.⁹²

In this chapter we noted the fatalistic perceptions that were created and developed in pagan Arabia and its poetry. Among other things, they may have taken shape through Persian and Greek influence. Under Islam they found a place in the Arabic poetry written as early as the Umayyad period and then in the Abbasid period, and even in Islamic thought. From the later Arabic poetry these perceptions entered into Hebrew poetry, mainly in Spain. But because of their essential contradiction to the fundamentals of Judaism they were not absorbed into this poetry except as glittering ornamentation on its surface, like garments on a body. Only a few poets, such as Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid and Moshe b. 'Ezra, and only in a certain part of their work, saw them as a suitable vehicle for expressing their thoughts on human life.

⁹¹ Levin 1973, pp. 161–162.

⁹² Levin 1995, II, p. 90.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE POETRY OF SHĀMU'EL HA-NAGID AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF ARABIC POETRY OF SELF-PRAISE

The early *paytanim* of Eretz Israel and their disciples in the lands of the East were leaders in prayer (שליחי ציבור), so apart from signing their names in their poems by an acrostic or similar devices they distanced themselves almost entirely from their works. This was not the case with Arab poets. As early as pre-Islamic *jāhili* times, and still more under Islam, they praised themselves, their heroes, their tribe, their pedigree, and their poetry in excessive and exaggerated terms.¹ When in the Middle Ages Hebrew poetry began to resort to the norms of Arabic poetry, it also acquired this quality of self-praise. The first in this respect, as in several others, was Sa'adia, who in the *rashut* prefacing the *azharot* in the *shiv'ata* for the festival of Weeks, אֶלֶהִים אֶצֶל יוֹם הַקָּלוֹה, includes the following four lines in praise of his work:²

I have adorned my prayer
And as with thirteen I have sifted
Ornaments of gold I have hung and smoothed,
With the gold of my poems I have covered it over.

Sa'adia found an apt setting for the motif of Arab self-praise: the *rashut*, in which the early Hebrew *paytan* spoke of himself as representative of the community and its leader in prayer. However, Hebrew poetry attained its fullest exposition of the motif of self-praise only in Spain, especially in the poetry of Shāmu'el Ha-Nagid (993–1056), of the third generation of Spanish Hebrew poets. Only in him did Hebrew poetry reach the zenith of its flowering. The expressions of pride are more numerous and varied in Ha-Nagid's poetry than in that of the other Jewish poets in Spain.

¹ For a general review of Arabic poetry in the *jāhili* period and its self-admiring elements see Nicholson 1969, pp. 79 ff. See also Fākhūrī.

² Sa'adia 1941, p. 189. For the Hebrew original and an analysis of these four lines in respect of Sa'adia's innovative attitude to the beauty of the language of poetry, and their meaning, see p. 58 above.

Scholars have shown that much of the imagery and many depictions in Ha-Nagid's poems of wine, of love, and of war are taken from Arabic poetry.³ In a study devoted to the influence of the Arabic self-praise poems (*fakhr*) on the Hebrew self-praise poems in Spain, Levin discusses Ha-Nagid's poem *הַנְּשִׁמָּה מִן־אֶשֶׁר הִתְהַאֵז נְרוּנָהּ*. He comments that many of the ideas and locutions of self-praise in Ha-Nagid's poetry have parallels in Arabic poetry, and occasionally they are evidently influenced by it.⁴ Still, Ha-Nagid, as a great poet, shapes these ideas and motifs in his own way, in keeping with his personality and the ethical and religious sources on which he draws. This statement is our concern here.

A. *Praise of the Poem*

This is a well-known unit in the Arabic *qaṣīda* appearing towards the end.⁵ Arab poets customarily likened their poems to shining stars, colorful garden flowers, and above all jewels glittering and sparkling, joined into a precious necklace. An example is Mutanabbī's poem of praise, written in honour of 'Alī b. Aḥmad al-Antākī.⁶

وما قلتُ من شعرٍ تكادُ بيوتهُ / إذا كتبتُ يَبْيِضُ من نورها الحبرُ
كأنَّ المعاني في فصَّاحةٍ لفظِها / نجومُ الثريا أو حلافتك الزَّهرُ

³ Ratzaby 1970; 1972; Levin 1968 (= Levin 1995, I, pp. 40–70). And see p. 226 above.

⁴ See Levin 1995, chapter four: 'Poems of self-praise (*al-fakhr*)', vol. I, pp. 150–208, and especially pp. 150–153. Most of the chapter is a discussion of self-praise in Arabic poetry (pp. 153–173) and of the poems of self-praise of Ibn Gabirol (pp. 174–201).

⁵ For a collection of verses culled from Spanish Arabic poetry that treat the poem, its literary value, and the beauty of its language, see Kattānī 1966, pp. 111–117.

⁶ I take most of the examples of Arabic poetry in this article from the work of Mutanabbī (915–965), for two reasons: (a) In the opinion of medieval and contemporary Arab researchers, he is the greatest of the Arab poets, although most modern European scholars have reservations on that score; (b) Mutanabbī and Ha-Nagid are very alike on the theme of self-praise and yearnings for greatness, as we shall see. Mutanabbī's poems have enjoyed the largest number of published editions and commentaries in the Middle Ages and in modern times. For this article, I used these books: Ma'arrī 1986; Mutanabbī 1958; Ṭabbāl 1985; Arberry 1967; Wormhoudt 1970; Bonebakker 1984. On the Arab poets' use of words in praise of their poetry, see Hamori 1974, pp. 3–30; Schippers 1994, pp. 287 ff. For the verses cited above see Arberry 1967, p. 41; Ma'arrī 1986, p. 331.

The ink almost whitens through all the lustre of the verses I compose
while they are written
Like the subject matter in the lucidity of its wording are the stars of
Pleiades or your glittering qualities.

The Hebrew poets of Spain followed this example and so did Sa'adia. Ha-Nagid adds words in praise of his poetry at the end of many of his war poems, written in the *qaṣida* structure. An example is the poem **הָלִי תַעֲשׂ**:⁷

הַכִּינוּתִי כְּכֹר שִׁירָה, וְעַתָּה / תְּהַלֵּלָהּ הַמֵּאִירָה בְּכִסְיֵלִים
מִמְלָאָה, עָלַי תִּשְׁבּוֹן רְעוּתָהּ / בְּמִדְּהַלְלִי תְהִלִּים
וְעִנְיָנִים יִקְרִים מִפְּנִינִים / וּבִכְנִי שִׁיר בְּאַבְנֵי שִׁיר שְׁקִילִים
וְאִם הַשִּׁיר עֲקָרָה מִלְּהוֹלִיד / כְּמוֹתָן, וְאַבּוֹת הַשִּׁיר שְׁכוּלִים

To him I have heretofore composed a *Shira* and now a *Tehilla* which
is bright as the stars
Its form is similar to that of its sister, in number of lines it is like the
Psalmist's praises
Its subject matter is more precious than pearls with stanzas balanced
in measures of verse
The creators of verse are barren unable to bear its like, even the
fathers of poetry are bereaved.

But unlike the Arab poet, Ha-Nagid usually directs the praise of his poetry to the glory of God, and not to his own, as in the two verses that immediately precede those cited above:

לֹאֵל עֲזוּז, אֲשֶׁר נִרְאָה בְּסוּפָהּ / וְכַשְׁעָרָה עָלַי שׁוֹעֲרֵי אֱלִילִים
וְלֹא נָתַן כְּבוֹדוֹ לְאַחֲרִים / וְלֹא הוֹדִישׁ תְּהִלָּה לְפִסְלִים

To the God of strength who appears in the storm and in the whirl-
wind against the idol-worshippers
Who has not given his glory to another, nor bequeathed his praise to
statues.

Similarly in his famous poem **עֲזוּ אֱלֹהֶיךָ**:⁸

לֹאֵל, הַגִּדִיל עֲשֵׂה, שִׁירָה אֲנִידֵל / תְּחִי עַל כָּל בְּנוֹת הַשִּׁיר לְשָׁרָה
בְּמִדְּבָרִים כְּסָפִירִים אֲרוּנָה / וְשִׁיחִים מִן בְּדִלְחִים תַּפְוִינָה
מִמְלָאָה כְּתָמִים בְּחִרְיָנָה / וּכְמוֹרֹת תְּהִלִּים בְּסִפְרָהּ

⁷ Shāmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, p. 26 (English translation, Weinberger 1973, p. 41). And compare Yelin 1940, pp. 38, 90 ff.: תַּפְאֶרֶת הַתְּחִימָה ('The embellishment of the ending'); Pagis 1970, pp. 193–196; Levin 1995, I, pp. 96 ff.

⁸ Shāmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, p. 14 (English translation, Weinberger 1973, p. 28).

To the Lord who has done great things I will expand in song, that
 it be as a minister to all others
 With words like sapphire I will weave and with speeches of bdellium
 I will stitch
 Like the Thummim, but filled with rhyme and like the songs of *Tehillim*
 in number.

This feature naturally belongs to Ha-Nagid's overall perception of his war poems as poems to the glory of God.

B. *Praise of Warriors*

Apart from Mənḥaem b. Sarūq in his poem אֶפְרַת נֹר לְשִׁבְט מִוִּשְׁלִים in which he lauds the valour of the Jewish army of the king of Khazars, the only other Hebrew poet in Spain who wrote of the heroism of warriors was Ha-Nagid. He himself was an army commander, and he directed many battles in the field. This heroism is described in minute detail in accord with the norm in the Arabic *ḥamāsa* (heroism) poetry from the *jāhili* era until the time of Mutanabbī.⁹ Although a basic contradiction exists between the standards of Arab heroism, particularly as regards predestination, and cruelty towards the defeated enemy, Ha-Nagid plucked the sting from this contradiction by introducing the religious nationalist element in several places in his war poems:

1. *The opening of the poem.* The convention in the Arabic *qaṣīda* is to devote the opening to an erotic theme. Ha-Nagid does not adhere to this norm in his war poems, for often the openings of these poems are no other than poems of praise to God, as in אֱלֹהֵינוּ עֹז and הַנִּימְקָה הַנִּימְקָה, or in the poems of manifest yearning for the ruined Zion in בְּעֵין מִכִּיר אֱלֹהֵינוּ and הָאֶעְצֹר נִחְלִי עֵינֵי and בְּלִבִּי חֹם לַמִּפְקָד הַנְּעֹזִים.¹⁰

2. *The middle of the poem.* The normative structure in the body of the Arabic poem of heroism is an account of the fear of the warriors before the battle, followed by their taking heart, especially against the background of the fatalistic perception, until the crushing victory. Now the poet goes on to laud the valiance of his tribes' fighters, and details the acts of desecration on the bodies of the vanquished foe. The turn from desperation to victory is therefore based

⁹ Levin 1968. See also Ḥayyat 1966.

¹⁰ See Allony 1971; Levin 1995, I, pp. 62 ff.

on the pagan fatalistic notion of predestination, *qadar*.¹¹ Ha-Nagid was obviously unable to identify with this approach. It undermines the very foundation of the Jewish creed, which is reward and punishment deriving from free choice. According to his belief, the change from a state of fear to exultation in victory on the battlefield is simply the result of a Divine and moral decision, depending on man's actions on the one hand, and God's grace on the other.

This concept takes on a most impressive presence in the poem: a break in the account of the battle and a shift to the religious and spiritual world. The poet evokes his God, resting on the personal and national tenets of Jewish tradition: man's righteous deeds, Torah that he has learned, the virtue of the patriarchs, and the destiny of the nation. Ha-Nagid does not hang his fate on a *force majeure* that is not subject to influence but on a Divine being operating according to moral principles, and his trust in it is absolute. This is a clearly religious perception, with no place whatsoever in Arabic poetry, a perception that is well-known from the ethical philosophic Jewish works from Sa'adia's school. It found expression in the liturgical poetry of Spain, for example, in *Keter Malkhut* by Ibn Gabirol in the sense of 'from thee I shall flee to thee'. Only after this caesura in the flow of the poem, which includes a prayer to God and the expression of trust in him, comes the about-face to victory. This structure is typical of most of Ha-Nagid's war poems.¹²

The problem remains of the expressions of cruelty toward the beaten enemy, meant to flaunt the victors' ferocity, and whose source seems to be Arabic poetry. But it turns out that the poetry of the Bible served as Ha-Nagid's source in this theme, as it served did—alongside Arabic poetry—for the courtly poetry too. A graphic example of this is the stamping on the enemy's body, lying on the ground soaked in its blood, in the poem *לִבִּי בְקֶרְבִּי*:¹³

וּשְׁמֵנוּ אֶדְמָה מִדְּמֵיהֶם מִצְבֵּעַת / וְאֶרֶץ בִּפְנֵי רִוְיָהֶם מִבְּקַעַת
תִּהְיֶה—וְתִרְמָס רִגְלֶךָ עַל וְעַל גִּלְגָּלָהּ / וְעַל אֶזְרָךְ נֶפֶשׁ חַלְלִים מִשְׁנֵעַת

And we made mounds of earth colored with their blood and a highway from the dried up corpses of their lords

As you walked you trampled with your feet upon a body or a skull
and you heard the cry of the mortally wounded.

¹¹ See Ringgren 1955.

¹² For a detailed discussion of this subject see the previous chapter.

¹³ Shāmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, p. 37 (English translation, Weinberger 1973, p. 55).

Likewise in *נִגְלִית יִשְׁרָה*:¹⁴

הִנֵּה לְאֱלֹהֵי—אֲשֶׁר פָּעַמִּי בְּדָם צָרִי / וְאֵין פָּעַמִּי בְּדָם מִטְּנֶפֶת

Here is to my God, who has washed my foot in my foes' blood, but my step is not defiled with blood.

This motif is reminiscent of an ancient custom that expresses the victor's triumph over the foe in several places in the Bible: 'That you may bathe your feet in blood, that the tongues of your dogs may have their portion from the foe' (Psalms 68:24); 'The righteous will rejoice that he has seen vengeance, he shall bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked' (Psalms 58:11); 'Putting the blood of war upon the girdle about his loins and upon the sandals on his feet' (1 Kings 2:5). But with Ha-Nagid this motif serves solely as a metaphor for victory, not as the recounting of a real act.

3. *The ending of the poem.* Above we observed that in Ha-Nagid's war poems the section in praise of the poem, borrowed from the Arabic *qaṣīda*, becomes praise of God. But at the close of the *qaṣīda* there is also a section of self-praise by the Arab poet, for example, Mutanabbī in a *qaṣīda* he wrote in his youth:¹⁵

فَاطْلُبِ الْعِزَّ فِي لُطَى وَدَعِ الذُّلَّ / وَلَوْ كَانَ فِي جَنَانِ الْخُلُودِ
يُقْتَلُ الْعَاجِزُ الْجَبَانُ وَقَدْ يَعِ / —حِزُّ عَنْ قَطْعِ بُخْنِ الْمَوْلُودِ
وَيُوقَى الْفَتَى الْمَحْشُوقُ وَقَدْ خَوَّ / ضَّ فِي مَاءِ لَبَّةِ الصَّنِيدِ
لَا يَقُومِي شَرُفْتُ بَلْ شَرَفُوا بِي / وَبِنَفْسِي فَخَرْتُ لَا يُجْدُودِي
وِهِمُ فَخَرْتُ كُلَّ مَنْ نَطَقَ الصَّنَا / دَ وَعَوَّذُ الْجَانِي وَعَوْتُ الطَّرِيدِ
إِنْ أَكُنْ مُعْجَبًا فَعَجَبٌ عَجِيبٌ / لَمْ يَجِدْ فَوْقَ نَفْسِهِ مِنْ مَزِيدِ
أَنَا تَرَبُّ النَّدَى وَرَبَّ الْقَوَائِي / وَسِمَامُ الْعَدَى وَغِيظُ الْحَسُودِ
أَنَا فِي أُمَّةٍ تَدَارِكُهَا اللَّـهُ / هُ غَرِيبٌ كَصَالِحٍ فِي ثُمُودِ

So seek glory in blazes, and spurn humiliation even if it be in eternal paradise

The weakling coward will be slain, and he too feeble to cut an infant's headwrap

Whilst the adventurous warrior who has plunged in the breast-blood of heroes is preserved

Not in my people have I found honour, but rather they in me; and my boast is in myself, not in my ancestors

¹⁴ Shāmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, p. 138.

¹⁵ Original and English translation in Arberry 1967, pp. 20–23 (another translation in Wormhoudt 1970, p. 7).

In whom indeed is the pride of every true Arab, and the refuge of
 the wrongdoer, and the succour of the outcast
 If I am conceited, it is the conceit of an amazing man who has never
 found any surpassing himself
 I am the twin of bounty, the master of rhyme, the bane of my ene-
 mies, the baffled rage of the envious
 I am amongst a people—may God save them in His mercy—a stranger,
 like Šālih amongst Thamūd.

This self-praise, which is typical of the Arab poet in ending his *qaṣīda*, acquires a different character entirely in Ha-Nagid's war poems. He does introduce self-praise, but it assumes a general national dimension, for example in the ending of the poem עזו אלהי: ¹⁶

לכן אחי, חנו זמרה לאל חי / וחרבו שיר ותודה בעצרה
 ואמרו לו: יהי לי עוד לסומך / ולהומכים בתורה הישרה
 ופור משנה עשו לאל אשר קם / וסעף בעמלק ציץ ופארה
 ותשמיעו באפדיקי וצען / והודיעו בני בית הבחירה [...]
 וקראו את שמה אחות למקרה / אחשוורוש ואסתר הנבירה
 וכחביה בספריכם, למען / תהי לעד ומדור דור זכירה

Therefore my brethren give forth with hymns to the eternal God and
 increase the songs and praise in the assembly
 Say to him: 'May You continue to support me as well as those who
 hold on to the Torah true'
 Now make a second Purim for the God who arose and cut off from
 'Amalek flower and fruit
 And make it heard in Africa and Egypt and notify the children of the
 Chosen House [...]
 And call its name: 'Sister to the Happening of Ahaswerosh and Lady
 Esther!'
 And write it in your books that it may abide forever and be remem-
 bered from generation to generation!

C. *Praise of Pedigree*

As we saw from the introduction above, Mutanabbī regarded him-
 self as too superior to boast about himself, so in eulogizing his grand-
 mother, who was like a father and a mother to him, he said:¹⁷

ولو لم تكوني بنت أكرم والد / لكان أباك الضخم كوكب لي أما

Were you not the daughter of the most distinguished father, your
 greatest glory was your being a mother to me.

¹⁶ Shāmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, p. 14 (English translation, Weinberger 1973, p. 28).

¹⁷ Mutanabbī 1958, p. 175.

Usually, however, Arab poets down the generations would brag about their genealogy and tribal origins. For example, the *jāhili* poet ‘Amr b. Kulthūm said in his famous *mu‘allaqa*:¹⁸

ورثنا مجد علقمة بن سيف / أباح لنا حصون المجد دينا
ورثة مهلهل والخير منه / زهيرا نعم ذخرا لنا دينا
وعتابا وكلثوما جميعا / بهم نلنا تراث الأكرمين
وذا البرة الذي حدثت عنه / به نُحْمى ونُحْمى الملحقينا
ومنا قبله الساعي كليب / فأبي المجد إلا قد ولينا

We are heirs to the glory of Alkama bin Saif; he mastered for us the castles of glory

I am the heir of Muhalhil and his better, Zuhair, a fine treasure indeed to treasure

Heir to ‘Attāb, and Kulthūm, the whole of them, by whom we attained the heirdom of the noblest

Heir to Dhul Bura, of whom you’ve heard tell, our defence, through whom we defend the shelterers

And, before him, Kulaib the Striver was one of us; so what glory is there we are not possessed of?

A venerable and pure Arab descent was also an important value in Muslim society in Spain.¹⁹ In keeping with this, the Jews of Spain too boasted of their origin, which traditionally was from the tribe of Judah as long ago as the First Temple era. This was expressed by Moshe b. ‘Ezra in *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-al-Mudhākara* and by Yəhuda Alḥarizi in his feeling of superiority over the poets of the East.²⁰ However, the Jewish poets in Spain did not ordinarily refer to, or boast of their origins, except for Ha-Nagid. He abundantly paraded his origins from the tribe of Levi, mentioning the role of its members as poets in the Temple, for example, in the poem שְׁעָה מִנִּי:²¹

ואומר לי: התוכל את להלל ? / השיבותי: אני דוד בְּדוֹרִי!
וענני: השאול בנביאים ? / עניתיו: ירשה ממררי
ומאסיר ואלקנה ואסף / ומישאל ואלצפן וסתרי
ואיכה לא תהי שירה סדורה / בפני לאל אשר נהה מזורי?
ומהורי ידותן המהלל / לנצח, ויצאתי להורי

¹⁸ Original in Lyall 1894, p. 118 (English translation in Arberry 1957, p. 207).

¹⁹ See Pérès 1937, pp. 251 ff.

²⁰ Ibn ‘Ezra Moshe 1975, chapter five, pp. 54 ff.; Alḥarizi 1952, chapter eighteen.

²¹ Shəmu‘el Ha-Nagid 1966, pp. 33–34 (English translation, Weinberger 1973, p. 52).

He said to me: 'Are you capable of giving praise?' I replied: 'I am the David of my age!'
 And he answered: 'Is Saul (also) among the prophets?' I replied: 'Mine is the heritage from Merari
 And from Assir and Elhanah and Asaf and Misha'el and Elzafan and Sitri'
 How can I not compose songs to God who cured my wounds?
 From my forbear Yedutun the musician of praises I learn to glorify (God) and I am worthy of him.

Likewise in *הַתְּהַדֵּעַ אֶת פְּעָלֵי*.²²

אֲנִי נֶכֶד קֹהַת וְשֹׂאֵר מְרָרִי / מִחֵי הַשֵּׁם, מְטִיבֵי הַטַּעֲמִים

I am a descendant of Qehat and the progeny of Merari, men of renown and best in discernment.

Ha-Nagid does not restrict his treatment of the tribe of Levi to poetic talent, but also includes the subject of prophecy, which is one of the chief themes in his self-perception. Continuing the passage cited above, he stresses his family descent, through which he is linked to the greatest prophets of Israel:

וּמֵאֲבִי וּמִבֶּן-צֹוֹף שְׁמוּאֵל / לְפָנִים הוֹעֲרֻ דָּמִים בְּדָמִים
 וּבֶן אָבִי וּבֶן מֹשֶׁה נִבִּיא אֵל / שָׂאֵר בָּשָׂר וְקִרְבַּת הַלְלוּמִים
 אֲנִי אֶקְרָא שְׁמוֹ 'אָבִי' וְהוּא לִי / 'בֶּנִי' יֶקְרָא בְּהַקְבֵּץ עַמִּים
 וּמִי יוֹצֵא בִּיחְסֵי מוֹם לְשִׁמְצָה / תִּקְרַךְ תִּמְצָא אֲנֹשׁ מְלֵא בְמוֹמִים

My father and the prophet Samuel of old were interconnected by blood lines

Even Moses, God's prophet and my father were related by family and flesh

The former I will call "Father" and he will say "Son" to me, when the nations are assembled

Whoever finds a flaw in my pedigree for purpose of derision, investigate him and discover a man full of blemishes!

His pride in his relationship with two of the most important prophets of the tribe of Levi, Moses and Samuel, emerges also in his polemic against his rivals in the poem *אֵם תִּכְבֵּד עֵין נוֹלֶה*:²³

מִי טָהָרוּ יוֹלְדָיו, תְּחוֹרִיד אוֹתוֹ / פֶּעַם, בְּדֶרֶךְ מַעְלָה, טִנְפָה?
 שִׁימָה שְׁמוּאֵל עַל שְׁמָאֵלִי וְתָנָה / מֹשֶׁה עָלִי רֹאשִׁי, כְּמוֹ טוֹטֶפֶה

²² Shāmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, p. 282 (English translation, Weinberger 1973, p. 103).

²³ Shāmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, p. 140.

He whose parents are pure, can a filthy foot bring him low while on his way to high stage?

Put Samuel to my left and place Moses on my head, like a phylactery.

In the poem *יְשָׁחַק וְנִגְלִיתָ יִשְׁרָאֵל*, which he sent to the Exilarch Yīṣḥaq Yəḥīzqiyyahu, a scion of the Davidic dynasty, Ha-Nagid highlights his prophetic ancestry:²⁴

לְכֶם מְלוּכָה וְלִי מוֹפֵת וְנִבְיָאָה, בִּי / אֲתֶם וְנִהְיֶנוּ בְּעוֹלָם זֶה כְּמוֹ מוֹפֵת

You have kingship and I have a miracle of prophecy, only you and we in this world like as a paragon.

In several of his poems Ha-Nagid alludes to prophetic revelation that came upon him in the time of his youth. He usually terms this occurrence *בְּשׂוֹרָה* (tidings), a sign that assured him that no ill would befall him, even when he encountered times of grave distress. He devotes a special poem to this, *יִוֵּם צָר וּמִצְוֶה*, which opens the cycle of war poems.²⁵

Prophecy's resort to poetry, which in medieval Hebrew poetry is unique to the work of Ha-Nagid, is known in Arabic *jāhili* poetry. Historians of ancient Arabic poetry indicate the place of the *kāhin*, the prophet and soothsayer, in the development and the style of poetry.²⁶ Of course, in the Bible also (Balaam, etc.) and in the literature of the ancient Near East prophecy is linked to poetry as literary creation. An Arab poet associated with prophecy is Abū al-Tayyib b. Ḥusayn, who was nicknamed Mutanabbī (claimant to prophecy) because of his ambition to be a prophet and to present the Muslims with a new Qur'ān.²⁷ But Ha-Nagid, in contrast to the Arab poet, did not regard himself as a prophet. Moses and Samuel are mentioned only to show his relation to the tribe of Levi, from which sprang such important figures. Nevertheless, he is imbued with a deep feeling of trust in God, who will save him from every tribulation that befalls him, a feeling arising from the 'tidings' announced to him in his boyhood.²⁸

²⁴ Ibid., p. 138 (English translation, Halkin 2000, p. 45).

²⁵ Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, p. 3 (English translation, Weinberger 1973, p. 72).

²⁶ See Nicholson 1969, pp. 72–74.

²⁷ Arberry 1967, p. 2.

²⁸ Compare Pagis 1993c, pp. 277–285. Pagis does not discuss this issue from the perspective of self-praise, but from the poet's sense of mission.

D. *Ambition for Greatness*

The *jāhili* poet's words of praise for himself usually came at the end of the *qaṣ̣ida* opening, in the part known as *riḥla*, namely the journey from the place of disappointment, where the poet had hoped to meet his love, to the endless desert wastes. In these self-adulatory phrases the poet frequently speaks of his boundless ambitions, expressed in metaphor of the natural desert landscapes: expanse to the ends of the earth, mountains rising forever, and seas whose shores are beyond human vision. This, for example, is the language of the *riḥla* section at the end of the *nasīb* of the poem written by Mutanabbī in praise of Badr b. 'Ammār b. Ismā'il:²⁹

الفتُ ترَحَّلِي وجعلتُ ارضي / فُتُودي والغريِّي الجَلالا
فما حاولتُ في ارضٍ مُقاما / ولا أزمعتُ عن ارضِ زَوالا
على قلقٍ كأن الرِّيحَ تحي / أوجهها جنوباً أو شمالاً

I have gotten used to travelling and made earth my saddle and my
Gorair camel strong
I have not wanted any resting place on earth and I have not decided
to stop at any place
On a swaying one as if the wind were beneath me, I steer it to the
southward or to the north.

Sometimes he devotes a whole poem to self-praise, in which occurs the motif of the journey in the desert expanses in its metaphorical garb. An example is the poem he wrote in his youth:³⁰

تُحَقَّرُ عندَ هَمِّي كُلَّ مطلبٍ / ويقصُرُ في عيني المدى المتطاوُلُ
وما زِلْتُ طورا لا تزولُ مناكبي / إلى أن بدت للضَّيَمِ في زلازلُ
ومن يبغي ما أبغي من المجدِ والعُلَى / تساوى الحاي عندَهُ والمقاتلُ
إذا اللَّيْلُ وارنا أرتنا خفافُها / بقدحِ الحصى ما لا تُرِينا المشاعلُ
كَأَنِّي من الوجناء في متن موجة / رمتُ بي بحاراً ما لَهْنُ سواحلُ
يخيّلُ لي أن البلادَ مسامعي / وأني فيها ما تقول العوادلُ
ومن يبغي ما أبغي من المجدِ والعُلَى / تساوى الحاي عندَهُ والمقاتلُ

My desire makes every object contemptible to me, a seeming distant
goal is limited in my eyes

²⁹ Ma'arri 1986, pp. 145–146 (English translation, Wormhoudt 1970, p. 56).

³⁰ Ma'arri 1986, pp. 124 ff., no. 19 (English translation, Wormhoudt 1970, p. 11).

I was still the mountain whose heights had no end, until calamities
 appeared to me as injustice [. . .]
 When night had veiled us her hoofs showed us in sparks from stones
 what flame over showed
 On the back of the strong camel I was on a wave, driving me on the
 seas which have no shores
 It seemed to me the deserts were in my hearing and I was for them
 what the gossips say³¹
 He who wants what I want of glory and eminence finds life and death
 of equal value to him.

Similarly, in a poem he wrote in praise of 'Alī b. Aḥmad b. 'Āmir
 al-Antākī:³²

وكم من جبالٍ جُبْتُ تشهدُ أنّي الـ / جبالٌ وبحرٍ شاهدٌ أنّي البحرُ

And how many a mountain I have crossed, that testifies that I was a
 true mountain, and how many a sea testifying that I am the sea.

In another short poem Mutanabbī says,³³

أَيَّ محلٍّ أرتقي / أَيَّ عظيمٍ أنقي
 وكلّ ما قد خلق الـ / ه وما لم يُخلق
 مُحْتَقَرٌ في هَمِّي / كشعرةٍ في مفرقي

To what height I shall ascend? What mighty I shall be afraid of?
 What ever is created by God and whatever he did not create
 Is less than my praise as a hair in my head's parting.

In a generalized philosophical formulation Mutanabbī preaches aiming
 for the heavens in the quest for greatness:³⁴

إذا غامرتَ في شرفِ مَرومٍ / فلا تنعَمْ بما دونَ النجومِ
 فطعمُ الموتِ في أمرٍ حقيرٍ / كطعمِ الموتِ في أمرٍ عظيمٍ

When you plunge yourself into the quest for a desired distinction, do
 not be content with anything short of the stars
 For the taste of death in a small matter is as the taste of death in a
 mighty matter.

³¹ Al-Ma'arrī interprets: Just as the rebuke does not dwell in my ears, so I do not dwell in any land.

³² Original and translation in Arberry 1967, pp. 38–39.

³³ Original and translation in Arberry 1967, pp. 22–23 (another translation in Wormhoudt 1970, pp. 13–14).

³⁴ Original and translation in Arberry 1967, pp. 52–53.

Similar units and ideas are found in the poems of Ha-Nagid. The poem *אם תבך עין גולה* was written in 1056, the last year of Ha-Nagid's life, after his victory in a battle, and in part it should be seen as his reflecting on his life. The battle is described in only four verses (36–39), while the main part is praises for Daniel, the head of the *yashiva* in Babylonia. But the opening of the poem is self-praise for success in life, the result of constant restlessness, being driven, and wanderings:³⁵

הפִּיץ רֶכֶב עַל בְּמַחֵי בֶן עֵוֶשׁ / יִרְכֹּב לְחַפְצוֹ בְּמַחֵי מִנְפָּה [...] .
 אִם כָּל מִשׁוֹשׁ הַלֵּב בְּהַכְבֵּד — אֵל / תְּהִיָּה כֶּכֶת צֹנְהָ בְּבוֹ עֲרָפָה
 וּפֶשֶׁךְ תִּכְלַע לָךְ בְּבֶטֶן שַׁחַת / אוֹ תִּאָּחִיז יָדְךָ בְּקַרְנֵי סוּפָה
 אִם אֵין לָךְ נוֹס מֵאֲשֶׁר נָגוּר עַל / רֹאשְׁךָ — רִדָּה יָם אוֹ בְּצִיָּה עוֹפָה
 וַיִּהְיֶה וְלָךְ בְּנֹחֵיב תִּקְלָאוֹת, עַד כִּי / תִּשָּׁנִי מְלוּכָה אוֹ תִּחִי לְגִדּוּפָה

He who desires to ride on the heights of the Little Bear, shall ride
 for his desire even on plague's heights [...]

If all the joy of the heart is honour, do not be like a young ewe scorn-
 fully beheaded

Conceal your soul in a pit's belly or hold your hand in a storm's
 horns

If you cannot run away from what you have been doomed to, sail on
 the seas or fly in the desert

Drive and step in the path of hardships, until you acquire kingship
 or be doomed to curse.

Also, as emerges from his famous poem *נשמה מאשר תחאו גרועה*, the quest for greatness filled his being right from his youthful days, for the poem was written when he fled from Cordoba in 1013, aged 21, after the invasion by the Berber tribes. The poem is wholly devoted to self-praise, and is written in forms and imagery familiar from Arabic poetry, especially that of Mutanabbī. Examples are the lack of opportunity to realize lofty goals, the ascent up high mountains, and wanderings across the expanses of the land, and also enmity to enemies and friendship to friends:³⁶

נִשְׁמָה מֵאֲשֶׁר תִּחְאוּ גְרוּעָה / וּנְפֶשׁ מֵאֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁאֵל מְנוּעָה [...] .
 בְּרִנְלִי אֶעֱלֶה סֹלֶעַ, וְאֶרְדַּ / אֵלַי שַׁחַת, בְּמַעֲמָקִים תִּקְוֶעַה
 וְאֶחָפֵד אֶת שַׁפַּת מִדְבָּר בְּמִדְבָּר / וְאֶקְרַע יָם בְּכָל שׁוֹחָה קְלוּעָה
 וְאֶשׁוּט עַד אֲשֶׁר אֶרְוֶם וְאֶעֱלֶ / אֵלַי שִׂיָּאָה, תִּחִי לְעַד יְדוּעָה

³⁵ Shāmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, pp. 139–140.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 211–212 (English translation, Weinberger 1973, pp. 19–20).

וְהַמָּצָא לְצָרִי בִּי הָרְדָה / וְהַמָּצָא לְדוּדִי בִּי תְשׁוּעָה
וְאֶרְצֶע אֶת בְּנֵי הַדְרִים בְּאֵזֶן / וְלִי אֵזֶן לְמוֹדַעִי רְצוּעָה
וְלִי נֶפֶשׁ לְרַעִים מִחֻזָּקָה / וְלִי נֶפֶשׁ לְמַשְׁטֵימִים מְנִיעָה

The soul is far from its desire and the spirit is refused its requests [. . .]
I will climb the rock with my feet, and descend into the pit that is
stuck in the depths
And I will sew together one rim of the desert with another and I will
split the sea with every swimming sail
I will roam until I ascend and reach the heights that are known unto
eternity
And my enemies will be in terror of me, but my friends I will save
Free men will be faithful to me even as I to them
My spirit holds fast to friends even as it avoids my accusers.

