

The Convergence of

JUDAISM

AND

ISLAM

RELIGIOUS, SCIENTIFIC, AND
CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

EDITED BY MICHAEL M. LASKIER AND YAACOV LEV

The Convergence of Judaism and Islam



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University Press of Florida

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Acknowledgments

This edited volume is about religion, intellectualism, and culture in Judaism and Islam. There are few, if any, studies that resemble it when focusing on the medieval and early modern times. The authors recruited for this purpose rank among the best researchers in their field: historians, scholars of Arabic and Hebrew literature, musicologists, mathematicians, and philosophers. Indeed, some chapters are a *mélange*. The picture that emerges is that the relationship between Judaism and Islam is complex and depends on social conditions, common or contradictory interests, and religious and cultural exchanges. During the final preparations for the publication of this volume, one of the authors, Professor Juliette Hasine from Bar-Ilan University, passed away prematurely. She was a dear colleague, and we shall cherish her memory.

We express our sincerest gratitude to the following people and institutions: Professor Fred Astren, director of the Jewish Studies Program at San Francisco State University; Bar-Ilan University's Aharon and Rachel Dahan Center for Culture, Society and Education in the Sephardic Heritage and its director, Dr. Shimon Ohayon; and William Frost, president of the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation in New York. Without their gracious and generous financial support, the realization of this project would not have been possible.

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1

Introduction

MICHAEL M. LASKIER AND YAACOV LEV

The single and collaborative leading works on Jews and Muslims in medieval and modern times published in English during the past four decades include Shelomo Dov Goitein's *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts through the Ages* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974); Bernard Lewis's *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Steven M. Wasserstrom's *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Joshua Blau's *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic: A Study of the Origins of Middle Arabic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965); Norman A. Stillman's *Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979); and Benjamin H. Hary, John L. Hayes, and Fred Astren, eds., *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communications, and Interaction: Essays in Honor of William M. Brinner* (Boston: Brill, 2000).

Goitein's *Jews and Arabs* paints a rather idyllic picture of Jewish-Muslim relations. Most of his analysis extends from the early days of Islam on into the fourteenth century. Although of superb quality, it is a general work. The same holds true for Lewis's analysis in *The Jews of Islam*, which is less diverse. It probes the links between Islam and other religions, general Judeo-Muslim traditions, as well as the late medieval and early modern periods that refer to Jews and Muslims in Sunni and Shiite milieus. Wasserstrom's *Between Muslim and Jew* sheds significant light on specific Jewish-Muslim interaction in the context of messianism, Midrash, the influence of Judaism on the emerging Shiite community, and class structure. Conceptually, Wasserstrom builds upon the findings of social and

political historians regarding interreligious symbiosis. This excellent book is confined to early Islam.

Blau's pioneering study *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic* strictly concerns the symbiotic aspects of language and linguistics. Stillman's *Jews of Arab Lands* is a historical source book that is largely based on a wealth of primary documents, many of them published in their entirety. It covers the period from early Islam until 1880. The twenty-eight essays subsumed in the edited volume honoring William M. Brinner analyze and document Jewish-Muslim coexistence from the advent of Islam until the 1970s. It encompasses religious, historical, philosophical, linguistic, literary, and political themes. Albeit an impressive thematic undertaking, it seeks to cover in a single book an extremely broad period and suffers from a periodization imbalance: the overwhelming majority of the essays relate to the Middle Ages.

The Convergence of Judaism and Islam with its sixteen chapters is the most comprehensive and exhaustively written collection of interdisciplinary essays to date on the Judeo-Muslim experience dating from medieval times to the advent of modernity. This is its *raison d'être*. There is innovative research into fresh topics pertinent to the days of the prophet Muhammad, the great caliphates, and the multiethnic Muslim empires at the height of their achievements and during their decline. The book is not rigidly structured according to chronological or thematic principles, nor does it follow a strict historical-chronological mode. The broader thematically based essays are complemented by specialized problem studies, all of which make larger points. The chapters do not run consecutively and successively from one early period or century to the next with perhaps the sole exception of studies relating to Jews in early Islam. Even the essays that focus on the modern period relate largely to the persistence and vitality of the *traditional* Judeo-Muslim relationships and commonalities. In several Islamic societies as late as the 1930s, the benefits of modern-style education or the dissemination of occidental ideals among Muslims and Jews were nonexistent or the lot of tiny privileged elites. Countries like Yemen remained immune to modernization for a long time. Changes occurred under European colonialism in much of the Arab and Islamic worlds, and among the non-Muslim minorities in their midst, owing to the gradual integration into the modern world economic system and with the rise of nation-states. These phenomena are investigated separately in our companion volume, also sixteen chapters long, entitled *The*

Divergence of Judaism and Islam: Interdependence, Modernity, and Political Turmoil.

How does this volume fit into the larger discourse in the field and contribute to its enhancement? Like other leading studies, the central thesis permeating our sixteen essays is that Judeo-Muslim ties during the medieval and early modern periods were relatively peaceful at many levels evolving around cultural diversity and intellectual and professional cooperation. This contrasted sharply with the grim realities in premodern Europe under Christendom where policies of institutionalized persecutions and acute socioreligious marginalization prevailed. At the same time, however, we contend that the positive convergence was not consistently idyllic and had been nuanced. While not denying the vitality of Goitein's "symbiosis," we share the term *commensality* expounded by Stillman as being a more suitable expression of coexistence derived from mutually advantageous gains. Similar to other books, we examine factors related to history, literature, culture, and religion. Judeo-Muslim relations are measured by the extent of closely knitted ties, mutuality, interpenetration, and occasional tensions and disagreements that arise at different levels. But there is more: several key essays extend the definition of the relationship to Jewish communal life per se in the realm of Islamic society, at times parallel to it.

As already suggested, the major studies listed above are more restricted in scope or suffer imbalances of historical periods. Other studies emphasize Judeo-Arabic language and literature or concentrate heavily on religious aspects. Several are textbook-oriented as well as reference works, or they are more theoretical in nature, expanding on works of existing scholarship by incorporating symbolic and conceptual aspects of inter-religious symbiosis. We believe very strongly that our project will have a lasting value.

Two broadly defined sections guide this volume: (1) premodern Jewish-Muslim religious judicial and mystical interaction, commonalities, and conflicts; and (2) scientific-intellectual, professional, and cultural pursuits. The opening chapter, "Fourteen Hundred Years of Intertwined Destiny in Judaism and Islam?" provides a comprehensive overview by Norman A. Stillman. Like Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, a leading scholar of Islam, Stillman points out that medieval realities significantly differed from modern ones. While taking a bird's-eye view of Jewish-Muslim interrelationships throughout the centuries, Stillman characterizes this

intertwined destiny as “commensality,” derived from the Spanish term *convivencia* (cohabitation, coexistence), which implies living together in a shared environment. This sharing applied well throughout the duration of the Ottoman Empire. Whereas much of the focus in his analysis is set on the Middle Ages and the early modern era, Stillman deviates to some degree by going beyond these periods. He admits that political factors of the modern era did hurt the Judeo-Muslim *entente*, yet other central reasons including the adoption by Muslim secular intellectuals, nationalists, and religious leaders of modern western anti-Semitic notions as well as Christian traditions of the blood-libels. Over time, anti-Jewish feelings gained momentum in the Muslim milieu through the radical Islamism—Sunni and Shiite—that extended beyond the Middle East and North Africa, including the European Union, where large concentrations of Jews and Muslim migrants could be found.

Section One—Religion, Law, and Mysticism—opens with Brannon Wheeler’s chapter, “Quran and Muslim Exegesis as a Source for the Bible and Ancient History.” Wheeler examines the concept of the “Arab” prophets in the Quran and early Muslim exegesis. Using Muslim exegesis and documentary evidence from the ancient and late antique Near East, he details how Muslim exegetes used biblical references and other pre-Islamic conceptions of prophethood to demonstrate that Muhammad was a continuation and culmination of an ancient Arab history of prophecy. In addition to illustrating how Muslim exegetes fashioned their authority vis-à-vis Judaism and Christianity, this Islamic conception of prophecy highlights the more general historical context from which biblical and Quranic notions of religious authority emerged from the common culture of the ancient Near East.

Bat-Sheva Garsiel’s “The Quran’s Depiction of Abraham in Light of the Hebrew Bible and Midrash” also analyzes the Quran, stressing the possible Jewish, Christian, Judeo-Christian, or Gnostic sources of inspiration for the Quranic revelation. Abraham emerges as a figure that is respected by the Bible and Quran. Although at first glance the Quranic depiction of Abraham “seems to be a modification of some earlier Jewish traditions,” Abraham is perceived in the Quran as a prophet, the father of the believers, and the first Muslim. The Prophet saw himself as the final prophet in the footsteps of Abraham, whose true monotheistic religion was falsified by the Jews and Christians.

In “Present at the Dawn of Islam: Polemic and Reality in the Medieval Story of Muhammad’s Jewish Companions,” Shimon Shtober contends with other aspects pertinent to the early Islam. He discusses the relationship between the Prophet and Arabia’s Jewish elite, concurrent with the precarious cultural and social climate to which ordinary Jews were then exposed.

“The Use of Islamic Materials by non-Muslim Writers” by Yehoshua Frenkel, provides a full spectrum of Jewish-Muslim interrelationship by painting a broad picture of Jews within the matrix of Muslim state and society. This essay is neither an investigation into the interdependence between Islam and Judaism nor an attempt to reveal commonalities in the holy sources. Relating to the post-632 CE periods under the caliphates, Frenkel argues that the Muslim version of the rise of Islam and the position of the Jews within the Muslim state was not challenged by the Jews, who instead chose to “manipulate the dominant Islamic version of the past and used it to tell a historical story that supported their own case.” He utilizes a sixteenth-century Hebrew text of Joseph b. Isaac Sambari (edited and published by Shimon Shtober) that recounts Jewish history under Islam, concluding that the non-Muslims “learned to read Islamic tradition in a subversive way” and have produced what can be dubbed a “counter history.”

It is thus acknowledged that all non-Muslim religious groups under the caliphates and later Muslim central authority usually refrained from challenging the hegemonic position of Islam and its laws head on. Notwithstanding, tensions arose when the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims were at a low ebb or once the latter felt particularly threatened as communities or as individuals.

Juliette Hassine’s “The Martyrdom of Sol Hachuel: *Ridda* in Morocco in 1834” is a case in point, focusing on the problem of Jewish conversion under Islam. In 1834, Sol Hachuel, a fourteen-year-old Jewish girl from Tangier, was beheaded, having been charged by a *Shari’a* court in Fez with accepting Islam and then reverting back to Judaism—an accusation which she denied. Backed by source material in French, Judeo-Arabic, and Hebrew, hitherto untapped, this study analyzes Judeo-Muslim relations based on the concept of *ridda* (apostasy). It defines Hachuel’s execution as martyrdom in the collective memory of Moroccan Jewry, while myths about her abounded. Thereafter, Jews in significant numbers

regarded the Muslim *qāḍīs*, Muslim witnesses who incriminated her, and even the Sharifian Sultan Abd al-Rahman as “losers,” “immoral men,” and “dishonest.” Whereas Hassine does not rule out that her sources may well be regarded as “apologetic literature” favoring Hachuel, there can be no doubt that her beheading affected Jewish-Muslim relations adversely in precolonial Morocco with long-range consequences.

As in nineteenth-century Morocco, Jews in other Muslim lands were either victimized by certain stringent aspects of Islamic jurisprudence or sought to benefit from its contents that proved advantageous to them. This appears to have been the case for Yemen in the 1930s, where issues concerning both Islamic Law and Halakha emerged. The study produced by Mark Wagner, “Halakha through the Lens of Shari‘ah,” is a case in point. In 1935, Jews in Ṣan‘a were in conflict over whether the Kuḥlānī Synagogue was private property or within the domain of a pious endowment (*waqf*). The Jewish leadership enlisted the ruling Imām Yaḥyā Ḥamid al-Dīn to help resolve the crisis. Simultaneously, prominent Yemeni Muslim jurists, too, became involved. What was the decision adopted by the Imam? Did it differ from the recommendations offered by the Muslim jurists? In the broader sense, to what extent were non-Muslim legal systems regarded as legitimate in post-Ottoman Islamic Yemen? Wagner addresses these and other intriguing issues.

The Judeo-Muslim interrelationship went beyond religious orthodoxy to include mysticism. Ronald C. Kiener’s chapter, “Jewish Mysticism in the Lands of the Ishmaelites: A Re-orientation,” is an attempt to rewrite the history of Jewish mysticism by examining its geographical origins and focusing on its medieval and premodern manifestations. It is also an effort to wrest the account of Jewish mysticism from its Eurocentric focus and place it instead in the context of Islamic culture. Kiener elaborates at length on the ways in which Islamic culture helped shape mysticism among the Jews beginning in ninth-century Baghdad and continuing with such currents as the Sufi-tinged Jewish pietist movement of thirteenth-century medieval Egypt, the ecstatic Kabbalah movement founded by Abraham Abulafia, and the origins of the so-called Spanish Kabbalah. His major thesis is that based on this research the centrality of Islamic culture cannot be ignored in developing a historical account of the evolution of Jewish mysticism.

Islam and Judaism complemented each other in other vital domains: the mathematical sciences, the professions, and cultural diversity. Section

Two—Scientific, Professional, and Cultural Pursuits—begins with Michael Katz's chapter, "Al-Khwarizmi's Mathematical Doctrines in Ibn Ezra's Biblical Commentary." Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (1098–1164) was something of a polymath, best known for his biblical commentaries. He was also a mathematician, and Katz discusses the impact of al-Khwarizmi's mathematics on Ibn Ezra's writings. Al-Khwarizmi (780–845) was a luminary from whose name and works are derived terms such as *algebra* and *algorithm*, while Ibn Ezra is considered a transmitter of al-Khwarizmi's mathematical ideas to Europe. As far as Ibn Ezra's use of al-Khwarizmi's mathematical principles in his biblical commentary, Katz points out that "over the years Ibn Ezra's approach was challenged from both the religious and scientific points of view." Nonetheless, he states, "No one can deny the elegance with which Ibn Ezra integrates mathematics into his biblical exegesis."

Although during the Middle Ages Jews and Muslims collaborated in mathematics and other sciences, while Jews are known to have contributed to the field of medicine, the point that pharmacy was a Jewish profession is less well known. The fact that two of the most popular pharmacopoeias were composed by Jews is even more esoteric. Leigh N. Chipman's chapter, "Pharmacopoeias for the Hospital and the Shop: *al-Dustur al-bimaristani* and *Minhaj al-dukkān*," examines two thirteenth-century pharmacopoeias, one written by Jewish Karaite physician Abu al-Fadl Dawud ibn Sulayman ibn Abi al-Bayan al-Isra'ili and the second by the other little known Jewish druggist, Abu al-Muna Dawud ibn Abi Nassar al-Kuhin (Cohen) al-'Attar al-Haruni al-Isra'ili. One of these pharmacopoeias (*al-dustur al-bimaristani*) was aimed at hospital use, while the second (*Minhaj al-dukkān*) was designated for private pharmacies. Both texts were written in Arabic, and Chipman asks whether the Jewishness of the authors is reflected by their works or had influence on the content. She states that these works were "aimed principally at a non-Jewish audience" and that they "express no clear-cut religious identity beyond a general monotheism."

The benefits reaped by the Jews under Arab Islam at its zenith through the enrichment of medieval Hebrew and poetic creativity—infused by Arab poetry—compares well with the progress they made in science and the professions. This is lucidly corroborated by Libby Garshowitz's "Jewish Parody and Allegory in Medieval Hebrew Poetry in Spain," where she refers to Anadaluia as the place this decisive encounter took place. Her

discussion is focused on the transmission of Arabic culture in Hebrew guise into the Jewish communities of twelfth-century Christendom. Of particular importance is the love poetry of Jacob ben Elazar (c.1170–1235), author of a ten-chapter collection (*maqama/mahberet*) of love stories composed in about 1233. She singles out chapters 7 and 9 and points out that Jacob ben Elazar's poetry testifies to his "virtuosity and adroitness in the Hebrew language" and the contribution of Arabic poetry in this context.

The following three chapters complement Garshowitz's study on Andalusia: Merav Rosenfeld-Hadad's "The Holy Book of Praises of the Babylonian Jews: One Thousand Years of Cultural Harmony between Judaism and Islam," Amnon Shiloah's "Encounters between Jewish and Muslim Musicians throughout the Ages," and Efrat E. Aviv's "'Estos Makames Alegres' (These Cheerful Macams)—External Cultural Influences on the Jewish Community of Izmir on the Eve of the 'Young Turk Revolution.'"

Merav Rosenfeld-Hadad devotes attention to the impact of Arabic-Islamic paraliturgical songs on Jewish culture and Hebrew poetry, with roots in Iraq, pointing out that since the days of the 'Abbasid Caliphate in the lands of Islam, the content of the Jewish religious poems "comprises themes and ideas that were inspired by the Quran and the Hadith as well as Arabic poetry, Islamic philosophy, theology, and mysticism. . . . It lasted more than a thousand years . . . and continued across the Ottoman Empire, when Islam was no longer as strong and powerful. Such influence is still evident in the Aleppo-Syrian Jewish community of New York."

Amnon Shiloah's chapter is about music and musicians. He describes the collaboration of the renowned Jewish musicians and their Muslim counterparts and fleshes out important illustrations of such interaction mainly in Tunisia, Iraq, Egypt, Uzbekistan (Bukhara), and Tajikistan. Whereas Rosenfeld-Hadad speaks about Arabic-Islamic songs enriching Hebrew poetry, Shiloah turns to the influence of Jews on their non-Jewish milieu.

Efrat E. Aviv provides a wide array of cultural phenomena to include Ladino, Turkish, and aspects of early modernization. Yet her main concern is with the influence by Ottoman Turkish musicians and theatrical performers on Izmir's Jewry in the final decades of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Covering mid-eighteenth-century Morocco until the inauguration of the colonial era in 1912 is Jessica Marglin's "Poverty and Charity in

a Moroccan City: A Study of Jewish Communal Leadership in Meknes, 1750–1912.” This final chapter tackles the “culture of giving” and the ways Jews and Muslims coped with their less fortunate populations in one of Morocco’s most traditional urban conglomerations. The case study of Meknes is considerably important, for it is one of the key inland royal Moroccan cities where the Jewish community was sizeable. Marglin applies charity and poverty to the broader Middle Eastern/North African context. Her findings reveal that (1) prior to the penetration of European concepts about charity, Jews and Muslims viewed poverty as a permanent and natural reality that could be treated but by no means eradicated; (2) both groups portrayed the poor either as inferior beings worthy of some contempt or innocent victims of their fate; (3) donating to charity in order to assist the poor or scholars was a religious duty (by way of *waqf* endowments among Muslims and *heqdeshim* among Jews), particularly pronounced during holidays and feasts; and (4) while Meknessi Jews regarded poverty as a fact of life that could not be altered, they nevertheless went beyond providing temporary relief. Part of the communal leadership’s goal had been to protect their members from avoidable impoverishment, by centralizing their responses to poverty and charity. Their Muslim counterpart chose not to act in a similar fashion.

2

Judaism and Islam

Fourteen Hundred Years of Intertwined Destiny? An Overview

NORMAN A. STILLMAN

One does not have to be a specialist in Comparative Religion, Islamic, Jewish, or Middle Eastern Studies to know that Muslim-Jewish relations are not—on the whole—ideal at this moment in time. Usāma bin Lādin has on numerous occasions over the past few years called for a *jihād* against “the Jews and the Crusaders.”¹ The tropes and themes of both European medieval and modern post-Enlightenment anti-Semitism are to be found among the principal tenets of virtually all contemporary Islamist groups. This is irrespective of whether they are Sunni, such as the Ikhwān al-Muslimūn, al-Qā’ida, al-Jamā’a al-Islāmiyya, and Ḥamas, all in the Middle East, or Jamī’at al-’Adl wa’l-Iḥsān and an-Nahḍa in the Maghreb, or Ḥizb ut-Taḥrīr in Europe, or for that matter whether they are Shī’ī, as in the case of Khomeinism or Ḥizbollāh.²

But it is not only among the Islamists who, after all, represent a small minority among Muslims, that such ideas have currency, but alas, among many members of the broader Muslim population as well. When the Malaysian prime minister, Mahathir Mohammed, said in a speech before the Organization of the Islamic Conference in October 2004 that “today the Jews rule the world by proxy” (an allusion to the topos of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*), he not only received unanimous applause from the kings, presidents, amirs, and ministers in attendance, but was praised even by such a widely respected and generally enlightened figure as the Afghan president, Hamid Karzai.³

There can be no doubt that the pervasiveness of anti-Semitism across the broad spectrum of contemporary discourse is a concomitant of the Muslim world's emotional and political engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In fact, such ubiquitous fantasies as the Blood Libel or the Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world are without any precedence in the *longue durée* of Islamic thought. Like so many aspects of modernity in Asia and Africa, these ideas are Western imports, historically un-Islamic, and have been branded as such by a few bold and enlightened Muslims.⁴

This lamentable hostility has, regrettably, been reciprocated within certain quarters of Jewry as well. Visceral anti-Islamic sentiments can be found among extreme religious-nationalist quarters both in Israel and the Diaspora. For decades, popular, generally nonacademic, historians have been producing revisionist accounts of the Judeo-Islamic historical encounter which emphasize a "persecution and pogrom" approach that is the very antithesis of the *Wissenschaft des Judentum's* "golden age" vision, but like the latter, this is a polemical distortion of the past and, indeed, a more seriously distorted one. Fortunately, this anti-Islamism is even more of a minority fringe phenomenon in the Jewish world than is its homologue in Muslim society.⁵

The widespread contemporary animus obscures the fact—in the public mind, at least—that the historical relations between Muslims and Jews, and between Islam and Judaism, have been far different in the course of the 1,400 years since the birth of Islam. And while never idyllic—nothing in human history has ever been so—the cultural interaction was for long periods mutually beneficial, and interpersonal relations were often good, at times even cordial, and certainly far more nuanced than the contemporary state of affairs would suggest. There is also a tragic irony in all of this, since Islam and Judaism have so much in common and have contributed so much to each other's development.

As to the issue of "Intertwined Destiny" as posed by the title of this chapter, it should be emphasized that one does not mean to imply the element of Divine Providence or preordination—something best left to the theologians—but rather, whether or not these two religious civilizations, Judaism and Islam, have been intertwined in what the arbiter dictum of English usage, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, calls the "weakened sense" of the word *destiny*, namely, "What in the course of events will become or has become . . . ultimate condition."⁶ When suggesting the title of this

chapter to the editors of this volume, it was debated whether or not it could be with or without the question mark, the reason being that with regard to the past the declarative is most appropriate, whereas as far as the future is concerned, the interrogative is more prudent. As a historian, this author feels more at ease when looking at the past, and it is in the course of the 1,400 years of the Judeo-Islamic *longue durée* that an intertwined destiny is most apparent.

The intimacy and mutuality of the social and cultural interaction between Judaism and Islam has been characterized by many leading scholars using the biological metaphor of symbiosis. The term was popularized by Shelomo Dov Goitein in the book *Jews and Arabs*, in which he referred to a period of “creative Jewish-Arab symbiosis, lasting 800 years [ca. 500–1300], during the first half of which the Muslim religious faith and Arab nationhood took form under Jewish impact, while in the second half traditional Judaism received its final shape under Muslim-Arab influence.”⁷

Goitein’s schema is too neat and tidy an oversimplification: first Judaism gives to Islam and then Islam to Judaism. Further, it does not properly appreciate the later Middle Ages, during which, he notes, Jews “had their full share in the appalling decline of those [i.e., Arab] countries,” and it totally ignores the modern era. Nevertheless, both the notion of symbiosis and Goitein’s basic periodization took hold and became the standard conceptualization in scholarship.⁸

However, since symbiosis can be characterized by either a parasitic or a commensal form of mutualism, it may be more appropriate to describe the interrelationship—the intertwined destiny—by the concept of “commensality,” which not only implies living together in a shared environment (like the Spanish term *convivencia*, often used by historians of Islamic Spain and early kingdoms of the *Reconquista*), but also, as its Latin root would indicate, “sharing from the same table” (in this case a table of culture, not comestibles).⁹

The destiny of Islam and Judaism was intertwined from the time of the prophet Muhammad’s mission in seventh-century Arabia. Without wishing to become involved in what has become on the whole an arid and futile debate that began with Abraham Geiger in the nineteenth century and was followed by Charles Torrey, Richard Bell, Tor Andrae, and Goitein in the twentieth, as to whether Jews, Christians, or Judeo-Christian and Gnostic sectarians were the primary sources of inspiration for the

Quranic revelations, suffice it to say that there was a significant and specifically Jewish component among those influences, including religious ideas, ethical notions, and biblical lore. This is being said while taking cognizance of Julian Obermann's still valid caveat that seemingly Jewish material could have come into earliest Islam from Christians, and seemingly Christian material could have been transmitted by Jews (although this author has always found this much less likely).¹⁰ However, there are simply too many significant parallels between Judaism and Islam to be reasonably explained as coming exclusively, or primarily, from non-Jewish sources. It is noteworthy that the great body of extra-Quranic lore which comprises an important part of Muslim scriptural exegesis (*tafsīr al-Qur'ān*) is actually called *isrā'iliyyāt*, or Israelite narratives, and some of the earliest transmitters such as 'Abd Allāh b. Salām and Ka'b al-Aḥbār were converts from Judaism. Early Islam's receptivity to Jewish hagiographic lore is further reflected in the oft-quoted *Ḥadīth* that enjoins traditionalists: *Ḥaddithū 'an Banī Isrā'īl wa-lā Ḥaraj* (Relate traditions from the Israelites without any qualms).¹¹

As to parallels, it is the very structural model of the Islamic religion, which is far closer to that of Judaism than it is to Christianity, that testifies to an early formative Jewish influence. But more importantly, this structural similarity laid the foundation for the historical commensality, the intertwined destiny of Judaism and Islam, over the centuries that followed. The most distinguishing features of this structural congruence were the shared, strict, uncompromising monotheism of the two faiths which rejects all iconography of Deity; the analogous notions of an all-encompassing Divine Law that is partially revealed in a written scripture and partially oral in form and that is conceived of as the path one follows (*halakha/sharī'a*); the parallel notions of purity and impurity (*ṭahara, ṭum'āl ṭahāra, najas*) and of religiously permissible and impermissible food (*kasher, ṭaref/ḥallāl, ḥarām*); and the physical marker of circumcision. All of these structural affinities helped to create the psychological possibility for a productive mutual existence. The Islamic perception of Jews as *ahl kitāb* (scriptural people) together with the more numerous Christians and Zoroastrians and the absence in Islam of the Christian claim to being *Verus Isrā'el* and of the *odium theologicum* precluded the Jews being the ultimate "other" in Islamic society and also laid the groundwork for an interaction considerably less fraught with the tensions obtaining in Christendom despite the limitations of the *dhimma* social system.

For their part, the Jews' perception of Islam as not being idolatrous in the way Christianity was perceived also contributed to the course of the intertwined destiny. Jewish apocalyptic writings (the *midreshē ge'ūla*) interpreted the Islamic conquests as divine retribution visited upon wicked Edom (Byzantine Christendom).¹²

The five hundred years following the Muslim conquests were an axial period for both Judaism and Islam. The majority of world Jewry at that time now lived in the *Dār al-Islām*. The conquests engendered a veritable wave of urbanization, the like of which the world west of India had not seen since Greco-Roman times, and it was during this period that the majority of Jews (particularly in their great demographic center of *Bavel/Iraq*) completed the transition that had already begun in Late Antiquity from an agrarian to a cosmopolitan way of life.¹³

It was also during the first half of this period that Jews, from Iraq in the east to Spain in the west, went over to speaking Arabic, the lingua franca of the new *oikoumene*. But more important than merely adopting Arabic as their spoken vernacular, Jews by the tenth century were using Arabic in Hebrew characters for nearly all forms of written expression, including in the religious domain. Queries and responsa (*she'elot u-tshūvōt*), scriptural exegesis (*parshanūt*), legal documents (*sheṭarōt*), and treatises of all sorts were written in Judeo-Arabic.

One reason for this thorough linguistic assimilation, as Joshua Blau has pointed out, is that in the Jewish Middle Eastern heartlands, Arabic supplanted Aramaic, the previous *koiné* of both Jews and Gentiles, which had already been used for both religious and profane writing. Thus the transition to Arabic seemed a natural process affecting everyone irrespective of nationality or confession.¹⁴ Three additional reasons should supplement Blau's explanation. First, there was the recognized linguistic kinship of Arabic to Aramaic and Hebrew that mitigated any feeling of foreignness. In fact, this kinship was duly recognized by the medieval grammarians and philologists. Second, there was the tremendous prestige of Arabic within Islamic society. This cult of language had a definite psychological impact upon the Jews of the Caliphate. Perhaps the most remarkable example of the profundity of this impact is Moses Ibn 'Ezra's well-known statement in his *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa'l-Mudhākara* that it was due to the power of their "eloquence and rhetoric" that the Arabs had been able to subjugate their great empire.¹⁵ The third reason for the thoroughgoingness of the linguistic assimilation is that there was a secular aspect in medieval

Islamic general culture for which Arabic was the medium, and thus it could safely be shared. By contrast, no such parallel existed in medieval Christian Europe where Latin was the language of a thoroughly clerical culture, and the vernaculars enjoyed no comparable prestige.

As noted previously, the centuries following the Muslim conquests proved to be an axial age for both Judaism and Islam. This period of more than half a millennium saw the classic systematization and formulation of their respective religious systems. Within the major urban centers of the Caliphate, Jews, together with other non-Muslims, took part in creating the secular aspects of the emerging medieval Islamic civilization and developed their own flourishing Jewish culture along parallel lines.

In Iraq, where the Gaonic academies were already flourishing centuries before Baghdad became the 'Abbāsid capital, some of the early schools of Islamic jurisprudence were established in close propinquity to the *battē midrash* and the *yeshivōt*. In fact, in early Arabic usage *majlis* was a Muslim parallel to *yeshiva/methivta*. Although the many striking parallels between *halakha* and *sharī'a* with regard to their scope of application, formulation, and methodology pose problems rather than solve them, they are indicative of a shared universe of religious, legal, and intellectual discourse, shared attitudes, and an awareness of what each other was doing. Already at the end of the nineteenth century, the father of Islamic Studies, Ignaz Goldziher, noticed the striking parallel—indeed, almost identical phraseology—in the formulas used by Muslim and Jewish jurisconsults in their responsa. But as Gideon Libson has astutely observed, the relationship between the legal sources of Jewish law and those of Muslim law “may involve a feedback model, according to which the Jewish system first influenced the Muslim, which at a later stage exerted influence on Jewish law.”¹⁶

This awareness was at its height during the Hellenistic renaissance in the medieval Islamic world, a period that Goitein has dubbed the Intermediate Civilization and Adam Mez, *die Renaissance des Islams*. In the cosmopolitan urban environment of Baghdad and other cities, there was widespread interconfessional contact within intellectual society. The famous shocked eyewitness account by the tenth-century Andalusian theologian Ibn Sa'dī of an open philosophical *majlis* in Baghdad is but one of many accounts of nonsectarian cultural intercourse. Within this intellectual environment, Jewish religious leaders followed their Muslim counterparts in adopting philosophy in the defense of religion, often to meet

similar challenges raised by freethinkers, such as Ḥiwi ha-Balkhī coming from within the Jewish fold or Ibn al-Rawandī and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, who emerged from the Muslim community.¹⁷

The cultivation by Arabic-speaking Jews of Hebrew grammar and lexicography under the direct inspiration of Arab linguistic science (*fiqh al-lughā*) is yet another area in which Jewish culture was nourished and enriched by its contact with medieval Islamic High Culture.

But perhaps nowhere was this enrichment more evident than in the new style of Hebrew poetry that emerged in al-Andalus in the late tenth century which adapted not only the rhymes and meters of Arabic prosody but even some of its profane themes as well. Jews cultivated this new Hebrew poetry, not as Blau has suggested because they did not possess the necessary mastery of Classical Arabic, but rather because they had so thoroughly assimilated the cultural *mentalités et sensibilités* of the surrounding Islamic society in which poetry was considered the ultimate national art form, that they, therefore, consciously chose to compose their own poetic artistic endeavors in their own national language.¹⁸

There were, to be sure, limits to this Judeo-Islamic commensality on the level of high culture—limits that were inherent in a premodern, hierarchical society in which religion was the primary mark of identity and in which one religious community was regnant and all others subordinate.

Judeo-Islamic commensality on the level of high culture did indeed decline as the more cosmopolitan, secular aspects of the medieval Hellenistic renaissance and overall material prosperity of the Arabic-speaking parts of the Muslim world waned after the mid-thirteenth century. This marks the end of the “creative symbiosis” in Goitein’s historical vision. For him, as for many other students of “Classical Islam,” the social and intellectual transformation of the Middle East and North Africa in the later Middle Ages is interpreted according to a Spenglerian model of decadence after efflorescence. However, I would contend that the changes that took place ought to be seen as an adaptation by Islamic civilization to historical challenges from within and without.

In spite of the changed atmosphere and the concomitant tendency toward greater marginalization of non-Muslims generally within the Muslim world, Judeo-Islamic commensality remained strong on the level of popular culture up until the modern era. Even in those places where Jews were compelled by force of law or custom to reside in their own ghettoized (such as the *Mellāh*, the *Ḥārat al Yahūd*, the *Qā’a*, or the *Maḥalleh*)

quarters, they were never as hermetically separated from their Gentile neighbors socially, linguistically, or culturally, as were their coreligionists in much of Christian Europe prior to the Emancipation.¹⁹

Jews were both producers and consumers of vernacular literature. They continued to occupy an important place in musical composition and performance. In Iran, Jewish musicians were guardians of the courtly musical tradition through the Qajar and Pehlavi dynasties, since music was something the Shi'ī mullahs viewed somewhat askance. In the Maghreb, Jewish musicians preserved *zajal* and *malḥūn* notebooks brought over by Andalusian emigrés. In some countries—most notably the Maghreb and Yemen—they were the master artisans par excellence.²⁰

Almost everywhere, Jews were an integral part of the local economy, and with the coming of the Sephardim after the Expulsions from Iberia and Sicily, Sephardi and Livornese Jews not only infused new physical and intellectual life into Islamicate Jewish communities, which had undergone a serious demographic decline in the pandemics of the later Middle Ages, but played a significant role as middlemen between the Muslim world and Europe.

Modern times brought about a weakening and eventually an end to Judeo-Muslim commensality, and this, too, was part of the intertwined destiny in *OED*'s sense of "what has become." The process of modernization which began with the mercantile and later physical penetration of the European powers into the Islamic world had a profound impact upon Jews and Muslims, albeit affecting them very differently. As noted above, commensality always had its limits. And while most Muslims tended to view the cultural, economic, and political forces from without with a natural suspicion and no little hostility, Jews and their minorities saw new horizons and were relatively quick to avail themselves of the opportunities afforded them first through the *Imtiyāzāt* (capitulations) and then, in far greater numbers, through the modern education provided by religious and cultural missionaries—in the case of the Jews, particularly by the Alliance Israélite Universelle schools. The latter gave its pupils far more than Western education. It gave them a new sense of themselves, new rising expectations, and an advantage of opportunity over the largely uneducated Muslim masses as the Middle East and Maghreb were being ineluctably drawn into what Emanuel Wallerstein has dubbed "the World Economic System."²¹ Thus, even before our contemporary phenomenon of globalization, Jews participated in what Charles Issawi has referred to as "the rise of

the Millets,” and they came to have a place in the new economy that was out of all proportion to their numbers or their traditional social status.²² Having no true proprietary investment in the Islamic social system, many Jews came to identify with the colonial powers, and irrespective of the strength of their attraction to Zionism, only a tiny few were attracted to local or Pan-Arab nationalisms and virtually none to Pan-Islamic nationalism. The intertwined destiny had become a parting of the ways.²³

But did this spell the end of the intertwined destiny? The lack of a resolution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, the heightened tensions between Jews and the Muslim populations in several Western European countries, particularly in France, and the sorry state of Muslim-Jewish relations worldwide referred to at the beginning of this chapter would all seem to indicate that, for better or for worse, Muslims and Jews still share a destiny that is intricately intertwined.

Notes

1. The text of the document in English translation may be found at <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223_fatwa.htm>. The text is discussed in Bernard Lewis, “License to Kill: Usama bin Ladin’s Declaration of Jihad,” *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 1998).

2. See Norman A. Stillman, “Islamic Fundamentalism,” and “Islamic Diaspora,” in *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution* (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2005), 1:358–60 and 360–61, respectively.

3. Mahathir’s remarks received extensive press coverage. See, e.g., David E. Sanger, “Malaysian Leader’s Talk Attacking Jews Draws Ire from Bush,” *New York Times* (October 21, 2003); Paul Krugman, “Listening to Mahathir,” *New York Times* (October 21, 2003); and the editorials “Islamic Antisemitism,” *New York Times* (October 18, 2003), and “Le modèle Mahathir,” *Le Monde* (October 29, 2003).

4. See, e.g., Muqtedar Khan, “Some Muslims Give Islam a Bad Name,” *Wall Street Journal* (October 30, 2001).

5. This historiographical process is discussed in Stillman, “The Judeo-Islamic Historical Encounter: Visions and Revisions,” in *Israel and Ishmael: Studies in Muslim-Jewish Relations*, ed. Tudor Parfitt (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), 1–12.

6. *OED*, 1:702b, s.v.

7. Goitein, *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts through the Ages*, rev. ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 10. For a thoughtful discussion of the notion of symbiosis in this context, see Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3–12.

8. Goitein, *Jews and Arabs*, 8. Bernard Lewis, e.g., speaks of “symbiosis” as well and adopts a similar periodization in *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). See particularly 77–78, referencing Goitein.

9. Stillman, "The Commensality of Islamic and Jewish Civilizations," in *Middle Eastern Lectures 2* (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1997), 81–94. For the classic expression of the notion of *convivencia*, see Americo Castro, *The Spaniards*, trans. Willard F. King and Selma Margaretten (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971). See also the comment on Castro's terminology in Thomas F. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain in the Early Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 292–93.

10. For a review of the historiographic debate, see Stillman, "The Judeo-Islamic Historical Encounter," 3; and also Julian Obermann, "Islamic Origins: A Study in Background and Foundation," in *The Arab Heritage*, ed. Nabih Faris (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), 58–120.

11. See M. J. Kister, "Ḥaddithū 'an banī Isrā'īla wa-lā ḥaraja," *Israel Oriental Studies 2* (1972): 215–39.

12. For these apocalyptic midrashim, see Yehuda Ibn Shemuel (Kaufmann), ed., *Midreshē Ge'ūla* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Mossad Bialik, 1953), 31–48, 49–54, 162–98, and 254–86. See also Bernard Lewis, "An Apocalyptic Vision of Islamic History," *BSOAS* 13, no. 2 (1950): 308–38.

13. The main outlines of this process of transition are described in Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1979), 27–35, and Stillman, "The Jew in the Medieval Islamic City," in *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society, and Identity*, ed. Daniel Frank (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 3–13.

14. Joshua Blau, *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic: A Study of the Origins of Middle Arabic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 19–22. David J. Wasserstein has recently offered compelling new arguments concerning the Arabization process that provide considerable nuance to Blau's schema. See his "Why Did Arabic Succeed Where Greek Failed? Language Change in the Near East after Muhammad," *Scripta Classica Israelica* 22 (2003): 257–72, in particular 271–72 concerning the Jews.

15. Moses Ibn 'Ezra, *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa'l-Mudhākara*, ed. Montserrat Abumalhan Mas (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1985), 1:42; Hebrew translation, B. Halper, *Sefer Shirat Yisra'el (Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa'l-Mudhākara)* (repr. Jerusalem, 1966–67).

16. Ignaz Goldziher, "Über eine Formel in der jüdischen Responsenliteratur und in den muhammedanischen Fetwās," *ZDMG* 53 (1899): 645–52; Gideon Libson, "Halakhah and Reality in the Gaonic Period," in *The Jews of Medieval Islam*, ed. D. Frank, 98n105. For a brief survey of the question, see Yaakov Meron, "Points de contact des droits juif et musulman," *Studia Islamica* 60 (1984): 83–117. On the possible Jewish influences at the early stage, see J. R. Wegner, "Islamic and Talmudic Jurisprudence: The Four Roots of Islamic Law and Their Talmudic Counterparts," *American Journal of Legal History* 26 (1982): 26–29. However, see Goitein's caveat in his essay "The Birth Hour of Muslim Law" in *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions*, ed. S. D. Goitein (Leiden: Brill, 1966): 126.

17. Goitein, "The Intermediate Civilization," in *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (ed. S. D. Goitein), 54–70; and Adam Mez, *Die Renaissance des Islams* (Heidelberg, 1922; repr., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968). From the time of Wissenschaft des Judentums scholars, the philosophical encounter between Islam and Judaism in this period

has been one of the two principal foci of scholarship in Judeo-Islamic studies. The pioneer work is Salomon Munk, *Mélanges de philosophie juive et arabe* (Paris: 1859; repr., Paris: Librairie Philosophique de J. Vrin, 1927) and one of the best recent works is Lenn E. Goodman, *Jewish and Islamic Philosophy: Crosspollinations in the Classic Age* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999). Ibn Sa'di's account is quoted by Alexander Altmann in his Translator's Introduction to Saadya Gaon, *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* (Oxford: East and West Library, 1946), 13–14.

18. For the juxtaposition of Blau's views and my own, see Blau, "Medieval Judeo-Arabic," in *Jewish Languages: Themes and Variations*, ed. Herbert H. Paper (Cambridge, Mass: Association for Jewish Studies, 1978), 121–31, and Stillman, "Response," 137–41.

19. For an overview of the process of social isolation, see Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands*, 64–94.

20. For Jews and vernacular literature, see Stillman, "The Judeo-Arabic Heritage," in *Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry: From the Golden Age of Spain to Modern Times* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 48–51, 54nn20–23; on Jews as musicians in the Maghreb, see Amnon Shiloah, "Music," in *Morocco*, ed. Haim Saadoun (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2003), 205–12 [Heb.]; Shiloah, "Music," in *Tunisia*, ed. Haim Saadoun (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2005), 184–92 [Heb.]; and Norman A. Stillman and Yedida K. Stillman, "The Art of a Moroccan Folk Poetess," *ZDMG* 128, no. 1 (1978): 66–67; for the Jewish role in Iranian music, see Habib Levi, *Ta'rikh-i Yahūd-i Irān*, vol. 3 (Tehran: Beroukhim, 1960), 435–36, 1011. The literature on the Jews as artisans par excellence in the Maghreb and Yemen is very rich. See Robert Attal, *Les Juifs d'Afrique du Nord: Bibliographie*, rev. ed. (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1993); Erich Brauer, *Ethnologie der jemenitischen juden* (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1934), 233–55; and Esther Muchawsky-Schnapper, "The Arts," in *Yemen*, ed. Haim Saadoun (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2002), 155–60 [Heb.].

21. The role of the Alliance has been the subject of several major studies, the two most important of which are Michael M. Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Jewish Communities of Morocco, 1862–1962* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983) and Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860–1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). See also Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 3–64.

22. Charles Issawi, "The Transformation of the Economic Position of the Millets in the Nineteenth Century," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, vol. 1, ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (London: Holmes and Meier, 1982), 261–85.

23. Stillman, "Frenchmen, Jews, or Arabs? The Jews of the Arab World between European Colonialism, Zionism, and Arab Nationalism," in *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication, and Interaction: Essays in Honor of William M. Brinner*, ed. Benjamin Hary, John L. Hayes, and Fred Astren (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 123–38; also Stillman, "Middle Eastern and North African Jewries Confront Modernity: Orientation, Disorientation, Reorientation," in *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries: History and Culture in the Modern Era*, ed. Harvey E. Goldberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 59–72.

SECTION I

Religion, Law, and Mysticism

3

Quran and Muslim Exegesis as a Source for the Bible and Ancient History

BRANNON WHEELER

As elucidated by Stillman, the commonalities between Islamic and Jewish civilizations contributed immeasurably to each other's development. This is most evident in the realm of their scriptures, religious sanctuaries, inscriptions, and stories of prophethood.

In his exegesis of Q 7:59–93, Sayyid Quṭb (1906–66) describes the stories of Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Lot as metaphors for the warnings given to the heedless by God.

This story captures the nature of faith and the nature of disbelief in the souls of human beings. It displays a repeated pattern for the faithful hearts and a repeated pattern for the disbelieving hearts. Those who believe in all of the messengers have no arrogance in their hearts and obey the messengers of God. It is not surprising that God would select one of them to speak and to warn them. Those who disbelieve in all of the messengers, they are the ones assuming their own greatness in sin, arrogantly thinking that authority was given into their hands by God the master of creation and the word.¹

All of these prophets were sent with the same message and all were rejected by their people, who were then punished by God for their infidelity. Sayyid Quṭb offers a similar interpretation of the stories of Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Shu'ayb in Q 11:50–95 and 26:123–91.

This metaphorical interpretation of the stories of Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Shu'ayb is not uncommon in the history of scriptural exegesis. John

Wansbrough cites the stories of these prophets as typifying the “prophetic cycle,” in part related to his contention that large portions of the Quran are to be understood as requiring “haggadic” exegesis.² In support of the conclusions of H. Hirschfeld, A. J. Wensinck argues that Hūd was an allegorical figure and that the name derives from the root *hwd* relating to Jews, Jewish practices, and Judaism.³ C. C. Torrey likewise asserts that the name Shu‘ayb is derived from *sha‘b* meaning “people,” and A. Geiger takes the story of Shu‘ayb as a confused conflation of biblical elements.⁴ Much of this interpretation is related to the presumption that similarities between the Bible and Quran are due to the latter being dependent upon the former.

In part, this metaphorical or literary interpretation of the stories of Hūd, Šālīḥ, and Shu‘ayb is due to the perception that these prophets do not appear in the Bible. All of the other prophets mentioned by name in the Quran appear to have biblical counterparts, although some disagreement exists about the exact identification of certain names: Adam, Idris (Enoch), Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Lot, Joseph, Job, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Zechariah, John, and Jesus. Dhu al-Kifl is consistently identified by Muslim exegetes as the son of Job, and Muslim exegetes identify many of the unnamed prophets in the Quran with biblical figures such as Ezekiel (Q 2:243), Samuel (2:246–51), and Jeremiah (2:259). Quran exegesis identifies the three messengers in Q 36:13–29 with the New Testament apostles Simon, John, and Paul, and other Muslim stories of the prophets also include accounts of Daniel and Samson.

Western scholars have often ignored the question of the historicity of the stories of the prophets contained in the text of the Quran, choosing to focus instead on the historical context in which the Quran was produced. Many scholars have attempted to evaluate the text of the Quran as a source for the history of the prophet Muhammad and early Islam, and scholars continue to concentrate on the history of the text of the Quran.⁵ But the historicity of the contents of the Quran as they relate to ancient and biblical history are overlooked, usually as evidence only that the Quran is derivative and depends upon earlier written and oral sources. Despite some suggestive remarks by scholars such as Reuven Firestone and Roberto Tottoli, little has been done to investigate what information the contents of the Quran can provide for the history of the Bible and the ancient Near East.

The following pages examine the Muslim exegetical concept of the Arab prophets as it relates to the Quran, the Bible, and other literary and documentary evidence from the ancient Mediterranean and Near East. Part one considers the literary and documentary evidence outside of the Quran for the Muslim image of prophethood. Part two introduces a wide range of sources evincing the existence of an ancient model of prophethood consistent with what is defined by Muslim exegesis on the Quran. This evidence shows how Muslim exegetes identify a model of prophethood linked with a territorial sanctuary that allows them to highlight and synthesize evidence from pre-Islamic sources to typify a Quranic model of prophethood. This model allows them to conceptualize and argue for the Arab provenance of prophecy, that the prophethood of Muhammad is a continuation and culmination of the ancient history of prophethood.

Arab Prophets and Prophecy among the Arabs

Muslim historians and exegetes mention a number of prophets who might be considered Arab prophets. These include otherwise unknown figures such as Khālīd b. Sinān b. 'Ayth al-'Absī, who, according to al-Mas'ūdī and others, lived in the period between Jesus and Muhammad. Ibn Hishām mentions the prophets Saṭīḥ and Shiqq, who foretold the coming of the prophet Muhammad to the South Arabian king. Other Arab prophets are identified in local contexts, such as the prophet Raḍwā in al-Jabal al-Akhḍar near Muscat, the prophet 'Umrān in Ṣalālah, and the prophets Aila and Zurayq in the Baqa' Valley of Lebanon. Some of these prophets might be related to the development of saint shrines and other local traditions regarding the importance of the burial sites of certain people. Others appear to be a continuation of older traditions associated with prophetic, priestly, and other cultic activities found throughout the ancient and late antique Near East.

Inscriptional and other documentary evidence from the ancient Near East and the Arabian Peninsula in particular attests to a number of functionalities and activities that appear to be consistent with the conception of prophecy in the Quran and early Islamic exegesis. The common Quranic terms "prophet" [*nb*] and "apostle" [*rs*l] are not found frequently among the Semitic inscriptions of the northern Arabian Peninsula and Fertile Crescent but are linked with terms found in Southern Arabic inscriptions and in Ethiopic.⁶ The Quran contains other terms associated with

prophetic activity and the prophet Muhammad in particular, such as “*kāhin*” cognate to the Hebrew Bible “priest” [*kōhen*]. Both Q 52:29 and 69:42 make a clear distinction between the prophetic status of Muhammad and that of a *kāhin*. According to Ibn Kathīr, a *kāhin* received visions from the Jinn and delivered them to people as though they were revelations from heaven.⁷ That the prophetic role of the *kāhin* was known in pre-Islamic Arabia is also evident from reports preserved in the biographies of the prophet Muhammad. Exodus 3:1 and 18:1 refer to Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, as the “*kōhen*” of Midian, suggesting that the term be applied to priestly figures among certain Arab tribal groups.

The term *khn* is also attested in Phoenician, Punic, at Deir Alla, in Old Aramaic, Official Aramaic, Jewish Aramaic of Palestine, and Mandaic.⁸ In Old Aramaic inscriptions, the *kōhin* is often linked with a particular deity such as Ba‘al [*khn b‘lt*], Ashtarte [*khnt ‘štrt*], Ba‘alshamayim [*khn šb‘lšmn*], and Yahweh [*khny‘zy yhw ‘lh’*]. A Nabataean inscription refers to the *kāhin* of Lat and Allāt [*khn ‘ltw ‘lht’*].⁹ Such references suggest that the *kāhin* was associated with a particular location and people attached to certain deities. Hebrew and Old Aramaic inscriptions also provide the title of “great” or “high” *kāhin* [*hkhn hgdl*, *khn’ rb’*], implying a hierarchy and possibly the affiliation of the *kāhin* to a state or other political establishment.¹⁰

Ibn Durayd records a tradition that the pre-Islamic *kāhin* ‘Amr b. al-Ju‘ayd, of the Rabi‘ah b. Sa‘d, was considered an “*afkal*,” a term known from the Sumerian *apkallu*, and attested also in Nabataean, Palmyrene, Hatran, Sabaeen, Lihyanite, and Hasaeen.¹¹ Like the *kāhin*, the *afkal* is often linked with particular gods, including Lāt and Allah, in Lihyanite, Hasaeen, Hatran, and Nabataean inscriptions.¹² A Palmyrene inscription mentions the “*afkal* of ‘Uzaza Allah the Good and Merciful” [*‘fkl dy ‘zyzw ‘lh’ ṭb’ wrḥmn*].¹³ The *afkal* is also connected with kingship and the state. A Lihyanite inscription refers to an *afkal* as “the representative of the Ghassan” [*wkl h‘sn*], and a Hatran inscription mentions “Sntṛq king of Arabia son of Nusrw the lord, the great father, the great priest [*‘fkl rb’*] of Shamash.” Both the *kāhin* and the *afkal* seem to be closely affiliated with the functioning of and the officiation at cultic activities such as sacrifice and the consecration of certain objects and locations. A Dedanite inscription mentions the “*Afkal* of Wadd and his sons,” who consecrate a boy as a victim or servant of the god Dhu Ghabat [*dh ḡbt*]. A Lihyanite

inscription attests to a rock being consecrated to Ba' alshamin by a female *afkal* [ʾfkl] named Bahani.¹⁴

Additional terms found in ancient and late antique inscriptions demonstrate the existence of other figures engaged in activities and having a standing not unlike that associated with prophets in the Quran and early Islamic exegesis. The *rbnwt* of several Palmyrene inscriptions appears to designate an office of administration and custodianship sometimes associated with sanctuaries.¹⁵ An Old Aramaic inscription from Nerab southeast of Aleppo identifies the bas-relief of Sin-zir-ban, the *kamar* of Shahar in Nerab [kmr Šhr bnr] as resting on a “throne” or “couch” [ʾršt] often related to kings. A group or perhaps a class of individuals holding the status of *kamar* is recorded as erecting a statue in the earliest dated Palmyrene inscription (44 BCE) and another group is credited with the dedication of a temple and its implements to the gods Bel, Yarhibol, and Aglibol in a Palmyrene inscription from the temple of Bel dated to 45 CE. The term *ptwr* also appears in a Nabataean inscription from Madāʾin Šālīḥ to label an office of an individual responsible for cultic activities such as the dedication of a tomb, and the term is also used to refer to altars in Hatra.¹⁶

Muslim exegetes highlight a number of terms used in the Quran that relate the establishment and government of sanctuaries or sacred locations to prophetic activities. The most common terms are permutations of *ḥrm* and *msjd*, which occur more than a dozen times together in the phrase *al-masjid al-ḥarām* (Q 2:144, 149, 150, 191, 196, 217, 5:2, 8:34, 9:7, 19, 28, 17:1, 22:25, 48:25, 27), linked with the cultic site of Mecca and a series of prophets. On the authority of Ibn Ishāq and al-Suddī, Ibn Kathīr explains that the true custodians of the Meccan sanctuary, mentioned in Q 8:34, are the prophet Muhammad and his followers.¹⁷ The exegesis of other verses, such as Q 5:97 and 9:17–18, specifies the cultic responsibilities of the prophets at the sanctuary, and other sources testify to the wider use of these terms in relation to cultic activities. Thamudic inscriptions attest to the use of the root *ḥrm* as a verb to describe the “consecration” of a rock, a location, or a person [nšwn], and the term is associated with the consecration of food to the temple of Wadd in a Minaean inscription. An inscription from Palmyra appears to commemorate the dedication of consecrated objects. A Nabataean inscription from Pozzuoli near Naples in Italy refers to the restoration of a sanctuary [mḥrmtʾ]. Two other

Nabataean inscriptions from Kharayeb and al-Jawf mention the making or building of sanctuaries [mḥrmt'] for Dhushara, and a Minaean inscription seems to designate a particular location as a sacred site [ḥrm].¹⁸

Muslim exegesis on Q 28:57 and 29:67 makes the claim that the Israelites, during the time in the wilderness of wandering near Midian, had a "safe sanctuary" [ḥaram amīn]. Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Shawkānī (d. 1250) points to the description of the safe sanctuary, provided with fruits of all kinds and provisions from God, as a parallel to the sanctuary in Mecca.¹⁹ Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh Ibn Abī Zaminīm (d. 399) uses the description of the Israelite sanctuary in Q 26:57–59 to extend a parallel between the prophetic activity of Muhammad and Moses.²⁰ According to al-Bayḍāwī, the mention of the "safe sanctuary" [ḥaram amīn] in Q 28:57 is a reference to the Meccan sanctuary that God provided the Quraysh in order to protect them from the surrounding tribes who might persecute them on account of their following the prophet Muhammad, as the Israelites were protected from Pharaoh in Midian.²¹ Muslim exegetes mention other sites of Israelite pilgrimage in the Arabian peninsula, including al-Rawḥā" and the Masjid al-Khayf in Minā.²²

In the Quran, the term *masjid* is most commonly linked with the adjective *ḥarām* [al-masjid al-ḥarām], although the term *masjid* occurs in other contexts, such as Q 7:29–31 [kull masjid] and in the plural [masājid, masājid allāh] (Q 2:114, 9:17, 22:40, 72:18) indicating a reference to a more generic location. The term *msgd* occurs in Official Aramaic and in a number of Nabataean inscriptions as a place or the object of cultic activities, and in the Targum Yerushalmī on Genesis 11:4, the root *sgd* is used to refer specifically to idol worship or the idol itself [bayt segidū].²³ An inscription from Madā'in Šālīḥ mentions the *msgd'* that was built for the god Sa'bu, and an inscription from Imtan records a *msgd'* that was offered "to Dushara and A'ra the god our lord who is in Bosra."²⁴ Nabataean inscriptions from Sahwit al-Khiḍr and the Roman road between Damascus and Palmyra use *msgd'* in reference to columns erected by specific individuals.²⁵ A stele from Bostra is inscribed as "the *msgd'* which Yamlik son of Masku offered to Dhushara A'ra for his well-being and the well-being of his sons."²⁶ In other Nabataean inscriptions from Jebel Ithlib, the term *msgd'* is used to refer to a stele carved in relief and niches. Two other Nabataean inscriptions designate altars dedicated to Ba'alshamin and to Allāt, "the lordess of the place."²⁷

The use of *msgd* to refer to cult objects is consistent with the accounts of the sanctuaries and shrines established by Abraham in the Bible and Muslim exegesis. Genesis 21:22–34 narrates Abraham's claim over a well he dug at Beersheba in association with the Philistine Abimelech, who is told (in Genesis 20:7) that Abraham is a prophet. Jewish exegesis explains that the "eshel" planted by Abraham in Genesis 21:33 is a sanctuary or shrine that Abraham establishes at Beersheba, to be understood in comparison with the other shrines established by Abraham where he built altars and invoked Yahweh at the oak of Moreh in Shechem (Genesis 12:6–7), the oak of Mamre in Hebron (Genesis 13:18), and between Bethel and Ai (Genesis 12:8). In his history, al-Ṭabarī preserves an account of the episode of Abraham at the well of Beersheba in which it is stated that the sanctuary established by Abraham was a *masjid*, thus linking the cultic sites associated with Abraham's prophetic activity with the *masjid* of the Quran.²⁸

Muslim exegetes link Abraham also with the establishment of the sanctuary at Mecca in the exegesis of Q 2:125 and 3:97, both of which refer to the "place of Abraham" [*maqām Ibrāhīm*] as a place of safety. According to reports given on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, the *maqām Ibrāhīm* encompasses all the locations where the rituals of the pilgrimage are performed, or to the entirety of the area enclosed in the sanctuary [*ḥaram*].²⁹ Thus the location of the sanctuary defined by Abraham corresponds to the area required for the performance of the rites. Abraham's establishment of sanctuaries and the building of altars in Genesis is consistent with activities described in other inscriptions, such as the inscription found in the vicinity of a shrine at Hatra that mentions the building of an altar and a "place" [*mqm*]. A Minaean inscription uses the term *mqm* as a reference to the "places" of the gods Wadd and Athtar of Qabad, and a Thamudic inscription refers to the "service of the "places" [*mqmt*].³⁰

By using these terms to describe Abraham's cultic activities from the Quran and Bible, Muslim exegetes also relate Abraham's sanctuaries to the Israelites. Q 26:57–59 and 44:25–26 refer to the "maqām karīm" of the Israelites, which exegetes connect to the "maqām amīn" of Q 44:51–53 and the "maqām rabbi-hi" of Q 55:46 and 79:40–41. Ibn Kathīr and others understand these passages to refer to the eschatological position of the Israelites, but some exegetes link these locations with Eden and with the sanctuary at Mecca.³¹ Ibn al-Jawzī associates the context of Q 44:17–29

with the locations through which Moses led the Israelites, and Yāqūt alludes to the Valley of Ṭuwwā near Mecca in Q 20:12 and 79:16 as the location where Moses is supposed to have received the tablets of the Torah.³² The identification of the Meccan sanctuary as the “maqām Ibrāhīm” displaces the rabbinic association of “ha-maqōm” in Genesis 22:4 with the future temple in Jerusalem. The cultic function of the Meccan sanctuary precedes and, later under the custodianship of the prophet Muhammad, supersedes the cult of the Israelite temple in Jerusalem.

Other Ancient and Arab Prophets

The activities linked to locations and objects associated with Muhammad and pre-Islamic prophets like Moses and Abraham are consistent with the evidence found in inscriptions throughout the late antique and ancient Mediterranean and Near East. In focusing on the connection between prophethood and the founding of sanctuaries, Muslim exegetes were able to draw upon a rich pre-Islamic tradition linking religious figures and enclosed or protected locations. Several Aramaic inscriptions from the northern Arabian city of Tayma refer to a *hgr*’ dedicated to Manat [mnwh], “the goddess of goddesses.”³³ An Aramaic inscription from Carthage mentions the *hgr*’ as the boundary enclosing the hill upon which were built the sanctuaries of Ashtart [‘štrt] and Tanith [tnt], and a Nabataean inscription describes part of a tomb as a *hgry* or “protected” for those who dedicated it.³⁴ A Thamudic inscription appears to link a *hgr* directly with a figure responsible for a protected sanctuary [dh’lhrm].³⁵

Other inscriptions, using terms associated with activities in the Quran, attest to sanctuaries and enclosures dedicated by particular individuals. A Hatran inscription engraved on a plaque dedicates a dwelling [mškn], a protected place [ḥṭm], and a catalog of other items.³⁶ Another Aramaic inscription from Tayma marks a special stone as dedicated to Manat, the “goddess of goddesses.”³⁷ A Minaean inscription designates a particular location as “protected” [ḥm], and a Lihyanite inscription marks a tomb [qbr] as protected [ḥm]. The generic term for “place” [’tr] is also attested as being used to designate sacred or protected locations. A Palmyrene inscription refers to “Allāt the lordess of the place” [rbt ’l’tr],³⁸ and a Nabataean inscription, from Elus on the road between Petra and Gaza, marks a special place [znh ’tr] established by Notairu “for the life of Aretas king of

the Nabataeans.”³⁹ Other terms can refer to specific places designated for certain ritual activities, such as the Nabataean reference to the “place of the sacred banquet” [mškb] and the Phoenician inscription marking the “holy place” [mqdš] of Šaddam-Ba‘al in Malta.⁴⁰

Muslim exegesis on Q 5:3 explains that the term “nuṣūb” refers to special stones that were set up around Mecca to mark the boundaries of the sanctuary in pre-Islamic times. The setting up of stones, pillars, and other markers is widely attested in literary and documentary sources. A treaty between Assur and Tyre (675 BCE) mentions a “Bethel” and the treatises of the kings of Kerak and Arpad in Syria were written on standing stelae.⁴¹ The Bible (Ex 34:14, Deut 16:22) refers to the *mšb* as the means to worship other gods, and a host of Greek words refer to the “baitulia” [bayt-el] as stones that were believed to represent certain gods. The *Lexikon* of Suidas (tenth century CE) describes how the Arabs of Petra worshipped the god Ares through a standing stone.

Theus Ares is the god Ares at Petra in Arabia. The god Ares is worshipped by them for they venerate him above all others. The image is a black stone, rectangular and unshaped, measuring four feet in height by two feet in width. It is set on a base worked in gold. To this they burn incense and against it they pour the blood of the sacrificial animals. And that is their form of libation.⁴²

The terms *mšb* and *nšb* are used commonly in the ancient world to designate stones marking temples and other sanctuaries in Phoenician, Aramaic, Minaean, Palmyrene, Nabataean, Syriac, and Safaitic. An Old Aramaic inscription testifies to a *nšb* erected for Allāt in the temple of Allāt.⁴³ A Nabataean inscription along the stepped path up Jabal al-Khubtha claims: “These are the *nšyby* of al-Uzza and the lord of the house [wmr byt’] which are made by Wahballah the caravan leader son of Zaidan.”⁴⁴

Pillars and other more stylized stones are also set up and inscribed with dedications marking certain locations as sanctuaries. A Palmyrene inscription on a column drum of limestone from the Ba‘al-Shamin sanctuary records that it was offered to Ba‘al-Shamin, “the good god,” by Attai and Shbahai, the daughters of Sahra, and Ata, the daughter of Firdaws, in the year 335 [=23 CE].⁴⁵ A similar Palmyrene inscription is found on an altar in the temple of Arsu identifying the altar as dedicated to Arsu, to Qismaya, and to the “daughters of El” in the year 375 [=64 CE].⁴⁶ An Old

Aramaic stone, perhaps from the time of Nabonidus in the fifth century BCE, now in the Louvre, pictures the god Salm of Hajam above a cult officiant before an altar.

In the 22nd year . . . [in Taym]a, Salm of Mahran and Shingala Ashira, the gods of Tayma, to Slam of [Hajam] . . . appointed him on this day [in Tay]ma . . . which Salm-Shezeb, son of Pet-Osiri, set up [hqym] in the temple of Salm of Hajam, therefore the gods of Tayma made grants to Salm-Shezeb, son of Pet-Osiri, and to his descendents in the temple of Salm of Hajam, and any man who shall destroy this pillar [swt'], may the gods of Tayma pluck out him and his descendants and his name from before Tayma. This is the grant. . . . Neither gods nor men shall bring out Salm-Shezeb, son of Pet-Osiri, from this temple, neither his descendants nor his name (who are) priests [kmry'] in this temple forever.⁴⁷

The connection between the cult officiant, here identified as a “kmr,” and the setting up of the stone in a sanctuary is further emphasized by the protection of the stone and the site being linked with the family of the cult officiant.

A number of the inscriptions show a connection between the standing stones and burial sites. A similar connection between *nušūb* and tombs is made in Q 70:43.

The day they emerge from their graves quickly [al-ajdāth sirā'-an] as though rushing to *nušūb*.

A Neo-Punic inscription from Tunis designates a stone “set up” [tn' 'bn z] to mark the tomb of Ahath-Milkath. Other types of standing stones are used to mark the places of sanctuaries and burial sites. Lihyanite and Hasaeen inscriptions refer to the protection [h̄m] of tombs, and the Nabataean Turkmāniyah tomb inscription provides an elaborate description of the consecration and protections afforded the tombs on which it is written.⁴⁸ Other terms, such as *wgr* and *npš*, can refer to both tombs and sanctuary markers, and the widespread use of these terms may indicate that one of the primary means for identifying a sanctuary was with a tomb.⁴⁹ The term *npš* is commonly used among the Safaitic cairns of the basalt desert.⁵⁰ A Nabataean inscription marks a spot dedicated “to Allah and her *wgr*.” Several Lihyanite inscriptions on standing stones refer to the erection of a “*kherem*” [h̄rm] on a regular, seasonal basis, as a gift to the

gods. A Thamudic inscription from Rūḍat al-Nāqah states: "For my god [allahi], a *kherem*."⁵¹

The older widespread link between standing stones, sanctuaries, and burial sites is also evident in the close association of the Meccan sanctuary with burials and funerary rites. Muqātil b. Sulaymān states that there are seventy prophets buried in the sanctuary of Mecca, including Hūd, Šālih, and Ishmael.⁵² In his commentary on Q 2:125, al-Suyūfī lists the various prophets who are buried in the Meccan sanctuary.⁵³ According to al-Ḥalabī, there are three hundred prophets buried in the area around the Ka'bah, and the Ka'bah itself is a stone structure considered by some to mark the burial site of various implements associated with pre-Islamic kings and prophets.⁵⁴ Many of the rituals associated with the pilgrimage to Mecca, in pre-Islamic and Islamic times, including circumambulation of the tomb, wearing of certain types of clothing, and restrictions on behavior, closely parallel funerary and mourning customs attested in Jewish, Christian, and pagan contexts.⁵⁵ A number of Ka'bah-like cube structures are found in pre-Islamic Arab areas such as Petra and Madā'in Šālih.

Older, pre-Islamic inscriptions attest to a range of activities associated with cultic objects and locations, many of which have direct parallels with biblical examples and the Quranic image of prophethood highlighted by Muslim exegetes. Pilgrimage [ḥgg] and the visitation of standing stones and tombs is a frequent example. A Safaitic inscription from a cairn in the basalt desert refers to a visit.

Behold, there came a suppliant and visited this building, being a traveler of Yamāmat, keeping off dangers, and he became a brother here.⁵⁶

Note that this inscription mentions a number of significant details which are suggestive of aspects associated with the visitation of tombs and sanctuaries: travel in the name of a deity, safety of a traveler and protection of the site, supplication of a god at the location, and joining a brotherhood of other travelers or adherents. Inscriptions from Tayma also tell of pilgrimage as a penance for adultery and seeking a healing for sickness.⁵⁷ A Dedanite inscription records a visit for sins, and another Safaitic inscription records an experience of misfortune by a visitor.⁵⁸ Ugaritic inscriptions attest to the visitation of tombs for feeding the dead, consulting the dead, and mourning.⁵⁹

Some inscriptions demonstrate how travel to the site or establishment

of the sanctuary is related to a vision. The Deir ‘Alla inscription records the vision of Ballam, son of Beor, the “seer of the gods,” and another Old Aramaic inscription is attributed to “the hand of the seer and the hand of the diviner.”⁶⁰ An Aramaic inscription from Elephantine records the bringing of a dream to the temple for interpretation.⁶¹ In an inscription from Hatra it is stated that the altar and the chapel were dedicated after someone saw a vision in a dream [dhzy’ bħlm’].⁶² Stephanus the Byzantine relates that Aretas, son of Obadas, received a prophecy from his father about the founding of a city in Arabia, the vision of a man dressed in white on a white camel as a site of the new city, which was to be built on a rock.⁶³ Several Safaitic inscriptions mention visions including the dream of a well, the vision of a father from the wilderness, and the vision of an uncle accompanied by a drawing of a woman thought to represent Allāt who is invoked in the inscription.⁶⁴

Many of the inscriptions record ritual activities practiced at the sanctuary or location of the pilgrimage. A Safaitic inscription appears to record the circumcision of the person named on the stone, a practice mentioned by Origen and Bardesanes as common among the “Ishmaelites” at the age of thirteen.⁶⁵ Another Safaitic inscription mentions the practice of augury [‘f], and the practice of writing or inscribing at the location of the sanctuary is widespread.⁶⁶ Examples of writing include the writing of personal names and the name of locations from which visitors traveled.⁶⁷ Also common is the nonliterary depiction of seven dots, dashes, and crescents—symbols normally attributed to a group of seven Babylonian deities.⁶⁸ Some inscriptions show that pilgrims recorded their visit by inscribing the name of a deity.

Wani b. Fasi cut [tqt] the name of he who is above him so that he might favor him, bless him, and guide him [farḏh ws’ dh w’ħrth].⁶⁹

Drawings of human, animal, and nonrepresentational figures are also common, as is the drawing of items thought to have been sacrificed and dedicated at the site.

Inscriptions and archaeological evidence often attest to pilgrimages to sanctuaries for the purpose of making an offering. An Old Aramaic challice from Iran, dated to 600 BCE, is inscribed as an offering to a deity.⁷⁰ A silver bowl from Tell al-Maskūḥa in the eastern Nile Delta, dated to the fifth century BCE, is inscribed as being an offering to “the God” [hn-’lt] from Qynw, son of Geshem, king of Qedar.⁷¹ Three bronze statues are

dedicated to Ilumquh, master of Awwam, in a Sabaeen inscription, and a Dedanite inscription records the offering of a statue to the god Dhu Ghabat by Abdgawth, son of Zaydallah, to honor the house of Ahu Ali and Ammi-Bal of Dedan.⁷² In a Nabataean inscription from Imtan to the Southeast of Bostra, a *msgd* is dedicated as an offering to Dushara and A'ra, and Palmyrene inscriptions record the dedication of altars to various deities.⁷³ An engraved plaque from Hatra lists the items dedicated to a particular location, including a mace, spade, axe, trough, and lever, and it details a curse put there to protect the contents.⁷⁴ Safaitic inscriptions from the basalt desert preserve brief accounts of sacrifices and offerings made for protection from the gods.⁷⁵

Some of the offerings and the pilgrimages made to make the offerings are reported to be in fulfillment of a vow. Papyri from Nessana catalogs the offerings brought to the monastery for the pilgrimage to Sinai.⁷⁶ An Ammonite seal of Abinadab records the vow Abinadab made to Astarte in Sidon and the statues dedicated at a particular location.⁷⁷ A Phoenician inscription from the coast between Tyre and Acre states that 'Abd-Alim installed a gate and doors to Ba'al-Shamin in fulfillment of a vow. Dedanite inscriptions mark the offering of statues to Dhu Ghabat and other deities as a votive offering [hndr].⁷⁸ A Thamudic inscription from Aqabah Mashid records the consecration [ndr] of an individual. Inscriptions in Proto-Sinaitic originally from the entrance to a mine record the vows of miners to offer sacrifices if they are rescued by the gods.⁷⁹

Some evidence also suggests that the rules for behavior at sanctuaries and for pilgrims was not unlike some of the regulations defining the Islamic ritual of the pilgrimage to the Meccan sanctuary. A Lihyanite inscription consecrates [ʾhmr] a rock "so that no woman can ascend it."⁸⁰ The shedding of blood in the sanctuary [hgb] is prohibited by a Palmyrene inscription.⁸¹ An inscription from Shrine IV in Hatra contains an invocation against anyone wearing shoes past a certain point at the site.⁸² Two altars were set up and dedicated to "She'a-Alqum, the Good, the Bountiful," by Ubadu, son of Animu, son of Sa'd-Allât the Nabataean, "who does not drink wine [l' št hmr]" in the year 132 CE.⁸³ Two Thamudic inscriptions refer to the shaving of the head and the plucking out of hair in association with pilgrimage and visitation of the site of the inscription.⁸⁴

These examples attesting to the establishment and visitation of sanctuaries demonstrate the continuation of patterns and practices well known from the royal inscriptions of the ancient Near East. Numerous

inscriptions record the erection of statues, pillars, temples, and cities by kings in order to ensure their good fortune and the well-being of their kingdoms. The “List of Date Formulae” of the reign of Hammurabi provides a catalog of activities later attested in scattered popular inscriptions and in the Arabic literary descriptions of the cult at the Meccan sanctuary and elsewhere through pre-Islamic Arabia. Hammurabi establishes justice, constructs thrones, builds walls, erects temples and shrines, provides water for pilgrims, gives protection to his people, dedicates sacred objects such as thrones, statues, and daises for deities, and digs canals. The parallel building activities of Marduk in the *Enuma Elish* suggest a close relationship between the creation of the natural world by the gods and the construction of civilization by kings. More specific examples from South Arabia demonstrate that the model was current in the Arabian Peninsula, and examples from Nabataean and Lihyanite inscriptions show the spread and continuity of the practices.⁸⁵

Early Islamic accounts of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib’s recovery of Zamzam and the eventual reestablishment of the sanctuary under the prophet Muhammad conform to this general ancient model.⁸⁶ In other ancient civilizations, the king or cult officiant circumambulated the walls of his capital city, ritually linking his authority to the establishment and protection of that territory. The different accounts of the recovery of the True Cross and the building of the churches in Palestine are another example of this ancient model linking the recovery of the cult object with the establishment of a sanctuary and the pilgrimages to the sanctuary to visit the cult object. In other ancient and Arabian contexts the custodian of the sanctuary establishes his status as cult officiant by erecting the cult object, often accompanied by divination or receiving a vision from the deity.⁸⁷ Muslim exegetes construct the image of prophethood, linking the civilizing function of the cult officiant with the founding of the sanctuary, from this general model found in the legends of the True Cross, the ancient Near East, and also in China, Rome, Egypt, and Southeast Asia.

Conclusion

In his *al-Kāmil fī al-ta’rīkh*, ‘Alī b. Abī al-Karam Ibn al-Athīr (555–630) refers to the Jews’ rejection of the prophets Hūd and Šālīḥ as being mentioned in the Bible.

As for the People of the Torah, they allege that there is no mention of 'Ād, Hūd, Thamūd, and Šāliḥ in the Torah. Their word among the Arabs in pre-Islamic and Islamic times is like the repute of Abraham. Their rejection of this was not as astounding as their rejection of the prophethood of Abraham and his message and likewise their rejection of the existence of the Christ.⁸⁸

That Jews (and Christians) might deny the mention of the Arab prophets is not unwarranted given the argument made by Muslim exegetes for the Arab provenance of ancient prophecy. Muslim exegesis maintains that the prophets Hūd, Šāliḥ, and Shu'ayb are part of the biblical tradition as is the prophet Muhammad and the model of prophethood epitomized by the stories of these prophets.

Muslim exegetes draw upon a rich tradition of cultic activity attested throughout the ancient and late antique Near East and Mediterranean but especially in the Arabian Peninsula and the Fertile Crescent. Stories of the prophets in the Quran are provided against the backdrop of a larger biblical and ancient Near Eastern milieu in which prophets are identified for their role as custodians of the sanctuary, and the sanctuary as a model for civilization. For the Muslim exegetes, the historicity of Arab prophecy is demonstrated by reference to this pre-Islamic evidence, evidence which is taken to depict prophethood in terms consistent with the model of prophecy found in the Quran and in the life of the prophet Muhammad. This model, evinced in ancient sources, allows Muslim exegetes to emphasize biblical materials to demonstrate the Arabian heritage of Israelite prophecy and the central importance of Arabian prophets to the history of ancient prophecy.

It is important to note that, by drawing upon the Bible and other ancient sources to construct a Quranic model of prophethood, Muslim exegetes are engaging directly with the extant text of the Bible. Despite the widespread idea that Muslims do not accept the Bible as authoritative and dismiss it as unreliable, it is evident that Muslim exegetes used the Bible to demonstrate the authority of the Quran and the prophet Muhammad.⁸⁹ At issue is not a matter of arguing over the text of the Bible but of gaining the biblical text as an ally, as data for the construction of a generic paradigm of prophethood that allows for Islam to have a historical pedigree. It is not a question of whether or not prophethood was, historically, like it is

conceived and portrayed by Muslim exegesis. This is analogous to how Christian “Old Testament Theology” reconstructs a “history” of the Bible that features the origins and development of certain key Christological concepts such as covenant, salvation, and messianism. The Muslim reconstruction of the history of prophethood is not unlike how Christian theologians claim the Old Testament prefigures the mission of Jesus Christ; for Muslim exegetes, the evidence of the Bible and ancient Near East testifies to the Quran and the prophet Muhammad as a continuation and culmination of the ancient history of prophethood.

The lack of attention given to the historicity of the Quran’s accounts of ancient prophets is particularly striking given the rich history of using the Bible as a source for the history of the ancient Near East. Parallels between the Quran and the Bible would seem to suggest at least the possibility of using the Quran to supplement the information found in the Bible. This would seem especially relevant for that scholarship focusing on the Arabian Peninsula and the Arabs in the Bible and the ancient world. Historians and biblical scholars, however, whether they accept or reject biblical sources, routinely ignore the Quran and Muslim exegesis in their study of ancient Arabia.⁹⁰

Baruch Halpern observes that the Bible is judged to be history not because it contains a factual account of the past but rather because it knows it is lying about that past.⁹¹ The Bible and, *mutatis mutandis*, the Quran and its exegesis are historical insofar as they tell a story that communicates a certain message. History is not just a more or less accurate account of “what happened” without the direction of the context in which the story of the past is told, redacted, and received. Nor is the issue about whether the account in the Quran is more accurate than in the Bible. Muslim exegetes use certain parts of the Quran, such as the “Arab prophets,” to pull together a larger conception of prophecy that makes the Bible an example of the more general model of ancient prophecy, a model that is consistent with the paradigm of prophethood in the Quran and the mission of the prophet Muhammad. Indeed, the generic nature of the Quranic model of prophethood allows Muslim exegetes to highlight the cultic practices associated with Yahweh in the Bible, evidence of practices often ignored by Jewish and Christian interpretation. Muslim exegesis represents a conscious and strategic decision to place the biblical text within the context of the ancient Near East and a certain conception of prophets and prophecy among the Arabs.

Notes

1. Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī ḏilāl al-Qurʾān* (Cairo: Dār al-Sharūq, 2004), 3: 1306.
2. See John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), esp. 21–25. Also see the comments of Andrew Rippin, “Ṣālih,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 8:984, and “Literary Analysis of Qurʾān, Tafsīr, and Ṣyra: The Methodologies of John Wansbrough,” in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, ed. Richard Martin (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 151–63.
3. See A. J. Wensinck and Ch. Pellat, “Hūd,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), 3:537–38, and H. Hirschfeld, *Beiträge zur Erklärung des Korān* (Leipzig: O. Schulze, 1886), 17n4.
4. See C. C. Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* (New York: KTAV, 1933; reprint, 1967), 71; A. Geiger, *Was hat Muhammad aus dem Judenthum aufgenommen?* (Bonn, 1833), trans. *Judaism and Islam* (Madras, 1898), 137–42. Also see the discussion in Roberto Tottoli, “Shuʿayb,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, ed. J. McAuliffe (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004), 605–606 and his *Biblical Prophets in the Quran and Muslim Literature* (Richmond: Continuum, 2002), 45–65.
5. See, e.g., A. Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Moḥammad* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1861); Arthur Jeffery, “The Quest of the Historical Mohammed,” *Muslim World* 16 (1926): 327–40; Richard Bell, “Mohammed’s Call” and “Muhammad’s Visions,” *Muslim World* 24 (1934): 13–19, 145–54; Rudi Paret, *Mohammed und der Koran* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1966); F. E. Peters, “The Quest of the Historical Muhammad,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23 (1991): 291–313; Claude Gilliot, “Muhammad, le Coran et les ‘contraintes de l’histoire,’” in *The Qurʾān as Text*, ed. Stefan Wild (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 3–26. To some extent this has been inverted by Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims. A Textual Analysis* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995). On the Quran text, see the groundbreaking but unfinished work in Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qurʾān* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1937); Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorāns. Dritter Teil: Die Geschichte des Korantexts*, ed. G. Bergsträsser and O. Pretzl (Leipzig: T. Weicher, 1938; reprint, Hildesheim, 1981); Anton Spitaler, *Die Verszählung des Koran* (Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1935); A. Fischer, “Grammatisch schwierige Schwur- und Beschwörungsformeln des klassischen Arabisch,” *Der Islam* 28 (1948): 5–6; Rudi Paret, *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1971); Angelika Neuwirth, *Zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1981).
6. Walter W. Müller, “Südsemitische Marginalien zur Etymologie von nābī,” *Biblische Notizen* 32 (1986): 31–37; Müller, “Übersetzung dieser Inschrift,” *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments. Band I. Lieferung 6* (Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1985), 662; H.-P. Müller, *ThWAT* 5 144; von M. Görg in *Biblische Notizen* 26 (1985): 9; W. Leslau, *Ethiopic and South Arabic Contributions to the Hebrew Lexicon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), University of California Publications in Semitic Philology, vol. 20, 32; ‘Alī al-Akwaʿ, *al-Amḥāl al-yamanīyah* (Beirut: Muassasat al-Risalah, 1984/1320), vol. 2, nr. 5854; Müller, *Beiträge zur hamito-semitischen Wortvergleihung: Hamito-Semita*, ed. J. and Th. Bynon (Hague: Mouton, 1975 [Janua Linguarum, series practica 200]), 68, nr. 58.

On the “nabū” (perhaps “diviner”) attested at Mari, see H. B. Huffmon, “Prophecy in the Mari Letters,” *Biblical Archaeological Review* 3 (1970): 199–224; A. Schmitt, *Prophetischer Gottesbescheid in Mari und Israel* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1982); A. Malamat, “A Forerunner of Biblical Prophecy: The Mari Documents,” in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, ed. P. D. Miller et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987). For the Assyrian “nabītu,” see H. Weippert and K. Seybold, *Beiträge zur prophetischen Bildsprache in Israel und Assyrien* (Freiburg: Universitäts Verlag, 1985).

7. See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*, on Q 52:29. Also see the discussion of the kāhin in T. Fahd, *La divination arabe* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966); William Robertson Smith, “On the Forms of Divination and Magic Enumerated in Deut. XVIII, 10–11,” *Journal of Philology* 13 (1885): 273–87; 14 (1885): 113–28; A. Jamme, “La religion sud-arabe préislamique,” *Histoire des Religions* 4 (1947): 239–307.

8. See DNWSI 1: 490–91; Lidzbarski, *Handbuch*, 294; Theeb 2000: 125–26; Tomback 1978: 138; Sokoloff 1992: 225; Macuch 1963: 195–96; Euting 249: 2; Cowley 30: 18; Fitzmyer and Harrington A56: 1.

9. See KAI 11; KAI 14, 15; CIS 1: 379; Cowley 1923: 38, 1; Savignac 1932: 591–93, no. 2.

10. On these terms, see IEJ 36: 39m3 and Cowley 1923: 30, 18.

11. For the reference to ‘Amr b. al-Juʿayd, see Ibn Durayd, *Ishtiqāq*, ed. Wüstenfeld, 197; Bevan, 154–55; T. Fahd, “Kāhin,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 4: 421. For the references to ʿfkl in other languages, see DNWSI 1: 95–96; Qudrah 1993: 72; Theeb 2000: 33–34.

12. For these inscriptions, see Qudrah 1993; Jamme 1052; Hatra 67: L3; Aggoula 1991: 67; Dijkstra 1995: 235; Iram, BIAUL 10 (1971): 57–58.

13. CIS 3974: 2, 4064: 5.

14. See Jaussen and Savignac: 55; Hatra: 345; Jaussen and Savignac: 49, 64; Winnett 1937: 17.

15. See Bounni and Teixidor: 44.

16. On the Nerab inscription, see Cooke: 64. The bas relief is not located in the Louvre museum. For the Palmyrene inscriptions, see Asad and Gawlikowski, 29. For the Nabataean inscription, see Healey 1993: 29, 1. For examples at Hatra, see Dijkstra 1995: 214 (Hatra 68); Aggoula 1989:311 (Hatra 338) and Safar 1971: 11–12 (Hatra 290).