Arabic parallels to the second motif are found in the excerpts cited above from Mutanabbī's poetry. The following is a parallel to the first motif from another of his poems:³⁷

مَا كُلُّ مَا يَتَمَنَّى الْمَرْءُ يَدْرُكُهُ / تَجْرِي الرِّيحُ بِمَا لَا تَشْتَهِي السَّفَنُ

A man does not attain everything that he desires; the winds convey
whither the ships do not list.

Another parallel to the third motif is from the *qaṣīda* by 'Amr b. Kulthūm, already mentioned:³⁸

وَأَنَا الْعَاصِمُونَ إِذَا أُطْعِمْنَا / وَأَنَا الْعَازِمُونَ إِذَا عُصِمْنَا
وَأَنَا التَّارِكُونَ إِذَا سَخَطْنَا / وَأَنَا الْآخِذُونَ إِذَا رَضِينَا [...]
بَأْنَا الْمُطْعَمُونَ إِذَا قَدَرْنَا / وَأَنَا الْمُهْلَكُونَ إِذَا ابْتَلَيْنَا

We are the just rulers over obedience, we are the just chastisers of
rebellion
We promptly abandon that which disgusts us, we lay hold eagerly of
what pleases us [. . .]
We the benefactors when we are able, we the destroyers when we are
set upon.

The hyperbole in Mutanabbī's short poem cited above is also used in Ha-Nagid's poem *יְשָׁרָה נְגִלִית זְמַמִּי*, it too written in 1055 at the end of his life:³⁹

לִי מַעֲשִׂים נִפְלְאוּ מִכָּל וּמַעֲלֹת, כֹּל / נֶפֶשׁ מֵאֵנָה לְחַנּוּנִים, וְנִכְסֶפֶת
יְכַבֵּד שְׂגִיר מִנְשֵׂא שִׂיאִי, וְאֵלֵי עַב / עִמָּסָה זְמַמִּי — אֲנִי נִפְלָה בְּמִדְחָפֶת

³⁷ Original and translation in Arberry 1967, pp. 104–105.

³⁸ Original in Goren 1970, p. 43 (English translation in Arberry 1957, pp. 207–208).

³⁹ Shāmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, p. 135.

אֶרְכֵּב עָלַי בְּמַחֵי מוֹת אֵלַי חַי / עוֹלָם, וְאֶלֶךְ אֵלַי עֵדֶן עַלִּי חַפֵּת
 וּבִאֵשׁ חֲלָלִים בְּאֵפִי מֵר, וְרִיתִי-רֵ / קָח יַעֲלֶה — צִחֲנֶת עֲנִלָּה בְּחוֹךְ רֶפֶת
 בְּאֵחִי בְּאַחֲרִית יָמַי עוֹלָם, אֶבֶל דִּרְכִּי / דֶּרֶךְ קְדוּמִים אֲשֶׁר חָזוּ בְנֵי יִפֶּת

I have deeds which are distinguished from anything else, even high qualities, every soul desires to reach them, even strive for them
 Mount Senir is beyond bearing my pinnacle, and were a cloud to bear my thought, it would fall heavily
 I shall ride on the heights of death to eternal life and I shall go to paradise through hell
 The stink of the slain is myrrh to my nose, and the smell of perfume ascends on me like a stench of a heifer in a barn
 I came in the end of the days of the world, but my way is the way of ancestors who were the sons of Japheth.

The ambition for greatness and the self-praise in it, as in early Arabic poetry, are plain. The elements are those of the tribal *murū'a*, namely the set of heroic qualities: courage and daring, strength, magnanimity to the weak, and vengeance against the enemy, and even success in relations with women.⁴⁰ This perception of *murū'a* changed with the rise of Islam and the expansion of the Arab Muslims' spiritual world after they had come into contact with the Greek and Persian cultures.⁴¹ Concurrently, a refinement occurred in the quality of the quest for greatness in Mutanabbī's poetry, as it did in that of other poets of the Abbasid period that preceded him, with the accretion of the spiritual dimension.⁴² The following are several verse of a poem by Mutanabbī that reflect this tendency:⁴³

فلا مجد في الدنيا لمن قلّ ماله / ولا مال في الدنيا لمن قلّ مجده

There is no glory in the world for he whose fortune is scanty, and for whom glory is scanty, there is no fortune in the world.

أعز مكان في الدنيا ظهرُ سابعٍ / وخير جليس في الأنام كتابُ

The most honoured place in the world is the back of the fastest camel, and the book is the best of friends for a talk among human beings.

⁴⁰ On the norms of the *murū'a* in the *jāhili* era see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*², VII, pp. 636–638; Goldziher 1967, I, pp. 11–44; Montgomery 1986, p. 7.

⁴¹ See Ḥamawī.

⁴² On the change in the norms of self-praise in the Abbasid period in the poetry of the 'new poets' (*al-muḥdathūn*) see Fākhūrī, pp. 23–37; and on Mutanabbī 1958, pp. 29 ff. And compare Levin 1995, I, pp. 162–163.

⁴³ Tabbāl 1985, p. 131 (translation of the last two verses in Arberry 1967, p. 82); and *ibid.*, pp. 128 ff., on Mutanabbī's philosophical outlook.

الرأي قبل شجاعة الشجعان / هو أول ولها المكان الثاني
 فإذا اجتمعا لنفس حرة / بلغت من العلياء كل مكان

Judgment comes before the courage of the courageous; the former is first, and the latter the second place

So when they are combined in a haughty spirit, that spirit reaches every place of elevation.

Nicholson has pointed out Mutanabbī's 'fondness for sententious moralizing on topics concerned with human life; [. . .] He is allowed to be a master of that proverbial philosophy in which Orientals delight and which is characteristic of the modern school beginning with Abu 'l-'Atāhiya'.⁴⁴

Now in Ha-Nagid's work there may be seen a transformation of the motif of self-praise and the quest for greatness from the material earthly domain to the ethical, philosophical, and spiritual sphere. Naturally, it uses the conventional themes borrowed from Arabic poetry. The poem ⁴⁵הַנֶּפֶשׁ מֵאֲשֶׁר תִּחְאֹז נְרוּעָה begins with four verse formulated in the broad philosophical language of lack of opportunity to realize all the soul's ambitions and desires, even though the body is 'fat and sated and full'. The ambition is thus not for material but for spiritual things. This is the Neo-Platonic perception, well known from the writings of *Ikhwān al-Safā'* and Sa'adia's school. הַנֶּפֶשׁ מֵאֲשֶׁר נִפְשׁוֹ לִבְנָה / וְכִלְבָּנָה לְהַחֲנִשׁ יְנֻעָה (Can one restrain oneself whose soul is pure and who like the moon labours to rise). Ha-Nagid's soul is white, spotless, and pure of materiality. Such a soul certainly strives for spiritual achievements, עָלִי שֶׁחֶק שְׂרוּעָה (spread upon the heavens); and in general, what is the pleasure in material attainments in this world, וְהַנֶּפֶשׁ בְּרָעָה (When the soul is afflicted?). These were meant only to serve the soul in its accomplishment of spiritual gains, which also enjoy existence in the eternal world! This point was not grasped by his fellows, so he rejected their opinion that his entire

⁴⁴ Nicholson 1969, p. 312. Attention was paid to Mutanabbī's tendency in this respect already in the Middle Ages. For example, the vizier Ismā'īl b. 'Abbād, known as al-Šāhib (937/8–995/6), collected 252 aphorisms from Mutanabbī's poems and presented them as a gift to his master Fakhr al-Dawla al-Buwayhī. See Ibn 'Abbād 1993. At the end of the book the editor inserts a passage from Tha'ālībī in his essay *Yatīmat al-Dahr* in praise of Mutanabbī's aphorisms in his poetry. Also compare Salāma 1995.

⁴⁵ Shāmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, pp. 209–210 (English translation, Weinberger 1973, pp. 19–20).

ambition was merely for material, earthly things. He asserted that their soul was bestial, and unlike a soul aiming for things of the spirit.

The spiritual theme also appears in three verses in the poem *אם תבך עין נולה*, which as stated was written in the last year of Ha-Nagid's life.⁴⁶

עצל, ראה דרכי וחסדומם, כי / נוד תר לנפשי את אשר נכספה
ויעמידני בהיכלי ענן / עמדי חסר ענן בארץ עיפה
לו יחוני נח, והוא רש, ידע / במה ימיני חוד וזון אספה

You, lazy one, look at my way and be astonished for wandering looked
for, for my soul what it strives for

It placed me in the halls of joy, staying without pleasure in a weary
land

Were he to see me calm, and he being poor, he would realize then
with what my right hand collected glory and fortune.

These words may well be interpreted as metaphors for the soul's craving for its supreme source: 'Halls of joy' are the higher spiritual worlds that the soul strives for, while 'weary land' is the lower material world, dismal and dark. Jewish poets had inserted notions of this kind into their work since the tenth century, from the time of Sa'adia and Sa'īd b. Bābshād.⁴⁷

Two more pieces of evidence attest to the refinement and the transformation, one negative and the other positive. The negative one is that we do not discern in Ha-Nagid's work expressions of boasting of the kind found in the work of Mutanabbī, to the point of proclaiming that he has mastery over death. For example,⁴⁸

تَمَرَسْتُ بِالْآفَاتِ حَتَّى تَرَكْتُهَا / تَقُولُ أَمَاتِ الْمَوْتَ أَمْ دُعِرَ الذُّعْرُ

I dominated illnesses to the point they say: Is Death dead or Fear is
afraid?

سَيَعْلَمُ الْجَمْعُ مَن ضَمَّ مَجْلِسُنَا / بَأَنِّي خَيْرٌ مَن تَسْعَى بِهِ قَدَمُ

He who joins our company should know that I am the best of human
beings.

⁴⁶ Shāmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, p. 140.

⁴⁷ See p. 348 below; Fleischer 1990a, pp. 119 ff.

⁴⁸ Mutanabbī 1958, pp. 189, 332.

His praise of himself was even greater than that of the kings in whose honour he wrote poems. Such was the case with Sayf al-Dawla, ruler of Aleppo, who took him into his circle and in whose praise the poet wrote dozens of poems:⁴⁹

شاعر المجد خدنه شاعر اللف / سظ كلانا رب المعاني الدقاق

His intimate friend, the glorious poet, the poet of the words; we both are the masters of the fine ideas.

Likewise in respect of Kāfir al-Ikhshīdī, the ruler of Egypt:⁵⁰

وفؤادي من الملوك وأن كا / ن لسانی يُرى من الشعراء

My heart is the kings' heart, although my tongue seems to be of the poets'.

The positive evidence is Ha-Nagid's self-praise for his knowledge of Torah and for his observance of the commandments. This has no parallel in the poems of Mutanabbī or of other Arab poets. For example, in his boast of his descent from the tribe of Levi he says of himself in the poem *כמו זאת*:⁵¹

ומי נחצב מצוד קהת או בור / מררי, ומרים לו מחוללת
וצעד כמוהם על מרומי שור / וחומה, ולא צעד עלי דלת
ורבה עלי יראה, והנחל חק / אלהיו, ולא נחלה מבחלת
ונדל עלי תורה ועל משרה / ומאס בגליו או פתלתלת

And who stems from the rock of Qehat or the well of Merari, and Miriam is his bearer?

And stepped like them upon the summits of a wall or a rampart, and did not step on a door?

And was brought up on God-fearing, and was bequeathed the Law of his God, not a wild estate?

And was brought up on Torah and power and despised what is pervert or crooked.

Note also the expressions of abnegation and modesty in Ha-Nagid's poetry, which also are not for Arab poets. Such is the case in *הגלי העש*, all of which is gratitude to God for his grace to the poet and for his wonders that he does not deserve.⁵²

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 239.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 447.

⁵¹ Shemu'el Ha-Nagid, 1966, p. 63 (English translation, Weinberger 1973, p. 41).

⁵² Ibid., p. 25.

הֲלִי זֹאת? וְאֲנִי תוֹלַע וְלֹא אִישׁ / בְּזוּי עַמִּים וְנִקְלַל בְּשָׂפָלִים
 וּמִי אֲנִי וּמִי חַי, אֲדֹנָי? / אֲנִי רַב מַעֲוָה, רַע מַעֲלָלִים
 אֲנִי קָטָן וְצָעִיר מִשְׁוֹעוֹת / וּמִקְלֵל הַחֲסָדִים הַפְּעוּלִים
 וְאֵם תְּשׁוּלִים בְּעוֹלָם זֶה זְכוּתִי / וְתַשִּׁיב לִי כִפִּי צָדִיקִי וְמוֹלִים
 בְּמָה זֶה אֶעֱמֹד בְּיוֹם דִּין, וּבְמָה / יִהְיֶה חוֹבִי וְהַפְּסָאִי מִחוֹלִים?

Is this done for me? For I am a worm and not a man, despised among people, lowliest among the low

Who am I and what is my life, my Lord? I am great with sin, evil in deeds

I am puny and unworthy of this triumphs and all your gracious gifts
 If You reward me for my merits in this world and requite me according to my righteousness

How shall I fare on the day of judgment, and how shall my guilt and sins be forgiven?

Conclusion

Elsewhere in this book we discuss the way in which Ha-Nagid uses Arab motifs in the different kinds of poem. An example is the love poems, which aroused controversy even in his own day and for which his son Yəhosef was obliged to write an apology. In any event, regarding self-praise, one cannot but discern many borrowings from Arabic poetry, especially, if I am not mistaken, from that of Mutanabbī. Still, as a writer with the power of original and independent creation, Ha-Nagid fashions these ideas in his own way, which in principal is indebted to the spiritual and normative world of Judaism.

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PART THREE

THE POETICS OF HEBREW POETRY IN SPAIN

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CHAPTER NINE

METAPHOR IN MEDIEVAL HEBREW POETRY

A. *Introduction*

Metaphor can be discussed in Bible interpretation, in philosophy, and in linguistics. These three kinds of medieval Jewish writing do indeed contain important references to metaphor, and in the discussion of one of these genres the others must be considered also.

The first study and discussion of metaphor occurs in Jewish literature in Talmud times, apparently because of the need to contend with Greek paganism as well as Greek philosophy. Thus developed the allegory of Philo of Alexandria, who metaphorically explains isolated words and phrases in the Bible, such as 'the hand of God' and 'the eye of God', and also more comprehensive literary units, such as the account of the Creation. The basis of this allegory is not literary, rhetorical, or aesthetic, but theological and apologetic. This approach is very familiar also in the various kinds of literature of the Sages, such as the Aramaic translations of the Bible (Onkelos and Jonathan), commentary to Song of Songs, and also in *midrashim*, such as in the famous saying, 'The world to come has not eating and no drinking and no washing and no oiling and no sexual intercourse in it, only righteous sitting in it and enjoying the illumination of the Lord' (*Berakhot* 17a).

The question arose again in the Middle Ages following the encounter with Arab-Muslim culture, and through it Greek philosophy and poetics. This time, however, the subject was considered from two aspects: theological and apologetic, and literary, rhetorical, and aesthetic. From the first aspect metaphor was given the name *majāz*, and this was associated with the method of *ta'wīl*. This meant taking things back to their origin, their true meaning, and not taking what might be got from the linguistic attire.¹ This was a kind of a continuation of the allegory of Philo and the Sages. But all this was

¹ On the *ta'wīl* in Muslim commentary to the Qur'ān and in Sa'adia's commentary to the Bible see Tobi (*ta'wīl*).

only in the context of isolated words, not of larger literary units. This approach was developed mainly in response to the sharp criticism by Islam of expressions personifying God, particularly in the *midrashic* literature and still more in later literature from the age of the *geonim*, such as the book *Shi'ur Qomah*. The *ta'wîl* was first developed by the Karaites in connection with the Bible, out of the desire to guard the Jewish scriptures from criticism anticipated from Islam, namely to remove understandings of Bible verses that might be taken as personification. But they also used it to conduct a relentless struggle against Talmudic literature and the *piyyutim*. Sa'adia developed the *ta'wîl* in defence of the scriptures also, but obviously he could not attack the *midrashim* or the *piyyutim*. He only regarded himself as not being committed to them.² In the second aspect, that of literature, rhetoric, and aesthetics, the metaphor was given the Arabic name *isti'āra*, translated into medieval Hebrew as העברה (transfer).

The latter contains a response to Arabic poetry and poetics. Contemporary Hebrew poetry, and the Eastern *piyyut* generally, were most circumscribed in the use of metaphor, because essentially the *piyyut* was just a substitute for the regular formulation of the liturgy. The language of prayer was remarkable for its simplicity, since it had to be equal for all and it was composed by the Sages, whose language was without figures of speech. The leaning to simplicity of language continued in the *piyyutim*, as is clearly evident in those at the start of the period of the *piyyut*. Only after the passage of time and for reasons beyond our scope here *paytanic* writing found other artistic and rhetorical means of embellishment, usually morphological, in the domain of language (syllogism) and of structure in verses and stanzas. Instead of the metaphor, the *paytanim* may have tended to use a similar or parallel rhetorical means, the *kinnui* (emblem), that is, a metaphor that became a synonym, thereby losing its metaphoric nature almost entirely.³

Sa'adia takes pride of place in the introduction of the metaphor into Jewish thought. In his Bible commentary he refers not only to the allegorical and apologetic aspect of the metaphor, but also its

² Nor were Shāmu'el b. Ḥofni and other *geonim* in Babylonia who had been influenced by Arab-Muslim and Greek culture bound by the *midrashim* of the Sages; we cannot expand on this here. For Sa'adia's attitude to *piyyutim* see Tobi 1995.

³ Despite the enormous importance of the *kinnui* in the ancient Eastern *piyyut*, so far no comprehensive and thorough-going research has been conducted on this subject. And see Fleischer 1975, pp. 104–107.

literary, rhetorical, and aesthetic aspect. He makes much use of metaphoric language, in contrast to the *paytanim* who preceded him, and he even states this expressly in one of his *paytanic* works, perhaps a unique case. In another literary genre also, commentary to his own writings, the issue of metaphor is clearly presented. This is in the second version of *Ha-Galui*, written first as a Hebrew book of polemics against the Exilarch David b. Zakkay and his entourage, but also as a model of fine Hebrew writing. This version contains an Arabic addition treating the subject of the polemic; but more importantly for our concern is its reference to figures of speech, including metaphor. In poetics too Sa'adia was the first in Hebrew literature to propose a definition of the image, within the overall definition of the poem (in the Hebrew introduction to *Ha-Egron*).⁴

Nevertheless, we do not find wide use of metaphor in poetry except at the hands of poets already under the evident influence of Arabic poetry. This was of course mainly characteristic of the Hebrew courtly poetry in Spain. But in the Eastern school of Hebrew secular poetry the tendency to recurrent use of metaphor was considerable. An example is the poems of Abraham Ha-Kohen, who lived in Baghdad around the end of the tenth century and wrote paeans in honour of various notables of the Jewish community there.⁵ Without doubt, a firm and unequivocal connection exists between increased use of metaphor in Hebrew poetry and the courtly-*cum*-hedonistic content that entered it. That is, this new content, which came into Hebrew poetry in the tenth century from Arabic poetry of the Abbasid period, was also woven into other aspects of the poetry, including metaphoric language, as we discussed in chapter two above. It probes the status of metaphor in Arabic poetry, from which the influence on Hebrew poetry arose. Yet as we shall see later, this was not the only literary source that reinforced the position of metaphor in Hebrew poetry from the tenth century onwards.

B. *Metaphor in Arabic Poetry*

Metaphor was a customary in ancient Arabic poetry of the *jāhili* period and the beginning of Islam. But the Muslim Arab poets were

⁴ For all this, see chapter three above on Sa'adia's theory of poetry.

⁵ On Abraham Ha-Kohen see above, chapter two, p. 48.

not conscious of its use until the second half of the ninth century when they were engaged in stormy controversies over the extent of its application. This occurred following the appearance of the Abbasid poet Abū Tammām, in the first half of that century. Abū Tammām was considered a representative of the new school in Arabic poetry, which made much use of figures of speech. This was a result of the approximation to Persian culture in the second half of the eighth century, which caused a strengthening of the tendency to embellishment in art, including poetry. This innovative school came to be known as *badīʿ*, and usually five figures of speech are listed in it. First comes *istiʿāra* (borrowing).⁶ This trend, which Abū Tammām took to mannerist extremes, was not welcomed by the theorists of poetry, although the poets were attracted to it.

Indeed, around the start of the ninth century a polemic erupted between the followers of the old school and the new. The two sides faced off around the work of two of the greatest Arab poets of the time: Buḥturī, representative of the old school (denoted by ‘milk’, characteristic of Bedouin culture) and Abū Tammām, representative of the new school (denoted by ‘wine’, characteristic of the urban courtly/hedonistic culture). The theorists of poetry, even those who generally supported the new *badīʿ* school, such as Ibn al-Muʿtazz, who will be mentioned here again, fiercely panned Abū Tammām for his mannerist usage of figures of speech, including his exaggerated metaphor.

The foremost defender of *badīʿ* was the poet and theoretician of poetry ʿAbd Allah b. al-Muʿtazz. He wrote his views on *badīʿ* in a monograph entitled *Kitāb al-Badīʿ*, the first book of poetics in Arabic literature. In it he seeks to prove the legitimacy of rhetorical figures, and to do so he cites examples of their diverse uses from the Qurʾān, from the *ḥadīth* (oral traditions from the Prophet Muḥammad not contained in the Qurʾān and committed to writing with the passage of time), from sayings of the Prophet’s Companions, from Arabic poetry of ancient times and the infancy of Islam, and of course from later Arabic poetry. The book has five chapters, in each of which the author considers one figure of speech. The first and most wide-ranging chapter concerns the aforementioned *istiʿāra* (borrowing).⁷ Ibn

⁶ The other means were *tajnīs* (paronomasia), *ṭibāq* or *muṭābaqa* (antithesis), *mubālagha* (hyperbole), and *tamām* or *latmīm* (epanalepsis).

⁷ On the book and its author see Bonebakker 1990. To date the book has

al-Muʿtazz does not discuss the language of metaphor in respect of theory, but gives many examples of it from the above sources (pp. 3–23). He gives a few examples of flawed metaphors too, so that poets may learn what not to do, without pinpointing the flaw in them (pp. 23–24). Yet in the introduction to the book he does define metaphor: استعارة الكلمة لشيء لم يعرف بها من شيء قد عرف بها (Borrowing of a word for something that is not known by it from the thing that is known by it) (p. 2).

Ibn al-Muʿtazz was not the first in Arabic literature to discuss and define metaphor. Authors who preceded him include Abū ʿUbayda (d. 824/5) in the context of Qurʾānic commentary, and the term he uses is *majāz*. These discussions of Qurʾān commentators certainly influenced the Karaite and Rabbanite Bible commentators in the age of the *geonim*, and led to the development of the *taʾwīl* method mentioned above. Our concern however is not with this but with poetry, even though there was apparently mutual fertilization between the discussions of metaphor in scripture and in poetry, in both Arabic and Hebrew literature.

Following Ibn al-Muʿtazz many theorists of Arabic poetry extended the discussion of metaphor and its development from ancient poetry to modern, and particularized its different kinds. Usually the deliberations are not theoretical but empirical, namely they reflect on certain stanzas in which metaphor is found, and these recur in the discussions of the various theorists (*shawāhid*). One verse is of particular interest, that of the *jāhili* poet Imru al-Qays in his *muʿallaqa* (verse 45). The verse reads as follows:⁸

appeared in only one edition, which includes an introduction but no translation by the Russian scholar Ignatius Kratchkovsky (1935). Other parts of the book deal with these means: *tajnis*, *muṭābaqa*, *radd aʿjāz al-kalām ʿalā mā taqaddamahā* (repetition of a word in another verse in three possible places: at the end of the first hemistich and at the end of the second hemistich, at the beginning and at the end of the verse, and in different places in the verse) and *al-madḥḥab al-kalāmī* (paronomasia, use of the same word many times without change in its meaning as in homonymy). Next Ibn al-Muʿtazz discusses several other rhetorical figures not included in *badīʿ*, such as *iltifāt* (parenthesis) and *ḥusn al-ibtidaʾāt* (embellishment of opening).

⁸ The account here is according to Heinrichs 1977, whose essay has three parts. One: A study by Heinrichs himself of metaphor in Arabic poetry and of the revolution that occurred in the term *istiʿāra*. Two: An English translation of statements by different theoreticians on the above verse of Imruʾ al-Qays. Three: A definition of *istiʿāra* by different theoreticians. To the best of my knowledge, this work by Heinrichs is the most important study of metaphor in Arabic poetry. For Imru al-Qays' verse and the English translation see Heinrichs 1977, pp. 3–4.

فقلت له لَمْ تَمْطَا بصلبه / وأردف أعجازا وناء بكلكل

And I said to it (*i.e.*, the night) when it stretched out its back and followed up with (its) hindquarters and struggled to get up with (its) breast.

In his study of metaphor Heinrichs states (pp. 1, 9) that in the early texts on poetics the term *isti'āra* was used for metaphor of the kind known in modern research on medieval Arabic poetry as the genitive metaphor (see below), such as the very famous metaphor in the *mu'allaga* of the *jāhili* poet Labīd, يد ریح الشمال (the hand of the north wind). Heinrichs terms this kind the 'old metaphor'. Yet this does not invariably mean a genitive metaphor, but a metaphor in which a certain thing is borrowed from an owner in whose possession it is found in our real world for someone (or something) who does not possess this thing. That is, the 'hand' is borrowed from the rider on his beast for the north wind. Old metaphor of this kind may be also a verb, which is not in the context of the genitive metaphor or of any linguistic structure, for example, 'death looks': clearly, death cannot look because it has no eyes. By contrast, in the later poetics literature the term *isti'āra* is used specifically for simile, such as 'narcissus' for 'eye'. This kind of metaphor, which Heinrichs calls 'new metaphor', is basically the likening of one thing to another. He also asserts (pp. 6–7) that the old metaphor was given the name *mathal* (simile) or *tamthīl* (likening) in Arabic poetics literature, while the later metaphor was called *tashbīh* (imaging). Before the eleventh century this distinction between the two kinds of metaphor was not apparent to all the Arab theorists of poetry, including Ibn Rashīq in his well-known composition *al-'Umda*. Only 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, a contemporary of Ibn Rashīq, clearly distinguishes these two types.

Heinrichs believes (p. 13) that the distinction itself between the two kinds of metaphor arose because of the great importance of the new metaphor in poetry from the Abbasid period. Not that the new dislodged the old, because the new is also found in early Arabic poetry, although its significance in terms of poesy is not great and its occurrence is limited. On the other hand, old metaphor continued to exist with great vitality in the work of the new poets, and indeed came to be used in an excessively mannerist fashion, which generated sharp criticism from theorists such as al-Āmidī and al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī who lived in the tenth century. In fact, the audacious use of the old kind of metaphor seems to have been a focus of the polemic on the

subject of *badīʿ*, which intensified owing to the excesses of Abū Tammām. As for new metaphor, this acquired an important place only in the later Abbasid poetry, because it was the historical product of banal, rather effete simile, so it needed some time to develop.

Von Grunebaum, the renowned scholar of Arabic literature, attributes the eventual replacement of simile by metaphor to the influence of Persian culture. Heinrichs considers this a great overstatement, for as early as the end of the Umayyad period Arab poets were making 'new metaphors'. In any event, the Arabs continued to resort to old metaphors, while the Persians preferred the 'new metaphors'.

Alongside the theoretical discussions of the definition of *istiʿāra* and *tashbīh*, deliberations took place in the context of the interpretation and style of the Qurʾān, and the impossibility of imitating it (*ʿijāz al-qurʾān*). In the poetic and aesthetic aspect of poetry, these terms acquired the sense of borrowing a thing or an idea from A for B. But in the interpretive and theological aspect of the Qurʾān they acquired the sense of borrowing the name of a thing from A for B because of the connection between them. True, in both aspects the terms are figures of speech. However, the interpretive distinction was made so as to solve religious and philosophical problems, and was based on the assertion that metaphoric language 'is not right', and is not supposed to compare or to liken one thing to another. The literary distinction was made so as to determine the aesthetic facets of the work of art, and was based on the notion that metaphoric language transfers substantive or abstract properties from one thing to another. Certainly, Arab theorists did not normally distinguish clearly between these two systems of analyzing metaphoric language, and confused them, principally by projecting from the religious and philosophical system onto the literary and aesthetic system. Therefore, their grasp of the various kinds of metaphor was somewhat technical and lacking in depth.

Needless to say, the foregoing comments on the definition of metaphor are in reference to the theorists of poetry alone, and they may teach about their perceptions. They are not binding on the poets themselves, who by virtue of their creative powers were free of extra-literary obligations and concepts. They for the most part looked at the aesthetic aspect of metaphor, although some of them did so excessively and made a particular effort (*takalluf*) to do so, which was not to the benefit of their poetry. Those received a negative

verdict from the critics too. In any event, the scope of metaphor that the poets occupied was far wider than that which the theorists marked out for them.

C. Intensified Use of Metaphor in Hebrew Poetry in Spain

These questions of definition of metaphor in the religious context of the Qurʾān, and in the literary context of Arabic poetry, stimulated the appearance of similar questions in Jewish literature, albeit with a gap of some generations and of course in respect of the Bible and of the new Hebrew secular poetry. As noted, Saʿadia was the first to ponder these matters, in attempting to defend Jewish tradition against the enemy without in the form of the dominant religion of Islam and the enemy within, the Karaites and other breakaway sects from the Rabbanite tradition.⁹ Saʿadia gave legitimacy to the aesthetic perception of metaphoric language as a positive and worthy value, in both Bible text analysis and poetry writing. Perhaps even more, he applied his mind to a theological examination of Bible interpretation, and in his translations and commentaries extensively applied the *taʾwīl* method with metaphoric expressions referring to God or contrary to plain reason. On the other hand, Hebrew poetry began to be written, and it was receptive to Arabic poetry and ready to absorb new norms from it, in form as well as content, including metaphor.

Hebrew poetry at that time found it easier than Arabic poetry to grant respectability to metaphor. This was because of its affinity with the language of the Bible. This very approach to Bible language as a model to be imitated, as Saʿadia used to say, and which his pupil Dunash b. Labraṭ determined as the only option, caused an upsurge in the use of metaphor. This was because Bible language is very rich in metaphor, certainly far more than the Qurʾān. Furthermore, Hebrew poetry was written under the influence of late Abbasid poetry, namely in the tenth century, by which time *badīʿ* had wholly conquered Arabic courtly poetry in the East and in Spain. The various kinds of metaphor came to be the main rhetorical figure in poetry, excluding rhyme and metre. Hardly a verse in any of the three gen-

⁹ The sages of Islam criticized the Jews for locutions of personification of God even before the rise of the Karaite movement. See Mann 1931/5, II, pp. 38–39; Cook 1987, pp. 176 ff. See also Mann 1921/2, pp. 257–258.

res of courtly poetry, namely poems of wine, of love, and of nature, lacks metaphor. The linguistic fabric of these genres, all basically short poems (*maqṭū'as*), is constituted almost entirely of metaphor. By contrast, metaphor is comparatively slight in philosophical poems and laments, as their mood is gloomy and their conceptual message is appropriate, in keeping with the outlook of medieval man that it be spoken in simple language, not in language charged with metaphor (see more on this below). In the *qasīdas*, the paeans or the war poems, metaphor is scant also, except for the openings (*nasīb* or *tashbīb*), many of which, at least in the poems of Shōmū'el Ha-Nagid, Shōlomo b. Gabirol, Moshe b. 'Ezra, and Yāhuda Ha-Levi, are written as *maqṭū'as* of courtly poetry in the genres of wine, love, and nature. Usually they combine the motifs of these three genres together. The saying 'The best of a poem is its falsehood' was understood as an affirmation and as great esteem for the use of metaphoric language.¹⁰

Hebrew poetry in Spain did not indeed go to extremes in metaphoric language before the third generation, from the work of Ha-Nagid and after, most probably because only he at last broke through the limits of the various properties of Arabic poetry that had come to rest on Hebrew poetry. Until his day Hebrew poetry was bound by the fetters of the ancient eastern tradition, which was not partial to metaphor. Not surprisingly, Aharon Mirsky says nothing on the use of metaphor by Yīṣḥaq b. Khalfūn, the aged contemporary of Ha-Nagid. By contrast, Mirsky states that although Ibn Khalfūn was one of the makers of change from the language of the Sages to the language of the Bible, 'still evident in his poetry is the impression of the time of transition between the school of the *paytanīm* and the school of the [new] poets'.¹¹ On the language of some of the poets in the generations preceding Ha-Nagid, Moshe b. 'Ezra says in his book on poetics: אֵלֶכָאֵלִיָּה מִן נִמְע וְנִזְחָה אֶלְבְּרִיעַ (empty of all kinds of embellishment).¹² He undoubtedly includes metaphor, which, as we saw above, was the most important device in the rhetorical complex known as *badī'*.

In any event, in the classical period of Hebrew poetry in Spain, the eleventh century and the first decades of the twelfth, metaphor

¹⁰ For an extensive discussion of this issue see Pagis 1970, pp. 46–50; Dana 1983, pp. 97–105.

¹¹ Mirsky 1961, Introduction, p. 40.

¹² Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 60.

assumed the first place among the rhetorical figures of poetry. This is proven not only from the poetry writing itself, but also from the comments of the theorist Moshe b. 'Ezra. He distinguishes its two kinds: the old and the new. To this subject he devotes two out of the twenty chapters concerning various rhetorical figures in the second part of Section Eight of his book on poetics and Hebrew poetry in Spain. Chapter one is on *isti'āra* (borrowing), referring to the old kind, namely the metaphoric phrase. Chapter thirteen is a discussion of *tashbīh* (simile) in reference to the later kind, in which the thing itself and the thing likened to it are found side by side, with or without the letter (or word) of likening.¹³ But the main discussion of metaphor is clearly in chapter one, where Ibn 'Ezra addresses its definition, while in chapter thirteen there is hardly anything except instances.¹⁴ This is what he has to say about borrowing, to which he devotes chapter one in his discussion of rhetorical figures:¹⁵

This subject is one of the most excellent in the pillars of writing and one of the sweetest among the merits of prose and poetry. [. . .]. Know, in addition to what we have explained, that metaphor is of the most beautiful for the goal of the two mentioned genres [poetry and prose]. Although the plain is basically more trustworthy, and metaphor is an addition, in the end the metaphor is a plating of adornment. So, when the poem is plated with a coating of metaphor, and bedecks itself with the attire of figurative expressions and allusions, the embroidery of its silk beautifies and its dullness becomes finer.

¹³ Ibn 'Ezra's division is not absolutely precise, because in the second part of the chapter on *tashbīh* he gives pure metaphors without the element of the thing likened, and also genitive metaphors; the Arab theorists of poetry did likewise, as Heinrichs 1969 well demonstrates.

¹⁴ Nevertheless, a definition of simile is found in this chapter, which indeed is presented in a roundabout fashion. I refer to chapter 28 in *Kūāb al-Lumā'* by Yona b. Janāh: 'On what is said in the word and the intention is something else', which Ibn 'Ezra mentions in his discussion of simile. Still, one cannot infer outright that Ibn 'Ezra accepted this definition of Ibn Janāh, because he puts forward a fairly strong reservation about it in this chapter: 'And Abū al-Walīd [Ibn Janāh], God's mercy upon him, devoted to this issue a special chapter [. . .] and he talked at length about it. Indeed, he exaggerated in this regard with many details. Were all his words correct, it would be impossible to rely on anything written in the Torah or to have confidence in any saying. Although there are many things in this chapter which deserve support, yet he who praises that chapter as a whole, is mistaken' (Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, pp. 256–259). Incidentally, Ibn 'Ezra is right in his statement about Ibn Janāh, but one should bear in mind that the latter's approach is not literary but purely linguistic. For that reason he includes in chapters 28 and 29 of his book many subjects that have nothing to do with the literary definition of simile.

¹⁵ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 225.

Clearly evident in the same chapter is the influence of the Arabic books of poetics. The definition of borrowing by Ibn 'Ezra, *ומעני אלאסתעארה* (and the essence of borrowing is a word for a thing not known from a thing known), is taken verbatim from the aforementioned definition of Ibn al-Mu'tazz in *Kitāb al-Badī'*. Even the genitive metaphors serving as examples of borrowings, such as *אם אלכהאב* (mother of the book, i.e., the Qur'ān) and *ננאח אלדל* (wing of surrender), are drawn from that book.¹⁶ One realizes the great frequency of metaphor in Hebrew poetry in Spain, and Ibn 'Ezra's favourable attitude to this, from what he says in chapter thirteen:¹⁷

The poets can almost endlessly use this device. As similes are always the fruit of thought and they exist in most of the poems, no verse is more suitable than another to be used as a sample for the device of simile. The Hebrew poets as well use similes according to their aptitude and their level. The Bible has a very large number of exemplars.

Ibn 'Ezra is indeed right that metaphor became ever more central in poetry, and reached its peak in his own, he being the greatest exponent of the *badī'* method in Hebrew poetry. He was able to enlarge the use of metaphor in his poetry without this impairing its value.

One of the finest ways of using metaphor is known as realization of metaphor.¹⁸ Here the poet continues to develop the metaphoric image, and treats the metaphor as if it is itself real. Thus a three-fold figurative structure is created: (1) the signified (the thing likened, the actual thing), (2) the signifier (metaphor), which becomes the signified, (3) the second signifier referring to the signifier-signified preceding it. Sometimes a complete, intricate, and developed image serves as a metaphor for a particular subject, and other metaphors are contained within it. Perhaps the best example in medieval Hebrew poetry is the poem *אזורו שנס אשור* by Ibn Gabirol. Its middle section is a depiction of a night tempest, influenced by descriptions of storms in Arabic poetry. The tempest itself may be understood

¹⁶ This is noted by Halkin in Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 227, n. 18, and p. 229, n. 28, and also Dana 1983, p. 278, n. 4; *ibid.*, pp. 117–118, a meticulous comparison of this chapter of Ibn 'Ezra's book with the Arabic books of poetics.

¹⁷ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, pp. 257–259.

¹⁸ On this matter see Elizur 1993. Tsur 1975, p. 10 names this means by the usual word in English metaphysical poetry: a conceit. He defines it thus: 'A metaphor understood at face value; that is, if it is developed literally to the point that it must be understood literally'.

as a metaphoric formulation of the poet's frustration in his attempts to reach God, namely it constitutes a signifier for a frustrating actuality. But it itself, the tempest, is described in many metaphoric terms, addressing, through the signifier-signified relationship, actual elements in it.¹⁹

In the work of poets of the generations after him a crisis arose in the use of metaphor in poetry, expressed in an ambivalent attitude towards it. On the one hand, we encounter poets who have reservations about it, such as Yəhuda Ha-Levi in the new poetry genres that he composed, the 'sea poems' and the 'Zion poems'. In these, many of the rules of Arabic poetry that had been a regular feature of Hebrew poetry in Spain are disregarded, including the rules of *badīʿ*. Similarly, Abraham b. Ezra departed still farther from classical poetry and sought new ways, reducing to a minimum the use of metaphor compared with his predecessors. This may have had to do with his severe criticism of the *kinnui* (emblem) method in the *paytanut* and his sharp attack against Elʿazar Ha-Qilliri, the greatest of the *paytanim*.²⁰ On the other hand, an over-abundance of rhetorical figures, including the various kinds of metaphor, is evident, for example, in the poetry of Yiṣḥaq b. Ezra, Abraham's son, and this did nothing for his poetry. Incidentally, the first signs of mannerism in medieval Hebrew poetry not in the language context appear already in the work of Abraham b. Ezra, for example, a poem constructed in *yatedot* alone, or poems written down in certain geometrical shapes.²¹

The focus of Hebrew writing in Spain between the mid-twelfth and the mid-thirteenth century on the *maqāma* genre reinforced the tendency to metaphoric mannerism, and to linguistic mannerism in general. Among other things this was due to the influence of the greatly admired *maqāma* composition of those days, the *maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī (d. 1122). One of the characteristic expressions of this mannerist use of metaphor, as a technical means displaying the poet's figurative skill, and quite unconnected to the metaphor's qualitative contribution to the work itself, is revealed in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century in Toledo. This was the new centre of Jewish culture in Spain after the collapse of the Jewish communities in the

¹⁹ On this poem see Tobi 1990b.

²⁰ This criticism is included in his commentary to Qohelet 5:1. On this see Malachi 1983; Yahalom 1985, pp. 183–196.

²¹ On this see Pagis 1993, pp. 81–108.

south following the invasion by the *Muwaḥḥidūn*. *Sefer Ha-Mashlim* by Ya'aqov b. El'azar has one chapter (the second) that matches poetry against prose, and even though poetry seemingly wins this hard-fought battle its status becomes extremely precarious.²² The third chapter in this book describes a tournament among poets on their ability to pack the maximal number of images into one verse of poetry. One of them manages to stuff five similes for the whiteness of the (male) beloved's teeth into one verse:²³

כְּחֵלֶב אוֹ כְּעֵין קָרָה / כְּשֶׁלֶג כְּכַפּוֹר בָּרֵד

Like milk or like ice, like snow, like frost, hail.

Another demonstrates that his powers are no less:

כְּצֹמֶר אוֹ כְּמוֹ שֶׁחַר / כְּדֵר צִיץ אוֹ כְּמוֹ וָרֵד

Like wool or like dawn, like a pearl, a blossom, or like a rose.

The tourney does not end here, and other poets in the company wish to show their virtuoso mettle, by squeezing seven similes into one verse, not a mere five, in the description of the beloved:

כְּעֵשׂ כְּעָב כְּמוֹר כְּאֵרִי / כְּהִימֶן כְּצִירִי כְּצִבִּי

Like moth like a cloud, like myrrh, like a lion, like Heman, like balsam, like a buck.

An interesting feature that typifies the decline of Hebrew poetry after the classical period is that often the metaphoric language become immobile, constructed on a hackneyed Bible quote, with no freshness or vitality. This feature characterized Hebrew writing in other periods too, such as the end of the era of the Eastern *piyyut* and the age of the Jewish enlightenment.

D. Ambivalent Attitude to Metaphor in Hebrew Poetry in Spain

Despite all the foregoing, throughout the existence of Hebrew poetry in Spain reservations were voiced about the use of metaphor. The

²² Ben El'azar 1993, pp. 23–27.

²³ Ibid., p. 28. On this verse and its like in the above debate as part of the discussion on mannerism in medieval Hebrew poetry see Pagis 1993, pp. 109–123, especially p. 113. And see *ibid.*, pp. 115–118, parallels from works of Ibn Ḥazm in Spain and Alḥarizī in the East for 'accumulations of similes'.

most obvious indication of this can be found in comments by Moshe b. 'Ezra on poetry, after he praised metaphor:²⁴

The difference between a phrase containing a borrowed expression and a phrase that does not contain it is like the difference between eloquence and abstruseness. Indeed, there are poets in both nations who exaggerated in their use of borrowing. They composed poems that the hearer despises and his soul abhors. This is the sickness of exaggeration. The scholars of our time, who opposed the use of borrowing, did not see the right way and they went astray. That is because borrowing is abundantly found in our sacred books and it is impossible to count the verses quickly. There is nothing faulty in that. Indeed it is impossible to escape it. He who thinks deeply about it has to clarify an important point concerning the chronology, as the poems of the Arabs are later than the prophetic books [. . .]. After the proofs I presented from our sacred books and from the Qur'ān, I was not afraid of the strong objection of the scholars and the lawyers of our time who opposed borrowing. This is especially because I realized that the best of the lawyers of *halakha* and the greatest philosophers, Rabbi Sa'adia and Rabbi Hāye and other philosophers, interpret the most difficult questions in the prophetic texts by borrowing [. . .]. Indeed, those of nowadays who object this way, study with a sharp ear and look with penetrating eye at the small concerns of human beings, but they are afflicted by blindness in regard to big concerns.

While I cannot determine who was the target of Ibn 'Ezra's remarks, they do attest to fairly vigorous objection to the very use of metaphor, made by various weighty circles in the Jewish community in Spain. They included people engaged in religious law and philosophers. Although Ibn 'Ezra dismisses their objection in principle, he agrees with the critics of poets who overdo their use of metaphor, or more precisely, who use metaphoric means in conjunction with hyperbole or overstatement,²⁵ that is, a far-fetched simile or metaphoric word.²⁶ Ibn 'Ezra illustrates this with a verse of his own, although he conceals his authorship:²⁷

²⁴ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, pp. 225–227.

²⁵ In Arabic poetics literature different names are given to this means: *ghuḥw*, *tagh-mīq*, *ṣighāl*, *ighrāq*, *mubālāgha*. Ibn 'Ezra devotes to this figure a special chapter (sixteen) among his chapters discussing the various rhetorical figures.

²⁶ On the use of metaphors by way of hyperbole see also Tobi 1973a, pp. 62–63; Tsur 1975, pp. 12–15 (Tsur calls this *miraculism*).

²⁷ See Halkin's comments in his edition of Moshe b. 'Ezra 1975, p. 229, ns. 47, 48.

עַד יִדְשְׁאוּ אֶבְנֵי בְצוּרֵיהֶם אֲדָמָה / סוֹפֵד וּמְזֶרֶם בְּכִי יִרְטְבוּ

I will stay bewailing until grass grows on the stones of their vestiges,
until they will be inundated by the flow of weeping.

In this verse, the metaphoric phrase 'by the flow of weeping' is meant to indicate the force of the poet's sorrow. His tears are so many that they are like a flowing current liable to flood the gravestones. The *poetry theoretician* Moshe b. 'Ezra does not hold back from criticizing the *poet* Moshe b. 'Ezra for this excess in metaphoric language. As he says in the same place:

In order to intensify his intention, a Hebrew poet wrote unnecessary words, depicting as well that he shed tears copiously [. . .]. This is endless too, as he said that he would stop weeping when the stones became inundated with his tears.

Ibn 'Ezra likewise presents an Arabic verse by the Abbasid poet Dhū al-Rumma as a negative example of the use of metaphor by way of hyperbole. This example is taken from Ibn Rashīq's *al-Umda*, whose exaggeration Ibn 'Ezra also negates.

Yet not only excessive use obstructed a favourable attitude to metaphor in poetry. Other perceptions did so too, some of them arising outside poetry proper. First of all was the very notion predominant in Arab and Jewish poetics, that metaphor was nothing but an external dress for a certain idea. The whole purpose (of the dress) was to beautify, and not to express the idea in a more precise way, which was one only, with no other. This simplistic perception was entirely different from Aristotle's mimetic definition of artistic work in the *Poetics*. The Greeks saw metaphor as a qualitative expression of the idea, while the Arab theorists of poetry saw it as only as an outer ornamentation.²⁸ The rationalism that underlay Muslim and Jewish culture in the central Middle Ages reinforced this concept. That is, concurrently with the beginnings of the theoretical discussion on metaphor in Arabic poetry (or apparently even earlier), a fierce controversy was being conducted on allegory in the Qur'ān; and with a delay of a few generations, similar discussions and polemics were taking place in Jewish literature in respect of Bible and Hebrew poetry. The projection from the rationalist perception of the philologists, the philosophers, and the theologians onto

²⁸ For a wide-ranging discussion of this subject see Pagis 1970, pp. 35–54.

the perceptions of the theorists of poetry is undoubted. True, the poets themselves, particularly the Arabs, did not see themselves bound by philological, philosophical, or religious concepts, nor by the views on poetry of literary critics and theorists of poetry. This was not the case with the Hebrew poets, whose work did not grow and develop at all until after a theory of Hebrew poetry had come into existence, borrowed from Arabic literature. Most of them indeed were themselves philologists, philosophers, or theologians. An eminent example is Moshe b. 'Ezra himself, who apart from his book of poetics *Kitāb al-Muḥādara wa-al-Mudhākara* wrote a comprehensive work on metaphor in its linguistic and interpretive aspect in connection with the Bible. This is *Maqālat al-Ḥadīqa fī Ma'nā al-Majāz wa-al-Ḥaqīqa* (The Essay of the Garden on the Meaning of the Metaphor and the Real).²⁹ In any event, alongside appreciation of metaphor there was great concern that it be taken literally.

A very clear indication of the influence of the philosophical and linguistic perception on the theorists' outlook is the assertion of most of them, Jews and Muslims alike, that plain speech (*muḥkam* or *ḥaqīqa*) is more lucid and comprehensible than embellished and metaphoric speech (*majāz*). This view is linked to moral perceptions, touching on false statements made against rulers who did not deserve them, and on the fear by Muḥammad, the Prophet of Islam, of appearing as just another of the *jāhili* poets. This was how his sworn opponents among the wealthy Mecca merchants wished to portray him. We cannot expand on this subject here; suffice it to note what Moshe b. 'Ezra had to say in his two essays, and Yəhuda Alḥarīzī in his book *Taḥkāmōni*.³⁰ These two theorists of poetry state explicitly that if the poet intends to deliver a straightforward message to the reader, better that he do so in ordinary language, not metaphoric. And indeed, metaphor of the various kinds characterizes courtly, hedonistic poetry, and is quite rare in philosophical poetry.

This position obviously did not arise from the milieu of poetry, but from that of religious and philosophical interpretation of the Qur'ān and the Bible, even though the above terms are taken from there.³¹ The word *majāz* there does not refer to a rhetorical essence

²⁹ On this composition see the in-depth study by Fenton 1997. Fenton's scholarly edition of the composition, written in Judeo-Arabic, is forthcoming.

³⁰ For Ibn Ezra's comments on this subject see Pagis 1970, pp. 40 ff.; Dana 1983, pp. 97 ff.; Fenton 1997, pp. 299 ff. For Alḥarīzī's remarks see chapter 11 below.

³¹ On *muḥkam* and *majāz* in Qur'ān commentary and Bible commentary see Zucker 1984, pp. 35–69.

but to an allegorical essence, to *ta'wīl*, which makes it possible to interpret the Qur'ānic or biblical expression in a way devoid of contradiction of what is required by religious tradition or pure logic.

Reservations about metaphor and apologetics for its use appeared not only in theory but in practice also. Pure metaphors are very few in Hebrew poetry in Spain, compared with metaphors of other kinds, which contain some element explaining the metaphor and removing any fear of an understanding that is not the correct and intended one. This was accomplished in poetry in several ways:

1. Of all kinds of metaphoric language, first place is held by the genitive metaphor; one of the components of this construction is real and lets us to grasp the true meaning of the whole expression.³² This is the metaphor called by Heinrichs the 'old kind' of Arabic metaphor (*isti'āra*); it is discussed by Moshe b. 'Ezra in his first chapter on rhetorical figures. Incidentally, as Heinrichs has pointed out,³³ apparently purely verbal metaphors should be seen as a kind of genitive metaphors, as the metaphoric verb is in combination with a real noun, which discloses the true intention. Hence, the form of the genitive metaphor is not the chief thing. This is the fact of the combination of a real component with a metaphoric component, and from the real the true intention of the metaphoric is to be learned.

2. Every metaphoric locution in poetry is accompanied by a real expression, intended to eliminate the sense of 'falsehood'. Let us test this with a short poem, the work of Yiṣḥaq b. Khalfūn, which was sent to his young friend, later to become Shāmu'el Ha-Nagid:³⁴

פני חבל כצוואר המצרע / לכן הרק בפניה צדקה
 והנעל בערף אוהביה / וגלוי מערם — חקה תקינה
 לכן רום ללענה אם תהכיל — ותראם כי תרומו מתיקה
 ורזה תרפך מרם בני איש / ולא תשמע אליהם קול נאקה
 ולא תחמל עלי קטן וגדול / ותאמר כי בזה יש לי חשיקה
 נחשים הם ועקרבים, ולו ת- / עניק להם יהידתם עניקה
 בני חבל לעולם יבגדו כ- / אשר תבגד בעת צרה וצוקה
 אמת, חפה פאמם, פן חביאם / ברחם הרחבה העמקה
 קרונ אוהם כמו סתר וגלוי / ואל ערב ללא תרד עלוקה

³² On the genitive metaphor in Hebrew poetry see Pagis 1970, pp. 64–70; Tsur 1975, pp. 25–33. For a detailed and in-depth discussion of the genitive metaphor in the poetry of Abū Tammām, who made much use of this figure, including extreme metaphors that evoked harsh criticism by the Arab theorists of poetry, see Schippers 1981.

³³ Heinrichs 1977, p. 8, especially n. 16.

³⁴ For the Hebrew original and the English translation see Carmi 1981, 283–284.

The World's face is like a leper's neck, therefore, it is only right to spit in her
 It is fitting and proper to cast one's sandals at the nape of her lovers
 and to strip them bare
 So, if you can, make them drink deep of wormwood, but pretend to satisfy them with sweet drinks
 Then make your sword drink deep of men's blood and do not heed their groans
 Show no mercy to high or low, but say outright: 'This is what I wish to do'
 They are snakes and scorpions, these children of the World, and even if you offer them your precious life as a gift
 They will always betray you as does the World herself in time of anguish and distress
 Yes, they are just like their mother—so put them back into her deep, wide womb
 Kill them, either secretly or in the open, God is your pledge that you will not go down to hell.

This was written in 1020 as an exhortatory poem for Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid, after he had been dismissed from his post and two of his relatives had been murdered. The translation of the text of the Judeo-Arabic inscription at the top is this: 'Ibn Khalfūn mentioned in the letter he wrote with these verses the matter of some people of his [Ha-Nagid] adversaries who were happy when he was afflicted by these two bad events. He wrote in it some of his verses, in which he cursed those adversaries'. In the first two verses, written wholly in metaphoric terms, the poet describes Ha-Nagid's enemies as lovers of *ḥבל* (World), this being the mythic image for treachery and corruption, the ugly face of the world ('like a leper's neck'), and he states it in general philosophic terms. They are to be treated with humiliation and complete disgrace, as having no right to existence in this world. The third verse is also metaphoric; it contains a recommendation from the poet to his addressee on how he should treat these adversaries. He uses the metaphor typifying, in fact, *tevel's* attitude to men: the great swindle, as if it is granting them something sweet, but which is bitter.³⁵ The metaphoric language in the first three verses is resolved in the plain language of the fourth and fifth

³⁵ See e.g. the poem of Moshe b. 'Ezra *בְּרַחַת בְּרַחַת* (Schirmann 1961, I, p. 372): *וְנִיר מִהַיּוֹמָן כִּי מִתְנוּחָיו / בְּרֹאשׁ פִּתּוֹן מַעֲט נִפְתָּ בְּקִרְבּוֹ // וְהִשִּׁי נִפְשָׁךְ בּוֹקֵר בְּשִׁיבוֹ / וְיִחַל תְּהַפּוּכֹתָיו בְּעֶרְבוֹ* (And have fear of Time, as his gifts are like a snake's venom, within which there is little honey // And cherish an illusion to your soul in the morning in regard to his goodness / but he shall enforce his vicissitudes in his evening).

verses, in a way that leaves no doubt as to the poet's meaning. True, the fourth verse too has a metaphor—'make your sword drink blood'—but this is a well-worn image, an everyday Bible quote. Metaphor recurs in the fifth verse, in the phrase 'they are snakes and scorpions', referring to the trait of betrayal in men, and this too is explained in a subsequent verse, the seventh, and again by way of general philosophical parlance. The eighth verse is metaphoric: 'Put them back into her deep, wide womb', meaning the womb of *tevel*, whose children these enemies are portrayed to be. This metaphor too is explicated in turn in the ninth verse, with the express and clear-cut statement, 'Kill them, either secretly or in the open'.

3. The use of a negative metaphor, which entails understanding the metaphor as reality; the term itself is puzzling, being a kind of oxymoron. The structure includes a metaphoric verb, and adjacent to it, before or after, is a negation word that precedes the noun required for that metaphoric verb. This means was very common in Arabic and Hebrew poetry in Spain.³⁶ To elucidate, here is one instance of it in a short poem by Todros Abū al-Āfiya:³⁷

בְּלִי לְשׁוֹן יְשִׁיחִי אֲמָרִים / עֲסִיסִי עַת שִׁפְת כּוֹסִי אֲנָשֶׁק;
רָאָה בִּי נִפְלְאוֹת אֵל, כִּי לְכָל לֵב / אֲנִי חֲשׂוֹק, וְדִלּוֹתִי כְּחֹשֶׁק

He speaks to me without tongue, my wine, when I kiss the edge of
my cup:

'See in me God's wonders, because by every heart I am desired, and
my thinness is like a desirer.'

The speaker is the desirer, telling of his desired. This desired one speaks with his desirer in the language of love by means of the kiss, and the relationship between them is described by the metaphoric verb יְשִׁיחִי (he speaks to me). But since this dialogue is 'a falsehood', as there is no real talk between the desirer and the desired, the poet clarifies his intention with the phrase בְּלִי לְשׁוֹן (without tongue), namely this is a conversation that does not take place through tongue. Hence, יְשִׁיחִי is not to be taken as reality but as metaphor only. The oddity of oxymoron arises here too, namely a conversation without words, which is something unimaginable. Yet this puzzlement is only on the rhetorical, external, ornamental level, not on the true, qualitative level of the poem.

³⁶ For a discussion of this structure, with many examples from the poets of Spain, see Pagis 1970, pp. 72–78; Tsur 1975, pp. 62–82.

³⁷ Tordos 1932/7, I, p. 56.

E. *Conclusion: Reservations about Metaphor among
Followers of Philosophy*

Moshe b. 'Ezra, the great proponent of poetry and its *badī'* aspect, chose to devote an entire essay not only to the literary, figurative, and aesthetic aspect of metaphor, but to its theological and apologetic aspect as well. This tendency intensified with the consolidation of philosophy in Jewish culture in Spain and other countries within the Arab-Islamic cultural orbit, and in consequence of the political crisis that befell the Jewish communities in southern Spain and North Africa with the rise of the *Muwahhidūn*. We note in particular Maimonides, who considered metaphor sophistry. True, he did not reject it totally, because he could not disregard its existence in the biblical Prophets. There it had a didactic function, because of the impossibility of human understanding of God's prophecy in plain language (preface to *Guide to the Perplexed*). But precisely for that reason he disqualified it because of its potential figurative and aesthetic effect, and in fact restricted metaphor to allegory only. That is, Maimonides maintained the dichotomy between an idea and its dress, but in his perception the dress had no aesthetic purpose, only a distinctly educational and utilitarian one. He is still far from the Aristotelian perception that does not maintain the causal connection between actuality and metaphor, and sees the metaphoric expression as a necessity, which cannot be satisfied by means of any other expression of actuality.

Maimonides' perception is associated with his negative attitude to secular and even liturgical poetry, although this is not the place to deal with that subject in detail. However, a parallel manifestation of negation of poetry is found in the writings of Muslim sages of the same period, including al-Ghazālī, who influenced Maimonides in various matters. In any event, many of the Jewish thinkers in Christian Spain adopted this approach of Maimonides to 'falsehood' in poetry in the philosophical and religious respect, and wrote comments censuring poetry or sought to limit it just to domains able to receive the sanction of the religious tradition. Examples are the aforementioned Ya'akov b. El'azar and Shem Tov b. Falaquera in his *Ha-Mavaqqesh* and *Reshit Hokhma*,³⁸ as well as many other writers after the Spanish expulsion, such as Yehoshua' Benveniste in Constantinople

³⁸ For Falaquera's criticism of poetry see Tobi 1990a.

in the seventeenth century.³⁹ But not only the Jewish followers of philosophy in Spain, usually known as 'pupils of Maimonides', were influenced by him in this regard. All over Christian Spain, in the era known as post-classical, Hebrew poetry lost the robust status it had enjoyed in the classical Muslim period. Poetry became a vehicle without pride in itself, especially because of the metaphor in it.⁴⁰ The clearest expression of this is actually in a poem of Tordos Abū al-ʿĀfiya, the most outstanding of the Jewish poets of Christian Spain, which ponders the—seemingly—essential connection between the poem and the 'false' metaphor in it:⁴¹

משורר לא ידבר רק החלים / ועל לא נהיה ישא משלים
ומה השיר לבד דברי שקרים / משורר יפרטם על פי נבלים
וחשיר ייף ונהדר בפנבים / ובמשלים — כעץ נהדר בעלים [...] .
אבל זה הכלל: אין חן לשירה / בלי שקר בלי דברים בטלים

A poet utters only falsehood, and about what did not happen he recites songs

What is a poem if not words of lies, a poet plays them with a harp
The poem is beautiful and embellished by falsehood and metaphors—
like a tree beautified by leaves⁴² [...]

But this is the rule: There is no charm to a poem without a lie, without nonsense.

The status of metaphor in Hebrew poetry in the post-classical period thus became undermined as part of the undermining of secular poetry. We have a wealth of sources on this subject, in the poetry itself as well as in theoretical texts of various kinds, above all the writings of Maimonides, who is much preoccupied by matters concerning poetry, its language, and its content. But on this it is worth expanding elsewhere.

³⁹ For Benveniste's views on the purpose of poetry see Tobi 1988.

⁴⁰ To date no research has been conducted on *ars poetica* in Hebrew poetry in Spain, i.e., considerations of poetry on itself, either as the expression of high self-esteem or as negative criticism. Anyway, even a cursory look reveals the huge difference between poetry in the Muslim era and poetry in the Christian era in this regard.

⁴¹ Schirmann 1961, II, pp. 418–419.

⁴² It is almost impossible not to present in this respect the marvellous verse by Yehuda Ha-Levi from his poem עובר רקיהים (Schirmann 1961, I, p. 493): ואל תשיאך חכמת יוניה / אשר אין לה פרי כי אם פרחים (Do not be seduced by the Greek philosophy, which has no fruit but flowers only). That is, the flowers and the leaves are the external form only, of no value, even if beautiful, as against the fruit, which is the essence and the core. Just as the wisdom of Greece is without fruit according to Ha-Levi, so is the poem in the view of Tordos, having nothing but leaves, and no fruit.

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CHAPTER TEN

MODIFICATIONS OF LANGUAGE AND OF METRE IN HEBREW MEDIEVAL POETRY COMPARED WITH *DARŪRAT AL-SHʿR*, *ẒIHĀFĀT*, AND *ʿILĀL* IN MEDIEVAL ARABIC POETRY

A. *Introduction*

In the long history of Hebrew poetry there was a continuous development in the relationship between metre and content, whose tendency was to disconnect the *conceptual* element from the main *formal* element in poetry. While in Bible poetry metre is based on notional parallelism between the two parts of the stich, in the later schools of poetry metre has become increasingly independent.¹ Nevertheless, until the era of the later Eastern *piyyut* in the ninth and tenth centuries, metre is not autonomous, but largely depends on the content, and accordingly does not have a rigid and ordered array of feet and stresses, and even the value of these is not identical and fixed.²

But in the ninth century, after the Arab philologist al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad (d. 791)³ discovered and formulated the rules of metre in Arabic poetry, Hebrew poets and philologists realized that this element of precise quantitative metre in Arabic poetry was missing from Hebrew poetry. This finding was disconcerting for Jewish scholars because on the one hand they were bound to admit to the pleasantness and quality of Arabic metre, but on the other hand they could hardly admit to the superiority of Arabic poetry to theirs. Consequently, they developed an ambivalent and apologetic attitude to this metre. The first to commit his thoughts on the subject to

¹ Much has been written in Hebrew and in European languages about the structure and metre of the poetry of the Bible. Here we note two articles only: Segal 1939, pp. 90–108; Gordis 1945, pp. 136–159, especially his comments on post-Biblical parallelism poetry, pp. 155–159. See also Barash 1924, pp. 47–52; Yelin 1940, pp. 14–16; Mirsky 1977, pp. 47–49.

² On metre in the ancient Eastern *piyyut* see Mirsky 1967, pp. 174–178; Fleischer 1977a.

³ On him see Sellheim 1978.

writing was Sa'adia (882–942). True, in his own poetry he does not use the Arab metre because he is a neo-classicist, adhering to the original ancient Hebrew *piyyut*.⁴ But in the second version of his book *Ha-Egron* the influence of Arabic rhetoric is readily apparent, as transpires, among other things, from its title, *Kitāb Uṣūl al-Shi'r al-'Ibrānī* (The Elements of the Hebrew Poetry). In the preface Sa'adia makes the claim that 'a book of metres has been lost entirely to people' (ונבי עין אלנאס בנימלה כחאב אלאהת קאד).⁵ When his pupil Dunash b. Labraṭ presented him with his new poems set in the Arabic metre, Sa'adia expressed surprise: 'Nothing like it has been seen in Israel', he said.⁶ Furthermore, a pupil from Sa'adia's school, imitating conventional chronology in the history of Arabic poetry, places metre as a central pillar in determining the chronology of Hebrew poetry from Yose ben Yose to his day. He even uses the specific Arabic term *'arūd*.⁷

Like Sa'adia, and following in his footsteps, the pupils of Mōnaḥem b. Saruq in Spain argued that knowledge of metre 'is lost from our hands because the iniquity is great, and it is vanished from us as the guilt is enormous from the day when they fell into exile'. But they added—ascribing this to Sa'adia—that the use of Arabic metre in Hebrew poetry caused corruption of the language. Dunash, the first in Hebrew poetry to write in Arabic metre, had diverged from Hebrew grammar by establishing metre as an independent component in the poem, whose power superseded that of grammar and content.⁸

I dare suggest that the criticism by Mōnaḥem's pupils of Dunash for his use of Arabic metre in Hebrew poetry be set aside.⁹ But they are undoubtedly right in respect of the tension that arose between metre and language, and the need to depart from the rules of grammar for the purposes of metre. This is not an issue unique to Hebrew

⁴ See pp. 141–142 above.

⁵ See Sa'adia 1969, pp. 150–151. Views of this kind in various domains were expressed by other Jewish sages. See e.g. Maimonides, *Guide to the Perplexed* I:71, on the sciences of philosophy, and on the laws of benediction for the new moon, 17:24, in respect of astronomy.

⁶ Dunash attests thus in his *Criticism* of Sa'adia (Dunash 1866), §31, p. 105. Yahalom 1979a, p. 28, somewhat questions Dunash's understanding of Sa'adia's statements as praise for him and his invention. But see Yahalom 1983, p. 42. And cf. p. 140 above.

⁷ Sa'adia 1969, pp. 388–389. Allony ascribes the phrase to Sa'adia himself, but this is rejected by Goldenberg 1973, pp. 120–121 and by Fleischer 1977, p. 72.

⁸ Compare p. 141 above.

⁹ I hope to expand on this elsewhere.

poetry, but it did appear the moment that this poetry began to be written, by Dunash in the mid-tenth century, in exact quantitative metre. Arabic poetics developed an intricate and elaborate system of rhythmic and linguistic rules, so as to settle and relax the tension that naturally arose from the rule, accepted by poetry, of being written in precise quantitative metre. In this set of rules at times the metre demands modifications in the language, and at times the language demands modifications in the metre. These modifications are well known in the science of Arabic metre (*ʿilm al-ʿarūd*), and are called *zihāfāt*, *ʿilāl*, and *darūrat al-shiʿr*.¹⁰ These are clearly defined and formulated in great detail in medieval Arabic books of language and poetics; they existed in principle in Hebrew poetry also, but were not coherently formulated in Jewish literature owing to the slight engagement of medieval Jewish scholars in poetics.¹¹

Below we set out the normative rules accepted in Hebrew poetry to resolve disagreements arising from the presence of exact quantitative metre in this poetry. We shall seek the roots of these rules in the conventional norms of Arabic poetry.

B. *Modifications of Language*

As stated, Dunash was the first of the Hebrew poets to write in exact quantitative metre,¹² and presumably as a philologist he was also the

¹⁰ See Weil 1965. Also Ibn Abī Shanab 1928; Maling 1973/7, especially appendix A, pp. 93–97. (I am deeply indebted to the late Prof. David Semah of the department of Arabic Language and Literature at the University of Haifa who apprised me of this important article. He also generously enlightened me through his wide understanding in this area of metre in classical Arabic poetry.) On *darūrat al-shiʿr* see Kopf 1976a, p. 23, §8a; Goldenberg 1983 (the Arabic term *zihāf* is misprinted throughout this article as *zikhāf*).

¹¹ The only composition devoted to poetics of medieval Hebrew secular poetry is *Kūtab al-Muḥādara wa-al-Mudhākara* by Moshe b. ʿEzra. Oddly enough, a discussion of metre of poetry is missing, but this discussion might have been presented on pages lost from the only entire manuscript of the composition. See Allony 1979, pp. 53–54. By contrast, compare the list of dozens of books on poetics of Arabic poetry presented by Yelin 1940, pp. 353–354. In the lists of metres compiled by Yehuda Ha-Levi in his short essay on metres and Abraham b. ʿEzra in the book *Šahot*, the modifications are not discussed. See Allony 1951, pp. 117–186. However, I have recently found in the Genizah Firkovitch Collection in St. Petersburg two pages, a vestige of a Judaeo-Arabic work about the irregularities of metre in medieval Hebrew poetry. I hope soon to study these pages.