17. See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*, on Q 8:34. In his exegesis of Q 8:34, al-Ṭabarsī reports that the verse refers not to the prophet Muhammad and all his followers but only to those believers who are truly fearing of God. See al-Ṭabarsī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, on Q 8:34, 44:51–53, 55:46, and 79:40–41.

18. For the Thamudic inscriptions, see Philby 1956: 40 [ḥrm], and Jaussen and Savignac 64 [ḥrm]. On the Minaean inscription, see Jaussen and Savignac: 7, in which is mentioned the consecration of food [ys ʿrbn] to the temple of Wadd as a penance for violating something sacred [ḥrmn]. For the Palmyrene inscription, see Hillers and Cusini 3927: 3. For the Pozzuoli inscription, see Lacerenza 128–31. For the inscription from Kharayeb, dated to 101 CE, see Starcky 1985: 181. For the inscription from al-Jawf, dated to 44 CE, see Savignac and Starcky: 1957. For the Minaean inscription, see Jaussen and Savignac: 120.

19. See Muḥammad b. ʿAlī, *Fatī al-qadīr al-jāmiʿ bayna fannī al-rawāyah wa al-dirāyah min ālim al-tafsīr*, ed. Hisham al-Bukhārī and Khuṭr ʿIkārī (Beirut: al-Maktabat al-ʿAṣriyah, 1996), on Q 28:57.

20. See Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh Ibn Abī Zamanīn, *Tafsīr Ibn Abī Zamanīm: Mukhtaṣar tafsīr Yaḥya' b. Salām*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan Muḥammad Ḥasan Ismā'īl and Aḥmad Farid al-Mazīdī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al- 'Ilmiyah, 2003), on Q 26:57–59.
21. See al-Bayṭāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa asrār al-ta'wīl*, on Q 28:57.
22. For an overview of these traditions, see Uri Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur'an: The Children of Israel and the Islamic Self-Image* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1991), 38–41.
23. See DNSWI 663; DISO 160; Lidzbarski, *Handbuch*: 328; Cowley: 44, 3.
24. Winnett and Reed: 157; Cooke: 101.
25. For Sahwit al-Khiṭr, see Healey 1996: 96. For Dumer on the road from Damascus to Palmyra, see CIS 2: 161, Cooke: 97.
26. Cantineau 1978: 24.
27. Littman 1940: 21–22, nos. 23–24; RES 2052.
28. See al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk*, 1: 271–72; Brinner, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, 65–66. Also see the narratives in *al-Tha'labī, Qiṣaṣ al-anbiya*, 47; Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 1: 46–47; Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), 48–51.
29. See the references given in Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al- 'aẓīm*, on Q 2:125 and al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, on Q 2:125.
30. For the Hatra inscription, see Hatra: 62. For the Minaean inscription, see Jaussen and Savignac: 17. For the Thamudic inscription, see Jaussen and Savignac: 286.
31. See, for example, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥabīb Qasir al- 'Āmilī (Maktab al-A' lām al-Islāmī, 1409), on Q 26:51–59.
32. See Shihāb al-Dīn Abū 'Abdallāh Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1957), s.v. Ṭuwwā, Jābars. Also see Muḥsin al-Malaqqab al-Ghayṭ al-Kāshānī, *Tafsīr al-ṣāfi* (Tehran: Maktabat al-Ṣadd, n.d.), on Q 18:83 and 'Alī al-Faṭl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār Maktabah al-Ḥayyāh, n.d.), on Q 18:84.
33. See Theeb: 1993; Beyer and Livingstone 1987: 291–92; Dijkstra 1995: 74, 75–76; CIS 2: 336. On the identification of Manat [mnwh] in these inscriptions and locations, see Attila 7 (1983): 105–106; ZDMG 137 (1987): 290–91; Syria 62 (1985): 65–66. According to Cooke, *A Text-book of North Semitic Inscriptions: Moabite, Hebrew, Phoenician, Aramaic, Nabataean, Palmyrene, Jewish* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), 219, the center of the Manat cult was in Qudayd on the pilgrimage route between Mecca and Medina.
34. See WR 79; CIS 200; JS 1: 30.
35. For the Aramaic inscriptions, see WR 79; CIS 200; JS 1: 30. For the Thamudic inscription, see JS 609 (2: 618).
36. See F. Safar, *Sumer* 27 (1971): 3–5; al-Ḥaṭr, 45; Aggoula, RIH 4: 181–83; R. Degen, *Neue Ephemeris III*: 1978: 68–72; Vattioni, *Iscip.*: 90–91.
37. See al-Theeb, Aram and Nabat, 'lht (Aram, no. 1: 2 “goddess”).
38. See JS 162; JS 81; RES 2052.
39. See Cantineau 1978: 43; Dijkstra 1995: 48–49.
40. See WR 57; CIS 234; JS 1: 40. Also see J.T. Milik, *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), inscription 108; CIS 1: 132; Cooke: 38.
41. See Roellig: 1995.
42. Suidas, *Lexicon*, ed. A. Adler (Leipzig: In aedibus B. G. Teubneri, 1931), 713.
43. See CIS 2: 182.

44. See Healey, 81; Dalman 1912: 96–98; Marklein 1995: 111–14.
45. See Asad and Gawlikowsky, 111, A 1498/9192.
46. See Asad and Teixidor 1985: 286; Dijkstra 1995: 98.
47. See CIS 2: 113; DNWSI 2: 781; DISO 191; Cooke: 69.
48. See, for example, JS 79, 81, 257, 312 and Jamme 1996: 1044–50, 1058. For the Nabataean, see Healey, *The Nabataean Tomb Inscription of Mada'in Salih* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 238–42.
49. See Beeston: 158; Leslau 1987: 608; Theeb 2000: 83; Jamme 1996: 1045, 1046, 1050, 1058.
50. See Oxtoby 1968: 29, 31, 34; Winnett and Harding: 244, 404, 849, 924, 1051, 2004, 2469; pl. 587. For Nabataean examples, see CIS 2: 332 from al-ʿUla; W. al-Šāliḥī, *Sumer* 31 (1975): 26–27 from Madā'in Šāliḥ.
51. For the Nabataean inscription, see CIS 2: 183. See Jaussen and Savignac, 569.
52. See Muqatil b. Sulayman, *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*, ed. ʿAbdallāh Maḥmūd Shihātah (Cairo, 1979), on Q 2:125. Also see the reports in Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makkah*, 39; al-Fāsī, *Shifāʾ al-gharām bl-akhbār al-balad al-ḥarām* (Cairo, 1956), 1: 197. Also see the discussion of these references in Uri Rubin, “The Kaʿba: Aspects of Its Ritual Functions and Position in Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Times,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8 (1986): 110–11.
53. See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Darr al-manthūr fī tafsīr al-maʿthūr*, on Q 2:125.
54. See al-ḥalabī, *Sirah al-Ḥalabī*, 14. For other references to the burial of prophets in the Meccan sanctuary, see Ibn Qutayba, *Maʿārif*, 14; Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, 1: 52. On monoliths, see P. Arnaud, “Naïskoi monolithes du Hauran,” in *Hauran I: Recherches archéologiques sur la Syrie du sud à l’époque hellénistique et romaine*, ed. J.-M. Dentzer (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1985), 2: 373–86. For general comments, see J. Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums, Gesammelt und Erläutert*, 73–94; H. Lammens, *L’Arabie Occidentale Avant l’Hégire* (Beirut: Imp. Catholique, 1928), 101–79, esp. 167, 173–76; Dominique Sourdel, *Les cultes du Hauran à l’époque Romaine* (Paris: Imp. nationale, 1952), esp. 19–112; J. Teixidor, *The Pagan God: Popular Religion in the Greco-Roman Near East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 62–99; K. Dijkstra, *Life and Loyalty: A Study in the Socio-Religious Culture of Syria and Mesopotamia in the Graeco-Roman Period Based on Epigraphic Evidence* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995); U. Avner, “Ancient Cult Sites in the Negev and Sinai Deserts,” *Tel Aviv* 11 (1984): 115–31.
55. See, e.g., Arent Jan Wensinck, “Semitic Rites of Mourning and Religion: Studies on the Origin and Mutual Relations”; E. W. Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London: East-West Publication, 1890); G. E. von Grunebaum, *Muhammadan Festivals* (New York: Schuman, 1951). For this paragraph, see Brannon Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden: Ritual, Relics, and Territory in Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
56. See Littman 1940: 1211.
57. See Winnett and Reed: 63, 9, 10.
58. See Jaussen and Savignac: 52; Winnett 1937: 12; Oxtoby 1968: 101.
59. See KTU 1: 20–22, 142; 1: 124, 161; 1: 5, 11–22; Lammens, 1928: 203; Grimme 1929:

24–30; Lewis: 1989; Smith and Bloch-Smith: 1988. For Safaitic evidence of mourning, see Winnett and Harding.

60. See Deir 'Alla 1:1; KAI 202, A, 12.

61. See CIS 2: 137.

62. See Ibrahim 1986: 528, dated 125 CE.

63. Stephanus 144.19–26. For the city of Obada as the location of the burial of Obadas, see Stephanus 482.15–16. The god 'BDT is mentioned in the En Avdat inscription (Negev, Obadas) and is found in Dedanite/Lihyanite inscriptions (Sima, Inshriften 59). On the cult of Obadas, see Healey, *Religion*, 147–51 and Dijkstra, *Life*, 319–21.

64. See Winnett and Harding: 1679; Littman 1943: 325, 403–404.

65. See Winnett and Harding: 1423; Origen, *Philocalia* 23.16.28–29; Bardesanes, Book 58.2.

66. See Winnett and Harding: 3696.

67. See, e.g., Jaussen and Savignac: 162, 182, 665, 692; Qudrah 1993: 160.

68. On the seven dots, see Beatrice Laura Goff, *Symbols of Prehistoric Mesopotamia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), esp. 450–54; E. Douglas Van Buren, "Symbols of the Gods in Mesopotamian Art," *Annalecta orientalia* 23 (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1945), esp. 74–82; Hehn, "Siebenzahl und Sabbat," *LSS* II, 5 (1907): 4–6, 17–27, 44–58; Zimmern, "Die sieben Kinder Enmesarra's," *ZA* 23 (1909): 363–66; Weidner, *OLZ* 22 (1919): supp. 1012; Van Buren, "The Seven Dots in Mesopotamian Art and Their Meaning," *AfO* 12 (1941): 277–89.

69. Winnett and Reed: 16.

70. See Dupont-Sommer 1964: 115; Dijkstra 1995: 246.

71. I. Rabinowitz, "Aramaic Inscriptions of the Fifth Century BCE from a North-Arab Shrine in Egypt," *JNES* 15 (1956): 1–9; W. Dumbrell, "The Tell el-Maskhufla Bowls and the 'Kingdom' of Qedar in the Persian Period," *BASOR* 203 (1971): 33–44.

72. See Sabaic 567: 9–10; Jaussen and Savignac, 41.

73. See Dussaud and Macler 1901: 36; Cooke: 101; Asad and Gawlikowski: 118, A 1471/8834.

74. See Safar 1971: 3–5.

75. See Ryckmans, *HUCA* 23 (1950–51): 431–3; CIS 875, 852, 3946; 4359, 1658; Littman: 649.

76. See Casper J. Kraemer Jr., *Excavations at Nessana*, vol. 3: *Non-Literary Papyri* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 13, 62, 89.

77. See Aufrecht 1989, 56: 3.

78. See Winnett and Reed, 9; Jaussen and Savignac, 2: 83; Jaussen and Savignac, 82; Philby 1956: 167.

79. See Cairo Museum 52517, 52514, 52510.

80. See Jaussen and Savignac: 64; Winnett 1937: 17.

81. See Asad and Gawlikowski 101.

82. See Hatra: 29.

83. See Cooke: 140.

84. See Winnett and Reed: 41, 42.

85. See, e.g., RES 3624; CIH 957; ANET 663; RES 4653; Jamme 538; ANET 663; RES 283; Tawfiq: 31–32, no. 13; RES 2774; Tawfiq: 24–25; ANET 666; Philby: 84; Jamme 1963; Jamme: 949; NET 669–70.

86. On the relationship of the sanctuary at Mecca in pre-Islamic times with other Arab sanctuaries and their custodians, see T. Fahd, “Une partique cléromantique à la Ka'ba préislamique,” *Semitica* 8 (1958): 55–79 [=Proceedings of the 27th International Congress of Orientalists 24 (1957): 246–48]; T. Nöldeke, “Der Gott MRA BYTA und die Ka'ba,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 23 (1909): 184–86; Shahabuddin Ansari, “How Ka'ba Came to Be Defiled with Idols,” *Studies in Islam* 19 (1982): 39–45.

87. See the examples cited in Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, 159–61. On the role of divination and dream interpretation in the office of the sanctuary custodian, see T. Fahd, *La Divination arabe* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966); A.F.L. Beeston, “The Oracle Sanctuary of Jar al-Labba,” *Le Muséon* 62 (1949): 207–28; H.J.W. Drijvers, “Inscriptions from Allāt's Sanctuary,” *Aram* 7 (1995): 109–19.

88. Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kāmil fī al-ta'rikh*, ed. C. J. Tornberg, *Ibn-el-Athiri, Chronicon Quod Perfectissimum Inscibitur* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1867; reprint, Beirut, n.d.), 1: 93. A similar comment is found in Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa al-mulūk* (Beirut, n.d.), 1: 139.

89. For this, see Brannon Wheeler, “Arab Prophets of the Quran and Bible,” *Journal of Quranic Studies*, 8(2006): 24–57.

90. See, e.g., Ernst Axel Knauf, *Midian* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1988), and his *Ishmae: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Palästinas und Nordarabiens im 1.Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1985).

91. See Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988).

4

The Quran's Depiction of Abraham in Light of the Hebrew Bible and Midrash

BAT-SHEVA GARSIEL

The Quran is a collection of Muhammad's teachings, aimed at inculcating the belief in one God and presenting its principles to the nascent Muslim community (2:185). The Quran integrates figures, among them biblical ones, into its *suras* in order to reinforce the subject under discussion and to exemplify it.¹ Unlike the Bible, therefore, whose stories appear in more or less chronological order, the Quranic figures may appear in one *sura* and reappear in another in varied sermons or in other contexts. Consequently, those who wish to discuss a figure in the Quran must glean information from different *suras* in which the character appears and construct him like a mosaic, fitting together relevant depictions and characterizations from various texts.

Abraham and Moses are the most important among the early prophets to appear in the Quran. The Quran viewed Moses as the prophet sent to transmit a new religion to his people and Abraham as the father and founder of Islam. Muhammad is regarded as the conglomerate character of both of them, as the one continuing their mission and sealing the chain of all prophets. Similarities between the depiction of Abraham in the early Jewish traditions and its parallels in the Quran have been noticed by scholars.² Earlier scholars, however, did not fully capture the wide scope of the parallels; neither did they delve into the reasons for the changes wrought by the Quran in its adaptations.

This study examines the image of Abraham in the Quran in comparison with the wide range of Jewish sources that preceded the Quran, including

midrashic exegeses, and discusses the major differences between these various traditions.

Abraham: The Prophet, the First Muslim, and the Founder of Islam

Abraham's image in the Quran underwent developments and modifications. At the onset of Muhammad's Mecca period, Abraham was considered an ordinary prophet, appearing generally in the list of prophets and messengers.³ But at the close of the Mecca period and during the Medina period, when Muhammad realized that the Jews were not willing to convert to Islam, he changed his approach. He ceased presenting Islam as a stage parallel to but more developed than Judaism, and instead he spoke of Islam as a religion more ancient than and completely separate from Judaism. In line with this concept, the image of Abraham in the later *suras* was transformed into that of the first Muslim, the person who laid the earliest foundations of Islam.⁴

One of the reasons for which Abraham was selected as the first Muslim is that his persona was famous and revered in all of the monotheistic religions. This is reflected in the Quran, which asks: "People of the book, why do you dispute concerning Abraham? The Torah was not sent down, neither was the Gospel, but after him" (3:65).⁵ According to this concept, "Abraham in truth was not a Jew, neither a Christian; but he was a Muslim, a *Ḥanif*. Certainly he was never one of the idolaters."⁶ The term *Ḥanif* attributed to Abraham describes a man who believes in only one God. At that time, the new religion was not yet called "Islam." The Quran used the term *islam* to refer to submission and obedience to God and acceptance of His rulership. The Quran thus coined a new term, one found neither in the Hebrew Bible nor in the New Testament.

At first glance, the Quran's description of Abraham seems to be a modification of some earlier Jewish traditions, with an added emphasis laid on Abraham's being a Muslim, that is, on his obedience and submissiveness to God. There is some basis in Genesis 17:1 for such a description when the Lord said to Abraham: "Walk in My ways and be blameless," which seems to allude to a person who follows the guidance of God and walks in His ways. Similarly, there are comments in early *midrashim* (postbiblical homiletic commentaries on biblical texts), emphasizing Abraham's submissiveness to God. One *midrash* states that "even when he did not find a place to bury Sarah, Abraham did not question God's ways."⁷ That

is, Abraham accepted God's decree submissively. Another *midrash* depicts Abraham as one who heeded God's orders, even with regard to a minor commandment given orally.⁸ Yet another *midrash* states: "Since you have made known to all that you love Me, and you did not withhold your son . . . I will treat you as if I asked you to sacrifice yourself, and you did not hesitate."⁹ Therefore, it seems to me that the description of Abraham as "submissive and obedient" may very well have been influenced by the earlier Jewish sources that Muhammad or his disciples heard from their Jewish neighbors, but in the Quran it undergoes accentuation, expansion, and Islamization. The principle of submissiveness turns from an appropriate characteristic of a believer to a term that characterizes the community of believers who are faithful followers of Muhammad. At a later period, this principle is extended to become a concept defining the new, exclusive religion of Islam.¹⁰

David Zvi Baneth disagrees with the interpretation of the term *Islam* as "submissiveness to God." He argues that submissiveness to God expresses a very high spiritual level, and it cannot be that when Muhammad established the new religion he used a high-level language to speak to his simple audience. Moreover, his earliest followers included slaves and poor people who would not be persuaded to join a new religion by the idea of "submissiveness." On the contrary, that would distance them from it. Therefore, Baneth suggests that the term *Islam* denotes unity, wholeness, totality, something indivisible. The emphasis is on wholeness, not on submissiveness. To reinforce his idea, Baneth points out that Muhammad blamed his people for believing in polytheism. So it is logical that the term *Islam* is the opposite of "association" (idolatry). Thus it signifies faithfulness, indicating that a person must give himself wholly to one God only. The term *Islam* became the name of the new religion in contrast to polytheistic religions that worship a multiplicity of gods.¹¹

Muhammad's mission was thus to restore the faith of the *Ḥanifiyya*, namely, the belief in one God, which was the belief of Abraham, the first Muslim. In the Quran, when God commanded Muhammad to obey him submissively, he replied: "I have surrendered myself to the Lord of all beings. My Lord has guided me to a straight path, a right religion, the creed of Abraham, a man of pure faith, he was no idolater" (6:161).

Muhammad is depicted in the Quran as a follower in the footsteps of Abraham. The analogy between the two, as reflected in the Quran, is the basis for the Muslim view that the first Muslim community epitomized

the synthesis of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, while it also signified something distinct from those two monotheistic religions. Moreover, according to the Muslim viewpoint, Muhammad's mission was to spread Islam, the religion of Abraham, which was distorted or forsaken by Jews and Christians alike.¹²

According to the Quran, Abraham was a prophet (19:41) who passed God's test and proved himself to be a true believer (2:124). God took Abraham as a dear friend (4:125). Abraham was the father of the believers and the first Muslim.¹³ The Torah was brought down from heaven to the Children of Israel at a later date, only during the days of Moses. Therefore, the Children of Israel are not the followers of Abraham. Only Muhammad and his community of believers are the true disciples of the religion of Abraham, and they were the first to follow in his footsteps (3:68; 16:123). Ibn Hisham (ninth century CE) relates that Muhammad entered the schools (*madāris*) of the Jews and invited them to convert and become Muslims. When they asked him to what religion he belonged, he replied: "The religion of Abraham."¹⁴

It is noteworthy that the Quran's perception of Abraham as a prophet is already found in Genesis, when God appeared to Abimelech in a dream and referred to Abraham as "a prophet."¹⁵ Similarly, in the *midrash* we find: "Abraham is a prophet."¹⁶ Likewise, the perception that Abraham passed a test is found in Genesis: "God put Abraham to the test. For now I know that you fear God."¹⁷ Even the perception in the Quran that God took Abraham as a friend is based on a couple of *midrashic* homilies: "*Yedid* [a friend] is Abraham",¹⁸ "Abraham is called '*Yedid*.'"¹⁹

To summarize, Muhammad attributed characteristics to Abraham that were known to him and his disciples from the Hebrew Bible and its *midrashic* exegeses. At the same time, a slight Islamization of the image is recognizable in the emphasis illuminating Abraham's obedience and submissiveness, which paved the way for Abraham to become, according to the Quran, the father of Islam.

Building the Ka'ba and Abraham's House

Another indication of the Quran's perception that Islam preceded Judaism is that according to the Quran, Abraham built the Ka'ba together with Ishmael even before the Pentateuch was delivered to the Jewish people.

This place became the holiest site to Islam and the center for pilgrimages and the observance of additional religious ceremonies (2:125, 127; 3:96–97; 22:26–27).²⁰ Abraham is reported to have prayed to God and requested: “Make this a secure land, and provide its people with fruit” (2:126; 14:35–37). He asked God to distance him and his sons from idol worship. He also thanked Him for the birth of his sons, Ishmael and Isaac, and added that he had settled his sons in Mecca (14:35–40). Abraham requested that God send a messenger to the settlers of Mecca from amongst them (2:129).²¹ The Temple in Mecca is the earliest house of worship (3:96);²² therefore, the Ka’ba is regarded as the Temple of Abraham.²³ According to commentaries on the Quran, Mecca has a stone called the Station of Abraham where there is a carving of Abraham’s foot. It served as a site of prayer (2:125; 3:97).²⁴

The Quran tells us that Muhammad calls out to his listeners: “Take to yourselves Abraham’s station for a place of prayer” (2:125). The Quran thus treats the Ka’ba as “Abraham’s place of prayer.” So far, no basis for this tradition has been found among the local Jews.²⁵ However, it is noteworthy that in the Book of Jubilees, the expression “The House of Abraham” appears when Abraham says to Jacob: “I built the house for myself . . . and for my seed.” “And this house I built for myself. . . . And he named it: The House of Abraham.”²⁶ Muslim traditions and Western scholars posit that during the pre-Islamic period, there were individuals or groups of monotheists in Arabia known as “Hunafa.”²⁷ One may suggest that these individuals were familiar with the expression “The House of Abraham,” similar to what appears in the Book of Jubilees. Apparently, this information reached them through Christians in Ethiopia, since the Book of Jubilees was among their holy writings. One may presume that monotheistic Arabs in the environs of Mecca and Medina transferred the “House of Abraham” tradition to their own holy site.²⁸

According to another opinion, the Ka’ba was a holy site for idol worshippers during the pre-Islamic period. Muhammad at first tried to persuade Muslims to terminate Ka’ba worship, but when he realized that they would not give it up, he purified it of idolatry by bringing it into the framework of Islam, sanctifying it, and attributing its founding and ceremonial rites to Abraham.²⁹ In Shelomo Dov Goitein’s opinion, Muhammad felt that the existence of the Ka’ba and its worship in Mecca was a sign of the grace of God, since it brought business to the city to

such an extent that the city was dependent on it economically. Therefore, Muhammad retained the Ka'ba ritual in Islam.³⁰

It seems to me that it is worthy of note that Genesis mentions four times that Abraham built an altar to God³¹ and that the motif of "building an altar" can also be found in early *midrashic* traditions.³² If Muhammad and his disciples were indeed aware of these *midrashic* traditions, they may have transferred the site of the altar from the Land of Israel to Mecca in order to create an additional link between Abraham and Islam.

Analogies between Muhammad and Abraham

The description of Abraham in the Quran was affected by the desire to establish analogies between Abraham and Muhammad. Abraham Geiger estimates that Muhammad identified himself with Abraham to the extent that at times, when Muhammad refers to Abraham, he digresses from the subject of his discourse and inserts motifs unrelated to the original theme but related to his own life. Thus he transforms himself from a storyteller of ancient events to a preacher on contemporary ones. For example, when Muhammad relates an argument between Abraham and his father and his people regarding idolatry, he shifts from the story of Abraham's argument with his listeners to direct moral preaching to his own audience on the subject of Paradise and Hell (26:69–104).³³ A similar shift in the Quran may be found in the portrayal of Abraham's reproof of his father concerning idolatry. In this text, Muhammad speaks of Abraham's readiness to ask God to pardon his father. Suddenly Muhammad turns to his own audience and comments that he, too, is willing to pray to God on behalf of his listeners who are idol worshippers (19:41–50).

Another example of an analogy between Muhammad and Abraham is embedded in the story of Abraham in Ur of the Chaldeans. The Quran delineates how Abraham reached the conclusion on his own that there is one God:

When night outspread over him, he saw a star and said, "This is my Lord," but when it set, he said, "I do not love the setters." When he saw the moon rising, he said: "This is my Lord," but when it set, he said: "If my Lord does not guide me, I shall surely be of the people gone astray." When he saw the sun rising, he said, "This is my Lord, this is greater." But when it set, he said: "O my people surely I am

quit of that you associate. I have turned my face to Him who originated the heaven and the earth. A man of pure faith, I am not of the idolaters.” (6:75–79)

In this Quranic episode, the influence of postbiblical Jewish sources is discernible. In these sources, the departure point is how Abraham managed to achieve recognition of one God by means of his own power and solely by examining the celestial bodies and observing their weaknesses.³⁴ One may assume that the Quran borrowed the kernel of the story from Jewish sources and intertwined them into its *suras* with the intention of creating an analogy between Muhammad and Abraham. Both of them lived among idolaters; some of whom bowed down to the sun and moon (41:37). And each reached an awareness of one God on his own.

The Quran goes on to relate that after he had recognized one God, Abraham attempted to persuade his father and his people to forsake idol worship, for the idols could not assist them and were unable to provide their believers with a means of support (6:74; 21:52–56; 29:24–25). Likewise, Abraham reasoned with his audience that there is only one God, the Creator of the universe (21:56). In another passage, Abraham tries to persuade his audience: “Serve God and fear him; that is better for you” (29:16). He then clarifies that the peoples preceding them had rejected the messengers sent to them and therefore had been punished. At this point in the story, Muhammad again shifts from the role of storyteller to that of a preacher threatening his people that they, too, will be punished if they do not abandon their idols (29:22–24). The Quran continues, relating that Abraham decided to destroy the idols in order to convince his people that the idols are worthless. When the people left, he shattered the idols, leaving just the biggest one untouched. When his people saw what he had done, they asked Abraham if he had destroyed them. He replied that it was the big idol who had shattered the others and suggested that they ask that idol for confirmation. But the people replied that no idol could speak. So Abraham asked them why they worshipped such idols if they did not have the power to help or harm. His people had no answer, so they called out: “Slay him or burn him” (21:57–68; 29:24; 37:83–98).

In the confrontation between Abraham on the one hand and his father and his people on the other hand, we can also recognize the influence of the *midrash* that describes the tactics used by Abraham to persuade his peers that the idols were helpless.³⁵ The Quran apparently portrays the

confrontation in order to point out the similarities between Muhammad and Abraham. At the beginning of his mission, Muhammad was compelled to argue with his people, sometimes unsuccessfully, in order to persuade them to forsake their idols. In order to strengthen his position and to give validity to his words, he selected a similar story about Abraham's life that was familiar to his audience.³⁶

It is noteworthy that according to the Quran, Abraham attempted to persuade his father to believe in one God, and when he refused, Abraham prayed, "Forgive my father, for he is one of those astray" (26:86). In other *suras*, however, the Quran states that the Prophet and his believers were forbidden to request that idolaters be pardoned. Nevertheless, the Quran justifies Abraham's act, explaining that "Abraham asked not pardon for his father, except because of a promise he had made to him. And when it became clear to him that he was an enemy of God, he declared himself quit of him" (9:113–114). In this instance, as in the case of Noah, who asked forgiveness on behalf of his transgressor son, the story of Abraham prompts a discussion on the appropriateness of asking forgiveness for pagans. This question interested Muhammad's followers a great deal, especially the first believers who apparently attempted to request pardon for their pagan relatives.³⁷

The Quran relates that Abraham was expelled from his homeland. His father became so angry with him for not believing in his idols that he evicted him (19:46). There is another passage, however, that seems to contradict this, and it presents another reason for Abraham's departure: "We delivered him and Lot unto the land We blessed" (21:71). According to the first statement, Abraham was exiled from his homeland by his father; but the second one infers that Abraham was in danger (apparently from his people or his father), and therefore God helped him escape. In contrast, in Genesis there is no hint of any danger or force by anyone—only a command by God: "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation . . . and they set out for the land of Canaan."³⁸

It seems to me that the Quran gives other reasons for Abraham's leaving his home in order to create an analogy to an incident in the life of Muhammad. The Quran notes that nonbelievers in Mecca plotted to have Muhammad arrested or expelled from Mecca (8:30), and Muhammad was compelled to flee to Medina. This description shows an analogy between

Abraham and Muhammad. Both were exiled from their countries because of their belief in one God. And, just as Abraham was saved from his pursuers and merited the blessing of God, so was Muhammad saved from the people of Mecca, and he succeeded in his mission.

According to John Kaltner, the Quran emphasizes that Abraham left his country in order to distance himself from idolaters, whereas his destination is rendered of secondary importance. Therefore, there is only one brief statement that mentions the blessed land to which Abraham escaped.³⁹ In my opinion, Muhammad preferred not to emphasize the promise to Abraham that he and his descendants would inherit the Land of Israel. So he modified the reason why Abraham left his land and minimized the importance of the destination of his escape. This change suits Muhammad's universalistic approach, which views the religion of Islam in its multinational scope, in contrast to Judaism, which focuses on the selection of the People of Israel and the inheritance of the Land of Israel.

Covenant between the Pieces (*Berith bein ha-Betarim*)

The Quran significantly alters the biblical story of the Covenant between the Pieces. According to the Quran, Abraham asked God to show him how he resurrects the dead. God's reply was as follows: "Why, dost thou not believe?" "Yes," he said, "but that my heart may be at rest." Said He, "Take four birds and twist them to thee, then set a part of them on every hill, then summon them, and they will come to thee running. And do thou know that God is All-mighty, All-wise" (2:260).

In Jewish sources, the Covenant between the Pieces plays a central role.⁴⁰ Although the Quran adopts some of the early Jewish material in its story, the central motif is changed. In contrast to the Jewish sources, in which the Covenant between the Pieces stresses the promise of the Land of Canaan to the forefather of the people and his descendants, in the Quran the central motif is God's ability to resurrect the dead. The themes concerning the Land of Israel and the covenant with Abraham and his descendants are not even mentioned. It seems to me that the Quran disregarded the promise of the Land to the People of Israel in order to minimize as much as possible attention to the land promised to the Children of Israel,⁴¹ because in the Quran's perception, Abraham was the first monotheist, the father of the religion of Islam, which is principally a universal

religion (34:28) and is not dependent on the People of Israel and the Land of Israel.

It is noteworthy that the motif of the resurrection of the dead that became a central motif in the Quran's story of the covenant is not entirely foreign to Jewish sources—it is found in the *Midrash Hagadol*⁴² citing a sage named Abba Hanan.⁴³ However, the description of the resurrection of the dead in the Quran adds the motif of joining the pieces. According to Geiger, the joining of the pieces is a motif foreign to Judaism.⁴⁴ But in my opinion, the motif is found in the vision of the dry bones in the book of Ezekiel. There it says: “I prophesied as I had been commanded . . . and the bones came together bone to matching bone; the breath entered them, and they came to life.”⁴⁵ Apparently Muhammad was influenced by elements of the Covenant between the Pieces found in Genesis and the *midrash*, as well as by elements that appear in the Vision of the Dry Bones in Ezekiel, and integrated them into its description of the covenant.

The Angels' Visit to Abraham and the Destruction of Sodom

Another event in the life of Abraham that the Quran deals with is the angels' visit to Abraham on their way to overturning Sodom. The event is described in two *suras* (11:72–78; 51:24–30).⁴⁶ Table 4.1 presents the variations in the story between the Jewish sources and the Quran.

The story of the angels' visit in the Quran is similar to the biblical narrative, with some *midrashic* additions. According to the *midrash*, Abraham saw three angels, invited them to join him, and served them food, but they only *seemed* to eat and drink.⁴⁷ In the Quran, on the other hand, the messengers of God came to Abraham, who served them food, but they did not touch the food. The Quran apparently integrated into its story the *Midrashic* motif of the angels only appearing to eat and drink, adding some descriptive details. In the *Midrash*, the description is based on the view that the angels are not flesh and blood and therefore do not eat. This motif was absorbed in the Quran, but an additional element was added: the messengers did not touch the food. The Quran's story introduces another alteration: According to the *midrash*, the angels feared Abraham; however, in the Quran, Abraham feared the angels. These changes may have stemmed from the desire to add tension and drama to the story. One should bear in mind that Muhammad would preach to his audience, and

Table 4.1. The Angels' Visit to Abraham: A Source Comparison

Genesis 18:1–15	<i>Midrash</i>	<i>Sura</i> 11:69–72	<i>Sura</i> 51:24–30
Abraham saw three people, invited them to his home, gave them bread, cakes, meat, butter, and milk.	Abraham saw three angels. ¹	Abraham saw God's messengers and hurried to bring them roasted meat.	The visitors came to Abraham. He gave them meat that was soft and good.
	The angels appeared to be eating and drinking. ² The angels feared Abraham. ³	He saw that they were not touching the food and feared them. They calmed him down.	Abraham was upset by them; they calmed him down.
		The angels told him that they were sent to the people of Lot.	
		His wife laughed.	
They told him that Sarah would give birth to a son.		They told her of the birth of Isaac and after him Jacob.	They told him of the birth of a smart son.
Sarah laughed to herself, saying: "Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment with my husband so old?"		His wife's reaction: "Will I indeed give birth and I am old and my husband is old?"	His wife smote her face and said: "An old woman barren."

Notes

1. *Bereshit Rabba* (Wilna), 48:9.2. *Baba Mezia*, 86b.3. *Bereshit Rabba* (Albeck and Wilna), 48:14.

sometimes they became bored and wished to leave. In order to keep their attention, he would sometimes add dramatic elements to his preaching.

Other changes in the Quran involved the interpretation of Sarah's reaction. In one *sura* (11:71), Sarah laughed before she heard of the future birth of Isaac. In another, "she smote her face" after the angels notified her of the future birth of Isaac (51:29). Quran commentators have attempted to explain Sarah's laugh before she heard the news of the birth of a son. Tabari thought that her laugh stemmed from her wonder at the behavior of the Sodomites, who did not react to the angels' words when they were informed of the punishment they could expect.⁴⁸ Tabari offers another opinion, according to which Sarah saw Abraham honoring the guests and

serving them, but they were not eating. She approached to serve them, but they did not eat. So she said: "What a wonder! We are serving our guests because we honor them, and they are not eating." So Sarah laughed.⁴⁹ Baidawi reviewed a number of opinions: (a) Sarah laughed out of fear when she realized that the messengers were angels; (b) She laughed out of joy at hearing of the death of the evil people, the Sodomites; (c) She smote her face out of embarrassment, for she was menstruating and felt a heat wave.⁵⁰ Another explanation brought by Baidawi is that when they gave the good tidings to Sarah, that she would give birth to a child at the age of 90, she laughed out of amazement.⁵¹ Yet another explanation is that she laughed out of excitement.⁵² We must note, however, that the last two opinions stray from what is written in the Quran, since according to the Quran, Sarah laughed before hearing the news of the birth of a son. In order to be able to accept either of those explanations, the order of the sentences should be changed: the statement that Sarah heard the good tidings concerning the future birth of Isaac and afterwards of Jacob has to precede her laugh.⁵³

In my opinion, the Quran's changes are due to rhetorical considerations: Sarah's laugh precedes the news of the future birth of a child, since such laughter arouses interest and tension among the listeners, who wonder: why did Sarah laugh? This wonder makes them more attentive in expectation of the good news. However, the portrayal of Sarah smiting her face after hearing the news reinforces the idea that the intent was to stimulate expectation and tension in the audience; since the custom of smiting one's face seems generally to be a sign of mourning, not of joy, the listeners are surprised and look forward to the continuation of the story.

The story of Abraham's attempt to save Lot and his people appears twice in the Quran. In *sura* 11, the angels relate the story of their mission to Abraham and he argues with God about Lot's people. But God answers him that the punishment has been decreed and cannot be revoked (11:74–76). In *sura* 29, on the other hand, Abraham only requests that Lot be saved, and God replies that Lot and his household will be saved (29:32). In two other *suras*, the angels notify Abraham of their mission to destroy the people of Sodom, and Abraham does not even react, let alone try to save them (15:57–60; 51:31–37). *Sura* 11, which relates Abraham's attempt to save the Sodomites, is partly similar to the Bible's version, but in contrast to the biblical narrative, which relates at length how Abraham attempts to save the Sodomites and requests mercy on their behalf,⁵⁴ *sura* 11 condenses the

description of Abraham's attempt to save them. In other *suras*, this part of the story is omitted entirely. In our opinion these changes are deliberate and correspond to the Quran's concept that a sinner should be punished and that the merit of forefathers or of righteous people does not help to save him (9:113–114).

The Binding Episode

In the Quran, the story of the binding of Abraham's son is very condensed in scope. It appears only once (37:101–10), and very few details are given. Abraham informs his son that in his dream he saw that he must sacrifice him. The son consents, and Abraham lays him down to sacrifice him. Then Abraham hears a voice that says to him: "Abraham, thou hast confirmed the vision." And he redeems his son with a large sacrifice.

The story in the book of Genesis is much more detailed. According to the narrative, God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son, thus testing Abraham. He says to him: "Abraham," and he answers: "Here I am." And He says: "Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him as a burnt offering."⁵⁵ In the *midrash Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer*,⁵⁶ however, we find an addition: "That night the Holy One blessed be He appeared to Abraham and said to him, Please take your son, your only one, whom you love, Isaac." The word *night* is apparently a Metonymic ellipsis for "in a dream at night." That is, according to *Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer*, Abraham was commanded in a dream to sacrifice his son.⁵⁷

The biblical story describes the preparations for the sacrifice, how the father and son go together to the site of the sacrifice, and the son asks his father: "Here are the firestone and the wood, but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?"⁵⁸ The father replies: "God will see to the sheep for His offering, my son."⁵⁹ It seems that according to Genesis, Isaac was unaware of his father's intention. The *midrash* also notes Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son out of his belief in God;⁶⁰ however, it also speaks of Isaac's readiness to be a sacrifice at the command of God.⁶¹ The detailed description in the Bible, along with the *midrashic* additions, contribute to the creation of an atmosphere of tension and drama and highlight the motif of sacrifice with regard to both father and son. This description was picked up by the Quran in its condensed narrative.

Following the narrative of the binding of Isaac in Genesis, an angel

appears a second time to Abraham and blesses him: "Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one, I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sand on the seashore, and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes."⁶²

There is an opinion that the description of the binding in the Quran indeed incorporates some components of the biblical story and the relevant *midrashim*, but that the Quranic portrayal lacks narrative details and artistic means. The differences stem from the fact that the Quran's main purpose is the message, and conveying the message generally takes precedence over the literary and artistic qualities of the story.⁶³ In my opinion, the main difference is due to the different goals of the two traditions. In the Jewish sources, the binding of Isaac plays a significant role in God's promise to multiply the descendants of Abraham and grants them victory over their enemies and an important status among all the peoples of the earth.⁶⁴ In the Quran, there is no interest in promoting these national aspects pertaining to Abraham's seed and the inheritance of the Land of Canaan. Therefore, the condensed episode serves primarily as another demonstration of Abraham's obedience.

The interesting point in the Quran's story of the binding episode is that the identity of the son who was to be sacrificed is unclear. The Quran's commentators and Muslim scholars express different opinions. Some assume that the bound son is Isaac, while others think it is Ishmael. These opinions are summed up by Ya'qubi, who adds that there are many traditions that support the different views.⁶⁵ Tabari thinks that the bound son was Isaac. Nevertheless, he encapsulates the two approaches and presents the varied argumentations. Tabari concludes his review, expressing a wish: "If only the Quran had stated explicitly which son was bound."⁶⁶

Western scholars, too, are divided about the question of who was the unnamed bound son. Some of them, like Geiger, think it was Ishmael.⁶⁷ Others, like Richard Bell and Firestone,⁶⁸ think it was Isaac. Firestone explains that Muhammad erased Isaac's name because he did not wish to extol the sacrifice of Isaac, and possibly he meant by that to diminish the importance of Isaac as a forefather of the Chosen People.⁶⁹ Haim Zeev Hirschberg, on the other hand, assumes that Muhammad did not know which son had been bound.⁷⁰ Newman adds that Muhammad related the story of the binding at a period when he still did not know that Ishmael was the son of Abraham.⁷¹

The historical background may explain the omission of the name of the bound son. The incident of the binding was related during the Mecca period, when Muhammad still did not have many admirers, and many mocked him and his teachings. He therefore deliberately concealed the name of the bound son. Had he said this son was Ishmael, not only the Jews but also the Arabs who knew the biblical and *midrashic* stories from their Jewish neighbors would have mocked him for his ignorance. Had he said that Isaac was the bound son, then Arabs to whom Muhammad addressed most of his words would have been disappointed that specifically Isaac, a forefather of the Jews, had agreed to be bound. So Muhammad adopted an approach of obtuseness that would appeal to both sides.⁷² It seems to me that indeed Muhammad deliberately used obtuse language with regard to the bound son, for in the biblical source it is significant that the son was Isaac. God selected Isaac as Abraham's heir and, following the binding, promised him that he would have many descendants and gain ascendancy over his enemies. Muhammad chose to disregard this promise that gives a national dimension to the story. Therefore, he omitted the name of the bound son. By doing so, Muhammad omitted one of the main messages of the story. There is no mention of the promise or of the destiny of the People of Israel.

Conclusions

The considerable attention in the Quran to the figure of Abraham indicates a process of development in the image of Abraham. He was transformed from a prophet to the father of Islam and builder of the Ka'ba. Muhammad saw himself as the direct follower in the footsteps of Abraham. According to the Quran's perception, the religion of Islam is the religion of true monotheism that preceded Judaism and Christianity and follows the religion of Abraham. Muhammad viewed himself as the reflection and counterpart of Abraham. Both attempted to persuade their listeners to leave idolatry and worship one God who was the Creator of the world. Both suffered threats and enmity on the part of their communities, most of whom worshipped idols, but both succeeded in their task: to transmit to the world the true religion.

The Quran deals with episodes and motifs taken from the life of Abraham similar to the ones dealt with in the Bible and in *midrashim*. But this similarity does not mean that Abraham in the Quran always corresponds

to the biblical and *midrashic* Abraham. In the Quran, Abraham's image is modified according to different outlooks. The Quran mentions Abraham's deeds and events of his life, but molds them and links them to similar situations in Muhammad's life. At times, however, the Quran deliberately deviates from this path and changes motifs in the stories concerning Abraham. Sometimes Muhammad conceals national motifs dealing with the people of Israel such as the promise of a multiplicity of descendants of Abraham, inheritance of the Land of Canaan, or the promise of superiority over enemies. Consequently, the stories of Abraham in the Quran differ from those in the Bible and *midrashim*. Abraham is portrayed in the Quran especially as a prophet, the founder of a universal religion. This approach is evident in the description of his departure from his father's house to go to a new land, in the story of the Covenant between the Pieces, and in the episode of the binding. Muhammad regarded himself as analogous to Abraham, but he added that he was the last of the prophets and thus superior to all his predecessors including Abraham. For he restored the original and true religion that had been corrupted by the other monotheistic religions, and he himself was the final transmitter of the true religion.

Notes

1. Cf. Angelika Neuwirth, "Myths and Legends in the Qur'an," *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* (Leiden: Brill 2003), 3:477–97.

2. The first to discuss the issue was Geiger. See A. Geiger, *Judaism and Islam* (1898; translated from German by F. M. Young; reprint, New York: Ktav, 1970). Significant scholarly contributions to our topic were made by R. Firestone in the following publications: R. Firestone, "Abraham's Son as the Intended Sacrifice (*al-dhabih*), Koran 37:99–113: Issues in Koranic Exegesis," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 34, no. 1 (1989): 95–131; R. Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham–Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990); R. Firestone, "Comparative Studies in Bible and Koran: A Fresh Look at Genesis 22 in Light of Surah 37," *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communications, and Interaction* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 169–74; R. Firestone, "Isaac," *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 2:561–62; R. Firestone, "Merits, Mimesis, and Martyrdom: Aspects of Shi'ite Meta-historical Exegesis on Abraham's Sacrifice in the Light of Jewish, Christian, and Sunnite Traditions," in *The Faith of Abraham*, ed. M. Hallamish, H. Kasher, et al. (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2003), 93–112 (Hebrew). See also U. Rubin's studies: "Ḥanifiyya and Ka'ba: An Inquiry into the Arabic Pre-Islamic Background of the Din Ibrahim," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990): 85–112; *Between Bible and Koran: The Children of Israel and the Islamic Self-Image* (Princeton: Darwin, 1999).

3. Abraham is mentioned in the following *suras* of Mecca: 6:74–83, 11:69–76, 14:35–41, 15:51–60, 16:120–23, 19:41–50, 21:51–73, 26:69–89, 29:16–18, 37:83–113, 38:45, 42:13, 43:26–27, 51:24–37, 53:37, and 87:19.

4. For further discussion, see A. Guthrie, “The Significance of Abraham,” *Muslim World* 32 (1955): 113–20, and F. E. Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 118–21.

5. The English translation of the Quran is from A. J. Arberry (New York: Macmillan, 1983).

6. *Ibid.*, 67. It is noteworthy that the expressions “Abraham’s creed,” “Abraham was a *Ḥanif*,” and “he was not one of the idolaters” appear in the Quran ten times: *suras* 2:135; 3:67, 95; 4:125; 6:79, 161; 12:38; 16:120, 123; and 22:78.

7. Baba Bathra 15a.

8. See *Bereshit Rabba*, Wilna edition (reprint: Jerusalem, 1994), 64:4 (Hebrew). In the Albeck edition there is a small difference.

9. *Bereshit Rabba*, ed. J. Theodor and Ch. Albeck (Berlin, 1912), 56:12 (Hebrew).

10. Cf. J. D. Levenson, “Abraham among Jews, Christians, and Muslims: Monotheism, Exegesis, and Diversity,” *Arc: The Journal of the Faculty of Religious Studies* 26 (McGill, 1998): 5–29.

11. D. Z. Baneth, “The Original Meaning of Aslama,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1972): 185–89.

12. D. Waines, *An Introduction to Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Ya’qubi, *Ta’rikh*, 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 13–14.

13. *Suras* 2:128, 131, 133; 3:65–67; 4:125; 6:161; 12:38; and 16:120–23.

14. Ibn Hisham, *Sirat al-Nabi* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Arabi, 1937), 2:179.

15. Genesis 20:7.

16. *Bereshit Rabba* (Albeck and Wilna), 40:2.

17. Genesis 22:1, 12.

18. *Menaḥot* 53: 2.

19. *Midrash Tanaim*, Deuteronomy (Tel Aviv: Hoffman ed., 1963), 33:12.

20. Cf. Levenson, “Abraham among Jews, Christians, and Muslims,” 27.

21. When he says, “A Messenger one of them,” Muhammad means that he is the messenger who was sent to the people of Mecca. It also means that Abraham mentioned Muhammad as his follower.

22. The Quran stresses the fact that the temple in Mecca was built before the temple in Jerusalem.

23. Rubin, *The Quran* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2005), 2:26–27 (Hebrew).

24. Most of the exegeses identify “Abraham’s Station” with the “Holy Stone” in Mecca that bears the same name. They explain that the stone is called “The Station of Abraham” because Abraham stood on it when he built the Ka’ba, or when he came to visit Ishmael and put his feet on the stone for Ishmael’s wife to wash them, and the footprints remained on the stone.

25. R. Bell, *A Commentary on the Qur’ān*, ed. C. E. Bosworth and M. E. Richardson (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1991), 2:23.

26. *The Book of Jubilees*, ed. A. Kahana (Tel Aviv: Masada, 1956), 22:24 (Hebrew).

27. U. Rubin, Ḥanifiyya and Ka'ba, 109.

28. *Ibid.*, 107.

29. Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 73; and H. Lazarus-Yafeh, "The Pilgrimage Religious Problems in Islam," *Israel Academy of Science and Humanities* 5 (1976): 223–24.

30. S. D. Goitein, *The Islam of Muhammad* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1956), 99 (Hebrew).

31. Genesis 12:7–8; 13:4, 18.

32. *Sabbath* 88a; *Bereshit Rabba* (Albeck edition), 39:16; *Bammidbar Rabba* (Jerusalem, reprint of Wilna edition, 1882), 10 (Hebrew).

33. See Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 99.

34. Cf. *Jubilees* 12:17–20; *Bammidbar Rabba* 14:2. In *Bet ha-Midrash* 2, ed. A. Jellinek (Leipzig, 1853; Vienna, 1878), the story is more similar to the story in the Quran.

35. *Bereshit Rabba* (Albeck and Wilna), 38:13; *Midrasch Hagadol Genesis*, ed. M. Margulies (Jerusalem, 1947), 12:1 (Hebrew).

36. Cf. Guthrie, "The Significance of Abraham," 117.

37. R. Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān and Muslim Literature*, trans. from Italian by M. Robertson (Richmond: Curzon, 2002), 25.

38. Genesis 12:1–6.

39. J. Kaltner, *Ishmael Instructs Isaac* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1999), 112.

40. Genesis 15:8–21.

41. For another instance in which Muhammad omits the topic of the Promised Land, see the discussion of Ur of the Chaldeans, above in section 3.

42. *Midrash Hagadol*, Genesis, Lech Lecha 17.

43. Abba Hanan is third generation of the Tanaim (approximately second century CE), which means that it is a very old Jewish tradition.

44. Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 100.

45. Ezekiel 37:1–11.

46. The visit of the angels is briefly mentioned in other *suras*: 15:51–60 and 29:31–32.

47. Baba Mezia 86b.

48. Tabari, *Tafsir al-Tabari min Kitabihi Jami al-Bayan 'An Tawil Aiy al-Koran*. B, 4 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1994), 293.

49. Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa-l-Muluk* (Leiden, 1964), 1:250.

50. Baidawi, *Anuar al-Tanzil wa-Asrar al-Tawil* (Ausenbrook: Bibliu 1968), 1:440.

51. *Ibid.*, 2:285.

52. Al-Jalalayn, *Tafsir al-Imamayn al-Jalalayn* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, n.d.), 295.

53. Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 102.

54. Genesis 18:23–32.

55. Genesis 22:1–2.

56. This collection is a midrashic work on Genesis, part of Exodus, and on a few sentences on Numbers, ascribed to Eliezer ben Hyarcanus and composed in Italy shortly after 833 CE.

57. *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* (New York: M. Higger ed., 1948), 31:6 (Hebrew).

58. Genesis 22:7.
59. Genesis 22:8.
60. *Bereshit Rabba* (Albeck edition) 56:4.
61. *Sanhedrin* 89b; *Bereshit Rabba* (Wilna and Mantova) 56:8; *Lekach-Tov* (= *Pesikta Sutartha*), ed. S. Baber (Wilna, 1880), Genesis 22:6 (Hebrew); *Tanḥuma* (Mantova, 1563; reprint, Makor ed., Jerusalem, 1970), the portion of Vayera, on the phrase "Some time afterwards."
62. Genesis 22:16–18.
63. Kaltner, *Ishmael Instructs Isaac*, 123.
64. Genesis 22:15–18.
65. Ya'qubi, *Ta'rikh*, 1 (Leiden, 1969) 1:25.
66. Tabari, *Ta'rikh*: 294–301.
67. Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 103.
68. Firestone, "Isaac," 561–62.
69. Firestone, "Merits," 93–112.
70. H. Z. Hirschberg, "The Torah Stories in Ancient Arabia," *Sinai* 18 (1946): 163–81 (Hebrew).
71. N. A. Newman, *Muhammad, the Qur'an, and Islam* (Hatfield, Pa.: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1996), 365.
72. Cf. C. C. Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* (New York: Jewish Institute of Religion Press, 1933), 90.

5

Present at the Dawn of Islam

Polemic and Reality in the Medieval Story
of Muhammad's Jewish Companions

SHIMON SHTOBER

In the year 1832, Abraham Geiger, a prominent member of the scientific movement known as *Die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, completed a dissertation entitled “Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?” (What did Muhammad obtain from Judaism?).¹ In the coming years many scholarly studies have dealt with this question in detail. However, even now, over 175 years after Geiger introduced the question, no exhaustive work has been produced. I do not presume to have exhausted the subject, but I would like to explore the question of Jewish involvement in the creation of Islam from a different perspective.

According to Muslim traditions, documented in the *ṣīrah* literature, some eminent Jewish leaders, living in the *Ḥijāz*, approached Muhammad, associated with him, and soon converted to his religion. This very early Islamic tradition was perpetuated by a similar series of legends, which proliferated in the Middle Ages and were widespread among Jews and Christians, especially in the Muslim East. The core of the legends, dealt with here, consists of the next motifs: (1) A group of eminent Jewish leaders/sages came to Muhammad and tested the credibility of his supposed heavenly mission; (2) soon they converted to Islam out of fear and constraint; (3) those “luminaries” were motivated by the desire to save their brethren from the evil that was awaiting them at the hands

of Muhammad;² (4) However, Muhammad's new Jewish companions enriched Islam, as they did collaborate with the Prophet in the composition of the Quran.

This study explores the various versions of this medieval story, which occurs in many sorts of literary materials, such as apocalypses, chronicles, and historical tractates. Asserting that this type of legends is fraught with anti-Islamic polemic, I will try to unravel these implicit polemic intents.

1. The Encounters of Muhammad with Jews of the Ḥijāz

A careful examination of the social environment in which Muhammad operated and of the cultural climate that prevailed in the Arabian Peninsula during the first third of the seventh century indicates that the prophet who brought the word of Islam to the Arabs had already had encounters with Jews in Mekka, his place of birth.³ Furthermore, from the time that he emigrated to Yathrib (later renamed Medina) in 622, these encounters intensified and turned into an open, lengthy, ongoing dialogue with the local Jews. This dialogue, which became increasingly harsh and hostile, extended over the next five years, until 627, the year that Muhammad landed the death blow to the last remaining Jewish tribe in Medina.⁴

The Quran contains only vague traces of these encounters between Muslims and Jews, which were fraught with violence on the part of the Muslims, but they were recorded in detail in the first comprehensive work on the history and deeds of Muhammad, *al-Sīrah al-nabawīyyah*. This biographical work, which is also named *the Sīrah of Ibn-Ishāq*, after its author, was put into writing already at the beginning of the second century of the Hijra.⁵ The different Muslim literary genres report in detail the tradition about individual Jews from the tribes and communities that lived in al-Ḥijāz who converted to Islam in the last decade of Muhammad's life. They also provide an even broader description of the Jewish tribes of the Banū Qaynuqā', Naḍir, and Qurayza and of the inhabitants of the desert oasis of Khaybar who clung to the beliefs of their ancestors. Their fate was a bitter one, and when they resolutely refused to adopt Muhammad's new religion, they were exiled from the Arabian Peninsula, some to the north of the Ḥijāz and some in the direction of the Fertile Crescent. Members of the Qurayza met an especially bitter fate, and many died a martyr's death for their staunch refusal to convert to Islam.⁶

2. The Jewish Companions of Muhammad: ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām, Prototype of a Leader

It should be stressed once again that unlike most of their brethren, only a tiny minority of the members of the above-mentioned Jewish tribes associated with Muhammad and adopted the Islamic faith. As with every subject that involves the history of the Jews in Arabia, here too our information derives from Muslim historical sources, which state that throughout all the years in which Muhammad operated, no more than twenty of these Jews converted to Islam.⁷ I will focus my discussion on one of the unique members of this particular group, who serves as an example from whom we can generalize about the entire group. I am referring to ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām (henceforth AiS), who was one of the first and most prominent Jewish converts to Islam.⁸ In many ways he is representative of his companions. AiS, son of the tribe of the Banū Qaynuqā’, who lived in Medina, is described in Muslim tradition as the most prominent member of his tribe socially and as a spiritual sage. In using the word *sage*, I am presuming that the Jews who lived in the Arabian Peninsula at that time practiced normative, rabbinical Judaism.⁹ AiS’s views may have been similar to those of the *ḥanīfs*, the pre-Muslim monotheists, as there is evidence that he shared their reverence for the al-Ka‘ba and believed that it was the “House of Abraham.”¹⁰

The *sīra* of *ibn Ishāq* relates a vivid story of the conversion of AiS to Islam, as he himself reconstructed it:

When I heard about the Apostle, whose description, his name and his time¹¹ [I had known beforehand], I was aware that he was the person whose arrival we had awaited. When he entered Medina I was filled with joy. When he established his residence in al-Qubbā, a man came and informed me of this, while I was working at the top of the date palm,¹² and my Aunt Khālida bint al-Ḥārith was sitting beneath it on the ground. I began saying the praise *Allāhu akbar*, and reiterated it, until my aunt reproached me and said, “I swear by Allāh that even had you heard that Musā ibn ‘Imrān had arrived, you would not have reiterated the Takbīr (the praise formula *Allāhu akbar*).” I said to her, “My aunt, he is the brother of Mūsā ibn ‘Imrān and follows his religion! Their religious mission is one!” She asked me, “Is he the prophet they proclaimed would come at the End of

Days (*annahu yub 'ath ma 'a nafs al-Sā'ah*)?" I responded, "Indeed, he is!" And then I went to him and converted to Islam. When I returned to my family, I instructed them to do the same, and they converted.¹³

There are indications that AiS wished to keep the Sabbath and other Jewish laws even after his conversion. But there are many traditions in the *Sīra* literature that claim that from the moment he became a Muslim, he identified with its spiritual world and provided staunch assistance to Muhammad in his frequent theological disputes with the Jews.¹⁴ He clearly expressed his devotion to Islam and his identification with the goals of the developing Muslim community already in the fourth and fifth years of the Hijra (626–27), when Muhammad fought against the large Jewish tribes in Medina—Naḍir and Qurayza—and decimated them. During the siege on Naḍir, 'Abd Allāh enthusiastically cut down the date palms that were his erstwhile brethren's source of livelihood. This constituted the most effective form of pressure, forcing them to surrender to Muhammad. After the surrender of the Banū Qurayza, and before the men were massacred, AiS was appointed to guard their women and children, who had been taken into captivity.¹⁵

The intensity of AiS's faith was unusual, even among Muhammad's Jewish friends, to the extent that Quran commentators found over a dozen different verses in the Quran that presumably allude to 'Abd Allāh's faith in Muhammad's prophetic mission. The following two verses are examples of such statements: "Was it not a sign to them, that it is known to the learned of the children of Israel (*an ya 'lamahu 'ulamā' Banī Isrā'īl*)?"¹⁶ "It is He who sent down upon thee the Book . . . and those firmly rooted in knowledge (*wa-al-rrāsikhūna fī al-'ilmi*) say we believe in it."¹⁷ In these verses and others, most of the commentators identified 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām as the first and foremost of these learned children of Israel.¹⁸ Thus Muslim tradition even further magnified and glorified AiS and his abilities. Inter alia, it attributed to him the ability to prognosticate, primarily because of his knowledge of the Pentateuch and other holy scriptures. For example, AiS stated that the third caliph, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, was described in the Book of God as "the leader of the deserters and the killers" (*amīr 'alā al-khādhil wa-al-qātil*), and consequently prophesied that he would be murdered.¹⁹ The extent to which the Muslims revered AiS is

reflected in the ḥadīth tradition brought in the name of Sa‘d ibn Waqqās, as follows: “I have not heard the Prophet say about any living person on earth that he is of the people of Paradise, except for ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām.” Another tradition is brought in the name of Mu‘ādh, another of Muhammad’s companions. According to this ḥadīth, Muhammad is cited as saying that religious information should be sought from four scholars, one of whom is ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām.²⁰ Indeed, the Muslims availed themselves of him extensively to obtain information from the Bible or the *midrashim* or to repeat it in his name.²¹

3. A Collective Portrait of the Jewish Converts to Islam in the *Sīra* Literature

It was stated earlier that in spite of AiS’s unique status, he is to be regarded as a particular case from which we can generalize about the entire group.²² The discussion here is thus expanded to include all of Muhammad’s Jewish friends, their relationship with the Prophet of Islam, and of course the evolution of the character of AiS. Muhammad’s Jewish friends appear over the course of 1,000 years in different historical texts as well as in pseudo-historical texts as a defined group having its own idiosyncratic makeup. Their roots begin in Muslim literature, from which they branch out and make their way into Byzantine chronography and into Jewish historiography of the Middle Ages and the early modern era. It is therefore of interest to follow the recurring appearance of this group in these historical writings and to analyze the fabric of the motifs that make up this tale. The earliest of these texts is found in the *Sīra of Ibn-Ishāq*, which was put into writing already at the beginning of the eighth century, approximately 120 years after Muhammad’s death. It reads as follows:

A group of Jewish sages (*naḥar min aḥbār Yahūd*)²³ approached the Messenger of Allāh and said, “Oh Muhammad, give us answers to the four riddles that we shall put before you. If you can do so, we shall follow in your footsteps, we will confirm the truth of your teachings, and we will believe in you.” The messenger of Allāh said to them, “You must swear to me in the name of Allāh and his covenant that you will confirm the veracity of my words, if I can answer your questions.” The sages responded, “We shall!” He said to them,

"Come, ask what you wish." They said to him, "Tell us how the newborn resembles the mother, whereas the seed comes from the man?" . . . They said to him, "How do you sleep?" He said to them, ". . . such is my sleep. My eye is asleep but my heart is awake" (*tanām 'aynī wa-qalbī yaqẓan*). They said to him, "Tell us about what Israel [the patriarch Jacob] voluntarily forbade himself and why?" Muhammad answered them, "I swear in Allāh's name and you too know that in the time of Israel, the food and drink he most loved were the milk and meat of the camel. One time he became ill, and Allāh cured him of his illness. Since then he has forbidden himself his much-loved food and drink, as a sign of thanksgiving to Allāh, that is, he forbade himself the meat and milk of the camel." They said to him, "Tell us about the spirit that lay upon him." He said to them, "You know the angel Gabriel. He came to me [in a dream]." They said to him, "We swear in God's name that it is true. But Muhammad is our enemy." (*wa-lākinnaḥu Muḥammad lanā 'aduwa*).²⁴

The Jewish sages go to Muhammad to try to get a sense of who he is and to determine whether he is a true prophet. Their questions/riddles were of the type that, in the future, Muslims would term *Dalā'il al-nubuwwah* (proofs that verify the prophecy).²⁵ Argumentation of this sort and endeavoring to gather proof that Muhammad was indeed a prophet generally came into existence in later times as a result of the disputations between Muslims and other monotheists, beginning in the Umayyad period, at the earliest. Thus this reconstruction of the encounter between the "Jewish sages" and Muhammad in the *sīra* may have been an anachronistic description. In any event, this encounter between the two sides is a polemical confrontation that takes place against a theological background. The tension and the hostility between the two sides, as they are described at the end of the episode in ibn Ishāq's book, reflect to a certain extent the actual state of affairs that existed with regard to Jewish-Muslim relations in the last decade of Muhammad's life. Muhammad seemingly passes the test of his reliability as a prophet, but the Jewish sages nonetheless stubbornly regard him as an enemy. From a literary perspective, this event, of the sages asking riddles of Muhammad in order to test him, became a central motif that was repeated in all medieval versions of the story of the interreligious encounter. With time, the story was supplemented

and enlarged both by Islamic materials such as the *ḥadīth*, and by extra-Islamic traditions, thus creating a tale out of the historical kernel underlying the story of Muhammad's Jewish companions.

4. Rudiments of a Legend: From Arabia to Palestine and Byzantium

The first signs of the developing tale already appear in a Hebrew apocalyptic text called *The Secrets of Rabbi Simeon bar Yoḥāi*. The earliest version of this pseudo-epigraphic text apparently dates back to the end of the Umayyad period, that is, the first half of the eighth century. The content relevant to this discussion reads as follows:

R. Simeon said, "At the beginning of his reign, he will go out to do evil to Israel and great men of Israel will join him, and give him a wife from amongst them, and there will be peace between him and Israel, and he will conquer the entire kingdom."²⁶

The vicissitudes of the relationship between Muhammad and the Jews are summarized here in a most laconic way some one hundred years after the actual event was recorded in the *sīrah*. It is commonly accepted that this section of *The Secrets* existed in one form or another already at the end of the Umayyad period.²⁷ As in the manner of an apocalyptic *midrash* that contains a visionary element, it is written in vague terms. He (Muhammad) will "do evil to Israel," but because "great men of Israel will join him," and they will even "give him a wife from amongst them," this will lead to peace between him and Israel. This is the first time that Muhammad's Jewish companions appear in a Hebrew source, where they are referred to as "great men of Israel," much the same as the *Sirāt Ibn Hishām*'s reference to them as sages (*aḥbār Yahūd*).

Two motifs emerge from this *midrash*, and both give literary expression to the violent clashes between Muhammad and the Jewish tribes. This somber state of affairs is reflected in one of the motifs, which in the future will be the linchpin that ties together all versions of the tale of the sages who joined Muhammad. This motif explains why these sages were thrust into Muhammad's lap. The text alludes to the Prophet of Islam's desire to do evil to their brethren, while the sages attempt to foil these plans. Why Muhammad wanted to do evil to Israel and what impelled him to do so is not explained in this very short, obscure text. It will be clarified

in later versions of this tale. The second motif—giving a Jewish wife to Muhammad—is unique to *The Secrets of Rabbi Simeon bar Yoḥāi*. It is based on the story of the marriage of Ṣafiyya to Muhammad after he conquered the Khaybar oasis in 628/7h. Ṣafiyya was the daughter of Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab, one of the Jewish leaders of Khaybar and a sworn enemy of Muhammad.²⁸ This motif, whereby the sages assuage the Prophet's rage by giving him a wife, appears exclusively in the apocalyptic *Secrets of Rabbi Simeon bar Yoḥāi* and does not reappear in any of the texts that will be discussed below.

* * *

During the first decades of the 'Abbāsid period, this legend made its way into the Christian world. Of the stories commonly found in Eastern provinces of Christianity and incorporating this legend, I will discuss its earliest version, which was included in the historical work of the Greek monk Theophanes Confessor, who lived and was active in Byzantium. Between the years 810 and 814, Theophanes wrote his *Chronica*, in which he covered the history of the kings of Rome, Persia, and Arabia. In a story about the life of Muhammad, he incorporated the tradition of the Jews who came to him and adopted his religion.

When he [Muhammad] first appeared, the mistaken Hebrews thought him to be their wished-for Messiah. Therefore some of the dignitaries went to him, adopted his faith, and abandoned the religion of Moses, prophet of God. And those who did this were ten in number, and they lived with him until he slaughtered (an animal). However, when they saw him eating the flesh of a camel, they realized that he was not the person they thought him to be. Because they were afraid to leave his faith, these contemptible people taught him vicious things against us, Christians, and went on living with him.²⁹

Theophanes' main purpose in integrating this episode into the section that he wrote about the emergence of Islam was to humiliate Muhammad, the enemy of Christianity. The objective of the Greek monk's stinging attack on the Prophet of Islam was to repudiate the Divine origin of his teachings. In his story about the actions taken by the "Hebrew" dignitaries, he makes it abundantly clear that the beliefs and teachings of Islam came to Muhammad from a human source—the Jews—whose beliefs, as

far as Theophanes himself was concerned, were wrong as well. Thus the Byzantine chronicler simultaneously attacked the beliefs of Christianity's adversaries on two fronts—the Jewish and the Islamic.

As to the substance of the story suggested by Theophanes, it is not difficult to observe the similarity between some of the components of the original story in the *Sīrah of Ibn-Ishāq* (regarding the group of Jews who were keen on visiting Muhammad) and the Greek version. In Theophanes' story, the group that came to Muhammad thought that he might be the Messiah (similar to AiS's hopes). That is why they came to test him and to try to understand him. After their expectations were proven false, they adopted his new religion against their will because they were afraid of him.³⁰ Moreover, the Byzantine chronicle was the first to specify that ten Jews converted to Islam and to characterize them as dignitaries of their community.³¹ With time, this perfect typological number—ten—would become a permanent feature of most of the versions of the tale that were produced in the late Middle Ages. Another element that Theophanes took from the *Sīra* is the eating of camel meat, which is particularly characteristic of the Arab or Muslim diet.³²

5. Sa'adya Gaon Tells the Story of Muhammad's Companions

Beginning in the tenth century, Jewish versions of the tale, based largely on a common earlier source, spread throughout the eastern Mediterranean Basin.³³ Most of the versions made mention of or developed the basic elements that appear in the Muslim versions as well as in the Christian version of the previous two centuries, some with changes in the story or the addition of new characters. The basic features of the story were expanded into a much more coherent and articulate plot than that of the earlier versions. One of the earliest Jewish versions of the legend, and the most detailed, was written originally in Judeo-Arabic.³⁴ In English translation, it reads as follows:

[And it was] a time of hardship when his kingdom began.³⁵ He claimed that he had the gift of prophecy, and his kingdom would survive until the days of al-Muqtadir.³⁶ But there are those who say that the chronology of these Kings corresponds to the order of the "Jewish" counting [eventually, the Seleucid counting] of "RoF'E[y]," that the end of his reign would be the same as the numerical value

of the letters “PeR'E,” and he shall be a wild man.³⁷ But God knows all, and neither of the two alternatives should be disregarded: the story of Muhammad's companions and the events of his life. This is the book [that comprises] the story of Muhammad who was in *Şarsa al-Ghanam*, a place [also] named *al-Jabal al-Ḥadīth*, and the events of his life until he moved to *Şarsa* and to the Ḥijāz, on account of the monk who was in Balqīn, on a post called “the sign of the Sun.” [Now] about the sages who came and told him about the events that had occurred to him and connived the composition of a book. They wrote down their names, each one of them within a *sūra* of his Quran. They interpolated [a verse] and wrote: “Thus did the sages of Israel counsel the wicked *ALLaM* [violent one],” in a hidden and jumbled way, so that it would not be understood. Let G-d curse the man, to whom this book comes his way, who understands it and informs one of the gentiles. There was a monk named Ḥabīb Baḥīrā, [his name] may it not be remembered. These are the sages who came to him: Abraham, also named *Ka'b al-Aḥbār*; Absalom, also named *'Abd al-Salām*; Ya'akov, also named *'Umar al-Shahīd*; Yōḥanan, also named *al-Munhazam ilā al-Janna*; Akīvā al-Anṭōki, also named *al-Ṭā'ir fī al-Janna*; El'azar, also named *Şāḥīb al-'Aṣā*; Yiftaḥ, also named *al-Maqtūl fī ḥubb al-Nabī*; Shema'yah also named *Murīd al-Nabī ilā al-bayt*; Barūch, also named *al-Maqtūl fī sabīl al-Nabī*; 'Asāel, also named *Khatan al-Nabī*; Ḥafṣ abū Şafiyya *mar'at al-Nabī*.³⁸ These are the ten [sages] who came to him and were converted to Islam by him, in order to prevent him from harming Israel even in the slightest. They produced a Quran for him and interpolated the writing of their names, each of them [in one *sūra*].³⁹

It seems that the provenance of this story was found in some historical treatise. The proof for this comes from the title of a parallel *geniza* document whose wording is almost identical to that of Gil's document. The title of this second document (Ms. JTS ENA 2554, fol. 2) identifies the story as a supplement to the book of history (*Ilḥāq ilā Kitāb al-Ta'rikh*).⁴⁰ Indeed, Gil's document provides us with specific data about the approximate time of the events. The introduction to “The Story of Muhammad's Companions” contains information that places it in the tenth century. The mentioning of the Caliph al-Muqtadir, as well as expressions of the tense

anticipation of the imminent end of the Muslim kingdom, reveal that. Moreover, the date that symbolizes “the end of his reign” is represented by the word *RoF’Ey* or *PeRe’*, the numerical value of its Hebrew letters, [1]281 of the Jewish-Seleucid counting, which corresponds to the year 969/970. This all points definitively to the period of al-Muqtadir’s heirs, the second half of the tenth century.⁴¹ In the case of this particular text, we can establish that the author is Rav Sa’adya Gaon, the author of the above-mentioned *Kitāb al-Ta’rikh*, who was active in the tenth century.

The above story of Muhammad’s companions is broader than the earlier stories. Motifs and figures were added to those that appeared in the Muslim *Sīra* and Theophanes’ *Chronica*. The plot branches out and develops beyond what we have seen in the earlier versions above due to the appearance of a new character—the Christian monk Baḥīrā. He was not mentioned in any of the earlier texts that deal with the Jewish sages. Based on the Muslim tradition of the story, which took shape in the eighth century, this monk, Baḥīrā, was Muhammad’s confidant from the time that the future prophet of Islam, as a young lad accompanying his uncle, Abu Ṭālib, came to the monk’s cell in Buṣrā in southern Syria at the end of the sixth century.⁴² The monk revealed to Muhammad during a feast he [Baḥīrā] had made in honor of the lad that he was destined to be a prophet. Although not indicated in Gil’s version of the story, it is important to mention Baḥīrā’s intense hatred of the Jews. According to the early version of the Jewish story about Baḥīrā, which originated close in time to the Muslim version, the monk persuaded Muhammad to do evil to the Jews. That is why in the supplement to *Kitāb al-Ta’rikh*, the unflattering “(his name) may it not be remembered” was wished upon Baḥīrā.⁴³ In order to ward off the harm that might befall their people, ten Jewish sages went to Muhammad, outwardly adopted his religion, and became his companions. As part of this friendship, these Jewish sages produced sections of the Quran for him and interpolated their names in different verses of it.⁴⁴ The Jewish sages, the heroes of this version of the story, were ten in total, a number with which we are already familiar from the episode described by Theophanes, a typological number that symbolizes a perfect formulation. In contrast to what we have seen up until now, here the names of the ten learned men are specified, and each is given his own identity. We no longer have a collective group of anonymous people. In this document, the Jewish sages are identified not only by name but also by their titles.⁴⁵ Moreover, AīS appears again as one of their leaders.

According to this version, he is listed second after Ka'b al-Aḥbār, who is also a well-known figure—a Muslim born to a Jewish father of Yemenite origin who converted to Islam; Ka'b died in 731/113h.⁴⁶ In the list of the ten sages, particular note should be taken of the Judaizing of an important Islamic figure, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the second caliph in the history of the Muslim kingdom. This pattern of peopling the group of Jewish sages with key Islamic figures and attributing them Jewish origin is in keeping with the ancient Jewish account of the active presence of Jews in the creation of Islam.

6. An Early Version of the Jewish Legend Encapsulated in a Late Seventeenth-Century Chronicle

The early Jewish story about Baḥīrā and the group of Jewish sages who joined Muhammad and converted to Islam was preserved almost in its entirety, although in some different form, in a later historical work. It is found in the first three chapters of the *Sefer Divrey Yosef* (The Book Containing the Sayings of Joseph, henceforth *SDY*), which describes the beginnings of Islam. The author of this sweeping historical work, Yosef Sambari, wrote it in the second half of the seventeenth century.⁴⁷ Due to its length, I will present below only a small part of the contents of these chapters, with major deletions:

And a new king arose, with renewed decrees⁴⁸ in the land of the East, and his name was Muhammad b. 'Abd Allāh. He was a hero and a soldier and a successful man and his time was auspicious for him, [but] wherever he turned he did evil, through his good friend and loyal ally, the great astronomer . . . the uncircumcised Buḥayrān.⁴⁹ Muhammad was joined by two wise men to do evil, rather than good. One was named Turḥmān, and the second was a prominent sage among the wise men of Israel, and he changed his name to al-Imām 'Alī. Both of them strengthened his [i.e., Muhammad's] hand to set up a new religion in the world. In addition, Muhammad decreed to the Muslims [laws], according to what is written in their books. He called the name of this book "Quran" and he said that he had brought down this book for them from Heaven. . . . And this man [Muhammad] knew not how to write, but he knew how to put it together, and the Imam 'Ali wrote it in ink.

After these events, Buḥayrān, the uncircumcised, advised Muhammad to destroy, to kill, and to exterminate all the seed of the Jews who did not come to his aid and keep his covenant. And when one of the Jewish sages saw . . . all the troubles that befell Israel, and he saw that Muhammad waxed great . . . he went and made a pact with him, and he became his soldier hero, and changed his name to Abū Bakr. Nonetheless, he remembered Israel, and he and al-Imām ‘Alī made a covenant that they would kill the Gentile [Buḥayrān] and they conspired against him to slay him.⁵⁰

The motif of the Judaizing of the founders of Islam, which appears succinctly in the tenth-century geniza document,⁵¹ has been considerably expanded here. That document identified ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb among the ten sages, whereas here we have the addition of another two Caliphs—founders of Islam. According to Sambari, Abū Bakr and ‘Alī had previously been Jews, and they converted to Islam in order to help Muhammad create his new religion and also in order to save their brethren. The empowerment of some of these Jewish sages in Sambari’s book and in Gil’s version of the story, and their identification as Muslims who had held high office in the nascent days of the Muslim state, may have been intended to lend credibility to the “fact” that they had participated in the creation of Islam. The plot of the Jewish Abū Bakr and ‘Alī to kill Baḥīrā, who had conspired to do evil to the Jews, was put into effect during a wine feast which the monk gave in honor of Muhammad and to which the two were invited as well.⁵² That is the continuation of the story in the *SDY*. Sambari’s motif of the feast is testimony to the antiquity of the material that he incorporated into his work, as its source is the *Sīrah of Ibn-Ishāq*.⁵³ This motif does not appear in a single one of the extra-Islamic medieval versions of the story, except for the *SDY*.

In the next chapter, after the story of Baḥīrā in the *SDY*, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām returns as the leader of that same group of Jewish sages that come to Muhammad:⁵⁴

And there were four learned men of Israel in Damascus, great and wise sages and their sin(!) was their leader,⁵⁵ ‘Övadyahū b. Shalom, who did not fear God. And they came to Muhammad to test him with riddles and were ensnared in his trap. They became part of his entourage and adhered to his covenant. And ‘Övadyahu b. Shalom introduced the following law for them: a woman who is divorced

from her husband and married another man, and the latter hated her, her first husband who sent her away, shall not be allowed to take her for a wife until she defiles herself with another man, and then she is permitted to her first husband.⁵⁶

This too is a reworking of the ancient story, because the motif of probing Muhammad by means of riddles and the ensnarement of the Jewish sages in Muhammad's trap originated in the *sīra* and the *ḥadīth*⁵⁷ and is not to be found in any of the other versions of the story. Even though the story evolved over the course of 1,000 years between the writing of the *sīra* and the writing of the SDY, and the venue was moved from Medina in al-Ḥijāz to Damascus, it is this later work which reintroduces AiS. It also resurrects his image as he was in the very early sources—in the Quran and the *sīra*. Moreover, AiS's connection with the Quran is also mentioned here explicitly. His contribution to the creation of Islamic law is expressed in this medieval story, by attributing to him the divorce law that was incorporated into the Quran. This contribution of AiS to a book that according to Muslim belief is of divine origin implies that he and his companions were responsible for writing it. We have seen above the deeds of the other nine sages, of whom AiS was one of the leaders, who also participated in the writing of the Quran and interpolated their names into its verses which they themselves wrote. In this work, Sambari joins those who contest the divine origins of the Quran and who denounce it as the product of human creation.

Summary

Muhammad's contact with the Jewish communities in al-Ḥijāz in the first three decades of the seventh century resulted in violent clashes. His encounters with members of those communities culminated in the expulsion of the Banū Qaynuqā' and the Banū Naḍir tribes and the massacre of the Banū Qurayẓa and of some of the Jews living in Khaybar. In terms of polemics and religious persuasion, the preaching of the Prophet of Islam produced meager results. Very few indeed were the number of Jews in Arabia who converted to Islam. Islamic historical tradition, and the *sīrah* literature in particular, include a story of a group of Jewish sages who come to test Muhammad with riddles, are convinced of the veracity of his religious mission, and adopt his religion. In those sources, AiS

is presented as the most respected, learned member of this group. These sources give literary shape to AiS, according him breadth and individual characteristics, in contrast to the other Jewish sages who came to Muhammad. An examination of the different texts of the tale of Muhammad and his Jewish companions leads to the conclusion that ‘Abd Allāh served as the exception from which we can generalize about the entire group of Jewish sages. This group, like Christian figures such as Baḥīrā, served as an effective tool in the propaganda machine of the expanding Islam, which resolutely went about acquiring followers to the new religion. The propaganda claim that is implied by the very existence of such a group could be worded as follows: If learned figures from among the *Ahl al-Kitāb* [the People of the Book] adopt Muhammad’s new religion, all the more so the rest of their brethren. The rejoinder of the opposing side to this claim is expressed in the various transformations, which the Jewish tale about Muhammad’s Jewish companions underwent. Primarily, the Jewish sages converted against their will and out of fear, and then they brilliantly aided Muhammad in writing the Quran and interpolated their names into its verses.⁵⁸ By so doing, they answered the Muslim allegation that they had tampered with the text of the Bible in order to conceal the proofs therein regarding Muhammad’s religious mission.⁵⁹ Here the Jewish sages retaliated by relating how they had ruined the Quran by incorporating their names into it. They were thus hinting, so to speak, that they did not touch their own scriptures, but instead wrote their opinion of the holy book of the Muslims and its lack of validity. It can thus be said that the “sages,” such as AiS and his associates who had accomplished their bold feat, were enlisted in this tale to serve as a mirror reaction to the religious struggle that existed in those days. This Jewish reaction was intended, *inter alia*, to stem the tide of conversion of the members of their community to the Muslim religion that was making inroads both politically and militarily. Apparently, this was the *Sitz im Leben* of the string of tales that we have discussed here. We can regard these stories as folklore and the like, but we still have to remember that those who, at the time, copied and disseminated them regarded them as the truth and used them as an effective weapon in the interreligious dispute in which they were engaged.

Appendix: Additional Sources of the Medieval Story about the Jewish Companions of Muhammad

As argued above, “the story of the companions of Muhammad” (*Kiṣṣat aṣḥābat* [!] Muhammad), the first detailed Jewish version, appeared in the tenth century.⁶⁰ From this point on, the story reappeared in different literary forms, up to and including Sambari in the seventeenth century.

These are the texts extant today:⁶¹

1. Al-Bukhārī,⁶² *Al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 3:51 (written in Arabic):

The section of the coming of the Jews to the apostle when he arrived at al-Madīna . . . Abū Hurayra in the name of the apostle, who said, “Had ten Jews believed in me, then all the Jews would have believed in me.”

2. *Kiṣṣat aṣḥāb Muhammad*, Ms. JTS ENA 2554, fol. 2 (written in Judeo-Arabic).⁶³

The story [about] the friends of Muhammad. Appendix to the Book of History. This is a book that comprises the story of Muhammad, who dwelt in the grazing field that is called *al-Jabal al-Ḥadīth*, and how he fared until he went up to *Ṣan ‘ā* and to *al-Ḥijāz* owing to the monk who was in Balqīn on a post called “the sign of the Sun.” They that came from among the sages went over to him and reminded him of his affairs and composed the book [the Quran] for him and interpolated and wrote at the beginning of a *sūra* of his Quran their names. They interpolated [a verse] and wrote: “Thus did the sages of Israel counsel the wicked *ALLaM* [violent one],” in a hidden and jumbled way, so that it would not be understood. Let God curse the man, that this book comes his way and would explicate this to one of the nations. There was the monk named Bahīrā, [his name] should not be mentioned. These are the sages who came to him: Abraham also named Ka‘b al-Aḥbābar; Absalom also named ‘Abd al-Salām; Ya‘akov also named ‘Umar al-Shahīd; Yōḥanan also named *al-Munhazam ilā al-Janna*; ‘Akīvā al-Anṭoki also named *al-Ṭā‘ir fī al-Janna*; El‘azar also named Ṣaḥīb al-‘Aṣā; Yiftah also named *al-Maqtūl fī ḥubb al-Nabī*; Shema‘ayah also named *Murīd*

al-Nabī ilā al-bayt; Barūch also named *al-Maqtūl fī sabīl al-Nabī*; ‘Asa’el also named *Khatan al-Nabī*; Ḥafṣ abū Ṣafiyya *mar’at al-Nabī*. These are the sages who came to him and were converted to Islam by him, in order to prevent him from harming Israel even in the slightest. They produced for him a Quran and interpolated the writing of their names, each of them within a *sūra*, without ground for suspicion. And they wrote in the *sūra*: “Thus did the sages of Israel counsel the wicked ALLaM in the name of Allāh.”