¹² This is not the place for a discussion of Pinsker's statement 1860, p. 56, that the Karaite poets anticipated Dunash in this respect; and see Brody 1937.

first to be aware of the tension created between metre and language; he refers expressly to this in his writings. It is probably true to say, albeit without evidence, that his remarks on this subject were written in response to the criticism he was subjected to by Mənaḥem's pupils for debasing language in his poetry. In any event, in his *Criticism* of Sa'adia¹³ Dunash devotes a considerable section to a discussion of the subject of דוחק המשקל (constraint of metre) and דוחק ההררזה (constraint of rhyming).¹⁴ The essence of the composition is reservations about Sa'adia's commentaries to the books of the Bible, generally the places where Sa'adia overlooks the principle of the triliteral root or other matters of grammar.¹⁵ But occasionally Dunash takes issue with Sa'adia on questions of grammar that do not arise from his interpretation of a particular word in the Bible. For example, he queries Sa'adia's assertion that out of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew language eleven are prefixed, infixed, or suffixed to words for various purposes (letters forming the mnemonic כה בשלום כה). Dunash believes that the number of such letters is thirteen, as ט and ׀ should be added, for they replace the ה of the הַתפעל conjugation in roots beginning with ה or ז.¹⁶ He likewise sometimes criticises Sa'adia for his linguistic usages in his poetry, for example, in *Essa Məshali*, where Sa'adia writes / וְרִאמוֹת וְכִדְכֹד וְאֶחָדִים / פְּרָקֶת זָהָב וְיָהֳלִים / תְּבוּרַת צֶדֶק הַקְדוּשָׁה, he invents a masculine noun אֶחָדִים out of the feminine noun אֶחָדָה (Exodus 28:19). Dunash believes that one should say וְאֶחָדִים, not וְאֶחָדִים.¹⁷

At one point in his essay¹⁸ Dunash criticises Sa'adia's ruling in his book *Saḥot Lashon Ha-Qodesh* (or: *Kutub al-Lugha*)¹⁹ that personal names not be used with the definite article or with the possessive pronominal suffix and not as on the independent part in the construct form.²⁰

¹³ As we know, some reject the attribution of the composition to Dunash, for example, Badillos 1991. But see Wilensky 1978, pp. 190–194; Oshri 1988, pp. 26–29.

¹⁴ Dunash 1866, pp. 29–39, §§114–140, and also pp. 40–44, §§120–124.

¹⁵ See Tobi 1984.

¹⁶ Dunash 1866, pp. 2–3, §6.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 23, §87. This passage of *Essa Məshali* is preserved in Ms. Adler 2779/12 and was published by Abramson 1974, pp. 51–54.

¹⁸ Dunash 1866, p. 29, §104.

¹⁹ This composition was recently published. See Dotan 1997.

²⁰ On the contradiction arising from Sa'adia's comments, as related by Dunash, as against what may be understood from chapter three of the above composition see Skoss 1955, p. 13, n. 39a.

Dunash takes a contrary view, adducing proof from a short poem referring to Ya'aqov b. Yiṣḥaq b. Jo of Spain:²¹

הַיֵּשׁ בְּעֶקְבִּים / כְּמוֹ יַעֲקֹבנוּ
אֲשֶׁר שָׁבָה יָרִים / וְהָיוּ שׁוֹבֵינוּ
יִזְכּוּ אֶל לְרֵאוֹת / בְּבִגְדֵי עִירנוּ

The writer of this poem is none other than Dunash himself. He thereafter permits forms of this kind, and others, that diverge from the linguistic norm, in that they are supported by parallel forms in the Bible, albeit rare and even unique. This method is of course known from Sa'adia's system: to enrich and expand Hebrew, he regards every word in the Bible, even irregular and unique, a model for imitation. It is even desirable, he asserts, to coin words in the same form from different roots. All this was by the method of syllogism (Heb.: דְּקָשׁ; Ar.: *qiyās*), of which Sa'adia was a proponent in the domain of language.²² But Dunash takes this path not because of the syllogism method, which he dismisses in principle, but because of the constraints of metre, and times even the constraints of rhyming. This principle of the constraints of the poem, caused by the exigencies of its metre and rhyme, exists in Arabic poetry under the name *ḍarūrat al-shi'r*. Kopf and Goldenberg have expanded on this.²³

In sum, Dunash, the founder of exact quantitative metre in Hebrew poetry, was willing to diverge from the grammatical norm for the sake of metre, although he found support for this divergence in rare or unique forms in the Bible.

The following are the main forms that Dunash permits for the *constraints of metre* and the *constraints of rhyming*:

- a. Treating a personal noun as an ordinary noun,²⁴ including
 1. Making definite with the article הַ (Joshua 9:1), הַיֵּשׁ (Genesis 13:3), הַיָּדִי (Numbers 34:14), הַיֵּצְהָר (Zachariah 4:14), הַיְּמִנְשָׁה (Deuteronomy 3:13).

²¹ The poem is presented here with two language amendments according to Allony 1947, pp. 92, 163.

²² Pp. 126–127 above; Yahalom 1986.

²³ See n. 10 above.

²⁴ Dunash 1866, pp. 29–30, §104.

2. Addition of relative and possessive pronominal suffix, e.g., הָרֹאשׁוֹנִי (Numbers 26:7), הַנָּדָרִי (Numbers 34:14), הַשֶּׁלֵּנִי (Numbers 26:20), יַעֲקֹבִנִי (his poem, above).
3. Pluralization, e.g., יַעֲקֹבִים, (his poem, above).
- b. Keeping of the definite article ה after the prepositions ל, כ, ב,²⁵ e.g., בְּהַדָּרָךְ (Nehemiah 9:19), בְּהַשְׁמִים (Psalms 36:6), בְּהַיִּים (Genesis 39:11), בְּהַחֲכָם (Qohelet 8:1), לְהַחֲזִיקָה (Nehemiah 12:38), לְהַמְצִיבָה (2 Chronicles 29:27), לְהַנְדִּיר (2 Chronicles 25:10), לְהַחֲכָם (verse of a poem, apparently by Dunash).²⁶
- c. Rendering the mobile *shava* quiescent, by such means as
 1. Dropping *dagesh* in פָּעַל third person plural past tense,²⁷ e.g., בִּקְשׁוּ (Zephaniah 1:6), and maybe be permitted it in other persons.
 2. Dropping *dagesh* after interrogative ה,²⁸ e.g., הַבְּסוֹד (Job 15:8), הַכּוֹנֶה (Genesis 34:31), הַמַּעַט (Genesis 30:15), etc.
 3. Dropping *dagesh* after definite article ה,²⁹ e.g., הַיָּלִידִים (Genesis 33:1), הַלְלוּיִם (Exodus 6:25), הַשְּׁלֵבִים (1 Kings 7:28), הַנְּשֻׁמוֹת (Jeremiah 33:10), הַמִּקְרָה (Qohelet 10:18; Psalms 104:3), בְּמִכְשָׁפִים (Malachi 3:5), בְּמִסְלָה (Numbers 20:19).
 4. Dropping *dagesh* after formative מ,³⁰ e.g., מִבְּצִיר (Judges 8:9), מִנְּבוֹרָהֶם (Ezekiel 32:30). Yet he allows use of these forms with *dagesh*, e.g., מִבְּצִיר, on the principle of restoration of a thing to its essence.³¹
- d. Retention of ה in future הַפְּעִיל,³² e.g., יְהוֹשִׁיעַ (1 Samuel 17:47), יְהוֹדִיךְ (Psalms 45:18), אֶהְיֶיכָה (in a verse of a poem, apparently by Dunash).³³
- e. Irregular forms of possessive pronominal suffix,³⁴ including
 1. Retention of ה of third person possessive pronominal suffix on a singular noun, e.g., בְּלָהֶם (2 Samuel 23:6).
 2. Retention of ה of third person possessive pronominal suffix on

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 30–31, §105, and p. 37, §110.

²⁶ Allony 1947, pp. 94, 168–169; Yahalom 1983, p. 421, n. 62.

²⁷ Dunash 1866, pp. 33–34, §108.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 40–42, §120. On interrogative ה with *patah* and *dagesh forte* in the following letter, see Yelin 1942, pp. 141–142; Yelin 1933.

²⁹ Dunash 1866, pp. 40–42, §120.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 35–36, §108.

³¹ See Goldenberg 1983, p. 122.

³² Dunash 1866, p. 37, §110; and compare Yahalom 1985, p. 132.

³³ Allony 1947, pp. 93, 166.

³⁴ Dunash 1866, p. 37, §110.

a plural noun, e.g., וְעִנְיָהוּ (Job 24:23), יָדִידָהּ (Habakkuk 3:10),³⁵ and also תְּנַמְלֹחֶיהָ (Psalms 116:12).

3. Retention of ה of third person accusative pronominal suffix on a verb, e.g., יִצְרָנָהּ (Deuteronomy 32:10), וְאֶרְוֹמָנָהּ (Exodus 15:2).
4. Third person plural accusative/possessive pronominal suffix מו on a verb or a noun, e.g., הִנֵּי־עָמוֹ (Psalms 59:12), וְהוֹרִידָמוֹ (ibid.), עָנְבָמוֹ (Deuteronomy 32:32), etc., and also in two lines of his poem:³⁶

וּבְנִיךָ הַבִּינָמוֹ / וְשָׂרִים אֵן תְּשִׁיחָמוֹ
וּבְצֹל כֹּנֵפִי כְרָמִימוֹ / לְהָרִית בְּשָׁמִימוֹ

5. First person singular possessive pronominal suffix נִי on a verbal noun,³⁷ e.g., בְּשׁוֹבְנִי (Ezekiel 47:7).
- f. Verbal noun פְּעוֹת and not פָּעוֹת,³⁸ e.g., שָׁחוֹת (Isaiah 22:13), פָּחוֹת (Leviticus 2:6).
- g. A feminine noun taking the masculine plural form,³⁹ e.g., שָׁנָה—שָׁנוֹת (Deuteronomy 37:2)—אֲשֶׁרָה—אֲשֶׁרוֹת (2 Chronicles 33:3)—אֲשֶׁרִים (Isaiah 27:9).
- h. Prefixing the letters ב, ה, ו, כ, ל, מ, ש before a verb in past tense,⁴⁰ e.g., הִחֲלִכֹנָא (Joshua 10:24), בִּהְכִּין (2 Chronicles 1:4).
- i. Rare forms for the sake of rhyme or metre,⁴¹ e.g., הַשְּׁמוֹר, הַשְּׁפוֹט, הַעֲבוֹר, according to יִשְׁפוֹטִי (Exodus 18:26), or הַשְּׁמָעוּהוּ, according to וַתִּתְקַנְהוּ (Judges 20:32).

There can be no doubt that Dunash had no intention of legitimising and permitting all these forms in Hebrew. He meant them only for the purposes of poetry, as transpires from his presenting proof for several of the forms from his own metred poems, and especially from express comments referring to poetry as in paragraph (i) above:

You may make it הַשְּׁפוֹט and הַשְּׁמוֹר and הַעֲבוֹר because of the *constraints of metre*. Say the three of them with שָׂרָק [ū vowel] if you have to

³⁵ Ibid., p. 31, §105.

³⁶ The two lines are given here with language amendments according to Allony 1947, pp. 92–93, 163.

³⁷ Dunash 1866, p. 31, §105.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 38, §112.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 31, §105.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 43, §124, and see p. 39, §114. Also compare Yahalom 1985, pp. 159–160.

⁴¹ Dunash 1866, p. 33, §108, and p. 49, §142.

because of the *constraints of rhyming*, and what is in the same form as *הַזְכוּר*, make it like that, as it conforms the rule. Similarly *יִשְׁקִיט* conforms the form *הַזְכוּר*.

Similarly regarding (e5):

Do not wonder regarding the unique irregular word found in the Bible and do it according to the rule of the metre and write it according to the same metre with which all the words conform, like *בְּשִׁיבִי*. You may then say in the same form *בְּקִיבִי*.

As for (b) above Dunash states:

Be aware regarding these three letters, namely *כ*, *ב*, *ל*. You have to use them with the same metre as in your whole poem, if your words may be metred only with the addition of the definite article *הַ* and if the metre does not flow except with a modification.

That is, in contrast to Sa'adia, who regarded the use of rare forms and forms inferred from them by syllogism as a desirable way of embellishing and expanding the language, Dunash allowed them only because of the constraints of metre and rhyme. These two approaches are in fact parallel to two approaches found in the Arabic books of philology and poetics.⁴² But the Arabs tended more to limit the use of rare forms and forms inferred from them owing to the constraints of the poem. This was the approach that Dunash adopted, and after him the philologists and poets in Spain such as Yonah b. Janāḥ and Moshe b. 'Ezra.⁴³

Dunash practised what he preached. Apart from the irregular forms in his poems, which he himself pointed out in his book *Criticism* of Sa'adia, other unusual forms are present too, for which he himself was criticised by the pupils of Mənaḥem. His own pupil Yəhudi b. Sheshet, who was obliged to defend him, admitted that this was a major departure from the syllogism method. Yəhudi b. Sheshet refers to a number of subjects:⁴⁴

- a. Rendering quiescent *shava* mobile, and the reverse, according to the word *הַקְשִׁיבָה*, which appears in the Bible once with quiescent (Psalms 55:3: *הַקְשִׁיבָה*) and once with mobile *shava* (Daniel 9:19: *הַקְשִׁיבָה*), and similarly with other words.

⁴² This was pointed out by Goldenberg 1983, pp. 120–121.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 134 ff.

⁴⁴ Stern 1870, I, pp. 49–50; II, pp. 22–25, 30, 39–40, 42–43.

- b. The word נָעַל, which Dunash presents in the construct form with שָׁוָה, according to the word סָחַר, found in the Bible in construct form with שָׁוָה: סָחַר בְּסָרַי (Proverbs 3:14).
- c. The word עֲבוּר, instead of בְּעֲבוּר, justification for which he finds in the word עֲמַת (Qohelet 5:15) besides the word לְעֲמַת.
- d. The word בְּשִׁמְרִים (בְּשִׁמְרִים), to which formative כ is prefixed before the verb in past tense. Justification for this form is found in the word כְּטוֹב (לֵב הַמֶּלֶךְ) (Esther 1:10), which he interprets as a past-tense verb and not as a verbal noun, and also in the word בְּהִכִּין (2 Chronicles 1:4) to which Dunash has already had recourse in his *Criticism* of Sa'adia.⁴⁵
- e. The pointing of conjunctive ו in the phrase שִׁית וְשִׁמִּיר with *qamaṣ* and not *shava*, even though שִׁמִּיר has the accent on the last syllable and not on the first. The grounds for this pointing, he says, is the word בְּאִרְנָה (Judges 9:41), where ב is with *qamaṣ* and not *shava*, even though the Massorah drops the א in pronunciation.

Dunash and his pupils thus present a different outlook from that of Mənaḥem and his pupils regarding the constraints of the poem. The latter group negated any possibility of violation of the linguistic norm because of the constraints of the poem, while the former allowed it, although only by syllogism from rare and irregular forms present in the Bible. Even then, it was only because of the constraints of the poem, and not for embellishment and expansion of the language, as was Sa'adia's method. Common to the two parties, who frequented the court of Ḥisdai b. Shaprut in Cordoba, is their establishing the Bible as the exclusive linguistic model. They utterly rejected the language of the Sages and *paytanim* of the East. Even in his poetic work Mənaḥem keeps close to the biblical norm for Hebrew language, although occasionally he is constrained—because of the rhyme, of course, as he did not write in exact quantitative meter—to devise forms. Examples are שְׁבִירֹן—שְׁבִירֹן; עֲצִירֹן—רְשָׁפוֹת; אֲנָפוֹת—רְשָׁפוֹת.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Yahalom 1985, pp. 160–161.

⁴⁶ Schirmann 1955, I, pp. 8–9, 30. Davidson 1928, pp. 297–299, published two songs of praise by one poet. The first is signed מְנַחֵם. If our discernment is correct as regards preservation of the biblical norm in the poems of Mənaḥem b. Saruq, it will apparently be hard to attribute these two poems to him. There are many linguistic innovations in them compared with the Bible, not necessarily due to the demands of the rhyme. But see Fleischer 1988, pp. 248 ff., who re-publishes these poems with completions, and demonstrates that their author is indeed Mənaḥem.

How did the poets of Spain after the generation of Mənaḥem and Dunash act?

The conventional norm, as represented by Moshe b. 'Ezra, rejected syllogism in principle, even for the constraints of the poem, and did not countenance it with verbs or with nouns. It also precluded derivation of nouns from verbs or verbs from nouns.⁴⁷ Yet this norm was certainly not upheld to the letter. For example, Yiṣḥaq b. Khalfūn made up many words in the nominal pattern פְּעִילָה, and took the example of unusual forms to create words by inference.⁴⁸ Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid likewise coined words for the sake of metre and rhyme.⁴⁹ Moreover, the poets of Spain resorted to various linguistic traditions of the Bible—Babylonian and Tiberian—when hard pressed for forms in their poems.⁵⁰ But this leaning to latitude arising from the constraints of the poem, characteristic of the first generations of the poets of Spain, steadily waned in later generations, when the theory of language finally crystallized in the time of Moshe b. 'Ezra and Yəhuda Ha-Levi. Language was made ever more pure; not only was syllogism because of the constraints of the poem denied, the use of unusual forms as in the Bible was also frowned upon.

C. *Modifications of Metre*

Another way of resolving the tension between language and metre was to introduce certain modifications into the patterns of the metre, and adapt them to the language. Note that the growth of exact quantitative metre in Arabic poetry was a natural, long-lasting process. Only after centuries were its different patterns distinguished and its rules formulated by al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad. With Hebrew poetry, how-

⁴⁷ See Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, pp. 202 ff. Indeed, regarding verbs, precision was less strict. See the comments by the editor Halkin, *ibid.*, pp. 17–18; and compare Pagis 1976, pp. 64 ff.

⁴⁸ Mirsky 1961, pp. 25 ff., especially pp. 40–44.

⁴⁹ Yarden, in Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid 1966, pp. 15–28; Ratzaby 1967; Ukashy 1999, pp. 13–17. Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 63, writes on the Nagid: 'His enviers and his negators among his generation and subsequent ones assailed him because of flaws in certain verses and some error in the Hebrew grammatical inflexions and conjunction, and because of his syllogism with some of the given names'. These remarks are undoubtedly an echo of the fierce controversy over allowing or forbidding syllogism in poetic language.

⁵⁰ See Tobi 1973; Ukashy 1999.

ever, metre was inserted artificially, as a sudden, almost brutal act, which wholly altered its appearance. Naturally, this act was accompanied by a great commotion, such as the objections of the pupils of Mənaḥem. Furthermore, in Arabic poetry, before the creation and formulation of developed patterns of exact quantitative metre, the *rajaz* metre had existed. This in fact is an iambic metre, a kind of *awtād* (◡—◡—) only, four or six in each line; from it sprang the other patterns. But Hebrew poetry had sophisticated metrical patterns imported into it right from the start.

In a clear-cut dialectical way we may say that Arabic poetry and its language existed before metre, while the Hebrew poetry under discussion was created after metre. The result was that the system of modifications of metre (*zihāfāt* and *ʿilal*) generated in Arabic poetry for the purpose of easing the tension between language and metre was more highly perfected and richer than that generated in Hebrew poetry. The latter was obliged to adapt to the rules of metre. Note also that in Arabic poetry the distinction between a short and a long vowel is not so rigid and absolute (when these vowels do not constitute part of the *watad*) as in Hebrew poetry.⁵¹ In Hebrew poetry every pointed vowel is a long vowel in metre, and every mobile *shewa* and every kind of *ḥataf* is a short vowel in metre, without any possibility of diverging from this distinction. By contrast, in Arabic poetry, even before we come to the allowances made by the rules of *zihāfāt* and *ʿilal*, still greater latitude exists, such as two adjacent short vowels (*sabab thaqīl*) joining to form one long vowel (*sabab khafīf*). Also, a short vowel at the end of a word (with an open syllable) instead of rhyming at the end of the verse is considered a long vowel (e.g., e.g., اكل). Furthermore, in Arabic poetry two kinds of *awtād* exist (at least in theory, although some deny this): *watad majmūʿ* or *maqrūn*, namely a short vowel and a long vowel, and *watad mafrūq*, a long vowel and a short vowel. Neither of these possibilities exists in Hebrew poetry because Hebrew does not have two consecutive *shewas* (or *ḥatafs*), or a *shewa* (or *ḥataf*) that is not followed by a vowel. Since Arabic metre is not constructed on simply short and long vowels, but on certain feet, which themselves are assemblies of *ashāb* and *awtād*, in fact those assemblies with two adjacent short vowels (*wāfir—mufāʿalatun; kāmīl—mutafāʿilun*) or with *watad mafrūq* in them (the fourth

⁵¹ For a detailed discussion of the metres of Arabic poetry see the articles listed in n. 10 above. See also Semah 1983a.

cycle in al-Khalīl's system, containing the six metres *sarīʿ*, *munsariḥ*, *khafīf*, *muḍārīʿ*, *muḡtaḍab*, and *mujtath*, among whose feet are *fāʿilatun*, *mafʿūlāt*, and *mustafʿilun*,⁵² are not possible in Hebrew.

Furthermore, the sixteen metres isolated by al-Khalīl (more precisely fifteen, the sixteenth being disclosed by al-Akhfash not long after him) are no more than basic patterns (*uṣūl*) out of many dozens of different metres (*furūʿ*).⁵³ In fact, the determination of these sixteen basic patterns, based on al-Khalīl's famous five cycles, necessitated disregard for most of the other metres and the establishment of a fairly flexible system of exceptions from these patterns (*furūʿ*). The number of basic assemblages became a fixed datum after al-Khalīl's labours, although in principle it could have been much larger (as indeed happened later in the *muwashshḥāt* that were not set in the classical metres). Likewise the exceptions from the basic patterns, which were recognised as legitimate and permitted, had their rules set down expressly, and a name was given to each mode of irregularity.⁵⁴ Here we shall make do with general definitions of two main kinds of irregularities:

- a. *zihāf* (plural *zihāfāt*; literally release, relaxation): irregular and variable change in the second consonant or in the quiescent letter of the *sabab*. A change of this kind may come in the metrical feet called *hashw*, i.e., all the feet of the meter, including the last one in the first hemistich of the verse—*ʿarūd*, and the last one in the second hemistich of the verse—*ḍarb*.
- b. *ʿillah* (plural *ʿilal*; literally illness, flaw): a more considerable change, appearing regularly and invariably in all the verses of the poem, be it in the *asbāb* or in the *awṭād*, but only in the feet *ʿarūd* and *ḍarb* (apart from a few exceptional cases, which this is not the place to give details).

The *zihāfāt* may be divided into two groups:

- a. In *sabab khafīf*: dropping of the second consonant or the quiescent letter in the *sabab*, which results in a short vowel instead of a long vowel, e.g., *mustafʿilun* > *mutafʿilun* (or as usually denoted *mafʿilun*); also *fāʿilun* > *fāʿlun*.

⁵² See Weil 1965, p. 670; Semah 1977.

⁵³ See Weil 1965, p. 671.

⁵⁴ See Ibn Abī Shanab 1928, pp. 8–20; Maling 1973/7, pp. 93–97.

- b. In *sabab thaqīl*: rendering the second consonant in the *sabab* quiescent (*taskīn al-muḥarrak*), which results in one long vowel instead of two short vowels, or *sabab khafīf* instead of *sabab thaqīl*, e.g., *mutafā'ilun* > *mutfā'ilun*; also *mafā'ilatun* > *mafā'iltun* (or as usually denoted *mafā'ilun*).

It is thus possible to define the *ziḥāfāt* as an omission that causes a slight and irregular rhythmic change. By contrast, the *'ilal* (which as stated are only in the last foot of the first hemistich of the verse and of the second hemistich of the verse) can be of two kinds in this respect: omission (*naqs*) or addition (*ziyāda*). For example,

a. Omission of

1. *sabab khafīf*, e.g., at the end of a foot: *fā'ūlun* > *fā'ū* (or as usually denoted *fā'al*).
2. *sabab khafīf* and the vowel before it, e.g., *mafā'ilatun* > *mafā'il* (or as usually denoted *fā'ūlun*).
3. the short vowel at the beginning of the *watad*, e.g., *mustaf'ilun* > *mustafun* (or as usually denoted *maf'ūlun*).
4. *watad majmū'*, e.g., at the end of a foot: *mustaf'ilun* > *mustaf* (or as usually denoted *fā'lun*).

b. Addition of

1. a long vowel in *sabab* at the end of a foot, e.g., *mafā'ilun* > *mafā'ilān*; also *fā'ilātun* > *fā'ilātān* (or as usually denoted *fā'ilayān*).
2. a long vowel in the last syllable of *watad majmū'* at the end of a foot, e.g., *mustaf'ilun* > *mustaf'ilān*; also *fā'ilun* > *fā'ilān*.
3. *sabab* after *watad majmū'* at the end of a foot, e.g., *mustaf'ilun* > *mustaf'ilātun*; also *fā'ilun* > *fā'ilātun*.

All these modifications, namely of *'ilal*, which are regular and invariable changes, and not of *ziḥāfāt*, create from the eight fundamental feet of Arabic metre thirty-seven secondary feet (*furū'*). The use of these modifications is not subject to the poet's free choice, but they are specific to these or other metres, such that each of the sixteen fundamental metres has secondary meters, totaling one hundred and three in all. Of these, thirty-six are according to modifications that apply to the *'arūd* (the last foot in the first hemistich of the verse) and sixty-seven according to modifications in the *ḍarb* (the last foot in the second hemistich of the verse).⁵⁵ Note that in this entire

⁵⁵ See Weil 1965, p. 672.

ramified and plentiful system of changes there is hardly any impairment of the *watad* through the dropping of the short or the long vowel in it. As has been incontrovertibly proved,⁵⁶ the *watad* is perceived in Arabic poetry as an autonomous unit, which suffers no alteration of the *zihāfāt* kind, nor of the *ʿilal* kind, except for its being dropped wholly at the end of a foot. The place of the *watad* is preserved, except for the last foot in the first hemistich of the verse and in the second hemistich of the verse, in which it is possible to drop it entirely, or only the short vowel at its beginning.

All in all, Arabic poetry was more accommodating than Hebrew regarding the status of metre in it. Owing to the properties of Arabic and the history of Arabic poetry the exact quantitative metre was more adaptable to it than to Hebrew poetry. In the latter the possibilities of variegation of metre were comparatively limited.

Turning now to the exceptions to the fundamental metres in Hebrew poetry, we shall try to find which of them originate in the theory of Arabic metre and which grew up only in Hebrew poetry, as a result of various constraints. As intimated above, in contrast to the major preoccupation with *ʿilm al-ʿarūd* in Arabic poetry in the Middle Ages and in modern scholarship, little work has been done on the theory of metre in Hebrew. None of the many known lists of metres in medieval literature until the eighteenth century refers to exceptions to the fundamental patterns, and modern research likewise has hardly done anything to examine and classify these exceptions. Needless to say, no names have been invented for them, as they were in the Arabic *ʿilm al-ʿarūd*. Only David Yelin researched the metres of Shōmuʿel Ha-Nagid, and not by chance. This poet made great use of diverse metres that branch off from the basic patterns—far more than any other medieval Hebrew poet.⁵⁷ In fact, apart from Ha-Nagid, those poets used the secondary forms of the fundamental patterns of the quantitative metres very little.

Of the two main kinds of Arabic meter, *zihāfāt* and *ʿilal*, the Hebrew poets used only the latter. It was unthinkable for a Hebrew

⁵⁶ Semah 1983a.

⁵⁷ D. Yelin, 'Metres in the Hebrew Poetry of Spain (according to the poetry of Ha-Nagid)'; 'List of Poems by Ha-Nagid According to Their Meters', in Yelin 1975, pp. 107–133. At the end of his remarks on metres of the Hebrew poetry of Spain, Yelin writes (1940, p. 53): 'Various modifications may be present in every metre. A full list of all the metres brought into being by these modifications will be presented at the end of the book'. But there is none.

poet, ever since the time of Dunash, to convert a long vowel into a short one, that is, at certain point in the poem to insert a *shava* or a *hataf* instead of a vowel, which we observed in Arabic poetry in the first group of *ziḥāfāt*. As for the modifications of the second group, namely joining two short vowels into one long one (turning *sabab thaqīl* into *sabab khafīf*), this was quite impossible in Hebrew poetry as the language does not tolerate two consecutive short vowels—two *shavas* or two *hatafs*. It is hard to say for sure what prevented the Jewish poets from changing a long vowel into a short one. It might have been due to the strict formalist perception of the difference between these two types of vowel, which had crystallized already in the Tiberian Eastern Hebrew philology before the entry of Arabic metre into Hebrew poetry, as may be seen from the abundant preoccupation of the Eastern philologists with the *shava*.⁵⁸ But as stated, Arabic poetry and its metres preceded Arabic philology and its sharp distinctions between a long and a short vowel. The Jewish poets therefore found it more convenient to modify the language than the metre. They made the mobile *shava* quiescent and the reverse, or used rare forms from the Bible and even created similar forms by syllogism that diverge—even irregularly—from the metre so as to facilitate its use. All that is stated here refers to poetry of one-rhyme poems, that is, in the structure of the Arabic *qaṣīda*. In the *muwashshahāt* the poets allowed themselves local and one-time-only modifications, usually by the addition of a vowel.⁵⁹

We may say then that of the system of irregularities in Arabic metre, Hebrew poetry adopted only *ʿilal*, namely invariable changes appearing throughout the poem. This could be by deletion, that is, turning a *yated* into a *ṭnuʿa*, e.g., וּפְעָלִים > מְחַפְעָלִים, and even converting a long vowel into a short one, e.g., מְפֹלְלִים > מְחַפְעָלִים; or by addition, as in the examples we showed above in Arabic poetry. Excluded, of course, is dropping a long vowel and a short vowel before it,⁶⁰ since this array, which exists in Arabic, is not possible in Hebrew as in fact it is identical with the *yated*. Also excluded is the addition of a long vowel in the *sabab* or in *watad majmūʿ*,⁶¹ because these forms do not exist in Hebrew either.

⁵⁸ Allony 1988, p. 599; Allony 1979, pp. 52–59.

⁵⁹ See Yelin 1940, p. 54, n. 1, a poem of Yehuda Ha-Levi. Other examples may be cited from the *muwashshahāt* of Moshe b. Ezra.

⁶⁰ See paragraph a2 in the above list of *ʿilal*.

⁶¹ See paragraphs b1–2 in the above list of *ʿilal*.

By contrast, Hebrew poetry did not observe two elementary rules of exceptions in Arabic meter. (a) *ʿilla* can only be in the last foot in the first hemistich of the verse or in the second hemistich of the verse (while in Hebrew poetry it is found also in the other feet). (b) Rarely, *ʿilla* can impair the *watad* (while in Hebrew poetry many of the modifications are created by deletion of the short vowel in the *yated*, and again, not only in the final foot but also in the others, e.g., נִפְעָלִים > מִחֻפְעָלִים). For example, the *long* metre with its modifications determined by Dunash is famous: פְּעוּלִים מְפֻעָלִים פְּעוּלִים פְּעוּלִים נִפְעָלִים נִפְעָלִים מְפֻעָלִים > מְפֻעָלִים. In general the Jewish poets often shortened the foot מִחֻפְעָלִים or פְּעָלִים in the various metres, such as the *shalem* (Ar.: *kāmīl*) metre and the *qaluaʿ* (Ar.: *ramal*) metre. This tendency to shorten the *yated* into a *ṭnuʿa* stems from the relative paucity of short vowels, namely *shəwas* and *ḥatafs*, in Hebrew, in contrast to Arabic.⁶² They had no hesitation about dropping all the short vowels in the *mutadārak* (Heb.: *mashlīm*) metre, consisting of four feet of *fāʿilun* (Heb.: פְּעָלִים) (in the first or the second hemistich of the verse), and thereby creating a meter consisted of long vowels only, without *yatedot*—four feet of נִפְעָלִים.⁶³ This was quite opposed to the spirit of the Arabic metre, structured on the distinction between short and long vowels.

Another means of change, which belongs neither to the *zihāfāt* nor to the *ʿilal*, is a rhythmic addition at the beginning of the verse. In Arabic *ʿilm al-ʿarūd*, this mode is known as *khazm*.⁶⁴ This too is encountered in Hebrew poetry, but only in the work of Ha-Nagid.⁶⁵

Great freedom was available to the Arab poet by virtue of an ancient poetic tradition. Throughout many centuries its bearers were certainly not aware of its theoretical minutiae until al-Khalīl came, who discerned and formulated them. Such freedom was not at the disposal of the Hebrew poets. They adopted Arabic metre owing to a sense of inferiority of a people whose ancient poetry had not been schooled in a precise and meticulous method of rhythm. Not only were they like men haunted by the spectre of the Arabic metre, with

⁶² Allony 1979, p. 115; Mirsky 1961, pp. 25–29; Yahalom 1983, pp. 42–43.

⁶³ See Yelin 1975, pp. 116, 120, 129; Yahalom 1983, pp. 55–57, sees this metre as a modification of the *mutaqārib* metre (פְּעוּלִים פְּעוּלִים פְּעוּלִים פְּעוּלִים).

⁶⁴ See Maling 1973/7, p. 97, §32.

⁶⁵ Yelin 1975, p. 123, the *pashuʿ* metre, ʔ 15–17, addition x at the beginning of the verse.

which they first became acquainted in theory and only afterwards in practice. They were forced also to turn their attention to another front, that of meticulous criticism by philologists and grammarians. These were not imbued with the spirit of poetry, and their irascible preciousness damped down the poet's spirit of freedom. Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid was unique, not only in his generation, in that his proud nature was unwilling to submit to the purists of language or to those bent on the pursuit of symmetry and rigidity. In metre and language alike, he gave free rein to his poetry. But the poets who followed him, among them Moshe b. 'Ezra and Yəhuda Ha-Levi, succumbed to the stringent requirements of poetics in the domains of language and metre; still, their poetic gift gathered strength to forge paths for itself despite these constraints.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE SOURCE OF ALḤARĪZĪ'S *TƏNA'E HA-SHIR* (CONDITIONS OF POETRY) IN *AMŪD AL-SHIR* OF ARABIC POETRY

A. *The Formulation of the Principles of Poetry in Arabic Poetics*

Yəhuda Alḥarīzī elaborated upon many Arabic *maqāmas*, written by Hamadhānī, Ḥarīrī, and other Arab writers, and then included them in his *maqāma*-form work, *Taḥkəmoni*.¹ This is so despite Alḥarīzī's explicit declaration in the introduction to that book that nothing taken from Arabic sources is included in it. Moshe b. 'Ezra was likewise closely attached to Arabic poetics in his work *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-al-Mudhākara*, as he, unlike al-Alḥarīzī, states in his introduction. Yet Alḥarīzī was greatly influenced by Arabic poetic writings beyond the elaboration of *maqāmas*. Moreover, through the discovery of Alḥarīzī's Arabic poetic source it may be possible to decipher a *prima facie* inconspicuous reference by Ibn 'Ezra to Arabic poetics.²

Like many Oriental and Adalusian Arab *maqāma* writers, Alḥarīzī devotes a considerable part of his *Taḥkəmoni* to literary criticism. In the third and eighteenth chapters, as well as most of the last five chapters, he takes an almost hostile attitude to non-Spanish Hebrew poets.³ In the third chapter he deals with Hebrew Spanish poets only, delineating the speciality of each poet and placing Yəhuda Ha-Levi above all. In the eighteenth chapter he compares Hebrew Spanish poets to other poets. Following Ibn 'Ezra's conclusion that Arab poets excel every nation's poets, Alḥarīzī similarly points out the distinct supremacy of Spanish Hebrew poets over the Eastern and other foreign poets. Then he evaluates the poetry of the four great Hebrew Spanish poets, Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid, Shəlomo Ibn

¹ See Kayyāl 1991, p. 9.

² On the influence of Arabic poetics on Ibn 'Ezra's book see Dana 1983; On the influence on his *Maqālat al-Ḥadīqa fī al-Majāz wa-al-Ḥaqīqa* see Fenton 1997.

³ Concerning this question, the additions to the published version of *Taḥkəmoni* that Stern (n.d.) made from various manuscripts are crucial.

Gabirol, Moshe b. 'Ezra, and Yəhuda Ha-Levi. Finally, in reviewing their work Alḥarīzī classifies all the poets in five grades.

However, between pointing out the Hebrew Spanish poets' supremacy and presenting a detailed estimation of each poet's creativity, Alḥarīzī signifies *כִּי יֵשׁ לְשִׁיר שְׁבַע עֲנָאִים וּבָהֶם יֵעָרֵב וַיִּנָּעַם / וַיְהִי דְרָכָיו* (That poetry has seven rules, whereby a poem becomes sweet and pleasant, and its paths become paths of pleasure. Whoever does not observe these rules, his poetry will be fit only for trampling upon).⁴ Actually, with these seven rules (*təna'im*), Alḥarīzī summarised Hebrew poetics as influenced by Arabic poetry, in his opinion. Indeed, the *təna'im* did enjoy a certain attraction by some scholars;⁵ however, nothing is stated about these *təna'im* in relation to a similar set of seven principles of *'amūd al-shi'r* in Arabic poetics.

Alḥarīzī's formulation of the seven *təna'e ha-shir* is not the first of its kind for Hebrew poetry. As noted above in chapter four, Sa'adia had already attempted in *Ha-Egron* to base Hebrew poetry on three elements, as follows: (a) the acrostic at the beginning of the verse, (b) the rhyme at its end, and (c) the contents in the middle.⁶ Although Sa'adia was referring to the *piyyut*, the ancient Eastern Hebrew school unaffected by Arabic poetry, his formulation is Arab in its spirit. By comparison, Alḥarīzī not only borrows the formulated rules for Hebrew poetry from Arabic poetics, he deals with Hebrew poetry, which is itself heavily influenced by Arabic poetry.

The attempt of medieval critics of poetry to determine poetic principles is part of the numerical systematisation that is so typical of medieval Arab and Jewish scholars who were influenced by Greek philosophy. The first concern of Arab critics was to define poetry in order to differentiate it from Qur'ānic verses, the heavenly prophecy of Muḥammad. These verses were designated by Muḥammad's opponents, the wealthy and arrogant merchants of Mecca, as ordinary Arabic poetry. The original Arabic definition of poetry is very simple, that is, a certain notion rendered in a rhymed and rhythmic wording. After Aristotle's *Poetics* was translated into Arabic in the tenth century, Arab scholars, mainly philosophers, tried to find another

⁴ The English translations throughout this chapter are from Reichert 1963/75.

⁵ See Pagis 1976, pp. 61, 211; Schippers 1994, pp. 65–69. For a Spanish translation of the eighteenth chapter of *Tahkemoni*, see Navarro-Vegas 1982.

⁶ See above, pp. 137 ff.

definition, influenced by that of Aristotle, less technical in nature.

By the second half of the ninth century, Arab critics were required not only to suggest a definition of poetry, but also to determine the characteristics of good poetry. This demand was too early to be a response to Aristotle's *Poetics*, nor was it a result of the controversy over Muḥammad's Qur'ān. It was the outcome of a social and literary situation arising from a dispute between the supporters of two Abbasid poets, Abū Tammām (d. 845) and al-Buḥturī (d. 897): Whose poetry was superior? Underlying this quarrel were different attitudes to *badī'*, the form developed by the Abbasid poets under the influence of Persian culture. The essence of *badī'* was the deliberate intensification and prolific use of five rhetorical devices, which were uncommon and accidental in pre-Abbasid poetry: metaphor, paronomasia, antithesis, epanalepsis, and hyperbole.⁷ Abū Tammām leaned to the new style (*badī'*) while Buḥturī leaned to the old one. It is related, that when asked to compare his poetry with Abū Tammām's, Buḥturī responded that his fellow-poet made more effort towards meaning, while he himself proceeded more in accordance with *'amūd al-shi'r*.⁸ He thereby coined the term to be used for some centuries to signify the positive qualities of ancient Arabic poetry, which was natural and spontaneous; he was not receptive to the weight of artificial rhetoric.

As shown by scholars of Arabic poetry,⁹ the concept of *'amūd al-shi'r* was developed by medieval Arab theorists of poetics. The two most significant were al-Āmidī (d. 980) in his book *Kitāb al-Muwāzana Bayn Abū Tammām wa-al-Buḥturī* and 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Jurjānī (d. 1001) in his *Kitāb al-Wasāta Bayn al-Mutanabbī wa-Khuṣūmihi*. Āmidī's contribution to the definition of *'amūd al-shi'r* is double: (a) it signifies that the poetry of a poet who adopts this concept is natural; (b) it characterises this concept by certain properties in conformity with Buḥturī's poetry—exposition of the poem's theme, smooth transition from the opening (*nasīb*) to the main subject, appropriate wording, suitable expression, lucidity, and comprehensible words.

Jurjānī generally did not associate *'amūd al-shi'r* with the distinction between ancient, natural poetry and later, artificial poetry. Nevertheless, he produced a clear definition of the term, including

⁷ These five devices are mentioned by Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1935, as already noted by many scholars. See e.g. 'Ajāmī 1981, p. 40, n. 39. And compare chapter nine above, n. 6.

⁸ 'Ajāmī 1981, pp. 30–31.

⁹ For a monograph on *'amūd al-shi'r*, see 'Ajāmī 1981.

six principles by which poetry critics could determine the virtue of poets within the framework of excellence and beauty. The principles are (a) exaltation and soundness of meaning, (b) eloquence and truth of language, (c) accuracy of description, (d) proper similes, (e) abundant improvisation, and (f) significant use of proverbs and proverbial poetic verses. Jurjānī alleged that Arab poets and poetry critics did not ascribe any importance to paronomasia, antithesis, metaphor, and other rhetorical devices, as long as the requirements of *‘amūd al-shiʿr* and the structural rules of the *qaṣīda* were observed.

‘Amūd al-shiʿr reached its last phase in the highly important introduction by Marzūqī (d. 1030) to his commentary on Abū Tammām *Ḥamāsa*.¹⁰ Marzūqī isolated seven principles (*khiṣāl*: singular; *khaṣla*: qualification) based upon Jurjānī’s as well as Āmidī’s definitions. As ‘Ajāmī has shown, the seven-principled *‘amūd al-shiʿr* disappeared from Arabic poetics literature after Marzūqī. Nonetheless, many of its principles were interwoven in certain books like *Kitāb al-ʿUmda* by Ibn Rashīq (d. 1063), and *al-Mathal al-Sāʿir fī Adab al-Shāʿir wa-al-Kātib* by Ibn al-Athīr (d. 1239). To these we may add some other later books, such as *al-Muqaddima* by Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406).

In any event, it is clear that the spirit of *‘amūd al-shiʿr* in its different formulations, especially that of Marzūqī, inspired the two major critics of medieval Hebrew poetry writing under the influence of Arabic poetry. These are, as stated, Moshe b. ‘Ezra (d. after 1138) in *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-al-Mudhākara*, and Alḥarīzī in *Taḥkamonī*, as well. The focus of this study is on Alḥarīzī.

B. Alḥarīzī’s Seven *Təna’e* Ha-Shir and *‘Amūd al-Shiʿr*

As mentioned, Alḥarīzī described the use of the seven *təna’e ha-shir* as a means of determining the value of a poem. To the degree that the *təna’im* are observed, the poem is of superior quality. He applied this model to explain the inferiority of non-Spanish Hebrew poets. In this sense, the background to Alḥarīzī’s *təna’e ha-shir* was entirely different from that of *‘amūd al-shiʿr*. Specifically, the context of Alḥarīzī’s discussion is not personal, as was the controversy between the fol-

¹⁰ See Marzūqī 1951, pp. 8 ff. For a study of Marzūqī’s introduction and his seven rules of *‘amūd al-shiʿr*, see Abū ‘Īsā 1983, pp. 211–219.

lowers of Abū Tammām and of Buḥturī. Nor is it chronological, as was the dispute between the supporters of ancient Arabic poetry and of the *badī'*. It does not concern attitudes to the distinction between natural and artificial poetry either. The background to Alḥarīzī's criticism is geographical. As a proud Spaniard, he probes the distinction between Spanish Hebrew poetry and Hebrew poetry of other countries. In this issue he was undoubtedly influenced by Moshe b. 'Ezra, who had devoted the entire fifth chapter of his book to 'Why the exiles in Spain are better at writing Hebrew poems and rhetorical essays and letters than those living in other countries'. Nevertheless, the teacher went further than the pupil; whereas Alḥarīzī dealt with the subject of non-Spanish poets, Ibn 'Ezra did not trouble to write a single word on the work of non-Spanish poets, except for those who had lived in Arabia prior to Islam. Alḥarīzī, on the other hand, in respect of four of his *təna'im* (nos. 1, 3, 4, and 5) notes that non-Spanish (Greek, Babylonian, French, and Damascene) Hebrew poets did not observe that specific *tənai*, hence their poetry is inferior. Alḥarīzī's discussion proceeds on a chronological basis with only one *tənai* (no. 2). He mentions 'our generation's poets', whose poetry is defective since they do not strictly use the rhythm.

Here is the first *tənai* of Alḥarīzī:

The poet must clear the words of his poems of all dross, and remove every discordant word from his text, lest he be like the Byzantine poets who fill their poems with foreign words along with the splendid ones. They mingle flowers with thorns, pearls with pebbles, and mother-of-pearl with thistles. Therefore, all their poems are bizarre, and the language weak, and the expressions perverted.

The source of this *tənai* is the second principle of *'amūd al-shi'r* as formulated by Jurjānī and Marzūqī. This is *jalālat al-lafz wa-istiḡāmatuhu* (the eloquence of utterance and its correctness). The poet, as Marzūqī wrote, has to be aware that any word he chooses for his poem must be noble not only for itself, in its separate form, but also for the frame of the poetic phrase. If the words are joined by an inappropriate expression, the entire phrase will be worthless.

The second *tənai* is as follows:

The poet must pay attention to the metre and the syllables of the poem. He must not add to nor subtract from the metre of his phrases, lest he be like the poets of our generation, the metre of whose poems is irregular, now too few [feet], now too many. For they do not pay heed to metre, and they do not know if the line has too much or too little.

In contrast to Āmidī and Jurjānī, who do not include the issue of rhythm in *ʿamūd al-shiʿr*, Marzūqī deals with it in his fifth principle, yet differently from Alḥarīzī. Marzūqī mentions the association of the parts of the poem, taking into account its rhythm, and the resulting pleasure caused by hearing it. Rhythm, says Marzūqī, must fit the poem so that it will be as one verse, and its recitation will be continuous, without any disturbance. According to Marzūqī, a piece of versification does not reach the rank of poetry unless it causes excitement and ‘melting with pleasure’ on the part of the listener. Alḥarīzī does not mention the aspect of aesthetic enjoyment caused by hearing a scanned poem, with the possible exception of a veiled hint at the end of the *ṭanai* (‘[. . .] and they do not know if the line has too much or too little’). In spite of this, Saʿadia, and of course Ibn ʿEzra, attributed special sweetness to the ear when it hears a scanned poem.¹¹ Alḥarīzī’s position on rhythm is thus very formal, in accordance with the tendency so characteristic of Maimonides’ followers, such as Yaʿaqov b. Elʿazar and Shem Tov b. Falaquera. They grant some significance to rhyme and rhythm only insofar as they make it easier for the listener to grasp the conceptual message contained in the scanned and rhymed poem.¹² Yet the great significance given by Alḥarīzī to rhythmic accuracy, by defining it in the second *ṭanai*, may match a development that occurred in later Hebrew poetics, namely attention to the structural elements of the poem, rhyme and rhythm, almost to the exclusion of everything else.

Alḥarīzī, then, wished to observe rhythmic accuracy in the poem, but on the other hand to disallow the addition of words to the poetic verse so as to complete the number of short and long vowels required by the specific rhythmic structure of the poem: these additions may spoil the poem. However, this device of addition was well known in classical poetry as a recommended rhetorical device, namely *tabliḡh*, the tenth of Ibn ʿEzra’s list of twenty devices. The difference of opinions concerning that device in Hebrew poetics is comprehensible in light of the different views on the subject of Arabic poetics. While Ibn Rashīq counts it in his list of devices (chapter sixty-one), Qudāma b. Jaʿfar (d. 922) negates and disqualifies it, claiming that its use impairs the poem.

¹¹ See above, p. 140.

¹² See Tobi 1990a; Ben Elʿazar 1993, chapter II, p. 26.

The third *tnai* is as follows:

The poet must take care that the themes of his poetry are strong, molten in the crucible of rhetoric, lest he be like the bards of Baghdad whose themes are withered, thin, the rhetoric devoid of all poetical worth. Among them there is no man who can draw from his intellect deep water. For the rope is broken, the bucket is cracked, the waters are spilled out, and the vessels are empty.

The *tnai* originates in the first principle of *‘amūd al-shi’r*, as formulated by Jurjānī and Marzūqī, *sharaf al-ma’nā wa-ṣiḥḥatuhu* (the loftiness and truthfulness of the utterance). This means that what is said in the poem should be exalted and acceptable by the standard of pure logic; otherwise it will be considered as lies and nonsense. Alḥarīzī also requires that the wording of the poem be sensible, so that it will arouse interest among scholars. This is expressed after the presentation of the seven *tna’im* as follows:

Therefore, every poet must take care that the themes of his poetry [...] are] strong and the language forceful, in order that they may please the intellectuals.

Of course, Alḥarīzī matches the issue of content with that of language, namely, that the poem must not only properly express the concepts, but it must also be exalted, not simple and pedestrian. This affinity between significant concept and strong wording recurs numerous times in words put by Alḥarīzī in the *maggid*'s mouth, *Heman Ha-Ezrahi*, concerning the protagonist poems *Hever Ha-Qeni*. Examples are: ‘when I heard the strength of his poem and its soundness, and the eloquence of his wording’ (chapter three); ‘and when I heard the eloquence of his words and the power of his proverbs’ (chapter twenty five).

The fourth *tnai* is as follows:

The poet must take care that his poems are readily understood, and that all of them are comprehensible to a connoisseur, lest he be like the poets of France, all of whose poems are full of confusion and need to be clarified.

This *tnai* was already one of the most important principles of *‘amūd al-shi’r* in Āmidī's remarks concerning lucidity of content and the possibility to comprehend the poem. Jurjānī was more specific when speaking about the proper use of metaphor (*shabbaha fa-qāraba*, ‘he compared one thing to another, but he did not go far in the

comparison'). Likewise, Marzūqī stated in his fourth principle, *al-muqāraba fī al-tashbīh* (convergence in the comparison), that the best simile is that which fulfills two requirements: that which is common among their features (of the simile and the item or idea) is more than that which is different, so that the similitude occurs without any difficulty. Furthermore, what is required of the metaphor is the best-known and most essential element of the actual item. In fact, Marzūqī returned to this issue in his sixth principle, *munāsabat al-musta'ār minhu li-al-musta'ār lahu* (the relation of the metaphor to the real). Marzūqī's position is generally in favour of the use of metaphor: 'the parts of poetry are three: common proverbs, rare simile, and close metaphor'. This is in contrast to those people to whom he refers in his discussion on the metaphor, at the top of his list of figures of speech in the eighth chapter of his book. Those people categorically negated 'borrowed language.'

Alḥarīzī did not explicitly list the factors which render a poem incomprehensible. Yet he obviously did not include profundity of concept in this category, since in the third *ṭnai* he speaks of that profundity in positive terms, as he does likewise, in his judgement of the Provençal poets ('they have profound poetry. Their themes are good and strong, but are not sweet and pleasant like the poetry of Spain'). In addition, in this *ṭnai* Alḥarīzī does not mean incorrect grammatical usage as a factor making the poem incomprehensible, since he deals with that issue separately in the fifth *ṭnai*. We must infer that he intended to mean the usage of 'borrowed language' that is hard to understand because of the remoteness of the simile. Perhaps an allusion to this idea lies in Alḥarīzī's criticism of the French poets, repeated later:

Among the Jews of France, I have seen mighty scholars, brilliant as the lofty stars. In all culture, their hearts were like the Great Sea. They did not desist from learning anything, whether small or great. But as for the poetry that they compose, I attended and listened, but they spoke not right. Indeed, their themes are vile. They are not fit to hear. Their poems are hard as iron, laden with iniquities as the goat 'Azazel. All their rhymes are full of blunders. *They try to be profound in their poetry in order to be original.* But no man can understand them, except with a commentary. And there are commentators of their poetry, but the commentary requires a commentary.

Apparently, the words emphasised in the passage are levelled by the critic against the use of remote 'borrowed language', which necessitates

a commentary alongside the poem. Despite, or perhaps because of the prevalence of *badī'* in Arabic poetry since the end of the ninth century, the Arab critics negated not only the remote metaphors, but also a large quantity of metaphors in general as well, and sometimes even the metaphor in essence. Some of these critics, such as Jurjānī and Marzūqī, claimed¹³ that the best aspect of the poem is not its falsehood (*aḥsan al-shi'r akdhabuhu*), but its truth (*aḥsan al-shi'r aṣdaquhu*). In a later age Ibn Khaldūn, too, very definitely negated the conscious usage of rhetorical devices in poetry, not to mention prose.¹⁴

Alḥarīzī, however, does not negate the metaphor in essence, and certainly not the various rhetorical devices. This may be inferred from his creative work, which, by its very nature as *maqāma*, was influenced by the *maqāmi* works of the Arab writer Ḥarīrī, and possibly was one of the peaks of medieval Hebrew literature in the use of *badī'*. Moreover, from Alḥarīzī's theoretical discussion he seems not to negate the use of metaphor or of embellished *təna'im* in general. After delineating the seven *təna'im* he states that there are three kinds of poets in accordance with three categories of audiences: 'the class of fools, the class of intellectuals, and the class of critical poets'. For the fools, the themes of the poems should be 'plain and simple'; for the intellectuals, 'strong themes and forceful language', meaning profound themes and suitable wording; and for the poets whose interest lies in the craft of poetry, and not in its contents, 'pure art and beautiful style'. Ha-Levi, in Alḥarīzī's view, did well by utilising these three qualities in his poems; Ibn Gabirol's poems are suitable for the intellectuals, not for the fools, because of the poetry's profound themes; Moshe b. 'Ezra's poems should please the poets due to their rhetoric. In any event, Alḥarīzī is quite far from the position of the Arab theorists of poetics, as he does not disqualify the use of metaphor unless it is remote.

The fifth *tənai* is as follows:

The poet must guard his poetry from grammatical errors, lest he should seem like the poets of Damascus, more especially like Yiṣḥaq ben Barukh, the physician, all of whose poems are like broken potsherds, like straw without wheat. All his words are strange; his waters are bitter, and his themes are colder than snow. His heroes are weaklings;

¹³ For a detailed discussion of Jurjānī's views on 'borrowed language' see 'Ajāmī 1984, p. 58; for Marzūqī's views see Abū 'Īsā 1983, p. 219.

¹⁴ See Ibn Khaldūn 1958, volume III, pp. 406–407.

his men are effeminate; his saints are Sodomites; his utterances are full of blunders in phrases, words, and letters. He trusts in the fools who praise his poems, who lightly heal his pangs. They know not whether he exults or laments, whether he is a poet or a braying ass.

Grammatical accuracy is not mentioned by the three Arab poetry critics (Āmidī, Jurjānī, and Marzūqī) since this issue was beyond the scope of Arabic poetics; it certainly was absent from the controversy as to whose poetry, Abū Tammām's or Buḥturī's, was superior. By contrast, Hebrew poetics, ever since it was first influenced by Arabic poetics in Sa'adia's *Ha-Egron*, and even more in the works of Dunash ben Labrat, treated the obligation of the poet to grammatical strictness, while simultaneously contending uncompromisingly with *pay-tanic* linguistic permissiveness. One century and a half after Yehuda Ḥayyūj had set down the rules of Hebrew grammar, and approximately a century after Yona b. Janāḥ had summarised them, Moshe b. 'Ezra still found it necessary to exhort the young poet to be accomplished in Hebrew grammar. This of course, was not because improper grammatical usage was an actual issue; the call was made on behalf of tradition, this being a central issue in secular Hebrew poetry in Spain since its inception in the second half of the tenth century. In contradistinction, it seems that Alḥarīzī's criticism of Eastern poets of linguistic accuracy derived from the decadence of Hebrew language among those communities, as may be inferred from other contemporary evidence, too.¹⁵

The sixth *ṭnai* is as follows:

When the poet finishes his poem, he must not hurry to show it until he has polished it. He must not leave its filth upon it, nor its defilement upon its skirts. But he must remove from it all its mockeries, and he must clear away all its dross, lest he be like the foolish poets who before they perfect the poem, show it to the congregation and the community, and before their thought has travailed, bring it forth.

This *ṭnai* too is absent from the *'amūd al-shi'r* principles, although it was raised in Arabic poetic literature, as may be seen from the following passage in Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima*.¹⁶

After a poem is finished, [the poet] should revise it carefully and critically. He should not hesitate throw it away, if it is not good enough.

¹⁵ Tobi 1991b, pp. 203–205.

¹⁶ Ibn Khaldūn 1958, III, p. 385.

Every man is fond of his own poetry, since it is a product of his mind and a creation of his talent.

Likewise, Ibn 'Ezra warns the practising poet not to boast about his poem, and charges him to check it repeatedly and to present it before others in order to garner reliable criticism before presenting the poem in public.¹⁷

Apparently, the great number of poets in the non-Spanish communities visited by Alḥarīzī who dared to publish their poems, inferior in Alḥarīzī's estimation, impelled him to return to the issue of self-criticism in the seventh and final *tənai*. However, Alḥarīzī might have fixed seven as the number of *tənai'im* on his list, and he returned to a subject already covered, just to complete the tally. This is almost exactly paralleled in Marzūqī's principles, where the author repeats in his sixth principle an issue already addressed in a previous one (his fourth), in order to ensure a total of seven principles.

The seventh *tənai* is as follows:

The poet must select *for preservation* some of his poems, and discard some. He must choose thirty out of fifty and forty out of seventy. Then will his poetry be as faithful as a most beautiful bride.

Alḥarīzī ignored two principles of Marzūqī's *'amūd al-shi'r*. These are the third, *al-iṣāba fī al-waṣf* (accuracy of description), which is not of value, and the seventh, *mushākalat al-lafẓ li-al-ma'nā wa-shiddat iqtidā'ihima li-al-qāfiya ḥattā la munāfara baynahumā* (matching the words and the contents, and the strength of their necessitating the rhyme so that there will be no contradiction between them). Presumably, Alḥarīzī regarded these two principles as already included in the first principle, and more specifically, in the fifth principle of *'amūd al-shi'r*; these correspond to his second and third *tənai'im*. Marzūqī summarises his discussion of *'amūd al-shi'r* thus:

These principles are *'amūd al-shi'r* in the Arabs' eyes. He who is attached to them in their truthfulness and he who builds his poem upon them, is a highly gifted poet in their eyes and worthy of praise. He who does not apply them wholly will receive his share of excellence and success, according to the extent that he accepts them. This is agreed by all, and has force, and is a common custom, which we follow nowadays.

¹⁷ See Dana 1983, pp. 222–224.

Alḥarīzī likewise presents a brief summary, using it as a provisional format for his detailed and categorical poetry criticism, positive with regard to Spanish poets and negative with regard to non-Spanish poets:

By observance of these measures, the art of poetry was mastered by the people of Spain. They were wedded to their art. But apart from them, it was as one divorced. With them, their art was sanctified and sacred. With the others, it was profaned, a prostitute.

C. Saʿadia Maṣṣūra's Seven Təna'e Ha-Shir
(Yemen, Nineteenth Century)

Earlier we noted ʿAjamī's conclusion that the *ʿamūd al-shiʿr* as a whole, in the manner that Marzūqī formulated it, was no longer included in the works of poetry critics who lived later than Marzūqī. In Hebrew poetics it was otherwise. Not only did Alḥarīzī, in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries utilise Marzūqī's work in formulating his own *təna'im*, a nineteenth-century Yemenite poet, Saʿadia Maṣṣūra (d. before 1880) also included seven *təna'im* of poetry in the introduction to his *ḏiwan*.¹⁸ His seven *təna'im* are essentially based upon Alḥarīzī's, albeit with many modifications required by the different life and social-literary needs of nineteenth-century Jewish Yemen, as compared to those of the Jewish Mediterranean communities of the early thirteenth century.

These *təna'im* of the Yemenite poet are as follows:¹⁹

The first *tənai*: The poet must clear his words of all dross, and their [the dross'] companions will be on their own side. The companions should be arranged in one voice of a scream.

The second *tənai*: The poet must observe the metre of the poem and its syllables. He must not add to or subtract from the metre of his phrases. Thus the poems will not be broken, sometimes lacking, sometimes superfluous. He must pay heed to metre; he must know if the line contains too much or too little.

The third *tənai*: The poet must be aware lest he, God forbid, com-

¹⁸ These seven *təna'im* were originally published by Bacher 1911, pp. 51–53. On the similarity between these *təna'im*, and those of Alḥarīzī, see Idelsohn 1931, pp. 357–359. Both Bacher and Idelsohn did not identify the author's name. About the author, see Maṣṣūra 1955, Introduction.

¹⁹ The English translation given here is based on the text published by Idelsohn 1931. For a critical edition, this version should be compared with exact manuscripts.

pare sanctified things to those of Sodom. His utterances must not be full of blunders in words, prepositions, and letters.

The fourth *tənai*: The poet must take care that his poems are readily understood and that all of them are comprehensible to a connoisseur, and that they are not full of confusion with the need to be clarified.

The fifth *tənai*: [During the poetry reading] to silence the group so that it will not be like a cross-road, like the market place. He should guard himself from grammatical errors, lest his poems be like broken potsherds, like straw without wheat, lest his words be strange and his water be bitter.

The sixth *tənai*: He must not hurry to show his poems among his fellows and community members, but rather read them alone. Then he will read it and his taste will be blessed. He will not be embarrassed if he reads it from a script. The words of the wicked and of those who mock the reciter [in the original Hebrew: *mashorer*] who reads from a script will not enter his ears.

The seventh *tənai*: But he should choose from the poems a part of them, and discard the other part. He should choose thirty from among fifty, and forty from among seventy. However, he should read it as a whole; then he will be a master of wisdom and integrity.

A comparative glance shows that Maṣūra accurately took from Alḥarīzī the first, second, fourth, sixth, and seventh *təna'im*, while omitting Alḥarīzī's negative attitude to the poets of certain countries; he made minor linguistic modifications. Maṣūra's innovations are in the remaining two *təna'im*. The third *tənai* reflects an ethical-religious attitude to poetry, in the form of a warning not to use sacred expressions for the description of profane themes. Medieval poets had permitted themselves to write in this manner; however, the post-exilic poets, already influenced by the Kabbala, were very strict on this issue. They explained the poetic theme of love in an allegorical manner, namely love between God and *Knesset Israel*, or between the soul and the body, etc.

In the fifth *tənai*, Maṣūra mentions the necessity of maintaining silence during a gathering for poetry recitation, in accordance with the custom of Yemenite Jews. This custom developed from the notion that poetry was principally devoted to religious celebrations, and the fact that poems were heavily laden with religious motifs. Thus, the attitude to poetry and its recitation was akin to that to prayer in the synagogue. This is completely different from the milieu of Spanish secular poetry. The *mashorer* mentioned in the sixth *tənai*, then, is not the poet, but the reciter, the singer. At the end of the fifth *tənai* Maṣūra, like Alḥarīzī, adds the issue of being strict concerning adherence to grammatical rules.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

ARISTOTLE'S *POETICS* IN MEDIEVAL JEWISH LITERATURE

A. *Introduction: Translation of the Poetics into Arabic and the Commentaries on It in Medieval Arabic Literature*

Aristotle's (384–322 BCE) *Poetics* was compiled in about 330 BCE. More than 1200 years later Sa'adia Gaon (882–942), the first of the sages of Jewry to turn his mind to Hebrew poetics,¹ began to engage in the subject. The *Poetics* had not yet been translated into Arabic, the language of culture in that era, and also the language of Jewish academic literature. In 902 Sa'adia wrote the first, Hebrew, version of *Ha-Egron*, which is the first composition in Hebrew literature to deal with poetics, as indicated by its Arabic title, *Kitāb Uṣūl al-Shi'r al-Ibrānī*. Several years later he wrote the expanded Arabic version of *Ha-Egron*. This essay, in both its versions, while clearly evincing the influence of Arabic poetics literature is still devoid of any impact of Aristotle's views of poetry.² The *Poetics* itself was translated into Arabic only in the tenth century, before 932, by Abū Bishr Matā b. Yūnus al-Qunnā'ī (d. 940) from the Syrian translation of the ninth-century Nestorian monk Ishāq b. Ḥunayn. But the conventional opinion, as expressed by Hack, is: 'From these translations we realise that in the Middle Ages Aristotle's *Poetics* was not understood. Greek poetry was far from the grasp of Syrian and Arab scholars. They made gross errors in it'.³

¹ A few elements of the theory of literature may perhaps be found in several texts of ancient Tiberian philology. See, e.g., the list of eighth-century Karaite terms published by Allony 1988, p. 109. The use of the Arabic term *muṣawwītāt*, quoted in the Tiberian philological literature, and also found in the Arabic translation of the *Poetics*, does not of course indicate an Aristotelian influence; it is simply the use of an early Arabic term by the translator of the *Poetics* (Allony 1988, pp. 330–331). On the translation of the *Poetics*, see below.

² On *Ha-Egron* and Sa'adia's poetics theory see chapter 4 above. On the possibility of the presence of an Aristotelian idea in *Ha-Egron* see p. 154 above. For more on this subject see below.

³ Aristotle 1947, p. 60.

This translation, which is almost literal, apparently served the scholars of Islam, in particular the two important interpreters of the *Poetics* in Arabic literature: Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) (980–1034) in *Kitāb al-Shifāʾ*⁴ and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) (1125–1198) in *The Middle Commentary*.⁴ Yet still earlier than Abū Bishr passages from Aristotle in the realm of logic were cited by Arab authors, such as al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 869), undoubtedly according to Arabic translations that have not survived and are unknown to us. To al-Kindī (d. 873), sometimes described as the greatest of the Arab philosophers, is attributed an abstract of the *Poetics*, while al-Fārābī (d. 950) wrote an essay on the art of poetry, *Maqāla fī Qawānīn Šināʿat al-Shiʿr*, based on Aristotle's work.⁵

Needless to say, every Arabic work was part of the spiritual world of the scholars of Jewry in the Middle Ages in the sphere of Arab-Islamic culture, in the East, in North Africa, and in Spain, to whose influence they were exposed. So it is reasonable to suppose that the overt and covert traces of the *Poetics* in Arabic literature made their way into the Judaeo-Arabic literature too.

B. *The Attitude of Arabic Literature to the Poetics*

In fact, the *Poetics* was not appropriate for Arabic (and Hebrew) poetry, or for the concepts of its poets, for in this work Aristotle deals with the literary genre of tragedy from Homer's time to his own. He argues that Greek tragedy in terms of prosody was indeed written in the form of a poem, in which metre was an essential ele-

⁴ On Ibn Sīnā's commentary to the *Poetics* see Dahiyat 1974. On Ibn Rushd's interpretation see Hardison 1970. For Ibn Rushd's various essays on Aristotle's books of logic (the *Organon*), including the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*, see Badawī 1960, Introduction, pp. 1–15. Aristotle's 'Short Commentary' of the *Organon* was translated into Arabic and published in Riva De Trento 1560 under the title כל מלאכה כל המין לארסטוטלו מקצור אבן רשד הפלוסוף הנדול (All the Works on Logic by Aristotle from the Abridgements of Ibn Rushd the Great Philosopher). Only one small page was assigned to the *Poetics*, and it contains nothing to expand our knowledge on the issue. The 'Middle Commentary' of the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics* was translated into Hebrew by Todros Ha-Todrosi in 1337 in Provence. The translation is very poor because of the translator's imperfect knowledge of Arabic. The commentary to the *Rhetoric* was published by Jacob Goldenthal 1842, and the commentary to the *Poetics* was published by Fausto Lazineo (Ibn Rushd 1872). From these translations a Latin rendering of the *Rhetoric* was done by Abraham di Balmas and of the *Poetics* by Jacob Mantino; thus Ibn Rushd's commentaries were disseminated in Europe.

⁵ Cantrino 1975, p. 66.

ment, but it mainly concerned the narration of events. By contrast, Arabic poetry in its very nature was lyric. Although it was commonplace to state *al-shiʿr—dīwān al-ʿarab*,⁶ that is, Arabic poetry records the history of the Arab tribes prior to Islam, this means simply that the faint and blurred memories of historical events figure in it as allusions through occasional words, names of persons and places, or the appellation of the *ayyām*, namely the days on which famous battles were fought. But nowhere in Arabic poetry is there to be found an epic akin to Homer's. It certainly has no tragedies written in the form of a poem telling well-known tales of antiquity. In the time of the Umayyads (660–750), and thereafter under the Abbasids (750 on), Arabic poetry distanced itself still farther from the few epic elements that had existed in it earlier.