3. Ms. Cambridge University Library T-S 8K 20.2, fol. 2a-b (written in Hebrew):⁶⁴

And if they had done to us as our enemies⁶⁵ who were brought by Essar Ḥadon [an Assyrian emperor] from Kutha had wrought us and like those who came after them with the shepherd [Muhammad] had done, the one who sojourned in the place known as the New Mountain. He had dealings with the monk [Baḥīrā] who dwelt in the place named Balqīn, perched on a post known by the name of the Sign of the Sun. He had likewise dealings with the ten elders: Abraham also named Ka‘b al-Aḥbār; Absalom also named ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Salām; Ya‘akov also named ‘Umar al-Shahīd and Yōḥanan also named *al-Munhazam ilā al-Janna* and their friends, each by his name and his titles. They came to him and composed that shameful sign [the Quran], and so they wrote and interpolated their names, each and everyone. And so it is written in the *sūra* of the Cow:⁶⁶ “Thus did the sages of Israel advise the wicked ALLaM [Muhammad].” All this was done in order to save the people of the Lord so that he does not harm them with his plottings.

4. The Commentary of Abū al-Faraj Furqān b. Asad⁶⁷ on Deuteronomy 32:28; manuscript of the Russian National Library, Firkovitch Collection II, no. 2086, fol. 87 (written in Judeo-Arabic):

And he said that the meaning of the phrase “void of counsel” (Deuteronomy 32:28) refers to the counsels of the ten [sages] who say that they have composed this one, single book [the Quran]. And here was [the threat of] annihilation of Israel.

5. Al-Sama'ual al-Maghribi,⁶⁸ *Ifḥām al-Yahūd*, pp. 57–58 (written in Arabic):

The Jews assert that Muhammad had dreams indicating that he was to be a head of state (*ṣāhib dawla*), that he traveled to Syria on business of Ḥadija, met Rabbis and told them his dreams, and that they recognized that he was to be a head of state. Then they attached to him a companion, 'Abd Allāh b. Salām, who instructed him for some time in scholarship and jurisprudence of the Torah. They go so far in their claim as to ascribe the miraculous eloquence of the Quran to its compilation by 'Abd Allāh b. Salām. They also maintain that it was he who stipulated in the marriage law that a wife after her third divorce [*sic!*] from her husband shall not be permitted to remarry him until she has been married and divorced from another man, the purpose being, in their contention, to make the children of the Muslims *mamzerīm* [illegitimate children].⁶⁹

6. Abraham Zakkut,⁷⁰ *Sefer Yuḥassin*, Ms. Bodleian Library, Oxford, Heb. d 2798, fol. 63 (written in Hebrew):

In the year 794 ca.⁷¹ Muhammad [appeared, and the Christians said] that his father was an Arab Gentile and his mother was a Jewess of an Ishmaelite descent. He was a scion of all religions. These were three men who completed with him the book he wrote [the Quran]: Sirgo, Esseno—a false Christian—who began as a preacher of the Christian religion in Egypt. After this event he and a Jewish sage, Ben Yōḥanan of Antioch converted to his religion.⁷² It is said that he [Muhammad] was thirty-four years old and died in the year 632 of the Common Era.⁷³

7. "The Tale of Muhammad," ed. B. Cohen (written in Hebrew):⁷⁴

And it came to pass in the days of Zedeqiah the King of Judah, and he did evil things in the eyes of the Lord. And He sent against them the King of the Chaldeans . . . and He drove them into the Exile of Babylon . . . and they went from bad to worse for some fifteen hundred years for the Exile was heavy upon them. And it came to

pass in those days and behold a man, one of the sages of Israel . . . and his word was like that of a man of God who would listen to a dream and interpret it. And there came a day and behold a man is standing at the entrance of the house at sunrise and said to him, I dreamt a dream and there is none who can interpret it, therefore I came to you this day. And he said, in my dream I am standing in the midst of a large wood at the end of the middle-watch . . . and behold there grew an almond-tree in my left palm and it had twelve sinews [i.e., branches] . . . and behold the fire of God fell from Heaven and consumed the hand with all that were in it. And when he heard the dream, the man was increasingly afraid and felt faint . . . and said in his heart: "Woe unto us for the days of visitations have come upon us." Then he assembled all the people and he said to them: "Sanctify yourselves for fasting, call for the [holy] gathering and pray to God, for the days of visitations have come of which there is a prophecy [by] Hosea, saying Israel knows that the prophet is a fool and mad is the man of spirit."⁷⁵ Then he told them about the man and his dream . . . and he told them: "This is the interpretation: This man [Muhammad] will rule for about nine hundred years. . . . The animals are the rest of the nations who will believe in him, saying, 'Verily the prophet of the Lord art thou.' . . . Now let us take clever counsel and bring confusion to his tongue and destroy his livelihood, lest he becomes a stumbling stone for the House of Israel. And choose from among yourselves ten men, one out a thousand, who know science and grasp knowledge and who have strength to stand at the royal gates and bring there counsel from afar." It came to pass while they were talking with him and told him about the generation of Enosh and of the Flood . . . and all that happened to Abraham in Ur-Kasdīm . . . and all the words of the Torah that are fearful about Hell (*Gehinōm*) and the Garden of Paradise. All these matters will be written in a book using haughty language, so that all that hear it their ears will ring and will say that its contents are from God, that no man or woman born could have made them, and the name thereof will be *al-Qurʾān*. They will put it into the hands of the man. And they went before him each on his own and he knew not, and they were among those that ate from his table all the days. And the whole congregation heard it and they chose ten men, clever, wise ones, men of understanding and of fame . . . who

spoke in Arabic. They [the ten sages] sat for two months and wrote in the book whatever their hearts offered . . . and they gathered the congregation and they replied with these words saying, our souls we offer to die in your stead and you shall carry our sins for we acted treacherously against the Lord in following this man. The One who tries the hearts, the Lord knows that not in rebellion nor treachery was this deed done, but in order to turn his heart backwards . . . and in order to be for you a great deliverance. It is better that we ten leave the congregation to save you, so that a whole congregation perishes not from Israel with their children after them. Then there came a day when he [Muhammad] lifted his eyes and he saw, behold, a wise man come to meet him and he fell on his face to the ground before Muhammad. He said unto him: "I beseech you my lord, a vision appeared to me and behold the angel of the Lord rose up in flight . . . and he was carrying you on his shoulders, mounted the throne of the Lord and the Lord placed his hand upon your head. Then I heard them say that the whole world was created for his sake, for he is the chosen of the Lord." Muhammad was greatly amazed, but when he heard it he took courage and his heart grew increasingly haughty. After ten months, there came all the sages and they brought counsel from afar, estranged his friend, and stole his heart on that day, and Muhammad's hands strengthened and he arose and he set them up as the heads of the people, and they were among those who partook of food at his table.

Notes

1. Geiger's *Was hat Mohammed aus des Judenthume ufgenommen* was published in Bonn in 1833. It was translated into English under the title *Judaism and Islam*.
2. In some versions of the legend, the hostility demonstrated by Muhammad toward the Arabian Jews is already taken into account, and therefore the authors of these versions have provided another explanation for the act of conversion.
3. See Aloys Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammad*, 2d ed. (Berlin, 1899), 1:490; W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 158–61; Watt, *Muhammad's Mecca* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), 36–38, 44–45.
4. The exhaustive study on this issue is A. Jan Wensinck, *Mohammed en de Joden te Medina* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1908). Cf. Frants Buhl, *Das Leben Muhammeds*, 2d ed. (Heidelberg: Quelle und Meyer, 1930), 211–77. On the extermination of the last tribe, the Banū

Qurayza, see M. J. Kister, *Studies on the Emergence of Islam* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1999), 75–98 (Hebrew).

5. Muhammad ibn Ishāq (85h./704–151h./768), a prominent *Medinese* traditionalist. His *Sīra* is usually referred to by the name of its compiler, Ibn Hishām. See Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), xiii–xli.

6. See Wensinck, *Mohammed en de Joden te Medina*, 93–174; Yisrael Ben Zéev, *The Jews in Arabia* (Tel-Aviv: Mizpeh, 1931), 126–64 (Hebrew); Ḥayyim Zéev Hirschberg, *Israel in Arabia: The History of the Jews in Ḥimyar and the Ḥijāz from the Destruction of the Second Temple until the Crusades* (Tel-Aviv, 1946), 141–49 (Hebrew).

7. Cf. Hirschberg, *Israel in Arabia*, 142–43, 301nn26–31.

8. ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām (hereafter AiS) was presented in the medieval Jewish story as the leader of Muhammad’s Jewish companions. Muslim sources are replete with details about his life.

9. He is described as *ḥabr* in Muhammad Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-nabawiyyah*, 4 vols., ed. Musā al-Saqā et al. (Beirut, 1410h./1990), 2:121. Ibn Ishāq intentionally enhanced the status of other Jews who converted to Islam. For some characteristics of the religious life of the Jews in Arabia, see S. D. Goitein, “Who Were the Obvious Teachers of Muhammad?” *Tarbiz* 23 (1952): 146–59 (Hebrew), and Hirschberg, *Israel in Arabia*, 176, 191–98.

10. Cf. Uri Rubin, “Ḥanifiyya and Ka’ba: An Inquiry into the Arabian Background of *dīn Ibrāhīm*,” *JSAI* 13 (1990): 85–112, see 109; Michael Lecker, *Muslims, Jews, and Pagans: Studies on Early Islamic Medina* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 53 and note 9 there.

11. The Apostle = Muhammad. “His time” = of appearance.

12. AiS was apparently pollinating his palm trees.

13. Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-nabawiyyah*, 2:121–22. Since Wensinck was well aware of the fact that most Jews adamantly repudiated Muhammad and his religious message, he doubted the reliability of the report of AiS’s swift conversion. Goitein, on the other hand, assumed that AiS had already accepted Muhammad’s religious mission in some fashion while Muhammad was still in Mecca. S. D. Goitein, *The Islam of Muhammed: How Did a New Religion Emerge in the Shade of Judaism?* (Jerusalem: Akademon Press, 1966), 163 (Hebrew).

14. His nostalgic attitude toward the knowledge of Jewish law is established in Muhammad b. ‘Amr al-Wāqidi, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, ed. Malcolm Jones (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 40. As to his solidarity with Islam, see Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-nabawiyyah*, 2:151, 156–58.

15. Al-Wāqidi, 1:372 (Naḍir); 2:509 (Qurayza).

16. Quran Sūra xxvi: 197 (The Poets). See Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (London: John Allen and Unwin; New York: Macmillan, 1955), 2:74.

17. Quran Sūra iii: 7 (The house of ‘Imrān). Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, 1:73.

18. In his commentary on the Quran, Bayḍāwī identified sixteen references to AiS. He presents AiS as the leader of the group of Jewish sages, using the wording “‘Abd allāh and his friends.” See Wilhelm Fell, *Indices ad Beidhawii Commentarium in Coranum* (Leipzig: F.C.W. Vogel, 1878), s.v. Abdullah ibn Sallām.

19. Some other Jewish and Christians sages had this capacity for prognostication as well. Cf. Kister, *Studies on the Emergence of Islam*, 104–105.

20. Aḥmad ibn Ḥajar Al-ʿAsqalānī, *Al-ʿIṣābah fī Tamyiz al-Ṣaḥābah*, ed. Muḥammad al-Bajāwī (Cairo: Dār Nahdat Miṣr lil-ṭabʿ wa-al-Naṣhr, 1970), 4:119, ll. 9–10. His respected place in Paradise was evident, as he was described as “the tenth of the first ten people there.”

21. An instructive example of his familiarity with such information is found in M. J. Kister and Menahem Kister, “The Jews in Arabia: Notes,” *Tarbiz* 48 (1979): 231–49 (Hebrew), see 247 (citation of Mālik, *Muwatṭʿa*, 1:129–33).

22. Cf. the second section above, “The Jewish Companions of Muhammad,” between notes 7–9.

23. *Nafar* (in Arabic) is a party from three to ten men. Cf. Joseph G. Hava, *Al-Faraid Arabic-English Dictionary* (Beirut: Catholic Press, 1970), 787. On the number of ten Jewish sages, see the Byzantine and Jewish tales brought in the coming three chapters.

24. Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-nabawiyyah*, 2:141–42 (with omissions). Only the third and fourth riddles are cited in full, because of their relevance to the discussion that follows. See especially the excerpt from Theophanes’ *Chronica* in the next section.

25. As to the *Dalāʾil* literature, see Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwah wa-Maʿrifat Aḥwāl Ṣāḥib al-sharīʿah*, 7 vols., ed. ʿAbd al-Muʿṭī Qalʿajī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1405h./1985); Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 35–36, 148–50; Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 32–33.

26. Yehuda Even Shmuʿel (Kaufmann), *Midrashim of Redemption* (Tel-Aviv: Dvir Publishing House and Mosad Bialik, 1954), 171 (Hebrew). The most common name, among others, given to this apocalyptic vision by its editors is “The Secrets of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yoḥāi,” as the apocalyptic visions were ascribed to the distinguished rabbi of the second century. See the critical edition of Even Shmuʿel in his *Midreshey Geʾulah*, 169–74.

27. Many scholars assumed that it had been composed in this early stage of Islamic history. Cf. Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 3d ed., vol. 5 (Leipzig: Oskar Leiner, 1860), 406–10; Even Shmuʿel, *Midreshey Geʾulah*, 169–74; Bernard Lewis, “An Apocalyptic Vision of Islamic History,” *BSOAS* 13 (1949/51): 308–38, see 309, 323–31.

28. On the marriage of Ṣafiyya to Muhammad, see Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-nabawiyyah*, 3:271, 278, 4:219; Al-Wāqidī, 2:707–709; Julius Wellhausen, *Muḥammed in Medina das ist Vakidi’s Kitab al-Maghazī* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1882), 36, 172, 190. On Ḥuyayy ibn Akḥṭab, cf. Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-nabawiyyah*, 2:123.

29. Theophanes, *Chronica*, 342. This English version is based on the translation from the Greek made by Schwabé. Cf. Moshe Schwabé, “About the Ten Jewish Friends of Muhammad,” *Tarbiz* 2 (1931): 74–89 (Hebrew), see 75n1.

30. In Ibn Hishām (*Al-Sīrah al-nabawiyyah*, 2:129) this chapter was entitled “Who Were the Jewish Sages That Converted Hypocritically to Islam?” The *Sīra* also states explicitly that the sages feared Muhammad.

31. Cf. section 3 above: “A Collective Portrait,” note 23. The number of sages is also attested to in the ḥadīth of Muhammad ibn Ismāʿīl Al-Bukhārī (*Al-Jāmiʿ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed.

Ludolf Krehl, [Leiden 1862–1908], 3:51). The tradition there states in the name of the Prophet, “Had ten Jews believed in me, then all the Jews would have believed in me.” See appendix, section 1.

32. Cf. the third question in the excerpt (section 3 above, near note 24).

33. Most of the manuscripts that contain these versions were retrieved from the Cairo Geniza.

34. This Cambridge University Library manuscript, T-S 161.32, was deciphered and translated from the Judeo-Arabic by Moshe Gil. See Gil, “The Story of *Baḥīrā* and Its Jewish Versions” in *Hebrew and Arabic Studies in Honor of Joshua Blau*, ed. Haggay Ben-Shammai (Jerusalem: Tel-Aviv University, Faculty of Humanities and Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute of Asian and African Studies, 1993), 193–210 (Hebrew), see 206–10.

35. The Kingdom of Muhammad. The very beginning of this manuscript is missing, and therefore the first sentence of this text is fragmentary.

36. Al-Muqtadir, the eighteenth Abbāsid caliph, ruled the Muslim empire between 908 and 932.

37. The acronym of the date “RoF'E[y]” is based on the biblical verse “*Rof'ey elil kul-lechem*” (Ye are all physicians of no value; Job 13:4). The numerical value of the corresponding Hebrew letters R.F.A. is [1]281 (the year of the Seleucid era), i.e., 969–70. The anagram *PeRE* (alluding to the biblical verse “He shall be a wild ass of a man”; Genesis 16:12) was one of Muhammad’s most common appellations in medieval Jewish polemical literature. Cf. M. Steinschneider, *Polemische und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache zwischen Muslimen, Christen, und Juden* (Leipzig, 1877) in the indices (Register): 455 s.v. *PeRE* (Hebrew).

38. In this manuscript, eleven sages are enumerated!

39. Gil, “The Story of *Baḥīrā*,” 207–208. At the end there are some apocryphal verses ascribed to the Quran.

40. Cf. appendix, section 2. A. Neubauer, ed., *Mediaeval Jewish Chronicles and Chronological Notes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895), 2: 89–110, published a Judeo-Arabic manuscript of the Bodleian Library entitled *Kitāb al-Ta'rikh*.

41. The eschatological literature is replete with messianic speculations corresponding to those years. See Gil, “The Story of *Baḥīrā*,” 198–99.

42. One of the Islamic versions of this story is included in the *Sīra*. Cf. Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-nabawīyyah*, 1:147–49; Al-'Asqalānī, 4:271 (no. 598: *Baḥīra al-Rahīb*).

43. Gil, “The Story of *Baḥīrā*,” 206, iii, ll. 8–9. On *Baḥīra* in the multifaceted polemic arena, see Shimon Shtober, “The Monk *Baḥīrā*, the Counselor of Muhammad, and the Jews: Between Polemic and Historiography,” *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies* 1 (Jerusalem, 1990): 69–78 (Hebrew).

44. See David Zevi Baneth, “The Ten Jewish Companions of Muhammad,” *Tarbiz* 3 (1932): 112–16 (Hebrew). See 112–13 for conjectures as to the components of the early Jewish story of *Baḥīra*. See also Gil, “The Story of *Baḥīrā*,” 193–98.

45. The names of the sages and their titles take up fourteen lines of the manuscript. See Gil, “The Story of *Baḥīrā*,” 206.

46. Cf. M. Schmitz, “*Ka'b al-Aḥbār*” *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 4 (1978): 316–17.

47. See Shtober, *Sefer Divrey Yosef* by Yosef ben Yitzhak Sambari: *Eleven Hundred Years of Jewish History under the Muslims* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1994), 13–73 (Hebrew), for a detailed description of Sambari and his book.

48. Exodus 1:8; *Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Sota, 11a.

49. Buḥayrān is the diminutive Arabic form of the name Baḥīra.

50. Shtober, *Sefer Divrey Yosef*, 90–93.

51. See section 5: “Sa’ adya Gaon Tells the Story,” near note 38 (cf. the list of the sages in the *geniza* text: “Ya’ akov also named ‘Umar.”) and after note 46.

52. Shtober, *Sefer Divrey Yosef*, 93–94.

53. Cf. Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-nabawiyyah*, 1:148, and Guillaume, *Life of Muhammad*, 79–81.

54. Shtober, *Sefer Divrey Yosef*, 95.

55. A pun is intended in the Hebrew text “*va-ashamam be-ro’sham*” (their sin was their leader) instead of the scriptural phrase “*va-asimem be-rāsheikhem*” (I will put them as leaders). The latter is a quote from Deuteronomy 1:13. ‘Ōvadyah ben Shalom is a literal translation of the name ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām. Cf. the beginnings of the list of the sages and appendix, nos. 2 and 3.

56. Shtober, *Sefer Divrey Yosef*, 95. The law of the divorced women: Quran 2:229–30. The interpolation of this law into the Quran was already ascribed to AiS by Al-Sama’ual al-Maghribī, a twelfth-century convert to Islam, in his polemic treatise, *Iḥām al-Yahūd*. See Al-Sama’ual b. ‘Abbas al-Maghribī, *Iḥām al-Yahud*, ed. Moshe Perlmann, *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 32 (1964): 57–59. Al-Maghribī’s *Iḥām* is one of the sources used by Sambari in his chronicle.

57. As to the *Sīra*, cf. section 3 above, near notes 23–24. On the ḥadīth literature, see Al-Bukhārī, (*Al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:49), where he reports that AiS came to put riddles to Muhammad.

58. Cf. the version of the Geniza document in section 5 above, between notes 35–39, and in the appendix, nos. 2 and 3.

59. In Muslim sources beginning with the Quran, this allegation is defined as *Tahrīf*, i.e., (a blame of) distorting or corrupting the original biblical text.

60. Cf. the text in section 5, between notes 34–39 above. I have shown that some of the basic elements of this story are embedded in Muslim and Christian traditions of the second and third centuries after the Hijra.

61. Those versions of the story that I have already presented are not included in this appendix, except the saying of Al-Bukhārī mentioned in note 31.

62. Al-Bukhārī lived in the years 194h./810–256h./870. This citation of al-Bukhārī’s *Al-Ṣaḥīḥ* illustrates the inchoate features of this legend that appear in the ḥadīth literature.

63. According to J. Mann, “An Early Theologico-Polemical Work,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 121, no. 13 (1937–38): 426, the time of the composition of *Kiṣṣat aṣḥāb Muhammad* is the first half of the tenth century or possibly the preceding century. See also Baneth, “Ten Jewish Companions,” 114–16.

64. Mann, “An Early Theologico-Polemical Work,” 425, assumed that this Cambridge manuscript was written in the tenth century. Baneth, “Ten Jewish Companions,” 113, determined correctly that this manuscript is simply a Hebrew translation of Manuscript JTS ENA 2554, fol. 2.

65. The Samaritans. Cf. Kings II, 17, 24ff.

66. Sūrat al Baqarah (the Sūra of the Cow) is the second chapter of the Quran.

67. The Karaite commentator, Abū al-Faraj Furqān b. Asad (Yeshū'ah b. Yehūda), a resident of Jerusalem, lived in the eleventh century. See Leon Nemoy, *Karaite Anthology* (Excerpts from the Early Literature) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), 123–32.

68. Al-Maghribī was a twelfth-century Jewish mathematician and physician who converted to Islam. *Ifḥām al-Yahūd* is a harsh polemic treatise that he wrote. Cf. Moshe Perlmann's introduction to Samau'al al-Maghribī, *Ifḥām al-Yahūd*, 15–18.

69. Cf. the text of Sambari, above between notes 54–56.

70. Abraham Zakkut, a distinguished Jewish historian, was born ca. 1440 in Salamanca (Castile). He Left Spain in the wake of the Expulsion of 1492 and died ca. 1515 in Damascus. See Aharon Freimann's introduction to *Sefer Yuḥassin ha-Shalem*, 3d ed. (Jerusalem, 1966) (Hebrew) (reprint of Filipowski's edition of *Sefer Yuḥassin*), 1–11.

71. Obviously, the date is erroneous, as Muhammad appeared roughly in the year 610.

72. Cf. "Yōḥanan . . . , Akivā al-Anṭoki" in the *geniza* text cited in chapter 5, between notes 37–39.

73. Cf. Filipowski, *Yuḥassin*: 247b.

74. "The Tale of Muhammad," was published by B. Cohen in *Revue des études juives* 88 (1929): 12–17. He holds that this pseudo-epigraphic text was composed in the seventeenth century. Due to its great length, I only quoted the relevant parts of it with many omissions.

75. Hosea 9:7.

6

The Use of Islamic Materials by Non-Muslim Writers

YEHOSHUA FRENKEL

The collection and transmission of narratives about the emergence of Islam and the links between the new religion and neighboring communities was a popular practice among Muslim authors from the early years of the caliphate. Yet this tradition of learning and teaching was not confined to Muslim communities, and vestiges of several Islamic historical traditions can be identified in both Jewish and Christian sources. These texts, written in Arabic, Judeo-Arabic, Hebrew, and Syriac, seem to reflect a mirror-image of the Islamic narrative.

This study dwells upon a few historical narratives that support the thesis that the various communities making up the rich human mosaic of the central lands of the caliphate's vast domain were bound together by an Arabo-Islamic cultural symbiosis. This development could take place only after the enrooting of the caliphate in the Near East, the unchallenged recognition by its population of the hegemonic position of Islam, the canonization of sacred Islamic history, the evolution of identity, and the development of a sense of place.¹ The acknowledgment of Islam's hegemony was not limited to the Muslims. This perception was respected by all of the religious communities that lived within the boundaries of the Abode of Islam.

It will be argued that narratives of the past actually reflect the authors' identities and their religious community interests. The historical discourse illuminates the conflicting communal concerns. Chroniclers were apparently resolved to fortify their publics' positions. This led authors

(being Muslims, Christians, or Jews) to strengthen their collective identities and produce opposite interpretations of familiar historical narratives. Concentrating closely on the respective interpretations of these historical texts, we can investigate the interaction between Muslims and the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitab*) in the Fertile Crescent and to hypothesize about the role of these accounts in political and communal discourse. In order to advance the thesis stated above, I will present successive Islamic, Jewish, and Christian historical traditions revolving around similar events, after which I will draw conclusions from these narratives.

The Emergence of the Islamic Caliphate

The victories of Arab tribes over Byzantine and Sasanian armies and the emergence of the Islamic Caliphate (c. 660) instigated deep changes in the human, cultural, and religious map of western Asia and northern Africa. A new political and social order emerged from the vestiges of the past empires. Societies that for long centuries viewed themselves as the protectors of human civilization and true believers, and looked upon the Arab tribes of the desert as the barbarian enemy, found themselves controlled by people they regarded as evil.²

The Arabs, who for hundreds of years had been confined to the limits of the civilized world, had become the new rulers of western Asia and northern Africa (c. 650). They were a minority in the vast sea of Christians, Zoroastrians, Jews, and other religious and ethnic communities. Under these circumstances, the caliphs adopted a sophisticated policy. They did not aim to convert the indigenous occupied population, but rather accepted the very continuation of these communities under the shadow of Islam. The Islamic regime and holy law (*shari'a*) enabled non-Muslims to retain their old systems of beliefs and practices. Administrative measures enabled Jewish and Christian communities in the Fertile Crescent to persist under Islam. They had only to state their recognition of the hegemonic position of Islam and to pay a poll tax (*jizya*; *jawaāli*) to the agents of the caliphate.³

The community heads of the People of the Book (*kitabiyūn*) came to terms with the inferior position of their communities. There are no noteworthy indications to suggest that the majority of the non-Muslim population rejected the Islamic polity, and it seems that the contrary reaction was more common. Those among the indigenous people (*muwalladūn*)

who aspired to join the conquerors could do so by immigrating to the garrison towns (*amṣār*), where it was much easier to assimilate.⁴ In addition, the Umayyad (660–750) found legal solutions to overcome the obstacles that had been hampering mass conversion to Islam, in particular to solve the financial difficulties caused by emigration and conversion.⁵ This opened the doors for mass assimilation.⁶

Moreover, ‘Abd al-Malik’s (fl. 685–705) arabization of the caliphate’s administration generated a profound linguistic revolution. Within several decades, Arabic replaced the languages previously used by the population of the Fertile Crescent. As a result, the central Islamic lands, and particularly the urban centers of the caliphate, witnessed the expansion of a new Arabo-Islamic civilization.⁷ This civilization was adhered to by Arab tribesmen, and the diverse cultures of these regions, including Jews and Christians, were engulfed by it.⁸

Before giving several Jewish and Christian accounts on the relations between their communities and the dominant Islam, I will look at some stories that were popular among Muslim authors who wrote on the Islamic conquests (*futuḥat*). These pseudo-historical traditions often include anecdotes about the role of Jews and Christians in helping the advance of Islam. This kind of historical account had polemical significance. It was used by Muslim writers not only to prove the truth of Islam and that it was the ultimate faith, but also to negate the validity of other religions and even to present these religions as essentially the enemies of Islam.

In the Islamic accounts of the emergence of Islam we can distinguish two complementary types of descriptions of the functions played by the “People of the Book” in this formative period. In both, the ancient religions serve to legitimate the new mission, Islam. In one, Jews and Christians are represented as negative and refutable. In the other, they are described as collaborating with the advancing Muslims. Although these narratives construct their image as untrustworthy people, they do not contradict their role as eyewitnesses confirming the message of the Prophet.

Some Muslim authors present the *ahl al-kitab* as people who acquired the knowledge of reality, but refrained from obedience to the truth.⁹ This vision of the People of the Book can be easily traced in the hagiography (*sira*) of the Prophet and in Quranic exegesis, particularly in those chapters of the *sira* that depict Muhammad’s encounters with Jews and Christians.¹⁰ These people are said to have preserved written evidence concerning the future coming of the prophet Muhammad but concealed

this secret knowledge. Moreover, they are portrayed as adversaries who deny the mission of God's Messenger (*rasul Allah*) and even as the open enemies of his mission.¹¹

One example of this representation of the Jews is the story about the encounter between Muhammad and 'Abd Allah b. Sallam (of Qaynuqa').¹² The story recounts that this Jewish leader warned the Prophet that the Jews were a sort of people who would not hesitate to voice false accusations (*buht*).¹³ Another example is the story of Muhammad's birth. The Jews knew it would happen in Arabia but plotted to assassinate the newborn.¹⁴ A third example used by Muslim authors to advance their claim that in closed circles Jews and Christians retained and transmitted secret information concerning the coming of the Prophet is the story about the monk Bahira.¹⁵ In this story the monk recognizes the seal of the prophethood on Muhammad's back.¹⁶

Narratives of Conquests

The advance of Muslim armies from Arabia northward toward the Byzantine territories during the last years of the Prophet's life and immediately following his death (in 632) is described in great detail in several Islamic chronicles. In these accounts the other type of representation of the People of the Book in the Islamic sources often appears, namely their support of the advancing Islamic armies.¹⁷ For example, a version of the conquest of Caesarea by Mu'awiya contains a sub-narrative in which the Muslim commander ensures the welfare of a local Jew who in return leads the Muslims into the city through a secret gateway.¹⁸

Another salient topic in the biography of Muhammad and the accounts of the advance of Islam is the legal measures taken by the Muslim leadership, who are said to have inserted certain provisions into the treaties of surrender that aimed to safeguard the status of the "People of the Book." Early examples to this are the supposed agreements between Muhammad and the Jews of Arabia. Muslim writers treating this issue claimed that the Prophet exempted the Jews of the Khaybar Oasis from paying the poll tax (*jizya*).¹⁹

Another related issue is the accords that are said to have been agreed upon between the Muslim commanders and the population of the conquered lands. Several narratives on the Islamic conquests (*futuḥat*) incorporate what are known as 'Umar's stipulations (*shuruḥ*),²⁰ which were

signed between the indigenous population of the conquered lands and the notable Muslim caliph.²¹ Moreover, these pseudo-historical traditions include stories about the indigenous population anticipating the advance of the Muslims. They are said to await the fulfillment of the prophetic tradition about the coming of 'Umar b. al-Khattab and his forces.²²

Over and over again, the Islamic narrative of the emergence of the caliphate depicts the non-Muslim subjects as cooperating with the armies of Islam and signing truce pacts (*aman*; 'ahd) with the Muslim commanders. A case in point is the pseudo-historical account of Khalid b. al-Walid's journey (13/635). Muslim authors claim that on his way from Iraq to Damascus, Khalid seized the historical town of Tadmur (Palmyra in Syria). The local Christian inhabitants agreed to pay the Muslim commander a sum of money, in return for which he pledged to protect (*dhimma*) them. This story continues with another example in which Khalid meets the archbishop (*usquf*=*episcopes*) of Damascus outside the eastern walls of city, and the latter asks him to preserve the covenant ('ahd) between the victorious armies and the city's occupants. Similar narratives are told about other locations in Syria. The detailed pseudo-treaty between Abu 'Ubayda ibn al-Jarrah and the inhabitants of Baalbek (Heliopolis in Lebanon), and the accounts of the agreements between 'Amru b. al-'As and several Palestinian towns, are among those examples.²³

These types of narratives reconstructing the glorious past of Islam were adopted by later Muslim jurists, who claimed to have copied them into their manuals and market inspection (*hisba*) handbooks. The abundance of these texts in various genres supports the thesis that they formed an indispensable component of the Islamic discourse. The authors of these works produced copies of what they argued to be 'Umar's agreements with the protected people of various towns controlled by the caliphate. Historical sources providing information about these Muslim-*dhimmi* covenants describe complex legal documents consisting of corresponding paragraphs. While the protected people undertake not to convert their Muslim neighbors or to build new synagogues, monasteries, or churches, to cooperate with the agents of the Islamic government, pay the *jizya* tax, etc., the renowned caliph and his chief commander promise to protect the property, lives, and religious practices of the *dhimmis*.

The emergence of an Islamic polity brought about the necessity of self-definition and the rejection of the polemical positions that the adversaries of Islam voiced.²⁴ A clear-cut definition to separate the new Islamic

community from other religious denominations was implemented.²⁵ This led to the articulation of the Islamic creed (*kalima* or *shahada*) and to a redefinition of the term believers (*mu'aminun*).²⁶ If in the Quran this term could apply to the pietistic monotheists in general, from the Abbasid period onwards the term referred solely to pious Muslims.²⁷ Coins and inscriptions indicate that along with this development, the name of the prophet Muhammad became visible.²⁸ It is used as a confirmation of Islam as the sole true religion and its prophet as the last messenger.²⁹ To bear witness that Muhammad is the seal of the prophets (*khatam al-nabiyyin/khatim al-anbiya*) became one of the principal tenets of Islam.³⁰ Recalling the Islamic vision of the history of God's revelation to humanity, it is not surprising that Muslim authors claimed Islam to be the correct version of the true religion that past messengers had taught (*inna al-dina 'inda allahi al-islahmu*).³¹

Muslim theologians and jurists were active simultaneously in articulating the Islamic worldview and belief principles and in collecting information on the inhabitants of the Near East.³² Some of these works reflect familiarity with the pre-Islamic history of the indigenous communities of the Fertile Crescent as well as with their sacred scriptures.³³ This is evident as well from non-historical genres of medieval Arabic literature such as catalogs of faiths and religions (*milal wa-nihal*). From collections of anecdotes it is visible that the narratives of the People of the Book were not *terra incognita*.³⁴ These Arabic texts seem to reveal a certain communication between their writers and the non-Muslim population.³⁵ Yet history and heresiography were used not only to narrate the past or describe the present. Muslim authors employed these branches of knowledge as tools to establish the hegemony of Islam and to refute the worldview of non-Islamic religions.³⁶

It seems sound to argue that these writings reflect both the problems encountered by the caliphate in the vast territories under its control and the efforts made by Muslim jurists to legitimize the political and social order that they aspired to enforce in the Abode of Islam.³⁷ Moreover, those Muslim scholars who were troubled by questions regarding the relationships between Muslim and non-Muslim may have manipulated pseudo-historical accounts and used them in order to support their political and social agenda.³⁸

The Non-Muslims' Reaction

How did the non-Muslim subjects of the caliphate react to the pseudo-historical traditions and documents presented above? It seems that the "Protected People" refrained from challenging the accuracy of these texts or records, let alone commenting on the sacred Islamic historiography, which reflected the official Islamic ideology. Jews and Christians were immersed in Arabic-Islamic civilization and familiar with its writings. They chose to take what I would term as "a compromise approach." Although openly accepting the sacred historiography produced by the Muslim authors, the "People of the Book" in fact manipulated the dominant Islamic version of the past and used it to tell a historical story that supported their own cause.³⁹

They employed a sophisticated self-definition that made it possible for them to draw lines of demarcation between the governing religion and their own enclave communities. Samul ben Nissim Masnuth, for example, states that "nations differ in three components: tongue, script, and religion."⁴⁰ Nethanel ben al-Fayyumi (a Yemenite Jew d. c. 1165) asserts that "every nation should follow the doctrine that reached it, trail its prophets' path, and pursue its priests and heads. In this way no one remains without a religious doctrine. Everything is from God (*rabb*) the One and Unique and unto Him we are returning."⁴¹ All turn toward Him and pray, and every soul to Him points, as is said 'and the spirit returns to God who gave it.'⁴² Al-Fayumi then deals with the common Muslim accusation that the Jews forged the Holy Bible, which the Almighty gave to Moses in Sinai using *inter alia* a Quranic verse (14:4): "And We never sent a messenger save with the language of his folk."⁴³

It was stated above that the People of the Book had a good knowledge of various Arabic literary genres and that, due to interreligious polemics, they were familiar with the texts used by the Muslims to rationalize their inferior status.⁴⁴ Hence we should not be surprised to discover that Jews and Christians aspired to take Muslim arguments and turn them in their favor.⁴⁵ This is very common in circumstances such as the long and ongoing interreligious debate. By using different interpretations of a familiar narrative, it is easier to rebuff the opposite party.⁴⁶ Each side draws its own arguments and uses them against the other party.

We now return to the claim made in Muslim sources that 'Abd Allah b. Sallam played a significant role in Muhammad's story by recognizing

his true prophetic mission. Yosef Sambari, a Hebrew chronicler living in Ottoman Egypt, does not refute the details of this narrative, but writes that ‘Obadiah b. Shalom (the Hebrew version of the Arabic ‘Abd Allah b. Sallam) was a man who did not “revere the Lord,”⁴⁷ thus suggesting the reason for what he sees as ‘Obadiah’s betrayal.⁴⁸

Another example of the close relationship between Muslim and *kitabiyun* is the legendary story of Bahira the Monk.⁴⁹ Christian writers present Bahira (also named Sargis, Sergius, Nestorius) as a heretical (Nestorian or Arian) monk. They depict him in their anti-Islamic polemical texts as one who misguided his audience. This picture served Christian sources (written in Syriac and Arabic) as a tool to refute Muslim voices that argued that mankind anticipated the coming of Muhammad.⁵⁰

The Jewish Reaction

The Jewish Bahira legend reflects the convoluted relations between Jews and Muslims.⁵¹ Moreover, in some chronicles this narrative reflects the strained relations between Jews and Christians in the Abode of Islam, rather than the history of Muhammad. This seems to be the case with Sambari’s history.⁵² Sambari does not deny that the Prophet expressed anti-Jewish positions; indeed, Muslim sources are rich in detailed descriptions of an ongoing conflict between the small community of the Faithful and the Jews of Arabia.⁵³ To clarify this chapter in the early history of Islam, Sambari employs a simple method. He argues that anti-Jewish feelings among the Muslims in Medina were cultivated by Buhairan, an obtuse and wicked astrologer who attempted to induce Muhammad to give the Jews a final blow. Yet Abu Bakr (caliph 632–34), who is said to be the son of the Exilarch (*resh galutha*), plotted with ‘Ali b. Abi Talib (caliph 656–61) to kill Buhairan and thus delivered the Jews.⁵⁴

Moreover, Jewish communities claimed that Muhammad ensured their protection and well-being under the Abode of Islam. According to this presentation, the Prophet granted a group of Jews a letter guaranteeing their life, property, and religious practices (*kitab dhimmat al-nabi*) as a reward for their help fighting on Saturday (*al-sabt*= Sabbath) for the cause of Islam. At the same time, by stating that “they will not [be forced to] renounce their religion, will not violate the Sabbath, and will not annul the reading in the Pentateuch (*al-tawrah* = Torah),” the document defines Jewish identity under Islam.⁵⁵

A Jewish historical legend claims that the Jews dwelling in the Khaybar Oasis in the early seventh century were from the House of Rachabites.⁵⁶ The victorious Muslim forces evicted them from this location and compelled them to emigrate, yet negotiations between the quarreling parties resulted in exempting the Jews of Khyabar from paying the poll tax (*ji-zya*). An Arabic petition sent from Tiberias to the Fatimid court in Cairo clearly states this claim.⁵⁷ This reconstruction of the past was prevalent among the Jews of the Lands of Islam and can also be found in a late Hebrew account on the arrangements agreed upon between the Muslims and the Jews of Khaybar. Moreover, the text states that the authenticity of this tradition was approved by Muslim jurists.⁵⁸

It has been mentioned above that Islamic sources maintained that the indigenous population of the Fertile Crescent cooperated with the advancing Islamic armies. Taking up this narrative, Jewish sources write that the military successes did not put an end to the cordial relations between Jews and the emerging Islamic polity. A case in point is a Geniza document that contains a report on the meeting between the Jews and Muslims in Jerusalem. The Jews are said to have helped 'Umar b. al-Khattab in cleaning the holy city (*quds*) and exposing the ruins of the Temple. They pointed out to the caliph the location of the Rock, and he ordered them to build the Dome, which covered it. Then 'Umar issued a decree permitting seventy Jewish families to relocate from the Galilee to Jerusalem.⁵⁹ Hence they built a synagogue on the Temple Mount and visited the site.⁶⁰

Another example of this line of argumentation can be detected in a Jewish adaptation of the story of 'Amru b. al-'As, the Muslim conqueror of Egypt.⁶¹ In this version of the history, the Islamic leadership of the Nile Valley demonstrates friendship toward the conquered population, and the Jewish and Muslim parties sign a peace pact.⁶² This reconstruction of the past served the Jews of Islam. They could argue that the kings of Ishmael respected them and showed goodwill.

Several accounts of later events also indicate that the symbiotic rapport between the caliphate and the protected people did not break off even with the profound changes that the Fertile Crescent witnessed during the disintegration of the 'Abbasid Empire.

The first example is an account by a Jewish chronicler of the caliph al-Mu'tadid (279–289/892–902), who awoke from a nightmare in which Elias appeared in front of him and warned him of the danger that would ensue if he accomplished his evil device: "I will punish you severely if

the Jews of Baghdad are hurt.” The caliph called upon Netira, the head of the Jews, who came to the court dressed in shrouds. The Jewish leader explained to the caliph that the mysterious person he had seen was Elijah, the protector of the Jews, adding that Elias and al-Khidr are one and the same. At this point we notice a change of roles in the story’s dialogue. Netira, who in the first scene expressed great fear, now plays the role of a dignitary who holds the keys to the ruler’s court (*sultān*), while the caliph takes on the reverse position, that of the advocate. He suggests that the Jews will stop having to pay the poll tax. However, Netira insists that his people will continue to pay the *jizya*, arguing that the payment protects them. The caliph agrees with this counsel and undertakes to collect the *jizya* according to “the sacred tradition of the Prophet (*sunna*).” Hence the Jews of Baghdad adopt the dress code of the ‘Abbasids, demonstrating in this way their confidence in the caliph’s assurance. When Sufis plan to attack the Jewish community of Baghdad, the caliph orders them thrown into the Tigris River. The passing of the heroes of these stories does not put an end to the close contacts between the Jews and the caliph’s court. Netira continues to play an important role in the court of the caliph’s successor, al-Muqtadir (295–320/908–32), and the ‘Abbasids’ favorable attitude continues when Netira is replaced by Sahl. It is even said that this Jewish leader regularly sent money to Kufa, where the coins were distributed among the offspring of ‘Ali b. Abi Talib (i.e., Shiites) and the Hashimites (i.e., ‘Abbasids).⁶³

A partial explanation of the popularity of *al-faraj ba’d al-shidda* (deliverance after hardship) episodes among Jewish authors might be the literary-religious tradition that starts with the biblical book (*megillah*) of Esther.⁶⁴ This *topos* is reflected in a Jewish source recounting an event that happened in Baghdad during the Saljuq period and that shows how the Jews internalized their role as *dhimmis*. In it, we read that while the sultan had been persecuting the Jewish community, a pious woman, the daughter of Joseph the physician, declared that she had seen the prophet Elijah in a dream and that “she had been told by him that the redemption of Israel was at hand.” Hearing about these messianic expectations, the caliph considered punishing the Jews, but he was warned by the chief Muslim judge of Baghdad that “no person who has ever done evil to the Jewish people has remained unpunished.” At night, Elijah appeared to the caliph himself, “who was struck with awe.” Hence the Jews of Baghdad were exempted from taxation.⁶⁵ This exchange of roles seems to be a

traditional literary *topos* that Jewish writers employed to confront their people's complicated conditions under the caliphs.

The Christian Reaction

Christian narratives about similar events occasionally take a different path, particularly when it comes to details, yet they share with the Jewish narratives declared acceptance of the hegemony of Islam. These narratives suggest that Christian leadership found a convenient strategy in publicly admitting their inferiority under Islam, hoping thus to safeguard their communities and clergymen.

In an epistle attributed to the bishop Mar (mor) Gabriel from the Tur 'Abdin region (in southeast Turkey), we read that he met 'Umar b. al-Khattab, the caliph of the Muslims (*kalifa de-ḥanfota*). At the end of the meeting, the bishop handed the caliph a letter, and the caliph marked the document. It guaranteed the Christians' freedom of belief and church practices. The Christians were promised that they would be able to carry on with religious processions and that the clergy would be not liable to pay state taxation.⁶⁶

In some historical traditions, the Christian version of the episodes is completely opposite to the plot offered by the Jewish writers. This is evident in the Christian sources that tell the story about 'Umar b. al-Khattab, his arrival in Jerusalem, and his negotiations with Sophronius, the last Byzantine patriarch of the city.⁶⁷ The sequence of events described in these accounts brings together the head of the local church and the head of the Muslims. They negotiated the conditions of surrender before reaching an agreement that stipulated the conditions of the local people. In return for the patriarch's capitulations and the willingness of his congregation to reside under the shadow of the caliphate, 'Umar issued an accord document (*ṣulḥ*) that recorded his undertakings to protect the Christians and to guard their churches.

The Christian version of the surrender covenant includes an additional paragraph. It states that the Commander of the Faithful promised the local Christian population that the caliphate would prevent Jews from residing with them in Jerusalem. Following the endorsement of this covenant, 'Umar looked for a place to pray. Since he and the representative of the church were at the Holy Sepulcher, Sophronius suggested that the caliph pray in the church. But 'Umar refused, claiming: "Would I pray here

then in the future Muslims will demand the location for themselves.”⁶⁸ By transmitting this pseudo-account, the Christian chronicler actually says to his audience that this noble act by the Commander of the Faithful saved the church from confiscation. The Muslims should follow ‘Umar’s footsteps and not harass the Christian congregation as had happened in the Holy City during the days of al-Hakim. In addition to this object, the historical account aims to displace the Jewish population of Jerusalem.

The use of historical accounts to rationalize contemporary conditions was not limited to explanations of the conditions of the Protected People under the caliphs; it also served to clarify stories of relics and places. For example, an Armenian author claims in his description of sacred relics in Constantinople that they were brought to the Byzantine capital following the defeat of the imperial armies in the battle of Yarmuk (636). According to this story, the Christians were able to remove the sacred objects from the Church of the Resurrection while the Ishmaelite force encamped in Jericho. They carried the items from Jerusalem to the coast and loaded them on vessels heading for Constantinople. Following this successful rescue operation, the Christians demanded that the Muslims swear an oath guaranteeing their security, and then they opened the city’s gates.⁶⁹

Conclusion

It is not surprising that Jews and Christians put forward their claims centuries after the emergence of the Islamic polity. The *kitabiyun*’s reactions to the Islamic historical accounts could be established only after the latter became firmly rooted in Muslim consciousness. This development went hand in hand with the growth among the Muslims of a strong spirit of self-identity and the sense of an attachment to their place of residence.⁷⁰ This is clearly reflected in the merging of Islamic sacred history and geography.⁷¹ Often the building of Islamic solidarity was accompanied by the depiction of cities and regions as spaces blessed with a unique Islamic aura.

Only the accomplishment of these mental and intellectual evolutions could open the way for the Jews and Christians of the Land of Islam, who were not political dissidents and hence accepted the dominance of the Islamic state. It is evident that the “Protected People” (*ahl al-dhimma*) who lived under the shadow of the caliphs were familiar with the prevailing *topoi* in the Arabo-Islamic chronicles and other literary genres. Yet, while

the Muslim authors endeavored to reconstruct the early historical past of the congregation (*umma*) and supply the jurists with textual evidence to justify anti-Jewish and anti-Christian regulations and taxations, the *kitabiyun* learned to read the Islamic tradition in a subversive way.⁷²

Not disputing their position as communities without political power, the People of the Book argued that the model of the past restricted the measures that the governing Islamic administration could take against them. In order to secure their communities' position and to supply explanations of past events, both internally to members of their communities and externally to the governing Islamic *umma*, they acquired the knowledge to manipulate the Islamic historical narrative.⁷³ The "Protected People" argued that the primary Islamic texts ensured their property and lives. They demonstrated a close reading of Islamic sacred history in order to claim that it was the duty of the Islamic polity to protect them.

Moreover, they interpreted these pseudo-documents in a manner that safeguarded the *kitabiyun*'s autonomy and strengthened the position of their leadership. They manufactured what Amos Funkenstein called inauthentic narrative that served them as a counterhistory. The function of counterhistory is polemical, although I do not argue that by a systematic exploitation of the Islamic hegemonic narrative the non-Muslim authors aimed to distort the Muslims' self-image through the destruction of their collective memory.⁷⁴

The interests of the governing Islamic power were at odds with the concerns of the "Protected People." Adhering to their respective communal interests, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish writers used similar accounts to fortify their communities' positions. Hence it is not surprising to discover that, although analogous accounts of past events were used, they were construed in opposite ways. Saying so, we might deduce another conclusion from the above texts: under the caliphs, the Fertile Crescent witnessed the development of an Arabo-Islamic culture that encompassed all segments of the population. This culture enabled the People of the Book to live side by side with their Muslim neighbors. It underlined the legal pseudo-contractual relations between the hegemonic Islamic state apparatus and the Protected People. There is no need here to present the reaction of Muslim authors to this interpretation of the ideal polity.⁷⁵ Historical reality proved time and again that the Muslim majority rejected the harmonious picture depicted by the *kitabiyun*.

Notes

1. Place, according to this interpretation, is more than the location where social processes are taking place. It is a communal domain that carries administrative and political notations as well as cultural and religious meanings. In this role, place and landscape hold a special position. They are exhibited in written works and occupy a dominant position in popular practices and manners. John Agnew, "Representing Space: Space, Scale, and Culture in Social Science," in *Place/Culture/Representation*, ed. James Duncan and David Ley (London: Routledge, 1993), 251–71.

2. The biblical verses "And the angel of the Lord said to her: Behold, you are with child, and shall bear a son; you shall call his name Ishmael; because the Lord has given heed to your affliction. He shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against every man and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen" (Genesis 16:11–12) were quoted by some Christian authors when describing the defeat of the Byzantine Empire and the emergence of the Islamic Caliphate. Andrew Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), 230 and note 581; Walter Emil Kaegi, "Initial Byzantine Reaction to the Arab Conquest," *Church History* 38 (1969): 140, 143, 146; H. W. Bailey, "To the Zamasp-Namak," *BSOAS* 6 (1930–31): 55–56, 582n73; Robert H. Hewsen, "The Geography of Pappus of Alexandria: A Translation of the Armenian Fragments," *Isis* 62 (1971): 202n71.

3. Commonly Muslim jurists refer to Quran 9:29. U. Rubin, "Qur'an and Poetry," *JSAL* 31 (2006): 139, mentions earlier studies; Taqi al-Din Ahmad b. 'Ali al-Maqrizi (766/1364–845/1441), *al-Suluk li-ma'rifat duwal al-muluk*, ed. M. M. Ziyada (Cairo: Matba'at Dar al-Kutub, 1934) 1:712, records the collection in Cairo of the poll tax (682/1283–84). The Copts and the Jews came to Dar al-'Adl, where they paid the money while the heads of the Mamluk civil administration were present.

4. Khalil Athamina, "Arab and Muhajirun in the Environment of Amsar," *Studia Islamica* 66 (1987): 10.

5. The unclear distinction between the *jizya* and *kharaj* categories caused particularly severe difficulties. Jasir b. Khalil Abu Safiya, *Bardiyat qurra ibn Sharik al-'absi* (Riyad: Markaz al-Malik Faysal lil-buhuth, 2004), 121–23; Hamilton A. R. Gibb, "The Fiscal Pre-script of 'Umar II," *Arabica* 2 (1955): 1–16; Azeddine Guessous, "Le rescrit fiscal de 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Aziz: une nouvelle appreciation," *Der Islam* 73 (1996): 113–37.

6. Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wal-muluk*, ed. M. J. De Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1879; repr., 1964), 2:1353–54, 1507–10.

7. Bailey, "To the Zamasp-Namak," *BSOAS* 6 (1930): 56 (§ 13); Sidney H. Griffith, "Anthony David of Baghdad, Scribe and Monk of Mar Sabas: Arabic in the Monasteries of Palestine," *Church History* 58 (1989): 19; Sidney H. Griffith, "From Aramaic to Arabic: The Languages of the Monasteries of Palestine in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Periods," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 51 (1997): 24–29.

8. Joshua Blau, *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic*, 3d ed. (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1999), 4, 34–41; Norman Ruth, "Jewish Reaction to 'Arabiyya and the Renaissance of Hebrew in Spain," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 28 (1983): 64–66.

9. It seems that this role of the indigenous population did not stop with Muhammad's death. It is narrated that a monk in Damascus read a Greek inscription that predicted the future victories of the 'Abbasids. Shams al-Din Muhammad b. 'Ali Ibn Tulun al-Salihi (1485–1536/880–953), *Qurrat al-'Uyun fi akhbar bab jirun*, ed. S. Munajjid (Damascus: al-Majma' al-'ilmi al-'arabi, 1964), 8 (quoting Ibn al-'Asakir, *Ta'rikh madinat dimashq*).

10. Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 296 (quoting al-Tabari); Abu al-Hasan 'Ali b. Ahmad al-Naysaburi [Nisaburi] al-Wahidi (d. 468/1075), *Kitab asbab al-nuzul*, ed. W. al-Zakari (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Asriya, 1421/2000), 53; Moshe Gil, "Religion and Realities in Islamic Taxation," *Israel Oriental Studies* 10 (1980): 21–25. Gil accepts these literary traditions as authentic historical documents. I do not agree with his interpretation.

11. Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn al-Tayyib al-Baqillani (d. 1015), *Kitab al-bayan (Miracle and Magic: A Treatise on the Nature of the Apologetic Miracle and Its Differentiation from Charisms, Trickery, Divination, Magic, and Spells)*, ed. Richard J. McCarthy (Beirut: Librairie Orientale, 1958), 82–83 (§ 97), 86 (§ 106).

12. Montgomery W. Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 197.

13. Abu al-Bakr Ahmad ibn Husayn al-Bayhaqi (384–458/994–1066), *Dala'il al-nubuwwa wa-ma'rifat akhwal sahib al-shari'a*, ed. Abd al-Muti' Qal'aji (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1405/1985), 6: 260–61, 266–67.

14. Raif George Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih, das Heidelberger Papyrus* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1972), 1:118; Muhammad Ibn Sa'd (784–845), *Kitab al-tabaqat al-kabir* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1994), 1:162–63; Ahmad b. Wadih al-Ya'qubi, *Ta'rikh* (Historiae), ed. M. Th. Houtsma (Leiden: Brill, 1883/1969), 2:5–7.

15. Ibn Hisham, *al-Sira al-nabawiyya*, ed. al-Saqa et al. (Cairo, 1971), 1:191–94; Abu al-Hasan 'Ali al-Mas'udi (d. c. 345/956), *Muruj al-dhahab wa-ma'adin al-jawahir*, ed. Ch. Pellat (Beirut: L'Universite Libanaise, 1974), 1:83 (§ 150); Jalal al-Din Abu al-Faraj 'Abd al-Rahman b. 'Ali Ibn al-Jawzi (510–597/1117–1201), *al-Wafa bi-ahwal al-Mustafa*, ed. M. A. 'Ata' (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1408/1988), 141 (who names the monk Nastora). Among Muslim commentators it is common to connect this episode with Quran 5:82.

16. This monastery (Dair al-Ba'iqi) was visited by Muslim pilgrims as late as the late Abbasid period. Abu al-Hasan 'Ali b. Abi Bakr al-Harawi (d. 611/1215), *Kitab al-'isharat ila ma'rifat al-ziyarat*, ed. A. 'Umar (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thiqafa, 1423/2002), 24.

17. Albrecht Noth (in collaboration with L. Conrad), *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study*, translated from the German by Michael Bonner (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1994), 19, 167.

18. Abu al-'Abbas Ahmad b. Yahya ibn-Jabir al-Baladhuri (d. ca. 279/892), *Futuh al-Buldan*, ed. M. De Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1866), 141.

19. Qutb al-Din Musa b. Muhammad al-Yunini (d. 726/1326), *Dhayl mir'at al-zaman* [sequel to the mirror of the time] (Haydar-Abbad, 1380/1961), 2:253 (ah 701).

20. The Arabic sources refer to this document also as the covenant ('*ahd*), contract stipulations (*shurut*), or treaties ('*aqd*) of 'Umar. They argue that the caliph signed these agreements with Jewish and Christian inhabitants of the cities that the Islamic armies

conquered in the early years of the caliphate. It would be extremely difficult to accept this early date. See Milka Levy-Rubin, "Shurut 'Umar and Its Alternatives: The Legal Debate on the Status of the Dhimmis," *JSAI* 30 (2005): 170–206.

21. A. Noth, "Abgrenzungsprobleme zwischen Muslimen und Nicht-Muslimen: Die Bedingungen Umars unter einem anderen Aspekt gelesen," *JSAI* 9 (1987): 290–315; English translation in R. Hoyland, *Muslims and Others in Early Islamic History* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 103–24. Mark R. Cohen, "What Was the Pact of 'Umar? A Literary-Historical Study," *JSAI* 23 (1999): 101–57, edited a Mamluk version of the pact.

22. Nur al-Din 'Ali b. Burhan al-Din al-Halabi (AH 975–1044), *Insan al-'uyun fi sirat al-amin al-ma'mun* [al-Sira al-Halabiyya] (Cairo, 1964), 351; al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh*, 1: 2405; Ibn al-Jawzi, *Muntazam* 4:43 (AH 15); Izz al-Din Ibn al-Athir (1160–1233), *al-Kamil fi al-ta'rikh* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1966), 2:499–500.

23. Al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 110–12, 130, 135. The complicated relations between these two leaders are beyond the scope of the present study. See M. J. Kister, "On the Papyrus of Wahb b. Munabbih," *BSOAS* 37 (1974): 545–71.

24. Michael A. Cook, "The Origin of Kalam," *BSOAS* 43 (1980): 33; Josef Van Ess, "Political Ideas in Early Islamic Religious Thought," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 28 (2001): 153–56.

25. Cf. the graffiti: "I believe that there is no god except Him in whom the children of Israel believed (Quran 10:90) [believing as] a Muslim hanif nor am I among the polytheists (Quran 3: 67)." Fred McGraw Donner, "Some Early Arabic Inscription from al-Hanakiyya, Saudi Arabia," *JNES* 43 (1984): 185; an anti-Umayyad report blaming them for painting the wall of the Dome of the Rock with frescos representing human figures, as churches are decorated. Abu al-Fida Isma'il Ibn Kathir (701–74/1301–73), *al-Bidaya wa-al-nihaya* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'ilmiya, 2001), 8:288 (AH 96).

26. Frederick M. Denny, "Ummah in the Constitution of Medina," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 36 (1977): 43; R. B. Serjeant, "The Sunnah Jami' ah, Pacts with the Yathrib Jews, and the 'Tahrim' of Yathrib: Analysis and Translation of the Documents Comprised in the So-called Constitution of Medina," *BSOAS* 41 (1978): 12–15; Uri Rubin, "The 'Constitution of Medina': Some Notes," *Studia Islamica* 62 (1985): 13–16.

27. Quran, 49: 14, 6: 82, 33: 35; Dimitry Baramki, "al-Nuqush al-'arabiyya fi al-badiya al-shamiya," al-Abhath 17 (1964): 335 (no. 67: ll. 6–7); Moshe Sharon, "Arabic Inscriptions from Rehovoth and Sinai," *Israel Exploration Journal* 43 (1993): 55–56; Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn al-Tayyib al-Baqillani (d. 1015), *al-Insaf fima yajib u i'tiqaduhu wala yajuzu al-jahlu bihi*, ed. I. A. Haydar (Beirut, 1986), 89–90.

28. Cf. l. 3 in the inscriptions on the inner octagonal arcaded of Qubbat al-Sakhra in Jerusalem (72/692). C. Kessler, "Abd al-Malik's Inscription in the Dome of the Rock," *JRAS* (1970): 2–14; Estelle Whelan, "Forgotten Witness: Evidence for the Early Codification of the Qur'an," *JAOS* 118 (1998): 4. The inscription evidently reflects the early Umayyads' image of Islam.

29. Robert G. Hoyland, "Writing the Biography of the Prophet Muhammad: Problems and Solutions," *History Compass* 5 (2007): 11.

30. Referring to the Quran, Al 'Imran, 3:144, al-Ahzab, 33:40; 'Abd Allah ibn Mubarak al-Marvazi (736–97), *Kitab al-zuhd wal-raqa'iq*, ed. Habib al-Rahman al-'Azami (Beirut,

1966), 557 (tradition 1598); Hartwig Hirschfeld, *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Quran* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1902), 22, 23; John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 64–65; Gerald Richard Hawting, “The Disappearance and Rediscovery of the Zamzam and the Well of the Ka’ba,” *BSOAS* 43 (1980): 48–49; Y. Friedmann, “Finality of Prophethood in Sunni Islam,” *JSAI* 7 (1986): 177–215.

31. Quran, Al ‘Imran, 3:19 “The true religion with God is Islam. Those who were given the Book were not at variance except after the knowledge came to them, being insolent one to another.”

32. Julian Obermann, “Political Theology in Early Islam: Hasan al-Basri’s Treatise on Qadar,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 55 (1935): 138–62; Frank Griffel, “Toleration and Exclusion: Al-Shafi’i and al-Ghazali on the Treatment of Apostates,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 64 (2001): 339–50; Steven Wasserstrom, “Mutual Acknowledgments: Modes of Recognition between Muslim and Jew,” in *Islam and Judaism: 1,400 Years of Shared Values*, ed. Steven Wasserstrom (Portland: Institute for Judaic Studies, 1994), 64–65; G. D. Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia from Ancient Times to Their Eclipse under Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 14–17.

33. Abu al-Hasan ‘Ali al-Mas’udi (d. c. 345/956), *Kitab al-tanbih wal-ishraf*, ed. M. J. De Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1893); Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum 8:112–14; al-Mutahhar ibn Tahir al-Maqdisi (fl. 966), *al-bad’ wal-ta’rikh*, ed. and trans. Houart (Paris, 1899–1919), 4:34–41.

34. This is reflected even in popular literature. In the story of the hunchback, his corpse is transferred from the house where he has died to the house of a Jewish physician, then to the house of a Muslim neighbor, and ends up in the home of a Christian tradesman, who is portrayed as a drunkard. As the Jew, who is depicted as greedy, tramples on the dead body, he cries out: “O Ezra (Uzayr), O Moses, O Aaron, O Jushua son of Nun.” *Alf Layla wa-Layla from the Earliest Known Sources*, ed. Muhsin Mahdi (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 283, 284, 285; *Tausend und Eine Nacht Arabisch* (nights 104–106), ed. Maximilian Habicht (Breslau, 1825), 2:125–29; *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, ed. Bulaq (Cairo, 1252), 1:74–75; H. Haddawy, trans., *The Arabian Nights* (New York: Norton, 1990), 1:208–11.

35. Sh. Pines, “A Note on an Early Meaning of the Term *Mutakallim*,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971): 224–40.

36. G. Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muhammad* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1999), 10–11; Steven Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 180–81.

37. ‘Umar’s stipulations (*al-shurut al-‘umariyya*) can be traced not only in the chronicles but also in Islamic law manuals. Abu Bakr Muhammad b. al-Walid al-Turtushi (451–520/1160–1126), *Siraj al-muluk*, ed. M. F. Abu Bakr (Cairo: al-Dar al-Misriya, 1994), 542–47 (chap. 51 *fi ahkam ahl al-dhimma*).

38. M. J. Kister, “Haddithu ‘an Bani Isra’il wa-la harja: A Study of an Early Tradition,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972): 215–39; Kister, “Do Not Assimilate Yourselves,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 12 (1989): 321–71.

39. See the account of the Syrian patriarch Michael: "Ruha (Edessa) fell to the Moslem Arabs in 639 AD. It surrendered to the Arab general, Iyad Ibn Ghanm, who granted to the Bishop of Edessa the terms of the surrender. According to these terms, lives and property of the Christian inhabitants were to be secured as *ahl-al-dhimma*, in return for one dinar and two measures of flour to be paid for each male citizen." Translated by Joseph Tarzi, "Edessa in the Era of Patriarch Michael the Syrian," *Hugoye* 3 (2000): paragraph 4.

40. *Midrash Daniel wu-Midrash Ezra*, eds. I. S. Lange and S. Schwartz (Jerusalem: Mekisai Nirdamim, 1968), 11. Scholars do not agree on Samul ben Nissim Masnuth's place and time. Some argue that he lived in Aleppo in the twelfth century, while others advance the opinion that he lived in the western Mediterranean in the fourteenth century.

41. Paraphrase on Quran, 2:156. On al-Fayyumi, see R. C. Kiener, "Jewish Isma'ilism in Twelfth-Century Yemen: R. Nethanel al-Fayyumi," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 74 (1984): 249–66.

42. Koheleth 12:7.

43. *Bustan al-ukul [Gan ha-sekhalim]*, ed. Yusuf Kafah (Qiryat Ono: Halikhot Israel, 1984), 114–16.

44. S. Griffith, "Jews and Muslims in Christian, Syriac, and Arabic Texts of the Ninth Century," *Jewish History* 3 (1988): 66, 81.

45. Cf. the opposite roles of Abraham and Ishmael in Jewish and Muslim legends. A. Schussman, "Abraham's Visits to Ishmael: The Jewish Origin and Orientation," *Tarbiz* 49 (1980): 329, 337, 345.

46. 'Abd al-Masih b. Ishaq, *Risala* [The apology of al Kindy, written at the court of al Mamun (d. circa 215/830), in defense of Christianity against Islam] (Villach, Austria: Light of Life, 1998), 35–38, 45–51, 78–79, 85–86.

47. In contrast to the biblical verse: I Kings 1:3, where Obadiah is described as a heart-felt believer.

48. Yosef Sambari, *Sefer Divrei Yosef: Eleven Hundred Years of Jewish History under Islamic Rule*, ed. Sh. Shtober (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1994), 95.

49. R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997), 538.

50. S. Gero, "The Legend of the Monk Bahira: The Cult of the Cross and Iconoclasm," in *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam*, ed. P. Canivet and J-P. Rey-Coquais (Damascus, 1992), 47–58; S. Griffith, "The Prophet Muhammad," in *The Life of Muhammad*, ed. U. Rubin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 354, 373, 380–84.

51. M. Gil, "The Story of Bahira and Its Jewish Version," *Hebrew and Arabic Studies in Honour of Joshua Blau* (Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, 1993), 200 (Hebrew).

52. See Sh. Shtober, "The Beginning of Islam in Jewish Sources," *Pe'amim* 61 (1994): 90 (Hebrew).

53. More than one Muslim writer claims the Jews showed open hostility toward Muhammad. On this and on Jewish and Christian reactions to Islamic sacred history, see Jacob Lassner, *The Middle East Remembered: Forged Identities, Competing Narratives, Contested Space* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 313–85.

54. Eliyahu Capsali (fl. 1523), *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, ed. Aryeh Shemuelevits (Jerusalem:

Ben-Zvi Institute, 1975) 1:38 (chap. 5). On this source, see Martin Jacobs, "Exposed to All the Currents of the Mediterranean: A Sixteenth-Century Venetian Rabbi on Muslim History," *AJS Review* 29 (2005): 33–60. See also Sambari, *Sefer Divrei Yosef*, 90 (§a), 93 (§b).

55. S. D. Goitein, *Qiryat Sefer*, 9:507–21 (in Judeo-Arabic and Hebrew).

56. Jeremiah 35.

57. Moshe Gil, "Religion and Realities in Islamic Taxation," *Israel Oriental Studies* 10 (1980): 28, 33.

58. Sambari, *Sefer Divrei Yosef*, 97 (line 135).

59. M. Gil, *Palestine during the First Muslim Period* (Tel-Aviv: Misrad Habitahon, 1983), 2:1–3 (doc. 1) (Hebrew).

60. B. Dinur, ed., *Israel in Exile* (Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1973), 1:42 (doc. 10) (Hebrew).

61. Sambari, *Sefer Divrei Yosef*, 95 (§d).

62. This diplomatic term (*baqt*) was not strange to medieval Arab writers. Martin Hinds and H. Sakkout, "A Letter from the Governor of Egypt to the King of Nubia and Muqurra Concerning Egyptian-Nubian Relations in 141/758," in *Studia Arabica et Islamica: Festschrift for Ihsan Abbas*, ed. W. al-Qadi (Beirut, 1981), 209–29.

63. Nathan b. Isaac ha-Bavli (the Babylonian), *Akhbar Baghdad* in M. Gil, *In the Kingdom of Ishmael* (Tel-Aviv: Misrad Habitahon, 1997), 2:33–40 (doc. 11) (Hebrew).

64. On this genre in Muslim circles, see M. S. Khan, "Miskawaih and Arabic Histroiography," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 89 (1969): 718, 719. See also Nissim ben Jacob ben Nissim ibn Shahin (eleventh century), *An Elegant Composition Concerning Relief after Adversity*, translated from the Arabic with introduction and notes by William M. Brinner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Dan Ben-Amos, "Jewish Folk Literature," *Oral Tradition* 14, no. 1 (1999): 176, 177, 184.

65. S. D. Goitein, "A Report on Messianic Troubles in Baghdad in 1120–21," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 43 (1952): 57–76; republished by Gil, *In the Kingdom of Ishmael*, 2:229–34 (doc. 87) in Hebrew.

66. F. Nau, "Un colloque du Patriarche Jean avec l'emir des Agareens," *Journal asiatique* (1915): 274; N. A. Newman, *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries, 632–900 AD* (Hatfield, Pa.: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993), 29.

67. Al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wal-muluk*, 1:1403–10.

68. Yahya b. Sa'id al-Antaki, *Kitab al-Ta'rikh* [Annales], ed. L. Cheikho (Beirut, 1909), 2:17–18.

69. Sebeos, *Histoire d'Heraclius*, translated from Armenian and annotated by F. Macler (Paris, 1904), 97–98.

70. Zayde Antrim, "Ibn Asakir's Representations of Syria and Damascus in the Introduction to the *Ta'rikh Madinat Dimashq*," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38 (2006): 109–29.

71. The growth of the *fada'il* (virtue of place) genre clearly reflects this development. James E. Lindsay, "'Ali Ibn 'Asakir as a Preserver of Qisas al-Anbiya': The Case of David b. Jesse," *Studia Islamica* 82 (1995): 54, 79.

72. Numerous accounts report on persecutions and other harassments of the People of the Book by Islamic authorities. Al-Maqrizi, *al-Suluk li-ma'rifat duwal al-muluk*, 1:753.

73. Cf. the story on al-Ma'mun and Sa'id b. Ziyad in Damascus and the pact that the Prophet presumably gave to Tamim al-Dari. Al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wal-muluk*, 1:1142–43 (AH 218); Abu al-Qasim 'Ali Ibn 'Asakir (499–571/1075–1176), *Ta'rikh madinat dimashq wa-dhikru fadliha wa-tasmiyat man hallaha min al-amathil au ihtaza bi-nawahiha min waridiha wa-ahaliha*, ed. M. al-'Amrawi (Damascus 1415/1995), 21:60–61 (no. 2476 quoting al-Tabri); Muhammad Ibn Manzur (630–711), *Mukhtasar ta'rikh dimashq li-ibn 'asakir* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1989), 9:297–98 (no. 145).

74. “History, Counter-History, and Narrative,” *Alpayim* 4 (1991): 206–13 (Hebrew). For a critic of Funkenstein, see David Biale, “Counter-History and Jewish Polemics against Christianity: The *Sefer toldot yeshu* and the *Sefer zerubavel*,” *Jewish Social Studies* 6 (1999): 130–32.

75. Cf. Muhammad ibn Muhammad Ibn Sasra, *al-Durra al-mudi'a fi al-dawla al-zahiriya* (A Chronicle of Damascus, 786–99/1389–97), ed. and trans. W. M. Brinner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 1:126–29.

7

The Martyrdom of Sol Hachuel

Ridda in Morocco in 1834

JULIETTE HASSINE

In memory of my late brother, Raphael Hassine

Judeo-Muslim ties in Morocco deteriorated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. An important historical development that characterized the tense relationship between Jewish communal leaders and the Muslim authorities is the beheading of a Jewish maiden before a crowd for the crime of *ridda* (apostasy). As an initial step, it will be necessary to delineate the concept of *ridda*, how the law was applied in Morocco in 1834, and how the Jewish leaders reacted against this particular case.

The victim was 17-year-old Sol Hachuel of Tangier, also known by the members of her community as Sol Hatsadiqqah (Sol the Righteous).¹ Jews in central and southern Morocco called her Lala Soulika (Dame Soulika). A Moslem court in Fez condemned her to death by beheading in the year 1834.² Her prosecutors claimed that she converted to Islam and then reverted to Judaism. She firmly denied the charge.

Evidence for our arguments concerning the state of relations between Judaism and Islam at the time will be adduced from *piyyutim* (Jewish religious poetry) and texts written about her. Another important source for an examination of the credibility of the reservations of the Jews regarding the administration of justice and law in Morocco is a book by a French Christian traveler called A. Rey. His *Souvenirs d'un voyage au Maroc*, published in Paris in 1844, includes an important chapter describing the stages in the case, showing that each stage corresponds to the *ridda*

procedure as set out in Malikite law, still in force in Morocco today. A Muslim religious personality acquainted with the case almost certainly provided the author with the information.

The field of the relations between Jews and Muslims in Morocco has not heretofore been analyzed in the light of case studies such as the *ridḍa* event. Furthermore, no other researchers have described the execution of Sol Hachuel against the backdrop of the Islamic legal framework and Jewish sources (using some manuscripts not previously available). This research is thus the first of its kind.³

The reign of Sultan Abd al-Rahman, who confirmed the young girl's death sentence, has been studied and described on the basis of official documents by Ahmad Ibn Khālīd Al-Nasirī Al-Salawī. The chronicle called *Kitāb Elistiqsa liackhbari doual al Magrib Alaqsah* (Book of the Chronicles of the Far Western Maghreb) is extremely important for understanding the social and legal structure surrounding the sultanate.⁴ The archives of the Muslim authorities of Fez remain closed to scholarly study.

Herein, we shall rely on rare Hebrew sources together with two manuscripts, one in Hebrew and the other in Judeo-Arabic, which until we discovered them were not previously known to scholars. We are referring to a *piyyut* in a manuscript by Rabbi Yedidia Monsoniego, which opens:

Remember the righteousness of a woman of valor
and discuss her formidable strength and tell it to your children.⁵

צדקת אשת חיל זכרו
ועזוז נוראותיה שיחו לבניכם ספרו

and to a *qasā*, which begins with the verse “*Bisam Allah qaomi aouel klamī lerav La’lami*” (In the name of God, my shelter, I will dedicate my words to the Master of the Universe).⁶ This *qasā Bisam Allah qaomi* is of the type current in the literary circle of *malhun*.⁷ Because of the subject matter's complexity, we shall not discuss every paragraph dealing with the *ridḍa* issue, but restrict ourselves to a few select paragraphs. We shall also refer to other *piyyutim* published in editions not readily available today together with the Judeo-Arabic *qasās* in manuscript form.

According to the laws of protection (*dhimma*), which defined the status of the Jews as *dhimmi* or a protected minority under Islamic rule, rulers and judges were not permitted to force a Jewess to become a Muslim.⁸ In this historic context, it was illegal to treat Sol as a Jewess accused of *ridḍa*.

Therefore, in our opinion she was tried as a Muslim and brought to the scaffold as a Muslim, though she was a Jewess.

The crime of *ridda* constitutes a complex topic in Muslim law. Hanafi law states that if a Muslim denies his religion he is offered the opportunity to return to Islam. Thus he is given three days of grace because the judges believe there is an element of doubt and all doubt must be removed. The Malikite law of Morocco adds that if the defendant was a slave or a woman, the demand to recant must be presented within three days of the apostasy becoming public. The defendant should not be deprived of bread or water. Hanbali law contains similar provisions. The Imami law distinguishes two types of apostates. The first is referred to as a “deviant apostate,” that is, one who has Muslim parents and whose penitence is not accepted. Before his mandatory execution, he must be separated from his wife and deprived of the right to bequeath his property. The second type is called a “social apostate,” that is, one whose parents are not Muslims. This person converted to Islam as an adult but then reverted to his former religion.

The latter was Sol’s case according to the prosecutors, and if she did not recant, she had to be executed.⁹ The three-day period of grace or *tuba* (days of penitence) allows the judicial authorities the opportunity to try to persuade the accused to recant. The appointees of the judicial instance try to convince the accused of the superiority of Islam over other religions. They are commanded to prove the truth inherent in the faith and in Muhammad’s mission. The arguments are drawn from religious precepts, and the intention is to bring the accused to recognize his mistake.

A charge of *ridda* requires a rigorous interrogation of the witnesses by a religious court, a procedure apparently intended to deter Muslims from preferring false charges against non-Muslims living under Muslim rule.

To prove *ridda*, one needs at least two witnesses. These witnesses are usually male adult Muslims of upright character with no history of mental illness. They cannot be slaves. Witnesses can only give testimony after the *qadi* (Islamic judge) has established their fitness, after a private and public inquiry, and after he is convinced that their characters display no evidence of bias or prejudice. In this context, a person cannot be relied on to bear witness against his enemy.

If the accused is condemned to death based on evidence that is afterwards found to be false, the witness must pay *diyyah* (compensation) and may even be condemned to death for perjury, according to Shafii law. If a witness has a justifiable excuse not to appear before the court, then two

other witnesses can present his evidence, except in the case of slander and compensation. Testimony is recorded, and the witnesses must sign the record. The *La 'lami* (court scribe), who writes up the documents, also signs them. Other witnesses may also add their signatures to the testimony of the two primary witnesses.¹⁰

According to the ordinances for prosecuting the crime of *ridda*, Sol Hachuel was defined as a social apostate (a Muslim woman born of non-Muslim parents), whose age and healthy state of mind made her liable to the death penalty. Because she was female and because she was being tried under Maliki law in Morocco, Sol was given the prescribed three days to recant.

All the religious poetry written about her delves deeply into her incarceration and the judges' attempts to persuade her to recant. At the same time, none of the Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic texts showed that the Jews properly understood the concept of *ridda* in general or its application in Sol's case. The authors failed to comprehend that the aim of the persuasion as dictated by law constituted an attempt to get the accused to recant in the hope of averting the death penalty. In *Ma'ase ba-Na'ara ha-Tsadeqet* (A Tale of a Righteous Maiden), Yosef Ben-Na'im recounts that she was not starved in prison but deprived of food because she refused to eat the prison fare as it did not accord with Jewish dietary laws; hence Rabbi Raphael Ha-Tsarfati smuggled food to her.¹¹ Seemingly, Ben-Na'im thought that the provision of food and water to prisoners was an act of goodwill and not dictated by the law.¹²

Both the *piyyutim* in Hebrew and the *qasā* in Judeo-Arabic hint that there was a legal process including witnesses and official documents, for example, in "In Praise of the Fortunate Maiden" by Ya'aqov Abihazirah:

Together they plotted perjury
 They lied that she converted to the worthless religion
 They wrote and signed a wicked plot
 And she, perish the thought, had expressed no such words

יחדיו להעיד שקר הסכימו
 אמרו המירה לדת הבל למו
 קשר רשעים כתבו וחתמו
 והיא חלילה לא נשמע בפיה

Note also the following reference to the witnesses in *Bisam Allah qaomi*:

On the day that they prepared the contract and came to their master
and gave witness . . .

we wait for them to be destroyed for their perjury

יום עמלו כאגטהום וזאו לסידהום וסהדו סהודהום...
עלא סהאדת זור נראהום בלבדיקא
[ביום שעשו השטר ובאו לאדונם והעידו עדיהם
על עדות השקר נראה אותם בכליון]

These quotations from Jewish contemporaries show that the conduct of the trial followed the legal precepts of interrogation of the witnesses and signed statements witnessed by the court scribe. The authors' claims attack the witnesses. They cite perjury and forged documents in what may be called a "plot." They view Sol as a pious Jewess who had never converted to Islam.

The *piyyutim* refer to signed affidavits. In the *qasā Bisam Allah qaomi*, the anonymous poet mentions a *kagt* (document), which would be interpreted by the Jews as a signed affidavit or even a marriage contract.

Rey writes in his book that Sol admitted that she pronounced the *Shahāda*, i.e., declared her allegiance to Islam in a moment of weakness but immediately repudiated her words. She used these words in an attempt to prevail upon those who came to arrest her not to take her away with them. These men claimed that if she had something to repudiate, it was a sure sign that at some stage she had sworn allegiance to Islam and, as such, they had sufficient grounds to arrest her. When she resisted arrest, they tied her hands behind her back with a silk handkerchief and threatened that if she did not go willingly, they would take her by force.¹³

In a report received by the painter Alfred Dehodencq in the early 1850s, Sol fell in love with a Muslim and married him, but when her husband suddenly passed away, she decided to return to her faith and community.¹⁴

And thus the two events—the declaration of faith and the marriage—are included in the non-Hebrew traditions about Sol. However, these should be discussed as hypotheses and not as indubitable truth, given that to date no one has yet produced any documents confirming the theory. Therefore, in Sol's case we must relate to these hypotheses as possible accusations in the *ridda* trial.

We would point out that Jews forced to convert to Islam during the oppressive rule of Sultan Mawlay Yazid (reigned 1790–92) were permitted to revert to Judaism by Sultan Sliman II (reigned 1792–1822). So here was a precedent for such a return to one's former religion in Moroccan history. Other examples include the rule of the Marinids in Morocco at the end of the thirteenth century, when converts were permitted to return to Judaism, even though Sharia law prohibited this. The *qadi* Ahmed al-Wansharisi, who lived in the fifteenth century, stated that Jews who were forcibly converted could go back to their faith. This precedent in Morocco accords with the laws of the *dhimma*, which state that compelling *dhimmi* to convert, even to Islam, is forbidden, and furthermore it abides by the dictates of the Quran and the teachings of Muhammad.¹⁵ Sultan Abd al-Rahman (reigned 1822–1859) probably knew of Sliman II's decision and thought that he could follow a similar practice in the case of Sol Hachuel.

Her sentence was passed by the members of the '*ulamā*' (the *qadi* could be a member of this council). In Morocco the sultan is the "commander of the faithful," but he is not permitted to rule on matters of Islamic law. Rather, his responsibility lies only in implementing religious ordinances. When he is notified that a sentence has been passed, he is expected to authorize its execution. He has no right to veto a trial's outcome or a judge's sentence, except for legal reasons such as a flaw in the evidence, procedure, etc. Due process is his first priority in order to guarantee the rule of law.

If he is the sole instance for the authorization of a death sentence, one may ask why he did not use his privilege to delay the execution of the sentence for an indefinite period while Sol was held under arrest or even housed in the palace harem. But such a step might seem unsuitable for a pious Muslim in the eyes of members of the '*ulamā*' from the Bildiyyin (converted Jews) group.¹⁶ It appears that the contemporary Wahhabism of Sliman II's period influenced Abd al-Rahman, who valued the members of the Bildiyyin council of mostly Jewish origin. These "new Muslims" attended Sliman II from boyhood and served him as teachers and mentors. As an adult, he accepted them as arbiters of Muslim law. This group, which retained its influence during the rule of Abd Al-Rahman, did not advocate improvement in the social and economic conditions of the Jews.¹⁷ The legal case of Sol the Jewess presented an additional opportunity to deal harshly with the Jews. The pious sultan could not ignore

their recommendation to carry out the death sentence. In the *malhun* in the manuscript *Bisam Allah qaomi*, the influence of the 'ulamā' and its expeditious action in the Sol trial is described in a pictorial manner:

Morning and evening they met with the *Islamia*
 When the important people gathered together with the 'ulamā'
 They said what a noble woman, it is a pity that you should remain
 A homeless Jewess and you such a beautiful example of God's
 creation

סבאח ועשיה, עמלו לך דגיא מעא לאיסלמא...
 חין נזמעו לומא, וזאת מלומא מעא לעולאמא
 קאלוהא יא סריף / כסארא / תבקא
 יהודייה כאת תדור / יא זנת לכליקא
 [בוקר וערב עשו אסיפה מהר עם האיסלאמא
 כאשר נתאספו הגדולים / ובאו ביחד / עם החכמים
 אמרו לה הוי האצילה / חבל תשארי
 יהודיה משוטטת / יפת הבריאה]

The *qasā* emphasizes that they sent a Muslim woman to persuade her to practice Islam. The term *Islamia* is a synonym for *Bildiya*, a Muslim of Jewish origin. Abd al-Rahman, who was faithful to the laws of Islam, listened to the counsel of the 'ulamā' and accepted their advice. The chronicle of Khālid al-Nasiri tells us that the 'ulamā' prevented the execution of two thousand people from the Sherrarda tribe.¹⁸

Regarding Sol, he inclined toward the 'ulamā', which included members of the *Bildiyyin* who favored the death penalty. Owing to his loyalty to this group, he apparently declined to use his authority to delay the execution.

The other factor that contributed to the adopting of the recommendation and the implementing of the death sentence forthwith (after the three-day wait) was widespread publicity. Sol's case had become a public issue. If it was clear that she was not coerced into converting, any effort or attempt by a member of the court or by the sultan himself to reverse the sentence could seem like a reaction to outside pressure and therefore an insult to Islam and its laws. According to Rey, the *qadi* in Tangier attacked Sol's parents for publicizing the matter. In his opinion, the publicity prevented his intervention in their daughter's favor.¹⁹ Would things

have turned out differently if the matter had been treated with discretion? We can never know. There are no grounds for the claim that the family's activity caused the publicity. One may claim that from the moment the witnesses testified that Sol was an apostate Muslim, the matter became public, and within the Moroccan context of 1834, such publicity served to warn others, viz., death is the appropriate treatment for apostates from Islam. Discretion, therefore, was not in Islam's interest or in the interest of the young Jewess.