Most surprisingly, even the Arab writers—the philosophers among them, not the theorists of poetry, who belonged to the Aristotelian school and therefore pored over the *Poetics*—did not apply their minds to this difference between Arabic poetry, their heritage, and Greek tragedy, in respect of which Aristotle wrote his work. The principal reason was that fine Greek literature had not been translated into Arabic, and not even the adherents of Aristotle among the Arabs and the Jews had any real notion of it.

The *Poetics* concerns tragedy and similar genres, which indeed are written in the form of the poem; but they are not lyric poetry.⁷ But Arab (and Jewish) authors, seeing the word *shiʿr* (poem) as the rendering of the word *poiesis*, thought that it meant lyric poetry, as they knew it from Arabic (and Hebrew) poetry. Maimonides writes about poets in his *Maqāla fī Ṣināʿat al-Manṭiq* (Book of the Words of Logic) discussing the art of poetry: 'They beautify things and condemn by image and by mimesis of other things'. Thus he affixes Aristotelian mimesis to the poems of praise and of rebuke in Arabic poetry, in keeping with the Arab understanding that a tragedy in the *Poetics* is a poem of praise while a comedy is a poem of rebuke.⁸ Drinking

⁶ Ibid., pp. 20–26.

⁷ Aristotle 1947, pp. 26–27; Aristotle 1961, pp. 7 ff.

⁸ Maimonides 1935, p. 51; Pines 1960, p. 134; Cantrino 1975, p. 71. The *Maqāla fī Ṣināʿat al-Manṭiq* was written originally in Judaeo-Arabic, but only fragments of the source remain. These are contained in the Israel Efros edition, New York 1939, pp. 5–19. In any event presumably in the Judaeo-Arabic original Maimonides wrote *takhyīl wa-muḥākā*. Maimonides 1935, p. 70, lists the *Poetics* as the eighth of Aristotle's books of logic, which in the Middle Ages were known by the general title *Organon*.

songs, poems of love and passion, of nature, of parting, and of philosophy, which developed mainly in the era of the Islamic empires, after the Arabs had become permanent city-dwellers, were lyric poems in their very essence. But the Arab authors did not ponder Aristotle's view that lyric poetry does not enter the domain of mimesis at all.⁹

True, the term *mimesis* was difficult for medieval Arab writers to grasp. It was usually rendered by the Arabic word *muḥākā*, but generally this word was replaced or augmented by the words *takhyīl*, *tashbīh*, *tamthīl*, whose meaning is simply 'image' in the rhetorical sense.¹⁰ As no epic poetry existed in Arabic literature, and the Greek literature that was the subject of the *Poetics* was not translated into Arabic and was not known to the Arabs, they could not comprehend the poetic sense of the term *mimesis* as defined by Aristotle. Furthermore, in the *Poetics*¹¹ Aristotle deliberates on the importance of metaphor, and in the *Rhetoric*¹² on the special status of metaphor in poetry. This helped Arab commentators to understand the term *mimesis* in the rhetorical sense. True, the Arabs could not break free of the conventional notion of poetics, namely that it deals chiefly with rhetoric and prosody. The Arab theorists of poetry hardly considered the essence of poetry and the constitution of the parts of the various kinds of poem, the *qaṣīda*, the *maqṭūʿa*, and the *muwashshaḥ*, or its content, being praise, rebuke, complaint, remorse, wine-drinking, nature, love, and the like. Arabic books on poetics are no more than lists of metres (including a discussion of legitimate possibilities of departure from the accepted structures), of rhetorical means (*badīʿ*) to one degree or another of detail, of motifs, and of metaphors, and discussions of the language of poetry. Very rarely does an Arab theorist concern himself with a real question of poetics; examples are the famous passage in the book by Ibn Qutayba (d. 889), which discusses the content and structure of the *qaṣīda*,¹³ and the book by Ibn Sanāʾ al-Mulk (1949) on the *muwashshaḥ*.

We may illustrate the Arabs' mistaken notion of mimesis through the Hebrew translation by Todros Ha-Todrosi of Ibn Rushd's expo-

⁹ Spiegel 1972, pp. 19–20.

¹⁰ On the *muḥākā* in Arabic literature see Cantrino 1975, pp. 70–79; Rūbī 1983, pp. 71–101.

¹¹ 1457b, ll. 6–33; 1459a, ll. 16–22; 1461a, ll. 16–22 (Aristotle 1961, pp. 98–100, 101, 113).

¹² Book 3, chapter 2, 1460b, ll. 120 ff.

¹³ Ibn Qutayba 1865, pp. 6–7; Scheindlin 1974, pp. 7–24.

sition of the *Poetics* in a passage taken from the beginning of the book,¹⁴ as against the original.¹⁵

Ibn Rushd's Commentary

Every poem and every poetic text is either rebuke or praise. Thus it is regarding the crafts, which imitate the craft of poetry, which are playing the violins and the drums, and dances [. . .]. The poetic sayings, these are the imitating texts.

The *Poetics*

Epic poetry and Tragedy, Comedy also and Dithyrambic poetry, and the music of the flute and of the lyre is most of their forms, are all in their general conception modes of imitation.

Ibn Rushd does not know what dithyrambic poetry is, so he ignores it; he understands epic poetry and tragedy as a poem of praise, and comedy as a poem of rebuke; imitation he takes to be simile. Instead of considering tragedy and comedy as mimetic works, he finds himself discussing Arabic *qaṣīdas* of praise and rebuke (*maḏīḥ* and *hijāʿ*). So not surprisingly, subsequently Ibn Rushd adds his own interpretation, not through translation or paraphrase, in which he leads from the element of simile in the 'poetic texts' to 'kinds of image and simile', which are 'three, two simple and three more compounded'. According to his interpretation, the reference is to three kinds of figures of speech: simile, metaphor, and genitive metaphor, which Aristotle discusses in chapter 21 of the *Poetics* as part of the style of speech in tragedy. That is, Ibn Rushd explains mimesis as a simple rhetorical term.

Incidentally, Aristotle discusses metaphor relatively briefly, but Ibn Rushd dilates on this subject, as befits one versed in Arabic poetry, whose figurative language is its flesh and blood.¹⁶ Furthermore, he defines the six different kinds of figures of speech that he distinguishes as imitation, according to the view that mimesis is metaphoric language. Naturally, he adds purely rhetorical matters, such as the sixth kind: 'the Arabs are renowned for it, namely placing inanimate objects instead of speaking creatures', which Aristotle discusses, as he himself notes, 'in the book of rhetoric and he mentioned that Homer referred to it abundantly'.¹⁷

The Arabs, then, took the *Poetics* to be a book about rhetoric. So did one of the most important Muslim Aristotelians, the converted

¹⁴ Ibn Rushd 1872, pp. 1–2.

¹⁵ 1447a, ll. 14–16 (Aristotle 1961, p. 49).

¹⁶ Ibn Rushd 1872, pp. 19–21.

¹⁷ *Rhetoric*, book 3, chapter 11, 1411b, ll. 20 ff.

Baghdadi Jew Nətan'el Abū al-Barakāt (d. 1164/5), who severely criticised the Arab theorists of poetry and Arabic poetry. He took as his ground the *Poetics*, which he described as a book dealing with rhetoric: 'The author called this kind "rhetoric", whose meaning in Arabic is *shī'riyya* (poetics)'.¹⁸

From all the foregoing, we will not find an influence of the *Poetics* in the books of the Arab theorists of poetry. That is, nothing in the *Poetics* could attract their attention except the rhetorical and prosodic matters noted in passing in Aristotle's work. Hence, other than sporadic and casual references, we will not discover signs of the *Poetics* in these books.

By contrast, we do find its mark explicitly and at length in the books of the philosophers, who came to occupy themselves with poetics through their involvement in Aristotelian philosophy. But for the most part, as stated above, their engagement was based on an erroneous understanding of Aristotle's doctrine. The main matter that these philosophers wished to learn from the *Poetics* concerned the definition of poetry. But here too they were caught up by the formal, not the qualitative aspect. The traditional Arab definition stated that a certain content written in rhyme and metre is a poem.¹⁹ It is well known that Aristotle negated this formal definition (in that he referred, of course, to metre alone, and not to rhyme, which does not exist in ancient Greek poetry): he does not agree with those who call writers poets not by virtue of mimesis, but simply by virtue of metre. He adds that other than metre there is nothing common to Homer, who wrote poetry, and Empedocles, who wrote scientific works on subjects of nature and medicine in poetic metres. Homer deserves to be called a 'poet' and Empedocles is best called a 'physicist'.²⁰ Indeed, all the Arab Aristotelian philosophers emphasise that it is not metre that determines the quality of the poem, and they severely criticise the traditional perception in Arabic poetry that treats philosophical and scientific essays and entertaining stories written in metre and rhyme as if they are poems.²¹ Ibn Sīnā likewise avers that if narrative matter like that in *Kalīla wa-Dimna* were written in

¹⁸ Pines 1960, p. 130, translation from Arabic according to Abū al-Barakāt 1938, III, p. 276. For a discussion of this personality see Pines op. cit.

¹⁹ Cantrino 1975, p. 44; chapter 4, above, p. 138.

²⁰ *Poetics* 1447b, ll. 15–20 (Aristotle 1961, p. 50).

²¹ Pines 1960, pp. 132–134.

metre, it could not be considered poetry.²² But on this point the Arab philosophers diverged from Aristotle's perception, which states expressly²³ that

the poet or 'maker' should be the maker of plots rather than of verses, since he is a poet because he imitates, and what he imitates are actions. And even if he chances to take an historical subject, he is none the less a poet; for there is no reason why some events that have actually happened should not conform to the law of the probable and possible, and in virtue of that quality in them he is their poet or maker.

That is, the materials from which the work is constructed do not determine its quality as poetry. On the contrary, if the work in question is one of tragedy or comedy, which Aristotle discusses in the *Poetics*, the content necessarily is an account of some event in history or some other domain. The chief thing is the way in which the narrative material is elaborated, namely imitation, mimetic reworking. As for metre, although it does not determine the quality of tragedy or comedy as poetry, it is an essential component of them, according to the actual Greek literature that Aristotle had before him, namely Homer's epics and the tragedies and comedies of writers who succeeded him.

In sum, the Arab authors tried to cope with the qualitative questions discussed in the *Poetics*, and to apply them to Arabic poetry. But they failed, because they did not plumb the fundamental difference between mimetic Greek poetry, with which Aristotle was concerned, and lyric Arabic poetry.

C. *The Influence of the Poetics on Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-al-Mudhākara by Moshe b. 'Ezra*

Let us now study the impressions of the *Poetics* on the only book of the Spanish period that was devoted to Hebrew poetics in Spain, namely *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-al-Mudhākara* by Moshe b. 'Ezra.²⁴ As already noted, medieval Judaeo-Arabic literature is a part, albeit self-contained, of Arabic literature of that period; this is certainly the

²² Ibid., pp. 132–134.

²³ *Poetics*, 1451b, ll. 27–30 (Aristotle 1961, p. 69).

²⁴ See Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975. On the author's poetics theory and his secular poetry see Pagis 1970; on its affinity with the Arabic books of poetics see Dana 1983.

case with the works on poetics. Accordingly, Ibn 'Ezra's work did not differ from the poetics literature of the Arab authors as regards the minor influence on it of the *Poetics*. It did not enter the field of Arabic Aristotelian philosophical literature, which approached criticism of Arabic poetry using an Aristotelian yardstick despite its being faulty. Aristotle is indeed cited several times in Ibn 'Ezra's work, but almost always with a modification of the spirit of the original texts, arising from lack of fundamental comprehension of the literature on which they turned. Now we shall move on to those matters originating in the *Poetics* that are discussed in Ibn 'Ezra's essay.

1. *The difference between rhetoric and poetics*

Ibn 'Ezra devotes the first chapter of his book to a discussion of rhetoric, and the second to a discussion of poetics. This distinction stems from Aristotle, the first in Greek literature to differentiate poetics from rhetoric and to write a monograph on it.²⁵ Ibn 'Ezra uses the accepted terms of Arabic literature for each of these pursuits: *khiṭāba* and *ṣan'at al-shi'r*. Presumably, he was acquainted with the Arabic translations of the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*, as well as the works of the Arab philosophers on them. Yet in these chapters Ibn 'Ezra does not discuss the meanings of the terms according to Aristotle's sense, namely the theory of speaking, in which the element of logic is important, and to which the rhetorical means are subject, as against the theory of mimetic poetic works. Instead he explains them as representing two different kinds of literature: prose as against poetry. This division into *nathr* (dispersed) as distinct from *naẓm* (joined by means of metre and rhyme) stems from Arabic literature. The Arabs greatly debated, for example, which was preferable, prose or poetry,²⁶ and Ibn 'Ezra too expressed the various views on the question.²⁷ In any event, this division clearly contradicts Aristotle's outlook, which certainly did not distinguish rhetorical from poetic literature according to metre. Incidentally, Ibn 'Ezra devotes most of the early chapters to the Arabic names of these two kinds in Hebrew literature, and not to a qualitative discussion of them.

²⁵ Aristotle 1947, pp. 42–43.

²⁶ P. 155 above.

²⁷ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 27.

2. *The Content of the Poetics*

At the beginning of chapter eight in his book, Ibn 'Ezra defines the content of the poetics thus:²⁸

The goal of the philosopher in the eighth part of his writings on logic, which is called Poetics, in the art of poetry, is to clarify the difference between poetry and prose. He defines it with the definition that distinguishes them, and teaches us if poetry is a metred text or a non-metred text, and if there is a measure to its metres and its units and its kinds or if they have no measure. He also speaks of matters in which there is advantage and beauty to poetry, of equal aspects between it and prose and of aspects in which it differs from it.

Anyone even slightly acquainted with the *Poetics* will easily discern that these statements by no means reflect its content. One should ponder the fact that its essence, the concept of mimesis, the structure of tragedy, and epic poetry, is not mentioned at all. Ibn 'Ezra concentrated on nothing but subjects that served for the Arabic and Hebrew poetry of his day, especially metre, and did so entirely disproportionately to their weight in Aristotle's writing.

3. *The Role of Metre in Poetry*

We have already observed that Aristotle rated the importance of metre far below that of the mimetic principle, for metre is merely an artefact of poetry.²⁹ But Ibn 'Ezra,³⁰ citing the Greeks, states that a poem is words joined together into a musical composition; here there is a reference to Aristotle's words in the *Poetics*, as music too has a mimetic element.³¹ By contrast, he cites the Arab opinion, namely that although every poem is written in musical composition, not every musical composition is a poem.³² So how does the Arabs' view differ from the Greeks'? The Arabs set metre as the main element of the poem, and without it the existence of a poem is unimaginable. Therefore Ibn 'Ezra goes on to propose that the beginner poet work 'on the study of metres of poetry, which are the scales

²⁸ Ibid., p. 135.

²⁹ Aristotle 1961, pp. 61–62.

³⁰ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 137.

³¹ 1447a, ll. 22–27 (Aristotle 1961, p. 50).

³² This is how Ibn 'Ezra's phrasing should be translated and understood, not as Halkin's meaningless translation in this place. Halper's rendering is closer to the mark (1924, p. 110), especially the alternative translation he gives in a note.

of poetry and the ladder to its writing'.³³ In his view, the importance of metre in poetry is so great that he excludes Biblical texts from poetry because they do not have metre (actually Arabic metre!), even though he knows that many parts of the Bible transcend prose or are called poetry in the Hebrew tradition.³⁴ It is interesting that like the Arab theorists he has no need to support his words with the opinion accepted by some Greek authors, including Plato, that poetry is metred speech.³⁵

4. *Truth and Fabrication in a Poem*

In keeping with his mimetic perception, Aristotle permitted fabrication in a poem in the sense of a thing that did not exist in reality: 'Accordingly, the poet should prefer probable impossibilities to improbable possibilities. The tragic plot must not be composed of irrational parts. Everything irrational should, if possible, be excluded'.³⁶ He indeed indicates Homer as one who taught the other poets how they must narrate inventions. All this stems from his philosophy that the work of art does not represent reality as it is, but it has a world of its own, which is artistic truth, and not scientific or veridical truth.³⁷ Even earlier than Aristotle this idea was expressed, and in later times formulated in the famous phrase 'the best of the poem lies in its fallacy'.³⁸ But from this subject too Ibn 'Ezra—following earlier Arab theorists—strips the mimetic attire and clothes it in veridical-moral garb. After apologising for his excess praise or condemnation through his being drawn after the opinion of Arab and Jewish poets and poetry critics, he presents the reason for this approach: 'They said that the poet, when going too far from what is found within reality, and entering within what does not exist, his interest is only the image and attaining the purpose of the account'.³⁹ Immediately after this he cites the phrase 'The best of the poem is its falsehood', and

³³ Compare Dana 1983, p. 52.

³⁴ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 47.

³⁵ Aristotle 1961, p. 50.

³⁶ *Poetics*, 1460a, ll. 26–29 (Aristotle 1961, pp. 109–110).

³⁷ Spiegel 1972, p. 57.

³⁸ Aristotle 1961, p. 109; and see Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, 982b.

³⁹ As Halkin notes in Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 116, note to line 51, this sentence, in its Judaeo-Arabic original, is taken from the book of poetics of Ibn Rashīq (*al-'Umda*).

discusses matters arising from an ethical approach to truth and falsehood, good and evil, benefit and harm.⁴⁰ This is Plato's approach to 'Falsehood' in poetry, one that came to reside in the Hebrew poetry of Spain in the Christian period, and especially after the expulsion from Spain.⁴¹ But Ibn 'Ezra broke free to some extent of Plato's traditional constraints and allowed 'Falsehood' as metaphoric language intended to express a certain veridical truth: 'If a poem were devoid of invention it would not be a poem'. In any event, his vindication of 'falsehood' is only rhetorical.⁴² In this he certainly differs from Aristotle, who 'does not hang the definition of a poetic work either on the measure of the good (moral truth) or on the measure adopted in the perception of reality by the eye (scientific truth) but by the measure of beauty, which is its own master'.⁴³ As for metaphor as a rhetorical means, even Aristotle was aware of its importance and special place in poetry. He discusses it in the *Poetics* as part of the style of speech in tragedy (see above). Even after stating in the *Rhetoric* (book 3, chapter 4) that metaphoric language is beneficial for prose equally as for poetry, he asserts that it should not be overused in prose because by nature it belongs to poetry.

5. *The Relation of Poetry to Philosophy*

To demonstrate the importance of poetry Ibn 'Ezra cites statements attributed to Aristotle:⁴⁴

Philosophy cannot forgo the wisdom of poetry or the words of the those eloquent in language and the preachers, because lyrical sound is a vessel for their wisdom, and poetry and rhetoric are an adornment and ornamentation for reason [. . .]. Lucidity is obligatory for them, for with sincerity the work is like a gorgeous garment on the lovely form.

These comments diverge from Aristotle's idea. True, he saw figures of speech and the metaphorical language of rhetorical literature and of poetry not only as ornamentation but chiefly as a means of impressing and convincing the listener. But in these statements of Ibn 'Ezra,

⁴⁰ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, pp. 116–117.

⁴¹ See Tobi 1988.

⁴² Pagis 1970, pp. 40–42, 46–50, expands the discussion on the ethical-realist meaning of the phrase 'The best of the poem is its falsehood'.

⁴³ Spiegel 1972, p. 59.

⁴⁴ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe, p. 137.

poetry, namely mimetic writing in Aristotle's philosophy, is conceived as a work empty of anything except the aspect of ornamentation, of figures of speech, and therefore it is included in the domain of rhetoric. Aristotle would certainly have objected to seeing poetry as the servant of philosophy, for in his opinion it is a philosophical means, more philosophical and noble even than history.⁴⁵

6. *Poetry and Music*

Ibn Ezra quotes this excerpt referring to Aristotle:⁴⁶

Poetry is a composition whose long and short vowels are determined in accordance with several kinds of combinations of musical melodies in which nature delights and the soul finds repose, regardless of which kind of melodic combination, simple or elaborate, separate or attached.

Two main ideas are contained in this passage: (a) the various metres, constructed out of long and short vowels, are determined according to the melodies; (b) the soul delights in the music. The quotation does indeed originate in the *Poetics*, although this citation is not accurate. Aristotle states that the urge to imitate and the feel for melody and tempo are what gives rise to poetry. In this he notes 'metres being manifestly sections of rhythm'.⁴⁷ In the same context but elsewhere in the *Poetics*⁴⁸ Aristotle also deliberates on the great contentment that comes from tragedy by means of the music. Still, he accords music an independent status in the work of art, in contrast to metre. That is, the metred words are a means of imitation as an expression of thought, while music is independent in its imitations.⁴⁹ He holds melody more important than any of the other elements by whose means mimesis in tragedy is accomplished, more than language and rhythm. Furthermore, the contribution of the music to the catharsis produced by the work is great.⁵⁰ Thus it transpires that Ibn 'Ezra presents Aristotle's perception on the status of music in a

⁴⁵ *Poetics*, 1451a, l. 6 (Aristotle 1961, p. 68).

⁴⁶ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 135.

⁴⁷ *Poetics*, 1448b, ll. 20–22 (Aristotle 1961, p. 56).

⁴⁸ 1462b, l. 16 (Aristotle 1961, p. 117). A detailed discussion of music is found in Aristotle's *Politics*, book 8. On the subject of pleasure from the music that accompanies the poetry in the work of Ibn 'Ezra, compare Pagis 1970, pp. 263–264.

⁴⁹ 1449b, ll. 35–36 (Aristotle 1961, p. 62).

⁵⁰ Spiegel 1972, pp. 63, 118.

work of art as rather simplistic, possessing a one-dimensional connection to metre and serving as a cause of pleasure; he entirely overlooks the connection of music to mimesis and to catharsis in the work.

7. *Poetry: Natural Wisdom or an Acquired Craft?*

Chapter eight in *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-al-Mudākara*, which accounts for more than half the book, is devoted 'to the eighth desideratum, which is to instruct you in the best way in the craft of Hebrew poetry according to the Arab rule'.⁵¹ Hence it may be deduced that in Ibn 'Ezra's opinion poetry is an acquired skill. Certainly, this chapter is wholly constructed as guidance to the beginner poet in writing poetry; still, Ibn 'Ezra sees a need to stress the importance of natural talent: 'Know that poetry too will not fill the eyes and the ears and will not satisfy the heart and the qualities, unless there is nature in its maker and talent in its doer'.⁵² He goes on to note well-known figures in the history of Arabic and Hebrew literature, whose knowledge of grammar and rhetoric was vast, yet they still could not rhyme two words together. From his writing it arises that the poet must have an innate talent, but he must perfect it through learning and trial; the one cannot be without the other. This was one of the most serious matters in Arabic literary criticism (*ṭab'* or *ṣan'a'*? natural quality or craft?). The view championing the superiority of natural poetry was accepted until the eleventh century, when Aristotle's influence on the theorist al-Jurjānī (d. 1078) caused a reversal of positions. A synthesis between these two opinions came about in the twelfth century.⁵³ These different approaches mirror the debate between Plato and Aristotle. Plato regarded poetry as a result of spontaneous inspiration, a kind of uncontrollable 'madness' possessing the person;⁵⁴ Aristotle spoke of natural talent that should be developed.⁵⁵

Imitation, then, is one instinct of our nature. Next, there is the instinct for 'harmony' and rhythm. [. . .]. Persons, therefore, starting with this natural gift developed by degrees their special aptitudes, till their rude improvisations gave birth to Poetry.

⁵¹ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, pp. 135 ff.

⁵² Ibid., p. 137.

⁵³ See 'Ajamī 1984.

⁵⁴ Aristotle 1977, p. 67.

⁵⁵ *Poetics* 1448b, ll. 20–23 (Aristotle 1961, p. 56).

8. *Unity of the Work*

On the structure of the *qaṣīda* Ibn ʿEzra writes:⁵⁶

The poem is like the creation of man with the complex of his parts one with the other, and when one becomes separated from another the body puts out a cause, which destroys its qualities.

Elsewhere he writes in reference to Aristotle:⁵⁷

Any addition to perfection is a flaw, because it departs from the overall mean and balance, and departure from overall balance is non-balance.

This question of unity of the *qaṣīda* is discussed a great deal in scholarly literature.⁵⁸ This apparently may be due to the influence of the *Poetics*, in chapters seven and eight of which Aristotle discusses the need to uphold harmony and balance between the different parts of tragedy. The beauty of the work depends on its unity and harmonic perfection:⁵⁹

the plot [. . .] must imitate one action and that a whole, the structural union of the parts being such that, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjoined and disturbed. For a thing whose presence or absence makes no visible difference is not an organic part of the whole.

This is the origin of Ibn ʿEzra's statement that it is essential that the *qaṣīda* be entire and that there be no superfluous parts to it.

9. *The Eight (or Three) Desirable Properties of Poetry*

Ibn ʿEzra writes that in the eighth of the books of logic, namely the *Poetics*, Aristotle listed eight properties that serve to improve and beautify poetry:⁶⁰

Strength of words, pleasantness of theme, encompassing many matters in few words, beauty of images, finesse of metaphor, validity of matching, repetition of endings and openings, and observation of content.

⁵⁶ Ibn ʿEzra Moshe 1975, p. 179; and compare Pagis 1970, pp. 141–145.

⁵⁷ Ibn ʿEzra Moshe 1975, p. 195.

⁵⁸ Van Gelder 1982; Dana 1983, pp. 69–74.

⁵⁹ *Poetics*, 1451a, ll. 31–35 (Aristotle 1961, p. 67).

⁶⁰ Ibn ʿEzra Moshe 1975, p. 143.

He adds, citing Aristotle:

In three properties the poet will achieve what he needs: these are brevity of words, beauty of image, and observation of content.

The subject of the eight properties is reiterated elsewhere:⁶¹

If he [the poet] succeeds in introducing much content into a short essay this is the desired requirement and excellent art of composition, and this includes eight aspects, which the philosopher praised as the properties of poetry.

Although Aristotle does refer to several of these properties in the *Poetics* and in the *Rhetoric*, nowhere in his writing are three or eight properties assembled together. So Ibn 'Ezra's erroneous ascription is hard to understand, unless we assume that he was unacquainted with the direct translation of the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric*, and knew them only from commentaries on them by Arab philosophers. In any event, he did not treat these properties simply as rhetorical devices, as he notes later that 'the Arabs divided them into far more than this number and were meticulous in doing so'. He refers to the Arabic books of *badī'* in which the rhetorical devices are enumerated, reaching more than ninety, and examples are given from different poets.⁶² It seems to me that the number eight or three as a fundamental number of properties of the poem originates in the notion of *'amūd al-shi'r* in medieval Arab literary criticism, namely the desire to make a synopsis of the rules of the good poem.⁶³

D. *Other Aristotelian Influences in Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-al-Mudhākara*

Apart from the citations from the *Poetics* this book has passages from other works of Aristotle that touch on poetry.

1. *The Four Ontological Causes in a Work*

Aristotle notes these four causes in his book *Physics*:⁶⁴ the formal cause, the material cause, the active cause, and the purposive cause. Ibn 'Ezra mentions them in reference to Aristotle as follows: 'The

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 175.

⁶² Yelin 1940, pp. 353–354.

⁶³ See the discussion of this matter in the previous chapter.

⁶⁴ Spiegel 1972, pp. 37–48.

pen is the active cause and the ink is the material cause and the script is the formal cause and the art of writing is the purposive cause'.⁶⁵ Needless to say, this is a somewhat simplistic grasp of what Aristotle meant. This is not the place to dilate on the subject so we will only state that a more serious delving into Aristotle on this matter is found in *Quntres Pereq bə-Shir* by Yəhoshua' Benveniste (Constantinople 1634).⁶⁶

2. *Division of Speech into Truth, Invention, and Intermediary*

Ibn 'Ezra notes that Aristotle divided speech into truth, invention, and intermediary, which is between truth and invention, and states that their relations are in accordance with the use made of them by philosophers, poets, polemicists, and sophists.⁶⁷ Halkin has observed that this is not a literal excerpt but a summary of Aristotle's text in the *Rhetoric* (book 3, chapter 6). For Ibn 'Ezra the statements on poets are important, 'and invention is the works of poets according to their technique, not their word proper'. He means that the 'garb' of the poem, the metaphoric language, is 'invention', but the content is truth. This matches Ibn 'Ezra's view, which was conventional in the Middle Ages in Arabic literature, on the relation of 'garb' to content.⁶⁸

3. *Composing a Poem in a Dream*

Ibn 'Ezra devotes a special chapter to this in his book, namely chapter seven.⁶⁹ In his view, such a thing is possible, and to explain the matter he has recourse to a psychological discussion grounded, among other things, in the works of Aristotle.

E. *The Poetics in the Book Reshit Həkhma by Shem-Tov Falaquera (Spain, Thirteenth Century)*

Falaquera is known in Jewish history as one who sought to propagate the importance of philosophy and its knowledge among the Jewish communities, and as a defender of Maimonides' doctrine in

⁶⁵ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, p. 149.

⁶⁶ See Tobi 1988, pp. 19–20.

⁶⁷ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, pp. 117–119.

⁶⁸ Pagis 1970, pp. 40–46.

⁶⁹ Ibn 'Ezra Moshe 1975, pp. 120–133.

the great polemic that raged in Spain over his writings and his thought. To this end Falaquera dedicated almost all his works, including the book *Reshit Hokhma*. This is a summary of the various disciplines, philosophy, of course, above all; philosophy is nothing but Aristotle's doctrine, of which Maimonides—Falaquera's great teacher—was an adherent.⁷⁰

Falaquera himself was a poet, albeit not of the first rank among the Hebrew poets in Spain, yet he took a somewhat negative view of poetry in his philosophical studies, including his book *Ha-Mavaqqesh*, written in the form of a *maqāma*.⁷¹ Of course, he might have found a sturdy basis for this position in Plato's famous arguments against poetry in book ten of the *Republic*,⁷² but he too misinterpreted Aristotle's writing in the *Poetics*, keeping to the accepted understanding in medieval Arabic and Jewish literature. In the chapter on 'the discipline of logic' he enumerates the 'eight books of Aristotle on the subject of logic', and the last of these is the *Poetics*. The passage reads:⁷³

The eighth has in it the criteria by which poems are examined and the kinds of poetic locutions that they use for each and every thing. It lists the matters in which the art of the poem is perfect and several kinds of poetic usages and how is the artistry of each one of them and by which of the matters they should be examined if they are good and splendid and sweet; this book is called the *Book of the Poem* and in Greek *Poetics*.

These statements constitute a succinct summary of the *Poetics* in terms of 'the art of the poem' in it, yet they do not represent Aristotle's views, according to Falaquera, on poetry. But elsewhere Falaquera expresses himself unequivocally on this subject. For example, he adopts Aristotle's notion of mimesis in the *Poetics*: 'The poetic locutions are the devices through which to liken something that is spoken of in deference or in contempt or that it is lovely or odious or the like'.⁷⁴ However, Aristotle, as stated, is not referring to lyric poetry, which alone was known to his Arab translators and commentators, and in their wake the Jewish ones, but to the art of writing generally, particularly tragedy.

⁷⁰ On Falaquera and his philosophical method see Harvey 1987, and the bibliography at the end of the book.

⁷¹ On Falaquera's attitude to poetry see Harvey 1987; Tobi 1990a.

⁷² Falaquera 1902, p. 73.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

Moreover, later in his book Falaquera engages in casuistry, seeking to prove that the poetic imagination is misleading, supplanting philosophical study, and that by means of the poetic imagination it is easily possible to influence a person to act in one way or another. Although there is a beneficial aspect in poetry, as a didactic means on account of its formal properties—metre and rhyme—and by virtue of its imagination, it is still not suitable except for the masses, whose mind is incapable of philosophical deliberation, which alone ensures attainment of truth.⁷⁵

The art by which a person can imagine things is the art of the poem because imagining is one of the kinds of teaching the masses many of the difficult theoretical matters. This is so, for they [the difficult theoretical matters] will enter their minds as impressions and models because they will not understand them as they are in reality.

Furthermore, one can easily be misled, and mislead, when using the poetic imagination.⁷⁶

Or when we use misleading poetic locutions and we think something that is not truth to be the truth, or we use poetic locutions and we believe the imaginations. We think that in all these matters we have gone in the path of truth.

In his book *Ha-Mevaqqesh* also Falaquera refers expressly to Aristotle's *Poetics* and the definition of poetry as imitation: 'The definition of the poem is a text composed from what it imitates the thing, that is, from what is similar to it'.⁷⁷ It is not hard to find the source of this definition in Ibn Rushd's statement in his commentary to the *Poetics* cited above.⁷⁸ But here Falaquera went farther in negating poetry because of the invention in it, both actual invention, namely the words of praise for those who do not merit it and the like, and metaphorical invention.⁷⁹

Elsewhere we have shown Maimonides' influence on Falaquera's opinion of poetry, especially the negative evaluation in terms of philosophy.⁸⁰ Here, however, it should be noted that Falaquera was the

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 81.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 39.

⁷⁷ Falaquera 1924, p. 131.

⁷⁸ Without doubt, Falaquera saw Ibn Rushd's writing in the original Arabic, and not in the translation by Todros Ha-Todrosi, who lived about a century after him.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 77, 83.

⁸⁰ See Tobi 1990a.

first of the Jewish scholars to use extensively and boldly the mimetic notion of art in the *Poetics* according to the mistaken conception of the Arabs and the Jews, in order to attack poetry in principle. In the end, his words seem to have brought about, of course alongside other factors, the great decline in the status of Hebrew secular poetry, and the notion that poetry should be confined to the domain of the sacred alone.⁸¹

F. *The Poetics as a Source for Nətan'el (Beraw Fayyūmī?)*⁸²

It is not entirely clear who was Nətan'el, the author of the *Book of Grammar of the Arabic Language and the Hebrew Language*. Kokovtsov surmises that he is the well-known Nətan'el b. Fayyūmī, author of the ethical philosophical work *Bustān al-Uqūl*, who lived in Yemen in the twelfth century.⁸³ At the beginning of the first part the author deals with חדר אלכלמה עלי ראי ארסטו ועלי ראי אלערב (definition of the word in the opinion of Aristotle and in the opinion of the Arabs). Indeed clearly evident here is the influence of the chapter twenty of the *Poetics*, in which Aristotle discusses the style of tragedy in speech, namely purely linguistic matters. Nətan'el also quotes the *Poetics* directly: ויהי'א נץ כללם ארסו פי כתאבה פי אלשער (and these are Aristotle's words in his book on the poem).⁸⁴

⁸¹ See Tobi 1988.

⁸² Remnants of this Judaeo-Arabic composition were published by Kokovtsov 1970, pp. 172–189.

⁸³ The essay was published by R. Yosef Qāfīḥ (1954).

⁸⁴ Kokovtsov 1970, p. 176.