The authors of the *piyyutim* about Sol, who were leading rabbis in Fez at that time, saw the sultan as the highest authority, capable of saving the young Jewess from a bitter end. In their opinion, if the sultan refused to postpone the death sentence indefinitely after an unjust trial, it was because of arbitrariness and cruelty and not because of loyalty and commitment to the laws of Islam.

In Ḥayyim Ḥaliwa's *piyyut* about Sol, the Muslims who tortured and condemned her to death are characterized as lions and bears, members of a false religion, unclean water, sexually perverted, brave as dogs and Datan and Aviram, who rebelled against Moses.²⁰

The sultan's servants and advisors and the sultan himself are described in a somber way without any restraint or fear, for these texts were only comprehensible to the Jews and were passed from hand to hand within the community. Rabbi Shmuel Elbaz in his *Shimekha yah qiddesha* (Your Name, Almighty, she sanctified) describes how she was brought to the sultan's palace in Fez:

To the criminal city
She was sent with zeal
To lie among the uncircumcised
Where she would forget God's service.

"לעיר הפלילים / שלחה בחמדה
תשכב בין ערלים / שם תשכח עבודה²¹

Rabbi Elbaz, a resident of Fez at the time, called the town in which the sultan lived a "criminal city."

In this context, focusing on the relations between Jews and Muslims in Morocco in 1834, we would like to bring attention to another salient point

in Rabbi Elbaz's *piyyut*. He calls the Muslims 'arelim (uncircumcised), which is surprising given that Muslims circumcise males for religious reasons. The term is therefore not consistent with reality. An examination reveals that it is in accordance with Talmudic tradition (see especially Tractate *Nedarim* 31a, dealing with vows), where it is written that a person who swears not to benefit from an uncircumcised person may nevertheless benefit from an uncircumcised Jew, but not from a circumcised non-Jew.

In other words, the circumcision of a non-Jew does not alter his 'arel status, nor does failure to circumcise a Jew prevent him from still being a Jew. Almost certainly then, in his *piyyut*, Rabbi Elbaz uses the word *uncircumcised* as a synonym for "non-Jewish." Rabbi Elbaz was known as a great scholar and teacher of Torah and Talmud, who almost certainly knew the Talmudic source, and he used it to justify the word *uncircumcised* in describing the Muslims of his time. It is appropriate to add the last words of Sol to her executioner as they appear in Ḥayyim Ḥaliwah's *piyyut*, 'Am asher nivḥaru (People who were chosen).

Put on your sword

So she spoke, I will be killed, and I will not sin against my religion

חגר חרבך הרק ורוץ כגבור
כה דברה אהרג ולא אעבור

Sol encourages her executioner to kill her so that she may be made a martyr and not transgress any of the three prohibitions for which one should be ready to accept martyrdom rather than violate them. The three prohibitions are idolatry, murder, and sexual immorality (see the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Sanhedrin* 72b). Ḥaliwah sees Islam as idolatry and not as a monotheistic religion. In his opinion, Sol was right in preferring martyrdom to living as a Muslim. Ḥaliwah's conception of Islam is similar to that of Elbaz's, proving that the relations between the two religions, Islam and Judaism, were profoundly strained.

In both the *piyyutim* and *qasās*, the Muslim community, witnesses, judges, and the sultan are described as a gang of losers, immoral and dishonest, lacking ethical standards and spirituality; therefore, the only alternative was to curse them for what they had done to a young, righteous Jewess. In the manuscripts of the Judeo-Arabic *qasās*, Sol's mourners call

the Muslim judges “illegitimate” (*al-fsolim*), which followed Maimonides, who referred to the prophet Muhammad as *ha-Pasul* (the illegitimate one).²²

The poems mention documents produced in court and apparently presented to the sultan as well. Let us consider the declaration of allegiance to Islam. Did Morocco of 1834 require that conversion to Islam should be confirmed by a written document, as was the case in the Andalusia of Maimonides under the Muwaḥidūn (the “Unitarians”) and in later periods? At the time when the Muwaḥidūn also ruled in Morocco, the many incidents of conversion arising from oppression and persecution aroused suspicions of insincere conversion. Thus converting to Islam, it was decided, should be an act of free will and not merely a superficial act. Therefore, the converts declared fidelity to Islam before witnesses, and a document was drawn up to that effect, which was witnessed by a notary and signed by the convert. This procedure was like a statement or bearing witness, and its requirements created the assumption that the candidate understood the law with requisite awareness of the religious duties expected of him.²³

In his book, Rey reviews the stages of conversion to Islam as carried out in Andalusia.²⁴ It is reasonable to assume that his source of information believed that the Andalusian procedure from the Muwaḥidūn era was perhaps comparable to that followed in Morocco.

With regard to the procedures and laws relating to the age of a person condemned to death and the method of implementing the sentence, the concept of *taklif* (the imposition of duties on mankind by God) is of importance.²⁵ Other legal concepts such as *ʾakl* or state of mind and *bulugh*, i.e., physical and sexual maturity, according to Islamic law also should have played a role in Sol’s case.²⁶ Sol was 17 years old at the time her sentence was passed, and she was not pregnant, weaning, or menstruating. Under Islamic law, these factors should have been checked before carrying out the death sentence.²⁷

According to Islamic law, *tuba* (the grace period of penitence) normally lasts three days, but it could have been extended to further investigate whether or not the condemned person’s decision to revert to the former religion was freely made. Because a decision regarding the choosing of one’s religion should not be coerced, torture is not permitted.

Tuba is part of a legal procedure and is common to both Hanbali and Maliki law current in Morocco of that day; it was not accepted in Sunni,

Shi'a, or Hamami law. Yedidiah Monsoniego claimed that Sol was tortured for two months. Was this during the *tuba* period, which suggests it lasted two months? If this were indeed the case, it would have been exceptional and would also have represented a gesture of goodwill and an attitude of human kindness and consideration for the girl by the Muslim court. Rabbi Monsoniego, who composed his *piyyut* to mark the end of the thirty-day mourning period, did not see things this way.²⁸

In some cases, the death sentence was considered insufficient, and the body was burned or thrown into a river. This decision was left to the *qadis*, who were always uncertain about how to dispose of the remains of heretics. To bury them in a Muslim cemetery is forbidden, nor should their bodies, unlike other Muslim departed, be treated with the respect required by Islamic teachings. For example, they did not say the *Shahāda* prayer over them while facing in the direction of Mecca. In the *qasā Bisam Allah qaumi*, one of the Muslim women says:

Look at those features,
they do not merit burning

ראה דאק לגנזור
מא יסתאהלסי חריקא
[הנה הפנים היפות ההן
לא תיאות להן השריפה]

These words confirm the popular custom that the body of one condemned to death for apostasy (*ridda*) was incinerated, for which there certainly was historical precedent.²⁹ When the community found a Muslim guilty of betrayal, his body was burned and subsequently mutilated.³⁰ In Sol's case, we find no evidence that her body was mutilated by the crowd present at the execution. Sol was sentenced as a Muslim, and the authorities responsible for disposing of her body could decide whether to bury it, burn it, or throw it into the river. If the body was buried in a Jewish cemetery, this would have been the result of an agreement between the Muslim authorities and the Jewish community and therefore a demonstration of goodwill.

According to Jewish sources, the crowd did not mutilate the body, proving that the Muslim judicial authorities in Fez remained in control of the execution. These authorities apparently agreed to give her body to the Jewish community, even though Sol was treated as an apostate Muslim

whose execution should have taken place before sunset immediately after the *tuba* period.

Rey's book describes the *ridda* process in detail, and he researched the subject in depth, seemingly with the help of Muslim legal experts. However, there are lacunae in the treatment of the laws of evidence in his book. The rabbis showed little knowledge or understanding of the workings of *ridda*. None of the poets or the authors of the *qasās* at any time indicate that Sol converted to Islam; on the contrary, they say that she remained loyal to her religion. According to Yedidiah Monsoniego, the judges decided to torture her:

Perhaps she would convert when
She cried out in suffering

פן ואולי תמיר את דתה
תזעק בחבליה

Monsoniego became a member of the rabbinical court in Fez in 1840.³¹ He claimed that the judges forced Sol to convert to Islam. The '*ulamā*' and the sultan, however, knew that forced conversion was illegal. It went against the very notion of *dhimma* status, which governed the relations between Muslims and other "People of the Book." Therefore, they made certain that the question of Sol's Judaism was not raised during the trial or during the *tuba* persuasion and torture period. In their opinion, these methods were employed to ensure that she remained a Muslim, whereas the Jewish poets saw them as an attempt to coerce her into converting to Islam.

Was this paragraph found in the Pact of Omar known to the Jewish poets? If they had known it was illegal to force a Jewess to convert, would they not have used this information to attack the sultan and the judges for their lack of compliance with the laws of Islam's founding fathers? This claim would have strengthened the protests against the Muslim authorities in Fez.

This argument, which does not appear in any of the poetry, proves that the laws of *dhimma* prohibiting the forced conversion of a Jew to Islam were not clear to the Jewish authors or even to the community leaders, who claimed only that Sol was forced to convert without mention of Islamic laws against such activity. This ignorance of Islamic law in the events surrounding Sol shows how deep the abyss was between the Jewish and Muslim communities. We are talking about two separate,

completely different worlds, different not only religiously and socially but also culturally.

Indeed, the Jewish writings about Sol Hachuel in the texts and manuscripts that we have quoted herein could be principally classified as apologetic literature, and consequently these poems should not be relied upon as historical documents faithfully reflecting the total system of relationships between the two communities. Therefore, literary criticism as cultural hermeneutics could assume that these same manuscripts and texts try to construct a narrative and a tradition about Sol Hachuel, and for that purpose, it was preferable to the authors to bring out matters such as incomprehension and barriers between the two communities rather than to deliver a balanced picture of this issue (Sol's case) in order to represent the broader relationships between the Muslims and Jews in Morocco in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Notes

1. Regarding the surname, we have adopted the form used by Eugenio Maria Romero in his play *El Martirio de la Joven Hachuel* (Gibraltar: Imprenta Militar, 1837), three years after Sol's execution.

2. The Jewish community of Fez has retained its official documentation of Sol Hachuel's execution, found in *Yahas Fez*, a collection of sources on the history of the Jews of Fez. In 1879 the leader of the Jewish religious court, Avner Israel Ha-Tzarfati, sent the material to Isidore Loeb, one of the heads of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. (I would point out that two poems about Sol were published earlier in 1844 in *Qol Ya'aqov* by Ya'aqov Berdugo in London.) The documents may be found in David Ovadiah's book *Fez we-Khahameha* (Fez and Its Sages), 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Beit Oved, 1979). Sol is referred to in 1:157.

3. This work is part of a wider research project on Moroccan Jewry in the first half of the nineteenth century, which has occupied me for more than six years. This discussion about the *ridda* issue forms part of a chapter dealing with the relations between Jews and Muslims during the period. I have published an article in Hebrew on Sol Hachuel, "Le-Itzuv Demuta shel Giborat Tarbut lefi Teqstim" (The formation of a popular heroine reflected in texts), which appeared in an anthology, *Isha be-Mizrah, Isha mi-Mizrah* (Woman of the Orient, Woman from the Orient), ed. Tova Cohen and Shaul Regev (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2005), 35–54 (see especially the bibliography, 53–54).

4. The chronicle was translated separately by Eugène Fumey, orientalist and diplomat in the French diplomatic service, who served in Tangier between 1897 and 1903 (the year of his death) and it was published in parts 9 and 10 of *Archives marocaines* (Paris: Ed. Leroux, 1906, 1907).

5. This *piyyut* about the martyrdom of Sol Hachuel was only recently discovered, written on the last pages of one of the two manuscripts by Rabbi Yedidiah Monsoniego entitled *Qupat ha-Rokhlīm* (The Peddler's Satchel), setting out that which is forbidden and permitted by Torah law. The contents are arranged in alphabetical order, summarizing sources and referring to them. The manuscript, which includes the *piyyut* about Sol, is in the possession of Rabbi Dr. Moshe Amar of Bar-Ilan University. In his poem, the author testifies that it was written on the thirtieth day after Sol's execution. Rabbi Monsoniego also served as a ritual slaughterer in Fez and was appointed a judge on the rabbinical court in 1840, replacing his father, Rabbi Raphael Monsoniego, after his death. For further biographical and bibliographical details, see *Sefer Minkhat Ziqaron*, ed. Moshe Amar (Lod: Orot Yahadut Ha-Maghreb, 1999), 1–9.

6. This *qasā* about the righteous Sol came to me as a text found in a manuscript in the possession of Dr. Hayyim Bentov of Bar-Ilan University. Throughout this essay, we refer to the *qasā* by its opening phrase, *Bisam Allah qaomi* (In the name of God my shelter).

7. The Arabic *qassida* in Morocco is called *malhun*. The *qasā* is a less complex poetic form than the *qassida* and was adopted in popular Jewish literature in Morocco. The manuscript *qasā Bisam Allah qaomi* was influenced by the Arabic *qassida* of the *malhun* type. The structure of the Sephardic Hebrew *qassida* is derived from the Arabic *qassida*. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, after the Arabic *qassida* of the *malhun* type became the primary poetic form in Morocco, even Hebrew verse accepted the form. The *qasā Bisam Allah qaomi* belongs to the *malhun* genre and is characterized by a division into stanzas (*aqsam*) accompanied by a refrain (*harba*). The stanzas are composed of strings. Each string has two parts: the first part includes three lines whose rhyme changes in each stanza. The second part includes two couplets. The rhymes of the couplets are uniform in each stanza. For a discussion of the *malhun*, see Meir Nizri, "Ha-Prosodiyah shel ha-qassida be-shir yedidut le-or ha-qassida ha-Aravit (al-Mallhun) be-Morocco," PhD thesis, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, 1997.

8. Moroccan Jews were defined as *dhimmi*s or a "protected minority" by the Muslim authorities. The delineation was common practice as regards non-Muslims and included both Jews and Christians, who were described as "People of the Book." They were allowed to live under Muslim rule if they accepted a number of limitations embodied in the Pact of Omar, compiled in 687 CE (Muslim date, AH 78) and named after its originator, Omar b. al-Haṭṭāb. These precepts were designed to ensure the supremacy of Islam over the other religions. One of the clauses relevant to our discussion is the prohibition against discouraging anybody from converting to Islam. The *dhimmi*s who obeyed these rules were guaranteed protection against threats to their lives and possessions and were permitted freedom to organize their religious and social life. The Pact of Omar in effect separated Muslims from other communities. This segregation deepened over time, so that by the early nineteenth century very little communication took place between the Jewish community and the Muslim authorities, a situation exacerbated by persecution. Jews could neither read nor write Classical Arabic, because as *dhimmi*s they were forbidden to study the Quran. This explains the Jewish ignorance of complex legal matters such as *ridda*, under whose provisions Sol was sentenced to death. See Antoine Fattal, *Le statut légal des non-musulmans en pays d'Islam* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1958),

18–20, 36–37, 61–63, and André Chouraqui, *La condition juridique de l'Israélite marocain* (Paris: Presses du Livre français, 1950), 21–25, 47–55.

9. For a discussion of the various statutes of the law of *ridda*, see H. Ennaifer, *Foi et justice* (Groupe de Recherches Islamo-Chrétien) (Paris: Centurion, 1993), 104–13, and Fattal, *Le statut légal*, 141, 163–73.

10. For an explanation of the role of the witness in a *ridda* trial, see also the entry for *Shahid* (witness) in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, CD-ROM edition V.I.I.

11. This text is included in Yosef Ben-Na'im, *Malkhe Rabbanan* (Jerusalem: 1930). See my article in *Isha be-Mizrah, Isha mi-Mizrah*, 48 (see note 3 above).

12. See A. Rey, *Souvenirs d'un voyage au Maroc* (Paris: Bureau du Journal d'Algérie, 1844), 152. Rey records that the governor gave instructions to provide Sol with food and drink during her three days of imprisonment. Prior to this, he explained to her parents that only after three days would the situation become clear whereupon he would be able to decide her future (148–49). This is in accordance with the *tuba* process within the *ridda* proceedings.

13. See the *piyyut* “Et godel shevah na'arah ashira, asaper” (The highest praise for a young woman, I will sing and tell), which is included in Ya'akov Avihazirah, *Yagel Ya'akov* (Netivot, 2001). We quoted lines 11–13.

14. See Rey, *Souvenirs*, 148–66. The painter Alfred Dehodencq, who visited Tangier in the 1850s, included accounts of Sol's case as told by her contemporaries living in Tangier in his memoir, as collected by Gabriel de Séailles, *Alfred Dehodencq: Histoire d'un coloriste* (Paris: P. Ollendorff, 1885), 113. He also portrayed her in his painting *Execution of a Moroccan Jewess*. For statutes concerning marriage in Islamic law, see under *Nikah* in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1995, viii), 26–35.

15. For further information about the return to Judaism of those forced to convert to Islam in Morocco, see H. Z. Hirschberg, *Toldot ha-Yehudim be-Afrika ha-Tsefonit* (The History of the Jews in North Africa) (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1965), 1:84–85, 279–82 (Hebrew); Eliezer Bashan, *Yahadut Morocco, 'Avra ve-Tarbutah* (Moroccan Jewry, past, and culture) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 2000), 21, 62 (Hebrew); Rey, *Souvenirs*, 72–84. At this stage, it would be appropriate to make a number of comments on Malikite law, which is one of the basic elements of Moroccan Islam. The state has been administered using this body of law since the eleventh century (the Murabittin period). Spiritual leaders with mystical tendencies helped to spread the law and contributed to the expansion of a popular fundamentalist Islam. However, during the reign of the sultan Sliman II from the Alawite dynasty (1792–1822), the influence of Wahhabism increased, and this trend continued under his heir, Sultan Abd al-Rahman, while he remained loyal to Malikite law. Important historians specializing in Moroccan history, such as Abdallah Laroui, claim that the people were not shaped by Islam but rather by the form of Malikism that developed in Morocco. See Laroui, *Islamisme, Modernisme, Libéralisme* (Casablanca: Centre culturel arabe, 1997), 159. Other historians such as Mohammed Othman Benjelloun agree that Malikite Islam has distinctive features, being more tolerant not only of other religions but especially with the “People of the Book,” who settled in Morocco. See his book *Projet national et identité au Maroc* (Casablanca: Eddif, 2000), 79. To quote King Hassan II on the same subject: “Malikism is the intellectual backbone of

our culture. The Malikite teachings produced a number of great sages in Andalusia and the Maghreb, and we rely on them in the application of our legal principles. It is an open culture which borrows from other legal schools, aiding us to solve the problems that we encounter." See Hassan II and Eric Laurent, *Le génie de la modération* (Paris: Plon, 2000), 110–11.

16. See Mohammed Kenbib's monumental *Juifs et Musulmans au Maroc, 1859–1948* (Rabat: Université Mohammed V, Faculté des sciences humaines, 1994), 51, 61, 711.

17. We should emphasize that Sultan Abd al-Rahman was characterized by his loyalty to the religious institutions as set out in the Malikite laws, defined by both Moroccan historians and Sultan Hassan II as an open and tolerant body of law. Because his religiosity was influenced by Wahhabism, the combination is likely to create considerable tension and, as in Sol's case, perhaps even lead to the death penalty. This tendency was reinforced by the 'ulamā' from the Bildiyyin group.

18. In his chronicle, Ibn Khālid al-Nasiri al-Salawi relates how Abd al-Rahman reconsidered his decision to behead two thousand members of the Sherrarda tribe who were accused of treason. Prior to acting on his decision, he consulted the 'ulamā', whose members advised him not to spill so much blood. The sultan accepted their advice and canceled the mass execution. See *Archives marocaines*, 10:127. In Sol's case, apparently, a legal decision came down which called for the death sentence with a recommendation to carry out the execution as soon as possible. The British consul Drummond Hay wrote a letter to the Foreign Office in England from Tangier on June 9, 1834, a few days after Sol was executed in Fez. In the letter he cited the 'ulamā's influence as one of the major causes for the implementation of her sentence. See the British Foreign Office Archive, *Diary of the British Consulate*, Tangier FO 174/218, vol. 8, 1834–1836. This letter was first published by Ph. Abensur in the periodical *Etzi* 3, no. 11 (December 2000): 1, 6.

19. Rey, *Souvenirs*, 152.

20. The pejorative epithets used against Sol's judges are found in a *piyyut* by Ḥayyim Ḥaliwah, which starts with the sentence "‘*Am asher nivharu/le-shem ule-tehila*" (A people chosen for fame and praise). The *piyyut* was included in Rabbi Ya' aqov Bendugo, *Qol Ya' aqov* (London, 1844), 129–31.

21. *Shimkha yah qiddesha* is found in a manuscript at Bar-Ilan University (no. 566). A scholarly edition of the *piyyut* was published in Yehuda Razhabi, *Mi-Ginzat Shirat Qedem* (Texts and Studies in Oriental Liturgical Poetry) (Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalaim, 1991), 87–93. Rabbi Shmuel Elbaz was a member of a family of religious judges and scholars from Sefrou, although he lived in Fez and was almost certainly present in the city when Sol Hachuel was executed.

22. The *qasā* found in the manuscript at Bar-Ilan University (no. 142) opens with the sentence "*shimu ya nash ma zra/fimdinat Fes lkahra*" (Hear, gentlemen, what happened in the despicable city, Fez). In line 16, we read "get up, illegitimate witnesses, and testify." The poet is referring to Muslims, whom the Jews saw as illegitimate. In general, the Jews of Morocco of every generation used this term (in Hebrew, *pasul*) to refer to Muslims. This phenomenon is anchored in Moroccan Jewish tradition and is derived from Maimonides' *Igeret Teman* (Epistle to Yemen), in which he preferred the epithet *ha-Pasul* instead of referring to Muhammad by his name. See *Igeret Teman*, Halkin ed.,

trans. Boaz Cohen (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1952), 28, 52. The authors of the *piyyutim* about Sol—all sages and rabbinical judges and well acquainted with Maimonides' religious thought and philosophy—were fully aware of these details. In fact, it appears they reread Maimonides' works, especially *Igeret Teman*, before writing their poetry.

For sources discussing Maimonides' attitude toward Islam and forced conversion in North Africa, see Nehemiah Levtzion's articles and also the articles by Menahem Ben-Sasson and Eliezer Schlossberg, which appeared in *Pe'amim* 42 (Winter 1990): 8–60.

23. For sources on forced conversions in Andalusia in the Muwahhidūn period, see Judit Taragona and Angel Saenz-Badillos, "Moshé ben Maimon sous le pouvoir almohade," in *Présence juive au Maghreb*, ed. Joseph Tedgui and Nicole S. Serfati (Saint-Denis: Bouchère, 2004), 203–18. See especially 214–15.

24. Rey, *Souvenirs*, 147, 153.

25. See the entry for *taklif* in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 10:149–50.

26. In Rey's book, *Souvenirs d'un voyage au Maroc*, 153–54, the governor repeats in Sol's presence, "You are certainly not insane."

27. We express our gratitude to the president of the Shari'a court in Israel, Ahmed Natour, who explained the paragraphs relating to *'akl* and *bulugh* in the laws of *ridda*, after checking the relevant sources in Muslim law books. The meeting took place in his office on January 7, 2004. The relevant paragraphs in the law will be examined in detail as part of a more extensive research project now in progress. Here we have only presented a summary of the law and general conclusions.

28. Line 12 of the manuscript reads, "*inuha shne ḥodashim / yeme 'onya umerudeha*" (They tortured her for two months / the days of her suffering and her bitterness).

29. Fattal, *Le statut legal*, 165–66. In *Souvenirs*, Rey introduced the possibility of the body being burned or even that Sol might have been executed by burning (167).

30. See the *Archives marocaines* (1907), 10:155.

31. See the introduction to *Minḥat Zikaron* by Yedidiah Monsoniego, ed. Moshe Amar (Lod: Orot Yahadut Hamagreb, 1992).

8

Halakhah through the Lens of Shari‘ah

The Case of the Kuḥlānī Synagogue in Ṣan‘ā, 1933–1944

MARK S. WAGNER

In 1935, Jews in Ṣan‘ā, embroiled in a dispute over the leadership of the Jewish community in Yemen, sought the legal ruling of the Zaydī imām, Yahyā b. Muḥammad Ḥamīd al-Dīn, on whether the Kuḥlānī Synagogue was private property or a pious endowment (*waqf*). The status of the synagogue as property would strengthen the position of one of two factions within the Jewish community. Depending on the outcome, one faction might become dominant in all of the synagogues in the city. The acrimony that ensued between Muslim jurists over the imām’s ruling brought into sharp focus the divisions between them regarding the status of Jewish law and the interaction of Islamic and Jewish legal systems and raised the following questions: What is non-Muslim law, and what is its relevance to the Muslim jurist? Should Jews be permitted to commit acts that are illegal in Islamic law if they do not bring them to the attention of a Muslim court? More broadly, are non-Muslim legal systems legitimate as legal systems?

With the Kuḥlānī Synagogue dispute as a case study, we outline the varied and conflicting solutions that Muslim jurists in Yemen devised to respond to these questions using Zaydī sources and legal documents from the early twentieth century. The case of the Kuḥlānī Synagogue is special in that it forced Muslim jurists to decide what happened when Jews did something that was legal in Judaism but illegal under Islamic law.¹ Moreover, it forced Muslim jurists to rule on a substantive issue of Jewish law.

Table 8.1. The Case of the Kuḥlānī Synagogue

	Plaintiff: Ṣāliḥ b. Yaḥyā Ṣāliḥ	Defendant: R. Yūsuf Ṣāliḥ (plaintiff's cousin)
<i>Claim:</i>	The synagogue is private property	The synagogue is public property
<i>Legal representation:</i>	R. ‘Amram Qoraḥ Aḥmad al-Ḥāḍirī	R. Ṣālim Sa‘id al-Jamal
<i>Jewish supporters:</i>	The majority of the Jewish community (pro-kabbalah)	Reformist faction (anti-kabbalah)
<i>Muslim supporters:</i>	<i>Shari‘ah</i> court judges, rank-and- file Muslims	Imām Yaḥyā

Note: Muslim Judges: Luṭf al-Zubayrī, Ḥusayn Abū Ṭālib, Ḥusayn al-‘Amrī, and Imām Yaḥyā.

First, a few words are in order about the legal system in Ṣan‘ā‘ in the first half of the twentieth century and the Jews’ place within it. Faced with numerous Arab uprisings against their rule over Yemen, the Turks, who had ruled since 1872, capitulated their legal authority in the 1911 Treaty of Da‘‘ān. They ceded the application of *Shari‘ah* and the right to appoint judges to the reigning Zaydī imām, Yaḥyā Ḥamid al-Dīn (d. 1948), in the (northern) region of Yemen where Zaydis were the majority.² In 1918 Imām Yaḥyā entered the city, bringing Turkish rule over Ṣan‘ā‘ to an end. Three *Shari‘ah* courts were established in Ṣan‘ā‘, as well as a court at the imām’s residence that was overseen by a judge. Muslims were able to choose the judge before whom they wished to present their case. One of the judges was responsible for cases involving Jews, in addition to his regular duties. Above these four courts sat a court of appeals (*maḥkamat al-isti‘nāf*). Highest of all was the High Council (*al-majlis al-‘ālī*) consisting of seven judges.³ Imām Yaḥyā, in theory at least, was the ultimate legal authority.

Jews’ appearance as claimants in *Shari‘ah* courts predated these twentieth-century developments. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Yemeni rabbis railed against Jews who took recourse to Muslim courts because it undermined their own authority. They also regarded it as a sin.⁴ Nevertheless, Yemeni Jews brought many of their disputes to Muslim courts, even those involving only Jews.⁵ Engaging in “forum-shopping,” they brought their disputes to the courts that offered the highest likelihood of success. For example, Jewish women, faced with inheriting nothing under *halakhah*, turned to Muslim courts, where they inherited half as much as men.⁶ Jewish divorce cases in Yemen routinely involved

both Muslim and Jewish courts because one or both parties perceived an advantage in involving a Muslim court in their case.⁷

In early December 1933, the rabbi of the Kuḥlānī Synagogue in Ṣan‘ā, Yūsuf Ṣāliḥ, decided, with the support of most of his congregation, to change the synagogue’s prayer rite. The decision to change the rite reflected the congregation’s new orientation toward a movement for the reform of Judaism in Yemen, called Dor De‘ah.⁸ Adherents of the Dor De‘ah movement sought to purge Judaism of kabbalistic concepts embedded in Sephardic (called “*Shāmī*” in Yemen) prayers and liturgical practices.⁹ Three congregants objected vociferously to the change. In response to the disorder that ensued, Imām Yaḥyā ordered the synagogue closed.¹⁰ For the next two years a man whose authority was respected by both factions, Yaḥyā Abyaḍ, served as chief rabbi, but his death in 1935 rekindled the conflict.

Ṣāliḥ b. Yaḥyā Ṣāliḥ, one of the three congregants who in 1933 had objected to the change in rite, was also the cousin of the rabbi who initiated the change. He went to a Muslim court and claimed ownership of the synagogue. By bringing the issue to a Muslim court, he sought to gainsay any claims to leadership advanced by R. Yūsuf Ṣāliḥ (his cousin), the majority of the congregants, and the Dor De‘ah movement. If the synagogue was his private property, he was entitled to determine the ground rules.¹¹

Imām Yaḥyā requested the assistance of R. Ṣālim Saīd al-Jamal (1907–2001), one of his point men on Jewish affairs and a figure in the Dor De‘ah movement.¹² Imām Yaḥyā asked al-Jamal to translate into Arabic certain Hebrew documents relating to the legal status of the synagogue. In the interest of fairness he asked a rabbi from the opposing faction, ‘Amram Qoraḥ, to translate the same documents. When R. Qoraḥ encountered the Hebrew term *heqdes* (consecrated property), mentioned in connection with the synagogue, he translated the term as “*waqf*” (pious endowment). This was an idiomatic translation. It was a logical claim as the Jewish legal concept of *heqdes* (consecrated property) had evolved among Yemen’s Jews into a virtual mirror image of the Muslim concept of a *waqf*.¹³

In Islam, *waqf* property is distinguished from both private property and public property (such as a road or stream). Its founder’s designation of the property, motivated by religious intention, causes the *waqf* property to cease (the meaning of *waqf*) from being bought, sold, inherited, or taxed. *Waqf* property usually includes both revenue-generating and

non-revenue-generating enterprises. For example, stores, fields, or rental properties are designated as part of a *waqf*, along with a mosque or religious academy whose upkeep is financed by them.

Islamic law forbids making synagogues into pious endowments.¹⁴ R. Qoraḥ was probably aware of this. Therefore, by translating *heqdesh* as *waqf* he hoped that the Muslim ruler would decide that the synagogue was privately owned, thereby denying the reformers a platform. His opponent, R. al-Jamal, was in a quandary. He knew that *waqf* is the best translation of *heqdesh* and that Islamic law prohibits designating a synagogue as a pious endowment. He also argued that the private ownership of synagogues is forbidden in Jewish law and thus he could not, for the time being, countenance putting forward a competing private property claim.¹⁵ Not to be outmaneuvered by his opponent, R. al-Jamal translated *heqdesh* as *ibāḥah* (public property),¹⁶ an innovative translation that triggered an angry backlash from many of the most prominent Muslim jurists in Yemen and from rank-and-file Muslims who heard sermons denouncing his clever translation—and him—in the mosques of Ṣanʿāʾ.¹⁷

The dispute over the Kuḥlānī Synagogue quickly spread to eight other synagogues in the city, each of which faced a conflict between those claiming “public property” in the name of the reformist faction and those claiming private ownership in the name of the anti-reformist faction. From 1933 to 1944 the two factions (within the rabbinic leadership) pursued their claims to authority in *Shariʿah* courts.

By taking their claims concerning Ṣanʿāʾ’s synagogues to Muslim courts, the two Jewish factions threatened the survival of all of the approximately twenty synagogues in Ṣanʿāʾ because their Islamic legality was dubious. The Pact of ʿUmar stipulates that non-Muslims may not build new houses of worship. Whether or not they may renovate or rebuild existing synagogues was a source of disagreement.¹⁸ At two points in Yemeni history, 1668 and 1762, Zaydī imāms destroyed the synagogues of Ṣanʿāʾ.¹⁹ Several synagogues were also destroyed or looted during tribal rampages in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that were unconnected to these decrees.²⁰ In short, any synagogue in existence in early twentieth-century Ṣanʿāʾ could not have been built before the eighteenth century at the earliest.

Some Muslims viewed the upheaval within the Jewish community caused by the controversy over synagogues as a harm that outweighed

the benefit of their continued existence. Therefore, the controversy provided an opportunity to those who wished to press for the destruction of all of the synagogues in Ṣanʿāʾ. The controversy also spread to Manākhah, a town in the Ḥarāz Mountains with a significant Jewish population.

When the three Jewish plaintiffs challenged the change in prayer rite at the Kuḥlānī Synagogue, the matter went before the judge, Luṭf b. Muḥammad al-Zubayrī (1875–1944). In al-Jamal’s work, *The Synagogues of Ṣanʿāʾ, the Capital of Yemen*, al-Zubayrī is the principal villain—corrupt, violent, an inveterate Jew-hater, and a lecher.²¹ The Yemeni historian Muḥammad Zabārah describes al-Zubayrī as one who “leaned toward Prophetic traditions and had a preference for revelatory evidence [i.e., Quran and *Sunnah*]” (*kāna . . . māʿilan ilā l-sunan al-nabawiyyah wa-tarjīḥ al-dalīl*).²² Al-Zubayrī belonged to the branch of Zaydī jurisprudence that leaned toward Sunnī Traditionism. Though nominally Zaydī-Shīʿī, these scholars stressed the authoritative status of canonical Sunnī *ḥadīth* collections. Their belief in scriptural authority helps explain the bifurcation of authority within the Yemeni judicial system between the Zaydī imām on one side and Traditionist judges on the other that is on display in the case of the Kuḥlānī Synagogue.²³

Shortly after the controversy in the Kuḥlānī Synagogue reached the Muslim courts in May 1935, al-Zubayrī wrote a letter to Imām Yaḥyā. He called for the destruction of the Kuḥlānī Synagogue and explained further:

[The objecting congregants] claimed that all of the Jews’ synagogues are *waqfs*, knowing full well that an infidel may never establish a *waqf*. They had the impudence to state this explicitly. Is this not clear evidence of the mockery in their hearts for the *Sharīʾah* of [the prophet] Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh, may the prayers of God be upon him?²⁴

Soon thereafter, Imām Yaḥyā summoned R. al-Jamal and R. ʿAmram Qoraḥ, representatives of each Jewish faction, and asked them to translate Hebrew documents relating to the status of the synagogue in question. Qoraḥ translated the term *heqdes* (pious endowment) into Arabic as *waqf*, while al-Jamal produced the novel translation “public property” (*ibāḥah*). Imām Yaḥyā shouted, “What is this *ibāḥah*, O Jamal? You willfully distort the correct translation of ‘*heqdes*’!”²⁵ Al-Jamal responded:

“God forbid that your servant should willfully distort anything. I merely translated the essence (‘*inyan*) of the word *heqdes̥h*, which is *ibāḥah*, so that it might be of use to your Jewish subjects in this matter, for we do not have a law of pious endowments (*din heqdes̥hot*) under the laws of Muḥammad.” Imām Yaḥyā was persuaded by this explanation. “You have brought before us a word and its essence,” the imām said. “It is true that ‘Amram [Qoraḥ] translated the word and al-Jamal translated its essence, and it is correct that the essence is the principal thing.”²⁶

This incident caused a furor among some senior jurists. One of them, Qāḍī Ḥusayn al-‘Amrī, the head of the High Council (*al-majlis al-‘ālī*), sought an audience with the imām. (Qāḍī al-‘Amrī’s son, ‘Abdallāh, was the chief minister of Imām Yaḥyā’s government.) Qāḍī al-‘Amrī complained that al-Jamal was trying to trick the Muslims and attack Islam. According to al-Jamal, (who gives the text of this conversation in Hebrew), Imām Yaḥyā refined his ruling in the following reply:

He said that [Qāḍī al-‘Amrī] was correct that if the Jews come before us with a claim of “pious endowment” it is incumbent upon us to push aside and nullify the claim, but if they arrived arguing “public property,” *even though we know that among them it is a claim of pious endowment* [emphasis added], we must accept it, because it is enough that they themselves know that there is no law of pious endowments for synagogues among the laws of Islam.²⁷

According to al-Jamal’s account, the members of the judicial apparatus were nearly unanimous in their objection to Imām Yaḥyā’s position. Many of the most vociferous opponents of the imām’s ruling had studied the religious sciences together, shared an orientation toward Sunnī Traditionism, and were related to one another.²⁸ This shows a bifurcation within the Islamic legal system in Yemen between the Zaydī imām, who had the right as a *mujtahid* to issue binding rulings, and a Sunnī-inspired judicial apparatus that had evolved to the point where it did not need an imām.²⁹ The pro-kabbalah faction that represented roughly two-thirds of the Jews of Ṣanʿāʾ and opposed the reformist Dor De‘ah were aligned with Imām Yaḥyā’s opponents in the judiciary.

It is worth noting that the controversy over the status of synagogues had financial implications for those Muslims who argued that synagogues were private property. When Imām Yaḥyā took Ṣanʿāʾ from the Turks in

1918, Jews claimed that the land on which the Jewish Quarter (*qā' al-yahūd*) was built was their private property. Muslims claimed that it was *waqf* land on which Jews had neglected to pay rent. Jews countered that the paucity of documentation for their claims of private ownership were due to looting by tribesmen. The court determined that *waqf* land was mixed (*multabīs*) with land privately owned by Jews. A one-time payment of 7,500 riyals from the Jewish community to the *waqf* was negotiated in 1918.³⁰ The chief rabbi, Yaḥyā Ishāq, was made responsible for allotting the payment to community members.

When the synagogues controversy began in the mid-1930s, R. Sālim Sa'īd al-Jamal argued that Yaḥyā Ishāq, then head of the faction that claimed private ownership, made individual Jews' payments for the Jewish Quarter proportional to the size of their homes. He considered roads, bathhouses, and synagogues the responsibility of the entire community. Thus the faction now claiming private ownership of synagogues, al-Jamal argued, had in the past accepted the idea that they were "public property."³¹ Moreover, if the Muslim court ruled that synagogues were private property, representatives of the Muslim *waqf* could argue that those properties still remained to be bought or rented from them. In short, for financial reasons it would have been in many Muslim jurists' interests to press for the synagogues to be considered private property.

Imām Yaḥyā removed the judge Luṭf al-Zubayrī from the case of the Kuḥlānī Synagogue and gave it to Ḥusayn Abū Ṭālib, whom al-Jamal describes as honest, wealthy, and loyal to Imām Yaḥyā.³² Having scored a major victory with the imām's statement, al-Jamal entered Ḥusayn Abū Ṭālib's courtroom as the representative of the Dor De'ah faction. Al-Jamal explained the *halakhic* position to the judge:

The legal statute of Moses (*al-qānūn al-shar'ī al-mūsawī*), which was set down and legislated by Mūsā b. Maymūn [Maimonides], based on the great commentary on the Torah (*sharḥ al-tawrah al-kabīr*),³³ that is followed by all Jews in the world, [says] that synagogues in cities were built according to the wishes of every Jew in the world and they are "public property" (*mubāḥ*) to any who wish to pray therein, even if they are from the ends of the earth.³⁴

Aḥmad al-Ḥāḍirī, the attorney for the anti-reformist faction, objected, insisting that al-Jamal's claim of *ibāḥah* was clearly a fiction.³⁵ He said,

“Never before in history has there been heard a claim of ‘public property’ concerning the synagogues of the Jews.”³⁶ The judge, Ḥusayn Abū Ṭālib, was in a difficult position, caught between Imām Yaḥyā and the majority of Muslim jurists. He usually sided with the latter.

In June, Ḥusayn al-ʿAmrī met with Imām Yaḥyā a second time to protest his position on the synagogue issue. Yaḥyā interrupted him with a paraphrase of Quran 5:42, a proof-text for the right of non-Muslims to appeal to Muslim courts: “If they come to you, judge between them by what has been commanded.”³⁷ The imām reiterated his point that the property which the Jews claimed to be a *waqf* was not a *waqf* because they did not perform acts pleasing to God (see appendix). “If, however, they claim *ibāḥah* before us, we must accept it. Even if we know that it is a *waqf* for them, the principal thing is what they claim before us.”³⁸

On July 10, 1935, Yaḥyā sent a telegram to the Dor Deʿah faction. He was clearly exasperated with them. “We have written enough [on this issue] to satisfy a donkey—the point is the division of the synagogues in pious trust (*qismat al-kanāʾ is al-mawqūfah*).”³⁹ In the telegram the imām mistakenly described the synagogues as having *waqf* status. Realizing that the imām’s wording would do them (and him) more harm than good, the Dor Deʿah camp did not mention it.⁴⁰ In August 1936, according to al-Jamal, the Imām made the same mistake, using the word “*waqf*” in reference to the synagogues issue.⁴¹ This may show that Imām Yaḥyā was not particularly exercised over such terminology.⁴²

Soon after the imām’s telegram was sent, the officiating judge, Ḥusayn Abū Ṭālib, declared in court that it is impossible for Jewish law not to have a law of *waqf* and that Zaydī law cancels the Jewish law. He tried to force an end to the controversy by demanding that notable Jews affiliated with the Dor Deʿah faction swear that the synagogues were *waqfs*. He likely saw this as a way to call their bluff—that is, no matter how ingenious the claim of “public property,” they really believed that synagogues were pious endowments. After they swore that the synagogues were pious trusts, the Muslim court would annul the claim of *waqf* and those Jews claiming private ownership would win.⁴³

Thus began a dramatic battle of oaths. Since Imām Yaḥyā agreed in principle that synagogues could be “public property,” he demanded that the pro-kabbalah faction swear that the synagogues were private property.⁴⁴ Each side demanded that the other swear to a losing proposition:

if the Dor De'ah members swore to the *waqf* status of the synagogues, they would become private property because a *waqf* synagogue was an oxymoron in Islamic law. If the pro-kabbalah faction swore that the synagogues were private property, they would contravene *halakhic* regulations governing the status of synagogues in cities.

All parties involved agreed that Jews should take oaths according to Jewish law. The Jews of Ṣan'ā' possessed an elaborate ceremony for extracting oaths, based on Geonic precedent.⁴⁵ The ceremony took place at the al-Dhamārī Synagogue, in front of the "Torah of Ages" (*tawrāt al-dahārī*), a scroll believed to have been written by Moses himself.⁴⁶ Funerary preparations were made on behalf of the man who swore falsely, for he would surely die. Water for washing a corpse was brought, as well as a bier, a shroud, a pickaxe to dig the grave, a hoe and a basket for the displaced earth, and frankincense. Burning the frankincense would help disguise the putrid odor emitted by the false witness immediately after death. Ten rams' horns would be blown ten times each, and the oath would be made before the assembled audience.⁴⁷

Imām Yaḥyā was so impressed by the persuasive power of this ceremony that on at least one occasion he ordered a Muslim whom he believed to be committing perjury to submit to it. (The Muslim in question, a wealthy merchant, fled the scene before swearing, thereby forfeiting his claim.)⁴⁸ With Imām Yaḥyā backing the Dor De'ah faction and Ḥusayn Abū Ṭālib backing the pro-kabbalah faction, the two sides reached a stalemate. Neither of them was able to force the other side to take an oath.

Although they had won a powerful ally in Imām Yaḥyā, the Dor De'ah camp eventually abandoned R. al-Jamal's "public property" ruse. One reformist partisan claimed ownership of the Kuḥlānī Synagogue. The synagogue was divided in two, and each side was refurbished as an independent synagogue.⁴⁹ On one side, R. Yūsuf Ṣāliḥ and his congregation prayed according to their rite and studied texts given primacy by Dor De'ah.⁵⁰ On the other side, their ideological rivals, adherents of kabbalah, prayed according to their rite and taught the *Zohar*. This arrangement lasted until the mass emigration of Jews from Yemen to Israel in 1949–50.⁵¹ This story has an ironic epilogue: Ṣāliḥ b. Yaḥyā Ṣāliḥ, one of the three men who adamantly rejected the change in the Kuḥlānī Synagogue's rite and claimed ownership of it, ended up joining the Dor De'ah half of the synagogue that was under the leadership of his cousin, Yūsuf Ṣāliḥ.⁵²

Aside from its intrinsic value as a good story, the controversy over the Kuḥlānī Synagogue illuminates the issue of the interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims in the framework of Islamic law. R. al-Jamal took pride in the legal fiction he had thought up to escape the ban on non-Muslim *waqfs*. He trusted that this fiction played a role in bettering the lot of the Jews. However, while he was assembling documentation of the controversy in preparation for his emigration to Palestine, he discovered that he had not been the first person to skirt the issue of non-Muslim pious endowments by using the term “public property” (*ibāḥah*).

A copy of an 1866 *fatwā*, obtained by R. al-Jamal from the rabbi of a village south of Ṣanʿāʾ, describes that town’s synagogue as “public property.”⁵³ The scribe who copied the document in 1936 notes that he did not recognize the judge’s signature. Therefore, the judge who wrote this document is unknown. According to the document, two brothers who had owned the synagogue

made it into public property (*abāḥū*) to their satisfaction and of their own free will with a designation of public property (*ibāḥatan*) from which there is no recourse. There is nothing to prevent a Jew who wants to pray there from praying, nor is there any shame, harm, or cause for worry in this. None of the Jews are to squander [its resources] or to let it fall into disrepair. Instead it should remain public property (*mubāḥah*) for prayer, without any selling, buying, or inheritance of it.⁵⁴

The formulation above, written by a Muslim judge, stated the case for synagogues’ status as public property in a stronger manner than R. al-Jamal had stated in court. Therefore, al-Jamal did not merely pull the wool over the eyes of powerful Muslims. Rather, a pragmatic understanding of the interaction between Muslim and Jewish legal systems undergirded his ostensible ruse. That this logic was apparent to Muslims who dealt in this gray area explains both the Muslim judge’s ruling of public property above and Imām Yahyā’s sympathy toward R. al-Jamal’s legal fiction.

The case of the Kuḥlānī Synagogue forced Muslim jurists to grapple with the question: What is Jewish law? If Jews have a legal institution that resembles a Muslim *waqf* in every respect, is it a *waqf*? If so, and seeing that a *waqf* is forbidden to them, what is to be done about a putative *waqf* of the Jews? What Imām Yahyā and the anonymous judge had in common

was a philosophical position regarding the boundaries between Muslim and non-Muslim law. This position relies upon the strict separation of the two. Here, the impetus to keep in place the judicial separation of *dhimmīs* seems to derive less from an “intention to maintain the autonomy of the Jewish courts,” as Gideon Libson defines it, than from the intention to maintain the divine nature of Islamic law.⁵⁵ Jewish law was the domain of unbelief. The Muslim state permits Jews to engage in such unbelief. This, after all, is what makes them Jews. If Muslim jurists were to rule on discrete substantive issues within Judaism, such as the status of synagogues as property within Jewish law, they risk sliding down a slippery slope. They would be charged with using the legal process to Islamicize Judaism, eventually breaking down the social distinctions between the Muslim majority and the Jewish minority.

Thus, from this perspective, Jewish law is what responsible Jews say it is. Attempting to determine whether a particular Jew was acting in accordance with Jewish law would constitute another slippery slope, whereby the interpreters of divine law (*Sharī‘ah*) become involved in the study and application of a legal tradition that has lost its divine mandate (*halakhah*). Ironically, whereas on a theoretical level this stance dismisses Jewish law and, by extension, Judaism, on a practical level it allows a great deal of flexibility to Muslims and Jews who routinely come into contact with each other in legal settings. Nevertheless, no matter how great the imagined gulf separating Jewish law from *Sharī‘ah*, Imām Yaḥyā still found himself ruling on parochial questions such as whether or not Jews could study the *Zohar*.⁵⁶

It is precisely within such an interpretational scheme that terminological sleight of hand, such as the translation of the Hebrew *heqdes* (pious endowment) as *ibāḥah*, fills a needed function. This position, while maintaining the supremacy of Islamic law, defends Jewish law by default. It even defends, and may indeed rely upon, cunning legal devices made by Jews. It is also important to note that in exercising his legal reasoning, the Zaydī imām was charged with evaluating the benefit (*maṣlahah*) to his Muslim and Jewish subjects. A radical overhaul of Judaism by Muslims surely would prove destabilizing to both parties and, more importantly, would blur the boundaries between them.

The Yemeni judges Luṭf al-Zubayrī, Ḥusayn al-‘Amrī, and other members of the judicial apparatus took an activist stance toward combating

illegality in the Jewish community. In the case of the synagogues controversy, this involved addressing the *halakhic* issue of the status of synagogues in property law. While all would agree that Islamic law negates Jewish law, in this case it mattered to them what type of property Jews believed synagogues to be. Thus their view of Jewish law can be said to be sympathetic: from this vantage point Jewish law is a reflection of Islamic law. The episode in which the judge Ḥusayn Abū Ṭālib, after listening to R. al-Jamal's exposition of the Talmud and Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, said that Jews surely must possess a law of *waqfs* (he was correct) encapsulates this perspective on the division between Islamic and Jewish law. Why must Jewish law possess a law of *waqfs*? The qāḍī's assumption is that Jewish law is fundamentally rational—it must agree with Islamic law or else be made to do so. Thus the claim of *ibāḥah*, rooted in the dissimilarity between the two legal systems, is suspect.

Conflicts between the *Shariʿah* and Jewish law may also be the result of Jews incorrectly characterizing the content of *halakhah* or deliberately misleading Muslims about it (as happened in the case of R. al-Jamal). In this context we note that none of the Muslim jurists discussed here advocated an independent review of the sources of Jewish law. It was the testimony of Jews in Arabic that was the source of information on it.

The documentation of the 1930s synagogues controversy also shows the multiplicity of historically contingent factors that informed the application of Islamic law. The documents also shed light on the role of personal relationships in the synagogues controversy. There seems little reason to doubt the authenticity of either the mutual antipathy between R. al-Jamal and members of the Islamic judiciary or his connection with Imām Yaḥyā. The imām, after all, was unsympathetic to change in the lives of the inhabitants of Ṣanʿāʾ.⁵⁷ One factor that contributed to his decision to support the reformist Jewish faction may be that his aide, R. Sālim Saʿīd al-Jamal, was affiliated with that faction.

The judicial politics of Ṣanʿāʾ in the early twentieth century played an important role in the synagogues controversy. By Imām Yaḥyā's time a judicial bureaucracy that was ideologically oriented toward Sunnī Traditionism had developed to the point that the Zaydī ideal of "the informed decision of the Imām of the Age" (*ijtihād imām al-zamān*) had become an impediment. R. al-Jamal goes so far as to suggest that the imām's unpopular affirmation of the "public property" legal ruse in the controversy over

the Kuḥlānī Synagogue emboldened those opposed to his rule. This suggestion, in turn, leads to the conclusion that the synagogue controversy hastened the end of the Zaydī imāmate in Yemen.⁵⁸

Appendix: The Problem of the Synagogue *Waqf*

In Islamic law, the establishment of a *waqf* (a pious endowment) depends on its founder performing an act pleasing to God (*qurbah*). Whether or not a non-Muslim is capable of performing acts pleasing to God, and therefore is able to establish a *waqf*, is a debatable point. Among Sunnī jurists, the idea that a non-Muslim might establish a *waqf* to benefit the poor or his progeny was inoffensive. Indeed, non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire appeared before *Sharī'ah* courts to establish *waqfs*.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the possibility that a non-Muslim house of worship, an institution devoted to the propagation of unbelief (*kufr*), might be considered *waqf* property posed a problem for Sunnīs. Therefore, it is illegal to designate a synagogue as a *waqf*.⁶⁰

The Zaydī law manuals disagree on the issue of whether non-Muslims could establish *waqfs*. (Both agree that non-Muslim houses of worship cannot be *waqfs*). The *Sharḥ al-azhār* stipulates as one of the five prerequisites for a person who wants to establish a *waqf* that he must be a Zaydī Muslim.⁶¹ A commentary adds: “for [establishing a pious endowment] is a deed pleasing to God and unbelievers never perform acts pleasing to God” (*li-annahu qurbah wa-lā qurbah li-kāfir*).⁶² In contrast, the *Baḥr al-zakhkhār* argues that non-Muslims can establish other types of *waqfs*. It explained:

A *waqf* may be established for the *ahl al-dhimmah*, for they perform deeds pleasing to God (*fihim qurbah*), as God said, “God did not forbid you . . .” (Q 60:8) but *not* for their churches and synagogues and its servants . . . [and] *not* for the Torah and the Gospels due to their having been abrogated. (italics added).⁶³

The nineteenth-century jurist Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Shawkānī, whose influence was still felt among jurists in twentieth-century Yemen, explains why the establishment of *waqfs* must be limited to Muslims:

As for the stipulation of Islam [for the founder], it has been established that a *waqf* is an act pleasing to God that calls for a great

reward, and an unbeliever is unsuitable for this. *If he does establish one, the thing that he has established is not the sharʿī waqf that is our subject* (italics added).⁶⁴

Al-Shawkānī's caveat seems to indicate that he was aware that non-Muslims established pious endowments of their own and that they may have had laws governing such endowments. His discussion contains a significant ambiguity that allows two contradictory answers to the question of what should be done about a non-Muslim *waqf*. The first of these considers the non-Muslim *waqf* void, in which case a Muslim court is justified in redistributing, confiscating, or even destroying such property. The second treats non-Muslims as free to establish endowments so long as they do not seek the intervention of the *Shariʿah* court.⁶⁵ In other words, “don't ask, don't tell.”⁶⁶ On the one hand, non-Muslim pious endowments are categorically forbidden. On the other, they are not a concern of the Muslim court so long as disputes involving them are not brought before the court.

Thus if the issue of a non-Muslim pious endowment were to find its way to a *Shariʿah* court, a jurist basing himself on al-Shawkānī's position might conclude either that the issue lay outside the court's proper sphere, the *Shariʿah*, or that he might intervene. In fact, individual jurists reached both of these conclusions.

Al-Shawkānī's son Aḥmad, who, like his father, served as chief qāḍī, ruled on this very issue in September 1857. In his ruling (which dealt, incidentally, with a dispute over the Kuḥlānī Synagogue), the younger Shawkānī quoted his father in his ruling that “unbelievers never perform pious acts and the prerequisite for establishing a *waqf* is Islam.”⁶⁷

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Notes

1. Islamic legal manuals from highland Yemen, where the tradition of Islamic law was Zaydī and the non-Muslims in question most often were Jews, described hypothetical scenarios in which non-Muslims did something that was legal in their religion but that contravened Islamic law. Nevertheless, these prescriptive sources seem to have little or

no connection with reality. For example, two Zaydī law manuals, the *Baḥr al-zakḥkhār* (Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. al-Murtaḍā, *Kitāb al-Baḥr al-zakḥkhār al-jāmiʿ li-madhāhib ʿulamāʾ al-amṣār* [Ṣanʿāʾ: Dār al-ḥikmah al-yamāniyah, 1988] = *Baḥr al-zakḥkhār*) and the *Sharḥ al-azhār* [ʿAbdallāh b. Miṭṭāḥ, *al-Muntazaʾ al-mukhtār min al-ghayth al-midrār al-maʾrūf bi-sharḥ al-azhār* [Ṣaʿdah: al-Jumhuriyyah al-yamaniyyah, Wizārat al-ʿadl, 2003] = *Sharḥ al-azhār*), discuss the possibility that a non-Muslim man might marry a woman during the mandatory waiting period after divorce (ʿiddah) or that he might marry his daughter to a relative to whom she was forbidden. *Baḥr al-zakḥkhār* 4:147; *Sharḥ al-azhār* 5:138, 262–63, 10:526–27.

Jewish law also mandated a waiting period after a divorce and forbade marriages between relatives. Therefore, it is difficult to discern any practical import to the scenarios described in these Muslim legal works. Gideon Libson, *Jewish and Islamic Law: A Comparative Study of Custom during the Geonic Period*, Islamic Legal Studies Program (Cambridge: Harvard Law School, 2003), 371.

2. R. B. Serjeant and Ronald Lewcock, *Ṣanʿāʾ: An Arabian Islamic City* (London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1983), 96.

3. Shalom Gamliel, *Bate hakneset be-Ṣanʿāʾ birat teman* (Jerusalem: Makhon Shalom le-shivṭe yeshurun, 1996–97), 1:39–40.

4. Yehiel Nahshon, *Hanhagat ha-qehilah ha-yehudit be-teman* (Meʾot 17–18) (Tel Aviv: Ha-Agudah le-ṭipuaḥ ḥevrah ve-tarbut, 2002), 156–58. It seems that in the town of Ḥujariyyah, the rabbinic authorities succeeded in their demand that appeals by Jews to Muslim courts be made with their prior consent. Violators of this rule were fined (ibid., 137n254). See also Isaac Hollander, “*Halakha, Sharīʿa*, and Custom: A Legal Saga from Highland Yemen, 1990–1940,” in *Islamic Law: Theory and Practice*, ed. Robert Gleave and Eugenia Kermeli (London and New York: I. B. Tauris / St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 157–84, see 157.

5. Yehudah Ratzhaby, “Inyane yehudim be-teman be-ʿarkhaʾot shel goyim,” in *Ḥiqre ʿever ve-ʿarav mugashim le-yehoshuʾah blau ʿal yede ḥaverav be-melot lo shivʿim*, ed. Ḥaggai Ben-Shammai (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1993), 515–35, see 515–17; Nahshon, *Hanhagat ha-qehilah*, 138.

6. Yosef Tobi, “Yerushat nashim be-ḥevrah ha-yehudit ve-ha-muslimit,” in *Bat Teman: ʿOlamah shel ha-ishah ha-yehudiyah*, ed. Shalom Serri (Tel Aviv: Eʾeleh be-tamar, n.d.), 35–50; Nahshon, *Hanhagat ha-qehilah*, 144, 149–50.

7. Sometimes one or both Jewish parties turned to Muslim courts to “adjust” the divorce settlement. In other cases, the Muslim court drew up a document finalizing the spouses’ financial obligations to one another, and the *Bet Din* provided a Jewish document of divorce (a *get*). Sometimes the Jewish court adjusted the settlement that had been reached by the Muslim court. Nahshon, *Hanhagat ha-qehilah*, 141–44; Isaac Hollander, “*Ibra* in Highland Yemen: Two Jewish Divorce Settlements,” *Islamic Law and Society* 2, no. 1 (1995): 1–23.

8. The chief exponent of the Dor Deʿah movement was R. Yaḥyā al-Qāfīḥ (1849–1932), who attempted to modernize the educational system of Jews in Yemen by introducing secular subjects into the curriculum. He also mounted a withering critique on kabbalistic texts and traditions.

9. Naḥshon, *Hanhagat ha-qehilah*, 310; Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 293. The reformers advocated that Jews in Yemen adhere to the “*Baladī*” rite, which they believed to be based in the Judaism that had been practiced in Yemen before the diffusion of kabbalistic works and practices in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Some who prayed according to the *Baladī* rite, however, opposed Dor De’ah. The struggle over rite in Yemeni Judaism began in the eighteenth century, with the attempts by the Jewish grandee Sālim al-’Irāqī to change the prayer rite to *Shāmī* and the efforts of R. Yaḥyā Ṣāliḥ (Mahariṣ) to defend the *Baladī* rite. Yosef Tobi, *Iyyunim bimgilat teman* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1986), chap. 6.

10. Shalom Gamliel, *Pequde teman: Mas he-ḥasut be-teman* (Jerusalem: Makhon Shalom le-shivṭe yeshurun, 1982), 167.

11. Given the profusion of synagogues in Ṣanʿā, if a Jew did not approve of his synagogue’s affiliation (kabbalistic or anti-kabbalistic), why would he not simply pray at another one more to his liking? This was a question that Muslim jurists raised more than once during the synagogue controversy. To some extent, affiliation with a particular synagogue was family oriented. Extended families tended to live close together in the Jewish Quarter. The reformist position at the Ṣāliḥ Synagogue was represented by the Badiḥī family, who lived close to the building and prayed there. Gamliel, *Bate hakneset*, 2:93. Also, some synagogues, such as the al-Dhamārī Synagogue, which housed a Torah scroll said to have been written by Moses, were considered to be especially prestigious.

Each synagogue congregant had a set place to pray, a pallet near the wall, a book stand, and a place where he kept books for his own edification and to teach his children. Gamliel, *Bate hakneset*, 2:240n7. A Jew who did not pray three congregational prayers a day, called “*qāṭi’ ṣalāh*,” could not be a legal witness, as was the case for Muslims of dubious probity (*mashkūk al-’adālah*) under Islamic law. Moshe Piamenta, *Dictionary of Post-Classical Yemeni Arabic* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990–91), 405. The various duties in the synagogue—serving as the precentor (*shaliaḥ ṣibor*), opening the Ark, unrolling the Torah scroll, putting the Torah scroll away, lighting the candles, cleaning—brought no financial remuneration but were considered great honors. That said, a congregant honored with reading from the Torah (*’aliyah*) was expected to pay for the privilege. The resulting income went to the upkeep of the synagogue and to the support of the students who studied therein. Yehiel Naḥshon, *Bate kneset bi-Ṣanʿā* (Me’ot 17–18) (Netanyah: Ha-Agudah le-ṭipuah ḥevrah ve-tarbut, 2001), 48; Naḥshon, *Hanhagat ha-qehilah*, 286. A given synagogue’s factional affiliation would also have determined the content of the curriculum taught by the rabbi in his daily lessons.

12. In 1996, at the age of 90, R. Sālim Sa’id al-Jamal published the documents relating to the case of the Kuḥlānī Synagogue in three volumes, under the misleadingly bland title *The Synagogues of Ṣanʿā, the Capital of Yemen*. The book included documents that R. al-Jamal acquired years after the controversy from the son of the man from the opposing faction who initially had claimed ownership of the Kuḥlānī Synagogue. It also includes verbatim conversations between R. al-Jamal and conversations that did not occur in his presence. He explains that his record of such conversations was based on his close contacts with prominent Muslims, particularly three of Imām Yaḥyā’s sons. Gamliel, *Bate hakneset*, 1:369.

The documents relating on the case of the Kuḥlānī Synagogue constituted a portion of a much larger corpus of hundreds of legal documents that R. al-Jamal collected before emigrating to Palestine in 1944. After a career in the Israeli Ministry of Religions, al-Jamal founded the “Shalom Institute for the Tribes of Yeshurun.” He published several collections of the Muslim legal documents that he had collected in Yemen, along with Hebrew transliterations, translations, and commentaries. Bernard Haykel has drawn attention to the historical value of these documents in a paper delivered at the Judaism and Islam in Yemen workshop held at Princeton University’s Woodrow Wilson School on October 27, 2002.

13. In the Talmud, *heqdes* referred to property donated for the upkeep of the Temple in Jerusalem. R. Isaac Alfasi (d. 1103) applied the rules of *heqdes* to synagogues, an innovation that was upheld by his successors among the Sephardic rabbis, most notably Maimonides. David Fink, “The Corporate Status of *Hekdes* in Early Sefardic Responsa,” in *The Touro Conference Volume*, ed. Bernard S. Jackson (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), 17–24, see 20–22. Queries to Maimonides in Judeo-Arabic concerning consecrated property used the terms *heqdes* or *waqf* and the Arabic verb *awqafa*. Maimonides, *Teshuvot ha-rambam*, ed. Joshua Blau (Jerusalem: Mekise nirdamim: Jerusalem: 1985), 2:363, 371, 477. In response to a question concerning a *heqdes*, Maimonides used the Hebrew term *heqdes* and the Arabic terms *waqf* and *mūqif* interchangeably. Ibid., 2:363. In Yemen, the identification between the halakhic concept of *heqdes* and the concept of a *waqf* was even more marked. The clearest illustration of this point is the fact that a Jew who wanted to establish such an endowment needed to have a pious intention (*qurbah*). Naḥshon, *Hanhagat ha-qehilah*, 242–43; Piamenta, *Dictionary*, 389.

14. See the appendix: “The Problem of the Synagogue *Waqf*”

15. The Talmud specifies that synagogues in cities (*krakhin*) were public property that could not be sold (BT *Megilah* 26), a position affirmed by Maimonides (*Mishneh Torah*, Sefer Ha-Ahavah, Hilkhot tefilah 11:16). See also Israel Poleyeff, “The Sale of a Synagogue,” *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society* 2, no. 1 (1982): 19–34.

16. Muḥammad Fārūq al-‘Akkām, “Des fondements de la propriété dans la jurisprudence musulmane: la mainmise sur les biens vacants (al-istilā ‘alā al-mubāh),” *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 79–80 (1996): 25–41.

17. Gamliel, *Bate hakneset*, 2:34–35. Islamic law concerning synagogues, wrote Richard Gottheil, “occasioned much pious fraud on the part of the Jews themselves.” Richard Gottheil, “An Eleventh-Century Document Concerning a Cairo Synagogue,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* (original series) 19 (1907): 467–539, see 490.

18. The Zaydī imām al-Murtaḍā (1363–1437) says that the Imām should destroy synagogues unless there is a benefit (*maṣlaḥah*) that justifies their continued existence (*Baḥr al-zakhkhār*, 5:462–63). *Dhimmi*s cannot rebuild what has been destroyed in places other than those where they were considered to have lived at the time of the Islamic conquests. (Yemen is not one of them.) The nineteenth-century jurist Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Shawkānī took the same position. *Nayl al-awṭār*, ed. Ṭāhā ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf Sa’d and Muṣṭafā Muḥammad al-Ḥawārī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhīrah, 1978), 9:318. On the matter of whether or not they may rebuild synagogues that have been destroyed, a commentator on the fifteenth-century *Sharḥ al-azhār* wrote that *dhimmi*s are allowed to do so, “even

in our lands.” *Sharḥ al-azhār*, 10:497n6. The twentieth-century Zaydī jurist Aḥmad b. al-Qāsim al-ʿAnsī also states that *dhimmīs* may rebuild destroyed synagogues. Aḥmad b. al-Qāsim al-ʿAnsī, *al-Tāj al-mudhhab li-aḥkām al-madhhab* (Ṣanʿāʾ: Maktabat al-yaman al-kubrā, 1947), 4:453.

On the problems that “new” synagogues posed to some Muslim jurists in North Africa, see Matthias B. Lehmann, “Islamic Legal Consultation and the Jewish-Muslim Convivencia: al-Wansharīṣī’s Fatwā Collection as a Source for Jewish Social History in al-Andalus and the Maghrib,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 6 (1999): 25–54, see 34–41; John O. Hunwick, “The Rights of Dhimmīs to Maintain a Place of Worship: A Fifteenth-Century Fatwā from Tlemcen,” *al-Qanṭara* 12, no. 1 (1991): 133–55, and Hunwick, “al-Mahīlī and the Jews of Tuwāt,” *Studia Islamica* 61 (1985): 155–83, see 167–68.

19. In 1668 Imām al-Mutawakkil Ismāʿīl destroyed most of Ṣanʿāʾ’s synagogues and sent its Jewish population, along with the rest of the Jewish population of Yemen, to Mawzaʾ, a town on the Red Sea coast, to await deportation to India. After this expulsion, called the “Mawzaʾ Exile” (*galut mawzaʾ*) in Jewish sources, the oldest synagogue in Ṣanʿāʾ, the Kanīs al-ʿulamāʾ (Midrash he-ḥakhamim) was converted into the “Mosque of the Expulsion” (Masjid al-jalā). A poem by the jurist Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Saḥūlī in praise of the expulsion, rendered in an ornate calligraphic frieze, adorns its walls. Serjeant and Lewcock, *Ṣanʿāʾ*, 392, 398–400; Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Ḥajrī, *Masājid Ṣanʿāʾ* (Ṣanʿāʾ: Wizārat al-maʿārif, 1941–42), 42; al-ʿAnsī, *al-Tāj al-mudhhab*, 4:454n1; Bernard Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam: The Legacy of Muhammad al-Shawkani* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 119. In 1762, following the fall of the Jewish grandee Sālim al-ʿIrāqī, Imām al-Mahdī ʿAbbās ordered the destruction of the synagogues of Ṣanʿāʾ. They were rebuilt in 1792. Serjeant and Lewcock, *Ṣanʿāʾ*, 394, 400–418.

20. Gamliel, *Bate hakneset*, 3:341, 346.

21. According to al-Jamal, al-Zubayrī’s appetite for bribes led him to prolong the synagogues controversy. Gamliel, *Bate hakneset*, 2:71–73. Imām Yaḥyā investigated his corruption but could not find witnesses willing to testify against him. *Ibid.*, 3:201. Al-Zubayrī lured a young *sayyidah* into his home in al-Rawḍah and raped her. Witnesses saw his crime, and Imām Yaḥyā had al-Zubayrī jailed. The imām’s wife questioned the girl, and she was exiled to Ḥūth. Luṭf al-Zubayrī died in prison, and nobody would accompany his body to the cemetery. *Ibid.*, 3:202.

22. Muḥammad Zabārah, *Nuzhat al-naẓar fī rijāl al-qarn al-rābiʿ ʿashar* (Ṣanʿāʾ: Markaz al-dirāsāt wa l-abḥāth al-yamaniyya, 1979), 491–93. On al-Zubayrī, see also ʿAbd al-Salām b. ʿAbbas al-Wajih, *A ʿlām al-muʿallifin al-zaydiyyah* (McLean, Va.: Imam Zaid bin Ali Cultural Foundation, 1999), 799; Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Shāmī, *Min al-adab al-yamanī* (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1974), 83.

23. On this movement within Zaydī jurisprudence, see Haykel, *Revival and Reform*, 10–12.

24. Gamliel, *Bate hakneset*, 1:329.

25. *Ibid.*, 2:34. Al-Jamal rendered this conversation in Hebrew, so Imām Yaḥyā may have said *waqf* when he intended the Hebrew term *heqdesh*.

26. *Ibid.*, 2:34.

27. *Ibid.*, 2:34–35.

28. Zabārah uses almost the same expression to describe Zayd al-Daylamī (1867–1947), the head of the Court of Appeals, that he had used to describe Luṭf al-Zubayrī: “He inclined toward Tradition and the preference for revelatory evidence.” Muḥammad Zabārah, *Nuzhat al-naẓar fī rijāl al-qarn al-rābi* ‘*ashar* (Ṣan’ā’: Markaz al-dirāsāt wa l-abḥāth al-yamaniyyah, 1979), 304–305. Al-Zubayrī, who, according to al-Jamal, was the chief agitator against the imām’s view, had received *ijāzah* from Qāḍī Ḥusayn al-‘Amrī. Ibid., 491–93. Zubayrī was one of the qāḍī’s son ‘Abdallāh’s teachers. Ibid., 375–76. ‘Abd al-Karīm Muṭahhar also received *ijāzah* from Ḥusayn al-‘Amrī and was related to him. Ibid., 358–60.

29. Al-Jamal wryly observes that Zayd al-Daylamī, one of the most vociferous critics of *ibāḥah* for synagogues, once ruled that a synagogue was public property. Gamliel, *Bate hakneset*, 2:300.

30. Yehudah Ratzhaby, ed., *Bo’i teman* (Tel Aviv: Afīqim, 1967), 193–228; Serjeant and Lewcock, *Ṣan’ā’*, 427–31; Piamenta, *Dictionary*, 418.

31. Gamliel, *Bate hakneset*, 2:283–84, 372–73.

32. Ibid., 1:332, 2:72.

33. By “*sharḥ al-tawrāh al-kabīr*” al-Jamal meant the Gemara. Ibid., 1:331n2.

34. Ibid., 1:330–31. Al-Jamal paraphrased the argument in the Gemara that synagogues in cities may not be sold.

35. Al-Jamal describes this man as an “attorney” (‘*orekh din*’).

36. Gamliel, *Bate hakneset*, 1:331.

37. Al-Jamal says that he heard about this conversation from Imām Yaḥyā’s sons ‘Alī, Ismā‘īl, and al-Qāsim. Ibid., 1:369.

38. Ibid., 1:371.

39. Ibid., 1:390.

40. Ibid., 1:394–95.

41. Ibid., 2:255n6.

42. See al-Jamal’s comments on this point in *ibid.*, 1:395, 2:255n6, 2:271n1.

43. Ibid., 1:413.

44. Ibid., 1:416.

45. Boaz Cohen, *Jewish and Roman Law: A Comparative Study* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1966), 2:728. I would like to thank Eli Alshech for this reference.

46. Gamliel, *Bate hakneset*, 3:164.

47. Ibid., 1:416–17.

48. Ibid., 3:164–65.

49. It is unclear from R. al-Jamal’s account whether this was the result of a ruling by either Imām Yaḥyā or Ḥusayn Abū Ṭālib or whether it was a compromise agreement reached independently by the two factions.

50. Dor De’ah stressed the importance of studying *halakhah* (the Gemara and Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*) and works of medieval Jewish philosophy (Se’adyah Gaon’s *Kitāb al-amānāt wa l-i’ṭiqādāt* and Maimonides’ *Dalālat al-ḥā’irīn*; Yosef Qāfiḥ, *Keta- vim*, (Jerusalem: ‘Amutat Yad Mahari Qafah, 1989–2001), 2:1036; Yosef Tobi, “Trumat ha-rav yosef qafih le-ḥeqer yahadut teman,” *Sefer zikaron le-rav yosef ben david qafih*, ed.

Zohar ʿAmar and Ḥananel Serri [Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2001], 117–31, see 125.

51. Gamliel, *Bate hakneset*, 2:69, 3:86, 307–308.

52. Ibid., 3:309n16.

53. Al-Jamal calls this place “al-Qāriyah.” Ibid., 2:338. In his *Inṣiqlopediyah le-ḥakhme teman* (Encyclopedia of the Sages of Yemen) (Bene Beraq: Makhon le-ḥeqer ḥakhme teman, 2001) (*sub* Moshe Maḍmūn), Moshe Gavra explains that this place was the village of “al-Qārrah” south of Ṣanʿā, which was a vacation spot for prominent rabbis from Ṣanʿā, including R. al-Jamal. The village contained two synagogues: one belonged to the ʿUzayrī clan, and the other was “public” (*ṣibori*) (352–53).

54. Gamliel, *Bate hakneset*, 2:338.

55. Libson, *Jewish and Islamic Law*, 172.

56. See Mark S. Wagner, “Jewish Mysticism on Trial in a Muslim Court: A *Fatwā* on the Zohar—Yemen 1914,” *Die Welt des Islams* 47, no. 2 (2007): 207–31.

57. Serjeant and Lewcock, *Ṣanʿā*, 93–96.

58. Gamliel, *Bate hakneset*, 2:72.

59. Haim Gerber, “*Ha-Yehudim ve-mosad ha-heqdes ha-muslimi (waqf) bi-imperiyah ha-ʿothmanit*,” *Sefunot* 17 (new series 2) (1983): 105–31; Ron Shaham, “Christian and Jewish ‘*waqf*’ in Palestine during the Late Ottoman Period,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 54, no. 3 (1991): 460–72; Miriam Hoexter, “*Waqf* Studies in the Twentieth Century: The State of the Art,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 4 (1998): 474–95.

60. Al-Subkī’s treatise on the construction and repair of churches and synagogues was apparently prompted by a dream he had in which a *shaykh* brought up the troubling issue of property made *waqf* for the support of a non-Muslim house of prayer. Seth Ward, “Construction and Repair of Churches and Synagogues in Islamic Law: A Treatise by Taqī al-Dīn ʿAlī b. ʿAbd al-Kāfi al-Subkī” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1984), 118–19n7; Moshe Gil, *Documents of the Jewish Pious Foundations from the Cairo Geniza* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 8–9; Antoine Fattal, *Les Statut Légal des Non-Musulmans en Pays d’Islam* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1958), 143; Muḥammad Qadrī Bāshā, *Du Wakf* (Cairo: Imprimerie Nationale, 1896), 49–53.

61. *Sharḥ al-azhār*, 8:173–4. A commentary adds: “Even if [he is an unbeliever] by incorrect interpretation” (*wa-law taʿwīlan*), meaning that Shāfiʿis and other non-Zaydis are also forbidden to establish *waqfs*.

62. Aḥmad b. al-Qāsim al-ʿAnsī adopted the same position in his twentieth-century manual of Zaydī law. *Al-Tāj al-mudhhab*, 3:282. Al-Jamal commented on this statement in *Bate hakneset*, 2:367.

63. *Baḥr al-zakhhār*, 4:153.

64. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Shawkānī, *al-Sayl al-jarrār al-mutadāffiq ʿalā ḥadāʾiq al-azhār*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣabḥī (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2000), 3:50.

65. Virtually the same argument is made by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah in his *Aḥkām ahl al-dhimmah*, ed. Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ (Beirut: Dār al-ʿilm li l-malāyīn, 1981), 1:301: “If [the unbelievers] establish a *waqf* among themselves and do not appeal to us for legal decisions or ask us for rulings on its legality there is no objection—its legality is the same as

that of their nullified contracts and marriage agreements (*'uqūdihim wa-ankihātihim al-fāsidadah*)."

66. Ibn Qudāmah relates that "one is not to investigate their matter or ask about their matter unless they make recourse [to Muslim judges] (*lā yabḥath 'an amrihim wa-lā yas'al 'an amrihim illā in ya'tūhum*)."

Gideon Libson, "Otonomiyah shipuṭit ve-peniyah le-'arkha'ot mi-šad bene he-ḥasut 'al pi meqorot muslimiyim bitqufat ha-ge'onim," in *The Intertwined Worlds of Islam: Essays in Memory of Hava Lazarus-Yafeh* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Institute of Asian and African Studies, Ben-Zvi Institute, and Bialik Institute), 334–92, see 346n37, 348n43.

67. Gamliel, *Bate hakneset*, 1:146–7, 3:287. This nineteenth-century case shows that the ambiguous status of synagogues in Ṣan'ā' as property played a role in disputes over their leadership before the emergence of the Dor De'ah reform movement in the twentieth century.

9

Jewish Mysticism in the Lands of the Ishmaelites

A Re-Orientation

RONALD C. KIENER

During the last quarter century, the discipline known as the history of Jewish mysticism has produced a significant mass of evidence indicating the importance of Islamic and Middle Eastern culture for the shaping of Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah. As a result of this international scholarly investigation, the foremost scholar in the field today, Moshe Idel of the Hebrew University, was able to declare in 1991: “Muslim culture is the primary source of influence upon Jewish mysticism.”¹ This pronouncement is a far cry from the state of the field only fifty years ago, when most eyes looked to Europe in order to provide narrative explanations for the history and development of Jewish mysticism. Thirty years ago, Marshall Hodgson noted this Eurocentric gaze, correctly attributing it to Gershom Scholem, the pioneering researcher of the twentieth century who bestowed on the field its credibility. Hodgson wrote in 1974: “Scholem’s magnificent *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* [published in 1942] is based largely on manuscripts from Italy and Germany, and hardly professes to say much of Judaism in Islamdom except where there were direct contacts—as with the exiles from Spain.”² Even as Hodgson penned this observation, some of Scholem’s contemporaries and disciples were beginning to widen the net, so to speak.³ Twenty-five years after Hodgson’s comment, and despite an enormous international effort to bring Jewish mysticism into the discourse of Middle Eastern religious history,

a vituperative scholarly exchange took place between Gil Anidjar and Moshe Idel, with Anidjar accusing the field of Jewish mysticism studies of a kind of Jewish Orientalism—either an intentional ignoring of Islamic contextualization, or a disgusted distancing from the entire issue of Islam. Idel, in turn, accused Anidjar of willful deceit in his tendentious characterization of the field and all but charged Anidjar—of course, only rhetorically—with libel against the field and against Idel in particular.⁴ Idel quite rightly pointed out that the field has come a long way; and yet, outside of the specialists' domain, Jewish mysticism seems still to be a phenomenon of European provenance. In the history of ideas, it is now widely acknowledged—thanks primarily to the work of Harry Austryn Wolfson—that medieval Jewish philosophy in the guise of Moses Maimonides or Judah Halevi cannot be properly understood without a deep appreciation of the intellectual culture of al-Kindi or Ibn Sina or Ibn Rushd. But medieval Jewish mysticism is often popularly portrayed as either a xenophobic or a slightly Christian-influenced religious movement. With that in mind, what I am attempting in this chapter is not simply to summarize the state of the field but to suggest that since so much of the history of Jewish mysticism takes place either in or on the periphery of the Lands of the Ishmaelites—to use a Jewish medievalism—we must rewrite the history of Jewish mysticism accordingly. A good bit of the work has been done piecemeal, and a new narrative that takes this research into account has yet to be written. I propose to lay out a preliminary case for such a reorientation, first by considering the geographical origins of the earliest forms of Jewish mystical activity, then by reviewing some of the classic cases of medieval Jewish mysticism, and finally by observing some premodern and latter-day trends.

Early Jewish Mysticism

Since Jewish communities had thrived in what is known as the Ancient Near East for more than a millennium before the Muslim conquests of the seventh century, and since the internal affairs of the Jews were of little concern to the new masters of the Muslim Middle East, it was only natural that the patterns and structures of Jewish life under Persians and Byzantines would persist into the Muslim era. Even if we discount the historicity of the conquest narratives as an imposition of ninth- or tenth-century historical wishful thinking onto a time of great upheaval, it seems from

the surviving Jewish literature that the Jews fared the transition to Muslim rule rather well. There was no great upheaval with the arrival of the Muslim conquerors and their subsequent Umayyad regime. Indeed, all the major Jewish communities survived intact, and all the major communal institutions—the rabbinic academies of Sura and Pumbedita, the institutions of the Gaonate and the Exilarchate—flourished. More important, what was taught in the Jewish academies was left untouched by the new regime. What was preached and inculcated by rabbis of Sassanid Iran and Byzantine Palestine continued to be preached and inculcated by rabbis of Muslim Iraq and Palestine.

So it should come as no surprise that the magical and mystical traditions of late antique Judaism, which had been promulgated for many centuries, should pass into what would henceforth be Middle Eastern Judaism. And this presumption is borne out by the data: the agglomeration of texts, archived magical papyri, amulets, and incantation bowls both before and after the Muslim conquest all attest to the popular survival of hoary Jewish magic and learned meditations, even as the ancient Hebrew and Aramaic formulae began to be peppered with Judeo-Arabic.⁵

Going back to Greek and Roman Palestine, there is solid textual evidence that some Jews, inspired by the fantastic descriptions of heaven found in the prophetic book of Ezekiel, had engaged in visionary tours of heaven, thereby encountering heretofore undisclosed secrets of the divine realm. Socially unorganized but fairly widespread, these early Jewish mystics pondered the mysteries of the celestial *heikhalot* (throne rooms) and meditated on the imagery of the heavenly *merkabah* (the divine chariot of Ezek. 5). Pseudepigraphical and anonymous texts recount these pneumatic celestial visitations, ascribed to both ancient biblical and legendary rabbinic figures. For over a thousand years, from Hasmonean times until well into the tenth century, these so-called merkabah texts were produced and recopied in the lands of eventual Islamic domination.

The merkabah homilies eventually consisted of detailed descriptions of multiple-layered heavens (usually seven in number), often guarded over by angels and encircled by flames and lightning. The highest heaven contains seven palaces (*heikhalot*), and in the innermost palace resides a supreme divine image (God's Glory or an angelic image) seated on a throne, surrounded by awesome hosts who sing God's praise.

The ascent texts are extant in four principal works, all redacted well after the third century but certainly before the ninth. These texts all recount

ascent experiences of legendary biblical or rabbinic figures, and many of them contain episodes that are repeated, sometimes in great detail, in either Christian or Islamic “tours of heaven.”

While throughout the era of merkabah mysticism the problem of creation was not of paramount importance, the treatise *Sefer Yeṣirah* (Book of Creation, hereafter SY) represents an attempt at cosmogony, tinged with a merkabah milieu. The proposals for dating this anonymous text have ranged anytime between the first and ninth centuries, and it is never cited until the tenth. It features a linguistic theory of creation in which God creates the universe by combining the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, along with the ten numerals, or *sefirot*.

Researchers David Halperin and Gordon Newby have done the most to recover hints of merkabah mysticism in early Islam. In his book *Faces of the Chariot*, Halperin has provided a fascinating appendix that recounts numerous reverberations of merkabah imagery in *tafsir* and *ḥadith* and possibly in the Qurʾan itself. More recently, Halperin has adduced a variety of striking parallels between *merkabah* accounts and Shiʿite descriptions of Muḥammad’s *miʿraj*.⁶ Newby in particular tried to situate variations of merkabah mysticism in the Hijaz environment of Muḥammad’s day. It should be argued here against the most astonishing claim these two have made; namely, that the Jews of the seventh-century Hijaz were “greatly interested in mysticism” and that Muḥammad practiced certain ritual acts which reeked of Jewish merkabah mystical practice, particularly with reference to the heavenly ascension of Muḥammad, the *miʿraj*.

It seems to me simple common sense that when we use the Qurʾan or *ḥadith* to infer as to the religious trends of the Arabian Jews, we ought to regard the results of our efforts with a healthy bit of skepticism. In many ways, a description of Arabian Judaism from Arabic and Islamic sources would be akin to describing first-century Rabbinic Judaism from the synoptic gospels.

With that in mind, we take the *ḥadith* and *tafsir* concerning merkabah-like practices in Muḥammad’s day as evidence of merkabah awareness in the third century AH, but not in the first. By the time Islam had settled into the lands of the great Jewish communities north of Arabia, merkabah became a real religious phenomenon worthy of Islamic interest, and it is not before the ninth century that these images first appear in the exegetical literature.

It is against this larger backdrop that we ought to mention the persistent assertion by a number of scholars of early Shi'ism, in particular Paul Kraus, of a notable similarity between the aforementioned merkabah cosmogonical text SY and the esoteric letter speculations found in eighth-century Shi'ite *ghulat* teachings. The entire matter has been thoroughly and positively recapitulated by Steven Wasserstrom.⁷ The most compelling comparison involves the central assertion in the SY that the three Hebrew letters *alef-mem-shin*, corresponding to the elements Air, Water, and Fire, constitute "primal" letters from which all other letters are derived, and the *ghulat* teaching that the three Arabic letters '*ayin-mim-shin*, corresponding to 'Ali, Muḥammad, and Salman Pak, constitute a primal hierarchy of divine hypostases. If we were to accept this comparison, then we would be forced to reject the more anterior proposals for the date of the SY's composition, which is something most contemporary scholars are hesitant to do. The assertion that the letter doctrine of the SY is derived from Kufan *ghulat* teachings may indeed be a bit of philological overreaching, as Yehuda Liebes forcefully argues.⁸ But if this connection could be affirmed, it would constitute another powerful bit of evidence for the Islamic background of early Jewish metaphysics.

Rather than begin the charted history of Jewish mysticism in the Middle East with seventh-century Hījaz, we should look to the ninth century CE, and we should look toward Baghdad.⁹ Four coinciding sets of data point to this later date: first, the many copied manuscripts of merkabah texts of Iraqi and Palestinian provenance, most dating no earlier than the ninth century; second, the emergence of Hebrew liturgical poetry, mainly in Palestine, and rarely earlier than the ninth century, that takes up merkabah themes and imagery; third, the occasional and recurring reports of Jewish visitors to Baghdadi Ṣufi sessions and their miraculous conversion to Islam;¹⁰ and fourth, the reports of either an Iraqi or Palestinian Jewish scholar, reputed to have traveled from Iraq to Italy, where he left ancient magical and mystical traditions in the possession of European Jews. These reports come in multiple and garbled versions and are scattered across many centuries, but the essence of the tradition is this: a sage traveled from Baghdad to Italy, and either by oral or textual means, transmitted esoteric teachings to an elite circle of European rabbinic figures who went on to found a mystical stream in the Rhineland area. One version of the story, recorded in a book written by Shem Tov ibn Shem Tov in fifteenth-century Spain, recounts the travels of a certain Rabbi Qashisha' (an

improbable name meaning “elder one”) from the Iraqi academy of Mata Meḥasya to Apulia, in the twelfth century. There Rabbi Qashisha’ taught from a small book that he had assembled, and the great mystic German rabbi, Judah the Pious, came from Corbeil to study at Rabbi Qashisha’s feet.¹¹ While there is no other record of such a travel on the part of Rabbi Judah the Pious, if the tradition were true, it would place the migration of Iraqi Jewish mysticism to Europe no earlier than the twelfth century, when Rabbi Judah the Pious lived.

An even earlier variation on this migration trope comes in the guise of a single mysterious Iraqi Jew who appears in a Hebrew poetic legend entitled “The Chronicle of Aḥima’aṣ” written in Italy in 1054.¹² Here we are told a similar tale: a Rabbi named Abu Aharon—otherwise identified as Aaron ben Samuel of Baghdad, a practitioner of magic and a teacher of merkabah traditions—visits Apulia in the ninth century. Rather than Rabbi Judah, this wondrous Abu Aharon teaches Judah’s ancestors, the scions of the rabbinic Kalonymus family. And indeed, some 350 years later a devoted student of R. Judah the Pious, no less than R. Eleazar of Worms, the last great light of the German Pietists, as these mystics are now called, and a descendant of the Kalonymus clan, records a detailed name-by-name seventeen-generation *isnad* of how the secrets of Abu Aharon passed through the Kalonymus family in order to reach him.

If only we could know what these secrets were!¹³ It is generally accepted that the secrets of Abu Aharon concerned the order and wording of the ritualized liturgy of the Jewish prayers, an esoteric lore which was one of the principal disciplines of the German Pietists. This is as much as R. Eleazar of Worms alludes to. But what these secrets were we do not today know. Certainly, it was in Iraq in the ninth and tenth centuries that the first prayer orders were composed: the *Siddurs* of Amram Gaon and Saadya Gaon. Could it be that Abu Aharon was the conduit whereby these orders came to Europe, enhanced with mystical interpretations?

Other reports of the migration of Jewish esotericists from the Middle East to Europe keep popping up in the few historical comments proffered by European kabbalists. For example, Rabbi Isaac ben Jacob Cohen of Soria, a mystic who wrote in the latter half of the thirteenth century, provides this firsthand account:

When I was in the great city of Arles, a master of this tradition showed me an extremely old booklet. Its handwriting was crude and

is different from our own. It was transmitted in the name of a great rabbi and gaon. They referred to him as Rabbi Maṣṣliaḥ. Now the venerable Gaon, our Rabbi Peḥaṭiah, was from the holy city of Jerusalem. And this booklet was brought by a great scholar and pietist known as Rabbi Gershom of Damascus. He hailed from Damascus and lived in Arles for approximately two years, and people there told stories about his great wisdom and wealth. He showed this booklet to the elder sages of that generation. I copied from it some things.¹⁴

If we cautiously back away from the specifics, what we are left with is this: the implantation of long-existent merkabah secrets to European Jewry came by way of the transplantation of Eastern lore through the migration of Middle Eastern Jews to Europe. Whether the legend of Abu Aharon is fact or trope, it seems reasonable to believe that it was not European Jews traveling to Muslim Iraq that resulted in the appearance of merkabah lore in Europe, but the reverse case: Jews from Iraq and Palestine brought heretofore unknown esoteric traditions to Europe.

So to sum up this first phase in the history of Jewish mysticism, we have the emergence of an esoteric lore, centered on the visionary ascent experience of the merkabah, which developed in the pre-Islamic Near East. As Halperin has shown, beginning in the ninth century, some Muslim writers utilized these traditions, particularly in expanding upon the tradition of Muḥammad's glorious *mi'raj*.¹⁵ In this case the dynamic of osmosis seems to point from Judaism to Islam, and traces of this flow can be found in early Muslim magical, alchemical, and arithmomantic sources.¹⁶ And it is quite possible that the forces of osmosis flowed in both directions, as Jews were situated in one of the most prominent early centers of Ṣūfī and Shi'ite activity, Baghdad and southern Iraq. Possibly of special significance are the comparisons drawn by Michael Sells between merkabah visionary accounts and the famous *mi'raj* of Abu Yazid al-Bisṭāmī, who died in 878, though far from Baghdad.¹⁷

Early Kabbalah

It is in the later half of the twelfth century that a new form of Jewish mysticism appears in Provence, a teaching that builds upon the merkabah lore but now adds a theosophic dimension that was foreign to the largely descriptive accounts of the charioteers. The first known literary artifact

that puts forth this new theosophic teaching is entitled the *Sefer ha-Bahir*, “The Book of Brilliance,” and it caused quite a stir in rabbinic circles in southern France in the third decade of the thirteenth century. This book, which is shot through with symbolic and Gnostic themes heretofore unknown in Jewish circles, centers around the revolutionary teaching that God’s mystery is made manifest through ten divine emanations, or *sefirot*, which constitute a cosmic tree, a symbolic matrix of hypostases that interact in a Gnostic pleroma of cosmic good and evil, and in their totality provide the mystic with knowledge of the divine Being. Additionally, the heretofore relatively unknown doctrine of metempsychosis finds a home in a Jewish text.

Gershom Scholem, the towering figure of twentieth-century scholarship in Jewish mysticism, devoted more than a few studies, including his groundbreaking doctoral dissertation, to this short and cryptic book. In endeavoring to uncover the historic sources for the *Bahir*, Scholem was struck by certain parallels between it and an ancient, now lost, book of merkabah magic, angelology, and demonology entitled *Sefer Raza Rabbah* (The Book of the Great Secret), mentioned and cited by Iraqi and Palestinian Jewish scholars in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries. First mentioned (and condemned) in the ninth century by the Qaraite Daniel al-Qumisi, the *Raza Rabbah* was also referred to in more glowing terms by the eleventh-century Rabbanite leader Hai Gaon of Baghdad. While it is unlikely that any of the newer theosophic themes of the *Bahir* can be located in the *Raza Rabbah*, it is clear that some of the magical passages of the *Bahir* derive from it. For Scholem, teachings of Iraqi provenance find their way into European Jewish mystical discourse. Scholem adopted the legendary pedigree for the *Bahir* found in a thirteenth-century secondhand account: “This book came from the Land of Israel to the old Pietists, the Sages of Germany, the kabbalists, and from there it appeared and reached some of the eminent scholars among the Rabbis of Provence, who were in pursuit of every kind of secret knowledge.”¹⁸ In Scholem’s detailed theory, the *Bahir* starts with Eastern magical and angelological traditions (possibly Abu Aharon?) transplanted to Italy, then to Germany, then to Provence, where it was finally redacted in the 1170s, and only then to Spain, where it is first cited by name in the 1230s. In pushing his theory of an Eastern proto-*Bahir*, Scholem also noted certain Arabisms to be found in the Hebrew style of one part of the *Bahir*, a discussion of the Hebrew vowels, which he asserts in typical understatement “are cause for

reflection.”¹⁹ Here is the most salient example: in asking about the significance of the Hebrew vowel *hireq*, the *Bahir* reports that it is an expression for burning: *u-ma’y mashma’ hireq, leshon soref* (“And what is the meaning of *hireq*? It is an expression for burning.”)²⁰ and this association of the word *hireq* with the word *burning* does not occur in Hebrew or Aramaic, but does work if one recalls that the Arabic word *haraqqa* means “burn.” Scholem maintained that while the *Bahir* was composed in Provence, some of its thematic and stylistic sources came from the East.

As a further embellishment of Scholem’s vague claim for Eastern origins for the *Bahir*, Ronit Meroz has recently proposed that a far more sizable portion of the *Bahir* than those parallels to the lost *Sefer Raza Rabbah* must be situated in Iraq of the ninth century or, at the very latest, the first half of the tenth century.²¹

Also recently, an interesting if implausible alternative to Scholem’s account for the origins of the *Bahir* has been offered by Michael McGaha, situating the text against the backdrop of contemporary Andalusian *Ṣufism*.²² McGaha rejects Scholem’s account for the history of the origins of the *Bahir*; rather than thinking of it as a Provencal text that found its way to Spain, McGaha believes that it was written in northeastern Spain “at the end of the twelfth or beginning of the thirteenth century, by an Arabic-speaking Andalusian refugee from Almohad persecution.”²³ This hypothesized author was under the influence of early *Ṣufi* theosophy, Gnosticism, and letter mysticism, not unlike that found in the near contemporary *Futuḥat al-Makkiyah* of Muḥyi Din Ibn al-‘Arabi. To take one example of McGaha’s evidence, we have the already mentioned notion that the ten divine hypostases are presented in the *Bahir* as the fruit of a cosmic tree, also referred to as the *ha-male’* (“the all,” the *pleroma*). We quote from §14 of the *Bahir*:

It is I who have planted this tree that the whole world may delight in it and with it. I have spanned in it the All, called it “All,” for on it depends the All and from it emanates the All; all things need it and look upon it and yearn for it, and it is from it that all souls flower.²⁴

Scholem took this imagery as evidence for an ancient heretical Judeo-syncretistic Gnostic source for the *Bahir*, though he could not explain exactly how this material reached a medieval author. Using a more levelheaded approach, McGaha turns to Ibn al-‘Arabi’s discussion of the *shajarat al-wujud* (the tree of existence):

He [God] is the Root, and we are the branch of the Root. The [divine] names are the bough of this tree—I mean the tree of existence—and we are identical with its fruit, or rather, He is identical with its fruit.²⁵

McGaha furthermore notes that the *Bahir's* frequent term for the *pleroma*, often symbolized by water imagery, is directly and terminologically related to Ibn al-ʿArabi's term *mala'*, also enveloped by water metaphors. That which prompted Scholem to engage in convoluted hypothesizing and surmises about ancient Gnostic sources, McGaha resolves with economical simplicity. Needless to say, the issue is far from resolved,²⁶ since both Scholem's and McGaha's theories rest on a good bit of speculation, but at the very least the argument for Islamic influences deserves further investigation. If Meroz's dating is accurate, then instead of looking to Andalusia, we should redouble our efforts to understand the impact of Şufism upon the Iraqi Jewish community of the ninth and tenth centuries and use those early segments of the *Bahir* as a test case.

The Thirteenth Century

The thirteenth century is the decisive one for the development of Jewish mysticism. During this century, at least three distinct Jewish mystical schools or movements emerge: (1) the so-called Spanish Kabbalah, constructed on the *Bahir's* revolutionary doctrine of the ten *sefirot* as emanations of God, culminating in the Bible commentary known as the *Sefer ha-Zohar* (or "Book of Splendor") written in central Spain in the late thirteenth century; (2) the so-called prophetic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia, the peripatetic Spaniard who traveled throughout the Mediterranean basin, including war-ravaged Palestine in 1260; (3) and the esoteric pietism of Abraham Maimuni, son of Maimonides, and his disciples, in Ayyubid Egypt. Each of these mystical traditions, some more than others, were the products of a robust interaction between Islamic and Jewish cultures. Let us start with the most obvious, the Egyptian-Jewish pietism of the Maimunis of Egypt, and then return to what seems the most distant, the Spanish Kabbalah of late thirteenth-century Christian Guadalajara.

Abraham Maimuni was the son and successor of the renowned Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, or as he is known in the West, Maimonides. Abraham

was Maimonides' only son, born in 1186, and upon the death of his father in 1204, at the tender young age of 18, Abraham inherited the position of *Nagid*, or *ra'is al-yahud*, the semiofficial leadership of Egyptian Jewry, a kind of counter-exilarchate established by the Shi'ite Faṭimids to offset the similarly entitled position in Sunni Baghdad.²⁷

Maimonides was a controversial figure whose work came under attack during his lifetime but even more ferociously after his death. He is most famous for two works: a massive legal codex, the *Mishneh Torah*, and a dense philosophical text, *Dalalat al-Ḥa'irin*, or "The Guide for the Perplexed." This latter work, though primarily an exegetical defense of a rationalist Aristotelian interpretation of the Bible, lent itself to many interpretations, and its concluding section, which discusses the concept of the "Perfected Man" and the goal of the pious life, to "persist" in God's presence, touches on themes that were current in Islamic mysticism.²⁸ It is therefore not surprising to learn of the Ṣūfī master Ḥasan ibn Hud in Damascus in the thirteenth century, who taught his students from the *Guide*.²⁹

Whatever the interpretation, Maimonides' work generated a bitter internal controversy amongst Jewish intellectuals. Some thought his work too daring, too threatening. It was during one phase of this controversy in the thirteenth century that Abraham wrote a book which served as a defense of his father's legacy. This book is entitled *Kifayat al-'Abidin* ("The Complete Guide for the Pious"), which has been compared in structure and content to al-Ghazali's *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*.³⁰ Only a portion of the *Complete Guide* survives, but if we extrapolate from the extant portion, it was probably three times as long as his father's original philosophical work. Goitein, one of the principal researchers of this Egyptian pietist tradition, says of the *Kifayat al-'Abidin*: "It united, in a unique combination, the three great religious elements of the Judaeo-Islamic culture of the High Middle Ages: religious law, which pervaded all aspects of life with its innumerable minutiae; ethical pietism, which gave meaning and significance to all the injunctions of the Law; and finally, the spirit of Greek philosophy, which brought system, order, and lucid reasoning into the enormous mass of religious traditions."³¹ The work is a strenuous defense of his father's great writings, both the legal code and the philosophical treatise. Ferocious in his defense, Abraham maintains that the ascetic and pietistic turn he provides to his father's system is precisely what his father

passed down to him, and that the classical texts of Judaism are encoded with an esoteric set of secrets which signal this pietist turn. What is striking to any student of Şufism in the *suluk* of Abraham is that he makes the regular calls for *zuhd*, “asceticism” in the religious life of his people, and in doing so he specifically praises the practices of the now widely known urban Cairene Şufis. He in fact bemoans the present-day loss of numerous ascetic practices, which he attributed to the ancient biblical prophets, and bewails the fact that in his day, these pious rituals are practiced by the Şufis of Islam and not by the true inheritors of the Prophets, the Jews.

For example, concerning the practice of donning ragged cloaks during initiation into the pietist group, a practice not common amongst the Jewish masses then or now, Abraham writes:

You know that there is to be found amongst these Şufis of Islam (*al-mutaşawwifun min al-islam*)—because of the sins of Israel—the ways of the ancient holy Israelites, which is not to be found or is little found amongst our present-day community.³²

This lachrymose theme is repeated with a variety of specific Şufi-like practices praised by Abraham, including nocturnal prayer vigils, the need for isolation and tears in prayer, and subsistence on alms.

Unfortunately, since the portion of Abraham’s treatise dealing with *wuşul*, the theology and doctrine, is no longer extant, it is impossible to more precisely place Abraham into a particular Şufi system. We know he admired the Şufis and thought many of their practices were worthy of emulation, and we further know from the work of Paul Fenton that his pietist prescription survived for a few generations in upper-class Egyptian Jewry, creating a short-lived elitist movement that may have drawn from refugees or the descendants of refugees from the Almohad persecutions of Spain.³³ Ultimately, Abraham’s way failed, and his reforms and the pietist movement he championed did not survive much past the early fifteenth century, if we are to accept Fenton’s assertion that David b. Joshua b. Abraham (who died c. 1415) represents the last link in this Maimonidean pietist circle.³⁴ It was during David b. Joshua’s reign as Nagid that he was presented with a plaintive request by the wife of Başir, the bellmaker, to go after her wayward husband, now infatuated with the mystical fraternity of the Şufi master Yusuf al-Kurani, a thirteenth-century preacher of the *tariqah* of al-Junayd. This touching letter indicates the allure that Şufism held for Jews in fourteenth-century Cairo:

The maidservant the wife of Baṣir the bellmaker kisses the ground and submits that she has on her neck three children because her husband was completely infatuated with [life on] the mountain with al-Kurani, in vain and to no purpose, a place where there is no Torah, no prayer, and no mention of God's name in truth. He goes up the mountain and mingles with the mendicants, although these have only the semblance, but not the essence, of religion.

The maidservant is afraid there may be there some bad man who may induce her husband to forsake the Jewish faith, taking with him the three children. The maidservant almost perishes because of her solitude and her search after food for the little ones. It is her wish that our Master go after her husband and take the matter up with him according to his unfailing wisdom, and what the maidservant entreats him to do is not beyond his power nor the high degree of his influence.³⁵

We do not know how the Nagid responded to this plea, but it is quite possible that the bellmaker Baṣir had crossed a communal line, and it was precisely because of the Nagid's sympathy for Ṣūfism that the abandoned wife turned to her last hope.

It is by no means the case that with the close of this group, the interplay of Ṣūfism and Middle Eastern Judaism came to an end. The Cairo Genizah, that great literary storehouse of discarded manuscripts found a century ago in the ruins of Cairo's Ben Ezra synagogue, has given forth dozens of texts in Judeo-Arabic and in Hebrew of either Ṣūfi-influenced treatises for a Jewish audience, or else Hebrew transcriptions of Ṣūfi classics, from al-Ḥallaj to al-Ghazali to al-Suhrawardi to Ibn al-'Arabi.³⁶ If ever there was a syncretistic full-fledged Jewish Ṣūfism, it was during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Egypt.

A second individual of this thirteenth century, of far less glorious lineage, also illustrates signs of Ṣūfi impress. We now turn to Abraham Abulafia, the itinerant holy man and Messianic pretender, who—unlike most of the key figures in the history of Jewish mysticism—never received rabbinic ordination and never served as a communal leader. Born in Saragossa, he traveled to the far-flung reaches of the Mediterranean, a student and teacher sporadically of philosophers and mystics alike. In fact, he was once run out of town in Comino, near Malta, for his improprieties. Imprisoned and condemned to death by the Vatican in 1280 for presenting

himself to Pope Nicholas III as the Messiah, his life was spared, and he traveled on, spreading throughout the eastern Mediterranean his unique mystical system, the so-called prophetic Kabbalah. Like the *Nagid* Abraham Maimuni, Abraham Abulafia imagined himself a devoted disciple of Moses Maimonides, and over the course of his life Abulafia wrote (all his writings are in Hebrew) three progressively more detailed full commentaries to the *Guide of the Perplexed*.

As I have described elsewhere,³⁷ Abraham Abulafia has been a particularly perplexing figure for modern scholars. Since most of his voluminous writings remained in manuscript form until very recently, he was relatively unknown in learned pious circles, and when the first *Wissenschaft des Judenthums* scholars encountered his writings in the nineteenth century, there was much excitement and controversy. The first scholar to encounter Abulafia in the Munich Hebrew manuscript collection of the Bavarian State Library, Meyer Heinrich Landauer, concluded that Abulafia was nothing less than the author of the *Sefer ha-Zohar*, the aforementioned towering work of the so-called Spanish Kabbalah. Needless to say, this is an attribution that is no longer advanced. Nevertheless, Gershom Scholem devoted an entire chapter of his aforementioned *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* to Abulafia, ignoring many other key thirteenth-century players. Today Moshe Idel has become the leading Abulafia scholar, devoting numerous volumes to the study of this enigmatic mystic, and has placed emphasis on Islamic influences upon the Abulafian tradition.³⁸

Neither a pietist nor a theosophist, Abulafia claimed that his interpretation of Maimonides, and the systematic mystical program it generated, took over where the merkabah visionaries and the sefirotic topographers left off. His mysticism was a mysticism of Maimonidean psychology, where the soul through a particular kind of prescribed meditation is led to the divine effulgence and to a deathlike experience of utter unity with the Divine Being. The goal of the mystical path was to untie the knots which bound the soul to the material world and to thereby achieve a prophetic ecstasy, at which moment the mystic perceives himself to be one with God.

From the beginning, modern scholars have noted a Şufi-like tinge to much of Abulafia's teachings, and it is clear in his Hebrew writings that he was at the very least familiar with, if not conversant in, Arabic religious terminology. Two features immediately point to a Şufi backdrop to

Abulafia's system: (1) among his writings are first-person accounts of mystical meditations and "manuals of discipline," step-by-step procedurals for practicing a combined aural and visual meditation on the divine names and the Hebrew letters; and (2) his assertion that the goal of his mysticism is nothing less than unity with God, a deathlike state in which the mystic feels *hu' hu'* ("he is He"), an exact replication of al-Hallaj's expression of *unio mystica*. As to the first point: one is hard pressed to find in Jewish mystical literature outside of the ancient merkabah texts any first-person accounts of mystical transport, and the genre of "manuals of discipline," so noteworthy in Šufi *adab* literature, is one of the distinguishing features of Abulafia and his followers. As to the second point: the goal of the mystic way in the theosophical Kabbalah of Spain is rarely described so boldly as union with or even death unto God; instead, the Spanish mystics of the *sefirot* (and all their latter-day followers) speak at most of *devequt*, "adhesion" or a close drive-by acquaintance with God.

Idel has referred to Abulafia's mysticism as "the Kabbalah of Byzantium," for Abulafia had few if any followers in Spain, and not a single Abulafian treatise (by either master or disciple) was ever composed there. All his writings were composed in the eastern Mediterranean, and his successor school flourished for a time in Palestine. No doubt Abulafia's short visit to Acre in 1260 had something to do with the success of his school in the land of Israel, and a number of his disciples in the Galilee went on to produce writings even more pronouncedly integrating the master's teachings with Šufi traditions. One student in particular, R. Natan b. Sa'adya, wrote a remarkable short tract entitled *Sha'arey Šedeq* (Gates of Justice) that contains numerous references to Islamic spiritual practices.³⁹ For example, in this text, which is replete with first-person descriptions of complicated nocturnal meditations on the name of God, we find:

I . . . have probed my heart for ways of grace to bring about spiritual expansion and I have found three ways of progress to spiritualization: the vulgar, the philosophic, and the Kabbalistic way. The vulgar way is that which, so I learned, is practiced by Ishmaelite ascetics. They employ all manner of devices to shut out from their souls all "natural forms," every image of the familiar, natural world. Then, they say, when a spiritual form, an image from the spiritual world, enters their soul, it is isolated in their imagination and intensifies the imagination to such a degree that they can determine beforehand

that which is to happen to us. Upon inquiry, I learned that they recite (*zokhrim*) the Name of God in the Ishmaelite language, and they say “Allah.” I investigated further and I found that when they pronounce these letters, they direct their thought completely away from every possible “natural form,” and the very letters ALLAH and their diverse powers work upon them. They are carried off into a trance without realizing how, since no Kabbalah has been transmitted to them. This removal of all natural forms and images from the soul is called by them “effacement” (*meḥiqah*).⁴⁰

This last reference, to the Ṣufi doctrine of *maḥw*, is a perfectly plausible and accurate rendering of the concept, and the description of the *dhikr* is also exact.

Other Palestinian disciples of Abulafia, including Isaac b. Samuel of Acre, who then traveled to Spain, mix the master’s teaching with Ṣufi ideas. Idel hypothesizes that the Palestinian mystics may have already been engaged in a Ṣufi-Jewish syncretism à la Abraham Maimuni, and with the arrival of Abulafia, they found a master whose teaching fit their own *tariqah*.⁴¹

In a survey of Jewish mysticism in the Middle East, it may be far afield to now turn to Reconquista Spain to look for signs of Islamic influence on the so-called Spanish Kabbalah. The one sustained modern attempt to do so, by Ariel Bension, was not much more than vaguely suggestive of such connections.⁴² Yet the so-called *convivencia* between Christians, Jews, and Arabs in Castille and Spain makes the gaze worthwhile.

Drawing on the teachings first articulated in the *Sefer ha-Bahir*, a distinctively theosophical and theurgical form of Jewish mysticism sprang forth first in Provence; then in Northeast Spain, centered in Gerona; and finally in central Spain—all in the thirteenth century. Unlike the unknown author of the *Bahir*, we know many of the key figures of this mystical branch and its various subbranches by name, and we know that at least a handful of them were literate in Arabic, which is not surprising given the Mozarabic character of Spain at this time.

Much has been written recently on the influence of Islamic neo-Platonism for the development of the sefirotic symbolism of the Spanish Kabbalah. At least there are striking parallels that cannot easily be dismissed.⁴³ Furthermore, beyond the broad doctrinal comparisons, there are many folkloric, terminological, and literary themes in Spanish

Kabbalah, particularly as expressed in the *Sefer ha-Zohar*, which spark certain questions in the comparative religionist. To take but one example of a literary theme, the appearance in a late portion of the *Zohar* corpus of a theory of a fourfold interpretation of scripture is strikingly similar to Shi'ite and Şufi approaches to scriptural exegesis, even more so than it is to Christian text-theory.⁴⁴ Or, to take a terminological example noted over a hundred years ago by Steinschneider, the imagery of "a donkey bearing books" (*ḥamor nose' sefarim*) found in *Zohar Ḥadash* 101c bears a striking resemblance to the image of Qur'an 62:5: *al-ḥimar yaḥmilu asfaran*.⁴⁵

On the doctrinal level, the myriad theories of divine emanation and the differing and competing locations of the Divine Will and Intelligence in these myriad systems all point to a fervid intellectual climate in which precise influences are difficult to determine. Scholem, who studied Arabic in Basle as a young Orientalist, was first to suggest Islamic phenomenological parallels, but ultimately it has been others who have done the philological spadework regarding Islam. In particular, some of the obscure details of Isma'ili cosmology seem to reverberate in certain thirteenth-century Kabbalistic theories of the sefirotic world, and here it is Israeli scholars like Sarah Heller-Wilensky, Yehuda Liebes, Amos Goldreich, and Moshe Idel who have done most of the work. Islamic neo-Platonism comes in many guises, and it may be just as reasonable to attribute these similarities to the common denominator of the Long Recension of the Theology of Aristotle, which was rendered into Hebrew, as it is to look into the *Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Şafa'* (which was also partially rendered into Hebrew), or al-Kirmanî, or the neo-Platonic writers of Ishraqi and Andalusian Şufism.

This study is not intended to thoroughly review the Islamic context for the massive *Sefer ha-Zohar*, which could easily become a book-length effort. Suffice it to point out two important facts concerning the *Zohar*: (1) as a matter of historical documentation, the principal author of the *Zohar*—or alternatively, the lead sage of the circle that produced the bulk of the *Zohar*—was familiar with Islam in Spain;⁴⁶ and (2) the extant *Zohar*, a massive anthology of diverse literary pieces in three volumes that runs over 1,600 pages, contains numerous Arabisms, doctrinal affinities to Şufi teachings,⁴⁷ and interpretations of rituals and symbols in a Şufic key.⁴⁸ Therefore it may prove worthwhile to view this anthology, and the so-called Spanish Kabbalah from which it sprang, as emerging from within an Islamicate context.

Conclusion

There was much Jewish mysticism after the thirteenth century, and a good deal of it continued to take place in the lands of the Ishmaelites. Kabbalah took root throughout the Mediterranean, and there was much Kabbalistic literature (some of it in Judeo-Arabic) in North Africa, Palestine, and Syria well into the eighteenth century.⁴⁹ The famous mystical confraternity of sixteenth-century Safed occurred under Ottoman domain, and many of the Safed circle moved on to Damascus. The seventeenth-century mystical messiah Sabbetai Şevi, whose messianic mission culminated in apostasy to Islam, conducted his most successful campaign in Egypt, Turkey, and Palestine.⁵⁰ Well-documented is the fact that a small number of Sabbatians followed their messiah into the religion of Ishmael, forming the crypto-Muslim sect of the Dönmeh. This group reportedly survived in Turkey until the twentieth century and periodically arises in public discourse as the source for intriguing conspiracy theories in modern Turkish politics.

It is our modest hope to have persuaded the reader with these selected but highly representative examples that a new accounting of the history of Jewish mysticism is in order, one that places key historical developments in the narrative of Jewish mysticism within an Islamicate and Middle Eastern environment. Future recountings of the historical sweep of the many streams of Jewish mysticism will have to situate them in their proper setting—the lands of the Ishmaelites.

Notes

1. Moshe Idel, "Jewish Mysticism and Muslim Mysticism," *Maḥanayyim* 1 (1991): 33 (Hebrew).

2. Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 2:202n1.

3. Scholem himself made significant contributions to the study of Jewish mysticism in Islamic lands. For example, Gershom Scholem, "Sifro ha-'Aravi shel R. Yosef Ibn Waqar 'al ha-Qabbalah u-ve-Filosafiah," *Kiryat Sefer* 20 (1943–44): 162–153.

4. See the exchange between Gil Anidjar, "Jewish Mysticism Alterable and Unalterable: On Orienting Kabbalah Studies and the 'Zohar' of Christian Spain," *Jewish Social Studies* 3 (1996): 89–157, and Moshe Idel, "Orienting, Orientalizing, or Disorienting the Study of Kabbalah: 'An Almost Absolutely Unique' Case of Occidentalism," *Kabbalah* 2 (1997): 13–47.

5. See Shaul Shaked, "Medieval Jewish Magic in Relation to Islam: Theoretical Attitudes and Genres," in *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication, and Interaction: Essays in Honor of William M. Brinner*, ed. B. Hary, J. Hayes, and F. Astren (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), 97–109.
6. David Halperin, "Hekhalot and Mi'raj: Observations on the Heavenly Journey in Judaism and Islam," in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, ed. J. Collins and M. Fishbane (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 265–88.
7. Steven Wasserstrom, "Sefer Yeşira and Early Islam: A Reappraisal," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3 (1993): 1–30.
8. Yehuda Liebes, *Torat ha-Yeşirah shel Sefer Yeşirah* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 2000), 233–35.
9. Paul Fenton, "Judaism and Sufism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, ed. D. Frank and O. Leaman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 201–17.
10. Abu Ḥamid al-Ghazali, *Iḥya' 'Ulum al-Din* (Beirut, n.d.), 2:294.
11. Shem Tov ibn Shem Tov, *Sefer ha-Emunot* (Ferara, 1556) 4:14.
12. *The Chronicle of Aḥima' aš*, ed. Benjamin Klar (Jerusalem: Tarshish, 1974) (Hebrew).
13. Israel Weinstock and Gershom Scholem traded arguments over the "secrets" of Abu Aharon in *Tarbiz* 32 (1962/63). Weinstock claimed he had found a text that contained the secrets, and Scholem argued that Weinstock was misled.
14. Published by G. Scholem, *Mada'ey ha-Yahadut* 2 (1927): 248–9. See Joseph Dan, ed., and Ronald Kiener, trans., *The Early Kabbalah* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 169f.
15. Michael Sells has drawn useful parallels between merkabah visionary accounts and the famous *mi'raj* of Abu Yazid al-Bisṭami, who died in 878, though far from Baghdad. See Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Mi'raj, Poetic, and Theological Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 357n65. Bension suggested such a dynamic (specifically concerning the doctrine of paradise and hell) in his impressionistic *The Zohar in Moslem and Christian Spain* (1932; repr., New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1974), 48.
16. Yair Tzoran, "Magic, Theurgy, and the Science of Letters in Islam and Its Parallels in Jewish Literature," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 18 (1996): 19–62 (Hebrew). This osmotic dynamic also flowed from Judaism to early Eastern Christian mysticism. See Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 9–22.
17. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 357n65.
18. Shem Tov b. Shem Tov, *Sefer ha-Emunot*, 94a, citing Isaac b. Jacob Cohen of Soria.
19. Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 56n12.
20. *The Book Bahir: An Edition Based on the Earliest Manuscripts*, ed. D. Abrams (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 1994), 133, §28.
21. Ronit Meroz, "On the Time and Place of Some of Sefer ha-Bahir," *Daat* 49 (2002): 135–80 (Hebrew).
22. Michael McGaha, "The *Sefer ha-Bahir* and Andalusian Sufism," *Medieval Encounters* 3 (1997): 20–57.

23. Ibid., 31.
24. *The Book Bahir*, 125.
25. William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 100, translating *al-Futuḥat al-Makkiyah*, ed. U. Yaḥia (Beirut, n.d.), 3:315.11.
26. Alternatively, Wolfson argues a Jewish-Christian source lies behind this image. See Elliot Wolfson, "The Tree That Is All: Jewish-Christian Roots of a Kabbalistic Symbol in *Sefer ha-Bahir*," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3 (1993): 31–76.
27. Paul Fenton, "Abraham Maimonides (1186–1237): Founding a Mystical Dynasty," in *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership in the Thirteenth Century*, ed. M. Idel and M. Ostrow (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1998), 127–54.
28. Jose Faur, *Homo Mysticus: A Guide to Maimonides's Guide for the Perplexed* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999).
29. Ignaz Goldziher, "Ibn Hud, the Mohammedan Mystic, and the Jews of Damascus," *JQR* o.s. 6 (1894): 218–20.
30. Aviva Shusman, "The Muslim Sources of Rabbi Abraham Maimuni's Book *Kitab Kifayat al-ʿAbidin*," *Tarbiz* 55 (1985–86): 229–50 (Hebrew).
31. Shlomo Dov Goitein, "A Treatise in Defence of the Pietists by Abraham Maimonides," *JJS* 16 (1965): 105.
32. Abraham Maimonides, *The Highways of Perfection*, ed. S. Rosenblatt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1938), 2:266.
33. Obadyah Maimonides, *The Treatise of the Pool: al-Maqala al-Ḥawḍiyya* (London: Octagon Press, 1981).
34. See Paul Fenton's edition of *al-Murshid ila al-Tafarrud wa'l-Murfiḍ ila al-Tajarrud* (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1997); Fenton, *Deux traités de mystique juive* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1987).
35. S. D. Goitein, "A Jewish Addict to Sufism in the Time of Nagid David II Maimonides," *JQR* 44 (1953–54): 37–49.
36. A few examples will suffice: see Hartwig Hirschfeld, "The Arabic Portion of the Cairo Genizah at Cambridge," *JQR* o.s. 15 (1902–1903): 167–81, esp. 176–77, 180–81 (Hallaj); H. Hirschfeld, "A Hebraeo-Sufic Poem," *JAOS* 49 (1929): 168–73 (al-Ghazali); Franz Rosenthal, "A Judaeo-Arabic Work under Sufic Influence," *HUCA* 5 (1940): 433–84 (al-Suhrawardi). See Fenton, *Pool*, notes 10–15; Fenton, "Les traces d'Al-Ḥallag, martyr mystique de l'Islam, dans la tradition juive," *Annales Islamologique* 35 (2001): 101–127; Fenton, "Two Akbari Mss. in Judeo-Arabic" (Hebrew), in *Beyn 'Ever le-'Arav*, ed. Y. Tobi (Tel Aviv: Reubven Mass, 2004), 82–94 (Ibn al-ʿArabi).
37. Ronald Kiener, "From *Ba'al ha-Zohar* to Prophet to Ecstatic: The Vicissitudes of Abulafia in Contemporary Scholarship," in *Gershom Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism: 50 Years After*, ed. P. Schäfer and Y. Dan (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1993), 145–59.
38. Moshe Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), index s.v. "Sufism."
39. This book's author was unknown until recently. See now Moshe Idel, "R. Natan ben Sa'adya Harar: Ba'al Sefer Sha'arey Sedeq ve-Hashpa'ato be-Ereṣ Yisra'el," *Shalem* 7 (2001): 47–58.

40. *Sefer Sha'arey Sedeq*, ed. Yosef Parush (Jerusalem: Shaare Ziv, 1999), 21.
41. Idel, *Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 91–96.
42. Bension, *The Zohar in Moslem and Christian Spain*. See Fenton, “Two Akbari Mss,” 82n4.
43. See Shlomo Pines, “Shi'ite Terms and Conceptions in Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980): 165–251, esp. 243–47; Moshe Idel, “Ha-Sefirot she-me-'al ha-Sefirot,” *Tarbiz* 51 (1981–82): esp. 270n168; Amos Goldreich, “Mi-Mishnat Hgug ha-'Iyyun: 'Od 'al ha-Meqorot ha-Efshariyyim shel ha-Ahdut ha-Shavah,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987): 141–56.
44. See Ronald Kiener “The Image of Islam in the *Zohar*,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 8 (1989): 45*n5.
45. Ibid., 45–46*nn7–10.
46. Kiener, “Image of Islam.”
47. See Ronald Kiener, “Ibn al-'Arabi and the Qabbalah: A Study of Thirteenth-Century Iberian Mysticism,” *Studies in Mystical Literature* 2 (1982): 26–52.
48. Paul Fenton, “The Symbolism of Ritual Circumambulation in Judaism and Islam—Comparative Study,” *Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Thought* 6 (1997): 355f.
49. A good example would be Joseph b. Abraham Ibn Waqar of the fourteenth century. See Georges Vajda, *Recherches sur la philosophie et la Kabbale dans la pensée juive du Moyen Age* (Paris: Mouton, 1962), and most recently Paul Fenton's edition of *Sefer Shorshey ha-Qabbalah* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2004).
50. Paul Fenton, “Shabbetay Sebi and His Muslim Contemporary Muhammed an-Niyāzi,” *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times* 3 (1988): 81–88.

SECTION II

Scientific, Professional, and Cultural Pursuits

10

Al-Khwarizmi's Mathematical Doctrines in Ibn-Ezra's Biblical Commentary

MICHAEL KATZ

In the introduction to his Hebrew translation of *Ibn al-Muthanna's Commentary on the Astronomical Tables of al-Khwarizmi* (780–845), Rabbi Abraham Ibn-Ezra (1089–1164) writes:

... קם חכם גדול בישמעאל יודע סוד חכמת החשבון וחכמת העתים... וזה החכם היה מחמד בן מוסי אלכואריזמי. וכל חכמי הערבים שבימים האלה כופלים וחולקים ומוציאים השורש ככתוב בספר החכם... והוא הוציא כל מעשה הלוחות בדרך אחרת קלה על התלמידים שהיא שוה באחרונה למעשה כנכה החכם מהאינדיאה רק לא נתן טעם לדברים.

[There arose a great scholar in Ishmael who knew the secret of the wisdom of reckoning and the wisdom of times . . . and this scholar was Muhammad ibn-Musa al-Khwarizmi. And all Arab scholars nowadays multiply and divide and extract the root as is written in the scholar's book . . . and he brought out all the tables' work in another way, easy for the students, which is equal in the end to the work of Kanka the Hindu scholar, but he gave no reason for the words.]

Ibn-Ezra is best known as one of the leading biblical commentators in the Judaic tradition. But in the wide spectrum of his writings we also find poetry, science, linguistics, philosophy, and mathematics. Specifically, mathematics is thoroughly and systematically studied in two books by Ibn-Ezra—*Sefer ha-Eḥad* (Book of the Unit) and *Sefer ha-Mispar* (Book of the

Number). The influence of the great ninth-century scholar Muhammad al-Khwarizmi is manifest in these books. Al-Khwarizmi's impact is also noticeable in at least two other arithmetical manuscripts (in Hebrew and Latin) that have recently been attributed (not unreservedly) to Ibn-Ezra.¹ Arguably, Ibn-Ezra was one of the first to convey to Europe the ideas of al-Khwarizmi and with them certain fundamental doctrines of arithmetic.²

Muhammad ibn-Musa al-Khwarizmi was a scholar in Caliph al-Mamun's celebrated "House of Wisdom" in ninth-century Baghdad. He wrote extensively on mathematics and astronomy, and some of his writings were translated from Arabic into Latin, to be used as textbooks in schools throughout Europe from the twelfth century if not before. His best-known book is *Kitab al-Ḥisab al-Jabr w'al-Muqabala* (Book of Calculus of Completion and Balancing). The term *algebra* was coined from *al-Jabr* and the term *algorithm* from *al-Khwarizmi*. Some scholars³ maintain that in writing this book al-Khwarizmi was influenced by (a translation of) a Hebrew manuscript entitled *Mishnat ha-Midot* (Study of Measures, by a mysterious Rabbi N). Other scholars⁴ disagree, and they are probably right. But that discussion is beyond the scope of the present essay.

Another well-known book of al-Khwarizmi is *Kitab al-Ḥisab al-Hindi* (Book of Hindu Calculus), bringing to the Arab world, and later to Europe, some basic ideas of Hindu mathematicians. Also worth noting here is al-Khwarizmi's *Istiqraj Tariq al-Yahud* (Treatise on the Jewish Calendar), where he discusses the nineteen-year cycle of the Hebrew calendar as well as the specific dates of Rosh ha-Shana (Jewish New Year) and several other Jewish festivals.

What we want to show in this essay is that al-Khwarizmi's fundamental principles were utilized by Ibn-Ezra not only in his mathematical writings but also, in a subtle yet substantial manner, in his biblical commentary. This is most clearly revealed in his extensive discussion of the Holy Name in chapter 3 of the book of Exodus. And this will be the focus of our attention in the present essay.

The Holy Name

The story of the first encounter between Moses and God is often devoutly rehearsed and seldom fully understood. Perhaps hardest to understand are the verses dealing with God's name. We hear God speaking to Moses

from the burning bush, ordering him to deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Moses at first maintains that he is unfit for the job, but God insists that he should do it. Then we read:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה אֲנִכִּי בֹא אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתִּי
 לָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם שְׁלַחְנִי אֲלֵיכֶם וְאָמְרוּ לִי מַה שְּׁמוֹ מַה
 אֹמֵר אֵלַיִהֶם: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה אֲהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה
 וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲהִיָּה שְׁלַחְנִי אֲלֵיכֶם
 (שמות ג', י"ג-י"ד).

[And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Isra-el and shall say unto them The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Isra-el, I AM hath sent me unto you. (Exodus 3:13-14)]

These bracketed lines are taken exactly as they are, including capitals and punctuations, from the Winston edition of the King James Version. The key words here are EHYEH ASHER EHYEH (I AM THAT I AM) and then just EHYEH (I AM). In various other English translations we have "I will be what I will be" (or "I shall be what I shall be") and then "I will be" (or "I shall be").

The immediate question arising here is—Did Moses get an answer to his query? More than a few scholars and commentators maintain that he did not. God said to him—I am who I am and you needn't know my name. The Lord refused to divulge His name. The reason might be that knowing a name entails having a measure of domination. In the book of Genesis, Adam is called upon to give names to animals, so as to signify his domination of the animal kingdom.

Other commentators (probably the majority) hold that Moses did get a definite answer to his question. The repetition at the end of verse 14 of just the word *Ehyeh* ("*Ehyeh* hath sent me unto you") means that this ("I am" or "I will be" or "I shall be") is in fact God's name as He gave it to Moses. The idea is that God's name signifies the very essence of Being (Existence). Indeed, closely related to the word *Ehyeh*, in root and meaning, is the word *Havaiah* (Being; Existence; Creation), which in turn is closely related to the ineffable Hebrew name of the Lord—Jehovah in English.

Ibn-Ezra's Approach

Ibn-Ezra belongs here to the second group of commentators mentioned above. In his view God tells Moses that *Ehyeh* is His name. But in order to show the power and uniqueness of this name, Ibn-Ezra goes far beyond literal meaning. There are two commentaries by Ibn-Ezra on Exodus (and on parts of Genesis). One is usually referred to as “The Short Ibn-Ezra” and the other as “The Long Ibn-Ezra.” In the long one, the consideration of verse 14 is very lengthy indeed. It spreads over two or three full pages in various editions of *Mikraot Gedolot*.⁵

The extraordinary length of commentary on a single verse stems from the fact that here Ibn-Ezra mobilizes linguistics, astronomy, astrology, mathematics, and philosophy to interpret and extol the Holy Name. In the present essay we consider the mathematical part, where the idea is to show that God's name consists of letters whose gematric-numerical values have unique and beautiful properties.

There are three distinct letters in the Hebrew word *Ehyeh*—*Aleph* (א), *Hey* (ה) and *Yod* (י). The *Hey* appears again as the last letter. In *Haviah* and in the ineffable name we find again two of these letters—*Hey* (twice) and *Yod*, together with another letter, *Vav* (ו). So altogether there are four distinct letters here—*Aleph*, *Hey*, *Vav*, and *Yod*, with gematric values 1, 5, 6, and 10, respectively.

In Jewish tradition gematric values are specific numerical values attached to Hebrew letters. Gematria has to do with manipulations of these values and of combinations of values of several letters or words. It should be noted that Ibn-Ezra does not always approve of the use of gematria. His disdain of certain utilizations of gematria can be seen, for instance, in his commentary on Genesis 14:14. This verse tells us that the first of the three Patriarchs, Avraham (then still called Avram), led a contingent of 318 men to chase and attack the armies of the four kings who had taken his nephew Lot as prisoner of war. There is a famous *Drash* (homiletic interpretation), appearing in the Talmud (*Tractate Nedarim*) and in the Midrash (*Bereshit Rabba*), asserting that in fact this contingent consisted of just one man—Avram's domestic steward, the Hebrew letters of whose name, Eliezer, have gematric values adding up to 318. Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki), the greatest biblical exegete in Judaic tradition, quotes this *Drash* without any comment. Ibn-Ezra also mentions it, stressing that

it is *Drash* and that the scripture doesn't talk gematria with which anyone who so wishes can "bring out any name for good or for bad."

It seems that what Ibn-Ezra dislikes is the game (or art), quite popular in some circles nowadays, of summing up the values of letters in a word or a phrase in order to "discover" hidden meanings and connections.⁶ But when it comes to considering mathematical properties of a specific number that happens to be the gematric value of a certain letter, he does not hesitate to make the most of it. And that is exactly what he does with the numbers 1, 5, 6, and 10. He concludes his discussion of these numbers with the observation that their sum is 22—the total number of Hebrew letters (so presumably the letters of the Holy Name represent the full alphabet). But most of the discussion is dedicated to properties of each of the four numbers (and an additional number—9, for reasons to be explained below) by itself. Yet, while handling each number separately, Ibn-Ezra unfolds some of the fundamental principles of arithmetic. This is what we are about to show now.

In the following section, from the lengthy mathematical paragraph in Ibn-Ezra's commentary on God's name we shall quote, not necessarily in the order of their appearance, sentences and subparagraphs dealing with properties of the special numbers 1, 5, 6, and 10. In each case we start with the Hebrew original, followed by a bracketed English translation (as it is in the opening paragraphs of the first two sections above) and then by explanations and remarks. We shall similarly dedicate one section to the more general principles and one to the properties of the special number 9. An additional section will relate to the lengthy commentary on the Ten Commandments.⁷

Specific Properties

We start with a fairly simple property that holds for each of the four numbers under consideration (and for no other number).

ואלה ארבעתם אהוי הם הנכבדים. וכל מספר מרובע ששם
אחד נוסף על המרובע ככה יש בשרשו וככה בדומה
לו. וכן במרובע חמשה חמשה ובמרובע ששה ששה.
אלה הד' מספרים לעולם שומרים עצמם במרובעת וזהו
מעלתם על כל המספרים המרובעים.

[And these four—*Aleph*, *Hey*, *Vav*, *Yod*—are the distinguished ones. And every squared number where one is added to the square the same is in its root and the same in its like. And so in the square of five five and in the square of six six. These four numbers forever uphold themselves in square, and this is their eminence over all squared numbers.]

The mathematical property referred to here is the repetitive nature of endings of powers of certain numbers. If a squared number ends with 1, Ibn-Ezra tells us, then so does its root. Put vice versa—if a number ends with 1, so does its square. And by saying “and the same in its like” and then “forever,” Ibn-Ezra probably means that the same is true for other powers, not only squares. For instance, the powers of 11, the smallest two-digit number ending with 1, are 11, 121, 1331, and so on. This holds also for the powers of 5 (5, 25, 125, . . .) and of 6 (6, 36, 216, . . .).

While maintaining that this property holds for the four distinguished numbers (and for no other number), only with respect to the first three of them Ibn-Ezra states it in detail. Regarding the fourth one, the idea is that powers of 10 (10, 100, 1000, . . .), like those of any number ending with 0, always end with 0. However, Ibn-Ezra doesn’t admit here a name or a symbol for zero, and we shall return to this point later on.

We turn now to properties signaling each of the four numbers separately. Easiest to handle is Ibn-Ezra’s one-sentence reference to the number 6.

וחשבון ששה הוא חשבון שוה בחלקיו, ואין בכל מערכת
מספר שוה רק אחד.

[And the sum 6 is an equal sum in its parts, and in the whole system there is no equal number but one.]⁸

That is, in the system of numbers from 1 to 9 (the one-digit numbers), the number 6 is the only one that is equal to the sum of its factors ($6 = 1 \cdot 2 \cdot 3 = 1 + 2 + 3$).

Next we turn to the number 1, the most magnificent and most powerful number—the origin and building block of all numbers, Ibn-Ezra tells us. And then he provides three specific properties of the number 1, the last two of them tying it to the remaining two notable numbers—5 and 10.

כל מספר הוא באחד בכח, והוא בכל מספר במעשה. והוא יעשה בפאה אחת מה שיעשה כל מספר בשתי פאות. והנה כח האחד, ובחברך מרובעו אל מרובע כפלו אז יהיו חמשה... וכאשר תחבר מרובע האחד אל מרובע ראש הנפרדים יהיה המחובר הוא הדומה.

[Every number is in 1 potentially, and 1 is in every number actually. And it will do on one side what every number will do on two sides. And here is the power of the 1, and when you add its square to the square of its double, then there will be 5 . . . and when you add the square of 1 to the square of the head of separates, the sum will be that which is the like.]

The first sentence here refers to the most basic idea that the number 1 can give rise to any potential number, and any existing number is the sum of several repetitions of 1.⁹ This entails a certain specific property presented in the next sentence. The number 1 is half of its successor, 2. Any other number is half of the sum of its successor and predecessor. That is, in present-day mathematical formulation:

$$1 = \frac{1}{2}(2) \quad 2 = \frac{1}{2}(1+3) \quad 3 = \frac{1}{2}(2+4) \quad \text{and so on.}$$

(As we shall explain below, Ibn-Ezra doesn't have here 0 as a number. If he had, he would have had to notice that the number 1 is also the mean of its successor and predecessor, i.e. $1 = \frac{1}{2}(0+2)$.)

I translate the word *Hineh* into Here, though there are other equally good potential translations. And "the head of separates" is the first odd number (3). Also "the like" is the number 10, so called as it is "like 1," as we shall soon see. Thus, in present-day mathematical formulations, the last two sentences in the quotation above simply say:

$$1^2 + 2^2 = 5 \quad \text{and} \quad 1^2 + 3^2 = 10.$$

And these two sentences are meant to lead us to properties of the numbers 5 and 10.

וזהו חשבון השוה במרובעים, כי אם תחבר מרובעו אל מרובע כפלו כה יהיה מעוקב חמשה. וכל מספר לפני חמשה יהיה ערך המעוקב אל השנים המרובעים בחשבון בערך החשבון אל חמשה. ולמעלה מחמשה יהיה הדבר בהיפוך.

[And this (5) is a sum that is equal in squares, for if you add its square to the square of its double, the same will be the cube of 5. And any number preceding 5 the value of its cube to the two squares in the sum will be as the value of the sum to 5. And above 5 this will be in reverse.]

For the number 5 what we have here is:

$$5^3 = 5^2 + (2 \cdot 5)^2$$

For a number, say 4, smaller than 5 we have:

$$4^3 < 4^2 + (2 \cdot 4)^2 \text{ by a factor of 4 to 5}$$

For a number, say 6, greater than 5 we have:

$$6^3 > 6^2 + (2 \cdot 6)^2 \text{ by a factor of 6 to 5}$$

These are all, we note, derivatives of the identity:

$$N^3 = (N^2 + (2N)^2)(N/5)$$

So we get the factor N to 5, which reduces to 1 if $N=5$. The number 5 draws a border in this formula between ratios smaller than 1 and greater than 1. Ibn-Ezra wouldn't have, and probably wouldn't like, this kind of abstract formulation. But conceivably he would be pleased to see that the next formula in this line singles out precisely his next distinguished number, namely 10, as the next border case, for

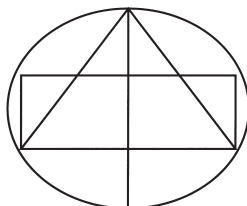
$$N^3 = (N^2 + (3N)^2)(N/10)$$

And indeed the number 10 draws a similar border, this time in geometry, as Ibn-Ezra proceeds to show.

ואם תשים אלכסון עגול במספרו ותוציא יתר בשלישית,
יהיה המשולש שהוא שווה השוקים כמספר הקו הסובב
וכמוהו המרובע הארוך בעגול. ולפני זה המספר יהיה ערך
המשולש אל הקו כערכו אל עשרה ולמעלה ממנו הפך הדבר.

[And if you place a circle's diameter of this number (10) and draw a chord at the third, the triangle that is of equal sides will be of the number of the round line, and like it the long quadrilateral in the circle. And prior to this number the value of the triangle to the line will be as its value to 10, and above it the reverse.]¹⁰

To understand what Ibn-Ezra tells us in this paragraph we need the following plot, where the two chords cut the diameter at one-third and two-thirds of its length.



The area of the rectangle is equal to the area of the big triangle, Ibn-Ezra says. This is easily seen to be true, since the height of the triangle is twice the width of the rectangle while the triangle's base coincides with the rectangle's long side. (And also since the two small triangles cut by the big triangle from the two corners of the rectangle are congruent to the two small triangles cut from the big one above the rectangle.)

Now, if the length of the diameter is 10, Ibn-Ezra maintains, then the area of the big triangle (and hence also the area of the rectangle) is equal to the length of the circle's perimeter. While if the length of the diameter is smaller than (or greater than) 10, then the ratio of the triangle's area to the circle's perimeter (or the reverse of this ratio) is the same as the ratio of the diameter length to 10.¹¹

These comments of Ibn-Ezra are captured by the formulas below, where A denotes area, T is for triangle, R for rectangle, P for perimeter, C for circle, and D for diameter.

$$A(T) = A(R) = P(C) \cdot D(C) / 10$$

Hence, clearly—

$$A(T) = A(R) = P(C) \text{ if } D(C) = 10$$

$$A(T) = A(R) < P(C) \text{ by a factor of } D(C) \text{ to } 10 \text{ if } D(C) < 10$$

$$A(T) = A(R) > P(C) \text{ by a factor of } D(C) \text{ to } 10 \text{ if } D(C) > 10$$

General Principles

So much for specific properties of the four distinguished numbers. And now to three fundamental principles of arithmetic. We see the following lines as the truly exciting part in Ibn-Ezra's commentary on the Holy

Name. But we stress that for him these lines here, the way he weaves them into the broader discussion, constitute merely an account of one aspect of his study of the numbers (1 and 10) representing the letters *Aleph* and *Yod*.

ודע כי האחד סוד כל המספר ויסודו... והנה כל המספרים הם תשעה מדרך אחת והם עשרה מדרך אחרת... והנה עשרה הוא דומה לאחד והוא שם כולל האחדים שהם מאחד עד עשרה... ותחלת המספרים הדומים לאחדים. כי בהגיעך לעשרים אז הם שני עשרות כנגד שני אחדים ושלושים כנגד שלשה אחדים וכן כל עשרות עד תשעים הם תשע עשרות כנגד תשעה אחדים. ובהגיעך למספר מאה הוא דומה לאחד ובהגיעך לתשע מאות גם הם כנגד תשעה אחדים עד שתגיע לאלף שהם עשר מאות. גם האלף הוא דומה לאחד עד היותם תשעה אלפים כנגד תשעה אחדים, ובהגיעך לעשרת אלפים אז נשלם החשבון בהיותו רבבה אחת. וככה עד עשר רבבות על הדרך הזה, כי כל ראשי המספרים הם דומים לאחד. על כן אמרו חכמי המספר כי כל המספרים הם חלק מעשרה או התחדש מכפלו או ממחברתו אל אחדיו או מהשנים דרכים נחברים.

[And you should know that the one is the secret of every number and its foundation. . . . And here all numbers are nine from one way and are ten from another way. . . . And here ten is like one and it is a name which includes the ones that are from one to ten . . . and the start of the numbers that are like the ones. For when you reach twenty then there are two tens against two ones and thirty against three ones, and so all tens up to ninety are nine tens against nine ones. And when you reach the number hundred it is like one, and when you reach nine hundred these too are against nine ones, until you reach thousand that are ten hundreds. Also the thousand is like one till there are nine thousand against nine ones, and when you reach ten thousand the sum is concluded by its being one myriad. And so to ten myriads along this way, for all heads of the numbers are like one. Hence sages of the number said that all the numbers are parts of ten or generated from its multiple or from its aggregate with its ones or from the two ways combined.]

One is the secret of arithmetic, and all numbers originate from it, Ibn-Ezra says here. Then he explains that there are two ways to look at

numbers. One is to consider nine different numbers, while the other is to think of ten numbers. Yet 10 is not really a new number requiring a new symbol, as it is in fact like 1. Ten is an inclusive name of the one-digit numbers and the first member of a new series of numbers resembling those of the basic series.

It is thus clear that Ibn-Ezra doesn't have here zero as a number in its own right with its own symbol. He does have it in other writings, using the same symbol we use today, borrowed from Indian mathematicians. He calls it Small Wheel (*Galgal Katan* גלגל קטן), and the idea presumably is that the emptiness of this symbol represents the nothingness of zero.

What Ibn-Ezra has here, without spelling it out, is the notion of zero as an empty space within a number of two digits or more. Moreover, between the lines we read here three of the most fundamental doctrines of arithmetic as we know it today, though they date from antiquity and from the Middle Ages. These are

1. The Decimal System
2. The Notion of Zero
3. The Position Principle

Ibn-Ezra states here that ten is like one and twenty is like two ones and so on. Similarly, one hundred is against one and two hundred is against two ones and so on; and this too is the case for thousands and myriads and beyond. The head of each system of numbers is like 1 (and the second member of each system is like 2, etc.). And the "sages of the number" (mathematicians) tell us that in this way all numbers are combinations of units and multiples of 10.

The decimal system is presented here together with the maxim (stemming from the position principle) that no new symbols are needed for numbers from 10 and on. All one has to do is look at the head of each number (or system of numbers) and at the way the number is built from units and multiples of 10. Thus when we see, for example, the number

3333

we know that from left to right the first digit represents three thousand, the second three hundred, the third three tens, and the fourth three units. The same symbol (3) appears here four times, but each time it is read differently according to its position. This way of writing numbers is

commonplace nowadays, seemingly obvious and natural. We take it for granted, hardly ever noticing the ingenuity behind it, assuming perhaps that it was like this always and everywhere. But it wasn't. For instance, roman numerals, based on the decimal system without the position principle, require different symbols in different positions, and so the number above would be:

MMMCCCXXXIII

Without the compactness enabled by the position principle, arithmetic would not have reached the advanced stage where it is today. It was from Hindu mathematicians that this principle was borrowed and implanted into medieval Arab mathematics. And it was from the writings of al-Khwarizmi, translated into Latin, among others, that the principle was imported to Europe and incorporated into western mathematics.

And this is also where the notion of zero, as a number or an empty place, comes into the picture. It is instrumental in discerning, for example, the number three thousand and thirty-three from the number three hundred and thirty-three. In our present-day writing, the first of these two numbers is:

3033

In Ibn-Ezra's writing, in line with his work discussed here, it would be:

ג גג

And with the Small Wheel, it would become:

ג0גג

Note that even though Ibn-Ezra used Hebrew letters, for example, the third letter *Gimmel* -whose gematric value is 3, and hence he wrote from right to left as is common in Hebrew, the number as a whole would be ordered just as we always see it ordered. For counting in Hebrew used to start from units (3 and 30 rather than 33).

The Number 9

From the discussion above, another number, 9, emerges as deserving our respect. It doesn't designate a specific letter of the Holy Name, but it is,

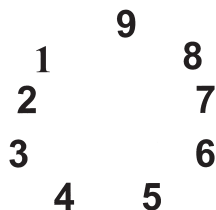
Ibn-Ezra says, the number of all (different) numbers. In other words, in the decimal system, which lies at the heart of Ibn-Ezra's treatment of the letters of *Ehyeh* and *Havaiah*, 9 is the largest one-digit number.¹²

Now, to show the beauty of the number 9, Ibn-Ezra, in the passage we are studying, writes as follows, right after telling us that there are nine numbers altogether.

ואם תכתוב התשעה בעיגול ותכפול הסוף עם כל המספר
תמצא האחדים שמאלים והעשרות הדומות לאחדים
לפאת ימין. ובהגיעך אל חמשה שהוא האמצעי אז יתהפכו
המספרים להיות העשרות אחדים והאחדים עשרות.

[And if you write the nine in a circle and multiply the end by each number you will find the ones left and the tens that are like the ones on the right side. And when you reach five, which is the middle one, then the numbers will capsize so that the tens become ones and the ones tens.]

The circle drawn below, with the numbers from 1 to 9, shows what Ibn-Ezra has in mind here. And we note that to many people nowadays this is a well-known game.



At the top of the circle we have the number 9 (9 multiplied by 1). Below it we have from left to right the number 18 (9 times 2). In the third line we find the number 27 (9 times 3). This is followed by 36 (9 times 4) and then by 45 (9 times 5). So far we have gone from top to bottom, and we have had tens on the left and units on the right. But now we have reached multiplication by 5 at the very bottom of the circle. So we'll turn around and start climbing up. And from this point onward we'll read from right to left, so that tens will be on the right and units on the left. In the bottom line we'll find the number 54 (9 times 6). Above it we have 63 (9 times 7). Further up we get 72 (9 times 8) and finally 81 (9 times 9).

We note that the position principle once again plays a central role here.

And if at this place in his work Ibn-Ezra had a symbol, say 0, for zero, he could have added it left of the 9. Then he would start with 09, as we sometimes write the number 9 today (e.g., in dates), and end with an additional number, 90 (9 times 10), thus neatly closing the story (and the circle).

The Ten Commandments

One last sentence we want to quote from the passage we are dealing with is this:

והנה עשר ספירות, כמספר עשר אצבעות, חמש כנגד חמש.

[And here are ten numberings, like the number ten fingers, five against five.]

This dichotomy, five against five, leads us to a similar dichotomy, relating to the Ten Commandments. Like other traditional commentators,¹³ Ibn-Ezra speaks of two tables with five commandments on each—those concerning human-to-God commitments on one table and those concerning human-to-human commitments on the other. Ibn-Ezra adds an assertion, accompanied by a detailed explanation, that in each of the tables the commandments appear in order of importance (or severance). Most severe on the first table is “I am the Lord thy God,” and on the other “Thou shalt not kill.”

Ibn-Ezra’s comments on Exodus 20:2 (where we find the first commandment) are even longer than those on the verse concerning God’s name that we scrutinized above. Among other things he writes here the following lines that are relevant to our discussion.

ואנשי המחקר מצאו כל דברי הגופות שהם עשרה... וכולם נסמכים על הראשון ונלווים אליו וממנו יצאו, כי הוא כמדות האחד בחשבון עשרה. כי ממנו יצא כל חשבון וכל חשבון ימצא בו כי הוא היסוד. והנה זה הדבור הראשון שאמר השם הנכבד כולל כל מצוות הלב הלשון והמעשה, כי מי שאינו מאמין בלבו בשם, אין עליו מצוה... וכבר פירשתי כי הדבור הראשון הוא היסוד ועליו כל בניני המצוות.

[And the men of research have found all things of the objects to be ten. . . . And they all lean on the first one and accompany it and were derived of it, for it is like *the virtues of the one in the sum of ten*.

For from it emerged every sum and every sum will be found in it for it is the foundation. And here this, the first commandment that the revered God spoke, includes all precepts of the heart, the tongue and the deed. For he who does not believe in his heart in God, on him there is no precept. . . . And I already explained that the first commandment is the foundation and on it are all constructs of the precepts.]

Ibn-Ezra speaks here about facets of objects. Researchers have found, he says, ten such facets (quality, quantity, etc.), and they all relate to the first one, presumably the object itself (the other nine merely describing various attributes). Thus, he maintains, we have here the like of the number 1. Here he returns to arithmetic, our concern; specifically to the notion of the number 1 as the foundation of all numbers. Similarly, he tells us, the first commandment is the basis of all precepts, for you won't follow God's rules and obey His instructions if you don't believe in Him. Thus the first commandment is the essence of religious observance just as the first number is the essence of arithmetic.

We note that here too al-Khwarizmi's influence cannot be ignored. The italicized words in the bracketed paragraph above echo the words of al-Khwarizmi in the following paragraph.

From the Latin Translation of *Book of Hindu Calculus*:

Et iam patefeci in libro algebr et almucabalah . . . quod uniuersus numerus sit compositus et quod uniuersus numerus componatur super unum. Unum ergo inuenitur in uniuerso numero.

English translation by André Allard:

I've already told in a book about al-jabr and al-muqabala . . . that any number is a compound and that any number is formed in the unit. The unit is thus in any number.¹⁴

Concluding Remarks and Story

Over the years Ibn-Ezra's approach was challenged from both the religious and the scientific points of view. Religious critics argued that it belittles God to have the glory of His name rest on numerical considerations. More relevant to our work here are the following mathematical observations:

1. Ibn-Ezra's manipulations concerning specific numbers may look like nothing much more than games. They may be amusing, but at least some of them are also trivial.

2. With enough patience and imagination, any number can be shown to have quite a few unique mathematical properties. As an example, we note that more than a millennium before Ibn-Ezra, Philo of Alexandria, in his book *Al Beriat ha-Olam* (On the Creation of the World), provided lists of properties of the numbers 4 and 7.

3. The specific properties Ibn-Ezra lists stem from the fact that we work within the decimal system. In his eloquent treatment of the decimal system, Ibn-Ezra seems to ignore the fact that this system is not God-given (even though He gave us ten fingers). Ibn-Ezra can hardly be blamed for this, since throughout history the decimal system (perhaps because of the ten fingers) was universally the most popular one. However, as is well known, there were always other systems, like the duodecimal system and most notably nowadays the binary system. And needless to say, in any nondecimal system, the properties Ibn-Ezra singles out with regard to, say, the number 9, as exhibited in the "clock" above, would relate to another number. Ibn-Ezra himself noted this in his mathematics books.

It is easy to agree with these arguments. Still, no one can deny the elegance with which Ibn-Ezra integrates mathematics into his biblical exegesis. And no one can take away from him his account of the basic tenets of arithmetic in the paragraph we are studying here. I would also venture to say that in the dichotomous division mentioned above (five against five), together with the continued reliance on the number 1 (and the awareness of the notion of zero), we may perhaps see hints of the binary system (alongside the decimal system, epitomized by the number 9).

It is on this combination (Ibn-Ezra's liking of dichotomies on the one hand, and of the number 9, on the other) that the following story rests. It is borrowed from a small book entitled *Mahalach Shevilei ha-Daath* (The Course of Wisdom's Paths), where it is called *Tahbulla* (stratagem). The book was written by Rabbi Moshe Kimḥi in the twelfth century and has since been published with commentaries in several editions. The story appeared as an appendix in some of these editions, making its way to the entry "Ibn-Ezra" in the *Hebrew Encyclopedia*. It shows the respect, mixed with humor, with which Ibn-Ezra was held in spite of the criticism leveled against him. So here it is, translated from Hebrew almost word by word:

It was found written in the book of deeds of the sage Rabbi Abraham Ibn-Ezra that once he traveled by sea with fifteen of his students. And there were also fifteen hollow men (*Reikim*) with him there. Then one day God cast a storm into the sea and the boat was about to break down and sink. The captain then ordered that half the men on board be thrown into the sea to ease the load. The sage Ibn-Ezra saw this and said to the captain: "What you tell us to do is right because it is better that half of us die and not all of us. So let us cast lots to decide who will be the ones to be thrown into the sea. And this is what we shall do. All thirty men will stand in one row and we shall start counting from the first one to the ninth and this ninth one will be thrown overboard. This way we shall go on until every man captured as number 9 is thrown away into the sea." And the men agreed to do so and they said to the sage Ibn-Ezra: "Rise, for this is your duty. You will align us as you like." And he got up and aligned them in such a way that always in the ninth place was caught one of the hollow men until they were all thrown from the boat and the students came out clear. And this is how he aligned them: First he stood four students, then five hollowed, and two students, and one hollowed, and three students, and one hollowed, and one student, and two hollowed, and two students, and three hollowed, and one student, and two hollowed, and two students, and one hollowed.

In this story the bad guys are called *Reikim* (hollow or empty), meaning that they were void of good deeds and learning. This reminds us of the empty Small Wheel denoting zero, and accordingly we shall now use 0 to indicate an evil man. And to comply with binary language we shall use 1 to indicate a righteous man (a student in this story). So this is how the above lineup would look (and it is easy to check that every ninth symbol is 0).

1 1 1 1 0 0 0 0 0 1 1 0 1 1 1 0 1 0 0 1 1 0 0 0 1 0 0 1 1 0

To celebrate the "victory" of Ibn-Ezra and the men of virtue in this story, there is a short poem attributed to Ibn-Ezra in some editions of the book mentioned above. I bring here the Hebrew original, followed by my poor English translation.

שיר מרובע מפי הראב"ע
 כל אוון ורע לצדיק לא אירע
 התחל בנושע וסיים ברשע
 הסב בתשע ויצא הרשע.

A song of four lines, Ibn-Ezra composed:
 To no ill and harm was the righteous exposed;
 Begin with a saved, with a sinner conclude,
 Go round by nine, and all malice preclude.

Now let's all hope and wait for total abolishment of malice, so we can live in a world of goodness and purity, a world in which Ibn-Ezras and al-Khwarizmis enrich each other in knowledge and insight, live side by side in harmony, and contribute together to the advancement of science and humankind.

Notes

1. See Tony Levy, "Hebrew and Latin Versions of an Unknown Mathematical Text by Abraham Ibn Ezra," *Aleph* 1 (2001): 295–305, and also Shlomo Sela, *Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 21.

2. For the influence on Ibn-Ezra of other Muslim scholars, consult, e.g., chapter 5 in Irene Lancaster, *Deconstructing the Bible: Abraham Ibn Ezra's Introduction to the Torah* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003) as well as several articles in Isadore Twersky and Jay M. Harris, eds., *Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra: Studies in the Writings of a Twelfth-Century Jewish Polymath* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

3. For example, S. Gandz, *The Mishnat ha-Middot* (Berlin: J. Springer, 1932).

4. For example, G. B. Sarfati, "Mishnat ha-Midot," in H. Ben-Shammai, ed., *Heqer 'Ever we-'Arav* (Tel Aviv and Jerusalem: Tel Aviv University and Hebrew University, 1993), 463–90 (Hebrew).

5. *Mikraot Gedolot* (Great Bible Readings), often called the Rabbinic Bible, is a collection of traditional biblical exegeses highly revered by Orthodox Jews.

6. Another explanation might be that Ibn-Ezra wants to reserve gematria strictly to matters of the utmost glory and mystery, such as God's name, our concern in the present essay.

7. Throughout this essay, the translations (and explanations) are mine, but in some places I have consulted H. Norman Strickman and Arthur M. Silver, *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch* (New York: Menorah, 1996). (Similar explanations and presentations can be found in several Hebrew sources, e.g., in the *Torat Chaim Chumash*, published by Mossad Harav Kook.) I tried to translate quite literally, and hence the English

text, just like the Hebrew original, is not easy to read and understand. I hope the added explanations and remarks will be of some help.

8. Here and in the sequel I use the term *Sum* to translate the word *Heshbon*. In the present context this seems more appropriate than *calculus* or *calculation* or *computation* (the terms to which the word *Heshbon* usually refers in modern Hebrew).

9. This is another place where al-Khwarizmi's influence is evident, as we show at the end of the section on the Ten Commandments.

10. Ibn-Ezra uses the term *Alakhson* for the diameter of a circle, while in today's Hebrew this term refers to the diagonal of, say, a rectangle or a parallelogram, and the word for diameter is *Kotter*. Similarly, he uses here the term *Yetter* for a circle's chord, while in modern Hebrew *Yetter* is the hypotenuse of a right triangle and the word for chord is *Meitar*—quite similar to *Yetter* and from the same root. We find here, perhaps for the first time, the term *Shveh Shokayim* for an isosceles triangle, just as in present-day Hebrew.

11. Two remarks are needed regarding this point. First, Ibn-Ezra did not mean to equate area and length conceptually, but only the numerical values of these two entities in the present context. This almost goes without saying. Second, the “equality” here is in fact only an approximation (though a very close one). It's hard to know whether Ibn-Ezra was aware of this. He would have been, had he tried to provide a formal proof of his claim. However, in the spirit of al-Khwarizmi and other Moslem mathematicians of the time, Ibn-Ezra showed little interest in formal “Greek type” proofs.

12. It is worth noting that for similar reasons the number 9 is held in awe by various traditional cultures. Here are two examples. In Chinese culture this awe is attested, e.g., by the nine concentric circles in Beijing's Temple of Heaven, where there are nine stones in the first circle, eighteen in the second, and so on up to eighty-one in the last circle. And in Buddhist temples, in India and elsewhere, we often find nine stairs leading to the Buddha.

13. For example, Ramban (Rabbi Moshe Ben Nahman) and Hekzoni (Rabbi Hekzekiah Ben Manoah).

14. See André Allard, “The Arabic Origins and Development of Latin Algorithms in the Twelfth Century,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 1, no. 2 (1991): 233–83.

11

Pharmacopoeias for the Hospital and the Shop

Al-Dustur al-bimaristani and *Minhaj al-dukkān*

LEIGH N. CHIPMAN

Two thirteenth-century works, one aimed at hospital use and the other at private pharmacies, constitute the basis of our study. We will show that the differences between them derive not only from the different audiences but also from the fact that one was authored by a physician and the other by pharmacists—that is, by members of the target audiences. We will also discuss the Jewish identity of the authors and its relevance for their writings.

Abu 'l-Fadl Dawud b. Sulayman Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan al-Isra'ili (d. 634/1236) was a pupil of Ibn Jumay', Saladin's court physician. Himself physician to Saladin's successor, al-'Adil, and the teacher of the medical biographer Ibn Abi Usaybi'a, Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan was director of the Nasiri hospital in Cairo, and he composed his famous *al-Dustur al-bimaristani fi 'l-adwiya al-murakkaba* (The Hospital Rule with Regard to Compound Drugs) for use there.¹ This work was published by Sbath in two essentially identical versions,² and consists of an introduction and twelve chapters that deal with the various kinds of compound drugs in use during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

Al-Dustur al-bimaristani forms part of the Arabic tradition of hospital dispensaries. Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan's most prominent predecessors were Sabur b. Sahl (d. 255/869)³ and Ibn al-Tilmidh (d. 560/1165),⁴ both of whom were Christians working in Baghdad. *Al-Dustur al-bimaristani* has remained well known to the traditional practitioners of the Middle East,

Table 11.1 Comparing the Contents of *al-Dustur al-bimaristani* and *Minhaj al-dukkān*

Topic	Chapter for al-Kuhin al-‘Attar	Chapter for Ibn Abi ‘l-Bayan
Preface (<i>khutba</i>)	√	√
Advice	1	
Syrups (<i>sharāb</i>)	2	5
Robs (<i>rubb</i>)	3	
Confections (<i>murrabā</i>)	4	5
Electuaries (<i>ma‘jūn</i>)	5	1
Stomachic pastes (<i>jawārish</i>)	6	2
Powders (<i>safūf</i>)	7	4
Pastilles (<i>qurṣ</i>)	8	4
Lohochs (<i>lu‘ūq</i>)	9	5
Pills (<i>ḥabb</i>)	10	3
Hiera (<i>iyārij</i>)	11	3
Decoctions (<i>maṭbūkh</i>)		3
Eye salves (<i>kuḥl</i>)	12	7
Eye powders (<i>ashyāf</i>)	13	7
Ointments (<i>marham</i>)	14	12
Oils (<i>duhn</i>)	15	10
Poultices (<i>ṭilā’</i>)	16	9
Dentifrices (<i>sanūn</i>)	17	11
Laxatives (<i>mushilāt</i>)	18	8
Plasters (<i>ḍimāḍ</i>)	19	9
Errhines (<i>sa‘ūṭ</i>)		6
Substitute	20	
Glossary	21	
Weights	22	
Ethics	23	
Simples	24	
Testing	25	

not least through its being quoted extensively in *Minhaj al-dukkān*, another thirteenth-century manual of pharmacology and also with a Jewish author, but aimed at private pharmacists rather than at hospitals.⁵

Minhaj al-dukkān wa-dastur al-a‘yan fī a‘mal wa-tarakib al-adwiya al-naḥī‘a lil-insan (The Management of the [Pharmacist’s] Shop and the Rule for the Notables on the Preparation and Composition of Medicines Beneficial to Man) was composed in 658/1260 in Cairo by the otherwise unknown Abu ‘l-Muna Dawud b. Abi Nasr al-Kuhin al-‘Attar al-Haruni al-Isra‘ili, a Jewish druggist. The work has twenty-five chapters, beginning with a moralizing exhortation to al-Kuhin al-‘Attar’s “son,” and includes chapters on simples, substitute drugs, and weights and measures. The

other chapters describe the preparation of compound medicines. This was a very popular book that survives in about thirty manuscripts. According to Goitein, it continued to be in use by “traditional druggists” in Cairo until the twentieth century,⁶ and according to Levey, it was “still very popular mainly outside the large cities” as late as the 1960s.⁷ In his introduction, al-Kuhin al-‘Attar states that he is composing this work because none of the preceding formularies have been suitable for pharmacists; rather, they have been written by physicians for physicians and are not as useful in a drugstore setting as they are in a hospital.⁸ Backing for this claim can be found in the titles of the formularies: *al-Dustur al-bimaristani* (The rule for the hospital) versus *Minhaj al-dukkān* (The management of the [apothecary’s] shop).

Table 11.1 compares the structure of the two works. Even the most cursory glance reveals that *Minhaj al-dukkān* contains more subjects than does *al-Dustur al-bimaristani*. While most of the text of *Minhaj al-dukkān* follows the usual structure of *agrabadhinat* (i.e., pharmacopoeias), that is, a division into chapters according to the method of preparation, these chapters are preceded and followed by chapters more commonly found in medical encyclopedias such as Ibn Sina’s *al-Qanun fi ‘l-tibb*. True to his aim of providing pharmacists with all the knowledge they need, al-Kuhin al-‘Attar combined the simple formulary with the relevant sections of encyclopedias aimed at physicians. Most of these additions were placed after the pharmacopoeia proper (chapters 20–25), but like the encyclopedias, which begin by defining the character and qualities desirable in a physician, *Minhaj al-dukkān* begins with a section on the qualities and character of the aspiring pharmacist. With this exception, all the material in *Minhaj al-dukkān* relates to practical rather than theoretical knowledge.

Like *Minhaj al-dukkān*, *al-Dustur al-bimaristani* begins with a preface. This, in fact, is the only nonformulary section there. The prefaces of books do not form a literary genre in themselves but are programmatic notes setting out the author’s purpose in writing. According to Freimark, “In the central part, almost always introduced by the rhetorical formula *amma ba ‘du* (‘now, then, now to the point’), the author states the real reason for writing his book. For this he mostly uses *topoi*, which consist largely of schematic patterns of thought and expression belonging to literary tradition, and which have parallels in European literatures of the late classical, medieval, and early modern periods. On the other hand, several authors also show personal approaches based on reality.”⁹

Even the most cursory reading of the *khutba* of *Minhaj al-dukkān* reveals its formal structure and use of *topoi* common to prefaces throughout Arabic literature. The characteristic tripartite division into opening praises, middle (“objective”) part, and closing praises¹⁰ is present: an exordium (p. 9) praising God for giving humanity the intelligence to know and use the various animals, vegetables, and minerals on earth is followed by a rehearsal of al-Kuhin al-‘Attar’s motives and objectives in composing *Minhaj al-dukkān* (pp. 9–11). These are followed by a detailed table of contents (pp. 12–13).¹¹ Finally, a single sentence (p. 13) asks for God’s help in achieving the author’s purposes.¹²

What are al-Kuhin al-‘Attar’s motives and objectives? He aims to fill a perceived need for a book that would cover all of pharmacy, pointing out the lack of such a book, aimed specifically at pharmacists, among both ancient and modern writers. This is his major criticism of our other subject here, Ibn Abi ‘l-Bayan. He continues by stating the requirements of his readers and clarifying his method.

Al-Kuhin al-‘Attar begins the main part of his preface with the following words:

And now to the point, I have longed for a collection that would comprise all my objectives, sufficient for all the needs of one desiring to achieve comprehension of everything relating to it. That would enable him to dispense with a guide to show him the details of the craft of pharmacy which he needs for what occupies him, not absolutely but in relation to his fellow. For this craft is the most honorable craft after the craft of medicine. [This is] because it is a tool of the craft of medicine, whose subject is the observation (*nazar*) of the human body in order to preserve health if it is present or to restore it if it is absent.¹³ This is only done through drugs, simple and compound, and customary foods. I have not found a book comprising all I wanted, neither an ancient nor a modern pharmacopoeia sufficient for what I intended.¹⁴

Two points are raised here: (1) the need for a comprehensive book of pharmacology, and (2) the status of pharmacy as the handmaid of medicine. The former is the result of the latter: pharmacy’s importance requires a special book devoted to it alone.

Of course, a good reason for writing a book is the fact that your predecessors have not done the job properly¹⁵ or were doing a different job

altogether. Al-Kuhin al-ʿAttar states this clearly: Although Ibn Abi ʿl-Bayan could have written the kind of book he himself intends, he did not do so.

Indeed, in my time the *shaykh* al-Sadid Ibn ʿl-Bayan composed a fine book named *al-Dustur al-bimaristani*, and stated that he noted in it everything that is needed, and there is no call for another collection. But upon my life! He omitted many things that are necessary to anyone with an interest in this craft, that is, the craft of pharmacy, which is known nowadays as the craft of perfumery and syrups (*sinaʿat al-ʿitr wa-ʿl-ashriba*).¹⁶ It was not above his capability, may God have mercy upon him, to compose something simpler in words and more useful, but he intended to be brief, and he addressed skilled physicians, for he mentioned in it [= his book] the rule for making syrups in general and robs in general and suchlike, and this is only for whoever understands medicine. But as for the apothecary or syrup-maker who wants to be guided by his words, it is necessary to clarify things to him as a teacher with a pupil, so that the reader remains safe from danger and free of responsibility. When this became clear to me, I understood how little use it was, despite its many virtues. If it had been more detailed and contained everything that I collated, I would not have dispensed with it nor composed this choice book.¹⁷

Indeed, Ibn Abi ʿl-Bayan himself says that he is writing for an audience of physicians: “And now to the point, this is a rule-book (*dustur*) comprising a clarification of the compound drugs used for most of the illnesses for which one is confined (*muqtassar ʿalayha*) in the hospital, and they are those used by most physicians, and their benefit is known, and their fame (*dhikr*) is widespread, of what Dawud b. Abi ʿl-Bayan the *mutatabbib* collected, and it is twelve chapters.”¹⁸ Despite the fact that the pharmacist was supposed merely to carry out the physician’s instructions, implying that the physician’s knowledge of drugs was equal to that of the pharmacist, there is clearly a difference in the level of knowledge required by different readers.

A striking omission, both from the *khutba* itself and from *Minhaj al-dukkān* as a whole, is any discussion of pharmacological theory. This is true of the physician-authored *al-Dustur al-bimaristani*, too. However,

that work specifically limits itself to the practical and does not claim to enable physicians to dispense with all other books.