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APPENDICES

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APPENDIX ONE

THE PROVERB WRITER SA'ĪD B. BĀBSHĀD: A TENTH-CENTURY EASTERN HEBREW POET

The Arab tribes erupted from the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century. From that time onwards the Jewish communities of the East came into contact with domains of Arab-Muslim culture. This caused them enormous excitement, one product of which was literary works of innovative styles, influenced to some degree or another by the surrounding culture. Most intense in this respect was the activity in the 150 years between the mid-ninth and the end of the tenth century, when the greatest writer was Sa'adia Gaon (882–942). He allowed Arabic language and culture to enter the gates of Jewish literature; facing him were many outstanding Karaite writers worthy of note.

This outburst of creativity waned almost entirely in Jewish consciousness in the following generations, and did not find its place in later copies of manuscripts or printed books from the fifteenth century on. The cause of this disappearance of Eastern writing was the flourishing of Jewish literature in Spain in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the era known as the Golden Age. Were it not for the archive of Eastern Jewish culture in Egypt (the *Genizah*, whatever its precise location: the synagogue named after 'Ezra in Fuṣṭāṭ or the cemetery in Basātīn), discovered at the end of the nineteenth century and pored over since then by dozens of scholars across the Jewish world, our generation would never have been so fortunate as to encounter hundreds of unknown works of beauty.

One of these works is the *Proverbs* (משלים) of Sa'īd b. Bābshād, who apparently lived in the region of Persia at the end of the tenth or beginning of the eleventh century. This is the estimate of Ezra Fleischer (henceforth F.), who assembled the *Proverbs* in a splendid scholarly edition.¹ The existence of this work became known in 1900, when S.Z. Schechter, the first of the Genizah scholars, set forth several lines from it in footnotes to his sensational publication of the book of Ben Sira in its Hebrew original. After that, several passages

¹ Fleischer 1990a.

of the *Proverbs* were published, without being accorded the importance they merit, by the researchers of the medieval *piyyut*, Joseph Marcus and Menaḥem Zulay; serious treatment of the text was given only by Ḥayyim Schirmann, the central figure in research of medieval poetry in the last generations. The next stage, the most decisive in the discovery and evaluation of the texts, was at the hands of the Leningrad (St. Petersburg) scholar Leib Wilsker, and in recent years of F., who as long ago as 1973 published two pages of the *Proverbs* of Sa'īd b. Bābshād. Since then he has treated this author in several publications until, in his words (p. 10), he came 'to the writing of this book' to pay off 'an old debt to himself'.

The book has four parts:

a. *Preface*. Here F. reviews the genre of *proverbs* in Hebrew literature in the period of the Talmud and the *geonim*, before the time of Sa'adia and of Sa'īd b. Bābshād, and after them the Hebrew *proverbs* literature in Spain. F. devotes extensive space to a deep discussion of Sa'adia's status in Hebrew literature, and especially to the famous passage apparently written by one of his students. This surveys the kinds of Hebrew literature until the mid-tenth century. The repetition of the discussion of this passage, originally written in Judaeo-Arabic, stems from the difficulty in understanding it because the translations offered by the various redactors were not exact. For example, it seems that in the description of the fifth kind, the words אֶלְמִשְׁנֵר אֶלְמִשְׁנֵר are not to be rendered the woven, or the combined fabric, but the intricate fabric; and the Hebrew word in the Arabic plural form פּוֹאֲסִיק should not in fact be understood as Bible verses but as lines of any poem. For we find that Sa'adia in his *Siddur* uses the word פֶּסוּק for a liturgical poem, and the word פּוֹאֲסִיק for liturgical poems.²

With a deft hand F. takes us over wide expanses, far beyond the circumscribed subject of early *proverbs* literature, such as the existence of pre-Spanish Hebrew secular poetry (pp. 20 ff.), which is one of the most interesting subjects in the study of tenth-century Hebrew poetry in the East, and of which very little is known. Without doubt, F. is right in stating (p. 42) that

Babylonia was the metropolis of Hebrew culture, and there, in its capital, were gathered most of the great poets and sages of the age. The

² See Sa'adia 1941, p. 58.

spirited existence of this secular culture could not but have enthralled the gifted members of the Babylon Jewish intelligentsia, and it was impossible that it did not impel the daring ones among them to find a way of fashioning a similar reality among the Jews.³

For sure, the East is to be seen as the cradle of medieval secular Hebrew poetry, influenced by Arabic poetry. Arabic secular poems by Jewish poets from the second half of the eighth century preceded the Hebrew secular poems.⁴ F. also presents much evidence for the existence of pre-Spanish Eastern secular poetry, not only from the work of Sa'adia but also from earlier writers, such as Ḥayawayh of Balkh and Nissi al-Nahrawānī, and also the belletristic character of the letters written by the Jewish sages earlier than Sa'adia (pp. 24–25). Note that the Karaite authors enjoyed a respected status in the development of fine and literary writing, which was certainly influenced by Arabic rhetoric and poetry, at least from the middle of the ninth century. Its influence is evident in the poetic stanzas in the grammar books and *שיר הנפץ* (*Song of the Vine*) by Moshe b. Asher.⁵

The Preface also offers a detailed discussion of the unrhymed *Proverbs* whose author and time are unknown, and whose first detection and publication were the work of A.A. Harkavy in 1902. F. justly gauges the Arabic influence present already in them, in the scientific terminology in the domain of philosophy, such as treatment of the five human senses and words *שערים* (chapters) and *עלילה* (plot) in innovative linguistic usages. F. likewise points out the extraordinary engagement in the subject of wine in these *Proverbs*, in which 'the sin of drunkenness and winebibbing is stressed with surprising vigour' (p. 34). One line—*וְלֹא נִכְנְעִים עַל שִׁכָּר / הַשְׂמֵחִים בְּשִׂמְחַת נִכְרִים* / יוֹסֵף (Those enjoying the pleasures of the gentiles and who do not submit for the disaster of Joseph) (ibid.)—may perhaps be seen as an interesting contemporary parallel to the famous criticism contained in the poem by Dunash b. Labrat *אֵל תִּישָׁן*, against whoever spends his time at the winefests in Cordoba:⁶

נִעְרַתְהוּ דָם דָם / עָלֵי זֹאת אֵיךְ תִּקְדֶּם / וּבֵית קִנְיָ וְהָדוֹם / אֱלֹהִים לְעֶרְלִים [...]
וְאֵיךְ נִשְׁתַּח יֵין / וְאֵיךְ נָרִים עֵין / וְהִינֵנוּ אֵין / מְאֻסִּים וְנַעֲוִלִים

³ And cf. chapter two above.

⁴ See pp. 33 ff. above.

⁵ On poetic stanzas and *שיר הנפץ* see p. 43 above.

⁶ Schirmann 1955, I, pp. 34–35 (English translation, Carmi 1981, p. 280).

But I reproached him thus: 'Silence! How dare you, when the Holy House, the footsteps of God is in the hands of the gentiles [. . .]
Then how could we drink wine, how even raise our eyes, when we are loathed and abhorred and less than nothing?'

b. The *Proverbs* of Sa'īd b. Bābshād. This is the major part of the book in extent and content. First a lengthy history is presented of research of these *Proverbs*. The manuscripts of the composition are described, these being extracts from the various copies scattered in libraries throughout the world. F. even reveals the forgery of the Karaite scholar Abraham Firkovich, who raised conjectures as to other names for the author, סעיד בן באבשאד סנאהה הכהן, in order to ascribe to him a Karaite origin, obviously with no justification at all. Step by step, F. sure-footedly guides the reader, along with a discussion of the problems of attribution and the complex of the work's linguistic features, in content and form, to the certain conclusion that the writer of these *Proverbs* lived in Babylonia or Persia at the end of the tenth century or the beginning of the eleventh (p. 161).

From F.'s first-rate analysis it emerges that Sa'īd b. Bābshād was already under the clear influence of Arab culture, but did not depend on the Hebrew poetry in Spain and its poetic standards. F. proves that the author made use of the famous late tenth-century philosophical-scientific collection of the sages of Islam. This encompasses 51 or 52 short monographs, and is known as *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (*Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*).⁷ Sa'īd b. Bābshād took various subjects from these letters, such as ocean tides and the notion that when man reaches perfection he is likened to an angel (pp. 135 ff.).

F. is undoubtedly right in stating at the end of his discussion of the influence of the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* on Sa'īd b. Bābshād (p. 151): 'Without a shadow of doubt, further search in the Arabic book will furnish ever more parallels, perhaps even closer to the *Proverbs* of Sa'īd b. Bābshād'. And indeed, to the tale of the beautiful garden at the opening of Part I of the *Proverbs* F. gives a parallel from the end of Epistle Eleven in Part I of the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*. In it, Aristotle's ten categories are likened to ten trees in a garden. But Sa'īd adds the idea that his way to the garden, which symbolises intellectual integrity, according to F.'s reasonable assumption (p. 71), is blocked, because he still lacks wisdom,

⁷ See Netton 1982. On the Brethren of Purity and their epistles see also Marquet 1971. On p. 1072 Marquet gives the time of the composition of the *Epistles* between 961 and 986.

which is the most perfect of qualities. This concept is later repeated in the writings of Shəlomo b. Gabirol, *Kītāb Iṣlāḥ al-Akhlāq* and *Fons Vitae*,⁸ and also in Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed* (III:51). Maimonides fuses this idea with the fable of the palace, which symbolises knowledge of God, which many strive to find, but do not find the way to, and those who do find the way do not find the gate: only those who go in God's right path find the way. This fable, which in Maimonides' treatment reaches the zenith of its development, was much favoured by the medieval scholars. Ibn Gabirol alludes to it in *Keter Malkhut*,⁹ as he does in his allegorical-philosophical commentary to the Torah in respect of the Garden of Eden.¹⁰

The idea is drawn from the words of the Brethren of Purity in their *Epistles*. In their perception, which reappears like the golden thread throughout their writings, the purpose and also the ambition of man is to unite with God, to attain Paradise. The means for this is purification of the soul, asceticism causing remoteness from the bodily appetites and suppression of the body, which is an obstacle on the way to spiritual perfection. In the Platonic outlook the world is a prison for the believer, and the soul yearns to break free of it and to reach Paradise, which symbolises unity with God, spiritual sublimity. True, the Qur'ān and other Islamic sources contain accounts of the material pleasures of Paradise, but these expressions are only intended for the masses, who do not understand the true language, which concerns abstract things.¹¹ So Sa'īd's garden seems to be no other than the Paradise of the Brethren of Purity, which is the final destination of every man. But from Sa'īd's words it transpires that finding the way to the garden is not easy. In the most vivid language he describes his desire to find the way leading to the garden, the twisted paths, the thick hedge, the garden gates that appear to him locked,¹² the gatemen stopping him from entering, and so on.

⁸ See Tobi 1990b, pp. 174–179.

⁹ See Ibn Gabirol 1950, pp. 18–19. In the notes the editor cites Maimonides in *Guide to the Perplexed*.

¹⁰ See Sirat 1975, p. 81, and cf. Kaufmann 1962b.

¹¹ Innumerable references to these matters are found in the different *Epistles*. See Netton 1982, pp. 14, 16, 38, 43, 52, 66, 71, 83, 103, and allusions to various *Epistles* in the notes.

¹² On p. 188, l. 15 Sa'īd says: וְרִיזִים וְסִנְיָרִים פִּתְחוּ נִרְאוּ לִי. I believe that וְרִיזִים should be understood in the sense of tied, tight shut, closed, according to Targum Onkelos with expressions such as וַיִּהְבֶּשׂ אֶת הַמֹּרֹד (and he saddled his ass. Gen. 22:3), וַיִּתְּנֵר אוֹרֵי פִתְשֵׁב הָאֶפֶד, (and he girded him with the skillfully woven band of the ephod. Lev. 8:7), and many more. See Kasowski 1940, pp. 160–161.

Even when he reaches the garden he cannot enjoy it, and only after he has turned to Wisdom,¹³ and after צוֹאִי מִזְמוֹתַי מִלֵּב טְהָרָתִי (I have purified my heart of the dung of my evil plots) and קִרְבִּי קִדְשָׁתִי מִנְּאֻנֹת (I have sanctified my innards of the pride of the heart), is he able finally to see the hidden garden: וְאָז נִן סְמוִי הִבִּיחַן נִלְוִי רְאִיתִי (And only then did I see a hidden garden, the hiding place openly). Only then he could enjoy the garden's delights, these being spiritual perfection. All the obstacles that Saʿīd portrays, and the means of removing them, are similar to those set out in detail by the Brethren of Purity. Furthermore, in Epistle Nine of Part I, the Brethren of Purity describe those who do not find the right way:¹⁴

واعلم يا أخي بأن أكثر الناس من أتباع واضعي الناموس وأنصارهم مقرّون بالآخرة
مؤمنون بها، ولكنهم لا يعرفون ماهيتها، ولا يدرون ما حقيقتها ولا كيفيتها ولا
أبنيتها، ولا متى وقت الوصول إليها، وهكذا أيضاً كثير من المتفلسفين مقرّون بعالم
الأرواح وجواهر النفوس، ولكن أكثرهم أيضاً لا يدرون كيف الطريق نحوها، ولا
كيف الوصول.

Know, O my brother, that most of the sons of man among the followers of the lawgivers and of their disciples agree regarding the World to Come and believe in it. But they do not understand its essence, and do not know what is its truth, nor what is its quality, nor what are its structures, nor when the time is to reach it. And thus also many of the philosophizers agree about the world of souls, and the substance of spirits, but also most of them do not know where the road to it is, nor how to reach it.

Ratzaby cites other passages from the Brethren of Purity,¹⁵ according to which even idol-worshippers aim to get close to God, and to this end God sent them prophets and messengers to guide them to find a better path. This idea of losers of the way appears expressly also in the writing of Saʿīd, albeit separately from the fable of the garden at the start of his composition. In excerpt 5 (ll. 71–76) are three fragmented stanzas (210–211):

כִּי טוֹב לֵךְ [בְּנִין] לְשֶׁרֶת אֵת הַהֶ[חֵם] (כְּמִים)
מִן [לְעֶזְרוֹ מְלוֹכָה] עַל הָאֱלִילִים
לְאֱלֹפִים רַבִּים הִרְאָה מִתְ[חֵם] (כְּמִים)
[הַמְּוֹנִים] עֲצוּמִים הַמְּבִינִים הַכְּמִים

¹³ Fleischer 1990a, p. 189, ll. 35–39.

¹⁴ *Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* 1957, p. 330.

¹⁵ Ratzaby 1973a, pp. 57–58; and cf. Ratzaby 1991, p. 374 (according to *Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* 1957, pp. 483–484).

וְכֵלָם מִחֲכָמָה [...] .
וּמִמְנָה תָּעוּ וּמִמְנִיבוֹתֶיהָ

It is better for you, my son, to serve the wise men
Than to act as a king over the foolish people

You see many thousands that display themselves as wise
The countless throng, and those with understanding who are wise

But all of them [...] of wisdom,
They stray from it and from its paths.

The content of the last stanza is akin to Ibn Gabirol in *Keter Malkhut* concerning those wearily searching for the way to the courtyard of the king's house and not finding it:

כִּי כִנְתָּ כֵלָם לְהַגִּיעַ עֲדֵיךָ [...] . וְלֹא רָאוּ וְתָעוּ מִן הַדֶּרֶךְ [...] . וְכֵלָם חָשְׁבוּ כִּי
לְהַפְצֵם נָגְעוּ / וְהֵם לְדִיךְ יָנְעוּ

The intention of all of them is to reach your place [...] but they do not see and they lose their way [...]. All of them believed that they had arrived at their destination, but they trudged in vain.

In the same fable of the garden Sa'īd writes (p. 189, l. 30): וַיִּדְמַתִּי נִפְשִׁי רִיחוֹ כְּרִיחַ מִסְרִית (I have defiled my soul; its odour is like a vile stench). As Ratzaby has shown in detail,¹⁶ in the early Eastern *piyyut* prior to Sa'adia, and also in the Italian and Ashkenazi *piyyut*, the motif of the vile stench of sin is found, conspicuously in the famous verse of Yiṣḥaq b. Mar Sha'ul:

חָטָאִי לוֹ יִרְחוֹן בָּם שְׂכְנֵי / אֲנִי בָּרַחוּ וְרָחֲקוּ מִנְּבוֹלִי

My sins, were my neighbours to smell them, they would run away
and go far from my vicinity.

Although the theme itself is present in early Hebrew sources, linking the subject of the soul to foulness, and the dichotomy of the poet and his soul, can indicate something on culling from Arabic sources.

Incidentally, the direct influence of Arabic may be seen in the speech to the soul in the fable of the garden (in several places), especially in the long poem in passage 11 (pp. 232–237). This is all direct speech to the soul, and a point-by-point account of the putrefaction of the human body after death in respect of the ethical-religious conclusions that this demands. It goes by way of the famous theme of

¹⁶ Ratzaby 1991, pp. 360–364.

memento mori,¹⁷ far beyond what we find in the last chapter of Qohelet or in the ancient Hebrew *tokhehot*.¹⁸ Right from the start of Islam, particularly in the dirges written by the poets for themselves, such as Mālik b. al-Rayb¹⁹ and later the ascetic poets such as Abū al-‘Atāhiya (748–825)²⁰ and Abū Nuwās (747/762–813/5),²¹ the poet is seen to address his soul in a moral-religious way. All this is under the influence of the ethical neo-Platonic philosophy, which impacted on the Brethren of Purity.²² True, Sa‘adia anticipated Sa‘īd with the long poem *וְאִמְצֵת אֶת בְּרִכִּי* opening the *וְפָשִׁי בְּרִכִּי* series of *piyyutim*,²³ which is entirely an address to the soul, and with his *tokheha* entitled *לִפִּי בְּרִיךְ*,²⁴ in which he describes the nothingness of man, including his contemptible body.²⁵ It has to be stated, then, that Sa‘adia too influenced Sa‘īd.

Naturally, this part of the book contains an in-depth discussion of questions of form: the couplet, known by its Persian name *mathnawī*, or its Arabic equivalent *muzdawij* (pp. 89–90), the syllabic-grammatical metre, the rhyme, and more. As F. notes, very many exceptions to the rules we commonly recognise are present in the work in respect of the syllabic-grammatical metre (p. 97): ‘In general, the picture of the syllabic-grammatical metre is still not clear enough, and it seems that until we have a way of verifying the reliability of the version of the passages, through parallel manuscripts, we shall be unable to make definitive statements about it’. In the modes of

¹⁷ See Fleischer in the Introduction to the book, pp. 126–127.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Brody/Wiener 1923, pp. 19–23.

¹⁹ See Levin 1973, pp. 81 ff. Levin notes rightly that Hebrew poets in Spain also, such as Shāmu‘el Ha-Nagid, Moshe b. ‘Ezra, and Yehuda Ha-Levi were influenced by this literary genre of Arabic poetry.

²⁰ On him see Guillaume 1960. His poems of abstinence were published in the book *Al-Anwār al-Ẓāhiya fī Dīwān Abī al-‘Atāhiya*, edition *Aḥad al-abbā’ al-Yasū‘iyyīn*, Beirut 1887, Part I, pp. 1–305.

²¹ On him see Wagner 1960. In his view, the poems of abstinence of Abū Nuwās are not the result of his repentance but are ironic. See also Wagner 1965, pp. 110–133. Abū Nuwās’s poems of abstinence were published in Abū Nuwās 1958/88, II, pp. 157–175.

²² See Netton 1982, pp. 33–52. Cf. also Gutmann 1963, pp. 49–50: ‘Jewish Neo-Platonists draw from the literature of Islamic Neo-Platonism, especially from the Encyclopaedia of ‘The Brethren of Purity’ of Baṣra, to the same extent as from the Greek Neo-Platonists that were translated into Arabic’. See also *ibid.*, pp. 55, 105.

²³ See Zulay 1964, pp. 111–114.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 65–77.

²⁵ Not without reason did the copyists of this term name this *tokheha* a *marthiya*, which in Arabic means ‘dirge’. See p. 85 above.

rhyme too, a large number of problems arise, regarding both the consonantal element in the rhyme (שֹׁר בְּחִמּוֹר rhyming) and the vowel element (*šere* with *ḥolam*, *qamaš* with *səgol*, *ḥolam* with *pataḥ*, etc.). What we know about the Jewish accent in tenth- and eleventh-century Babylon proves insufficient for us to resolve all of these difficulties. True, the rhyming of *šere* with *ḥolam*, *səgol* with *pataḥ*, and the like, is well known already from the Babylonian *piyyut*, and also from the Hebrew poetry in Yemen (pp. 98–99).²⁶ Still, no satisfactory solution regarding the rhyme שֹׁר בְּחִמּוֹר is to be found, and F. raises the possibility that the text is adulterated (p. 99).

I should like to suggest here a general explanation for these irregularities, which may go some way to clarifying the exceptions in the works of Babylonian poets in contrast to the rhyming of the poets of the Land of Israel, which in F.'s view (pp. 98–99, n. 43) is 'unflawed' in that respect. The making of metre and rhyme by the Jewish poets of Babylon of the tenth and early eleventh centuries, like other aspects of their poetry, was not bound by the rules of Arabic poetry, whose formal regulations were wholly crystallised and fixed by that time. These Arabic rules, more than being based on actual day-to-day language realisations, were based on philological analyses of written literature, on graphic marks in the domain of consonant and vowel, which never came near to fully covering the phonetic features prevalent in the spoken language. It was the same with the Hebrew poetry of Spain, which referred to the *written* language, not the *spoken* language, perhaps because in Spain there was no living tradition of Hebrew speech. By contrast, the Jewish poets in the East, possibly also under the influence of Persian poetry, which as F. points out (pp. 162–163) did not take special pains over stiff rules either, saw themselves free to rhyme (with consonant and vowel) and to devise metre according to the spoken language. This presentation of the perception of the poets of the East in rhyme and metre must take into account not only the similarity or the identity of the vowel pairs *ḥolam/šere*, *pataḥ/səgol*, and so on. It must also consider one of the most interesting phonetic phenomena in their speech, namely the *imāla*, that is, pronunciation of *qamaš/pataḥ* as *šere*. Lately

²⁶ To the evidence adduced by F. may be added the poems of Sa'adia (see Tobī 1982a, I, pp. 255–257). Incidentally in the poem אֵל תַּמְנֵי בָּאֵר כִּי אֲנִי עֲבָדֶיךָ by a poet called Shēlomo, published by Haberman 1968, we find a rhyme of *ḥolam* with *šere*: שֹׁר / יִמּוֹר / יִמּוֹר / יִמּוֹר. Perhaps one may learn from this about the Babylonian origin of the poet.

I paid great attention to this in connection with a pre-Sa'adian translation of the Torah into Judaeo-Arabic,²⁷ in which the letter *yod* was often written after the vowel *pataḥ*. Consideration of this linguistic feature may help explain the above rhyme **יְהוָה/יְהוָה**: the *ḥolam* is pronounced as *šere* according to the similarity of *ḥolam* and *šere* in the Babylonian tradition, and *pataḥ* is pronounced as *šere* according to the *imāla* phenomenon; hence all is in order.

In general, we have to gain a deeper and more comprehensive acquaintance not only with the *written* language of the Jews of the East in the relevant period according to the pointing. This as stated never can give full signification of linguistic phenomena. We must also get a grasp of the *spoken* language, indeed as it may be deduced from Arabic transliterations of the Hebrew language. We have an abundance of sources of this kind, even though research on them is far from sufficient. In my opinion this investigation will facilitate understanding the modes of rhyming and metre of the poets of Babylonia and Persia in the tenth and eleventh centuries. It may also further the illumination of dim corners in the theory of metre and rhyme of the Hebrew poetry in Spain.

c. *The Texts*. For the first time, in this book are assembled all the texts identified by F. and his predecessors as belonging to Sa'īd's composition, accompanied by a lucid commentary. The importance of the edition is not only in the presentation itself of the unadulterated text with comparison with the original manuscripts, but also in their being arrayed in the proper order, as F. reckoned it. The order of the different passages according to a reasoned and well-based consideration allows the formulation of an overall view of the work, beyond the linguistic and formal discussion. All these factors together promote the laying not only of an additional tier to research in medieval Jewish culture, in the period of the culture of the Jews of Spain, but also of a central pillar, on which any future research will be obliged to rest.

Here I take the liberty of citing some of F.'s words in a letter to me dated New Moon of Ellul 1991, referring to a poet whose poems I had assembled, words that apply also to the collection under review here (translated from Hebrew):

²⁷ Tobi 1994, pp. 104–105.

The poems of the poet himself are very beautiful, and it is good that they now are collected before us in a single anthology. You can never gauge the importance of a poet until you see all his works assembled in an edition that merits the name. He also does not *really* exist without that, not in terms of scholarship and not in terms of the cultural experience of the generation.

Sure enough, as long as the work of Sa'īd b. Bābshād was not revealed in F.'s edition we could not appreciate the poet's grandeur, its variegation in content and form, its overt and covert ties with the Jewish sources, and with the surrounding culture—Arab-Islamic-Greek, and perhaps even Persian. Spread out before the reader is the breadth of vision and openness of mind of Jewish writers in one of the culturally stormiest periods in the history of the Jewish world. It transpires that the Golden Age in Spain had many harbingers, of wide and independent horizon in the midst of Jewry in the East.

d. *Appendices*. For a balanced and full evaluation of Sa'īd's work, F. also presents the texts discussed in the Preface, which may shed light on the unrhymed proverbs and the rhymed Ben Sira, and also a poem by a poet named David Ha-Kohen b. Bābshād. This was one of the luminaries of the Karaite community in Fustāt in Egypt at the beginning of the eleventh century. It was to him that the Karaite scholar and forger Abraham Firkovich wished, unjustly, to attribute the writings of Sa'īd b. Bābshād.

APPENDIX TWO

SHĒLOMO B. GABIROL AND BAḤYE B. PAQŪDA: PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS IN SPANISH LITURGICAL POETRY

One of the great innovations of Hebrew poetry in Spain as against the early Eastern Hebrew *piyyut* is the introduction of philosophical ideas and content, chiefly from the Neo-Platonic school. These new subjects, common to the Muslim and the Jewish ethics literature, took hold actually in the *sacred liturgical* poetry, not the *secular*. True, a special genre of philosophical poems is to be found in the secular poetry too, but these reflect more the nihilistic approach of absolute despair and total withdrawal from life. The liturgical poetry, intended to be spoken as part of the synagogue liturgy, could not encompass that kind of approach, which contradicts the Jewish tradition. Philosophy, especially after Sa'adia Gaon gave the world his book *al-Mukhtār fī al-Amānāt wa-al-ʿItiqādāt* (The Chosen in Beliefs and Opinion, henceforward *Beliefs*), meant to defend Judaism and prove its justness as against other faiths, was considered among the Jewish communities throughout the Arab-Islamic cultural domain an inseparable part of religious education and pursuits. Not surprisingly, then, alongside nationalistic themes, namely the people of Israel and their relationship with their God and with the nations that held it in servitude, subjects originating in the ancient school of Hebrew poetry, the Hebrew-Spanish liturgical poetry and its followers evinced universal themes too, that is, those concerning the individual before his God. The liturgical poetry reflected a new spiritual essence in the people of Israel, authentic and striking religious experiences arising from the fact of the philosophical doctrine of ethics being part and parcel of the Jewish experience.¹

The accord between medieval Jewish ethics literature and liturgical poetry has been pointed out by various researchers. But until

¹ On all the foregoing cf. above, chapters on Sa'adia (three) and the philosophical poems in Spain (six).

recently no comprehensive work had been done aimed at establishing a proper system in the presentation of this accord. This task was undertaken by the late Prof. Aharon Mirsky (henceforth M.), one of the most venerated teachers and scholars of medieval poetry in the department of Hebrew literature at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. In the last generation M. published a series of articles on the relation between the Hebrew liturgical poetry in Spain, especially the philosophical poetry, and the foremost Judaeo-Arabic work of Jewish ethics in Spain, namely *al-Hidāya ilā Farāʾiḍ al-Qulūb* (Guide to the Duties of the Heart, henceforth *Hidāya*), by the *dayyan* of the Jewish community of Saragossa, Baḥye b. Paqūda. This composition was translated into Hebrew (*Hovot Ha-Lavavot*) by Yəhuda b. Tibbon at the request of members of the Jewish communities in Provence (the 'Lands of Edom', as he terms it at the start of the translation), primarily Məshulam b. Yaʿaqov of Lunel. Their knowledge of Arabic was too slight for them to understand works in this language, and the Muslim Arabic literature was closed to them on account of difficulties with the language. Recently M. assembled most of his articles in this book, expanding and deepening them. He arranged the work in ten sections according to the chapters of the *Hidāya*.

The central concept on which the entire book is structured is that Baḥye's essay served as a source for the Hebrew philosophical literature in Spain, and that all the poets of Spain used it in the writing of their poems. As he says in the Introduction (p. 23):

The poets of Spain delved into all ten chapters of the book, and what they encountered they wrote in their poems, to the point that we may sort the things written in the Spanish poems by the arrangement of the chapters of the book *Hovot Ha-Lavavot*.

This idea passes like a golden thread through the book. With his vast scholarship in Hebrew liturgical poetry and Jewish ethics literature in Spain, M. conducted a meticulous comparison of various subjects arising in the *Hidāya* and in Hebrew philosophical poetry in Spain according to the ten chapters of the book. The contribution of the book to an understanding of Hebrew liturgical poetry is enormous, especially in light of the fact that the major part of research into the Hebrew poetry of Spain from the start addressed secular poetry, not liturgical. Moreover, M.'s profound work serves to prove that Jewish culture in Spain in its various manifestations was a single cultural-spiritual unit; that is, the liturgical poetry too did not

ensconce itself within the four walls of Jewish tradition emanating from the Talmudic Sages. It opened its gates to the influences of the Neo-Platonic philosophy in its Arab dress.

This determination, of course, is not new, for many researchers have considered it, such as Levin, Ratzaby, and Scheindlin.² What is fresh in M.'s work is that the literary conduit through which this influence passed from Arabic philosophical literature to Hebrew liturgical poetry in Spain was Baḥye's *Hidāya*, not a direct connection between the Jewish poets and Arabic literature. M. sums up his approach at the end of the book thus (p. 298):

In the chapters of this book the source of the ethical philosophies and recognition of the Creator and the work of God in the poems of the poets in Spain has become clear to us. Also clarified is the nature of the fine poems; and that which inheres in the pure and beautiful phrases in the sacred poems was rarefied from the propositions formulated by R. Baḥye in *Hovot Ha-Lavavot*. His notions are stated in the poems, be they stated expressly or contained enfolded within the lovely polished verses. The abundance pouring down from *Hovot Ha-Lavavot* upon the poets in Spain is very great.

Furthermore, from various locutions repeated in Ibn Tibbon's translation of the *Hidāya* and in the poems, M. understands that this translation too influenced the poets. An example is the Hebrew word נְמוּל (reward), which is a translation of the Arabic مَكافأة in Baḥye's Judaeo-Arabic original, and it also appears also in a poem of Yehuda Ha-Levi (p. 165); M. also finds the source of the words of that poet, כִּי נִקְל אֲנִי וְאִנִּי כְדָאִי in Ibn Tibbon's translation: לְחִיּוֹת עֲבָדוֹ וְאִפְּלִי לֹא עֲבָד (ibid., emphasis added).

This presentation of the relation between Baḥye's work of theory and the liturgical poetry raises several difficulties, which M. himself recognises, and he solves them in his own way. First, it is plain that the infiltration of philosophical ideas from Arabic literature to Hebrew poetry is not the innovation of the poets who lived after Baḥye and might have been influenced by his book, but was already characteristic of the work of the poets who preceded him. M. gives quite a few examples from the poems of Yosef b. Abitor, Yiṣḥaq b. Mar Sha'ul, and Shəmu'el Ha-Nagid, who lived before Baḥye.³ Moreover,

² See, e.g., Ratzaby 1991, pp. 337–392; 'Borrowed elements'; Levin 1965; 1977; 1992; Scheindlin 1991.

³ See, e.g., pp. 15 ff., 23, 257 ff., 273. On p. 23 is noted the quotation in the

Saʿadia, the Babylonian Jewish philosopher and poet who predated the Spanish period, integrated philosophical notions in his poetry, apart from his theoretical work *Beliefs*, and he indeed influenced Baḥye in poetry and in theory, as M. points out.⁴ And recently Fleischer made it clear that the proverb writer Saʿīd b. Bābshād, who lived in Persia at the end of the tenth or beginning of the eleventh century took various ethical-philosophical concepts from the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*.⁵ It is clear to M. (pp. 14–15) that

Not all the ideas of *Hovot Ha-Lavavot* concepts are innovations of its author, but he collected them, studied them, and arranged them in a uniform array and by a single system. Not surprisingly, therefore, in his day and also prior to his day we find ideas written in the book also written in the poems of the poets of those times, who had not yet seen the book [...]. We shall see these words of R. Baḥye in the poems of poets of Spain contemporary with him and of those after him. But the concept of his words was already long known and famous and accepted among the poets of Spain.

Indeed, Baḥye himself in his preface to his essay refers to his sources. He does not name Arabic essays, as he does with the Hebrew sources, yet he writes that in his book he cites

from the pious ones and the scholars of every nation whose words have come down to us [...] such as the writings of the philosophers and the ethics of the ascetics and their best customs [...]. They say (*Megilla* 16a) that anyone who speaks wisdom even among the nations of the world is called a sage.

Furthermore, all agree that the founder of the new school in Hebrew liturgical poetry in Spain is Shēlomo b. Gabirol. This is also M.'s view (pp. 159, 298–299), except that in his opinion in regard to the relation between this poet and Baḥye, the latter predates Ibn Gabirol. As is known, this question has been controversial among many scholars, and the view accepted in research after Kokovtsov's clarifications

Hidāya from the famous *baqqasha* by Yiṣḥaq b. Mar Sha'ul on the subject of the 'odour of sin'. This is the only excerpt from the Hebrew poetry of Spain that Baḥye cites in his book. For parallels to this motif in the work of Arab poets in the East and in Spain see Ratzaby 1991, p. 364, where there is a detailed discussion of it. And compare p. 351 above.

⁴ Pp. 62 ff. On the philosophical elements and the influence of Arabic poetry on Saʿadia see chapter three above.

⁵ Fleischer 1990a, pp. 135 ff. And see pp. 349–351 above on the 'fable of the garden'.

is that Baḥye is later than Ibn Gabirol. Only one researcher, David Kaufmann, who did not see the evidence of Kokovtsov's or of others, held that Ibn Gabirol was later than Baḥye.⁶ M. tends to accept Kaufmann's position, without perusing the considerations of Steinschneider, Kokovtsov, and Zifroni, whose opinion is different. He bases himself on the fact that Baḥye cites not a single verse from Ibn Gabirol's work (p. 298). What then is M.'s opinion on the role of Ibn Gabirol in the philosophical poetry (ibid.)?

It is possible that in this also Ibn Gabirol, who was the father of poetry in Spain [...] and whose path the poets followed, influenced poetry, showing the way for poems to be based on concept and wisdom and knowledge. This is because in the poetry the faith of the people of Israel is depicted [...]. These high attainments, first expressed by R. Sa'adia Gaon who wrote them in the book *Emunot Və-De'ot*, the poets of Spain found ordered and arranged and illustrated in the book *Hovot Ha-Lavavot*. They appeared in the sacred poems in place of the texts of the Sages that came out of them. In this Shlomo b. Gabirol and the poets who succeeded him preserved Hebrew poetry to retain its character.

That is, in M.'s opinion Ibn Gabirol's role as a poet was limited to elaborating ideas formulated before him by Baḥye in the *Hidāya*. Needless to say, the poets who succeeded him also took from Baḥye directly, or indirectly through Ibn Gabirol's poems.

This view is hard to accept, in respect of Ibn Gabirol and of the subsequent poets. The fact that Baḥye does not mention Ibn Gabirol is not proof that he lived before him. M. himself seems not entirely content with the opinion that Baḥye predated Ibn Gabirol, for in one place in the book he concurs with those who date Baḥye later, to the last third of the eleventh century,⁷ and elsewhere he concurs with a scholar who reckons the two writers contemporary.⁸ Moreover, in all the comparisons of the ideas presented in the *Hidāya* and the liturgical poems there is nothing to indicate a direct drawing by the poem from the theoretical work. It is possible, but not certain. The poets of Spain undoubtedly knew Arabic well and were acquainted

⁶ See Kaufmann 1962a, pp. 14–15.

⁷ P. 102: 'It is an accepted view that R. Baḥye wrote his book in the last third of the eleventh century'. As is known, Ibn Gabirol lived in the first half of the eleventh century, and even those who date him late agree that he did not live after 1070.

⁸ P. 44: 'Whether Shlomo b. Gabirol predated R. Baḥye or whether R. Baḥye predated Shlomo b. Gabirol [...] as in any event they were of the same period'. This is Zinberg's view.

with its literature no less than Baḥye himself. From the comments of researchers cited above (n. 2) it clearly emerges that the poets of Spain such as Ibn Gabirol, Moṣhe b. ʿEzra, Yəhuda Ha-Levi, and Abraham b. ʿEzra were directly influenced by Arabic poetry and Arab philosophy; Yəhuda Alḥarīzī, who wrote philosophical poems in Arabic, turned to them abundantly.⁹ Levin has even proved that the love poems in the Hebrew liturgical poetry in Spain were influenced by Arabic love poems, which are secular poems, and also by Arabic Sufi poetry, which is religious.¹⁰ Furthermore, a later poet of the thirteenth century, Shem Tov Falaquera (?1225–?1290), was greatly influenced by the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* in his book *Ha-Mavaqqesh*; and the still later Kalonymos b. Kalonymos (fourteenth century) even translated one of the *Epistles*, known as the *Epistle of the Animals*, into Hebrew.¹¹

In general, the *Hidāya* was presumably well known to the Jewish poets in Spain who lived after the time of Baḥye, but there is no reason to state that these poets, who knew Arabic and its literature very well, did not write on philosophical matters except under the influence of the *Hidāya* alone. We may exemplify this with three motifs, very frequent in the Hebrew liturgical poems in Spain and in the ethics literature:

1. *Preparation of Sustenance for the World to Come*. M. himself (pp. 271–273) points out the source of the metaphor in treatise *Ketubbot* 67b, and in the poems of Ibn Abitor and Shəmuʿel Ha-Nagid, who predated Baḥye, while Ratzaby¹² gives parallels from Arabic literature. Baḥye therefore seems to have been just one of those who used this motif in Jewish literature, and he should not be regarded as the precise source for later Hebrew poets.

⁹ See Stern 1960.

¹⁰ See Levin 1971, which is mainly based on an analysis of Yəhuda Ha-Levi's poem *בְּאֵן מַעֲשֵׂי הַמַּחֲבֵרִים הָיִיתָ*. The poem is discussed by M. on pp. 293–294, and his conclusion (also in respect of another poem by Ha-Levi) is, 'They are close to the words of R. Baḥye, and the spirit of *Hovot Ha-Lavavot* suffuses them'. Cf. on this issue Ratzaby 1991, pp. 352–359.

¹¹ Vilna 1874, etc. And cf. Fleischer 1990a, p. 136, n. 2, p. 139, n. 11, and pp. 146–148; Ratzaby 1991, pp. 368–370.

¹² Ratzaby 1991, p. 340. We note incidentally that the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*, which so far have not been translated into English, or even Hebrew (except for the *Epistle on Animals*), exerted a very great influence on Jewish philosophers and poets in Spain and other countries.

2. *The Sleep of Folly*. This motif appears in the *Hidāya* and the liturgical poems in Spain (pp. 274–275). This is no other than a Neo-Platonic motif, which was adopted by Arab philosophers and poets, such as the Brethren of Purity.¹³ Here, too, it is doubtful that the *Hidāya* is precisely the source.

3. *The Body as Imprisonment of the Soul*. Bahye describes at some length the body as the place of imprisonment of the soul, and the poets of Spain refer to the body as a jail and to the soul as a captive (p. 212). The *Hidāya* should by no means be regarded as the source, for this Platonic motif too is very common in Arabic ethical literature and poetry.¹⁴

There certainly is no room to assume that the poets of Spain were influenced by Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew translation. Translations of Judaeo-Arabic literature were not meant for the Jewish communities where Arabic was the language of speech and culture, and these were the communities from where all the great poets of Spain hailed. Furthermore, all the great poets, except Abraham b. 'Ezra and Alḥarīzī, wrote their theoretical works in Arabic, not Hebrew. Yet these latter two themselves engaged in translation from Arabic to Hebrew. What M. adduces as proof from the phrasing in the poems of Yəhuda Ha-Levi, which is similar to the language of Ibn Tibbon in his translation of the *Hidāya*, cannot teach us anything. Ibn Tibbon, who was born in Granada in 1120 (and died in 1190), moved to Provence following the *Muwaḥḥidūn* persecutions in 1140. He settled in the city of Lunel, and only after his arrival there did he translate first the שער הייחוד of the *Hidāya*, at the request of Məshullam b. Ya'aqov. Several years later he translated the remaining nine chapters of the book, at the request of Abraham b. David (the renowned Rabad), who was dissatisfied with the translation of Yosef Qamḥi. It is also known that Yəhuda Ha-Levi sailed for Egypt in 1140 en route for the Land of Israel, and several months after his arrival in Egypt he died. These facts therefore disallow any possibility that he saw the Hebrew translation of the *Hidāya* or was influenced by it.

¹³ *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* 1957, p. 451.

¹⁴ See Netton 1982, and several references there to the occurrence of the motif in the *Epistles*.

In conclusion, it is doubtful that the *Hidāya*, the important work by Baḥye, may be regarded as the proven and necessary source of the integration of ethical philosophical concepts into the Hebrew liturgical poetry in Spain. Better that it be seen, like the liturgical poetry of Spain and other branches of Jewish writing in that country and others, as a distinct and comprehensive expression of the extent of the influence of Arab-Islamic culture in the Middle Ages on Jewish culture.

APPENDIX THREE

A POEM BY THE JEWISH APOSTATE TO ISLAM ABRAHAM B. SAHL?

A. *The Poet's Life History*

Abraham b. Sahl was born in Seville (c. 1211) towards the end of the rule of the *Muwahhidūn*, who had conquered southern Spain around the middle of the twelfth century. The Ibn Sahl family was well known in Spain even in earlier centuries, and its scions included important poets such as Yosef b. Sahl and Shəlomo b. Šaqbel.¹ Unlike many of the Jews of Andalusia, who chose to go into exile in Christian northern Spain, and even beyond the Spanish borders, on account of the religious pressure on them of the *Muwahhidūn*, the Ibn Sahl family remained where they were. The young Abraham certainly acquired a broad and deep Arab education in that cultural milieu, and at the young age of sixteen years he amazed his contemporaries with his ability to write Arabic poems.

In circumstances that are unclear he converted to Islam; presumably it was because he could no longer tolerate his existence as a member of a despised people, especially in the era of the fanatical *Muwahhidūn*. Ibn Sahl became one of the most important poets of his day in Arabic, and was renowned primarily for his poems of passion, many of which were written as *muwashshahāt*. He entered Muslim social and political life, and after Ferdinand III, king of Christian Castile, conquered Seville from the Muslims in 1248, Ibn Sahl moved his place of residence to Ceuta on the northern shores of Morocco, and in fact served at the court of the city governor, Abū ‘Alī b. Khallāṣ. In 1251 he drowned with the sinking of the ship on which he had set sail as companion of a political emissary to Tunisia. He was forty years old.²

¹ Schirmann 1996, pp. 483 ff.; Schirmann 1997, pp. 100 ff.

² Information on his life is found in many Arabic sources, in particular the work *Naḥḥ al-Tīb min Ghuṣn al-Andalus al-Raḥīb* by Aḥmad al-Maqqarī; see Maqqarī 1968, III, pp. 522–527. English translation by Pascual de Gayangos, London 1840, I, pp. 158–160. And see Mones 1971. See also the entry Ibrāhīm b. Sahl by Shmuel

The question of Ibn Sahl's apostasy exercised his contemporaries, and continues to intrigue those who have written about him ever since. It is told that in response to a question from his friend Ibn Sa'īd about his faith, for there were those who harboured doubts about his conversion to Islam, he replied: *ولله ما أظهر / للناس ما استتر* (The exposed things are to human beings, the hidden are God's).³ A sage of Islam likewise said of him: *اسلام ابراهيم ابن سهل وتوبة الزمخشري من الاعتزال* (Two matters are not correct: the conversion to Islam of Abraham b. Sahl and the recanting of al-Zamakhsharī from the *mu'tazilī* faith).⁴ This of course must be set against the many writers who state definitively that he did indeed submit to the religion of Muḥammad. In any event, his poetry, although Islamic themes are present in it, offers nothing to settle the issue.

B. אֵלִי אֵל אֲבוֹשָׁה, *a poem by Abraham b. Sahl*

1. Sources

At first glance the memory of Ibn Sahl has been expunged from the Jewish history and literature, for his name is not recorded in any Jewish source. But recently a Hebrew poem with the acrostic אברהם אבן סהל, has been discovered, which may go towards solving the riddle of the conversion to Islam of the Jewish poet who wrote in Arabic. The poem opens, אֵלִי אֵל אֲבוֹשָׁה בְּהִילָה אֶסְלָלָה. Davidson listed it in his *אוצר השירה והפיוט* (4895 א) according to two sources:

Moreh, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, VIII, cols. 1213–1214. Strangely, in the same volume, Col. 1193, there is another entry on the poet by the editor, in which there are many inaccuracies. His poems won great esteem throughout the generations, and are dispersed in many manuscripts, especially in North Africa. They have also been published in many editions, first in part and later in their entirety. See Ibn Sahl 1980. A monograph on his work was published by Soualah 1914/9. The Karaite intellectual from Egypt, Murād Farag, devoted to him most of one of his essay (Farag 1939, pp. 22–71), including an interpretation of many of Ibn Sahl's poems. An important poem written by Ibn Sahl at the time of his conversion is not included in the editions of his poems, and appears only in Maqqarī 1968, VII, pp. 445–449. According to Maqqarī, 'This poem does not require the lifting of suspicion and accusation against him' as regards his faith. Cf. Schippers 2001, and below more on this matter.

³ Ihsān 'Abbās in his introduction to the Ibn Sahl 1980, pp. 33–34.

⁴ Maqqarī 1968, III, p. 524.

i. *Baqqashot*, Constantinople 1545,⁵ folio [8]. In this source are only the strophes carrying the acrostic אבר[. . .]הל. The inscription preceding the poem is בקשה להן הנזכר (A supplicatory poem to be sung to the above-mentioned melody). It is preceded by the poem ארץ הקדושה יקרה המורה, to which we shall return below. At the head of that poem is the title בקשה להן מונטיא פירמושא (A supplicatory poem to be sung to the melody of the poem *Montaña Ferosa*). This is the beginning of a Ladino song presumably similar in mood to this poem, which sings the praises of the Land of Israel, and whose melody is deemed worthy of having a poem composed for it.⁶

ii. *Ahavat Ha-Qadmonim*, a Passover *Haggada* according to the custom of Būsa'da and Ghardāya (Algeria), Livorno 1904, folio 46. In this printing our poem is interspersed with strophes from the above-mentioned poem ארץ הקדושה, except for its first two strophes, which were printed at the end of the previous folio (45). The title is בקשה סימן אברהם.

Davidson indeed pondered the combining of the two poems, but was content to signify אברהם as the author's name.⁷ The present writer also recorded the poem according to a faded later Yemeni manuscript from the nineteenth century, and noted the author's name as אברהם.⁸

But a Yemeni manuscript happened to fall into my hands, and in it was a copybook of *baqqashot* whose time of copying may be estimated as the eighteenth century. Among the *baqqashot* is our poem, with the inscription אהרת, סימן אברהם בן סהל. However, a missing sheet left the last strophe truncated (from the word עזרה onwards in line 40). Continued search yielded another source for the poem, apparently the earliest, Ms. Munich 233, folio 192b.⁹

⁵ A single copy in the library of the New York Jewish Theological Seminary. I used the photocopy in the National and University Library in Jerusalem.

⁶ On the melodies of poems among the exiles from Spain see Tobi 1980, pp. 212–214.

⁷ Only in the listing of the poem ארץ הקדושה, 7681 א, does he note that אלי אל is by Abraham b. Sahl, but he does not include him in the table of poets.

⁸ Ms. Ben-Zvi 3131, folio 30b. See Tobi 1982a, p. 323, no. 736.

⁹ Steinschneider 1898/9 refers to this ms. as including poems of Abraham b. Sahl that had escaped the attention of Zunz; in fact, this poem alone is in it.

2. *Content and Matters of Form*

In content there is nothing special about the poem: it bemoans the tribulations of Exile and begs God to redeem his people from them and restore them to their land. But particular interest lies in the fifth strophe, which reads (ll. 19–20)

מְרוֹב צָרוֹתֵינוּ נוֹאֲשָׁנוּ מִשְׁוֹעָה
עָזַבְנוּ דָּתֵנוּ הָיִינוּ לַיָּוֵעָה

Out of the enormity of our sorrows we despaired of salvation
We forsook our faith, our life became a horror.

This expression of abandoning the faith, caused by terrible despair of the salvation of Jewry, seems to link Abraham b. Sahl, the author of this poem, to Abraham b. Sahl the thirteenth-century Jewish poet from Seville who converted to Islam;¹⁰ it is not typical of Jewish poets even in their most difficult hours to speak of forsaking the faith. They constantly confess to sins, grave as they may be, but they do not speak of leaving the Jewish belief. It will be observed that the strophe containing these lines, as well as the preceding strophe and the three subsequent ones, were omitted from the first published edition of the poem (*Baqqashot*, Constantinople 1545). This was on account of its extreme content and the atmosphere of deep despair that clouded all these strophes.

The poem is quasi-*muwashshah* (*zajal*) of most unusual structure. The structure of the first strophe is *a/bb/a*, while the structure of a regular verse is *cd/cd/d/ee/a*; *fg/fg/g/hh/a*. The body of every strophe is thus divided into two according to the change of rhyme, which alters from one strophe to the next. This structure is no other than the *ballata* known from Hebrew poetry in Italy. The late Dan Pagis had the following to say about this form: 'From the fifteenth century many Hebrew poems were written in Italy in the strophic pattern that so far have not been researched; at first sight it derives from the Spanish tradition as well as contemporary Italian poetry'.¹¹ Pagis analyses the two principles of this structure: (a) a 'connecting

¹⁰ A man by this name is also known from the first half of the eleventh century; this is the Karaite Abraham b. Sahl who lived in Egypt. On him see Gil (n.d.), index, p. 106, entry אברהם בן ישר (סהל) הוֹסֵסְתִּי; Fleischer 1977, pp. 243–244. But in terms of its content, structure, and rhyme, the poem cannot be attributed to this person, who moreover is not known as a poet.

¹¹ Pagis 1976, p. 351.

rhyme', signified by *d* or *g* in the above example, common to the last hemistich of the main part of the strophe and first hemistich of the *simṭ* lines; (b) a fixed final rhyme, signified by *a* above, common to all the last hemistiches of the *tawshīḥ* lines.¹² To these two a third principle should be added, namely that in the lines of the *tawshīḥ* there is a double rhyming system (apart from the connecting rhyme): the one changes from strophe to strophe (*ee* and *hh* above) and the other is fixed (*a*).

This structure would seem to deny authorship of the poem to the Jewish poet of Seville, Abraham b. Sahl, for this form is known in Hebrew poetry in Italy only from the fifteenth century on. However, it is in fact known from Hebrew poetry in Spain from the second half of the fourteenth century, albeit in only one exemplar. I refer to the poem by Yiṣḥaq al-Aḥḍab (1350?–1430?) on the arts, אִישׁ מְהִיר, אֲנִי בַמְהִירִים.¹³ In content it is influenced by the poem of 'Immanuel of Rome on the arts, אֲנִי יֵשֶׁן וְלִבִּי עָר.¹⁴ But 'Immanuel's poem, whose original Cassuto discovered in the 'Serventese of the master craftsmen of all the arts' by the Italian poet Rugiere Apugliese of the early thirteenth century, is not written in the structure under discussion but in the structure of a triple serventese: *aaab/bbc/cccd/*, etc.¹⁵

Likewise the principle of the 'connecting rhyme' is well known from the Hebrew liturgical poetry in Spain, especially in the work of Yōhuda Ha-Levi. In many of his poems the strophes are constructed in this pattern: *cdcdcd/d/b*, where *d* is the connecting rhyme and *b* is the common rhyme, which comes at the end of the lines in the opening strophe.¹⁶

True, we do not find structures of this kind in Ibn Sahl's Arabic writing, for in the *muwashshahs* he greatly perfected the lines of the *tawshīḥ* with systems more intricate than the *ballata* pattern, while in the only *zajal* poem the structure is simple: *aaabb* (the second line in the *tawshīḥ* is a refrain!).¹⁷ By contrast, we find main parts of stro-

¹² According to Pagis's statement, *ibid.*, p. 390, he intended to deal with this form in a separate study of forms in Hebrew poetry in Italy. As far as I know this work has not been published, and perhaps remains in his estate.

¹³ First published by David Kahana in *Ha-Shilo'ah* 10 (1902–1903), pp. 351–358, and again by Ra'anan 1988, pp. 68–81. And see *ibid.*, Introduction, pp. 25–26.

¹⁴ 'Immanuel 1957, I, *mahberet* nine, pp. 174–177.

¹⁵ Cassuto 1966, pp. 44–46, and see p. 53, n. 99. Cf. also, Pagis 1976, p. 350.

¹⁶ See e.g. מְהִיר שֶׁמֶךְ בְּקִרְבִּי, Ha-Levi 1978/80, I, no. 7, p. 15; יִרְצֶה צִיר אֵין פְּעֻרְבִּי, *ibid.*, no. 19, p. 45; מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לְהַדְרָה, *ibid.*, no. 30, p. 73.

¹⁷ On the *muwashshahs* see the end of the Ibn Sahl 1980. See also Hartmann 1897, pp. 44–47. On the *zajal* see Maqqarī 1968, VII, p. 445.

phe with a double rhyme system, and, moreover, in the *muwashshahs* of other contemporary Arab poets of Spain, Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240) and Shushtarī (d. 1264), and still earlier in two of Ibn Gabirol's liturgical poems (1055?).¹⁸

But we do find that the separate principles of the *ballata*—the 'connecting rhyme', the common rhyme of the *simt*, and the double set of rhyming, apart from the common rhyming of the *simt* lines—exist already in the Hebrew liturgical poetry in Spain, so there was no reason why they should not figure in a poem of the thirteenth century. That is, in terms of strophic structure at least, no difficulty presents itself in identifying the author of the poem אֵלֵּי אֵל אֲבוֹשָׁה as the well-known Abraham b. Sahl. Note that according to Pagis the Italian *ballata* developed in the thirteenth century out of several forms of Provençal dance songs, and that in Hebrew poetry it continued also after the quasi-*muwashshahs* forms from Spain and Provence.

In the book of *baqqashot* published in Constantinople, above this poem appear the words בקשה לחן הנזכר (a *baqqasha* poem to be sung with the above-mentioned melody). This inscription refers to that above the poem הַקְדוּשָׁה יְקָרָה הַמוֹדָה אֶרֶץ הַקְדוּשָׁה printed just before it: בקשה לחן מונטנייז פירמושא (a *baqqasha* poem to be sung to the melody of *Montaña Ferosa*). The poem הַקְדוּשָׁה אֶרֶץ הַקְדוּשָׁה is written in exactly the same structure and even metre, and not without reason are its strophes combined with our poem in *Ahavat Ha-Qadmonim*; furthermore, the name of their author is Abraham.¹⁹ But the time of composition of אֶרֶץ הַקְדוּשָׁה is unknown, and it cannot help us to determine the time of our poem. The poem intimated in the inscription is no other than the Spanish romance *Hermosa Montaña* known from the collection of Spanish romances published in Saragossa in 1552. The romance is noted as the melody of two other poems in this collection

¹⁸ Stern 1974, p. 19; Fleischer 1976, p. 259. To the two liturgical poems that he notes should be added the poem שֹׁכֵב כְּלִילִי, Ibn Gabirol 1971/3, II, no. 164, p. 496.

¹⁹ Although in the poem אֶרֶץ הַקְדוּשָׁה the acrostic is אֲבִרְהָם סְלָאִמָּה, and this is the accepted form, which Davidson (1925/33) records in the list of the poets in volume IV, p. 357, it seems to me that the last letter ה does not belong to the signature, and אֲבִרְהָם סְלָאִמָּה is enough, as in the text in *Ahavat Ha-Qadmonim*, folio 45b. This is a common family name among the Jews of Algeria and Tunisia. See e.g. the end of *Ahavat Ha-Qadmonim*, folio 56a. And see Davidson 1925/33, 33c, the signature סְלָאִמָּה in a poem in a collection published in Morocco. Incidentally, this poem should most certainly not be included among the poems of Jews of Yemen. See Ratzaby 1946, p. 55, no. 152 (mentioned there from a ms. only, and not from Davidson 1925/33, 7681a).

(nos. 17, 27) that are not written in the *ballata* structure, so it was not necessarily written in this structure either.²⁰ But one should not overlook the fact that the rhymes of the first strophe in the romance are *Sa* and *Da*, just as in the poem אֶל אֲבוֹשָׁה וְשֶׁה וְדָה (and also in the poem אֶל אֲבוֹשָׁה וְשֶׁה וְדָה).²¹ If we keep to our assumption that the known Ibn Sahl is the author of the poem, we find that this romance was composed not later than the beginning of the thirteenth century.

Incidentally, this *ballata* structure was common: it figures in eighteen of the four hundred poems of the Moroccan halakhist and poet Ya'aqov b. Šur (1673–1752).²²

The poem's metre is syllabic-phonetic, known as the 'Italian metre', giving equal value to short and long vowels. Every hemistich has six vowels. The presence of this metre in a poem from the first half of the thirteenth century in Spain is somewhat surprising, if indeed its attribution to the poet Abraham b. Sahl from Seville is maintained. Until recently it was accepted that the 'Italian metre' originated in Italy in the first half of the fifteenth century in the work of Moshe de Rieti. But not long ago it emerged that Aharon Ḥakīmān of Baghdad in the mid-fourteenth century wrote two of his poems in this metre; moreover, two of the liturgical poems of Italy in the second half of the ninth century, including one of Amittay of that period, are in the syllabic-phonetic metre.²³

²⁰ Unfortunately I was unable to read the romance in full because the above collection is missing from the National and University Library in Jerusalem. The identification of the romance was by Alatorre 1960, an article written as a critique of Hanokh Avenari (1960). The latter treats the melodies in the above book of *baqqashot*. The first strophe of the romance was given by Ms. Alatorre. It seems that it was popular among the people in the sixteenth century in Spain, as it is rendered by one of the protagonists in the book *Los Hierros de Adán. Colección de Autos [...] del siglo XVI*, Ed. L. Rouanet, Madrid 1901, T. II, p. 222, F<H, in the word *hermosa*. See Marcus 1965, p. 84, §3, and cf. Bar-Tikva 1988, p. 48.

²¹ Compare Bar-Tikva (op. cit.), referring to a poem of Ya'aqov b. Šur of the seventeenth century, the first strophe of which is has the same rhymes.

²² Bar-Tikva (op. cit.) rightly discern it. In n. 11 he detailed all poems with this structure.

²³ Beeri 1985, pp. 57–61; Fleischer 1981, pp. 138–139. It seems that the syllabic-phonetic metre was widely used in the Spanish popular poetry already in the beginning of Hebrew poetry in this country.

C. *Conclusion*

Examination of structure and metre do not therefore deny authorship of the poem to Ibn Sahl of Seville. But further support is still needed on account of this fairly amazing possibility. In any event, if the author of the poem is the thirteenth-century poet, the question of his conversion is resolved. The poem lays bare the divided heart and the double world of the apostate, whose conscience does not allow him entirely to renounce the faith of his forefathers and their hopes of redemption, to standing erect before the Gentiles. In the few words, 'Out of the enormity of our sorrows we despaired of salvation / we forsook our faith, our life became a horror' he encapsulates the distraught mental world of those who change their faith, of those unable to bear the weight of the affliction. Unlike the writer of the poem יְרִיבוּנִי עָלַי עֲזָבִי בְּרִיתְךָ (They quarrel with me because I left your religion), ascribed to Yiṣḥaq b. 'Ezra, who left Spain for the East, and who in the end converted, Ibn Sahl does not apologise, as if his deed was superficial, as the former says:²⁴

וְאִם אֹמֵר מְשַׁנֵּעַ הוּא נִבְיָא אֵל [...] /
בְּפִי אֹמֵר וְלִבִּי יַעֲנֵנִי: / מִכֹּזֵב אַתָּה וְעֲדוּתְךָ פְּסוּלָה

And if I say that Muḥammad is the Prophet of God [...]

I speak with my mouth, but my heart responds to me: You lie, and your testimony is invalid.

He explains the abandonment of the religion as the result of an insupportable social and political situation, detached from his own personal and private context. Presumably, he was not the only one whose spirit foundered under the pressure of the *Muwahḥidūn*. But although he seemed to leave the body of Jewry and become bound up in the life of the non-Jews, and enter into their culture, he did not sever the thread of national identification with the congregation of his forefathers. He too awaits salvation.

²⁴ Ibn 'Ezra Yiṣḥaq 1981, p. 147.

The Text of the Poem

- אחרת
סימן אברהם ב"ן סה"ל
אלי, אל אבושה
בחיל אסלדה אפעח כילדה
מצר, עין ולמושה :
- 5 בין שני אריות עדתך נפורה
כשיות דחיות מצדה אל צרה
ימנך עורדה
לנאול נאלתך זכרה אחבתך
ואבן הראשה :
- 10 רחמן, עד אנה יונתך בשביה ?
השוע פיונה עתיה צופיה
יום ליום חומיה
מעול צר ומצוקה שוקדת בחיקה
אל יוצרי אדרושה :
- 15 המבלי נואל להצענו כל צר ?
נאנחנו לך, אל, שוענו ממצר
הן ירך לא תקצר !
יגדל נא כחך ושלח משיחך
לעדה קדושה :
- 20 מרוב צרותינו נאשנו מישועה
עזבנו דחנו חיינו לזנועה
י"י שמעה
נעשה אל האחר גרונו נחר
צעקנו מבושה :
- 25 בנך בכורך פדה נא, יוצרנו
קום מאמרך בניב דווינו
חיש נא העלנו
גנה חר ציונה תשלח חיונה
מבור צר ומוקשה :
- 30 סורך נלה, עד ק- תי, צורי, נסתמה ?
עדתך בכלמה ביום צר נזעמה
גברת בחמה
שקועה, נשמה, עובדת האמה
שהיא פרה עושה :
- 35 האל מננו עורה נא משחק
עד מתי אויבנו כל אה לנו צחק ?
מעמד אל תרחק
נלה קץ ישענו ולציון העלנו
אל ביתך דרושה :
- 40 לחפצי-בה אקרא : יונתי חמתי,
בצרתך, עורה אהיה לך אמתי
עמי נחלתי
ישראל אושיעה ולעושה רשעה
אשלם לה ענשה :

Commentary

1 תהלים כא,ב: אלהי בך בטחתי אל אבושה. 2 איוב ו,י: ואסלדה בחילה [. . .] כי לא כחדתי אמרי קדוש: ישעיהו מב,יז: כיולדה אפעה. 3 איוב טז,ט: צרי ילמוש עיני לי. 4 יואל א,ו: שני שני ארתי; ירמיהו ג,יז: שה פזורה ישראל. 6 תהלים פג,ג: עוררה את נבורתך. 7 רות ד,ו: נאל לך אחה את נאלתי; ירמיהו ב,ב: זכרתי לך חסד נעורייך אהבת כלולתיך. 8 אבן הראשה — ישראל. זכריה ד,ו: 9 רחמן — הקב"ה. יונתן — ישראל. שביה — גלות. 10 תשוע — הצעק, תתפלל. צופיה — לנואל. 11 יום ליום — מדי יום. 12 איוב טז,כד: יבעתהו צר ומצוקה. שוקדת וכו' — מתמידה לומר בלִפְתָּה. 14 שמות יד,א: המבלי אין קברים במצרים. נוֹאל — הקב"ה. 16 במדבר יא,כג: היר ה' תקצר; ישעיהו ג,ב: הקצור קצרה ידי מפרות. 17 במדבר יד,יז: נדל נא כח ה'. 18 עדה קדושה — ישראל. 20 דברים כח,כה: והיית לזעוה. 21 דניאל ט,יט: ה' שמעה ה' סלחה ועשה אל תאחר; תהלים סט,ד: נחר נרוני. 23 מבושה — על שפלותונו בין הגויים. 24 בנך בכורך — ישראל, שמות ד,כב. 25 מאמרך — דבריך. גיב חזיונונו בדברי הנבואה שאמרת לנו. 27 נוה וכו' — אל בית המקדש שעל הר ציון (שמות טז,יג; תהלים מת,ג). היונה — ישראל, והלשון בבראשית ת,יב: וישלח את היונה. 28 בור — הגלות, זכריה ט,א: שלחתי אסיריך מכור. מוקשה — כמו מוקש, מלכות. סודך — סוד הנאולה, דניאל יב,ה: כי סתמים והסתמים הדברים עד עת קץ. 30 יום צר — תקופת הגלות, והלשון בתהלים קב,ג: ביום צר לי. נועמה — זכריה א,יב: ערי יהודה אשר עזמתה זה שבעים שנה. 31 נברת — ישראל צאצאי שרה נברת הנר, בראשית טז,ג. בחמה שקועה — שרייה כבעסו של הקב"ה. 32–33 נשמה — שוממה, חרבה. עוברת וכו' — ישראל עוברים את הערבים המוסלמים בני ישמעאל בן הנר שפחת שרי (שם), שמעיהם פורחים ומשנשנים. 34 תהלים פד,י: מגנו ראה אלהים. שחק — שמים. 35 אה — אהר, יהוקאל יחי. 36 תהלים כב,י: אל תרחק ממני. 38 דרושה — ירושלים, ישעיהו סב,יב: ולך יקרא דרושה עיר לא נעוה. 39 חפצי בה — ישראל בעת הנאולה, שם,ד: כי לך יקרא חפצי בה; שיר השירים ו,ט: יונתי תמותי. 40 תהלים מז,ב: עזרה בצרות נמצא מאד. 41 דברים ט,כז: עמך ונחלתך. 42 עושה רשעה — הגויים, מלאכי ג,יט: עשה רשעה.

Textual Variations

- א *Ahavat Ha-Qadmonim*, Livorno 1904, folio 46
 ב *Baqqashot*, Constantinople 1545, folio [8]
 ט Ms. Tobi, private collection
 ז Ms. Munich 233, folio 192b
 ח Ms. Ben-Zvi 3131, folio 30b

1 אלי — ט: אלי אלי. אבושה — ת: אבושה. 2 בחיל — אמת: בחילה. אסלדה — ת: אסלודה. כיולדה — ת: כיולדה. כתיבים אלו, וכן 'זלעשי' שבמור 42 משקפים הניית החולם כציר, כמקובל בעברית של יהודי דרום תימן. 3 ילמושה — ב: למושה. 4 עדתך — ב: עדרך. 6 עוררה — א: עורה. 7 לנאול — ב: לנאון, א: לנואל. 10 תשוע — ב: תשועתך. 12 בחיקה — א: בחוקה, ט: בחוקת, ת: בחוקת. 13 אל יוצרי — ב: האל. 14–33 ב: ליהא. לחצנו — א: לוחצינו. 15 ואחנו — אמת: אנתנו. אל — ט: האל, ת: אלי. שוענו — ט: שועינו. ממצר — ת: מן המצר. 17 ושלח — ט: ושלח נא. עזבנו — ט: ועזבנו. לזועה — ט: לזועה בלי מרנעה, א: לזועה. 21 שמעה — א: שמעה יי סלחה. 24 פדה וכו' — א: נלה קץ ישועתינו. 25 בניב — ת: בניב נא. 26 העלנו — א: והעלינו. 27 תשלח היונה — א: חשוע כינה. 28 מכור — א: מכור. ומוקשה — אמת: ומקשה. ט מוסיף כאן חרוזה שאינה מן הפיוט: נאלמתי דומיה החשתי מטוב / איה דבר חווים אשר דברו בטוב / החיה עם לא

אלמן אשר החשו מטוב / זה כמה שנים מכחם אנושה. 30 ביום — ת: בים, א: ביד. 31 בחמה
 — אמת: כחמה. 33 פרח — אמת: פחד. 34 נא — ת: ליתא. משחק — אט: משחר. 35 עד
 מתי — ת: ליתא. כל וכו' — א: כל איחר לי ניחר. אח לנו — במ: אחד לי. צחק — מ:
 שחק. מת: שיחר. 36 מעמד — במ: עדתך. תרחק — ת: תאחר. 38 דרושה — א: אדרושא.
 40 בצרתך — ב: בצדקתך. אהה — ת: אהי, א: היית. 41 נחלתי — א: נחלתך. 42 אושיעה
 — את: הושיעה. ולעושה — במ: ולאדום, ת: ולעושי.

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