* * *

Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan is the author most quoted by al-Kuhin al-'Attar, with eighty-two appearances of his name in the text of *Minhaj al-dukkān*. Al-Kuhin al-'Attar uses a number of formulae to quote Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan: *min dustur ibn 'l-Bayan* (5 mentions; all appear in Sbath's edition); *min lafz ibn 'l-Bayan* (2 mentions; neither appear in Sbath); *min khatt ibn 'l-Bayan* (6 mentions; none appear in Sbath); *min al-dustur* (43 mentions; almost all appear in Sbath); *min (al-)dustur al-bimaristan(i)* (22 mentions; 3 appear in Sbath); *'an or li-'bn bayan* (3 mentions; none appear in Sbath). In short, about three-eighths of the recipes al-Kuhin al-'Attar seems to quote from *al-Dustur al-bimaristāni* are not present in Sbath's edition. While it is easy to explain the absence of some recipes, the fact that almost no recipes quoted as taken from "al-dustur al-bimaristāni," appear in Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan's work is problematic. Without a doubt, al-Kuhin al-'Attar had been in personal contact with Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan—recipes he received orally (*min lafz ibn 'l-Bayan*; *'an ibn 'l-Bayan*) or as a kind of personal communication (*min khatt ibn 'l-Bayan*) may very well not have been included in the "official" compilation of recipes. But why is "al-dustur al-bimaristāni" quoted so often, if it is not Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan's pharmacopeia? Perhaps, contrary to what is generally accepted, rather than composing a dispensatory himself, Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan selected recipes from an existing one used at the Nasiri hospital.

Examination of the manuscript of Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan held in the library of the Royal College of Physicians of London¹⁹ revealed a slightly different text than that published by Sbath. Most recipes can be found in both, but some exist in Sbath that are missing in MS Tritton 38 and vice versa. This is not unusual in medical manuscripts in general and pharmacological ones in particular. What is unexpected, however, is that none of the additional recipes should be one of those quoted by al-Kuhin al-'Attar as coming from *al-Dustur al-bimaristāni*. Part of the solution may be that "al-Dustur al-bimaristāni" can be construed as a generic title given to books containing recipes that were used in hospitals, rather than the title of a particular work written by one author.

Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan was the teacher of Ibn Abi Usaybi'a, who is al-Kuhin al-'Attar's contemporary. On the basis of the sheer number of quotations

of Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan in *Minhaj al-dukkān*,²⁰ it may well be that he was al-Kuhin al-‘Attar’s teacher as well. This can be supported by the fact that Ibn Jumay‘—Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan’s teacher—is also quoted extensively in *Minhaj al-dukkān*. A specific chain of transmission (Ibn Jumay‘ > Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan > al-Kuhin al-‘Attar) seems a more meaningful explanation for this than a personal preference on al-Kuhin al-‘Attar’s part for quoting Jewish authors. If indeed al-Kuhin al-‘Attar and Ibn Abi Usaybi‘a were not merely contemporaries but fellow students, the question of why Ibn Abi Usaybi‘a did not include al-Kuhin al-‘Attar in his *‘Uyun al-anba’* becomes more pointed.²¹ The most obvious answer is because al-Kuhin al-‘Attar cannot be numbered in *tabaqat al-atibba’*; he was not a physician but only a pharmacist, as indicated by his name.

* * *

One of the most important aspects of a pharmacist’s work is the relationship with prescribing physicians. Comparing recipes composed by Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan for use in hospitals with the way those recipes are quoted in *Minhaj al-dukkān* for use by the private pharmacist can elucidate this relationship. How, then, do recipes from *al-Dustur al-bimaristāni* appear in *Minhaj al-dukkān*? The first characteristic that leaps to sight is the lack of verbatim quotation. Unlike most of the other sources quoted in *Minhaj al-dukkān*,²² Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan seems to give more details than al-Kuhin al-‘Attar does, as in the recipe for squill (*Urginea maritima*) oxymel (*sharab al-sakanjabin al-‘unsuli*). See table 11.2.

Most obvious here are the detailed indications provided by Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan that are completely missing from al-Kuhin al-‘Attar’s version of the recipe. Does he expect the physician to prescribe this medicine explicitly, thus making indications unnecessary? If so, why is this not always the case? In addition, Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan gives highly detailed instructions for preparation, contrasting sharply with al-Kuhin al-‘Attar’s vagueness: rather than sealing the mixture for two months and leaving it in the sun, Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan rather pedantically places the box in the hot sun and then takes it out of the sun, before mixing it with either sugar or good pure honey; rather than letting it achieve the [desired] consistency, Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan requires that the sugar and vinegar be cooked like plain oxymel (the recipe for which he has already given).

Another recipe with more detailed instruction in the *al-Dustur al-bimaristāni* version is for root oxymel (*sharab sakanjabin usuli*), which

Table 11.2 Two Versions of the Recipe for Squill Oxymel Syrup

al-Dustur al-bimaristani, p. 46	Minhaj al-dukkān, p. 37
Squill oxymel syrup	Squill oxymel syrup From Ibn Bayan's Dustur
Beneficial for hemiplegia and facial paralysis and joint pains and bad constitution and coarseness of the spleen; opens obstructions in the liver.	
Take from a medium squill bulb at harvest time the	Take from a medium squill bulb at harvest time the
quantity of one and a half ratls [1 ratl= app. 300 grams] Chop finely with a	quantity of one and a half ratls. Chop finely with a
wooden knife and place in a linen cloth and suspend	wooden knife and place in a linen cloth and place in
in a vessel filled with strong vinegar	a glass vessel filled with seven and a half ratls of
	strong wine vinegar
Let there be the space of two fingers between it	Let there be the space of two fingers between it
and the vinegar	and the vinegar
Stop the mouth of the vessel and place in the hot sun	Stop the mouth of the vessel and leave in the sun
for two months; take out of the sun.	
For every ratl of sugar or good pure honey, add	Then take of this vinegar four uqiyyas for every ratl of
four uqiyyas [1 uqiyya= app. 24 grams] of the squill vinegar. Cook as plain	sugar. Let it reach [the desired] consistency and
oxymel, remove and use.	remove.

describes in detail the procedure for dissolving sugar in vinegar.²³ However, this recipe also shows al-Kuhin al-ʿAttar using the Baghdadi *ratl* while Ibn Abi ʿl-Bayan leaves the choice of the Egyptian or Baghdadi *ratl* to the person making up the medicine—one would expect the opposite, with the hospital being more precise than the private shop.

Several recipes in *al-Dustur al-bimaristani* have more detailed indications than their counterparts in *Minhaj al-dukkān*, as in the recipe for barberry pastilles (*Berberis vulgaris*, *quras al-amirbaris al-rawandi*). See table 11.3.

Table 11.3 Two Recipes for Barberry Pastille with Rhubarb

<i>al-Dustur al-bimaristani</i> , p. 37	<i>Minhaj al-dukkān</i> , p. 97
Barberry pastille with rhubarb	Barberry pastille with rhubarb
	From the <i>Dustur</i>
Good for weak liver and stomach, extended and	We note its excellent benefits.
phlegmatic fevers, alleviates tertian, quartan and quintan fevers, opens obstructions, opposes putrefaction occurring in the arteries, good for the beginning of dropsy caused by heat in the liver and evil qualities, strengthens the internal organs.	
Iraqi roses, cleaned of thorns, seven dirhams, grated licorice	Rosebuds cleaned of thorns, seven dir- hams, licorice
and manna and barberry juice, of each four dirhams,	and manna and barberry juice, of each four dirhams,
spikenard and mastic and agrimony herb and	spikenard and mastic and agrimony herb and
bamboo-sugar, of each two dirhams, peeled	bamboo-sugar, of each two dirhams, peeled
rocket seed, three dirhams, fine lac and Chinese or Turkish	Rocket seed, three dirhams, fine lac and Chinese or Turkish
rhubarb and nutmeg and saffron, of each a dirham	rhubarb and nutmeg and saffron, of each a dirham
Macerate the manna and barberry juice in endive	Macerate the manna and barberry juice in endive
juice after removing its froth	juice after removing its froth
Knead with it the rest of the ingredients after	Knead with it the rest of the ingredients after their
grinding and sifting them, and make their weight	grinding and sifting and form into pas- tilles. [Make]
accurate; form into pastilles and dry in the shade.	each pastille two and a half dirhams, so that when it
Make each pastille one mithqal.	dries its weight remains one mithqal. Beneficial.

The contrast between the several lines of benefits of this pastille according to Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan, and so al-Kuhin al-ʿAttar's laconic *nadhkur manafi'ahu fi 'l-far'* is striking. Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan claims that this pastille is beneficial for weakness of the liver and stomach and for chronic and phlegmatic fevers; alleviates (literally: halves, *shatara*) tertian, quartan, and quintan fevers; opens blockages; acts against putrefaction occurring in the arteries, is beneficial for the beginning of dropsy caused by the heat of the liver and evil properties; and strengthens the internal organs. All al-Kuhin al-ʿAttar says is something along the lines of "We note its excellent benefits." Was this perhaps such a successful panacea that the pharmacist considered exact indications unnecessary? He ends the recipe with the word *nafi'* (beneficial), indicating that this medicine did, in fact, work. Did he rely on the physician to prescribe this pastille correctly?

Once again, the instructions for preparation are slightly more detailed in *al-Dustur al-bimaristani*; however, *Minhaj al-dukkān* has more practical advice on how to reach the desired dry weight of each pastille.

In the case of a decoction of fruits (*matbukh al-fakiha*) called *maybukhtaj*, the version appearing in *Minhaj al-dukkān* is more detailed. See table 11.4.

In this recipe, the *Minhaj al-dukkān* version lists several additional stages of preparation: The various simples are soaked in almond oil before being tied in a linen rag; ingredients are pounded and added to the julab to which the second straining of the cooked fruits is poured—and these extra ingredients are missing from the *Dustur al-bimaristani* version (perhaps a line was omitted from the Sbath manuscript?); the final mixture is formed into pills before being dissolved for ingestion. Moreover, the last sentence of the recipe is a list of ailments for which this decoction is beneficial, and the *Minhaj al-dukkān* version adds hemicrania (*shaqiqa*) to purification of the brain, nerves, and long-standing eye problems.

The only place where Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan gives more details than al-Kuhin al-ʿAttar is, surprisingly, at the heading, when discussing the name of the medicine: he notes that this is a decoction known in Egypt as *al-maybukhtaj* (a Persian word meaning "cooked wine") and in Syria and Iraq as "decoction of fruits," while al-Kuhin al-ʿAttar conflates this by the heading "Decoction of fruits, and this is the one known as *al-maybukhtaj*." According to both authors, the two names refer to the same thing, but Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan tells his readers where each name is used. It is unclear whether this is of any significance; after all, in other recipes al-Kuhin

Table 11.4 Recipes for a Decoction of Fruits (maybukhtaj)

al-Dustur al-bimaristani, p. 123	Minhaj al-dukkan, p. 123
<p>Description of a decoction known in Egypt as maybukhtaj and in Syria and Iraq as “decoction of fruits.”</p> <p>Many people use it in spring and autumn; it purges various humors, phlegm, yellow bile and burnt black bile; removes evil excesses. It has many virtues and no danger.</p> <p>Take de-pipped raisins, fifteen dirhams, chebulic and yellow myrobalans, both cleaned, and Indian [myrobalan] and Syrian bugloss and licorice and maidenhair and mallow-wood and crushed fumitory seeds and barberry, of each three dirhams; Meccan senna and polypody and Cretan dodder, tied in a linen rag and added after boiling, of each four dirhams; fleshy plums, cut in half, fifteen units,</p> <p>flowers of Iraqi violets, three dirhams, water-lily and fresh rose, of each seven flowers, leek seeds, one mithqal, fennel seeds, half a dirham. Crush those drugs that need to be crushed, steep all in four hundred dirhams of pure water for a day and a night. Boil until a quarter remains, strain and mash into it twelve dirhams of cassia fistula scales and ten dirhams of manna. Strain again over twelve dirhams of julep.</p> <p>Sprinkle it with</p> <p>half a dirham of sifted agaric, half a dirham of turpeth and ground and sifted rhubarb, half a dirham and one daniq of rubbed scammony and a spoonful of almond oil; use.</p> <p>One may add to these seeds, one mithqal of hiera picra, and knead everything in endive juice or fennel juice and swallow four hours before drinking this decoction.</p> <p>And this is to cleanse the brain and nerves and chronic eye diseases.</p>	<p>Description of a decoction of fruits and this is the one known as maybukhtaj.</p> <p>From the Dustur</p> <p>Many people use it in spring and autumn; it purges various humors, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile; removes evil excesses. It has many virtues and no danger.</p> <p>Take de-pipped raisins, fifteen dirhams, chebulic and yellow [myrobalans], both pitted, and Indian [myrobylan] and bugloss and licorice and maidenhair and mallow-wood and crushed fumitory seeds, of each three dirhams, Meccan senna and green polypody and Cretan dodder, soaked in almond oil and tied in a linen rag, added after boiling, of each four dirhams; thick plums, fifteen units</p> <p>cleaned tamarind twelve dirhams, sebesten and jujube, thirty units,</p> <p>flowers of Iraqi violets, three dirhams, water-lily and fresh rose, of each seven flowers, leek seeds, one mithqal, fennel seeds, half a dirham.</p> <p>Crush those drugs that need to be crushed and steep all in four hundred dirhams of sweet water for a day and a night. Boil until a quarter remains, strain and mash into it twelve dirhams of cassia fistula scales and ten dirhams of manna. Strain again over one uqiyya of julep and a spoonful of almond oil.</p> <p>Sprinkle the surface of the vessel with sweet smelling Chinese or Turkish rhubarb</p> <p>and agaric and pounded yellow turpeth with gummy edges, of each half a dirham, and one daniq of scammony.</p> <p>One may add, to the above seeds, hiera picra, one mithqal, and knead everything in endive juice or fennel juice and form into pills and swallow with julep four hours before drinking the decoction.</p> <p>Beneficial for hemicrania, cleansing the brain and nerves and chronic eye diseases.</p>

al-ʿAttar has been the one adding information about the different names in different places.

However, there are a few recipes with almost no difference, such as a gargle for clearing the brain, where al-Kuhin al-ʿAttar strains the liquid, but not necessarily through silk, as Ibn Abi ʿl-Bayan recommends,²⁴ or they simply have different names for the same thing, as in the identical recipe for a poultice called a *jabar* in *Minhaj al-dukkān* and a *dimad* in *al-Dustur al-bimaristāni*.²⁵

Al-Kuhin al-ʿAttar has certain expressions that he adds almost invariably, no matter whom he is quoting. The most common addition is the word *nafiʿ*, “beneficial,” which often appears tagged on to recipes. This almost never appears in the sources; indeed, when a similar word, like *mujarrab*, “tried and tested,” appears in the source-recipe, in *Minhaj al-dukkān* it will usually be accompanied by *nafiʿ* as well. An interesting variant is *nafiʿ in shaʿa allah*. The addition of “God willing” has the effect of weakening the approval expressed by “beneficial”—perhaps this recipe is not so beneficial after all? This might be the medico-pharmaceutical equivalent of the historians’ *allahu aʿlam*, “God knows best,” indicating at least a lack of certain knowledge and even distrust.

Up to now we have dealt principally with the professional identity of the two authors. What of their religious identity? We know from Ibn Abi Usaybiʿa’s biography of Ibn Abi ʿl-Bayan that he was a Karaite Jew. This information could not be derived from the extant text of *al-Dustur al-bimaristāni*—it contains not the slightest hint as to the religious identity of its author. Neither the Jewish nor the Muslim dietary laws have had any influence on the ingredients used to prepare drugs of classical Greek origin. The ashes of crabs and scorpions, wine, and the flesh of various unclean animals all appear there. The same is true of the recipes recorded in *Minhaj al-dukkān*. However, in contrast to *al-Dustur al-bimaristāni*, *Minhaj al-dukkān* does contain clues that hint at al-Kuhin al-ʿAttar’s Jewishness. The first clue, of course, is his name. The combination of al-Kuhin (= the priest) al-Haruni (= the Aaronid) al-Israʿili (= the Israelite) suggests an actual Jew, rather than a Jewish convert to Islam or a descendant of one, possible interpretations of the *nisba al-israʿili* by itself. Ibn Abi ʿl-Bayan’s name, as it appears in *al-Dustur al-bimaristāni*, does not even include this *nisba*. Without Ibn Abi Usaybiʿa’s biography, there would be no evidence that Ibn Abi ʿl-Bayan was Jewish at all, let alone a Karaite.

Other clues to al-Kuhin al-ʿAttar's religious identity appear mainly in the chapter on drug synonyms, of all places. In a work written in Arabic characters and aimed principally at a non-Jewish audience, a few plants are given names in Hebrew, as well as different Arabic names (in contrast to one of the most famous works in this genre, Maimonides' *Sharh asma' al-ʿuqqar*,²⁶ which gives no Hebrew names). In this chapter, al-Kuhin al-ʿAttar gives his readers interesting information about various plants, sometimes in addition to a list of synonyms and sometimes instead of it.

One interesting anecdote, particularly in light of the author's identity as a Jew of the priestly caste (from which his title *al-kuhin* = *ha-kohen* derives) appears in the entry for *ʿushar* (*Calotropis gigantea* or *Asclepias gigantea*):²⁷

Milkweed: this is the plant from which the sugar known as *sukkar al-ʿushar*²⁸ comes. It is a plant bearing fruit about the size of a pomegranate, green on the outside and white on the inside. In it is a wool softer than silk, from which the clothes of the priest who served in the Temple used to be made. I have been told that it is unlucky in the house, and I do not know the reason for this. It is reported that the priest would use it for serving exalted God and was not permitted to change it for another.

This tale does not appear in any of the other sources used in this section, while the secondary literature knows of *ʿushar* only as a source of sugar.²⁹ However, R. Saʿadya Gaon³⁰ in his *Tafsir* on Exodus 25:4 states that *ʿushar* is a kind of flax found only in Egypt, completely white and not colored.³¹ Indeed, the general consensus of Rabbanite tradition is that the words *shesh* and *bad* appearing in the biblical descriptions of the priestly garments refer to linen,³² whereas the Karaite tradition is that these garments were of silk.³³ Although the Karaites are also likely to have accepted Saʿadya's identification of *ʿushar*, we suggest that the reference to the priestly garments as being made of a kind of linen indicates that al-Kuhin al-ʿAttar—for whom no biographical details survive—is more likely to have been a Rabbanite Jew.

What then can we say of the relevance of their Jewish identity for our two authors? In a discussion of the medical works of Maimonides, surely someone whose Jewish identity was important to him in other intellectual spheres, Lieber has pointed out that

literate Jewish physicians of the medieval Islamic world, like their Muslim and Christian colleagues, were to base their ideas essentially on the writings of Galen and, through them, on the Hippocratic corpus—that is, on pagan Greek concepts. And the same held for the medicine of Christian Byzantium.

This international, or rather interfaith, unity of medicine was made possible by the fact that it was essentially untouched by theological considerations. . . . The Bible or Talmud are hardly ever invoked in medieval Jewish medical writings; just as the Koran makes little intrusion into the mainstream of Islamic medicine.³⁴

Lieber's point seems certainly to hold true of the physician Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan. But what of the pharmacist al-Kuhin al-'Attar? Unlike *al-Dustur al-bimaristani*, *Minhaj al-dukkān* contains two chapters (1 and 23) devoted to ethics, a large part of which have a religious flavor. In chapter 1, al-Kuhin al-'Attar immediately reminds his son that God has created men as intelligent beings and given them free will, thus enabling them to do good. The emotion uppermost in one's soul should be reverence for God.³⁵

Chapter 23 begins with a passage reminiscent of the Jewish prayer recited upon waking: "I thank Thee, Everlasting and Eternal King, Who hath returned my soul unto me in mercy." Al-Kuhin al-'Attar tells his son:

Know that on each day the creation is renewed,³⁶ and know that sleep is the lesser death. When a person wakens from sleep, it is as if he had been newly created, and it is incumbent upon him to thank exalted God for His power and His keeping him alive and able to thank Him for His grace.³⁷

There is constant mention of God throughout this chapter: One must aim to be worthy of God's reward; all profits are a gift from God; one must have faith in God, for it is He who provides livelihood, not human customers; be grateful to God always, no matter what your situation: if it is good, that it is good, and if bad, that it is not worse. The chapter ends with the words: "May God make you one of those who keep and fulfill [His laws], and not make you one who forgets and is neglectful. God directs all courses."³⁸

Both in form and content, these chapters of *Minhaj al-dukkān* are very similar to the ethical wills found in medieval Jewish literature. Two

near-contemporary examples are the “Father’s Admonition” (*Mussar ab*) of Judah ibn Tibbon (fl. late twelfth century) and the “Gates of Instruction” (*Sha’arei ha-mussar*) attributed to Maimonides and probably composed by a thirteenth-century physician.³⁹ Naturally, the Jewish ethical wills are addressed from father to son, as is *Minhaj al-dukkān* in its entirety. Like chapters 1 and 23 of *Minhaj al-dukkān*, the father delineates the correct way of life for his son. I will give a few examples of similar ideas: Ibn Tibbon tells his son, “Thou knowest, my son, that the Creator did not specify a recompense for any of the Ten Commandments, except for honoring parents,”⁴⁰ while al-Kuhin al-‘Attar says, “Follow your prayers by serving your parents, for Paradise is open before you during their lives.”⁴¹ Or again, Ibn Tibbon says, “My son! If thou writest aught, read it through a second time, for no man can avoid slips,”⁴² while al-Kuhin al-‘Attar tells his son, “If you write a letter to anyone, reflect on it very much, for it is your intelligence sealed with your seal.”⁴³ Even the advice that al-Kuhin al-‘Attar gives his son, to treat his shop and goods as a learned man treats his books—that is, to check them regularly and know what is there⁴⁴—appears in the *Mussar ab*, in admonitions on the proper care of one’s library.⁴⁵

Al-Kuhin al-‘Attar regards carrying out one’s duties as a pharmacist properly as a religious obligation, on the same level as belief. To him, the profession of pharmacy means constantly to fulfill the injunction to love one’s neighbor as one’s self. Neglectfulness on the pharmacist’s part is potentially life-threatening, thus such neglect would be a sin.⁴⁶ Despite the similarities to Jewish material noted above, however, al-Kuhin al-‘Attar expresses no clear-cut religious identity beyond a general monotheism. The relevant Arabic terminology was shared by Jews, Christians, and Muslims, allowing pharmacists from every community to see al-Kuhin al-‘Attar’s moral injunctions as relevant to themselves, as relevant as his instructions for preparing medicines.

Glossary of Pharmaceutical Terms

Decoction: a liquid preparation made by boiling a medicinal plant with water.

Julab: julep, simple syrup.

Pastille: a small medicated or flavored tablet.

Pill: a small pellet or tablet of medicine, taken by swallowing whole or by chewing.

Poultice: a soft moist adhesive mass, as of dough or clay, that is usually heated, spread on cloth, and applied to warm, to moisten, or to stimulate an aching or inflamed part of the body.

Rob: thickened juice of ripe fruit, obtained by evaporation of the juice over a fire until it acquires the consistence of syrup.

Notes

1. See Manfred Ullmann, *Die Medizin im Islam* (Leiden, 1970), 309; Juan Vernet, "Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan," *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2, 3:683.

2. For a discussion of this issue, see E. Lev, L. Chipman, and F. Niessen, "A Hospital Handbook for the Community: Evidence for the Extensive Use of Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan's *al-Dustur al-bimaristani* by the Jewish Practitioners of Medieval Cairo," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 53 (2008): 104–105. The two editions are P. Sbath, ed., "Le Formulaire des hôpitaux d'Ibn abil Bayan, médecin du bimaristan annacery au Caire au XIIIe siècle," *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Egypte* 15 (1932–33): 9–78; and P. Sbath and C. D. Avierinos, eds. and trans., "Sahlan Ibn Kaysan et Rašid al-Din Abu Hulayka: deux traités médicaux," *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Egypte* 25 (1953): 43–75. References to "Sbath's edition" throughout are to the 1932–33 edition.

3. On Sabur b. Sahl, see O. Kahl, "Sabur b. Sahl," *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2, 8:694.

4. On Ibn al-Tilmidh, see S. K. Khamarneh, "Ibn al-Tilmidh," *Dictionary of Scientific Biography* (New York, 1970–90), 13:415–16.

5. A recent edition is Abu 'l-Muna al-Kuhin al-'Attar, *Minhaj al-dukkān wa-dustur al-a'yan*, ed. H. al-'Asi (Beirut, 1992). On the book and its author, see L. Chipman, *The World of Pharmacy and Pharmacists in Mamluk Cairo* (Leiden, 2010).

6. Shlomo Dov Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*. vol. 2: *The Community* (Berkeley, 1971), 265.

7. M. Levey, *Early Arabic Pharmacology* (Leiden, 1973), 98.

8. *Minhaj al-dukkān*, 9.

9. Peter Freimark, "Mukaddima," *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2, 7:496. I would like to thank Prof. Sarah Stroumsa for referring me to Freimark's work.

10. Peter Freimark, *Das Vorwort als literarische Form in der arabischen Literatur* (Münster, 1967), 23.

11. Ibid., 26–27: "Oft ist das Vorwort der Ort, den der Autor als Inhaltverzeichnis benutzt. Es werden die einzelnen Kapitel und Unterabschnitte des Buches aufgeführt, um dem Leser die Behandlung des Gegenstands in Werk deutlich zu machen und um die Benutzung des Werkes zu vereinfachen."

12. Ibid., 62: "Im Ganzen ist dieser Schlussteil immer viel kürzer als die erster Teil des Vorworts, er wird auch gelegentlich ausgelassen."

13. This definition of medicine is that of Ibn Sina. See *al-Qanun fi 'l-tibb* (Beirut, 1420/1999), 1:13.

14. *Minhaj al-dukkān*, 9–10.

15. See, e.g., 'Ali b. al-'Abbas al-Majusi, *Kamil al-sina'a al-tibbiyya* (Bulaq, 1870), 1:3–6: criticisms of previous books by Hippocrates, Galen, Oribasius, Paul of Aegina, Ahrun, Ibn Serapion, and Muhammad b. Zakariyya' al-Razi (*al-Hawi*). Contradiction of one's predecessors was a favourite topos; see Freimark, *Vorwort*, 40.

16. This corroborates al-Biruni's etymology of *saydalani* originally referring to perfumers, particularly traders of sandalwood. Hakim Mohammed Said, ed. and trans., *Al-Biruni's Book on Pharmacy and Materia Medica* (Karachi, 1973), 1:4–5; cf. Max Meyerhof, "Das Vorwort zur Drogenkinde des Beruni," *Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Naturwissenschaften und der Medizin* 3 (Berlin, 1932): 4–5 (Arabic text).

17. *Minhaj al-dukkān*, 10.

18. *Al-Dustur al-bimaristani*, 17.

19. Royal College of Physicians of London, MS Tritton 38; Arthur Tritton, "Catalogue of Oriental Manuscripts in the Library of the Royal College of Physicians," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (October 1951): 182–92.

20. To say nothing of the direct reference to him and his book in the preface to *Minhaj al-dukkān*, see above.

21. For Ibn Abi Usaybi's criteria for inclusion, see Franak Hilloowala, "An Analysis of Ibn Abi Usaybi's *Uyun al-anba fi tabaqat al-atibba*" (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 2000), 145–63.

22. For a detailed comparison of al-Kuhin al-'Attar's sources and the use he makes of them, see Chipman, *The World of Pharmacy*, 18–45.

23. *Minhaj al-dukkān*, 97.

24. *Minhaj al-dukkān*, 197, and *al-Dustur al-bimaristani*, 52; another example is the recipe for *habb muntin* ("stinking pill"), in which Ibn Abi 'l-Bayan uses two-thirds of a *dirham* of *hiera picra* while al-Kuhin al-'Attar uses three *dirhams* (*al-Dustur al-bimaristani*, 31; *Minhaj al-dukkān*, 115).

25. *Minhaj al-dukkān*, 193, and *al-Dustur al-bimaristani*, 65.

26. Max Meyerhof, ed. and trans., *Šarh asma' al-'uqqar* (*L'explication des noms des drogues*), un glossaire de matière médicale composé par Maïmonide (Cairo, 1940).

27. *Minhaj al-dukkān*, 249.

28. According to Edward W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London, 1863–93), s.v., this is "a well-known kind of sugar, in which is somewhat of bitterness," or else "this is a kind of red sugar, which falls like dew upon this tree." See also *Minhaj al-dukkān*, 239, under *sukkar al-'ushar*, and 224, under *taranjabin misri*.

29. Rosa Kuhne Brabant, "Le sucre et le doux dans l'alimentation d'al-Andalus," *Médiévales* 33 (1997): 59: "Le terme *sukkar* . . . ne s'appliquait pas exclusivement au sucre de canne mais aussi aux sucres extraits d'autres plantes comme . . . 'uṣar." 'Uṣar is not mentioned in Robert B. Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles: Materials for a History up to the Mongol Conquest* (Beirut, 1972), but see now Z. Amar and T. Friedman, "Milkweed—Fibers to Fabric," *Shuttle, Spindle, and Dyepot* 28 (1997): 43–45.

30. R. Sa'adyah Gaon (269–331/882–942) was a theologian, philosopher, and philologist, one of a very few Jewish thinkers to be mentioned in the Arabic biographical literature. He was the head of the Talmudic academy at Sura, and his *Tafsir* is the first translation of the Torah into Arabic. P. B. Fenton, "Sa'adya ben Yōsēf," *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2, 8: 661.

31. Yehuda Ratzaby, *A Dictionary of Judaeo-Arabic in R. Sa'adya's Tafsir* (Ramat-Gan, 1985), 101 (Hebrew).

32. Exodus 28:1–43 describes the garments of the high priest in detail, using the words *shesh* and *bad*. Both words are conventionally translated as "linen"—in other words, Rabbinic Jewish tradition knows no other cloth originating from plant fibers used for the priestly garments. See Nahum Sarna (commentary), *Exodus = Shemōt: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia, 1991).

33. I consulted the extant Karaite translations/commentaries on Exodus noted in Meira Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation* (Leiden, 1997), appendix 3. In all cases, *shesh* was translated as *harir*, "silk." The verses containing *bad* were not translated.

34. Elinor Lieber, "The Medical Works of Maimonides: A Reappraisal," in *Moses Maimonides: Physician, Scientist, and Philosopher*, ed. F. Rosner and S. Kottke (Northvale, N.J., 1982), 15.

35. *Minhaj al-dukkān*, 15.

36. Another citation from the Jewish prayer book. The first blessing recited before the *Shema* refers to God as "He who in His goodness renews the work of creation each day constantly."

37. *Minhaj al-dukkān*, 265.

38. *Ibid.*, 271.

39. "A Father's Admonition by Judah Ibn Tibbon," and "The Gate of Instruction Attributed to Maimonides," in *Hebrew Ethical Wills*, ed. and trans. I. Abrahams (Philadelphia, 1926), 1:51–93, 101–17.

40. *Ibid.*, 1:56.

41. *Minhaj al-dukkān*, 268.

42. *Hebrew Ethical Wills*, 1:68.

43. *Minhaj al-dukkān*, 268.

44. *Ibid.*, 268.

45. *Hebrew Ethical Wills*, 1:80–81.

46. *Minhaj al-dukkān*, 16.

12

Jewish Parody and Allegory in Medieval Hebrew Poetry in Spain

LIBBY GARSHOWITZ

With the arrival of Fez native Dūnash ben Labraṭ (died ca. 990) in Córdoba, Spain, and his introduction of Arabic quantitative meter, structure, themes, and rhetorical style into Hebrew poetry, the golden age of Hebrew Andalusian poetry was launched.¹ Its most prominent representatives over the next two centuries (ca. 1020–1150), beginning with the Muslim caliphate of the welcoming ‘Abd-ar-Rahmān III (912–61), were Samuel ibn Nagrela (993–1056), Moses ibn Ezra (1055–ca. 1140), Solomon ibn Gabirol (1021–58), and Judah Halevi (1075–1141).

But many other poets soon joined their ranks, excelling in the creation of a new and enriched genre of poetry by the Jews of southern Spain, concentrated mainly in the Andalusian cities of Granada, Córdoba, and Seville and in the border city of Toledo, which embraced both Christian and Muslim influences. Their proximity to the seats of Muslim power enabled Andalusian scholars to become deeply involved with the learned courtiers there, skilled in belles-lettres, philosophy, and the narration of the glories of their conquests. Furthermore, these literary contacts enhanced their own creative skills, hitherto devoted to writing philosophical and grammatical treatises, codes of law, technical studies, and biblical translations, among others, in the Arabic language.

Soon, however, Andalusian Jews set out to write their own poetry in Hebrew, deeming it appropriate that their language was sufficiently rich and elegant to leave behind the domain of the Arabic language and

demonstrate their own skill, virtuosity, and wit in creating distinctively Jewish poetry in Hebrew.² They abandoned both writing in Arabic and translations of Arabic works into Hebrew and fashioned their literary discourses to reflect their contemporary milieu and to infuse them with Jewish topics in themes, form, style, and content. These Jewish craftsmen drew their inspiration from the Jewish literature in which they were steeped from their great past and reflected, perhaps in hindsight, their uncertain present and future. Their sources stemmed from all aspects of the biblical, midrashic, and talmudic literatures that they brilliantly wove into their secular and sacred poetry. Biblical allusions abound in these literary creations, as they wrote in their poetry of the destruction of their two temples, the loss of their hegemony and their land of Israel, and the lengthy exile, as exemplified by Dūnash ben Libraṭ's "Sleep Not!";³ the promises of eventual redemption, as in Samuel ibn Nagrela's "Wake Up, Wake Up";⁴ the awesome wonders of God's creation, as in Solomon ibn Gabirol's metaphysical treatise "Royal Crown";⁵ laudatory poems in praise (*shevaḥ*) of benefactors and friends, as in the several dedications to different patrons, both in Arabic and Hebrew, in Judah Alḥarizi's *Sefer Tahkemoni*;⁶ and the pleasures—and dangers—of wine, as in Samuel ibn Nagrela's "Wake Up, Wake Up" and Moses ibn Ezra's "Drink Up, Enjoy."⁷ Shifting seasons and lush gardens, fading and dying but reviving once again as winter edges into spring, were frequent themes in these poems.⁸ Andalusian poets wrote of battles and wars and ultimately their distaste of them.⁹ Dicta, moralia, and philosophical musings permeate this poetry as do "boasting" poems, a distinctive feature of both Arabic and Jewish poetry.¹⁰

Many of these poems formed the sacred and secular corpus of Hebrew *belles-lettres*. Also included in this corpus and heavily influenced by the Arabs was love poetry, specifically "poetry of desire" (*shirat ḥesheq*).¹¹ Filled with lust (*ḥesheq*) and longing, eroticism and jealousy, these poems were a direct heir of Arabic love poetry—characterized by its lavish scenes of nature, soirées devoted to enjoying wine, indulging in flirtatious dalliance in the presence of male and female servants, reading poems and improvising, playing musical instruments, and writing erotic descriptions of love between male and male/female lovers, usually designated by the Hebrew terms *švi* and *ʿofer*, for the men and *šviyya* and *ʿofra* for the women. Love poetry did not always garner approval; for example, Moses Maimonides (1138–1204) disparaged it.

Maimonides' Views on Love Poetry

Maimonides' objections to love poetry, both Arabic and Hebrew, stemmed from his belief that the Arabic language itself would be regarded as "out of place, vulgar, perhaps even blasphemous, and certainly inappropriate to a semi-religious or quasi-religious occasion." Concerning poetry's recitation in Hebrew, Maimonides' objection derived "from the language of the subject. . . . If, however, the purpose of that poem were vice, in whatever language it may be, it is prohibited to recite it." According to Kozodoy, "the recitation of poems in the Hebrew language, by contrast [to the Arabic] would in the view of [elders and saintly men] be permissible no matter what the particular sentiments being expressed, on the grounds that the language itself is sacred, and, being sacred, purifies and exalts that which is expressed in its syllables. The language, they would say, is an elevating and dignifying force; by its inherent sublimity it sacralizes the lowliest of subject matters." Kozodoy continues that Maimonides would have no use for this view, from the standpoint of the subject, not the language. As we shall see, Maimonides may not have approved of the material presented in this essay, the decidedly erotic poetry of Jacob ben Elazar.¹²

Biblical Intertextuality and Influence of Arabic Literature

The principal text for the genre of erotic poetry was the biblical Song of Songs. Hebrew poets wove biblical verses into their own works with ingenuity. Although the format, metrics, and themes of these Hebrew love poems may be derived from Arabic poetry, their images and language were purely biblical and midrashic. The sensuous language of Song of Songs aroused later Jewish poets to emulate the idyllic language, erotic images, and ideas of this collection of biblical love stories as intertextually they recalled the sheer joy, revelry, and lovemaking of the lovers in the biblical book, which resonates with explicit corporeal imagery and sensual expressions of affection between the coy but compulsive lovers. Descriptive passages of passionate love scenes found their way into the poetry of the Andalusians.¹³ The love poetry of the Middle Ages is filled with expressions like "lovesick (*ḥolat 'ahavim*) am I," declares the damsel who is totally enraptured with her soulmate, or "my beloved is like a gazelle" (*domeh dodi li-ševi 'o le- 'ofer ha-'ayyalim*).¹⁴ The love scenes in Song of Songs with its rich settings were magically exported into the secular

poetry of Spanish Jewry as they lauded the luxuriant gardens of Spain with her majestic mountains, warbling birds, and fleet-footed animals.

One of the many themes that Hebrew poets explored in biblical literature was the allusion to the marital relationship between God and Kneset Israel, the Jewish people, his acknowledged bride. This relationship, however, is replete with betrayal and recommitment, rejection and restoration, deception and redemption.¹⁵ Themes of perfidy and unrequited love, therefore, are both explicit and implicit in human male-female relationships, and both found their way into medieval Hebrew poetry, whether openly or disguised.

Influence of Arabic *Maqāma* Literature on Hebrew *Maḥbarot*

Another genre of poetry found in the extensive works of Andalusian Jewry and directly influenced by Muslim culture and literature is *maqāmāt* (Arabic) or *maḥbarot* (Hebrew) literature in rhymed prose and metered poetry. These compositions contain descriptions of travels and wanderings undertaken by Jews to many places in the *Maghreb* (west) and the *Mashriq* (east), wherever Jews lived, the communities the travelers encountered there, and their raucous adventures in faraway places, real or imagined (*bidayon*).¹⁶ These literary creations found responsive audiences and followed very closely upon what is regarded as the close of the golden age of Andalusian poetry, when literary activity began flourishing in northern Christian Spain following the traumas created by the upheavals of the Almoravid (1090) and Almohad (around 1147) invasions, which decimated Jewish communities in southern Spain and forced many Jews northward into Christian Spain and elsewhere in the Iberian Peninsula as well as to other countries. These “wanderings,” different from those (imaginative) tales in *maqāma* literature, were poignantly recorded by Andalusian poets such as Moses ibn Ezra, who was forced to leave Andalusia and who penned many poems detailing his previous unfamiliar solitude.

The master composer of Hebrew *maqāmat* (henceforth *maḥbarot*) was Judah Alḥarizi (1165–1225). With his translation of al-Ḥariri’s Arabic *maqāma* into Hebrew, known as *Maḥberot ’Iti’el* and the subsequent authorship of his own *Sefer Tahkemoni* in elegant, polished prose and poetry, the stage was set for other medieval Spanish Jewish scholars to follow in his footsteps.¹⁷ One such author was Alḥarizi’s contemporary and fellow Toledan, Jacob ben Eleazar (Abenalazar, c. 1170–1235).

Jacob ben Elazar's *Sippurei 'Ahava*

Jacob ben Elazar was the scion of a distinguished family, a Toledan, a wanderer, and a grammarian who translated the Arabic-language version of the book of animal fables, *Kalila ve-Dimna*, into Hebrew, and composed allegorical philosophic works and poetry.¹⁸

He penned his own ten-chapter *maqāma* or *maḥberet*, *Sefer Meshalim* (Book of Tales or Fables), also called *Sippurei 'Ahava* (Love Stories), in about 1233. This work is described by its editor as “having no equal in this literary *genre* in the medieval period.”¹⁹ In this work the reader encounters many of the subjects found in the scant examples of liturgical and secular poetry cited above. However it is indebted in content to sources found in other literatures—Greek, Persian, Provençal, Spanish and Hebrew.²⁰ Allegorical paeans on the soul's yearnings—in dialogue with the heart—to know wisdom, are reminders of Jacob ben Elazar's magisterial philosophical works.²¹ There are poems in praise of Hebrew, poetic descriptions of the competitive nature of poets, and a diversionary debate between prose and poetry (poetry wins)²² and pen and sword (so does the pen), concluding that both are subject to God.²³ Further enhancing this work are animal fables, interspersed with ethical discussions, tales of treacherous dealings between men and women, usually instigated by the latter and a common theme in *maqāma* literature. Also included are a legion of the usual suspects found elsewhere in medieval literature: bold hunters in animal form, handsome young men, and beautiful young women, all in pursuit of love, song, and dance. Ben Elazar demonstrates his wit, and perhaps racism, in his description of fierce battles with wicked black giants (*kushim*) who lack wisdom and in his tales of Yoshefe's *ménage à trois* and “Kima's and Sahar's Love Story.”²⁴ His cast of characters also include bearded hypocrites, middle-aged lechers, and deceitful young orphans. These tales are provocative, filled with the vice and wickedness of the townspeople that the travelers encounter. They are subtly woven tales of morals and codes of conduct, as one might expect from authors who have also written more somber works.

Jacob ben Elazar's place in the Arab-Christian milieu was conducive to the acquisition of consummate knowledge of the Arabic and Hebrew languages and cultures.²⁵ His travels to northern Spain and Provence would also have brought him into contact with other literatures and poetry such

as that of the troubadours. He surely would have encountered their writings on issues of morality, society, gender, and sexual relations, which were common themes in the Jewish world. Familiarity with the poetry in these areas, as well as the composition of that of his fellow Toledan, Judah Alḥarizi's *Taḥkemoni*, influenced Jacob ben Elazar to carry on the tradition of injecting another perspective into the literature of desire, that of parody, into his Hebrew composition. As the contact between Arab and Hebrew cultures lessened somewhat and translations of Arabic works into Hebrew increased, Jacob ben Elazar joined the cadre of authors who left the eloquence of Arabic poetry and language to articulate the expressiveness of Hebrew. Furthermore, as Andalusian poets moved northward and encountered other cultures, especially those of Christian Spain, they found that the Arabic language was not the *lingua franca* it had been in Muslim Andalusia.

Jacob ben Elazar's contemporary, Judah Alḥarizi, described in his varying dedications to different patrons the state of Hebrew: "the holy tongue, he was informed, was fast deteriorating, having been abandoned by its people, who now favored the Arabic language,"²⁶ which expresses succinctly ben Elazar's motives for writing his "Love Stories" in Hebrew: first, he wanted to chastise the Arabs who boast about the profundity and richness of the Arabic language and thereby mock the paucity of Hebrew to address many subjects,

Is there such a language to cheer and smear
And love arouse, as the Arabs?
Are there words as rich for wars and lore
as ours?²⁷

Ostensibly offended by this flaunting, Jacob ben Elazar stated, as his second reason for writing his composition, his belief that the divinely ordained Hebrew language was eminently qualified to express profound thoughts:

[God] has chosen the Sacred Tongue, the Hebrews' language, over
others,
He who mocks our tongue in turn is mocked and scorned
Because in a lesser language and alien tongue he speaks to this [Arab]
nation.²⁸

Jacob ben Elazar continues: “My *Book of Tales*’ intent and my dialogues will respond to Arabs who the Sacred Tongue assail, vaunting their boldness over me, saying, only in their language can tales be told!” (ll. 11–14)

According to these naysayers, only the Arabic language can “praise, ridicule, arouse love, mock” (ll. 16–17), to the extent that even Jacob ben Elazar’s fellow Jews are convinced that the Arabic language is superior: “They [the Arabs] have seduced my people and have so deceived them that indeed [my people] say that the Ishmaelites silence all others with their flattery and there are no words as pleasing [‘*arevim*’] as the Arabs” (“‘*aravim*,” ll. 20–21). *Sefer Meshalim*, then, is designed to remove the stigma of the “primitive nature” of Hebrew, which ostensibly shames his people.²⁹ He will reveal that the Hebrew language has not fallen into desuetude, since by zealously “posing riddles [*hiddot*] and allegorizing”³⁰ (l. 26) “whose content and good taste the astute [‘*ish maskil*’] will surely understand” [*bin yavin*, l. 4], his fellow Jews will see what they have hitherto neglected. And, indeed, *Sefer Meshalim* rings out with song, ridicule, parody, satire, an abundance of puns, alliterations, praise, love, and entertainment [*sha’ashu’im*] (introduction, ll. 2, 11). Jacob ben Elazar challenges the Arabs to retract their derision of the Hebrew language since *he* will demonstrate its superiority and exaltedness because God has endowed humankind with intelligence, perception, and speech. And if, indeed, the Hebrew language has lost some of its luster, Jacob ben Elazar will invigorate it.

The pivotal narrator in each *maḥberet* of this work is a foreigner, as found in Arabic literature, in this case Lemuel ben Itiel, of proverbial fame,³¹ storyteller *par excellence* (ll. 31–35), who is our author’s own alter ego. Ben Elazar has inserted his own name, Jacob, into his introduction, abjuring plagiarizers (*zar*) to distance themselves from his work, on the pain of death, a most unlikely eventuality for vulnerable Jews living as *dhimmi*s in Andalusian Spain or who were migrating elsewhere because of persecution and destruction.³² There are no central characters in this composition as in Alḥarizi’s *Sefer Tahkemoni*. What is found throughout, however, is a medley of subjects that have little connection to the rituals of Judaism per se, but as the reader will see, there is a strong advocacy of its teachings (*torot*), moralizing, and the quest for wisdom and the eschewing of treachery and violation of norms.³³ Jacob ben Elazar’s effusive praise and thanks to God and his wondrous creations reverberate throughout this composition, as found in the sacred and secular poetry

of his predecessors and contemporaries. As the reader quickly discovers, Jacob ben Elazar's *Sefer Meshalim* is more than an entertaining book of tales. It is a book whose alternate name, "Love Stories," marries love and fantasy, fun and frolic, parody and satire. This essay, then, focuses on Jacob ben Elazar's love poetry in *Maḥbarot* Seven and Nine, in which are found lusty tales of women besting men in battle, resourcefulness, and poetic creativity.

Maḥberet Seven: Yoshefe and His Two Loves

The protagonist of *Maḥberet* Seven is Yoshefe, (*'ish yafeh*, l. 4),³⁴ whose well-to-do parents, like the aristocrats around them, have lost both status and wealth because of the rise of evildoers (l. 6). Stricken with wanderlust and perhaps wanting a better life than he is now experiencing due to his reduced social status, Yoshefe is provided with rations for a long journey from his land of Ḥasar Susa, the inheritance of Simeon's descendants.³⁵ During his travels, he joins bands of roving drunkards and gluttons and is quite content to eat and drink with them and tell tall tales, all in rhymed, metered poetry. Upon their arrival in magnificent Cairo (ll. 48–63), whose beauty Yoshefe extols with even more elegance (*u-misrayim me-hullala, be-ḥura me-'aḥoteha*), the scruffy young man is led to a marketplace, ringing with the sounds of music, where the wares are enchanting women. He singles out the most beautiful gazelle (ll. 69–75) of all, whose eyes inflame him and captivate his soul. He cannot, however, purchase her until he resolves his slovenly state. That being done, he purchases her with money that he has hidden in his torn garments. With an agent's help, he also procures a magnificent house, surrounded by courtyards, waterfalls, lavish gardens, and stone lions spouting cascades of water, the typical backdrop found in contemporary Hebrew and Arabic literature and frequently the setting for wine soirées. He takes this most beautiful and chaste Yefefia as his lover (*ra'ya*),³⁶ ensconces her in his house, and arouses her desire (*hisheqah*), which she pretends to rebuff, warning: "My friend (*yedidi*), my eyes have spread a net," the first hint to the reader that women will take charge of both their bodies and voices. Yoshefe is consumed with passion and stung by her arrows of love (ll. 113–19). The virginal Yefefia has entrapped her lover with metaphorical weapons of war (*u-milḥama meqaddeshet*), instead of the reverse, and she succumbs to his charms, apparently without the benefit of sanctification through marriage. Henceforth

they spend their days and nights eating, drinking, and making love, batting their eyelashes and winking at each other,³⁷ kissing, hugging, fondling each other, consumed by the fires of love, unquenchable by their tears, as they sing of their mutual hunger (ll. 140–43). Yefefia becomes desire personified, a woman not afraid to express her wants and her passion, which have come to pervade her total being (ll. 124–27). Their growing love is shared, and Jacob ben Elazar minces no words in his erotic descriptions of their passionate lovemaking.

Meanwhile, a visit to the slave market yields up yet another breathtaking maiden, Yemima, “white and pure like the day” (ll. 143–46).³⁸ Consumed with jealousy at being passed over by Yoshefe, she sells one of her neck beads and commissions the overseer to buy her a horse, fine clothes, a royal crown, and weapons, no matter the cost. She pays him the munificent sum of two thousand gold coins—money most likely stolen from her previous master’s house (a common theme in Arabic literature), lies in wait to ambush Yoshefe at his house, and finally enters in male disguise. There, while he lies in a drunken stupor, entwined with Yefefia, Yemima kidnaps Yoshefe and leads him away, still asleep, into real captivity (*shevi*), as she says, no doubt in the hope that he in turn will now become captivated by her (ll. 144–64). An angry and jealous Yemima has turned the tables on Yoshefe: Yefefia, a dutiful slave girl, had followed a few steps behind Yoshefe, all the while preparing to ensnare him, but now *he* is Yemima’s captive and *he* trails *her*. He is the captive in this game of love, its victim, not knowing whether he will live or die, metaphorically of course. Yoshefe appears again to be led, this time by a woman, not by the ne’er-dowells he has encountered in his bizarre travels. Intoxication, which opponents of wine soirées derided, was Yoshefe’s undoing, as Yoshefe himself pointed out (ll. 15–19). His servitude to Yefefia as a metaphorical captive of love, a common theme in love poetry, has turned into actual physical captivity. In a fit of pique, he expresses his innermost feelings at the situation in which he now finds himself. Angry and completely subdued, Yoshefe voices his discomfort at Yemima’s physical abuse, not knowing that his captor is a woman in male disguise:

Woe is me, my lover, woe is me.
From your bosom have I been stolen away.

If only my bonds could be loosened.
Then revenge will be my way.

(ll. 166–67).

With an air of bravado (ll. 175–82), he challenges his captor (and the latter's imaginary forces) to a duel, as one would expect a chivalrous knight to do. He boasts of his bravery, which he imbibed with his mother's milk, flaunting his ability to pulverize them mercilessly because he is not like every lover (*hosheq*), weakened by desire. Before the challenge can be taken up, a newcomer appears on the scene, also on horseback, ranting and armed with a flaming spear. It is none other than Yefefia, his first love, who has discovered that Yoshefe is missing; she pursues him, also in male disguise, roaring like a lioness bereft of her cubs. Yefefia and Yemima tussle, noisily and lustily, amid dust and howls (ll. 183–99), swords ablaze, their appearances disguised by their helmets, and argue about their love for Yoshefe, whom Yefefia calls her "playmate" (*yedid sha' ashu' ay*, l. 237). The reader can almost savor their aggressive altercation:

They fought a mighty battle.
One dives, the other thrives.
One shrieks, the other screams.
One chases, the other trails.
One trips, the other draws.
One on the right, one on the left.
One taunts, one flaunts.

(ll. 193–96)

And so on. Yemima strikes down Yefefia, and Yoshefe comes to her rescue, quaking, frightened (l. 191) to see deadly scorpions and snakes upon her head (ll. 218–27). Her breasts are firm like apples, and he is suffused with pain when he lands on them, thinking they were actual spears! Typically, in medieval poetry, female body parts are compared to weapons of war, and raven black locks are also understood metaphorically, prepared by the pursued seductress as a feigned deterrent during battle.³⁹ The lover's (*hashuqa*) beauty, white of skin and (blood) red of face, both beckons and repels.

Yoshefe is mortified to discover that he has been kidnapped by a woman, not a man. *Women* have fought over him and prevailed, not he, the self-styled intrepid warrior. Yoshefe, who is paradoxically referred to as “a wise and perceptive son” (*ben ḥakham ve-navon*, ll. 6–7) at the beginning of this tale, is outwitted by two women and comments on the perfidious nature of the female species whose weapons are deceit and treachery, seemingly ignoring the “real” weapons they brandished which had terrified him (ll. 219–20). Yoshefe is willing to overlook these perversities because of the damsels’ profound beauty (ll. 229–33), saying, while still abreast Yemima,

Treachery becomes women.
 They have embraced its legacy.
 Like their unshared equity,
 It’s women’s sole property.
 Unremittingly plotting against me,
 Covering my face with notoriety,
 If not for her great beauty,
 Whose male conquest is her duty,
 Seizing the sun’s light,
 Like death is love’s might.

(Song of Songs 8:6)

A weeping Yefefia both consoles and is consoled. Her feverish wandering (*nedod*) in search of her beloved has paid off. The two joyfully resume their play while an embittered Yemima sobs noisily.

Pulchritude and play obsess Yoshefe, but it is poetry making that is both Yefefia’s and Yemima’s venture. Says Yefefia,

Now, my sister, [stop crying], be quiet.
 Plead profusely before him.
 Prostrate yourself because he’s your lord.
 If you’re shamed to utter separate words (*devarim nifradim*),
 String them together as one (*ve-hayu le-’ahadim*).

(ll. 257–58)

Thus Jacob ben Elazar pleads his case for the sorry state of the Hebrew language in the Jewish communities. Make poetry, not war, is his message.

Despite the fierce rivalry between Yefefia and Yemima,⁴⁰ the former surprises the reader with her magnanimity: after a lyric, lengthy, and

loving entreaty in which she describes her sadness at the temporary loss of her beloved (*hosheq*), her brief separation from him, and how she pursued Yoshefe “from mountain to mountain” (ll. 240–50), in contrast to the male lover in Song of Songs who “comes leaping over the mountains,”⁴¹ she entreats the weeping, bitter Yemima, “my sister,” also an inversion of the term in the biblical Song of Songs,⁴² to join her and Yoshefe, to compose metered poetry: “wake up, wake up, sing a song,”⁴³ which enralls Yoshefe (ll. 260–79). Yemima does, telling Yoshefe how her love for him has entrapped *her* (*shevi ’ahava*), and now she pleads for reciprocal love (l. 269). Yoshefe is overjoyed by her pleas and consents, captivated by both lovers’ beauty, their faces alternating between the red of pomegranates and the whiteness of snow (ll. 275–79). Jacob ben Elazar has utilized the descriptive visual imagery of medieval Arabic and Hebrew poetry, along with flattery, exaggeration, simile, and metaphor to turn this battle among jealous lovers into a witty farce about the use of language. Such was his intent.

The two women’s bonding leads to the three lovers settling down into a harmonious and loving *ménage à trois*, “kissing, hugging, lusting,”⁴⁴ but not before a still-chastened Yoshefe asks Yemima why, if she is so enamored of him, did she kidnap him and make him walk behind her horse, beating him all the while? Said he to his lover (*ra ’ayato*) Yemima: “If you loved and desired me, how could you steal me away into captivity?” (ll. 281–82). She protested that she did not like to be cast away when every other suitor thought her beautiful and sweet-voiced. Yoshefe, nevertheless, persisted: “Your beauty you have praised, but me you have abased” (l. 303). Yemima’s answer: “Because you took my sister Yefefia and cast me away, I who am desired and esteemed by many a swain.” In alluring, autoerotic song (ll. 287–302) Yemima gives voice to her own comeliness (*u-mare’i na’eh*), as does the damsel in Song of Songs.⁴⁵ Nor does she overlook her exquisite voice (*qoli ye ’erav*, ll. 283–302):

Is not every swain by my great beauty swayed?
On my face basks the sun in its rising and setting.
My face is a beloved’s toy and my voice a sweet joy.

(ll. 10 and 11)

Yemima, not to be outdone by her former rival, also regales Yoshefe with his own attractiveness: “laughing, white, even teeth, not detached, like his poetry thus!” (*mešummadim ve-’ayn nifrad*, l. 307), shining countenance,

exquisite stature, perfectly hewn, “Did he come from the pleasures of Paradise (*ha-va mi-ma‘adan ‘eden*), . . . its sole survivor?” (ll. 308–16). Yoshefe is truly unique, but the reader can only smile at the profuse hype and flattery, replete with similes and metaphors, comparing him with the phenomena of creation and pristine Eden, beautiful like the young damsels themselves: “fair like the moon and pure like the sun.” The reader, however, cannot ignore Yemima’s gibe at Yoshefe’s lack of poetic skill. He, unlike them, cannot string together a coherent poetic *stich*! Yemima continues to enchant her lover with her tales (*meshalim*) of love, and all three settle down and “play as is the habit of hedonistic lovers” (*mesaḥaqim kemishpaṭ ha-ḥosheqim*, l. 317).

This idyllic situation, however, is soon disturbed with the arrival of another chevalier, bloody sword drawn, whacking away at trees, shrieking and screaming, “splitting mountains with his strength and hurling down cedars with his breath, dispersing all in his path” (ll. 317–19), ready to do battle to save Yoshefe, who appears to be in no imminent danger. There is no explanation for why his sword is bloodied. There has been no report of any battle, nor does the new arrival appear to have suffered any visible wounds. Our author, however, adds an ironic touch to the entire scene: a once-shamed Yoshefe will now have his illusory honor restored by a man, not a woman (ll. 321–24).⁴⁶ Yemima challenges Yoshefe to fight the newcomer, apparently fearing a new rival (ll. 317–26), another young woman in male disguise, roles she and Yefefia had previously assumed. The two men battle aggressively, shrieking, overheard by all, although no one else is present! The newcomer turns out to be none other than young (*na‘ar*, ll. 88, 389) Masos, from whose house Yoshefe had been kidnapped, the procurer (*sokhen*) of all of Yoshefe’s wealth and the proprietor of the original love nest. The two men rejoice and kiss at discovering each other (l. 327) and return to Yefefiya and Yemima. Jacob ben Elazar continues with the burlesque of Masos’s “bloody battle” and scoffs at his implied chivalry by turning the “red” of the lover’s seductive lips and cheeks into the “bloody red” of an idle sword.

With the men’s return to the by-now fearful and tearful women, the farce continues. The women fear that Yoshefe has been captured or murdered by the new arrival but are overjoyed to find that this is not the case. The *ménage à trois* quickly turns into a *ménage à quatre*, again at Masos’s house, and they continue their former debauchery of eating and

drinking (l. 333). There seems to be no further play among them, however, which may be a harbinger of future events, as we shall see. The only positive opinion Masos seems to contribute to this *ménagerie* is, like Yefefia's previous advice to Yemima, his suggestion that Yoshefe should continue to string together individual words in his prose tale to fashion a truly beautiful necklace of poetry (ll. 365–66).⁴⁷ It would appear that Jacob ben Elazar is truly as interested in song as in love, in keeping with his intent of entertaining his readers and restoring the beauty of the Hebrew language.

The unexpected arrival of messengers from Yoshefe's father disrupts the enlarged household as they announce the restoration of the family's wealth and authority, the return of craftsmen to their trades, the return of high society to its former station, and the overthrow of the evildoers, who had caused Yoshefe to embark on his voyage of self-discovery (ll. 341–56). Yoshefe decides to return to his native land, much to Masos's chagrin as he bewails the sorrow that this parting (*perud*) will cause, since he and Yoshefe have formed a love pact (*berit 'ahava*, l. 376) which parting will sever. One wonders what kind of relations exist between the two men, since Masos refers to Yoshefe as *dod* (ll. 382–84), beloved, rather than *yedid*, friend, much like the love poetry written by men for men, their '*ofer* or *ševi*.⁴⁸ Magnanimous Yoshefe invites Masos to join him on his home journey and promises him that he will give him his young, pure, chaste sister, Šippor (Birdie), as an *'ama*, (attendant?) so that Masos may "sit and chirp" (*tashov ve-tišpor*, l. 391) with Šippor.⁴⁹ Now it is Masos's parents' turn to give him presents for his journey (ll. 394–97) to the Šippor he loves, sight unseen (l. 394). The four leave Egypt for Ḥasar Susa, Yoshefe's hometown, where they are joyously greeted. Handsome Masos takes Šippor as his *'ama*, and following a grand feast and the exchange of gifts, Masos falls in love (now for real!) with Šippor and does not leave her side for an entire year. Yoshefe, meanwhile, sits with his two young loves, Yefefia and Yemima, all singing songs, posing puzzles, telling tales, experiencing events, passing out parcels of clothing and other gifts as befits [Jewish] women, and performing righteous acts of loving-kindness. No rivalry or jealousy bothers them, as is customary among friends (*ke-mishpaṭ ḥaverim*, l. 411), which is a subtle touch of irony, as we shall see. Needless to say, Jacob ben Elazar is subliminally indoctrinating his readers with Jewish morals and ethics.

For an entire year Yefefia and Yemima tutor Šippor (where is Masos?), now referred to as Masos's wife (l. 412) in the art of love and beneficence and fill her young heart and mind with desire and intellect (*melo' hesheq* . . . *u-vin* ll. 422, 418), recounting adventurous love tales of young gazelles (l. 413), which they know in abundance. We know very little about Šippor other than her brother Yoshefe's flattering words about her as young and chaste. Neither her husband, Masos, nor Yoshefe speak of her beauty or her intellect, which she so admires about her tutors. We are not told about Šippor's transformation from *'ama* to wife. We know only that Šippor's youth renders her sensitive and easily influenced. Now Šippor begins to "chirp" (ll. 417–40), earning the two ladies' praise: "Many women have performed heroically, but you have outdone them all!"⁵⁰

But all is not as harmonious as it appears. There is a subtext here, a new twist. Šippor's song is different from the love songs of Yefefia and Yemima. While Yefefia and Yemima had adapted to some kind of *modus vivendi* with Yoshefe in their new love nest, they had insinuated, quite cunningly, into their exquisite songs tales about fat, healthy gazelles (*shemenot beri'ot*), jealous women (*nashim meqanne'ot*), women's deceit (*me'ilat nashim*), women hated and loved (*'ahuvot senu'ot*), busybodies (*ve-holekhot u-va'ot*), and women suspected of committing adultery (*u-minhat qena'ot*, ll. 413–14), common themes in Hebrew and Arabic *maqāma* literature and usually recounted by men. Šippor now begins to chirp, in rhymed verse, a rather different tune. After a full year of living in the *ménage à cinq*, she bemoans her youthful bridegroom's lack of sexual know-how, awareness, and sophistication and begins to bewail her own naiveté:

Wit have you taught [your] foolish maid [Šippor]
 Who now knows just a little
 A mind unversed in riddles and lore
 Unveils an ignorant boor [Masos]
 The deft knows riddles
 The base his mouth proclaims
 Your spirit on me is poured
 And in mine is love galore
 Tender and young is my beau
 Filled with yearning but untested
 Hitherto lovers he hates

And now his own desire he slakes
 No opening for love appears
 To find a portal he fears
 To hug or kiss me he tries not
 And now a storm churns the pot
 Surely once his heart's desire
 For death his soul incites
 Yet today with desire inflamed
 He will yet arouse love's flame

.....

His heart lacks desire (*hesheq*)
 Like mine, as far as Shinar
 As his rapport with me is close
 My soul is not remote

.....

Like ice bare of hair
 Like a clean-shaven priest
 Whom a razor has fleeced⁵¹
 Like a man with no face
 Stripped nude in disgrace
 Like a man with no gear⁵²
 Displaying his fear⁵³
 Like a frothing madman⁵⁴
 One he scolds, another he chides
 Like a fool inclined to folly
 Inclined to sit naked and dotty

(ll. 418–40).⁵⁵

As painful as Šippor's plaint is, the reader is somewhat startled by her, and Jacob ben Elazar's, candor. And it is to this that Yemima and Yefefia answer, apparently derisively and sarcastically because their delicate senses may be affronted by their novice's crude words: "Many daughters have acted daringly, but you have bested them all!"⁵⁶ As a counterbalance to the immediate desire that inflamed Yoshefe, Yefefia, and Yemima, rushing headlong into love and lovemaking, Masos not only appears to be biding his time but his erratic behavior, as described by Šippor, leads the reader to wonder whether Jacob ben Elazar is mocking the genre of love poetry itself in his exaggeration of its physical torments.

Masos is young and untutored in the art of love and “has set his soul (*nafsho*) to death / but the day will come when passion arouses his zest” (*u-vo ’esh ’ahava tiv ’ar*, ll. 426–27), hopes Šippor, like the love martyr who struggles incessantly with her/his passion, alternately flagging and surging. For the present Masos is content with platonic love, in Šippor’s words (*ve-lu qirvat yedid li tov, teḥi nafshi ha-lo’ miš ’ar*, l. 433), and Šippor, too, must yield for the present. Perhaps Masos’s youth and inexperience have led him to act wildly and irrationally when he appears to defend Yoshefe, yet he has the ability and means to furnish Yoshefe’s love nest in Cairo! Jacob ben Elazar ridicules Masos’s phlegmatic character as he turns hot and cold, tearful and exuberant, in his relationships with both Yoshefe and Šippor. In this *maḥberet*, ben Elazar also appears to mock courtly love with its martyr complex and ascetic nature, since it is not consonant with Jewish tradition as is, supposedly, harmonious, monogamous married love, which, if faithful, poses no source of interest to him in this parodic, satiric work. One’s wife should be of no legitimate concern to anyone but her husband. It is only the adulterous wife or a chaste young maiden who interests authors and readers of this piquant literature. In the case of Masos and Šippor, married love concluded in abstinence, although it had been a case of love at first sight, in each other’s company for a year! Perhaps Yefefia and Yemima subliminally undermined this relationship as they stoked Šippor’s curiosity and wonder with their tales of women’s wiles and perfidy. One can only surmise the reason for this—jealousy and thus betrayal of their protégée. But if Šippor entertains some ray of hope, so should the reader.

Summary of *Maḥberet* Seven

In the tale of “Yoshefe and His Two Loves,” Jacob ben Elazar introduced into his love poetry a rare phenomenon prior to the advent of the *maqāma* genre: women’s voices, somewhat stilled in biblical literature and medieval Hebrew love poetry but quite prevalent throughout Songs of Songs. These voices at times are equally strident and loving as they express both desire and reserve. Our author has allowed the women to embody contrived modesty through their provocation of their stricken lovers as Yefefia and Yemima pursue Yoshefe and Šippor tries to revitalize Masos’s love through complaints about the “courtliness” of her “courtier.” While handsome Yoshefe

is a slave of love, Masos is its quasi-martyr.⁵⁷ Jacob ben Elazar's hedonistic tale of love has returned both the sensuousness of love and its poetry as found in the biblical Song of Songs, parodic as it may be.

The Tale of Sahar and Kima

In Jacob ben Elazar's tale of "Sahar and Kima's Love" in *Maḥberet* Nine, the reader encounters another aspect of love poetry that differs markedly from the debauchery that is pursued by Yoshefe, Yefefia, and Yemima and aspired to by Šippor. The hero of this *maḥberet*, young Sahar (l. 62, he is called *na'ar* throughout), also has a rather interesting background. While escaping from his authoritarian father, Salmon, a member of the upper class as is Yoshefe's family, he reaches the sea of Jaffa and there finds a group of men fleeing from women (l. 8)! In a parodic rewriting of the biblical Jonah story, the helpless seafarers, including Sahar, faced with shipwreck and death because of a storm, promise to give money to the poor in exchange for their salvation. The ship breaks up, and Sahar is carried away by a strong wind to the dry land of the city of Šova (Aleppo, ll. 6–19). Sahar is the sole survivor of the shipwreck, while the others have been devoured by fish. He sings out the events of the shipwreck and gives profuse thanks to God, the powerful creator of heaven and earth and of the forces of nature (ll. 20–55). Meanwhile, in the city, from afar, Sahar is observed by a beautiful woman who informs her mother of the new arrival. They spread word of the newcomer's handsomeness to ever-appearing new female arrivals, who, while gazing at him, see his handsome face turn into that of a sharp-toothed lion (ll. 60–61). The metaphor cannot be misconstrued. Sahar is not only comely (*yefi sahar*, l. 65), like the moon, but also strong and aristocratic. That strength is deceptive, for he is soon entrapped by two laughing black giants whose spearlike eyes pierce him (ll. 67–72). He calls them Amalek, Israel's implacable enemy whom Israel is commanded to both obliterate and commemorate.⁵⁸ The reader expects to find a valiant and courageous knight, sole survivor of a shipwreck, ready to challenge his tormentors. Instead, we find that Sahar, with the face and teeth of a lion, has the courage of a pussycat. He sees these eyes as battle-ready, shooting arrows, and in metered song he bemoans his physical entrapment: "From the sea I've been delivered / and in [this] house now I've been severed" (*nimḥašti*, ll. 70–72). The brave

hero is now faint with fear (ll. 67–72). Sahar, however, through Jacob ben Elazar's voice, may be dissembling, for in the language of prayer he cites a phrase that is a cry to God for rescue, which does come, a subtle reminder, perhaps, to his reader of God's individual providence.⁵⁹ He is released, without the reader's being told how, alluding perhaps to God's mysterious ways and the Jews' future redemption.

While Sahar contemplates his misery, a fragrant apple enclosing words of love (ll. 82, 84) is tossed his way by the beauteous, chaste Kima, the confined resident of the palace.⁶⁰ Neither she nor her companions know whether they are more enchanted by Sahar's radiance (*zohar panav*, l. 82) or his song! Now it is Kima's turn to sing words of love: "Welcome to you, welcome [to you], [love-]struck at first sight (*shalom le-kha, shalom harug 'eynayim*" (l. 87). She continues, voicing her desire: "Lovesick from pain and by her love for you slain, she has taken twofold of your desire. If only I could be night and day with my antelope, laughing, hugging, and fondling my breasts!" (ll. 87–89). The chase has begun, and so has the sensual language! Both Kima and Sahar test each other throughout this *maḥberet*, sending messages on curtains (*parokhet*), reminiscent perhaps of the Ark's curtain, or through proxies, Kima's alluring intermediaries, who somehow incrementally increase in number.⁶¹ They send out feelers to each other, whether through these messengers or through (imaginary) kisses, Kima kissing her own hand (*va-tenashqehu 'al yadah kemo mishpaṭ yedidim ne'emanim*), as if it were Sahar's, "as is customary among faithful friends." She does not kiss his mouth, presumably because he is not physically near her. In turn, Sahar kisses her "from afar" (ll. 90–92) like a courtly, anguished suitor. According to Shulamit Elizur,⁶² this type of kissing was customary among servants and masters, not lovers, as a token of respect. However, since Sahar's lovesickness reduces him to the status of a "slave" to love, it is natural that Kima would obey the dictates of the servant-mistress relationship as well as observe the rules of courtly lovers who, unwillingly, must keep a physical distance from each other. Satirically and jocularly, the lack of Sahar's corporeal presence also prevents a closer relationship. The alluring Kima's eyes, however, dance and play as if they were hugging (ll. 295–96). Kima's coquettishness fulfills the requirements of courtly love, in which she reiterates that love among distinguished, cultured persons (*ašilim* or *nedivim*) is a meeting of hearts and minds, not flesh. That is the fate of friends who are separated lawfully (*ke-mishpaṭ yedidim ha-nifradim ke-ḥoq*, l. 92). Kima chastises Sahar:

Why are you angry and why downcast?
 To kiss and hug, is that our task?
 This is not done at our flat!

(ll. 301–309)

Nobility of heart and soul, protected by a guardian angel (*malakh yedi-dim*), is required for members of the higher classes, the aristocracy, not members of the “half-breed class” (*benei ha-ta‘aravot*, ll. 299–300)!⁶³ Kima emphasizes that pure love, righteous deeds, and the spirit of our love are chivalrous (*neqi-khaf bar pe‘alim ve-ruah ‘ahavatenu nediva*, l. 312). Their kisses, therefore, are symbolic, from afar! They may be in each other’s company, not to hug or kiss but to purify and unite their hearts (*‘aval lev zeh be-lev zeh doveq*); such is the responsibility of the prestigious, to embrace moral instruction, righteousness, justice, and fairness (*musar haskel, šedeq u-mishpaṭ u-mesharim*, ll. 305–306).⁶⁴ Indeed, they converse and sing love songs (*shir ‘ahav*) all through the night, neither approaching nor touching, although they crave and ache for each other, having to content themselves by simply drinking in each other’s radiance (ll. 328–33). But Jacob ben Elazar may be ridiculing this protracted, drawn-out flirtatious affair, for the verb he uses, *va-yithareshu*, “and they were silent” (l. 333), is the same verb used to describe the silence of the people of Gaza “who surrounded [the house] and waited all night long to kill Samson.”⁶⁵ Yet this very root, *h-r-sh*, in a secondary sense, means “to plough,” perhaps hinting that Kima and Sahar had not passed the night in melody and misery but in (imaginary) lovemaking,⁶⁶ the reason for dissimulating being Kima’s fear of her father the king, to whom she swears that despite her passionate love for Sahar, their relationship is celibate. In keeping with the ideals of courtly love, love for its own sake was worth pursuing, worth suffering for. Sahar has endured Kima’s flirtations and banishment from the palace’s environs. Also, he has endured the sting of burning arrows and has been forced to suffer other indignities such as endless wanderings, awaiting any word from Kima, content to listen to anyone who has any knowledge of his beloved. In his lovesickness, Sahar will pour out his torment to anyone who will listen. In an impassioned address in which he describes how they have mutually inflamed each other, Sahar reiterates that their mutual separation (*peredā*) has slain her as well as him. The woman, the owner of the apple (l. 104), whom Kima has sent to test Sahar, now gives him a perfumed letter in which Kima pours out

her heart and accuses him of slaying her! “Hurry up and heal me” (l. 131). This buffoonery ends when Sahar realizes that Kima truly loves him and wants him to join her in the palace in the capital. His dream has finally materialized! Any desire for revenge because of his erstwhile distress is dispelled upon his arrival at the palace. If the reader thinks that Sahar has suffered sufficiently, then s/he errs. Sahar continues to be challenged by the unapproachable Kima, who speaks in autoerotic terms of her own beauty, teasing him: “Kima is beautiful / Beautiful to the sight and beautiful in height” (ll. 267–68).

Their much-too-prolonged traumatic courting, both in public and in private, Sahar’s frustration and anguish, Kima’s coquetry, plotting, and torment, “I’ve stalked him in my net” (l. 285), take their toll on Sahar. Although he has played the so-called courtly lover who must protect his lady’s virtue, he has paid a terrible price. When Kima finally relents, she invites him to the palace and promises him love (*dodim*) instead of “wanderings” (*nedodim*), but not before marriage. It is through Kima, the coquette, that Jacob ben Elazar preaches abstinence before marriage. This would be the Jewish way to conduct one’s sexual life. It is Kima who speaks of “rules and precepts” *’eleh ha-ḥuqqim ve-ha-torot* (l. 308) that one must observe in courting!⁶⁷

Love Fulfilled

Although Kima has led Sahar on a not-so-merry chase, not everything is serious in their love affair, as in Sahar’s whimsical comic swimming scene. He must gain entrance to his love’s magnificent glass palace, surrounded by water on all four sides and, in language strongly reminiscent of the chaotic abyss prior to creation as well as the Israelites’ crossing of the Sea of Reeds, Sahar is ready to disrobe and swim, but is afraid to do so for fear of drowning (ll. 321–24)! The brave Sahar who had swum ashore in order to escape a shipwreck and black giants, who had allowed himself to be outwitted by Princess Kima and her father, the king, finds himself in perilous circumstances, death by drowning, not what one would expect from a chivalrous hero. But, as in Šippor and Masos’s tale, all is not well with Kima and Sahar. Even before they are allowed to marry, the two lovers, who continue to sing of each other’s beauty and bemoan their mutual entrapment, now begin to talk about love and strife (ll. 390–91), amid the

unquenchable fires of desire and reciprocal cruelty: "Both desire and war kill! Woe to warriors and woe to lovers," says Sahar (l. 370). Kima, who has tortured Sahar with the arrows of love, continues to play hide-and-seek with him. This love-and-hate relationship continues much too long (ll. 390–91), as Sahar asks Kima if this is characteristic of lovers (*te 'udat 'ahuvim*). Are strife and conflict (*riv u-madon*, ll. 394–96) prerequisites for composing love poetry? Adding fuel to the unquenchable fire of love is Kima's seemingly innocent request of Sahar to explain to her the difference between the pangs of love (*dodim*) and friendship (*torat ha-yedidut*). The reader can sense Sahar's feeling of despair as he admits that a beloved speaks no truth and that love lacks understanding and knowledge and is unable to distinguish between good or bad; such is the lesson the lover takes with him to the grave (ll. 427–38).

As the two lovers continue to agonize over their dilemma on the meaning of love, a maid servant informs Kima of her father's imminent arrival. Kima's fear of her father forces her to hide Sahar, but the king finds him and assaults him. She assures her father that their love was chaste. "He didn't touch me, and I didn't touch him . . . we were both clothed in righteousness . . . observant of the commandments (*mišva*) and reverence for our reputations" (ll. 472–75). The king ultimately gives his blessing to the couple, calling Sahar "a man in whom God's spirit abides" (ll. 517–18), but not before asking Kima why they so desire each other. Kima details both the torments and thrills of their love (ll. 483–84) in a brilliantly constructed and lengthy poem, similar in style to the Arabic-language *qaṣida* (ll. 485–514).⁶⁸ After the father's violent death (the reader is not told how), Sahar is enthroned in Aleppo in his stead, and following a year of wedded bliss he and Kima begin another type of duet, quarrelling and mollifying, separating and then reconciling, proving the adage that the road to true love is rarely smooth (ll. 522–23). When, as a married man, he is no longer challenged by Kima's flirtations and his mission of pursuing her, the handsome Sahar (l. 6) turns into a replica of his own tyrannical father (l. 7), taunting Kima, tormenting her for her defiance (ll. 524–26). Kima reminds her husband of their pure, spiritual love, suppressing its consummation until they were married, reproving him for accusing her of Eve's primordial offence (l. 528) and repeating the ancients' sins, bewailing the fact that "lovers (*ḥosheqim*) have become oppressors" (*'osheqim*, l. 544). As they continue this state of "battle" and contrition, Kima says, "If there's

no quarrel in love, how can there be gentle, friendly rebuking or pleasing bookmaking?"⁶⁹ Sahar agrees, and the two maintain this state of affairs, presumably throughout their marriage, until their dying day.

Insights into *Mah̄barot* Seven and Nine

In *Mah̄barot* Seven and Nine of *Sefer Meshalim* or *Sippurei 'Ahava* Jacob ben Elazar has not only given voices to his women but he has also given them names and identities. Names of lovers are not usually found in biblical poetry, except for the *Shulamit* in Song of Songs,⁷⁰ nor in Hebrew love poetry. Male lovers are anonymously addressed as '*ofer*, or '*sevi*, or the plural of these terms, as in Song of Songs. Jacob ben Elazar, however, has generously endowed his actors with names that characterize their traits, at times rather fiendishly. The choice of names in "Yoshefe and His Two Loves" and "Sahar and Kima's Love Story" cannot be accidental. Masos's name, joy, as in the biblical verse, "a bridegroom's rejoicing over his bride,"⁷¹ must be satirical, to say the least. There is a bridegroom and a bride, but no marital bliss! Birdie/Şippor, who sings like the bird that her name connotes, chirps her unexpected plaint (*teluna*) in which she laments Masos's boorishness and his lack of desire and affection, complaining, "He hasn't even tried to kiss me!" (l.425). She, who sings of her frustrated desire despite being well tutored in the art of love, only enhances Jacob ben Elazar's seeming disdain for the serious nature of love poetry, perhaps even the institution of courtly love, although in the tale of Kima and Sahar he apparently displays his approval of it. Şippor's tale is harsh but comical and seemingly derides the tradition of the cruel female lover so pervasive in Hebrew love poetry. Masos is the only male lover in these two *mah̄barot* who appears untainted by the pangs of love. His façade as the jocular and prosperous procurer of Yoshefe's opulent love nest in Cairo and the quasi-defender of Yoshefe's honor belies his parodied manhood and bizarre behavior. On the other hand, Yoshefe, Yefefia, and Yemima, whose names signify "attractiveness," "beauty" and "purity," respectively, are coveted and loved, and they prove that beauty and handsomeness succeed in attaining love, despite torment and anguish along the way. Nowhere in his "Love Songs" has Jacob ben Elazar written about Şippor's beauty, only her youth, intellect, generosity, and composition of poetry under the tutelage of Yefefia and Yemima. If our author is hinting that Masos's and Şippor's unconsummated love is the expression of ideal,

courtly, and chaste love, advocated by some earlier Arab writers and later Hebrew poets, the reader must remember that Masos and Šippor are now married and therefore entitled to indulge in conjugal love, should they wish to do so. This would be of no interest to any outsider. It is more likely that Jacob ben Elazar is parodying the “abstinence” and “continence” advocated by those who believe in mystic love, who believe in the “slavery of love” rather than in its realization.⁷² Sahar’s name signifies the full moon,⁷³ whereas Kima’s name symbolizes the Pleiades, a cluster of stars that metamorphosed into the seven daughters of Aethra and Pleione, the seven sisters. Hence Kima’s allegorical handmaidens at her beck and call in her and Sahar’s “dance of love.”⁷⁴

Throughout *Maḥbarot* Seven and Nine, Jacob ben Elazar has used images of war and affection, portraying and parodying love as a veritable battlefield, fought by both men and women. Might this warfare between the sexes hint at Israel’s (and the Jews’) exile because of their baseless hatred as they quarreled and quibbled with each other, abandoning God’s teachings? Yefefia, Yemima, and Yoshefe dwell harmoniously, as did their ancestors, arguably, in the early days of Israelite history. Hence there seems to be little sermonizing or moralizing in their tale. Sahar and Kima, however, quarrel incessantly, indulging in “love spats” (ll. 522–35) once their love has been consummated. Kima, like Šippor, may have been disappointed in her marriage, and she therefore derides its physical aspect: “The lust of the obscene is obscenity” (*ve-khol ḥesheq benei naval nevala*, ll. 314–16) or “the spirit (*ruah*) of love arouses evil, but the spirit of wisdom (*hokhma*) tantalizes” (ll. 480–82).⁷⁵ Since Jacob ben Elazar only hints at external elements for Israel’s woes, such as the aristocracy’s fall from power along with its eventual restoration, could he be alluding to the eventual reconciliation of his fellow Jews if they follow God, the commandments, and the paths of wisdom and excellence? Since our author’s works are imbued with the pursuit of wisdom and the honing of the intellect, it is possible that he is reaching out to his fellow Jews to abandon the fleshly pursuits of foreigners and take up once again the vocation of Jewish living. Moreover, since Jacob ben Elazar has endowed Kima with the desire for wisdom, it is through her words that he has introduced a didactic, but also entertaining, quality into his poetry.⁷⁶ He has created Kima as the proactive partner in this love story, as one who carries the greater part of poetry making, who is empowered not only by her body but also by her voice. She is also the initiator of morality, introducing

tidbits of wisdom throughout her poems. Love-smitten Sahar, however, is left “without mind (*lev*) and knowledge” (*da’at*, ll. 275–76), and he acknowledges Kima’s words of censure and admonishment as she keeps his advances in abeyance: “Blessed is your good sense, and blessed are you” (*barukh ta’amekh u-verukha ’at*, l. 318). Jacob ben Elazar’s *Sefer Meshalim* is more than a repository of games of love, in which artificial situations and actors are posed. It is also a moralizing social commentary in praise of mores, morals, and marriage through the voices of women. The reader is reminded of his intent in composing this work: “They pose riddles, but the intelligent and perceptive will comprehend their significance” (introduction, ll. 4–5).

Conclusion

Jacob ben Elazar’s success in showing the diversity of the Hebrew language favorably bridges the gap between Arabic literary discourses and other *maqāmas* (*maḥbarot*) written by his Jewish contemporaries. His *Sefer Meshalim*, or *Sippurei ’Ahava*, has breathed humor into medieval Hebrew. His intention to “pun, play, ridicule, and mock,” along with exaggeration and overblown phrases, is notably successful. He has transformed the texts he has used, Song of Songs and others, into moral and didactic lessons for his contemporaries and for posterity. Furthermore, what distinguishes this *maḥberet* from others is not only the eloquent or bawdy language used throughout, but also visual descriptions of duels, palaces, and gardens. His characterization of make-believe actors turns them into authentic human beings, visual and sentient. Both Yefefia and Yemima become take-charge women: Yemima in the slave market, and Yefefia’s invitation to her rival to join the love nest! If their “protégée” Šippor is unsuccessful in her quest for love, it is Masos who is to blame. If the reader is somewhat surprised by the fickleness and weakness of the hero, Yoshefe, s/he needn’t be, for at the beginning of the tale of Yoshefe’s wanderlust, he had attached himself to drunken sots, although “his desire was remote from theirs” (l. 38). He is a “naif” (*’ish tam*, l. 38). It is only when he is infatuated with *female* wares in the slave market that he begins to initiate action, but not for long. With his capture by a woman, he regresses and only then reacts. He is “led,” instead of “leading,” a captive, no longer a captor. Instead of a stalwart “hero,” we find aggressive “heroines,” a sexual role reversal, similar to those in many Arab tales. Instead of

dueling and virile male warriors, it is women who have turned the tables: disguised as males, they display full competence in martial arts, characteristic of tales of female prowess found in other contemporary tales such as troubadour literature, with which Jacob ben Elazar would certainly have been familiar.⁷⁷

In another proverbial twist of the blade, Jacob ben Elazar has portrayed his women as wily and resourceful, capable of achieving their goals. Not only do men praise their beloved's beauty but the women also "take up the word," so to speak, and proclaim, in autoerotic terms, their own nubile beauty and desire. They are sharp and canny. The tale of Yefefia and Yemima illustrates their developing maturity. Far from being the ingénues first encountered here, subservient to male seduction and lovemaking, the two "slaves" have developed into proficient snarers of men, poets and storytellers *par excellence* and sexual beings, comfortable in their sensuality and sexuality and content in their spiritual fulfillment. In this game of sexual politics the women star, not the men, neither quaking Yoshefe nor asexual Masos. It is only the young, unfortunate Šippor whose voice chirps and rings out in plaintive song, bewailing her sorry lot. Two women get what they want: Yefefia and Yemima live in ongoing harmony. They achieve love and attention; young Šippor does not. In Jacob ben Elazar's tale of "Sahar and Kima's Love," flint-hearted, elitist, imprisoned Kima (l. 251) displays her wit, sagacity, and song making in matters of love and morals before she succumbs to her husband's autocratic behavior.

In the narration of these two *maḥbarot*, the reader is left with the impression that Jacob ben Elazar has applied his considerable linguistic skills not only to satirize the game of love played out between men and women through song but also to display his virtuosity and adroitness in the Hebrew language. Notwithstanding his satire, he displays eloquence and elegance in descriptions of the beauties of nature and his surroundings, reminiscent of the sensual Song of Songs and contemporary medieval poetry.

Jacob ben Elazar's erotic prose and poetry might have antagonized Maimonides, had he been alive, but Maimonides' younger contemporary, Moses ibn Ezra, writer *non pareil* of multilayered poetry, defended "love (*ahava*) and passion (*ta'ava*) as proper subjects for poetry," because of their charismatic appeal "in the sacred writings, even if their true inner meaning is not always understood."⁷⁸ And thus it is with Jacob ben Elazar's poetry.

Along with his objective to “praise, ridicule, arouse love, mock,” Jacob ben Elazar’s actors have strung together words to make a necklace of song, love, and beauty that both captivates and titillates the reader. In his collection of love songs, Jacob ben Elazar has included all the elements of secular Andalusian poetry: luxuriant settings, wine, desire, praise, death, complaints, and hyperbole. He has also incorporated, in a parodic and allegoric manner, the substance of courtly love: a burlesque of the aristocracy, the lampooning of courtly wooing, quasi-secrecy, and imagination. Above all, he has made his whimsical characters and situations breathe life and frolic into this Hebrew *maḥberet*. This work may not shed much light on Jacob ben Elazar’s own personal life, but perhaps the circumstances that led his male characters, Yoshefe and Sahar, to “flee,” namely, the downfall of the elite or flight from one’s own family, may reflect some details of his own history: personal turmoil or upheaval in the Jewish communities amid hostile Muslim and Christian host societies with the resultant loss of Jewish autonomy, scholarship, and culture. And, most likely, this particular work was intended to imbue the reader with wisdom (*diverei ḥokhma*), knowledge (*da’at*), and perception (*derekh tevunot*), key features of a Spanish-Jewish intellectual. However, Jacob ben Elazar has proven the mettle of his introduction: the Hebrew language can arouse love, mock, play, sing, tantalize, brood, reflect, and, above all, entertain.

Notes

1. On Dūnash ben Labraṭ, see Eliyahu Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973), 1:252–63; Arie Schippers, *Spanish Hebrew Poetry and the Arabic Literary Tradition* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 50. For a good background to medieval Hebrew poetry, see Ross Brann, *The Compunctious Poet* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 1–22.

2. See Rina Drory, “Literary Contacts and Where to Find Them,” *Poetics Today* 14 (1993): 277–302. Her thesis stresses that non-Arabic contacts, especially in Christian Spain, also contributed to the literary climate of Jews turning to writing in Hebrew.

3. See *Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence* (hereafter HPSP), 4 vols., ed. Hayyim Schirmann (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Bialik Institute and Dvir, 1954, 1961), 1:34.

4. See in Schirmann, HPSP, 1:147, #4, *hitna’ari*, *hitna’ari*, based on Isaiah 52:1–2.

5. See *Keter Malkhut* in Schirmann, HPSP, 1:257–85.

6. See Drory, “Literary Contacts,” 284–87. Jacob ben Elazar, the author of *Sefer Meshalim*, or *Sippurei ’Ahava*, was also dependent on benefactors, such as Samuel and Ezra, the sons of Judah ben Nathanael in Beaucaire, Provence, who were among Alḥarizi’s patrons.

7. For Samuel ibn Nagrela, see, e.g., in Schirmann, *HPSP*, 1:164. For Moses ibn Ezra, see, e.g., in Schirmann, *HPSP*, 2:372–73, #1.

8. See, e.g., Solomon ibn Gabirol in Schirmann, *HPSP*, 1:219, #79; Moses ibn Ezra in Schirmann, *HPSP*, 2:371–72, #144.

9. See, e.g., Samuel ibn Nagrela's "Battle at Alfuentes," in Schirmann, *HPSP*, 1:85–92. For his distaste of war see *HPSP*, 142, #21, "war's beginnings resemble a beautiful wench."

10. See, e.g., Solomon ibn Gabirol, "I Am the Prince and the Song Is My Servant," in Schirmann, *HPSP*, 1:192, #61.

11. See Schippers, *Spanish Hebrew Poetry and the Arabic Literary Tradition*, 50, 140–203; A. M. Habermann, 'Iyyunim ba-shira u-va-piyyut shel yemei habeynayyim (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1972), 47–50; Shulamit Elizur, *Secular Hebrew Poetry in Moslem Spain* (Hebrew) (Ramat Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2004), 3 vols., 2:69–127; Raymond P. Scheindlin, *Wine, Women, and Death* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1986), 77–89; Neal Kozodoy, "Reading Medieval Love Poetry," in *AJS Review* 2 (1977): 115.

12. See Maimonides in his commentary to *Mishnah 'Avot*, 1:17, as cited by Kozodoy, "Reading Medieval Love Poetry," 111–13 and n. 1; Schirmann, "L'amour spirituel dans la poésie hébraïque du moyen âge," *Lettres Romanes* 15, no. 4 (1961): 315–25, especially 315. For all Maimonides' citations on poetry, see Kozodoy.

13. These erotic poems were interpreted by later investigators as multilayered, openly sensual on the simple (*peshat*) level, and descriptive of God's and Israel's love and attachment to each other on the rhetorical level (*derash*). Allegorical treatment of Song of Songs as the divine-human relationship is the essence of Rashi's interpretation and for the Church fathers as the loving relationship between God and the Church.

14. Quotations are from Song of Songs 2:5; 1:9–11, 15.

15. For Israel as God's bride, see Jeremiah 2:2 and Hosea 2:21–22. For God and Israel's troubled relationship, see Moses' recapping of Israelite history in Deuteronomy 32; the prophet Jeremiah's indictment in 2:2–9, and the prophet Hosea's recitation of God's rejection of Israel in 2:7–15, 3:1.

16. See S. D. Goitein, "Ha-maqāma ve-ha-maḥberet: pereq be-toledot ha-sifrut ve-ha-ḥevra ba-mizrah," *Maḥberot le-sifrut* 5 (1951): 26–40.

17. For a more complete list of Arab *maqāmāt*, see Lois Anita Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre* (New York: New York University Press, 1971). See especially ibn Ḥazm's (994, Cordova–1064, Jativa) *Dove's Neck Ring*, ed. and trans. W. J. Arberry (London: Luzac, 1953).

18. His philosophical works included *Sefer pardes rimmonei ha-ḥokhmah ve-'arugat bosem ha-mezimah* and *Sefer gan ha-te'udot ve-'arugat ḥuqqot ḥamudot*. His grammatical work, which exists in fragmentary form in Arabic, was called *Kitāb Al-Kamil (Sefer ha-shalem)*. Animal fables in the form of moral-didactic and philosophic lessons were a common feature in medieval literatures. For an in-depth discussion of Jacob ben Elazar and his works, see also Jonathan Decter, *Iberian Jewish Literature: Between al-Andalus and Christian Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 136–49.

19. These comments were first made by Hayyim Schirmann, *HPSP*, 3:207–208, and followed by Yonah David, who edited the sole unique manuscript. See his introduction, iv and 7–11, for a brief biography of Jacob ben Elazar and details of his compositions. For

a more extensive biography, see Schirmann's *History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain and Southern France*, ed. Ezra Fleischer (Jerusalem: Magnes Press and Ben-Zvi Institute, 1977), 222–55; *Ya'akov ben Elazar: Kitāb al-Kamil*, ed. Nehemiah Allony (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Studies, 1977), 6–11, in which Allony illustrates Jacob ben Elazar's depiction of Arabs as lacking culture.

20. See J. Schirmann, "Les Contes Rimés de Jacob ben Eléazar de Tolède," *Études d'Orientalisme Dédiées à la Mémoire de Lévi-Provençal* (Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve, 1962), 285–97, and J. Schirmann, *History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain and Southern France*, 224–40, 250–55.

21. *Maḥberet* One elevates the desire to be wise into an erotic rhapsody about the love of wisdom through the intellectual soul as opposed to the material one. See Schirmann, *History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain and Southern France*, 250–52; Decter, *Iberian Jewish Literature*, 141–42.

22. *Maḥberet* Three. See also Moses ibn Ezra's *Sefer Shirat Yisrael*, ed. Ben-Zion Halper (Leipzig: Matshaf, 1924), 62–80, and Alḥarizi's *Book of Taḥkemoni: Jewish Tales from Medieval Spain*, trans. and annotated by David Simha Segal (Portland, Ore.: Littmann Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001), Gate 18, 175–89. Henceforth all citations to *Sefer Taḥkemoni* are to Segal's edition.

23. *Maḥberet* Four. See also Alḥarizi, *Sefer Taḥkemoni*, Gate 40, 302–306 and, for its analysis, 601–603.

24. *Maḥberet* Seven ("Yoshefe and His Two Loves") and *Maḥberet* Nine ("Kima and Sahar's Love Story") are analyzed in this essay.

25. See Yonah David, *Sefer Meshalim*, 7–8.

26. On Alḥarizi's discourse on the composition of literary works in Arabic and Hebrew, see Drory, "Literary Contacts," 285–92, and Judah Alḥarizi, *Sefer Taḥkemoni*, 11–15.

27. *Ha-yesh lashon le-hallel 'o le-gadef ve-la- 'ir 'ahavah ki-leshon 'aravim, u-millhamot ve-qorot ha-zemanim ve-'ay millim ke-millenu 'arevim?* See also Rina Drory's translation of this passage in "Literary Contacts," 293; Schirmann, *History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain and Southern France*, 222, 224 and nn. 1, 10. To quote Raymond Scheindlin's work, "Rabbi Moshe Ibn Ezra on the Legitimacy of Poetry," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 7 (1976): 101–15, especially 101–102: "How is it that poetry is a natural aptitude of the Arabs but an affectation among the other nations?" Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

28. *ki be-la' agei safa u-vi-leshon 'aheret yedabber 'el ha- 'am ha-zeh*, Isaiah 28:11. See also Maimonides' comments as cited in Kozodoy, "Reading Medieval Love Poetry," 111–13 and note 1.

29. See Judah Alḥarizi, *Sefer Taḥkemoni*, Arabic dedication, introduction, as quoted in Rina Drory, "Literary Contacts," 289. Alḥarizi states, "I have noticed that most of the Israelite community in these lands of the East are devoid of the Hebrew language and denuded of its beautiful garments."

30. Ezekiel 17:2: *hūd ḥiddah meshol mashal*. See also Drory: "put forth a riddle and speak a parable," in "Literary Contacts," 293.

31. Proverbs 30:1, 31:1.

32. See, e.g., Solomon ibn Gabirol in Schirmann, *HPSP*, 1:227, #86: *le-gonevei shir*.

33. In *Maḥberet* One, the soul (*neshama*) is perceived as a young, beloved, and love-sick fawn (‘*ofra*) in conversation with the heart, representative of the sinful body.

34. The reference is to Avshalom in II Samuel 14:25.

35. See Joshua 19:5; I Chronicles 4:31.

36. In Hebrew love poetry, the term *ra’ya* connotes a beloved woman, usually one of high rank.

37. On the role of the “eye” in Islamic love poetry, see Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love among the Arabs*, 59; Ibn Ḥazm, *The Dove’s Neck Ring*, “On Hinting with the Eyes,” 68–70: “and the frequency of surreptitious winks with the eye, and the inclination toward leaning against each other” (ll. 140–45). In Hebrew love poetry, see, e.g., Samuel ibn Nagrela in Schirmann, *HPSP*, 1:167–68, #18, based on Song of Songs 4:9: *libbevuni ‘einei ševi*, “a gazelle’s eyes have aroused me.”

38. See Rashi at Job 42:14 and also Song of Songs 6:10. On slave girls as prizes of war and in relationships with Jews, see Shelomo Dov Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 6 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967–93), 1:130–47.

39. See David Segal’s description in “Jacob ben Elazar’s Tales: The Essence of the Seventh *Maḥberet*” (Hebrew), in *Aharon Mirsky Jubilee Volume: Essays on Jewish Culture*, ed. Zvi Malachi (Lod: Habermann Institute, 1986), 353–64, especially 358, where Segal suggests that Yoshefe’s falling on Yemima’s spearlike breasts leads to his comical composition of five verses of poetry!

40. This common theme in Arabic poetry was soon incorporated into medieval Hebrew poetry. See Schirmann, “L’Amour spirituel,” 318–19, who discusses this phenomenon.

41. Song of Songs, 2:8.

42. 4:9. According to Schirmann, “L’Amour spirituel,” 316, a true lover would never renounce or abandon his first love should he take another one, and thus Yoshefe could enjoy the pleasures of both women.

43. Alluding to Judges 5:12: ‘*uri*, ‘*uri*, *dabberi shir*! The prophetess Deborah is urged to compose a victory song.

44. For Arabic-language versions of harmonious, polygamous matrimonial relationships, see J. C. Bürgel, “Love, Lust, and Longing: Eroticism in Early Islam,” in *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam*, ed. Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid-Marsot (Malibu, Calif.: Undena, 1979), 113–14.

45. *Sheḥora ‘ani ve-na’va*, “I am dark but beautiful!” This in contrast to the later medieval love poetry in which the beloved’s skin is usually pale and white.

46. See also Segal, “Jacob ben Elazar’s ‘Tales,’” 359.

47. *Nelaqqet mi-penimim ve-‘im meḥubbarot ‘anaq neqashsher mi-šavvronim*. See Song of Songs 1:10.

48. On the subject of erotic love between men see Schirmann, “The Ephebe in Medieval Hebrew Poetry,” *Sefarad* 15 (1955): 55–68.

49. See Judges 7:3: “Whoever is terribly afraid must turn back early (*yashov ve-yišpor*) from Mount Gilead.” In this writer’s opinion Jacob ben Elazar puns on the dual meaning of the root *š-f-r*: 1. to sing, shout out; 2. *šafra*, morning, or to rise early, on the analogy

of the Aramaic. Therefore, my translation, repointing *tashov* to *teshev*, punning on the words *šippor* and the Hebrew root *š-f-r*, or retaining the text, “go and sing.” The use of the term *ʿama*, attendant or servant, is also strange, calling into question Yoshefe’s true intention for his sister.

50. Proverbs 31:29: *rabbot banot ʿasu ḥayil veʿat ʿalit ʿal-kullana*.

51. In medieval love poetry, the lack of facial hair denotes the youth of the beloved. See Elizur, *Secular Hebrew Poetry in Moslem Spain*, 2:83.

52. The phrase Jacob ben Elazar uses is “having no penis” (*beli ʿever*), as in Nahum 3:5 and *beli maʿar* in I Kings 7:36. See also Segal, “Jacob ben Elazar’s ‘Tales of Love,’” 360, where he describes Šippor’s derision of Masos as “crude.”

53. Nahum 3:5.

54. Paraphrasing I Samuel 21:14–15.

55. Habakuk 3:9.

56. I have altered slightly my previous translation at n. 55 above to reflect its antithetical meaning. See also Segal, “Jacob ben Elazar’s ‘Tales of Love,’” 360.

57. According to prophetic tradition in Islam, “Who loves and remains chaste and dies, dies as a martyr.” See Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love among the Arabs*, 103, and Schirmann, “L’amour spirituel,” 315.

58. See Exodus 17:8–16; Deuteronomy 25:17, 19; I Samuel 15:2–3. Maskil, the hero of *Maḥberet Six*, also refers to the black man, Kushan Rish ʿatayyim, as Amalek and derides the former’s black mistress. On this inherent racist streak in Jacob ben Elazar’s *Sippurei ʿAhava*, see Schirmann, *History of Poetry in Christian Spain and Southern France*, 237 and notes 62 and 63. See also Abraham Melamed, *The Image of the Black in Jewish Culture: A History of the Other*, trans. Betty Sigler Rozen (London: Routledge-Curzon, 2003).

59. Psalm 64 (attributed to David) in which the psalmist asks God for protection from Machiavellian slanderers who use their words like arrows. When this wish is fulfilled, the psalmist praises God and offers up thanks. Verse 7, which Sahar quotes in his castigation of the two black men, contains problematic language in the Hebrew text. The direction of the arrows hurled by the mysterious plotters is reversed, with God’s help, and discharged back at the evildoers. Their plotting has backfired, and the psalmist has found safety in his trust in God. Rashi, at verse 7, suggests that this verse must be studied further.

60. On the use of “apples” as a love motif, see Songs 2:3, 5; 7:9; and 8:5. For medieval poets, the alluring apple represents desire (*teshuqa*). For the importance of “writing” and “letters” as a means of courting, see also Ibn Ḥazm, *The Dove’s Neck Ring*, “Of Allusion by Words,” 65–67, and “Of Correspondence,” 71–72.

61. On the use of messengers as a conduit between the lover and his beloved in Arabic poetry, see Ibn Ḥazm, *The Dove’s Neck Ring*, 73–75.

62. See *Secular Hebrew Poetry in Moslem Spain*, 2:112–13, in which Elizur analyzes a love poem by Samuel ibn Nagrela found in *Divan Shmuel Hanagid: The Collected Poetry of Samuel the Prince*, 993–1056 (Hebrew), ed. Dov Yarden (Jerusalem: Hebrew Union College Press, 1966), 311: *yishshaq ʿalai yado beʿovro ʿalai*, “he kisses [his] hand as he passes me by.” See also Schirmann, “L’amour spirituel,” 318, who states that these type of kisses were a mark of spiritual love, of necessity according to the [unwritten] code of courtly love, unfulfilled by physical love. In his lengthier analysis of *Sippurei ʿAhava*

in *History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain and Southern France*, 234–37, Schirmann states that courtly love, abstinence from physical love, was not a “forever after ideal” in Judaism, since its adherents are expected to marry and produce children.

63. My translation of *malakh yedidim* as “guardian angel” is influenced solely by the context in which this phrase is found. Since the two chaste, but aroused, lovers do not engage in “physical touching” but satisfy themselves with imagined caresses, an [imaginary] guardian angel was sent not only to prevent them from actual physical contact but also to guard them from “messengers of love” (*malakhei dodim*, l. 115) who have aroused their passion and through whom they hug and kiss each other (*neshaqtiha neshaqatni*) and who are sent, perhaps, to encourage their mutual love. In his notes to this tale of “Kima and Sahar’s Love,” the editor, Yonah David, 160, suggests that the term *malakh yedidim* may be influenced by a foreign language which neither he nor Schirmann (“L’amour spirituel,” 318) recognizes. Schirmann, however, in *History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain and Southern France*, 235 and n. 56, suggests that this phrase may refer to a “friendly messenger” and may be borrowed from the Arabic. If Jacob ben Elazar’s contact with troubadour literature was extensive, perhaps he knew such a phrase from Provençal or Occitan literature.

64. Proverbs 1:3.

65. Judges 16:2.

66. See Judges 14:18: “If you hadn’t ploughed with my wife, you wouldn’t know the answer [to my riddle].” The medieval commentator Rashi notes that the Philistine men had engaged in sexual intercourse with Samson’s Philistine wife in order to pry from her the answer to the riddle Samson had posed.

67. See also Raymond Scheindlin, “Sippurei ha-’ahavah shel ya’akov ben el’azar: Bein sifrut ‘aravit le-sifrut romans,” *Divrei ha-kongres ha-’olami ha-’ehad-’asar le-mada’ei ha-yahadut* 3 (1994): 16–17.

68. Each line in this poem contains four stichs, with the first three in each line ending in identical rhymes and the fourth stich ending in an identical rhyme throughout the poem.

69. l. 545: *ve-’ey mitqey tokhaḥot yedid ò ’ey ne’im sefer*.

70. Songs 7:1. See also Scheindlin, *Wine, Women, and Death*, 81–82, who describes this phenomenon in medieval love poetry.

71. Isaiah 62:5.

72. See, e.g., Schirmann, “L’amour spirituel,” 318–19, and Ibn Ḥazm, *The Dove’s Neck Ring*, “On the Virtue of Continence,” 262–84: “The finest quality that a man can display in Love is continence: to abstain from sin and all indecency” (262). For additional information on the idea of mystical love in Arabic literature, see Annemarie Schimmel, “Eros—Heavenly and Not So Heavenly—in Sufi Literature and Life,” in *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam*, 120–41, especially 122–24. See also Schirmann, “L’Amour spirituel,” especially 317–19. Schirmann (316) also states that medieval Hebrew poets seemed to have adhered to a certain “code mystérieux, lois de l’amour.” Dan Pagis, *Change and Tradition in the Secular Poetry of Spain and Italy* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Keter, 1976), 221–22, describes Jacob ben Elazar’s emphasis on spiritual love.

73. See Songs 7:3, *’agan-ha-sahar*, in combined form.

74. The word *kima* occurs also in Amos 5:8 in combination with *kesil*, Orion, as it does in Job 9:9, 38:31; Isaiah 13:10. In BT *Berakhot* 58b Samuel said: “Were it not for the heat of Orion the world could not endure the cold of Pleiades and were it not for the cold of Pleiades the world could not endure the heat of Orion,” which can be understood as alluding to Kima’s alternating passion and cruelty toward Sahar. Furthermore, Samuel puns on the word *kima*, referring to it as “about a hundred (ke-me’a) stars,” Kima’s hand-maidens or perhaps the many trials Sahar must endure.

75. Along with these words Kima states that the status of “kind words” (*nedivot*) of “spiritual love” (*hishqam*) are found in “their books, filled with innocence (*tom*) and integrity (*yosher*), and reverence (*yir’a*) and humility (‘*anava*).” The editor, Yona David, in his notes to this chapter and these lines, 160, understands “their books” to refer to the books of love written by members of the “half-breed society,” that is, those of inferior intellect. He states in the same note that Schirmann emends the text to read “our books” (*sefareinu*). It is possible that if the correct reading is “their books” (*sifreihem*), then Jacob ben Elazar may be subtly continuing his ridicule of them; if the emendation “our books” (*sefareinu*) is followed, then our author could possibly be extolling Jewish literature to his fellow Jews who may no longer be familiar with them, an accusation shared by his contemporaries. However, Jacob ben Elazar may be casting an indirect jibe at the works of Arab love poetry, which he intended to do, and therefore the reading “their books” should be retained.

76. On the didactic and moralizing spirit of love poetry, see Catherine Léglu, “Satirical and Moralising Poetry,” in *The Troubadours: An Introduction*, ed. Sarah Kay and Simon Gaunt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 47–65.

77. For female mastery of the martial arts see Decter, *Iberian Jewish Literature*, 140–41, who, citing Tova Rosen as well as other sources, briefly reviews the possible roots of the themes of “cross-dressed knights” and female militancy.

78. See Moses ibn Ezra, *Sefer ha-’iyyunim ve-ha-diiyunim*, ed. A. S. Halkin (Jerusalem: Mekitse Nirdamim, 1975), 277–79.

13

Miṣḥaf al-Shbaḥot—The Holy Book of Praises of the Babylonian Jews

One Thousand Years of Cultural Harmony
between Judaism and Islam

MERAV ROSENFELD-HADAD

After a prolonged stay of nearly 2,600 years in the Diaspora, the Babylonian Jews returned in 1951 to their homeland, the renewed state of Israel.¹ Only three years later, in 1954, they published their first edition of a book entitled *Sefer Shirim Tehilat-Yesharim Hashalem, Pizmonim, Bakashot Vetishbaḥot* (The Complete Book of Songs, Praise of the Righteous, Songs, Supplications, and Praises), called also *Miṣḥaf al-Shbaḥot* (pl. *mṣāḥif*, s. *shbaḥ*). It was the second comprehensive collection of religious songs created by this community.² The first was published in Baghdad in 1906.³

The book comprises poems belonging to all the occasions of the ancient para-liturgical practice which functions as a complementary worship to the main observance of communal occasions, such as the Sabbath and the three main festivals, Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, and life-cycle occasions, such as circumcision and bar mitzvah. These are celebrated mostly outside the synagogue, by singing each of these poems to a melody mostly adapted from an existing Arabic song.

This chapter addresses the *Miṣḥaf* as a book of religious practice with poems that reflect Jewish life, as an isolated community nourished only by its own religious and cultural sources. It is also viewed as a collection of poems that taken together narrate the story of Jewish existence as part of a larger fabric of social and cultural life, in which a rich and long-lasting

discourse between Judaism and Islam took place in many aspects of life and scholarship. This is a story of one thousand years of Hebrew religious poetry, its poets, and its carriers, the Babylonian Jews. In essence, this is also the story of the para-liturgical song (PLS) of any other Arab-Jewish community: all members of such communities are familiar with this repertoire, and its performance practice is as pivotal in their lives as it is for the Babylonian Jews.

1. The Poems of the *Miṣḥaf*

The *Miṣḥaf* contains 371 poems of various genres. Most are written in Hebrew, but there are also poems in the Judeo-Arabic vernacular, Aramaic, and Turkish, all written in the Hebrew alphabet. For most poems, the author of the text is not named. These poems contain religious themes, which express communal or private supplication, petition, and confession to God, called *Baqashah* (supplication, pl. *Baqashot*). They also express adoration, thanksgiving, intercession, and praise of God, called *Shbah*.

2. Musical Information Given in the *Miṣḥaf*

The scant musical information given in this book is scattered over a few headings of the poems. Only 15 out of the 371 poems have headings with musical information of any sort. Each such heading includes a recommended melody, which is indicated by the opening words of another poem. There are no particular qualities shared by these songs that appear to differentiate them from the other songs in the *Miṣḥaf*. Furthermore, this musical information does not assist in tracing the original melody of a specific song. However, it reveals the rich sources from which the melodies are borrowed. They can be taken from other para-liturgical poems that appear in the *Miṣḥaf*, from hymns that belong to the liturgy or other religious practices, and from secular Arabic songs.

3. The Emergence of the PLS

The poems of the *Miṣḥaf* show clearly that the history of the text of the PLS is not necessarily the history of the PLS as a distinct religious genre. Shiloah (1992, 111) describes the emergence of the *piyyut*, a religious sung

poem, performed outside the liturgy, as a socioreligious process: “Thus in the course of time the *piyyut* broke through the limitations of liturgy and synagogue song and found an accepted niche during public and private ceremonial occasions.” Shiloah does not mention any particular time at which the PLS emerged. There are, however, scholars who tend to mark the sixteenth century with Najarah’s poetry as a starting point for the appearance of the genre. His songs are described as a kind of para-liturgical poetry performed at special pre-dawn rituals of devotion (Tietze and Yahalom 1995, 9). Najarah’s poems are not, however, radically different from much earlier religious poetry and, therefore, the definite time in the past at which this genre emerged is yet to be discovered.

4. The History of the PLS in the Context of the Arabo-Islamic Cultural Domain

Scholars agree that the Arabo-Islamic influence on Hebrew religious poetry was strong, long-lasting, and encompassed both time and place (e.g., Altmann 1969; Scheindlin 1991, 1994; Levin 1986; Tobi 2000; Mirski 1992; and Schippers 1994). It continued for more than a thousand years and took root wherever Muslims were the rulers and Jews were their subjects. It had started as early as the ninth century in the most important spiritual centers of both Judaism and Islam, i.e. ‘Abbāsīd Baghdad, and continued in Muslim Spain, roughly between the tenth and fifteenth centuries (Tobi 2000, 40). Both periods represent the “Renaissance of Islam” (Stillman 1997, 87). During later periods, when Islam was no longer as strong and powerful, this influence moved to different places throughout the Ottoman Empire.

The Arabo-Islamic impact on Hebrew poetry resulted in radical changes that are evident in its form, style, content, and even language. Indeed, the structural, poetic, and linguistic borrowings are so extensive that some define it as a poetry that differs from Arabic poetry only in its language (Tobi 2000, 7). In its content, Hebrew poetry expressed new ideas, replacing themes of communal concerns and hopes with matters involving the individual’s religious experience and wishes (Scheindlin 1991, 22). These ideas were inspired not only by Arabic poetry but also by the Quran, the *Ḥadīth* (the sayings attributed to the prophet Muhammad), and Islamic philosophy, theology, and mysticism (Lewis 1984, 80).

The intense presence of these sources in Hebrew religious poetry makes the poems impossible to understand without a thorough acquaintance with the wider cultural surroundings that nourished the mind-set of the Jewish poets (Tobi 2000, 7).

However, this immense influence does not imply that Hebrew religious poetry is a pure imitation of Arabic poetry. The Hebrew poets reached literary peaks no less sophisticated than their Arabic counterparts—otherwise these poems would not have been treasured as a very important form of Jewish poetry from the ninth century until the present day (Tobi 2000, 8, 11).

The pivotal role that Arabo-Islamic culture had in shaping the PLS is also attested in its music. As early as the 1930s, major studies in ethnomusicology describe this strong influence on many aspects of the melody and its rendition. Idelsohn (1923) and Lachmann (1929), two pioneering scholars in the study of Jewish musical traditions among the communities who lived in Arab countries, were the first to identify the strong presence of this culture in their Jewish religious songs. From this point onward, the way was opened for studies addressing religious songs in Jewish communities that still live in the same countries, such as the Djerba community (Lachmann 1929; 1940; Davis 1985; 2002), communities that immigrated to Israel, such as the Babylonian Jews (Idelsohn 1923; Shiloah 1983) or to the West, such as the Syrian Jews in New York and elsewhere in the Americas (Shelemay 1998; Kligman 2001). These studies show unequivocally that the Arabic musical tradition has long been a pivotal component in the cultural life of these communities, religious as well as secular, and in their identity as Arab-Jews (Shelemay 1998).

It is important at this stage to note that, regarding the influence of Arabo-Islamic culture on Hebrew religious poetry and its music, this study follows the path paved by findings made in previous works and does not address any of the influences that Judaism had on Arabic culture and Islamic religion. This presentation should by no means be seen as an attempt to undermine the Jewish influence; rather, it is a reflection of the particular focus of this study. That is to say, in literature and the arts in general, and in Hebrew poetry in particular, “the Muslim influence on the Jews is enormous, and it is almost entirely one way” (Lewis 1984, 81). This assertion is equally valid in the case of the melodies, which are all borrowed from the Arabic repertoire of songs, and which also dictate the singing style of these Hebrew poems.

The Historical and Cultural Scope of the *Miṣḥaf*

The Poets: General Description

Discovering the names of the poets and establishing their chronological order reveals that the *Miṣḥaf* covers one thousand years of Hebrew religious poetry, dating from the tenth century. It contains poetry written by the most prominent poets. All produced their work within the Arabo-Islamic civilization and were much influenced by it.

Seventy-two poets, whose work collectively comprises over 270 poems, were identified in the *Miṣḥaf*. The poems written between the tenth and sixteenth centuries remain the most popular among Arab-Jews, including the Babylonians, and also in some Ashkenazi communities. In particular, these include poems by the most prominent poets of the golden age of Muslim Spain, during the eleventh and the twelfth centuries, such as Ibn Gabirol, Yehudah Halevi, and Avraham Ibn 'Ezra. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which ended with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, are not represented in the *Miṣḥaf*.

The presence of the Babylonian poets in the collection is evident only from the eighteenth century onwards. It is known that Hebrew poetry continued to be written in Babylon of the post-'Abbasid era (twelfth and thirteen centuries) and mainly in the quasi-*muwashshah* style (*shir me'eyn-ezori*) (Tobi 1981, 51). It is also known that after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, the poets of the East, especially the Babylonians, continued to write in the Spanish style (Tobi 2000, 19). Yet this period of Babylonian religious poetry is not represented in the *Miṣḥaf*. A possible reason for this finding might simply be the lack of documented information regarding rabbinical scholarship of any sort, including poetry, between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. According to Benayahu (1993, 9), neither books nor manuscripts from this period, or even earlier, have survived. This is because Babylonian works of religious scholarship were not copied throughout this period, as was the custom with Jewish scholarship and poetry of Muslim Spain. However, the reason for the absence of earlier poems is not yet known definitely.

As to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Rosen-Moked (1982, 132) affirms that it is even possible to say that a certain kind of renaissance of the Spanish school took place among the Babylonian poets. This is evident in the work of three nineteenth-century poets, 'Abdallah Ben

Table 13.1. The Poets of the *Miṣḥaf*

Period	Time	Place	Prominent Poets	Poems in the <i>Miṣḥaf</i>
'Abbasid Baghdad/ Muslim-Spain	10th century	Baghdad and Cordoba	Dunash Ben Labrat (915–70)	1
Muslim Spain	11th to 15th centuries	Spain	Shlomoh Ibn Gabirol (1020–57)	8
			Yiṣḥaq Ben Yehudah Ibn Ghayyath (1030–89)	1
			Yehudah Halevi (1075–1141)	5
			Avraham Ibn 'Ezra (1089–1164)	6
			Maimonides (1138–1204) ^a	1
		Provence	Yiṣḥaq Ben Yehudah Hasniri (13th century)	1
			Yosef Ben Ḥanan Ben Natan Ezobi (13th century)	1
			Zrahyah Halevi (13th century)	1
Ottoman Empire	16th century	Constantinople	Shlomoh Ben Mazal Tov (16th century)	2
		Safed	El'azar Ben Mosheh Azkari (1533–1600)	1
			Avraham Maimin (16th century)	1
		Palestine ^b	Israel Ben Mosheh Najarah (1555–1625)	81
		Libya	Shim'on Lavi (d. 1545)	1
		Tunis	Fardji Shawat (16th century)	2
	17th and 18th centuries	Morocco	Mosheh Ben Aharon Adhan (17th and 18th centuries)	1
			David Ben Aharon Ḥasin (1727–92)	2
			Mosheh Ashkar Hakohen (18th century)	1
Baghdad ^c	18th through 20th centuries	Baghdad	23 Poets ^d (18th and 19th centuries)	52
		Ḥalab ^e	Yosef Ben Eliyah al-Hakham (1835–1909)	49
		Ḥalab Egypt	Yiṣḥaq 'Antabi (18th and 19th centuries)	1
		Ḥalab	Refael 'Antabi (19th century)	1
		Ḥalab	Mordekhay 'Abadi (19th century)	6
		Ḥalab, Jerusalem–New York	Avraham 'Antabi (20th century)	1
			Yiṣḥaq 'Abadi (20th century)	1
Total PLSs				228

Notes:

a. Not certain.

b. Also Adrianople in Turkey, Damascus, Safed, and Gaza.

c. Under the Ottomans until 1918.

d. The most prominent poets are Mosheh Halevi (1835–1909) with seven songs; Rabi 'Abdalla Ben Rabi Khther Hnin (d. 1859) and Saleḥ Maṣḥiah (1773–1885) with six songs each; and 'Ezra Ben Rabi Eliahu Sofer (19th century) and Sason ben Rabbi Mordekhay (1747–1830) with four songs each.

e. Also known as Aleppo.

Rabbi Khther Hnin, whose poems appear in the *Miṣḥaf*, Yehezkel Hnin, and Avraham Mosheh Shmuel. And despite the lack of information, some of the strophic poetry of the Babylonian poets that appears in the *Miṣḥaf* attests to their acquaintance with the Spanish poetry and the *muwashshah* (*shir ezor*) in particular.

Two other groups of poets are represented here. The first are the North African poets from Libya, Tunis, and Morocco between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. This is despite the fact that the close relationship between the Babylonian and North African communities dates from the ninth century (Gruner 1989, 49).

The second group is the poets of Halab (Aleppo), from the eighteenth century onwards. This can perhaps affirm the close relationship between the Babylonian and Syrian communities that was reinforced in the eighteenth century, when the former was in desperate need of leaders. After a disastrous plague that killed a large number of its members, including the leadership, the Babylonians invited the Syrian Rabbi Şdaqah Huşin (1699–1733) to be the head of their community (Hakak 2005, 15). The work of his son, Mosheh Huşin (d. 1810), was identified in the *Miṣḥaf*.

Chronological and Geographical Boundaries

When the veil of anonymity is lifted from the poets of the *Miṣḥaf*, a panoramic landscape of time and place is revealed. This book encompasses chronological and geographical boundaries that are, although broad, carefully defined. Within these boundaries, it conveys the four formative periods of Hebrew religious poetry in general and the PLS in particular. These poets lived in the major capitals of Arabo-Islamic civilization while conducting an intense intellectual dialogue with the surrounding society.

The *Miṣḥaf* documents the first encounter of the Jews with Arabo-Islamic culture in 'Abbasid Baghdad during the tenth century; it then moves to Islamic Spain from the eleventh to the fifteenth century, before returning to western Asia under the rule of the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century. This journey comes to an end in Baghdad between the eighteen and the twentieth centuries, the city where this artistic and religious journey began.

Thus the *Miṣḥaf* documents almost the entire history of Jewish para-liturgical poetry, embracing periods of cultural growth and flowering in

Islamic civilization as well as periods of decline. It covers all times and places in which Jews created and performed this genre under the wings of the Arabo-Islamic civilization, which had given birth to this genre and nourished its poetic and musical features through the entire second millennium. The first two periods are the formative and classical periods of medieval Islam and Judeo-Arabic culture. The third period was the last of the great periods of Islamic culture, when the large and creative Jewish communities were scattered throughout the Ottoman Empire. And the fourth and last period represents the final phase of Judeo-Arabic life in Arab lands.

The Arabo-Islamic Culture as Reflected in the *Miṣḥaf*

It would be almost impossible to portray in the framework of a single study the influence of Arabo-Islamic culture and religion on the entire collection of the PLSs in the *Miṣḥaf*, in all its complexity and variety. The aim of this study is more limited. Instead, four prominent poets will represent each of the four periods described above. Dunash Ben Labrat (915–70) represents the first period in 'Abbasid Baghdad. Shlomoh Ibn Gabirol (1020–57) represents the second period in Muslim Spain and Israel Ben Mosheh Najarah (1555–1625) represents the third period, in the Ottoman Empire, mainly in the Middle East, including North Africa. Hakham Yo-sef Ḥayyim Ben Eliyah al-Ḥakham (1835–1909) represents the last period, mostly in Baghdad, then still under the rule of the Ottoman Empire.

The work of each of these poets is significant in both the history of Hebrew religious poetry, and in reflecting the influence of the Arabo-Islamic culture on this poetry. The following sections give a general account of the various aspects of this influence on the work of each of the four poets, illustrated by one each of their poems, all of which are analyzed here in this inclusive manner for the first time.

'Abbasid Baghdad and Dunash Ben Labrat

In 762, during the reign of the caliph al-Mansur (754–75), Baghdad grew from a small suburb near the capital of the Sassanid Empire, Ctesiphon, into the capital of the caliphs of the 'Abbasid dynasty. The small community of Jews, who had lived there from the third century, gradually expanded and became the largest Jewish urban community in the area

known today as Iraq (Rappel 1978, 31). Between the eighth and the tenth centuries, various caliphs implemented different policies, for or against the Jews; nonetheless, and despite all the restrictions, many Jews adopted the values, manners, and customs of Arabic culture. By the tenth century, Jews were using Arabic for nearly all forms of writing, both secular and religious (Stillman 1997, 83). And the first blossoms of Arabo-Islamic influence on Jewish life, thinking, and writing, including religious poetry, had started to be apparent (Ben Ya'akov and Cohen 1971, 1445).

The period between the mid-seventh and mid-eleventh centuries witnessed the golden age of the *geonim*, the heads of the prospering academies of Jewish learning in Sura and Pumbedita, which were located in southern Iraq and moved at the beginning of the tenth century to the 'Abbasid capital, Baghdad (Fawzi 1993, 193). This era coincided with an unparalleled efflorescence of Arabic culture during the Umayyad and 'Abbasid dynasties. The strong influence of this culture on Jewish life contributed to the growing importance of the Jewish leaders in Babylon. Thus Baghdad also became the spiritual capital of the Jewish people. It was the place where *rashey hagolah* (the leaders of the Diaspora), the highest authorities on Jewish law, lived. Here, Hebrew poetry encountered Arabo-Islamic culture and as early as the ninth century, it started to come under its influence (Tobi 2000, 40).

Dunash Ben Labrat (915–70), a poet, linguist, and musician, was a native of Fez. He received his education in Baghdad at the feet of Sa'adyah Gaon (882–942). In 960, he moved to Cordoba, where he became an influential figure whose role in establishing the foundations of the new Spanish school of Hebrew poetry was significant. As the earliest poet whose work appears in the *Miṣḥaf*, Dunash represents the first stage at which Jewish scholarship was influenced by the Arabo-Islamic civilization. As a devoted disciple of the Sa'adyah Gaon, Dunash absorbed much of the literary doctrine of the late Hebrew Babylonian poetic school (Fleischer 1975, 337). In this same cultural environment, he made his most revolutionary step, introducing Arabic poetic meter to Hebrew poetry (Tobi 2000, 55).

Arabo-Islamic Influence

Tobi (2000, 11) describes Dunash as the poet from the East who opened the door to the Arabic influence on Hebrew poetry which became completely

reliant on Arabic poetry, and every Jewish poet's goal was to try his best to follow the footsteps of the Arabic poets.

The Quantitative Meter

One of Dunash's most significant contributions to Hebrew poetry was the introduction of Arabic poetic meter, the quantitative meter, which is based on a distinction between short and long syllables.⁴ It replaced the Hebrew metric system, which was prevalent at that time, and was based on the distinction between stressed and unstressed syllables (Stoetzer 1998, 619). Dunash's invention is considered to be a revolutionary act of immense influence on Hebrew poetry (Yahalom 1979, 24). This is because it deviated from Hebrew grammar and bestowed on the meter the status of an independent element overriding the grammar and content of the text. As such, it also raised enormous opposition (Tobi 2000, 256).

The new meter had far-reaching implications for sung poetry. The old system had not included any consideration of time. The articulation of the words was according to the intensity of their syllables rather than their length. As a result, a melody for a Hebrew poem was in free rhythm. The new metric system, on the other hand, gave length to the syllables and thus created the foundation of metered melody with flowing rhythms, which was easier for singing. It also made the formal idea of a stanza more prominent, an innovation that helped to bring music into religious practice (Boehm 1971, 594).

Dunash's pioneering invention was difficult to grasp until the time of Ibn Gabirol, who furthered its presence in Hebrew poetry, religious as well as secular (Levin 1986, 129). Only then, and subsequently over many centuries, did it spread to other places, such as North Africa, Turkey, Syria, Babylon, Egypt, and Yemen (Hrushovski 1971, 1121). From Dunash's time onwards, meters based on syllable counting have ruled Hebrew poetry.

Biblical Language

Dunash was not the first to introduce biblical language into Hebrew poetry, but he was the first to use it exclusively (Tobi 2000, 120). Inspired by the Islamic adoration of Quranic language, his predecessor and teacher Sa'adyah viewed biblical Hebrew as a language which was by no means less sophisticated, rich, or powerful than the language of the Quran. Therefore, he encouraged the use of both the biblical style and the old

paytanic style, which had been prevalent since the third century. The latter included a combination of biblical and new words created by the *paytanim* (poets) according to their special linguistic needs (Schirmann 1998, 39). The Spanish school of Hebrew religious poetry continued Dunash's legacy and insisted on rigid adherence to the form, syntax, and grammar of pure biblical Hebrew (Tobi 2000, 56).

The *Qaṣīda*

In Cordoba, Dunash was the first poet to write perfect Hebrew *qaṣīda*, the most prestigious and classic Arabic genre.⁵ The *qaṣīda* comprises a variable number of bipartite lines, up to one hundred, all of which have identical meter. The rhyming scheme is aa ba ca da, etc., that is, the rhyme appears in both parts of the first line and only in the second part in the rest of the lines (Jacobi 1998, 630). Later on, in Islamic Spain, Ibn Gabirol adopted and developed this genre (Schirmann 1998, 124).

Dunash's *Dror Yiqra* (Proclaim a Release) (first stanza, author's translation): Poetic Characteristics, Content, and Melody

Proclaim a release for both son and daughter
And the LORD shall guard you as the pupil of His eye
Your name is pleasant and shall never cease
Sit [and] rest on the Sabbath day

Dror Yiqra M(55;78), was written in 960 when Dunash was in Spain (Alcalay 1993, 160). It is sung during the Sabbath meals, especially during the first meal on Friday evening. The poem reflects two of Dunash's inventions: Arabic quantitative meter and the exclusive use of biblical language.

Most scholars call *Dror Yiqra* a *zemer* (song) and do not relate to its poetic genre (Allony 1947, 36, 38; Schirmann 1954, 40; Fleischer 1975, 412; Ratzaby 1996, 1:47–48; Breuer 1993, 24; Weinberger 1998, 134; Schirmann 1998, 126, 128). In Dunash's time, the *qaṣīda* had reached its greatest length and was cut into strophes, with shorter lines and a unique rhyme situated at the end of each of them, instead of one rhyme at the end of the longer original line. As the first poet to write Hebrew *qaṣīda*, it is likely that Dunash was influenced by this development, and what we see here reflects this effect (Breuer 1993, 24). Breuer relies on this assumption when he tries to explain the reason for the combination of two poetic elements

noticeable in Dunash's poem for the first time. These are the absence of *ḥaruz mavriah*, that is, a similar rhyme at the end of each of the strophes of the poem, and instead, the appearance of a rhyme at the end of each line of the strophe, and the changes of rhyme from one strophe to another.

The poem has six stanzas; each has four symmetrical lines of eight syllables and a similar rhyming scheme: aaaa, bbbb, cccc, etc. Dunash uses the Arabic quantitative meter of a type called *hazaj*, *hamarnin* in Hebrew.⁶ This particular meter entered instantaneously into secular and religious Hebrew poetry, and the most famous example is *Dror Yiqra* (Ratzaby 1996, 47).

Dunash uses biblical vocabulary, though in his own style. For example, the first two words of the poem *Dror Yiqra* are a variation on three biblical sources. Leviticus 25:10 has *veqeratem dror bareš* (and you shall have the horn sounded throughout your land), Jeremiah 34:15 has *liqro dror* (proclaim a release), and Jeremiah 43:8 has *liqro lahem dror* (proclaim for them a release).⁷ The poem also demonstrates the change or twist Dunash made in the grammatical function of these words and thus in their meaning. Perhaps he did this in order to fit the biblical quotations to the new Arabic meter. For example, in line 2, in the phrase *ne'im shimkhem* (your voice is pleasant), the word *ne'im* should be *na'im*, as it appears in Psalm 35:3—*zamru lishmo ki na'im* (sing hymns to His name, for it is pleasant). Another example is in line 4—*shvu nuḥu* (sit, rest). In the original text, Numbers 22:19, it appears as *shvu venuḥu* (sit and rest).

The heading of the poem does not indicate any melody to which it is sung. The Babylonians have several melodies for this popular song. All of them are based on *maqāmāt* (s. *maqām*, Arabic musical scale), although their original Arabic songs have yet to be identified (see Shiloah 1983, 62 and note 15).

Muslim Spain and Shlomoh Ibn Gabirol

Jewish settlements in Spain developed significantly in the eighth century, a short time after the Muslim conquest, and were in close relation with the Babylonian leadership.

The period during the eleventh and twelfth centuries is regarded as the best that Jews ever experienced under Islamic governance, as they enjoyed a high degree of religious and civil autonomy. The free religious, political, and cultural atmosphere gave rise to a significant Jewish courtier class,

with a sense of identity combining Jewish and Arabo-Islamic cultural values and ideas. Social and intellectual collaborations were common and normal between Jews, Muslims, and Christians (Brann 1991, 1).

Shlomoh Ibn Gabirol (1020–57) was a Spanish poet and philosopher. He is regarded as the major religious poet of the Arab-Jews, and a large number of his poems have been preserved in prayer books of many Jewish communities. Eight of his poems were discovered in the *Miṣḥaf*, and they appear on various occasions.

Ibn Gabirol is considered the founder of the new school of religious poetry in Muslim Spain and thus the most important poet of this era (Mirski 1992, 159, 298; Levin 1986, 92). More than any other poet, he is responsible for the great change that occurred in Hebrew poetry under the influence of Arabo-Islamic culture. As a follower of Sa' adiah Gaon and Dunash, he is also seen as a poet who allowed deeper amalgamation of Arabo-Islamic features with Jewish ideas and values in Hebrew poetry.

Arabo-Islamic Influence

Islamic Mysticism and Arabic Secular Poetry

The neo-Platonic School, founded in the third century by Plotinus, formulated an idea concerning the human soul and its purpose. The origin of the human soul, before it was united with matter, existed in the Eternal and Supreme, and thus its goal was to return to this high origin. This idea was adapted and further developed by the Islamic neo-Platonic school, which viewed God as the Eternal and the Supreme. The earliest step was made by al-Kindi (d. 866), the first Muslim philosopher, then by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā (Pure Brethren), a group of Muslim philosophers in Basra, Iraq, of the tenth and eleventh centuries. Later, it reached its intellectual fruition in the works of al-Farabi (872–950) and Ibn Sina (d. 1037) (Levin 1986, 137).

The work of these neo-Platonic philosophers, mostly that of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā, was brought to Muslim Spain by the philosopher Ḥamid al-Din al-Kermani (d. 1020) and studied by Ibn Gabirol, who eventually adopted their ideas, which are clearly manifested in his poetry (Levin 1986, 139).

Among all the Jewish neo-Platonic philosophers of the Middle Ages, Ibn Gabirol was the most original and significant; his ideas shaped the core thinking of Jewish philosophy, theology, and *Kabbalah* (Jewish

mysticism). He transplanted neo-Platonism into Hebrew poetry without any feeling of contradiction between his Jewish religious beliefs and his philosophical outlook (Guttmann 1964, 89).

This same idea also appears in the early Sufi mystic and ascetic poetry, called *zuhdiyyāt* (ascetic poems, s. *zuhdiyya*, from the verb *zahada*, to renounce or to turn away from) (Levin 1986, 136). This genre was developed in the early Islamic period and became the favourite poetic style during the first years of the new Muslim empire, especially at the beginning of the 'Abbasid dynasty in the eighth century (Stern 1974, 81). In a varied number of rhymes and metered lines, ranging from less than ten to over forty, written in simple language, these poems convey the vigorous attempt of the worshipper to come closer to God.

Levin (1986, 95) states without any equivocation that Sufi mysticism had a strong impact on Ibn Gabirol's life and work. He was the first poet of Hebrew religious poetry to adopt the *zuhdiyyāt* genre, including its ideas, not only in his poetry but also in his other works. He was influenced, in particular, by the *zuhd*, the idea of the rejection of material comforts in order to pursue personal contemplation and meditation, and he eventually adapted this concept as a way of life. Cole (2001, 30) raises only briefly the possibility that Ibn Gabirol was the first Jewish Sufi.

Ibn Gabirol was the first Hebrew poet to shape his philosophical and mystical ideas in a form that was entirely influenced by the imagery and prosody of Arabic love poetry. He used it as a model for his description of the love between God and the people of Israel, particularly for expressing an intimate and direct appeal of the individual believer to God (Scheindlin 1991, 37; 1994:109). The religious state of the worshipper was one of the most important ideas that occupied the Hebrew religious poets of Muslim Spain (Levin 1986, 92). According to Scheindlin (1991, 139), it was completely inspired and influenced by Arabo-Islamic ideas prevalent at that time. Ibn Gabirol's act, in this respect, is considered a radical development, because it demanded an absolute abandonment of the early Hebrew hymnology in both form and content (Levin 1986, 119).⁸

The *Muwashshah*

Ibn Gabirol was the first Hebrew poet to write poems in the *muwashshah* genre (Schirmann 1998, 316). In his time, this genre was disdained by classical and prominent poets, Jews as well as Muslims, as it was considered to

be a promiscuous and sensual form of song, performed by female slaves in taverns. Here also, Schirmann views Ibn Gabirol's act as courageous. He wrote his *muwashshaḥ* in the *mu'āraḍa* (imitation) technique prevalent in Arabic poetry, particularly in this genre, which is based on the imitation of an existing poem. The close contact that the Hebrew poets in general, and Ibn Gabirol in particular, had with contemporary Arabic poets who wrote *muwashshaḥāt* is attested by the numerous cases of *mu'āraḍa* that still can be ascertained, despite the scarcity of the Arabic material (Stern 1974, 45).

Ibn Gabirol's *Shfal Ruah* (With Lowly Spirit, Scheindlin's translation 1991, 177): Poetic Characteristics, Content, and Melody

- 1a With lowly spirit, lowered knee and head
- 1b In fear I come; I offer Thee my dread.
- 2a But once with Thee I seem to have no worth
- 2b More than a little worm upon the earth.
- 3a O Fullness of the world, Infinity-
- 3b What praise can come, if any can, from me?
- 4a Thy splendour is not contained by the hosts on high,
- 4b And how much less capacity have I!
- 5a Infinite Thou, and infinite Thy ways;
- 5b Therefore the soul expands to sing Thy praise.

The *Baqashah Shfal Ruah* M(16;9) also appears in the liturgy and is recited in the Morning Prayer of the second day of Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year).⁹ It reflects the longing of the feeble and humble worshipper for the unreachable and Almighty God, emphasizing the huge gap existing between the two.

Ibn Gabirol uses the Arabic poetic genre called *qit'a* (pl. *qit'a*), *psuqah* in Hebrew: a short and monothematic version of the often polythematic *qaṣīda*, which was widely used for *zuhdiyyāt*. The *qit'a* comprises not more than ten lines, each divided over two hemistiches. In comparison with the classical and sophisticated *qaṣīda*, the *qit'a* tends toward simpler diction, less elaborated rhetoric, and greater lyricism.

This genre symbolizes the real Spanish revolution in Hebrew poetry under the influence of Arabo-Islamic culture, not only through its form

but also through its content, that is, the intimate and direct appeal to God (Fleischer 1975, 402). Six out of his eight poems in the *Miṣḥaf*, including *Shfal Ruah*, are *qiṭa'*.

The rhyming scheme is typical of the *qiṭa'*: aa, ba, ca, da, etc. The poem is structured on the Arabic meter called *wāfir*, *hamerubeh* in Hebrew, which has eleven syllables in each hemistich of each line.¹⁰

Ibn Gabirol uses wide-ranging and versatile sources of biblical quotations and vocabulary.¹¹ In a few cases, he quotes the biblical version as is. For example, the first two words of the poem are taken from Isaiah 57:15 and Proverbs 17:19 and 29:23. In others, just like Dunash, he makes few adaptations to fit the words into his poem. An interesting example is the two words *shfal qomah* (low stature) in line 1, quoted from Ezekiel 17:6, and translated in the poem as “lowered . . . head.” Here, Ibn Gabirol separates the words: *shfal*, which appears at the beginning of the verse, and *qomah* at the end. He then slightly twists the grammatical form of the verb *shfal*: in Ezekiel it appears in the feminine form, *gefen soraḥat shiflat qomah* (a spring vine of low stature) and in the poem in the masculine, referring to a male worshipper. The word *qomah* (stature) is also changed to *veqomah* (and stature), and between this pair of words, Ibn Gabirol inserts another word, *berekh* (knee), perhaps intended to emphasize the insignificant rank of the worshipper.

The thoughts, aspirations, and ordeals of the individual worshipper are at the center of this poem. The influence of secular Arabic poetry on the content is expressed through the direct and rather intimate speech of the worshipper to his creator, God. The neo-Platonic idea combined with Islamic mysticism, according to which the human soul has the potential, the ability, and the need to unite with God through a spiritual process, is also expressed here.

The earthly human body gives the worshipper a keen sense of worthlessness (lines 1 and 2). This human weakness creates a huge chasm between God and the worshipper, who nonetheless yearns to reach his maker. The cosmic gap widely separating the two is expressed in its two extremes: on the one end stands the humble and fearful worshipper, who considers himself unworthy (lines 2, 3b and 4b); and on the other end stands the Almighty God with His infinite measures of goodness and greatness (lines 3a, 4a, and 5a). The yearning of the worshipper to unite with God, and thus to close this huge gap, is expressed through a dynamic process of self-struggle which is described throughout the poem. The last

word of each of the lines ends with the syllable *mah*, which in Hebrew constitutes the word *mah* (what). This word can open various questions such as what to do, what to think, how to speak, etc. Thus it creates an impression of the state of emotional turmoil the worshipper is in, which grows even stronger as the appearance of *mah* is so dense; all five verses of the poem end with this syllable.

With this emotional unrest, it seems, the answer hides in the question, as *mah* also constitutes half of the word *neshamah* (soul), perhaps suggesting that the way to resolve this perplexing situation is through the *neshamah*. Indeed, the poem ends with the optimistic hope of a devoted lover when he finds the way to reach his beloved, God. This huge gap between the two can be reconciled only through the soul, which will unite with God on common ground. It is expressed in the last verse through two variations of the same word *gadol* (infinite or great): *vehigdalta* and *tagdil*, used for God and the worshipper (lines 5a and 5b), respectively. For God, *vehigdalta ḥasadim* (“ . . . and Infinite Thy ways”); and for the worshipper, *lekha tagdil lehodot kol neshamah* (“Therefore the soul expands to sing Thy praise”). This unity between God and the worshipper is realized through a spiritual process of contemplation and prayer that leads the worshipper to unification with God.

Scheindlin (1991, 139) asserts that the form and structure of this poem derived entirely from secular Arabic poems. Furthermore, he says that its content is saturated with Islamic thinking to the extent that “the specifically Jewish element of the liturgy is either completely suppressed or drastically reduced, and the theme of love all but disappears.”

In this poem, as in Dunash’s, there is no indication as to the melody to which the poem should be sung. Two melodies are prevalent among the Babylonians. The first is sung in *maqām nawā jihārkah* by Shlomoh Reuven Mu’alem (1905–89), who was one of the most famous cantors in Baghdad of the first half of the twentieth century and later on in Israel. The second version is sung in *maqām bayāt* by Moshe Havushah, the grandson of the Baghdadi cantor Gurgi Yair, a contemporary of Mu’alem.¹²

The Ottoman Empire and Israel Ben Mosheh Najarah

For both Muslims and Jews, the year 1492 symbolizes the dramatic transition from the fifteenth century to the sixteenth. For the Muslims, it marks the fall of their last hold in Spain, in Granada, and the end of classical

Islam (Kahen 1995, 415). The Ottoman Empire became the next, and to date, the last, of the great Islamic world states. In this same year, the Jews were expelled from Spain, a trauma that left its mark on Jewish life for many centuries. A number of places within the Ottoman Empire became the home of large and important Jewish communities formed by both the already existing Jewish population together with the new exiles from Spain. The spiritual crisis of the post-exile experience led to a remarkable engagement in Jewish mysticism, *Kabbalah*, which was accompanied by rituals of singing. This was an attempt by the Jewish people, as a nation, to understand the meaning of this last trauma while establishing a new life under the wings of a new empire and hoping for a better future. In addition, the void caused by the departure from the rich cultural milieu of Spain was filled, for these Jews, by Ottoman Turkish culture (Tietze and Yahalom 1995, 11). In this new environment Najarah's poetry emerged, reflecting the influence of the Turkish culture as well as Arabic.

The poet and musician Israel Ben Mosheh Najarah (1555–1625) mirrors in his poetry both a strong bond with his predecessors, the poets of Muslim Spain, and a new poetic form, style, and content. His work symbolizes a significant phase in the history of Hebrew religious poetry, inasmuch as it represents, for the first time, a simple poetic version of the genre that is more accessible to all members of the community (Benayahu 1990, 281). Najarah's poetry served as a model for an entirely new school of poets in subsequent years, a school that still exists today in Hebrew religious poetry. There is no Arab-Jewish poet of religious poetry who has not been influenced by Najarah (Benayahu 1990, 283). The Babylonians' admiration for this poet is expressed through the inclusion of eighty-one of his poems, which have been identified in the *Miṣḥaf* and thus make him the most popular poet in this collection.

Arabo-Islamic Influence: Text and Music

Both Arabic secular poetry and mysticism continued to be influential in Najarah's poetry. It reflects a combination of strong Jewish identity, steeped in Jewish suffering and longing for redemption and elements taken from the wider cultural environment, such as Arabic poetic genres and melodies (Tietze and Yahalom 1995, 19). Indeed, the content of his poems are no longer similar to Dunash's serene descriptions nor to Ibn Gabirol's refined expression of the sensitive worshipper who experiences

intimate and complex religious dilemmas regarding his relationship with God. Najarah's main concern is much more crucial; it is the emotional state of the nation resulting from its memories of the painful expulsion and the urgent need to create an atmosphere of faith in and hope for a better future.

Najarah adapted Arabic and Turkish songs that describe earthly and sensual love as models for his religious songs. This was expressed through an abundance of metaphors and images of sensual love, while giving the plot of a secular love song a religious meaning (Tietze and Yahalom 1995, 17).

Tietze and Yahalom (1995, 16) describe two sources of mystical concepts and ideas that inspired Najarah. The first consisted of the ideas and rituals of the Baktashy Dervishes, the mystics from Turkey, who sang sensuous love songs with mystical portent. In his poetry, just as in Ibn Gabirol's, the sensual flavor appears in the form of carnal images describing the relationship between God and the people of Israel. In this respect, Najarah kept the tradition of the Spanish school of Hebrew poets, who were influenced by the Islamic classical school of mysticism. Despite the fact that Najarah was not a mystic himself, and the extent of his personal involvement in Jewish mystical life is uncertain, the second and new source of influence reflected in his work involves the mystical ideas formed by the kabbalist Isaac Luria (1534–72). Luria contributed new concepts that continued to be pivotal in Jewish mysticism long after his death (Tietze and Yahalom 9, 41). Thus Najarah continued to amalgamate in his songs both Islamic and Jewish mysticism, a combination that appeared in the *Mishqaf* for the first time in Ibn Gabirol's work.

Najarah adapted and further endorsed the *mishqal havarti foneti* (phonetic-syllabic meter, PSM), known also as the Italian system (see Beeri 1985, 52; Tobi 1995, 26). The PSM is based on the principle of creating a fixed number of syllables in each line of the poem, which is usually strophic and with short lines. The syllables are defined with no distinction between their length, long or short, as was the case in Dunash's quantitative meter, or accentuation, accented or not accented, prevalent before Dunash's innovation. As a result, the *shva n'a* (mobile *shva*) is regarded as a vowel (Schirmann 1997, 689).¹³

Najarah's preference for the PSM is heavily reflected in his work. Perhaps because most of his songs were written to existing Arabic or Turkish songs, the simplest way he could adjust the Hebrew language to these

songs was by using a flexible metric system such as this. From Najarah's time on, the PSM became widespread in the East and almost the only meter used by most poets (Beeri 1985, 50).

The influence of Arabic music on Najarah's work derived directly from the original Arabic and Turkish songs that he had chosen as models for his own, and their appearance in his work is of an unprecedented scope (Seroussi 1990, 290).¹⁴ In his book *Zmirot Yisrael* (The Songs of Israel, 1587), he describes these songs as *nigunim nokhriyim* (foreign melodies), and he states clearly that they are not appropriate for poems written in the holy language, Hebrew, because they are *divrey ḥesheq vezimah* (words of desire and lechery) (Najarah 1587, 1). Nonetheless, he, as his predecessors, continued the practice of adapting Hebrew religious texts to foreign melodies of existing secular and popular songs, out of a wish that worshippers would abandon these foreign songs and adapt the proper ones, his songs. In addition, Najarah was the first to classify and edit his songs according to their *maqāmāt* and not only according to their religious occasion (Tietze and Yahalom 1995, 14).

In the context of the para-liturgical singing, Najarah introduced a new textual and musical device, the *ptihah*, a short introductory song succeeded by other longer ones. Half of the *ptihot* in the *Miṣḥaf* are his.

Najarah's *Yihyu Kemoṣ* (They Shall Become as Chaff before the Wind) (first stanza and refrain, author's translation): Poetic Characteristics, Content and Melody

- 1a They who worship their god Chemosh¹⁵ shall become as chaff
before the wind
- 1b And upon the worshippers of Bel¹⁶ agony shall come
- 2a To every man who supports his sculptured image
- 2b And to prevent its fall ties it with rope
- 3a And in his bosom he shall hide it
- 3b He sings to it in the midst of the congregation
- 4a And in time of stress it stops its ear
- 4b As if his worshipper is not in the same place
- 5a Happy is the people of the living God
- 5b And into the bosom of the living God and His lot he has fallen.

This *Baqashah* which is sung at dawn, was inspired by a Turkish *ghazal* of the poet Qazi Burhanuddin (1314–98), *la'l-i lebin ki sordugum* (It Is the Ruby of Your Lips That I Am Asking About) (Tietze and Yahalom 1995, 133).

This poem presents one of the structural variations of *shir me'eyn-ezori*. It consists of four stanzas; the first has five lines, of which the last functions as the refrain. Each of the following three stanzas has four lines and is divided over two segments.

Najarah's rich repertoire of original Arabic and Turkish sources resulted in an equally rich repertoire of poetic forms, which demonstrates many types of rhyming patterns even in the frame of one poem. Indeed, the poem under discussion has two sets of rhyming schemes. The first is unique to each of the stanzas, and the second appears in the last word of each of them and rhymes with the last word of each line of the first stanza.¹⁷ The overall structure of the poem and its rhyming scheme are typical of the *shir me'eyn-ezori* and, in fact, of a large number of Najarah's poem (Schirmann 1997, 707).

The poem is written in the Arabic meter called *rajaz* (Tietze and Yahalom 1995, 133), the syllables of which are determined according to the principle of the PSM. Thus each line has sixteen syllables, eight in each hemistich.¹⁸

Najarah's language is simple and uses vocabulary that is no longer purely biblical, at least not to the degree and intensity of sophistication of the Spanish school of poets.

The strong bond between God and the people of Israel is described through a comparison with the type of relationship other nations have with their gods. In this respect the poem reflects the shift from the concerns of the individual worshipper, which occupied Ibn Gabirol and his contemporaries, to those of the nation, a development typical of poems written in the post-exile era following the expulsion from Spain.

There is no indication in the *Miṣḥaf* as to the melody to which *Yihyu Kemoṣ* is sung. However, in the heading of two other poems, *Yihyu Kemoṣ* is quoted as the recommended melody for their performance.¹⁹ The only known melody sung by the Babylonians to *Yihyu Kemoṣ* is performed by Shlomoh Reuven Mu'alem in *maqām 'ajam* and by Havushah in *maqām bayāt* (Shiloah 1983, 40).²⁰

10. Baghdad and al-Ḥakham

Iraq of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a battleground between the two great empires of the time—the Persians, who were mostly Shiites, and the Ottomans, who were mostly Sunnites. The seventeenth century added another catastrophe for Iraq: plagues that came from the Far East through India and Persia beset the country and caused the deaths of a large number of the people. Only from the mid-nineteenth century was this problem finally solved, through the aid of international organizations (Rappel 1978, 64).

The leadership of prominent rabbis such as the Aleppo-born Rabbi Ṣdaqah Ḥuṣin (1699–1733) and the most prominent and admired Rabbi ‘Abdallah Somekh (1813–89) brought significant improvements in the life of this community, and during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jews became influential in Iraq in both commerce and government. One of their major achievements was the foundation of an educational system for Jews and for the wider population of Iraq (Hakak 2005, 15). However, this situation did not last long. From the 1930s onwards, the conditions of life for the Babylonian Jews deteriorated rapidly, coming to a tragic peak in the *farhud* (pogrom), the massacre and looting of 1941 (Ben Ya’akov 1971, 90).

Life went back to normal; however, Zionism gained increasing publicity among the Jews and thus provoked frequent protests against them and discriminatory legislation by the Iraqi government. After 1945, the situation deteriorated, resulting in the mass exodus of the Jews in 1950 and 1951, only two years after the establishment of the state of Israel (Spector-Simon 2003:351).

Al-Ḥakham (1835–1909), known also as Ben Eish Ḥay (A Living Man), was a rabbi, poet and the last spiritual leader of the Babylonian Jewry on the eve of their mass emigration from Iraq (Ben Ya’akov 1965, 194). He was known as a progressive halakhic authority whose leadership was widely recognized by all Jewish communities, Babylonians as well as others in the East and West (Stillman 1995, 21).

Al Ḥakham’s Poetry

Al-Ḥakham was a prolific writer of both rabbinical works and poetry. He wrote more than two hundred poems, all of which reflect the influence of

the Spanish school, as well as Najarah's strong and more noticeable impact (Ben Ya'akov 1965, 190). Forty-nine poems by al-Ḥakham are found in the *Miṣḥaf* and thus reflect his special status and importance among the Babylonians.

Arabo-Islamic Influence

Most of al-Ḥakham's poems in the *Miṣḥaf*, are written in simple language using almost a fixed vocabulary, describing clear ideas presented mainly in one of the less complex forms of *shir me'eyn-ezori*. In this way, al-Ḥakham, like Najarah, aimed to create songs that were accessible to all members of the community. Many of his songs are typical of the Iraqi indigenous folk songs, such as the *zuhayrī* and the *'atābā*. These genres were prevalent in al-Ḥakham's time and are very popular among the Babylonian Jews down to the present day (Avishur 1994, 79).

Al-Ḥakham's interest in Jewish mysticism, *Kabbalah*, is evident in most of his poems. Thus he continued the long tradition of expressing mystical ideas and thoughts in poetry, as had his predecessors Ibn Gabirol and Najarah. In his private life, al-Ḥakham maintained a reclusive life after a family calamity (Ben Ya'akov 1965, 197).

The special rhetoric and eloquence of the *khaṭīb* (Muslim preacher, pl. *khuṭaba*) were very influential on the Jewish preacher, *darshan*, in all Jewish communities in Arab lands (Ben Ya'akov 1994, 253). In most cases, the prominent *khuṭaba* were major religious scholars, poets, and spiritual leaders with pietistic, ascetic, and mystical tendencies. Their sermons were intense amalgamations of quotations from the Quran and the *Ḥadīth*, proverbs, and poetry drawn from a wide variety of sources. Many of the *khuṭaba* had written works based on their preaching (Meisami 1998, 594).

The scholarly religious qualifications and authoritative status of the *khaṭīb*, as well as his extensive reliance on scriptures, are equally typical of al-Ḥakham, who was also known as a talented *khaṭīb*. His sermons belonged to a tradition passed on to him by his father, one which had run in the family for generations. These sermons were regarded by the Babylonians as important events in their religio-cultural life (Ben Ya'akov 1994, 259). Al-Ḥakham's speech, in the spoken Arabic of the Babylonian Jews, was simple and clear. His themes were mainly religious, imbued with biblical quotations, moral sayings, proverbs, and popular stories,

mostly derived from the Arabic written secular literary tradition, such as *Alf Layla wa-Layal* (One Thousand and One Arabian Nights), but also stories known in the oral tradition (Avishur 1994, 112).

Most of al-Ḥakham's poems are written in biblical Hebrew, combined with other Jewish religious sources, as well as the spoken Arabic of the Babylonian Jews. Some of the poems are written entirely in Arabic. These features are shaped into a style that amalgamates free and rhymed verse with a simple form of *shir me'eyn-ezori* (Avishur 1994, 111). It seems that al-Ḥakham's poetic style was inspired by his talent as a charismatic *darshan*, and his writing is simply an imitation of his speech.

Al-Ḥakham's *Barukh El Ḥay* (Blessed Be Our Living God; first stanza and refrain, author's translation): Poetic Characteristics, Content, and Melody

- 1a Blessed be our living God
- 1b [Who] for His glory created us
- 2a [Who] brought us to bear [His] commandments
- 2b [Who] gave us the true Torah
- 3a [Who] manifested to us His sacred promise
- 3b With His commandments He sanctified us
- 4a Happy are the people who worship the living God
- 4b King and Lord of Hosts
- 5a Great and performs wonders
- 5b Blessed be our living God of confessions

In *Barukh El Ḥay* M(213; 318), a song intended for Bar Mitzvah celebrations, al-Ḥakham uses the *mu'āraḍa* technique and imitates Najarah's *Yihyu Kemoš*. Thus the presence of the Arabo-Islamic influence is evident both in the sheer use of this technique and, as a result, in the almost total replication of Najarah's poem. The poems are identical in their poetic form, meter, rhyming scheme, and, to some extent, in their vocabulary.²¹

This poem, as Najarah's, is *shir me'eyn-ezori*. It has eight stanzas. The first consists of five lines of which the last two function as a refrain. The remaining stanzas have three lines each. In all stanzas, each line is divided over two hemistiches.

The poem also presents two sets of rhyming schemes, though in a simpler manner than Najarah's: the first belongs to each of the stanzas, and the second, to its refrain.²²

Al-Ḥakham's language demonstrates his scholarly knowledge of both Jewish scriptures and of rabbinical writing. He also uses simple vocabulary that is known to his congregation and taken from passages in the Bible, such as Psalms, Isaiah, Exodus, the Song of Songs, Proverbs, and the liturgy (Ben Ya'akov 1970, 328).

This poem expresses wishes and blessings for the bar mitzvah boy. His thirteenth birthday symbolizes a significant stage in a young man's life as a Jew, a stage at which he is expected to act according to the rules and spirit of the Torah. Two mystical elements are evident in the poem. The first is based on the idea conveyed in the *Zohar* (part 1, 179:1), the book of Jewish mysticism, according to which, at the age of thirteen, the *yeṣer hara'a* (the evil inclination) leaves the child and *Ḥayeṣer hatov* (the good inclination) replaces it. This idea is expressed explicitly in the third stanza (line 3) *nimlat mipaḥ yokshim* ([the bar mitzvah boy] has escaped from the fowler's trap [the evil inclination]), and in the fifth stanza (line 1) *yeṣer ksil še yomar veyeṣer tov ba bigvulo* (Evil inclination be set apart and good inclination enter his domain).

The second mystical idea is expressed through the word *or* (light), which appears in various forms and symbolizes kabbalistic figures. According to the *Kabbalah*, *haor hane'elam* (the hidden mysterious light) is the mystical light of God. In *Barukh El Ḥay*, two synonyms for light appear in the second stanza. The first is *orah* (light): *veyilvash khesimlah orah* (And he shall clothe himself in light as a garment) (line 1), and the second is *betifarah* (glory or brilliance): *asher ne'etar betifarah*, ([and] He shall wear the crown of glory [that God gave him]) (line 2). Both lines describe the light as royal garments, a majestic dress and a crown, suggesting that the bar mitzvah boy will be surrounded and protected by God's holy light and thus will be safe.

The melody of Najarah's *Yihyu Kemoṣ* is cited in the heading of this poem as the melody to which the poem is recommended to be sung. The maqām is thus the same, *'ajam*, and is the only melodic version for this poem, which is sung by Shlomoh Reuven Mu'alem.²³

The PLS and Its Poets in the Perspective of a Millennium

The brief yet extensive survey of the PLS leaves no doubt as to the role of Arabo-Islamic culture in its creation. All the poetic characteristics of the PLS, its form and content as well as its music, present this artistic product as one that comprises four main combinations of elements that might be understood as dichotomous. In its content, the PLS amalgamates elements taken from the religious worlds of both Islam and Judaism, as illustrated in Ibn Gabirol's poem. Furthermore, this genre is united in another layer of what seem to be contradictory elements, the religious and the secular. That is to say, these religious ideas and thoughts are expressed many times through secular and mundane images borrowed from Arabic love songs and are sung to their melodies, as shown in Najarah's work. The melodies themselves, typical of Arabic culture in general, create another layer of dichotomy, as each of them combines elements such as measured and unmeasured melodic sections and composed and improvised parts.

A further dichotomous layer of the PLS is created through the juxtaposition of oral and written traditions. The music of the PLS was not documented in notation, but was transmitted orally, and thus can be ephemeral and changeable. The text, on the other hand, is documented and fixed. All of these three layers of seemingly polar elements are united again in a poetic form and style created by the Arabic *'arude* (prosody) and *'ilm al-balagha* (rhetoric), and written and expressed in Hebrew, with its own grammatical rules, rhetoric, associations, and allusions.

This chain of extraordinary combinations is not exclusively confined to the genre alone. It is also typical of both its poets and its carriers. The biography of many of the poets attests very clearly to their strong and immaculate Jewish piousness, combined with equally strong involvement in the surrounding Arabo-Islamic culture, without any split or feeling of contradiction between the two.²⁴

The same mixture of elements also characterizes the identity of the Babylonian Jews. This conclusion is based on interviews held by the author, between the years 2003 and 2008, with members of the Babylonian community in Israel, all born in Baghdad during the 1930s and 1940s, and all of whom immigrated to Israel between 1949 and 1951. They all described their identity as having two components: Jewish religion and Arabic culture. The harmonious coexistence between these two components was described almost unconsciously and in the same breath. Their

Jewish identity was expressed as one which has a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people; an allegiance that is bound to their shared history. As one of them, Morris Hadad, said, "My father was a Jew, his father was a Jew, my grandfather's father was a Jew, so I am Jewish, too, and my children and their children forevermore will be Jewish as well. We can't do anything about it. This is our destiny."²⁵ The religious component of their Jewish identity was described in a manner typical of the *masortiym* (traditionalists), Jews who keep the spirit and word of the commandments. Hadad explained their approach: "Religion is meant to *lishmor* (to keep and preserve) our Jewish identity. Tradition is the important thing and not fanaticism." Perhaps this strong sense of belonging, coupled with a lack of fear of being converted, may explain the reason for the tremendous influence that Arabo-Islamic culture had on these Jews in the past, as well as in modern times. They acquired many of their customs and ideas from this culture, in the most natural way, but at the same time they did not have any sense of betraying their own identity and heritage as Jews. For them, as they expressed it, blending with the Arabo-Islamic cultural environment meant enhancing and intensifying their joy of life.

This coexistence, it appears, has its long and deep roots in 'Abbasid Baghdad of the mid-eighth century. The profound assimilation of the "Islamicated Jews" of that time, as Stillman (1997, 86) calls them, who adapted Islamic "*mentalité et sensibilities*," never meant total assimilation. "This simply could not occur in a traditional hierarchical society in which religion was the hallmark of individual identity, the ultimate goal of individual concern, and the determinant of individual social and political status." It seems that Stillman's observation of the past is equally relevant more than a thousand years later. The main characteristics of the traditional and hierarchal society of the Babylonian Jews remained, in essence, almost intact until the eve of their departure from Baghdad, and, to some extent many of these characteristics still exist today.

Both the set of values and tastes that constitute the identity of the carriers of the PLS, as Jews by religion and Arabs by other aspects of their culture, comprises, again, a combination of elements that might be understood as contradictory. In this respect, all three components of the paraliturgical realm are similar: the PLS, its poets across the centuries, and its carriers all reflect, in their very nature, an innate coexistence between the diverse elements existing in their cultural surroundings.

It is true, though, that this phenomenon can be found in other artistic

products of other cultures at different times. Still, this doesn't make it less extraordinary, particularly when bearing in mind its intensity, which is rooted in all layers of the para-liturgical realm, and its duration for centuries on end.

What are the reasons for this extraordinary phenomenon? What makes these elements, which create a coherent genre, complementary yet contradictory at the same time? These questions are no doubt two of many other questions that invite further study of the PLS of the Babylonians, as well as of all Arab-Jews.

Notes

1. The period of 2,600 years begins from the first exile of the leadership of the kingdom of Yehudah to Babylon in 597 and 598 bce. Rappel 1978, 33.
2. Edited and published by Saleh Maṣṣur, a Babylonian Jew who immigrated to Palestine in 1929. Ben Ya'akov 1965, 208; 1980, 405 (Hebrew).
3. Edited and published by Rabbi 'Ezra Dangur (1848–1930), who was a prominent *talmid ḥakham* (religious sage) and the *ḥakham bashi* (chief rabbi) of the Babylonian Jewry (1923–27). Ben Ya'akov 1965, 172.
4. For Sa'adyah's knowledge of Arabic meter, see Tobi 2000, 58. For the debate among scholars on whether Dunash was the first to write metered poetry, see Tobi 1995, 9.
5. For earlier attempts made by Hebrew poets to write *qaṣīda*, see Tobi 2000, 51.
6. For example, first two lines: 1-De; 2-ror; 3-yiq; 4-ra; 5-le; 6-ven; 7-'eim; 8-bat; 9-ve; 10-yin; 11-šor; 12-khem; 13-ke; 14-mo; 15-ba; 16-vat.
7. Other words were retrieved from Ezekiel, Psalms, Zechariah, Numbers, Ruth, and Exodus.
8. For Jewish sources in Ibn Gabirol's work, see Levin 1986, 65.
9. For the original function of this poem in the liturgy, see Fleischer 1975, 51, 397, 401.
10. For example, first line: 1-She; 2-fal; 3-ru; 4-aḥ; 5-she; 6-fal; 7-be; 8-rekh; 9-ve; 10-qo; 11-mah.
11. He quotes from Isaiah, Proverbs, Ezekiel, Micah, Exodus, Psalms Leviticus, I and II Kings, I and II Chronicles, Numbers, Psalms, and Job.
12. See the Mu'alem Collection of liturgical and paraliturgical songs and recitation of various biblical passages at the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Centre in Or-Yehudah; Havushah 2009.
13. The *shva n'a* is pronounced in English like the letter *t* in the word *train*, but will be considered as the letter *t* in the word *terrain*, and thus in Hebrew it is regarded as a syllable.
14. Also from Persian and Greek songs. Benayahu 1990, 221.
15. God of Moab and Edom.
16. The chief god of Babylon, known also as Merodakh.
17. For example, first stanza and refrain: AB AB AB CB DB (DB is also the refrain); second stanza: EF GF HF IB.

18. For example, first hemistich: 1-Yih; 2-yu; 3-ke; 4-moṣ; 5-ʿov; 6-dey; 7-Ke; 8-mosh.
19. The songs are M(103;143) and M(213;318).
20. See note 12.
21. For example, the meter of the first line: 1-Ba; 2-rukḥ; 3-el; 4-Ḥay; 5-e; 6-lo; 7-hey; 8-nu; 9-ki; 10-likḥ; 11-vo; 12-do; 13-be; 14-ra; 15-a; 16-nu.
22. For example, first stanza: AA AA AA BC CC; second stanza: DD DD DD.
23. See note 12.
24. For Dunash, see Tobi 2000; for Ibn Gabirol, see Levin 1986 and Stern 1974; for Najarah, see Mirski 1962, Yahalom 1991, 29–36, Tietze and Yahalom 1995, and Benayahu 1990; for al-Ḥakham, see Yaʿakov 1994, Stillman 1995, and Zohar (2001).
25. Interview with Morris Hadad, Tel Aviv, November 11, 2003 (in Arabic and Hebrew).

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14

Encounters between Jewish and Muslim Musicians throughout the Ages

AMNON SHILOAH

What best defines the relationships between Muslim and Jewish musicians is the strong feeling of belongingness to a community. Here, *community* means artists who share the same emotional experience, consider music to be a lifestyle, draw on the same theoretical and expressive norms for their music, and adhere to the values championed by both ancient and modern authors.

The numerous Arabic and Hebrew sources glorifying the important role and place of this music in the life of individuals and society presents us with diverse controversial opinions. Indeed, in the philosophical approach that prevails during the golden age of Islamic civilization, one finds ideas extolling the knowledge of music as a vehicle leading to philosophy, perfection, and happiness, as well as a force of harmony and morality.¹ At the other extreme we find the harsh attitude of radical religious authorities who don't approve of music and see it as a debasing agent endowed with an intoxicating influence, which drives the believer away from concentrating on the meaning of prayer and scriptural messages and from performing his religious duty. Between these two extremes stands the particular mystic approach that perceives the influence of music as rather elevating and brings the faithful close to his Creator. But this influence depends on the degree of his intention and devotion. Central to all of these approaches is the belief in the overwhelming power of music, which is both laudable and condemnable.²

Against this general background let us proceed to the discussion on the different aspects that have characterized the long-lasting collaboration of famous Jewish musicians and their Muslim colleagues. It should be noted that references to this subject are found in Hebrew and Arabic sources, in European scholarly studies, and in oral folk traditions as well. Based on this material, it would be interesting to ask, How is this collaboration reflected in the testimonies of non-Jewish authors and musicians? I shall provide a number of examples gleaned from various writings extending from the pre-Islamic period to the twentieth century and representing important centers from Central Asia to North Africa. These examples embody characteristic patterns whose meaning will be clarified at the conclusion of this article.

Al-Gharīḍ al-Yahūdī

Al-Gharīḍ al-Yahūdī was a poet, singer, and composer who lived in Medina during the early ninth century. His biography is reported by the tenth-century author al-Iṣfahānī in his monumental *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (Book of Songs), which contains a collection of poems from the pre-Islamic period to the ninth century, all of which were set to music. Al-Gharīḍ the Jew is described in this book as a *Kohen* (priest) of the posterity of Aharon ben Amram and a member of the Jewish group living in Yathrib-Medina. Al-Iṣfahānī mentions other Jewish poets belonging to the same group, but the very fact that he dedicated a special entry to al-Gharīḍ points to his artistic ability and reputation. Al-Iṣfahānī even reports that Muhammad was pleased with one of al-Gharīḍ's songs.³

Hirra al-yahūdiya

A second figure from the same period is the Jewish South Yemeni singer and poet Hirra. She was the daughter of Binyamin, and her activity was also linked to Muhammad but in a pejorative way.

In an article by the famous French scholar Charles Pellat entitled "Sur quelques femmes hostiles au prophète,"⁴ the author analyses testimonies concerning the participation of women poets and musicians in the campaign of propaganda against Muḥammad's preaching for his new religion. It is a well-known fact that in the Bedouin society of that time in which

poetry and the singing of poems were considered a frightening weapon, women fulfilled an important role in the tribal battles. They accompanied their tribal warriors and encouraged them with singing, drumming, and the utterance of epigrams (short poems ending with satiric attacks against the enemies). They also marked a victory in battle with special songs and lamented those who died with dirges giving expression to grief in verses.

Among the women who took part in the hostile campaign against the prophet, Pellat mentions Hirra the Jewess as one of a south Yemeni group of women from Ḥadramaut who joyfully celebrated the death of the prophet with songs and drums.⁵

The View of Mgr. Higinio Anglés (1883–1969)

The following viewpoint of this eminent ecclesiastic Spanish scholar, who for many years headed the Pontifical Institute for Sacred Music in Rome, transfers us from the Arabian Peninsula to the Iberian Peninsula where a musical and cultural symbiosis was established.

In a French article, “La musique juive dans l’Espagne médiévale,”⁶ Anglés wrote: “The many centuries of continuous existence of Jewish communities in Spain, from the biblical period and particularly after the Destruction of the Temple . . . until the year 1492, must be considered a blessing for the art of music in the Iberian Peninsula.”⁷

Anglés mentions in this respect the extensive participation of Jewish musicians in the musical life of their environment, particularly after the Muslim conquest. Anglés stressed that the Jews were not passive recipients but rather active contributors who influenced the crystallization of a cultural symbiosis. From evidence that has come down to us, we know the name of eighteen Jewish court musicians who were active between the ninth and fifteenth centuries. Anglés also cites documents attesting to the existence of unique Jewish music, primarily liturgical. One of those documents was transmitted by a fifteenth-century chronicler who describes the special participation of Jews in mourning ceremonies held after the death of their benefactor, Alfonso, king of Aragon and Naples, in 1458. According to this testimony, at an assembly of Jews held in the town square in the afternoon hours, six rabbis uttered Hebrew lamentations around the coffin, and weeping women chanted their own appropriate dirges.⁸

Al-Manşūr al-Yahūdī

From the period of crystallization of the Andalusian musical style, we have an account of the first eminent Jewish musician mentioned in the records: al-Manşūr al-Yahūdī, who was connected to the court of the Umayyad caliph al-Ḥakam at Cordoba. The Arab author and biographer al-Maqqarī (1591–1632) reports in the book *Naḥḥ al-ṭīb* that the Jewish al-Manşūr was delegated in 822 by his patron, al-Ḥakam, to meet Ziryāb, the leading Baghdadi musician at the court of Hārūn al-Rashīd in Kairawan. In al-Maqqarī's lengthy tale, Ziryāb is described as a highly gifted and inspired innovator. After al-Ḥakam's demise, Al-Manşūr was to persuade him to offer his services to the new caliph, 'Abd al-Raḥmān, in Cordoba. Thus al-Manşūr helped bring about the splendid era of Arab music in Spain inaugurated by Ziryāb. It is assumed that al-Manşūr continued his musical activity together with Ziryāb.⁹

Isaac ben Shime'on al-Yahūdī

In the first half of the twelfth century in Cordoba lived another Jewish musician, Isaac ben Shime'on al-Yahūdī.

The Arab historian and literateur ibn Sa'īd al-Maghribī lists him in his extensive work, *al-Mughrib fī ḥula al-Maghrib*,¹⁰ among the most illustrious and learned Cordovan music masters. Isaac ben Shime'on is described as "one of the wonders of his time in his outstanding musical mastership both as singer and instrumentalist." Al-Maghribī adds that he was a follower (perhaps a disciple) of the famous philosopher and musician ibn Bājja, known in the West as Avempace (d. 1139), who was considered a moving force in the establishment of the Andalusian style and as a music theorist who was compared to the famous philosopher and music theorist al-Fārābī (d. 950), according to the Tunisian author Aḥmad al-Tīfāshī (1184–1253).¹¹

Dhay al-Isrā'īlī

The Berber faction Dhū an-Nūnids, one of the numerous party kings known as *mulūk al-Ṭawā'if*, who appeared in Spain in the eleventh century,

established themselves as an independent kingdom, fixing their capital in Toledo. In the second half of the eleventh century, one of their descendants, al-Ma'mūn, ruled there and was known for the glory he endowed to his court and for having fostered a brilliant Islamic cultural revival. Famous in particular is the impressive banquet marking the celebration of his grandson's circumcision. An eyewitness described this event with great details that have been fully reported by the Adalusian Arab author Ibn Bassām (d. 1147) in his work *al-Dhakhira*. During the long hours of eating, drinking, and rejoicing, an ensemble of musicians performed behind a curtain. They were led by the Jew Dhay al-Isrā'ilī [another version Dānī], who is described as a musician superior to the famous Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (d. 804), who was one of the greatest musicians in the court of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd in Baghdad and the father of the legendary musician Ishāq al-Mawṣilī (d. 850). The text tells that the host, al-Ma'mūn, was highly excited while hearing the music that night, and what the Jew performed was a song expressing sadness.¹² It is worth mentioning that the celebrated scholar Levi-Provençal has published a French paraphrase of the aforementioned description.¹³

From Spain to Morocco

Alexis Chottin, who was the head of the National Conservatory of Arab Music in Rabat, mentions in his *Tableau de la musique Marocaine* the remarkable fact that when Hebrew texts are adapted to replace the original, they maintain the Arab metric and prosody, which, he points out, is not a translation. In his chapter on synagogue music, he argues that Jews are supportive of Andalusian music because "after a lengthy vacuum to religious bans, when a new sultan was eager to return to tradition of the ancient caliphs by reconstituting a *sitāra*, he often recruited new musicians and new dancers from the *mellah*."¹⁴

The famous French painter Eugène Delacroix, who attended a Jewish wedding in Tangier in 1832, wrote in his diary that the Jewish musicians of Mogador were the best in Morocco.¹⁵

A well-known tale is illustrative of the presence of Jewish musical groups in the royal courts and the positive attitude of the rulers toward them. On the ninth of the month of Av, the sultan wanted to hear the songs and music of a Jewish group who ordinarily performed at his court.

He summoned the musicians to the palace. As painful as it was, the musicians could not refuse, but chose to play lamentations on this day of mourning, which commemorates the destruction of the two temples. The sultan greatly appreciated the pathos of these songs and asked what prompted them. The Jews explained that on this day of fasting they were forbidden to play music or rejoice. Henceforth they were known as the “singers of affliction.”¹⁶

A similar tale with similar motive is known among Persian Jews. Here the hero of the tale is a great Jewish musician, Isaac, who was a favorite of Shah Naṣr al-dīn (1848–1896). Isaac was summoned to play for the shah, who was in a dour mood. It happened to be Yom Kippur, but Isaac had to obey the shah's order, and he played the *ṭār* (a long-necked lute) and sang *piyyuṭim* he had heard that day in the synagogue. When the shah inquired about the source of these moving songs, Isaac answered that they were the holiest of all prayers sung by the Jews, whom he had to leave at the shah's behest. The ruler immediately let him return to the synagogue, showering him with expressions of gratitude and gifts of gold coins.¹⁷

Alexander Christianowitsch in Algiers

The pianist Alexander Christianowitsch (1835–1874) arrived in Algiers in 1860 after serving in the Russian navy. Due to health problems, he remained in Algiers, where he sought to develop his keen interest in classical Arabian music of which he had acquired knowledge from Arabic theoretical writings.¹⁸ His first exposure to Algerian music took place in one of those coffee concerts in vogue at that time. The Jewish musical ensemble he heard there featured a singer and players on *rebāb* (a spike fiddle held on the knee), *kemenjeh* (viola), *ṭār* (frame drum), or *derbukka* (goblet drum). This first encounter with Arab music fell far short of his expectations and was rather a source of disappointment.¹⁹

One of his acquaintances advised him to meet a known expert in classical music who would satisfy his search. From this expert he learned that the musicians he heard at the coffee concert were by no means representative of genuine classical music and that a Jew can never assimilate it properly. To this assertion, Christianowitsch mentioned having enjoyed the performance of a Jewish *qānūn* (cithar) player whose proficiency was highly recognized and appreciated. While admitting the excellence of that

player, the specialist contended, the pieces he performed belonged to a popular musical genre, but he was not proficient in the art of the classical multisectional form of the *nūba*.²⁰

In the neighboring country of Tunisia, one finds a similar interpretation in the book on Tunisian music of Ṣādeq al-Rizqī.²¹ This author pretends that although most of the local Jewish musicians excelled as players on a variety of musical instruments, they were deficient as performers of classical Tunisian vocal pieces. The reason for this deficiency came from their incapacity to produce the specific vocal intonations required in the performance of this type of vocal pieces whose role was to underline the correct meaning of the sung text. Besides, al-Rizqī argues, their Arabic pronunciation was defective. They confused words and swallowed letters to the extent that the text became incomprehensible; they simply did not catch the secrets of classical Arabic and its expression.²²

In *The Artistic Emergence in Algeria*,²³ musicologist Nadya Bouzar-Kasbadji devoted her first chapter to the Jewish composer and violinist Edmond Nathan Yafil (1872–1928). She exalted the peculiar contribution of this great master to the renaissance of Algerian music and the process of innovating traditional music that increased its appeal among common people.

Yafil published a selection of Jewish songs and the transcription in European notation of numerous Algerian pieces. In 1909 he founded a school of Arab music that became an essential factor in the process of modernization of musical education. Two years later, he founded *al-Muṭribiyya*, an organization that was essentially Jewish at its beginnings and involved many active Jewish musicians, and in 1922 he was endowed the chair of Arab music at the conservatory of music.

A remarkable representative of female artists was the Jewish sultana Dāhud, alias Reinette l'Oranaise. This great blind artist excelled as a singer and 'ūd player, and after a notable career in Algeria, her celebrity continued in Paris, where she appeared in public concerts and made many recordings.

In Paris, another Algerian who is still dominating the scene is Enrico Massias. Enrico and his father were members of a famous ensemble in Constantine founded and directed by his stepfather, Raymond Leiris, who was assassinated in 1961.

Jewish Tunisian Musicians

In Tunisia, toward the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, about sixty known Jewish artists were active in the indigenous theater, music, and recording industries. Many of them were leading figures in the movement of the prevailing artistic reform and the stylistic modernization of traditional art music. Among these musicians were David Hajaj, Shalom Sa'ada, Benin Semama, Raoul Journo, and the Jerusalem-born cantor and composer Asher Mizrahi. A singular phenomenon in this development is the unusual and impressive participation of numerous highly gifted women. They included Louisa al-Tunisia, the Semama sisters, Fritna Darmon, and Leila Sfez, who owned a famous coffee concert, a meeting place for Jewish, Muslim, and Christian music lovers. Leila Sfez was the aunt and teacher of one of the most famous artists of her time in the realm of theater and music, Ḥabiba Msika, until her murder at the hands of an obsessive admirer.²⁴

Jewish Musicians in Iraq

Jewish musicians played a determinant role in a traditional chamber music ensemble called *Chalgi Baghdad*, which specialized in the prestigious classical multisectional genre called *Iraqi maqām*.²⁵ This ensemble featured a solo singer called *qārī' al-maqām*, who was generally a Muslim, and four instrumentalists who played the *djawza*, a spike fiddle, the resonator of which was made of coconut, the *santūr*, a trapezoidal hammered dulcimer, the *dunbuk*, a single-skinned drum, and the *duff*, a tambourine. Such a group headed by the composer, 'ud player, and singer Ezra Aharon, vocalist Mohammed al-Qabanji, and six Jewish instrumentalists was selected by the Iraqi authorities to represent Iraq at the first International Congress of Arab Music, held in Cairo in 1932. It is noteworthy that the participants, including composers Bela Bartok and Paul Hindemith and musicologists Robert Lachmann, Curt Sachs, and H. G. Farmer, elected Aharon as the best musician present, and Bartok wrote a complimentary review of the ensemble. Aharon came to Palestine in 1934 and settled in Jerusalem. When the first radio station was established in Jerusalem in 1936 by the British mandatory government, he was selected by composer Karl Salomon to head a special section of Oriental Jewish music.²⁶

Composer and violinist Ṣāleḥ al-Kuweitī is another Jewish musician who gained sound fame. Upon the establishment of the first Baghdad radio station in 1936, he was summoned to create and lead a musical ensemble to perform regular concerts on the air. The famous Egyptian singer Umm Kulthūm performed one of his songs.

In Baghdad, a group of four or five female drummers intoned refrains to their leader's singing. They appeared at parties of both Jewish and Muslim women.²⁷

Central Asia

In Central Asia, Uzbekistan, namely in Bukhara, and in Tajikistan, a great number of Jewish female and male musicians distinguished themselves as performers, composers, and dancers in the classical music of the cyclic genre called *shashmaqām* (lit. six *maqāms* referring to multisectional compositions comprising songs, instrumental music, and dances), as well as in the contemporary styles established during the Soviet era. At times their number reached 30 percent of all active professional musicians. Among the most distinguished were Nerio Aminoff Sulman Yudakov, Yeltchiti Zabsanov, and the Eliezeroff family. Also this region was blessed with numerous gifted women musicians, such as Rina Glibova, and special female ensembles called Sozanda. These ensembles had three or four singers who accompanied the singing and dancing of the soloist, who would attach anklets to her legs.²⁸

Conclusion

What conclusions can be drawn from the foregoing series of instances, which refer to various forms of participation of Jewish musicians in their respective indigenous musical activities? It seems to me that it is appropriate to observe the following patterns.

1. Obvious integration of these Jewish musicians into the indigenous classical musical world and their assimilation with its spirit and its norms and the variety of its timely predominating styles.
2. Active pioneering in the development and promotion of emerging new styles, particularly in modern times. They distinguished themselves in this period in the elaboration and dissemination

of a hybrid style, which represents a kind of modernization and popularization of the classical musical tradition, making it more appealing to the new generation of audience.

3. One finds occasional reluctance on the part of Muslim purists concerning the deficient knowledge of Jewish musicians with respect to established norms including defective knowledge of classical Arabic and correct utterance in the performance of vocal music. In turn, their excellence as instrumentalists is usually recognized and extolled.
4. The presence and active involvement in musical life of an unusual number of gifted women musicians. This phenomenon is characteristic of modern times in particular.
5. In commenting on the remarkable involvement of numerous gifted Jewish and Christian musicians in the musical life of their surroundings, some scholars explain this phenomenon as a direct consequence of the hostile attitude toward music maintained throughout the ages by radical Muslim religious authorities. To bypass this intransigent approach, rulers and other prestigious music lovers used the service of gifted non-Muslim musicians in the realm of secular music at various times and places.
6. In view of the foregoing patterns, one may ask the pertinent question: Would it be possible to think that in the process of this long collaboration between Jewish and Muslim musicians, to detect an extent of a Jewish contribution, in other words, to admit that the influence did not go exclusively one way? This is not a question that can be answered with certainty. A kind of positive answer is found in the aforementioned works of Anglés and Chottin to which we can add the two tales on the stratagem used by Moroccan Jews and Persian Jews, who played synagogue music for their respective rulers. Why then can we not conceive of an instinctive or random incorporation of Jewish elements in regular performances?

A Lebanese collector of ancient recordings published a CD dedicated entirely to the art of past Jewish musicians.²⁹ He wrote in his introduction that the secular music of the Jews of Arab countries is a rich and unexplored domain revealing a specific musical heritage. It does not refer to a Jewish school in the Arab repertoires in the full sense of the word, but

it represents melismatic techniques, special arabesques, and preferential musical modes.

Notes

1. These ideas are masterfully developed in A. Shiloah, *The Epistle on Music of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā* (Tel-Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1978).
2. See A. Shiloah, "Music and Religion in Islam," *Acta Musicologica* 69, no. 2 (1997): 15–28.
3. Abu al-Faraj Al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghāni*, 24 vols. (Cairo: D(ah)r al-kutub al-mi(s)riyya, c. 1929), 3:116–17.
4. Ch. Pellat, "Sur quelques femmes hostiles au prophète," in *Vie du Prophète Mahomet*, colloquium (Strasbourg, 1980), 77–86.
5. Ibid., 83.
6. Higinio Anglés, "La musique juive dans l'Espagne médiévale," *Yuval: Studies of the Jewish Research Centre* 1 (1968): 48–64.
7. Ibid., 48.
8. Ibid., 53.
9. Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Maqqar(ih), *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās (Beirut, 1968), 3:122–23.
10. Ibn Sa'id al-Maghribī, *al-Mughrib fi ḥula al-Maghrib*, ed. Shawqī Ḍayf (Cairo, 1953), 1:128–29.
11. Benjamin M. Liu and James T. Monroe, *Ten Hispano-Arabic Strophic Songs in the Modern Oral Tradition: Music and Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 42.
12. Ibn Bassām, *al-Dhakhira*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās (Beirut: Dār al-Thaq(ah)fa, 1975), 4:1:126–36.
13. E. Levi-Provençal, *Islam d'Occident* (Paris: Librairie orientale et Americaine, 1948), 119–20.
14. Alexis Chottin, *Tableau de la musique Marocaine* (Paris: Geuthner, 1939), 149–53.
15. Eugène Delacroix, *Journal d'Eugène Delacroix* (Paris: Plon, 1893), 215.
16. Dov Noy, ed., *Jewish Folktales from Morocco* (Jerusalem: bitfutzot ha-golah, 1964).
17. Laurence D. Loeb, "The Jewish Musician and the Music of Fars," *Asian Music* 4, no. 1 (1972): 3–14.
18. Alexander Christianowitsch, *Esquisse historique de la musique arabe aux temps anciens, avec dessins d'instruments et 40 mélodies notées et harmonisées* (Cologne: M. Dumont-Shauberg, 1863).
19. Ibid., 2.
20. Ibid., 5.
21. Ṣādeq al-Rizqī, *al-aghānī al-tūnisiyya* (Tunis: al-D(ah)r al-tunisiyya li'l nashr, 1967).
22. Ibid., 16–17.

23. Nadya Bouzar-Kasbadji, *L'Émergence artistique algérienne au XXe siècle: contribution de la musique et du théâtre algérois à la naissance culturelle et à la prise de conscience nationaliste* (Alger: Office des Publications Universitaires, 1988); see also A. Shiloah, "Rencontres et ententes musicales entre juifs et musulmans en Algérie," *Perspectives: Revue de l'Université Hébraïque de Jérusalem* 9 (2002): 170–83.

24. See A. Shiloah, "Témoignages sur le rôle des musiciens juifs dans la musique tunisienne," *Juifs et Musulmans en Tunisie*, ed. Sonia Fellous (Paris: Smogy éditions, 2003), 300–316; A. Shiloah, "Ha-musiqa shel yehudei Tunisia," *Qehillot Yisrael ba-mizrah—Tunisia*, ed. Haim Saadoun (Jerusalem: Ministry of Education and Ben-Zvi Institute, 2005), 184–92.

25. The *Iraqi maqām* refers to a complex, highly structured genre belonging to types of the compound form and is usually performed by a specialized group known as a *tchalghī baghdadi*.

26. A. Shiloah, "Ezra Aharon ve-ha-zemer ha-ivri ha-mizraḥi bi-tequfat ha-Yishuv," in *Yerushalaim bi-tequfat ha-mandat*, ed. Y. Ben-Arieh (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2003), 449–72.

27. A. Shiloah, "Ha-musiqa shel yehudei Iraq," in *Qehillot Yisrael ba-mizrah—Iraq*, ed. Haim Saadoun (Jerusalem: Ministry of Education and Ben-Zvi Institute, 2002), 115–22.

28. Elena Reicher (Tamin), "Le-te'udah shel ha-shirah ha'amamit shel yehudei Bukhara—mimtza'im rishonim," *Pe'amim* 104 (2005): 115–23.

29. Bernard Moussali, *Méodies Judéo-arabes d'autrefois, Maghreb et Moyen Orient*, CD (Paris, Blue Silver 50556-2).

15

***“Estos Makames Alegres”* (‘These Cheerful Maccams’)—External Cultural Influences on the Jewish Community of Izmir on the Eve of the “Young Turk Revolution”**

Theater and Music

EFRAT E. AVIV

The relationship and mutual influences between the Jews and Muslims in the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are evidenced by focusing on the Jewish community of Izmir as a microcosm of the entire Empire. This affinity manifests itself in the adoption of song and theater customs. Although these cultural instruments were outcomes of the modernization processes experienced by the Ottoman Empire, they served to strengthen, expand, and even increase the already existing gaps within Jewish society.

As soon as the Jews expelled from Spain arrived in Turkey in 1492, their lives were influenced by the Muslim-Ottoman environment. A particularly deep impression was made on dress and the living conditions in the home. Evidence of influences in the use of cosmetics also exists, such as Jewish women dyeing their hands for decorative purposes, as the Turkish women were accustomed to doing. Interaction between Muslims and Jews also occurred in all matters related to culture and leisure. For example, rabbinical religious authorities wrote restrictions regarding

sitting in coffeehouses, a phenomenon that began in the mid-sixteenth century among the Jews of the Empire.¹ These and other influences were more vastly expressed from the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the introduction of modernization and westernization to the Empire. The westernization and modernization of the Ottoman Empire, which increased in intensity from the end of the eighteenth century, had a profound impact on Ottoman Jewry.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Alliance Israélite Universelle organization began its activities among the Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire. The Alliance established a network of modern schools, which played a significant role in the westernization and modernization of the local communities. An integral part of this westernization was the introduction of western literary and artistic motifs into the communities' cultural and artistic life.² This was the beginning of a multifaceted cultural transformation for the Jewish communities throughout the Empire. Journalism, literature, poetry, historical records, and naturally drama—both original and translated—were influenced.

Modernization was more evident in Izmir than in other regions. In fact, during the nineteenth century, Izmir became an important metropolis and one of the most renowned cultural and commercial centers in the world and in the Ottoman Empire.³ Izmir's financial and cultural prosperity attracted many Jews and other minorities such as Armenians and Greeks. Therefore, we have chosen Izmir in order to make a case study for the other communities in the Ottoman Empire, examining the various theatrical foundations and transformations undergone by the Jewish-Sephardic theater and music.

As the upper classes discovered the opportunities for educational enlightenment at these new AIU schools, they began distancing themselves from the old communal framework and traditions. New employment opportunities arose, clothing became more westernized, and wealthy Jews left the Jewish quarters in Izmir and moved to new ethnically and religiously mixed areas.⁴ Until then, the Jews used to live in the bazaar areas (*Çarşı*), such as Argat Bazar and Lazarato. From the end of the nineteenth century, the wealthy families who were now new *bourgeoisie* moved to the western side of the city, to neighborhoods such as Çeşme, Karataş, Karantina, and Göztepe, where new housing was built.⁵ Moreover, Ladino, which was the language used for daily life up to this period, was

now limited to religious use and was being replaced by French and later Turkish.⁶ Yet the general public remained loyal to traditional values and to the rabbis. This led to increasingly pronounced financial, intellectual, and social divergence within the Jewish community.

This social and religious polarization influenced by the non-Jewish population manifested itself mainly in theater and music. From existing literature on Jewish-Sephardic theater, it appears that even before the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, their rich culture provided Spanish Muslims with many themes for the theater. After the Expulsion, Sephardic Jews owned theater companies and performed as entertainers, dancers, actors, and puppeteers.⁷ For instance, there is testimony by an eighteenth-century French author who notes that Jews were the ones activating the marionettes and the shadow theater figures, which were very popular with the Turks.⁸

Muslim literature and historiography prior to the Expulsion from Spain in 1492 mention the Jews as a theatrical theme. After the Expulsion, the Sephardic Jews are mentioned as dance troupe owners, comedians, puppeteers, and actors.⁹ There were two main influences in the world of theater. One is found in the culture of the Ottoman Empire and the other among descendants of the expellees themselves, who fled to Egypt and the Maghreb. The latter, who settled in the Ottoman Empire, brought Spanish influences with them. The findings of Metin And (1927–2008), the Turkish theater historian and critic in charge of teaching acting at Ankara University, show that the expellees who settled in Istanbul, Izmir, and Salonica brought their culture and customs with them.¹⁰ There is evidence of several Jewish entertainment groups performing in the Turkish theater (*Orta Oyunu*, Turkish *commedia dell'arte*), within the scope of the shadow theater (*Karagöz*) and in puppet shows.¹¹ The influence of the Spanish Jewish groups was so vast that they even enriched the Turkish language with the new Arabic and Spanish theatrical terms. But it was not only culture that they brought with them from Spain; they were also renowned for their skill in warfare, and they helped their Muslim hosts in trade and economics, politics and industry, the sciences, and literature. The French traveler Nicolas de Nicolay testified that the Jews taught the Ottomans to create cannons and gunpowder.¹² The Spanish Jews also introduced printing to the Empire, and they opened the very first Turkish printing house in Istanbul in 1493.¹³

A Short History of the Theater in the Ottoman Empire

At the dawn of the Ottoman theater, performances were held in the old Byzantine city squares, with a line of boxes used as seats for the audience. They were also held in tents and under canopies. Some shows were held on water floats and rafts or presented in embassies during and after the French Revolution, ostensibly for the foreign residents of the Ottoman Empire, although they would also be viewed by the Sultans Mahmut the Second (1808–39) and Abdülmecit (1839–61) and their entourages.¹⁴

After the introduction of coffee into the Empire in the second half of the sixteenth century, many theater performances would take place inside coffeehouses. Their owners would hire storytellers to attract clientele, as well as jugglers, musicians, dancers, and puppeteers. However, the most popular form of entertainment was the silhouette show.¹⁵ Theaters as we know them today were built only from the first half of the nineteenth century. By 1839, three Ottoman theaters had been established, featuring predominantly Italian plays that were targeted at foreign audiences. The French Theater (Fransız Tiyatrosu) was built in 1840 by the Ottoman government in conjunction with some foreign embassies. The first Turkish-speaking theater, called the Ottoman Theater (Osmanlı Tiyatrosu), was established in 1867 in ancient Istanbul.¹⁶

Cultural Influences on Jewish Theater

The Judeo-Spanish theater was thematically influenced by society, as is evident by the performance of many Turkish plays, such as those of Namik Kemal (1840–88). When the play's subject matter caused distress to the Jews, it was banned. An example appears in the journal *HaMaggid*:

From Constantinople we are informed that in one theater, Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice* was scheduled to be performed, but thanks to the lobbying of Haham Başı Rabbi Moshe Halevi, the play was banned, so as not to arouse the wrath of the people in the scenes with Shylock the usurer.¹⁷

The rabbi feared that the ludicrous image of Shylock, which represents the classic stereotype of the swindling Jew, would arouse scorn from the Muslim audience. Furthermore, as modernization progressed and

the environmental influence on the Jewish community intensified, an increasing number of plays were performed on Saturdays and festivals. Women were finally allowed to perform. This phenomenon was so problematic that the actresses' full names were never listed; only their initials appeared. The theater, as it was, had many opponents, particularly the rabbis and religious figures. They considered the theater as *halikha beḥuqot hagoyim* (following the ways of the Gentiles) and an offense against the Jewish religion, regardless of the play's theme. They believed the theater was an acute threat to the purity of Jewish life.¹⁸

The educated strata of the Jewish community considered theater an aesthetic art form that could contribute to the education of the lower classes, who used to shove each other in the theater entrances. The newspapers published advertisements that recommended abstaining from unnecessary joking or laughter, bottle throwing, and littering during performances or bringing babies to the theater.

The elite saw the theater as a highly important cultural gauge and wished to prove that Jewish society was not inferior to other societies in its appreciation of theater as an art. Hence it was used as a way of integrating Jewish society into the general Ottoman-Turkish population. For instance, one newspaper advertised a "dramatic and entertaining" evening, with all proceeds going to Talmud Torah, a prevalent phenomenon in Jewish society, which meant raising money from plays for the needs of the community. A committee was created for this Talmud Torah, headed by senior Muslim functionaries, including the mayor and chief of police. The ad states:

Our donor X has recently published a colorful invitation for our people . . . to participate in a dramatic and musical evening that will be given during mid-Passover, on Monday evening, April 1, at the Sporting Club. This will not only be an occasion for enjoyable entertainment and significant assistance to the devotion of Torah study so dear to our community. The partaking of the play's success is also a special opportunity to demonstrate to the non-Jewish residents . . . that the Jewish community of Izmir knows how to uphold its institutions and can be very generous with them. This is truly a great honor and pleasure for us, to see the senior non-Jewish

names that have joined together to do good, and have founded the honorary committee.¹⁹

Influences on Jewish Music

Music was not new to the Izmir community, but it also witnessed some innovations that had a direct impact on Muslim society. The songs of Sephardic Jewry can be divided into two categories: religious songs sung mainly in Hebrew and secular songs sung mainly in Ladino.

Religious Songs

Liturgical songs are sung in synagogues and at Jewish ceremonies such as circumcision, bar mitzvahs, and weddings. The structure, style, and character of these melodies are derived from the Spanish musical heritage that the expelled Jews brought with them to the Ottoman Empire from Spain. *Selihot* (penitential prayers recited in the weeks preceding Yom Kippur) and *piyyutim* of the High Holy Days are sung to these melodies. Other melodies were composed after the Spanish Expulsion or were borrowed from their host culture. These were meant to inspire the people and instill knowledge and love of Torah and *Mitzvot* (commandments) in their hearts. Holidays, Jewish values, religious leaders, and holy objects were all themes.

These songs were first sung in Hebrew, but later in Ladino, due to the efforts of a small group of rabbis and poets, including Rabbi Avraham Toledo, Rabbi Chaim Yom Tov Magola, and Rabbi Avraham Assa. Their goal was to strengthen the weak spiritual level of the people, who no longer knew Hebrew and could not read holy texts written in this language.²⁰ They wrote and translated books on Jewish law and ethics as well as liturgical poetry into Ladino. One example is a poem entitled *Komplas De Yosef HaTzaddik* (Poems in Honor of Joseph the Righteous). Songs were composed in Ladino honoring those who journeyed to the Holy Land to pray at the graves of *Tzaddiqim* (righteous) or Jews who wished to end their days there and be buried in its holy earth.

By the nineteenth century the masses could no longer read Hebrew, and the educated elite read French or Italian. The translation of *piyyutim*,

especially those sung on the High Holy Days, became a necessity. Liturgical songs reached the height of their popularity during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²¹

Secular Songs

Sephardic Jews adopted several literary genres from their surrounding culture; stories, parables, and proverbs were added to their repertoire of prose; romances and chansons enlarged their cadre of poetry.

During the centuries that Judeo-Spanish communities existed far from their Spanish homeland, romances became a symbol of their roots, deeply seeped in Spanish culture. These romances evolved as Ladino singers made their additions and changes. Thematically, romances resembled dramas, with topics ranging from historic events to love, hate, war, and betrayal.²² Musically, Judeo-Spanish romances were Middle Eastern in structure, containing scales with melodically flowing tunes with no repetitions in the song. Romances often had more than thirty stanzas consisting of four lines each. In contrast to Judeo-Spanish folk songs, which were cheerful and primarily composed with Mediterranean tunes after the Expulsion, the romances were composed in European scales, contained little text, and often repeated the second half of the song.

Despite the risk of Judeo-Spanish music becoming highly “Ottomanized,” much of the Spanish character and style were retained, thanks to liturgical songs and other singing traditions that were passed down for generations.²³

Spanish vs. Ottoman/Turkish Influence

Researchers disagree regarding the extent to which the Ottoman Jews clung to their Spanish cultural roots. Some Judeo-Spanish folk music researchers believe that many elements found in Ottoman Jewish music originate from the Iberian Peninsula. Others claim the distance from Spain caused Levantine Jews to disconnect from Iberian musical traditions. During the nineteenth century, when Western culture had a great influence on Jewish Levantine music and the French, Italian, Greek, and English styles of song impacted the music of the time, a new approach was created. The Jewish-Spanish community maintained an ongoing cultural dialogue with their Ottoman Muslim hosts.²⁴

Edwin Seroussi describes the Turkish *maccam* as an example of this new grafting. The Turkish *maccam* is an elaborate musical system. Typical key elements are defined musical forms, specific modes, and rhythmic patterns. The *maccam* is equivalent to the complex Persian Arab musical systems popular with urban life since the Middle Ages. The Turkish *maccam* is a musical arrangement containing many parts, both vocal and instrumental, set in a sequence known as *fasil*. Every part of the *fasil* is characterized by its own structure, rhythm, and parables. The Turkish *maccam* became a part of Judeo-Spanish culture almost as soon as Jews settled in the Ottoman Empire in the early sixteenth century. Written proof that Jewish Ottoman music was influenced by Turkish music is found in the headings and instructions accompanying many Hebrew liturgical songs. From the sixteenth century, headings indicate which Turkish song served as a basis for the Hebrew song or according to which Turkish melody the Hebrew *piyyut* should be sung.²⁵

A review of Turkish melody names listed in collections of *piyyutim* from the sixteenth century makes it possible to prove how the names of the Turkish songs became more common than names of Spanish ones within a short time. Furthermore, it was proven that Turkish influence was not limited to the musical field but extended to singing as well. From the sixteenth century we find Hebrew liturgy composed by Sephardic poets in the Ottoman Empire possessing structures and meters borrowed from Turkish song.²⁶

Influences on Jewish Musicians

Jewish Ottoman composers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries became increasingly skilled at composing Turkish *maccam*. Liturgical and para-liturgical singing became highly developed. Jewish poets and musicians formed musical groups in the large urban centers of Adrianopol (Edirne), Izmir, and Istanbul. Some of these musicians served as rabbis and cantors, while others split their time between the Jewish community and the aristocratic Turkish courts that employed them. The famous cantors and musicians of Izmir include Rabbi Yom Tov Dannon, also called Küçük Haham (the little *hakham*), who was active in the seventeenth century, and Rabbi Avraham Ariyas, known as Hace (expert teacher) by the Turks, who lived in the early nineteenth century. Issac Barki, known as Küçük Isak (little Issac), was one of Izmir's most famous violinists and

composers in the mid-nineteenth century. Composers Chaim Alzarki (who died in 1913) and Eliya Levy, known as Santuri Eliya (Eliya the Santuri player), were both active at the turn of the century.²⁷

Issac Algazi (1889–1950) was also born in Izmir and studied cantorial and Turkish music in the early twentieth century. Between 1923 and 1933 he served as the cantor in the Italian synagogue in Istanbul. His principal teachers were his father, Shlomo Algazi, and the Jewish composer Shem Tov Shikiar (1840–1920), who earned the title *Hoca Santo* (the saintly teacher).²⁸ Shikiar received lessons in the art of singing from the city's greatest singers, known as *paytanim*. He travelled to Istanbul when he turned twenty and spent a few years learning from the greatest *Hafızlar* (religious people who learn the Quran by heart and are learned in religious Islamic songs). Shikiar was also popular with Sultan Abdülhamit II (1876–1909), who was fond of music and occasionally invited Shikiar to his palace. Local Muslim singers used to envy Shikiar, and they expressed it by giving him a hard time. Algazi was a violinist and composer who taught in a school of the arts in Izmir and was so beloved by the sultan that his work *Hanoten Teshua Lamelakhim* (Prayers for the King and Country) was adopted by the palace as the official closing musical piece at state receptions.²⁹ Algazi was close to the president of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who hired him as a consultant to the National Institute of Turkish Folklore and even invited him to sing at Dolmabahçe Palace. Algazi derived his skill in artistic Turkish music from Shikiar.³⁰ Shikiar also conducted Turkish music lessons in the “Shalom” and “Portugal” synagogues.³¹ These lessons were advertised in the local newspapers. For example:

As previously announced, the *Fasil* in Mahor has been taught since the third of Tevet in Kahal Kadosh Portugal by the teachers (Shem Tov) Shikiar, (Haim) Alzarki, (Shlomo) Algazi. . . . We are pleased to learn that the audience attends the Kahal Kadosh for the rehearsals which are conducted with order and harmony. One can also hear the *Fasil* . . . by the Maestro Shikiar. . . . The audience is most enthusiastic.³²

This notice proves how developed the musical activity of the Jews of Izmir was in those years and how knowledgeable Jewish musicians were in Turkish music. The fact that rehearsals were held in synagogues demonstrates that music was important.

The Manner of Song Copying

In his book *Krach shel Romi* (City of Rome), Rabbi Moshe Yosef H̄azan, an Izmir native, describes the manner in which Christian tunes were adopted for prayers and holy texts.

... and I swear by the heavens and the earth that while I was in the big city full of ḥakhamim and scribes called Smyrna (Izmir) (may G-d protect it), I saw some of their ḥakhamim who were great poets and musicians ... and their leader was the wondrous Rabbi Avraham Hakohen Ariyas (may he be remembered in the next world) and for their musical rhythms of the High Holy Days which call for great humility and are called Chazanut. They would go to the Christian church behind the partition during their days of worship to learn from them that humbled sound which breaks all hearts and then they would arrange from those sounds wondrous *Qadishim* and *Qedushot*.³³

In other words, the cantors used to go to the churches in order to learn their tunes from the Christians, but that was only one example. Melodies were taken from Muslims praying at their mosques as well. During this period, the songs were mainly religious and para-religious and were composed using the popular instruments of Turkish music. However, from the nineteenth century, songs lacking all religious content were composed in the Jewish-Sephardic communities.

Parallel to the national awakening of the Balkans, the melodies used for anthems, whether official melodies or songs expressing national ideologies, became a widespread phenomenon in the repertoire of many Jewish communities. With the acceptance of the national state idea by the Jews of Europe as a solution to the “Jewish problem,” the anthem melodies entered the religious repertoire. It was now easy for synagogue cantors throughout the Ottoman Empire to adopt the melodies of the patriotic Turkish songs.³⁴ For example, during the “Young Turk Revolution” in 1908, the masses held meetings supporting the new government, resulting in the composition of pro-revolution songs. One of the songs, named *Por La Libertad* (For Liberty), contains twenty verses praising the new government and describing the background leading to the revolution, and it concludes by praising the values of freedom and equality that formed the basis of the revolution. The song was apparently written and sung in

Ladino. Around 1908 *Shir ha-geula* (Song of Redemption) was written by a teacher in the Jewish school in Silibri, in honor of Dr. Theodor Herzl's visit to Sultan Abdülhamit in Istanbul and was considered "a national song of our own."³⁵

The Rabbis' Response

As discussed earlier, music and theater affairs provoked the rabbis' concern more than once. Like in formal Judaism, Islam places certain restrictions on the use of music in religious worship. Quranic recitation is viewed by Muslims as reading (*okumak* in Turkish) rather than singing, as often perceived by Western scholars.³⁶ Indeed, some sources describe close relations between rabbis and Muslims, such as rabbis who taught Muslims Torah and Muslims who taught rabbis Islamic sources.³⁷ An example is Rabbi Avraham Mandil (1820–83), known as Haham Aga, who was a very talented composer and performer rumored to have sung with Dervishes (Sufi order members) at the Galata Tekke (lodge) and even to have been the teacher of Şeyh Ayatullah Efendi, leader of the Kulekapı Mevlevîs.

Yet at special times of the year the singing of highly melodic religious songs within the religious service in either mosques or synagogues was permitted. In Islam, it was mostly manifested by the Sufi brotherhoods (*Tarikatler*).³⁸

Despite the aforementioned, the Ottoman rabbis strongly opposed the theater and secular songs, especially those that dealt with love or foreign songs, since they lacked praise of G-d. Nonetheless, their main concern was directed at songs of love and lust, the melodies of which were used for the singing of prayers, or vice versa—the use of the melodies of religious songs to express the lyrics of love songs. For example, Rabbi Eliezer Papo, who lived in Sarajevo in the nineteenth century, expressed his repugnance at the fact that cantors sang *selihot* to melodies of love songs on the High Holy Days. He claimed that *selihot* are supposed to cause the person to feel remorse and not to dance:

And I find the deed bad, that some cantors on days of *selihot* sing some tones which hearing them gives you the desire to dance, from here they let you comprehend that they do not understand what comes out of their mouth . . . and especially make us think that with

these cheerful *maccams* . . . the public does not awaken to do *teshuvah* and take the *selihot* as a song.³⁹

Another prohibition regarding this matter is related to the Halachic prohibition on the theater regarding not following the ways of the Gentiles. However, some rabbis attempted to negate this prohibition. For example, Rabbi Hāzan believed that the music used for worship in churches and mosques was not a problem, for “finally, the same voices that are not unique to their worship are permitted in our worship.”⁴⁰ Rabbi Menaḥem de Lonzano was the first Jewish composer to write the beginnings of Turkish songs as titles of his songs, indicating the melody to which his songs should be sung. Rabbi de Lonzano said that he never wrote songs according to Turkish melodies that led to debauchery, but rather chose melodies that aimed to humble the heart and elevate behavior. He therefore chose only sad melodies from Turkish music and rejected the happy melodies. He even mentioned in the prelude to his songs that many of his melodies should not be sung on the Sabbath or on High Holy Days.⁴¹

Rabbi Hāzan adds that adopting the non-Jewish melodies is necessary, as the Jews were left with no remnants of their holy melodies. Thus there was no choice but to use non-Jewish melodies and apply them to Hebrew prayers. In other words, the problem was not the melody but the songs that were taken from the non-Jewish surroundings and that were sung in their language.⁴² Rabbi Papo also added that it was inappropriate to sing religious songs using love song melodies; however, songs sung in churches and mosques can be used, as they evoke remorse and submissiveness by non-Jews as well.

This entire topic was raised in a rabbinical discussion by Rabbi Ḥayyim Palacci (1787–1868). Palacci notes that the problem is actually with the musical instruments. He comments that the two most popular instruments used by Muslims, the *kemenche* and the *santur*, are played by plucking their strings, and if something goes wrong with one of these instruments, they must be repaired immediately during playing, which would be considered a desecration of the Sabbath. Thus if music must be played in synagogue on the Sabbath, it should preferably not be an instrument that will lead to its desecration.⁴³

Perhaps the music was only an excuse for a more profound fear. In the nineteenth century we hear about young Jews taking dancing lessons with Muslims, discussing religion and political affairs and even studying

together, so that when a young Jew wanted to marry a Muslim, he or she had to convert to Islam. This phenomenon was apparently not unique to the Izmir community but occurred throughout the Ottoman Empire. In 1903, for instance, thirteen Jews chose to become Muslims, in 1907 five Jews, and in 1908 eight. The Jewish community of Izmir decided to fight this phenomenon and founded an association to combat assimilation.⁴⁴ Perhaps the rabbis just took precautionary measures by prohibiting the adoption of Gentile customs, including “borrowing” their music.

The current Jewish community in Turkey reports a 30 percent assimilation rate. It is unavoidable that this process, resulting in so high an assimilation rate among Turkish Jews, began as a massive and not marginal phenomenon stemming from the period discussed in this article.

Conclusion

The influence of the surrounding Muslim culture on Ottoman and Turkish Jewry is evident. This influence was mutual, as Jewish culture affected its surroundings as well, although to a lesser degree. These influences were cause for disagreement in Jewish society, mainly between traditionalists and progressive Jews, and widened the gaps that appeared as modernization set in. The opposition of the rabbis led to prohibition and stricter separation between Jews and Muslims, but the historical changes enhanced the cultural collaborations and witnessed a process of total acculturation.

Notes

1. Yosef Yahalom, “Shira Ivrit Mistit Ve’Hareka Ha’Ivri Shela,” *Tarbiz* 4 (1991): 626–27.

2. The objective of Alliance Israélite Universelle was to educate in western ways and instill openness to progress and new cultures all over the Spanish world. However, the first to bring western civilization to these countries were actually the Christian missionary schools. AIU became the main source for disseminating modern and western ideas in the Jewish-Spanish world. This is clearly expressed through the distribution of the French language and culture.

See also Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Yehudey Sepharad Be’Artzot HaBalkan* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center Press, 2001), 93–100.

3. Daniel Goffman, “Izmir: From Village to Colonial Port City,” in *The Ottoman City between East and West: Aleppo, Izmir, and Istanbul*, ed. Edhem Eldem, Daniel Goffman, and Bruce Masters (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 128.

4. For more on clothes, see Siren Bora, *İzmir Yahudileri Tarihi* (Izmir: Gözlem Gazetecilik Basın ve Yayın A.Ş., 1995), 80–81.

5. Henri Nahum, "Yehudey Izmir BeSof HaMe'a Ha-19 Uvetchilat Hame'a Ha-20," *Shorashim BaMizrach* 4 (1998): 122–25.
6. David Yelin, "Kehilat Izmir," *HaShiloah* 3 (1898): 461.
7. Shmuel Moreh, "Trumatam Shel Yehudey Sepharad LaTe'atron Ba'olam HaMuslemi," in *Hevra veTarbut—Yehudey Sepharad Le'achar HaGerush, HaKongres HaBen-leumi HaRevi'i Leheker Moreshet Sepharad ve HaMizrah*, ed. Michel Abitbol, Yom Tov Assis, and Galit Hasan Rokem (Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim, 1997), 206.
8. Elena Romero, "Hebetim Dramatiyim VeHevratayim BaTe'atron HaYehudi-Sepharadi BeTurkia UveArtzot HaBalkan," *Bama* 127 (1992): 64.
9. Moreh, "Trumatam Shel," 206, 209.
10. See Metin And, *Drama at the Crossroads: Turkish Performing Arts Link Past and Present, East and West* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1991). On the Turkish theater, see also Talat S. Halman, *Rapture and Revolution: Essays on Turkish Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 105–54.
11. Moreh, "Trumatam Shel," 209.
12. Issac R. Molcho, "Lekorot Kehilot Israel: Konstantinople ve Izmir," *Oẓr Yehudey Sepharad* 10 (1967–68): 23.
13. On the Jewish printing houses, see Gad Nassi, ed., *Jewish Journalism and Printing Houses in the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2000).
14. Metin And, *A History of Theater and Popular Entertainment in Turkey* (Ankara: Forum Yayinalrı, 1963–64), 17–18; Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, 2 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 2:129.
15. Ralph S. Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origin of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), 107–108.
16. Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 2:129.
17. *HaMaggid* 16 (April 31, 1903): 183.
18. See, e.g., Moshe Yosef Hāzan, *Krach Shel Romi* (Livorno, 1872), siman aleph, daf gimmel, 'amud aleph.
19. *El Komersial* (The Commercial), March 28, 1907, 3–6.
20. On the group, see Moshe Attias, "HaMshorer Ha'Amami Rabbi Avraham Toledo ve Yetzirot BeLadino," *Shevet Ve'am* 2, no. 6 (1970): 117–35. See also Shlomo Rozanes, *Korot HaYehudim beTurkia uveartzot Qedem*, part 5 (Sofia, 1937), 89–95. On the music of the Jews in Spain, see Amnon Shiloah, "Hashira haliturgit haYehudit beSepharad veHitpathuta," in *Moreshet Sepharad*, ed. Haim Beinart (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992), 714–25.
21. Moshe Attias, *Kansionero Yehudi-Sepharadi* (Jerusalem: HaMakhon leHeker Yahadut Saloniki, 1972), 30.
22. Shmuel Rafael, *Ha'Abir ve HaRe'aya HaShvuya-Mehqar BaRomansa shel Dovrey HaLadino* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1998), 13.
23. Yitzhak Levi, "Neginatam shel HaYehudim Yotzey Sepharad," *BaMaaracha* 10, no. 6 (1970): 19.
24. Edwin Seroussi, "HaMusika shel HaShir Ha'Amami BeLadino," *Pe'amim* 77 (1999): 5, 17.

25. Edwin Seroussi, "HaMakam HaTurki BeShirat Yehudey Sepharad," *Apiryon* 32 (1994): 43–44; Molcho, "Lekorot Kehilot Israel," 25.
26. Seroussi, "HaMakam HaTurki." For Yahalom's view on Turkish melodies, see Yo-sef Yahalom, "Rabbi Yisrael Najara ve Hithadshut HaShira Ha'Ivrit BaMizrah Le'achar Gerush Sefarad," *Pe'amim* 13 (1982): 96–124.
27. Pamela J. Dorn Sezgin, "Ḥakhamim, Dervishes, and the Court Singers: The Relationship of Ottoman Jewish Music to Classical Turkish Music," in *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. A. Levy (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1994), 595–96.
28. In Hebrew, sources spelled it *Shikiyar*, whereas Dorn Sezgin spells it *Şikar* in "Ḥakhamim, Dervishes, and the Court Singers," 596–97.
29. Moshe D. Gaon, "LaMenazeah Binginot," *Maḥberet Vav* 1–3, nos. 54–56 (1957): 20–22.
30. Artistic Turkish music (*Türk Sanat Müziği*) is based on the notion of the Maccam.
31. Edwin Seroussi, *Mizmirat Qedem: Ḥayav VeYetzirato HaMusiqalit Shel HaRav Yitzḥaq Algazi MiTurkia* (Jerusalem: Renanot, 1989), 13–14.
32. *El Novelista*, 10.1.1905, 18, quoted in Seroussi, *Mizmirat Qedem*.
33. Ḥazan, siman aleph, daf gammel, 'amud aleph.
34. Seroussi, "HaMusika shel HaShir Ha'amami," 11–12.
35. David Tajar, "Zror Shirim Shel Yehudey Turkia," *Yeda 'Am* 31–32 (1967): 8–9.
36. Molcho, "Lekorot Kehilot Israel," 25.
37. Dorn Sezgin, "Ḥakhamim, Dervishes, and the Court Singers," 587–88.
38. *Ibid.*, 596.
39. Eliezer Ben Shem Tov Papo, *Damesek Eliezer—Orah Ḥayyim* (Belgrade, 1877), daf Resh Het, 'amud Aleph.
40. Ḥazan, siman aleph, daf aleph 'amud Bet, daf bet, 'mud aleph.
41. Yahalom, *Shira 'Ivrit Mistit*, 628.
42. Ḥazan, siman aleph, daf Dalet, 'amud Bet.
43. Ḥayyim Palacci, *Lev Ḥayyim—Orah Ḥayyim*, siman tet, daf yod 'amud bet.
44. Bora, *İzmir Yahudileri Tarihi*, 94–95.

16

Poverty and Charity in a Moroccan City

A Study of Jewish Communal Leadership in Meknes,
1750–1912

JESSICA MARGLIN

The leaders of Meknes's Jewish community in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries faced a number of pressing issues, such as contentious inheritance disputes and the maintenance of a delicate relationship with the Muslim authorities. Yet undoubtedly caring for the community's poor constituted one of the most burning responsibilities facing this city's Jewish leadership. The sheer number of community ordinances (*taqanot*) passed concerning poverty and charity testify to its centrality in the eyes of Meknes's leaders. In a collection of seventy-three *taqanot* enacted between 1750 and 1912, thirty-four concern poverty and charity.¹ Understanding the nature of Jewish communal leadership in Meknes requires investigating the challenge that most concerned Meknes's Jewish leaders—their responsibilities toward the community's poor.

Drawing mainly from *taqanot*, but also from responsa literature (*she'elot u-teshuvot*) and other communal and archival records, this essay explores how the Jewish leaders of Meknes responded to the needs of the poorest members of their community.² In so doing, I address two separate but intertwined issues. I investigate the history of poverty and charity in Meknes and use the lens of poverty relief to examine the nature of Jewish leadership there.

A close study of the texts produced by the Jewish leaders of Meknes reveals that the control of charity constituted a strategy with which these leaders asserted and consolidated their authority. While the responsibility

to provide for the Jewish poor in Meknes was undoubtedly religiously motivated, charity also served a political function. Far from observing a strict secular/religious divide, Jewish leaders combined the pious and strategic roles of poor relief.

Beyond analyzing charity as a political tool, I ground practices of charity in their historical context. Looking at other Jewish communities in the Middle East and Europe, I draw comparisons in order to shed light on the nature of Jewish communal leadership. Beyond the Jewish community, I point out similarities and differences between Jewish and Muslim practices, although I shy away from claims concerning where these norms originated.³ Temporally, I situate changing practices of charity in the transformations sparked by increasing contact with Europe in the late nineteenth century.

Meknes provides good ground for such a case study, though the differences among various Moroccan Jewish communities make drawing general conclusions about Moroccan Jews difficult.⁴ Rather, this inquiry contributes to emerging studies of poverty, charity, and Jewish leadership in the Middle East more broadly. In particular I build upon the work of Yaron Ben-Naeh and Mark Cohen, who as yet are the only scholars to write on poverty and charity among Middle Eastern Jews.⁵ Although studies of Muslim responses to poverty are more plentiful (especially concerning the legal and religious aspects of charity), relatively few scholars have turned their attention to the social history of poverty and charity. Unfortunately, no such studies exist for the Moroccan context.⁶ In order to contextualize the case of Meknes, I thus rely primarily on studies of communities elsewhere in the Middle East, particularly the Ottoman Empire. A full-scale comparison with Moroccan Muslim practice would involve original research using Muslim sources, which is beyond the scope of this inquiry. Nevertheless, I draw preliminary conclusions about the relationship between Meknes and Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities in the region.

The Jews of Meknes in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

Meknes's greatest claim to fame is its royal status (which it shares with Fez and Marrakech). Chosen by the sultan Mulay Ismail as his new capital in 1672, Meknes reached the height of its renown in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It did not take long for this new capital to

replace Fez as the center of Jewish learning in Morocco.⁷ Although by the late nineteenth century both Meknes and its Jewish community had declined in importance, it nevertheless remained a vibrant hub of Moroccan Jewish life. Most accounts agree that by the turn of the twentieth century, the city's Jews numbered about six thousand.⁸

The leadership of the Jewish community of Meknes followed patterns found in many other Moroccan cities. At the top of the pyramid, the *va'ad* (or the *ma'amad*), a council of learned elders, made the majority of decisions for the community.⁹ Usually composed of seven men, including rabbis and influential laymen, the *va'ad* wrote the *taqanot* that regulated much of the community's daily life.¹⁰ The *nagid* was primarily responsible for relations between Jews and the Muslim authorities. He acted in parallel to the communal council, and at times in cooperation with it.¹¹ A number of other communal officials—the head rabbi, the *shoḥet* (ritual butcher), and the treasurer, among others—were appointed by the *va'ad* or by the community itself. Yet not every member of the council agreed to each *taqanah*, and at times individual members passed *taqanot* on behalf of the entire group.¹² I thus use the term “Jewish leaders” rather than “*va'ad*” in order to emphasize the fluidity of the group responsible for communal decisions.

Meknes's Jewish leadership was faced with a community that in socioeconomic terms largely resembled its Jewish and non-Jewish equivalents throughout Morocco. Arriving at exact proportions for the makeup of Meknes's Jewish population is impossible at this point. Nonetheless, the sources indicate a general schema of the community. A tiny minority of extremely wealthy families occupied the top of the pyramid, comprising between four and ten households at the end of the nineteenth century.¹³ These families were generally engaged in trade and had connections with wealthy and influential Muslims.¹⁴ In the shadow of the fabulously wealthy lived the majority of the population who earned their livelihood as artisans or small-time merchants—those I refer to as the “middling sorts.”¹⁵ Although these householders were normally able to support themselves, they were poor enough to be in danger of slipping into destitution at even minor catastrophes.¹⁶ In precolonial Morocco, political turmoil was often the catalyst for a fall from riches. During times of political instability, merchants were unable to open their stores, artisans could not work in their shops, and many had their possessions looted by armed mobs.¹⁷ Finally, at the other end of the spectrum were the completely destitute,

those who relied entirely on the community and on individual charity for their livelihood. They included the elderly, the “weak,” and others unable to provide for themselves.¹⁸

Understandings of Poverty

In order to grasp the role of charity in the array of concerns preoccupying Meknes’s leaders, one must understand whom they considered to be poor. How did communal leaders view this sector of society and, by extension, their responsibilities toward them?

Although explicit definitions of poverty in the *taqanot* of Meknes are rare—generally the term *poor* (‘*aniyim*’) is used without further specification—other sources from the period give us an idea of how the Jewish communal leaders of Meknes defined “the poor.” They most commonly used the term *poor* to refer to members of the community who regularly received communal charity. Among those who could expect charity on a weekly basis (the evening preceding the Sabbath) were “widows, orphans, and the extremely poor,” a category that undoubtedly included the elderly and others unable to provide for themselves.¹⁹ A separate distribution for sages (or religious scholars) was called the *ḥaluqat ha-ḥakhamim*.²⁰ Migrant beggars traveling from city to city also merited the label “poor,” and though they were only passing through, Meknes’s Jewish leaders were responsible for them during their stay.²¹

A note of clarification concerning the inclusion of “sages” is in order. Bridging the distinction between the “middling sorts” and the absolute poor were scholars, or men of religion, often included in the category of “poor” by Jews as well as Muslims.²² The ‘*ulamā*’ (Muslim scholars) were considered poor because it was assumed that members of this group devoted their days to religious pursuits and therefore did not have time to earn a living.²³ Social histories of charity in Islamic contexts reveal that a significant portion of pious endowments were dedicated to the ‘*ulamā*’ throughout the Middle East.²⁴ Likewise, Jewish communities considered it their duty to provide for their scholars.²⁵ This included donations to scholars abroad, especially in Palestine, from whence messengers arrived on a regular basis seeking contributions to be distributed in the four holy cities (Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed, and Tiberias). But neither among Jews nor Muslims did the association of religious scholars with the “poor” mean that these recipients of charity were necessarily indigent. In fact,

many Jewish and Muslim scholars who received charity were relatively well off.²⁶

The leaders of Meknes's Jewish community had a clear sense of who merited the title "poor" and thus who was entitled to charity. But how did Meknes's Jewish leaders relate to poverty, and what did they consider their responsibilities toward the poor? It is best to begin by examining the larger Middle Eastern context in which Moroccan Jewish attitudes toward poverty were situated. In the early modern period—that is, before European ideas about poverty took root across the Mediterranean—Jews, Muslims, and Christians in the Middle East viewed poverty as a natural aspect of society. In Miriam Hoexter's analysis of Muslim charity in eighteenth-century Algiers, she points out that "the existence of poor people in the community was conceived of as a permanent fact."²⁷ Poverty was not a blight that an ideal society could theoretically eradicate. On the contrary, the very nature of Islamic pious endowments (in Arabic, *waqf*, pl. *awqāf*, or *ḥabs*, pl. *ḥubūs*), which constituted the most important form of charity among Muslims, rests on the assumption of poverty's permanence in Muslim society. *Awqāf* invariably include the clause that when the line of beneficiaries dies out, the endowment reverts to the poor.²⁸

Middle Eastern Jews—including Meknes's Jewish leaders—similarly conceived of poverty as a permanent state that God commanded them to do their best to ease.²⁹ Although Jews in the Ottoman Empire sometimes took a negative attitude toward beggars, they ultimately viewed poverty as an inevitable evil that they were responsible for alleviating.³⁰ Like most Muslims, the Jewish leadership of Meknes assumed that poverty would always exist.³¹ In the late nineteenth century, these attitudes toward poverty began to change.

The view of poverty as a natural aspect of society influenced the way in which the Jews of Meknes viewed poor individuals. Jews around the world considered it their religious duty to give charity.³² Nonetheless, in Europe and the Middle East, many Jews looked down on the poor as inferior and deserving of contempt. Ben-Naeh points out that although rabbis in the Ottoman Empire encouraged Jews to have pity on the poor, it was nevertheless common for the rich to abuse the less fortunate.³³ Meknes's Jewish leaders exhibited only concern for the poor in their writings, whom they portrayed as innocent victims of fate.³⁴ Their oft-repeated injunctions to give charity reminded their community that giving was among the most important responsibilities that Jews must perform.³⁵

Although not a source of contempt, everyone considered poverty shameful for those who experienced it. The shame of the poor forms a trope in the *taqanot*, whether because they could not afford certain pleasures in life or because they were unable to reciprocate the generosity of friends and relatives.³⁶ Humiliation clung closest to those who fell into temporary poverty. Jews who had some sort of income felt acutely the indignity of being unable to afford lavish celebrations or send appropriate gifts. Those who were permanently destitute, on the other hand, were unlikely to even consider such luxuries in their struggle to merely stay alive.³⁷ Letters from the community of Meknes to the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) explicitly recount the humiliation of Jews who were plunged into poverty by political turbulence.³⁸ The experience of poor Jews in medieval Cairo exhibits a similar pattern, with the suddenly impoverished far more ashamed than their permanently destitute coreligionists.³⁹ Although the permanently poor were undoubtedly also humiliated by their poverty, those hovering on the edge of destitution experienced a different quality of shame, one that compounded the lack of riches with the loss of social status.

Jewish attitudes toward the poor in Meknes often reflected the Muslim context in which they developed, as did their organization of charity. Yet Jewish leaders' strategies of poor relief also exhibited significant differences related to characteristics of their leadership structure.

Meknes's Jewish Leadership and the Organization of Charity

How did the Jewish leaders of Meknes respond to poverty? What can the organization and regulation of charity tell us about their leadership? As in Jewish communities across the world, the leaders of Meknes's Jewish community considered it their religious responsibility to provide relief and sustenance for those defined as "poor" both locally and abroad. Yet beyond this religious injunction, the control of charity constituted a strategy by which Jewish leaders asserted and reaffirmed their temporal authority.

In reconstructing how charity operated among the Jews of Meknes, I draw comparisons with Jewish and Muslim communities throughout the Middle East. In general, the Jews of Meknes, like other Jewish communities in the region, centralized the distribution of charity more than did Muslims. Indeed, in his study of eighteenth-century Aleppo, Abraham Marcus contrasts non-Muslims' tendency toward centralization with

their Muslim neighbors' more diffuse approach.⁴⁰ This is undoubtedly related to the emphasis on individual charity in Islamic law, as opposed to the development of communal charity in *halakhah*.⁴¹ Yet the interplay between the control of charity and the legitimization of authority also informed Muslim charity. Ottoman officials, from local bureaucrats to the sultan himself, established charitable endowments (such as soup kitchens, Quranic schools, and hospitals) as a way to consolidate and validate their power.⁴² At various points in the nineteenth century, the beys of Tunis employed similar charitable measures to legitimize their authority in the eyes of their subjects.⁴³ Among both Jews and Muslims, symbolic legitimization emerged from the leaders' responsibility to provide relief for the poorest members of the community.

One of the most important roles of the communal leadership structure was to ensure the regular collection and distribution of charity to the poorest Jews in Meknes. Their level of monopoly over the sources of charity varied, from unobtrusively providing coffers in which Jews could place their donations at their leisure, to levying taxes, to more symbolic strategies such as directing fines toward poor relief. Yet at every turn the Jewish communal leaders of Meknes kept charity firmly under their control—a striking contrast with the Islamic tendency to leave charity in the hands of individuals.

Charity given by individual Jews either directly to the poor or to communal coffers undoubtedly constituted a major aspect of charitable giving in Meknes. While communal leaders were least able to control this kind of voluntary giving, they nonetheless enacted regulations whenever possible. Individuals placed their donations in the communal "poor box" (*qupah le-'aniyim*). Later official appointees collected and redistributed the money.⁴⁴ Holidays were popular occasions for such donations, especially the three major festivals (Pesah, Shavu'ot, and Sukkot).⁴⁵ Individuals also donated to the communal poor box to mark private celebrations, such as a circumcision, a bar mitzvah, or a wedding.⁴⁶ Such occasions often entailed inviting the poor to feasts, almsgiving, and the distribution of specialty food items, such as spiced meats or dried fruits.⁴⁷ Jews and Muslims across the Middle East shared the tradition of giving to the poor on festive occasions.⁴⁸ Muslims, however, tended to make such donations directly to the poor, while Jews often went through a governing body.⁴⁹ Finally, Meknes's leaders were proactive in their attempts to collect charity from individuals. Various *taqanot* stipulated the responsibilities of a

treasurer (the *gizbar* or the *gabbai*), who would go from house to house once weekly, gathering money and bread to be distributed to the poor on Fridays.⁵⁰

Once collected, Jewish leaders carefully regulated the ways in which charity was meted out. The most important was undoubtedly the weekly pre-Sabbath distribution, probably carried out by the same treasurer sent to collect these funds.⁵¹ The communal leaders kept a list of weekly recipients, which included those unable to provide for themselves and religious scholars. Special distributions were probably also organized in honor of holidays, when extra charity was collected.⁵² The weekly distribution of charity was unique to Jews; most Muslim pious endowments provided for the poor on a daily basis through soup kitchens or other charitable institutions.⁵³

Among Jews, even the most private kinds of giving were regulated. In 1757, the communal leaders passed a *taqanah* limiting the amount individuals could give to various classes of beggars: *talmidei ḥakhamim* could receive the most, followed by “important people” and then by everyone else.⁵⁴ Only emissaries from Palestine were exempt from such limitations. The authors did not specify how these rules were to be enforced—in fact, their strict observation seems unlikely at best. Nonetheless, the limitation on direct, private giving indicates the great degree of control exercised by Jewish leaders in Meknes over every aspect of charity.⁵⁵

Although *sheliḥim* (Jewish emissaries) hailing from Palestine were exempt from regulations on individual giving, the communal leaders found other ways to control donations to the holy land. Emissaries from Palestine arrived regularly in all the major cities of Morocco.⁵⁶ The account book of an emissary from Jerusalem who arrived in Meknes in 1895 records the donations of 136 individuals (or groups of individuals), as well as the sums of a number of *qupot*.⁵⁷ Numerous *taqanot* regulated donations for these emissaries; their frequency indicates both the importance of charity to Palestine and the high level of control to which it was subject.⁵⁸ Meknesi Jews’ practice of sending significant amounts of charity to their holy cities was similarly prevalent among Muslims, who regularly made donations to the poor in Mecca and Medina.⁵⁹

Although the leaders of Meknes’s Jewish community left some decisions regarding charity for Palestine up to individuals, Jews were not free to give entirely as they saw fit. The donations given directly to the emissary when he arrived or those collected during the year and delivered in

a lump-sum were unregulated.⁶⁰ Yet in the 1820s a series of *taqanot* fixed certain holidays during which the Jews of Meknes were encouraged to donate to particular cities.⁶¹ The community also prescribed donations to the various *qupot* in honor of family celebrations. In 1886, for example, the leaders decreed that every woman who gave birth should donate to *Qupat Raḥel Imeinu* (the collection box of Rachel the Matriarch), which went to poor Jews in Palestine.⁶²

Communal leaders did not control only voluntary donations; they also saddled their constituents with obligatory contributions, which they collected primarily through an extensive taxation system. At various points the leadership of Meknes's Jews levied taxes on kosher meat and kosher wine, the revenues of which went entirely to the poor.⁶³ The tax on kosher meat to benefit the poor (the *gabella*) dates to the early modern period in Morocco; in 1603, the rabbis of Fez renewed it in a *taqanah*.⁶⁴ A treasurer was responsible for collecting these taxes and distributing the funds to the poor. Ottoman Jews levied similar taxes on kosher meat.⁶⁵ Taxation, one of the most direct affirmations of governmental power, exemplifies the close connection between authority and charity in Meknes.

Though central to Jewish leaders' strategy for regulating charity, the levying of taxes was probably secondary in import to the tax exemptions they administered. The major tax on the Jews of Meknes was the *jizya*, the poll tax required of all *dhimmi* subjects residing in Muslim lands. Communal leaders exempted men of religion from contributing to the payment of the *jizya*. A *taqanah* from 1800 stridently reprimands those who tried to make *talmidei ḥakhamim* contribute during a year when the *jizya* was particularly high.⁶⁶ The authors conceded, however, that if a scholar was engaged in his profession more than in the study of Torah, then the exemption did not apply. Others were supposed to contribute to the *jizya* "as much as they were able," which meant that those with means paid the taxes owed by the destitute.⁶⁷ In order to enforce this system, Jewish leaders enacted a number of *taqanot* designed to prevent tax evasion.⁶⁸ The custom of exempting men of religion and the poor from taxes was also practiced in Fez at least through the seventeenth century and in the Ottoman Empire through the early nineteenth.⁶⁹

While taxes proved the most visible way in which the regulation of charity reinforced Jewish leaders' authority, they were equally careful to manage other sources of poor relief. The pious endowments (*heqdeshim*)—buildings or leases on buildings consecrated as sources of income for the

poor—fell under their supervision.⁷⁰ The use of *heqdeshim* as a source of charity was closely related to Islamic practice, in which *awqāf* constituted one of the most important charitable institutions.⁷¹ Among Jews as well, pious endowments provided both housing and cash for local indigents and scholars. For instance, two *taqanot* from the eighteenth century offered a detailed explanation of the status of ten stores built just outside the walls of the Jewish quarter, the *millāh*.⁷² Both *taqanot* stipulated that one-third of the stores' *hazaqot* (the legal right of occupancy, considered to be separate from either ownership or rental) be dedicated to the poor.⁷³ When these *hazaqot* were sold, one-third of the proceeds went to charity.

The community also oversaw particular buildings dedicated to the poor. One source concerns buildings that belonged to the *gmilut ḥasadim* society (a “good deeds” society).⁷⁴ It seems that the profits from these buildings, including stores and houses, were collected by the society's treasurer and used for the its activities as well as distributed directly to the poor. Another *taqanah* describes buildings rented specifically to the poor; a treasurer was to be nominated to collect the rent from the tenants, from which he was to deduct the amount donated by the community.⁷⁵ At least one *heqdesh* was dedicated to the Jews of Palestine.⁷⁶ Private individuals could establish *heqdeshim*, as in the case of a woman who left part of her property to the poor.⁷⁷ Yet regardless of their specifications, Meknes's leaders took care to oversee how revenues from pious endowments were collected and distributed.

While control over individual charity, taxes, and pious endowments constituted concrete ways in which Meknes's Jewish leaders asserted their authority, a more symbolic strategy also fell under the auspices of poor relief. *Taqanot* on a range of subjects often threatened potential offenders with fines to be collected at the discretion of the *beit din* (Jewish court). These fines, stipulated the authors, would be designated for the poor.⁷⁸ A *taqanah* enacted repeatedly includes the threat of such a fine; it prohibited playing “karta” (or “al-karta”), a card game involving gambling. At least three separate *taqanot* specified that fines collected for playing “karta” would go to the poor.⁷⁹ The collection of fines intended for the poor was also a strategy used by Jews in Fez at least through the seventeenth century.⁸⁰

It is difficult to determine the extent to which these fines constituted an important source of charity. Yet the recurrence of the threat both to fine community members and to donate these fines to the poor reveals

charity's central role in the leadership structure of Meknes. On the one hand, the stipulation that the fines were for a good cause undoubtedly legitimized the prohibitions laid out in the *taqanot*. Jewish leaders' control of charity thus enhanced their authority. On the other hand, the designation of extra public money for the poor—money that did not flow from regular sources of communal income—reinforced the community's dedication to caring for its underprivileged members, again increasing its legitimacy in the eyes of Meknes's Jews.

Meknes's Jewish leaders saw it as their responsibility to control almost every aspect of poor relief, from donations by individuals to the symbolic legitimization incurred by levying fines to benefit the poor. Yet the supervision of charity did not represent the limits of their responsibilities. Beyond their response to existing poverty, the Jewish leaders of Meknes took it upon themselves to address the future financial state of their community.

Jewish Leaders and the Prevention of Poverty

Jewish leaders' focus on the immediate relief of suffering reflected their view of poverty as a permanent aspect of society. Nonetheless, they were far from content to merely provide handouts. Jewish leaders in Meknes waged a constant battle to prevent families from slipping into poverty in the first place. Although structural poverty would always exist, they nevertheless attempted to reduce the numbers of those who "fell from their riches." These efforts to control impoverishment are perhaps the best evidence of the extent to which charity and authority were entwined. The measures taken by Meknes's Jewish leaders also demonstrate the extensive centralization of charity among Jews as compared to Muslims; no attempt to prevent future impoverishment has been observed in Muslim charitable efforts. The wide range of Jewish leaders' authority stretched on one axis from individual to communal actions, on another from local to foreign causes, and on yet a third from present to future conditions.

Meknesi Jews' strategies for controlling poverty also challenge the dichotomy between "traditional" and "modern" approaches to charity. Many scholars juxtapose traditional charity, which limits itself to the material relief of poverty, with modern (i.e., European) ideas about charity, which seek to implement social policies that reduce and eventually eliminate poverty.⁸¹ The case of Meknes challenges this dichotomy, suggesting

that Jewish leaders' conception of poverty as permanent did not prevent them from offering both immediate and long-term solutions.

Although Jewish leaders across the world passed regulations aimed at controlling the financial affairs of individuals, scholars have yet to note the long-term goal of preventing poverty in other Jewish communities in the Middle East or Europe. Limitations on consumption intended to alleviate financial crises only took effect for short periods of time.⁸² In Meknes, however, regulations on consumption did not have time limits attached and aimed at controlling poverty permanently. Although this study reveals a new aspect of poverty relief, I suspect that further research would reveal similar policies elsewhere.

Jewish leaders in Meknes used sumptuary laws as their primary strategy to curb poverty. These sumptuary laws limited expenditures at family celebrations, holidays, and other occasions. They included detailed specifications of how many guests one could invite to certain events, who was included in the acceptable list of guests (for instance, only family members with a minimum degree of closeness), what kinds of food could be served, and which gifts could be exchanged.⁸³ The earliest surviving sumptuary laws from Meknes date from 1769; they were augmented, renewed, and altered fairly continuously until at least 1907. The fact that Meknes's leaders constantly rewrote these laws shows on the one hand that they were not being obeyed—otherwise, Meknesi Jews would not have required repeated reminders of the rules—and on the other hand that they were important enough to merit the effort of continuous reintroduction.

Although I use the term sumptuary laws to mean limitations on luxuries, I do not intend it to carry the connotations associated with sumptuary laws in Europe. In particular, the sumptuary laws passed in Meknes were not aimed exclusively at the very rich. Rather, the authors' explanations demonstrate that these *taqanot* were intended primarily for the middling sorts, who were the members of the community most likely to fall into poverty by spending too much on luxury consumption.

The intended consequences of sumptuary laws passed in other Jewish communities help explain their role in Meknes. Studies of sumptuary regulations in Poland, France, and the Ottoman Empire reveal commonalities among the uses of such regulations.⁸⁴ European sumptuary laws, aimed at preserving existing social hierarchies, included strict limits on how much each social class was allowed to spend on particular occasions.⁸⁵ Sumptuary legislation also strove to protect Jews from hostile

non-Jews in both Europe and the Middle East; many community leaders believed that the conspicuous display of luxury incensed Gentiles against Jews and thus endangered them.⁸⁶ Finally, communal leaders attempted to stave off financial crisis for individuals and the community as a whole by regulating consumption.⁸⁷

The language and nature of Meknes's sumptuary laws reveal that the city's Jewish leaders were primarily concerned with the regulation of consumption in order to prevent financial disaster. A common justification for the passing of sumptuary laws included in the body of the *taqanot* explained that lavish spending caused the wealthy to waste money and further devastated those who already hovered near poverty. The conclusion of a *taqanah* passed in 1907 put this reasoning succinctly: "All this [sumptuary legislation] we saw fit to pass for the sake of the poor who are unable to do as the rich."⁸⁸ Although the language of the *taqanot* uses the term poor, its authors were not referring to the poorest members of the community; such people would have been unable to afford even basic necessities, much less luxuries. Rather, they meant the middling sorts living on the edge of poverty.

These middling householders' efforts to "keep up with the Joneses" caused them to lavish increasing amounts on holidays and family celebrations, which could easily result in financial disaster. In 1806, a *taqanah* was passed limiting the number of eggs one could send to friends and relatives on the Sabbath of a family celebration. The authors wrote that this regulation "gladdened all the householders and all those with celebrations," since it stifled the competition to send more eggs than one's neighbor.⁸⁹ In 1897, another *taqanah* limiting spending on festive occasions concluded with the warning that many, including the wealthy, were losing a great deal of money.⁹⁰ Especially among the poorer members of the community, their inability to reciprocate the gifts of their rich neighbors caused shame and even strife between husbands and wives. Leaders feared that the poor would try to imitate the rich by sending equivalent gifts on festive occasions and throwing similarly lavish celebrations in spite of their far more limited means. In order to afford these luxuries, householders took out loans and fell into debt.⁹¹

The economic motivations cited in the *taqanot* are corroborated by the lack of other concerns normally at play in sumptuary legislation. There is no evidence in the *taqanot* from Meknes that the leadership attempted to delineate social classes through regulations on spending, since all

regulations applied equally to rich and poor.⁹² Neither did the community of Meknes enact limitations on consumption for fear of non-Jews' jealousy. Such *taqanot* from other communities emphasized limits on public displays of wealth that would attract unwanted attention from non-Jews.⁹³ Yet only one *taqanah* from Meknes specified what individuals could wear outside of the house;⁹⁴ the vast majority concerned strictly intra-communal affairs.

Although laws limiting consumption were the most common ways in which Meknes's Jewish leaders attempted to protect their community from slipping into poverty, they were not the only means exercised to this end. First in 1825 and again in 1855, the leaders of Meknes enacted *taqanot* prohibiting the sale or purchase of goods through middlemen.⁹⁵ They explained that as the community was experiencing hard times, selling goods through middlemen was causing a number of householders to lose money and go bankrupt.⁹⁶ In 1855, communal leaders deemed the *taqanah* sufficiently important that they ordered it read aloud in all the courtyards of the millāḥ so that women, children, and the elderly—who did not regularly attend synagogue—would also hear it.

While the Jews of Meknes viewed poverty as a fact of life that was not within their power to eliminate, they nevertheless attempted to protect their flock from avoidable impoverishment—a measure of control both symbolic and practical. This strategy unsettles the dichotomy of “modern” versus “traditional” Jewish approaches to poor relief. Nonetheless, at the end of the nineteenth century, Meknes's Jews confronted new ideas about how to respond to the needs of the poor.

Changing Strategies of Charity

Morocco in the second half of the nineteenth century played host to the drama of Europe's steadily growing involvement in the Middle East. While Europeans' impact was primarily political and economic in the precolonial period, cultural norms—including medical practices and ideas about the social order—were increasingly filtering into local communities. The presence of European diplomats in more and more Moroccan cities affected communal leadership structures and introduced new ideas about administrative responsibilities. European notions were often available to Moroccan Jews relatively early thanks to the presence of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. The AIU was a Paris-based international organization

founded in 1860 to promote the education and political emancipation of Jews outside of Western Europe, primarily in the Middle East, the Balkans, and North Africa.⁹⁷ It opened its first school in Morocco in 1862 and steadily expanded its scholastic network throughout the precolonial period.

Meanwhile, ideas about charity prevalent in nineteenth-century Europe were undergoing significant change, rooted in events of the sixteenth century. Poverty was no longer considered an acceptable fact of life, deserving of pity and material aid; it was a deplorable state that could, with the correct policies, be eradicated. Begging came to be seen as especially egregious, and attempts were made to put beggars to work. European Jewish communities had begun to adopt these views as early as the seventeenth century, and by the late nineteenth century they were widespread.⁹⁸ In London, for instance, new charitable organizations created after 1859 believed that the poor had the potential to pull themselves out of poverty with the proper education, supervision, and carefully regulated aid.⁹⁹ Nor were Muslims in the Middle East immune to these ideological currents. In Egypt, welfare reforms instituted midcentury introduced policies more in line with European opinions on poor relief. Centralized poor houses were created in Cairo, beggars were cleared from the streets, and able-bodied vagrants were drafted into military service.¹⁰⁰

Studies of the changing nature of charity among Middle Eastern Jews have yet to be conducted, but it is clear that new practices in nineteenth-century Meknes were related to European influences. For instance, at the end of the nineteenth century the Jewish leaders of Meknes established a hospital for the sickly poor.¹⁰¹ Although providing hospitals for those who could not afford private medical care has a long history in Muslim societies, no evidence of similar practices among Middle Eastern Jews exists.¹⁰² Meknesi Jews' decision to provide medical care most likely stemmed from the influence of European "modernizers." Jews in London, for instance, began to provide medical care based on new developments in hygiene and medicine.¹⁰³ European consuls working in Morocco often invited Western doctors or helped to establish hospitals as part of their efforts to reform Moroccan society.¹⁰⁴ Similar evidence that Meknes's Jews were increasingly aware of the implications of Western medicine is found in a *taqanah* from 1881 proscribing a number of changes in how charity was organized. Among them, the communal leaders decreed that the money collected from taxes on kosher meat was to be used to clear the trash in the *millāh*,

in order to prevent further outbreaks of cholera such as the one suffered two years earlier.¹⁰⁵ Jewish leaders often organized such public health projects in cooperation with European diplomats.¹⁰⁶

The AIU had an impact on the way charity was organized in Meknes even before its first teachers arrived in the city. Although the AIU's main purpose was educational, at times of crisis the organization collected emergency funds from wealthy European Jews and sent them to communities in need. In the late nineteenth century, the Jewish leaders of Meknes began writing to the AIU asking for such funds and received sizeable donations at least twice.¹⁰⁷

In 1902, the communal leaders of Meknes asked the AIU to found a school in their city. The school would, they hoped, relieve the financial hardships experienced by so many of the community's poorer members.¹⁰⁸ But the AIU's arrival sparked a fierce controversy between Meknes's leaders and the AIU. The debate was about more than charity, as the AIU broadly challenged the authority of Meknes's communal leaders.¹⁰⁹ Yet the fact that the ensuing storm centered on questions of charity reveals the extent to which the control of poverty relief was intertwined with communal authority in Meknes.

The controversy erupted over the community's pledge to contribute 30 duoros monthly to the AIU school, a sum that came from the tax on kosher meat which normally went to the poor and the scholars of the city. Although the community leaders of Meknes initially agreed to dedicate this sum to the cause of the AIU school, the vocal complaints of the city's scholars and other recipients of relief soon made them regret their decision:

Bands of poor devils, no doubt counseled by Rabbi Shlomo Berdugo and Menachem Benabou, crisscrossed the Mellah, crying, "We want the thirty duoros, we are dying of hunger, we no longer want a school that takes our bread and gives us nothing."¹¹⁰

The communal leaders even wrote to the AIU pleading with the Central Committee to release them of their monthly obligation, claiming that "the poor are crying out, saying, 'Give us bread!'"¹¹¹

The two camps—that of M. and Mme. Valadji (the schoolteachers), the AIU Central Committee in Paris, and a few Meknesi Jews on the one side, and the leaders of Meknes, scholars, and the poor on the other—understood the significance of the thirty duoros very differently.¹¹² From

Valadji's point of view, these thirty duoros were a wise investment in the future of Meknes's Jews. By supporting the AIU school, the community would enable their children to receive a modern education, one that prepared them for success in an increasingly European-oriented Morocco. The AIU camp believed firmly that education and regeneration would *solve* the problem of poverty in Meknes, as opposed to merely relieving it through handouts.¹¹³

The communal leaders of Meknes, on the other hand, understood the role of the AIU school very differently. They, too, saw the school as a way to relieve poverty in their community.¹¹⁴ Yet their idea of helping the poor followed the contours of the kind of poor relief they had previously overseen in Meknes. They expected the AIU to send financial help from Paris—immediate relief rather than long-term structural reforms. They believed that their investment of 30 duoros would literally be returned to them many-fold.¹¹⁵ These two views of charity—the community leaders' focus on immediate financial relief and the AIU's push for modern education—were seemingly irreconcilable, and the school was closed only six months after it opened.

Meknes's Jewish leaders resisted AIU-inspired strategies of poor relief out of ideological convictions about what was best for the poor of their city. Yet their opposition was no doubt compounded by the desire to maintain their control of communal charity and thus to preserve existing structures of authority. The fact that the 30 duoros had previously been designated for scholars no doubt amplified the threat of the AIU's encroachment on communal administration. The scholars, many of whom served on or had close ties to the *ma'amad*, saw the positions threatened by the partial loss of their weekly allotment. The council also worried about being seen as indifferent to the suffering of their poor, a perception that would have thrown their legitimacy into question. Communal leaders' refusal to pay the 30 duoros and the subsequent shuttering of the school marked their retention of control over the organization of charity in Meknes.

Nonetheless, Meknesi Jewish leaders' unwillingness to compromise with the AIU did not mean they resisted all possibilities of change. Like Muslim authorities in Egypt, Jews in Meknes introduced new innovations in poor relief that reflected the growing influence of European ideas, such as opening a hospital and taking sanitary precautions. Although the AIU school failed in 1902, by 1911 Meknes's leaders had invited the AIU for a second try; the school opened in that year was a success.¹¹⁶ Meknes's

leaders eventually proved willing to accept innovations in poor relief and, consequently, the relinquishment of some authority.

* * *

Questions of poverty and its relief figured prominently in precolonial Meknes. At the individual level, Jews were constantly asked to give to the poor. At the communal level, the challenge of caring for the city's Jewish poor constituted one of the most pressing issues facing the community's leaders. The history of poverty and charity in Meknes concerns both how Jewish leaders organized charity and how the Jewish leadership maintained itself. Charity was a responsibility saddled on Meknes's leaders as well as a tool they used to their advantage. Although I do not deny the religious significance of charity, I argue that in their responses to poverty, Meknes's Jewish leaders were doing more than simply fulfilling the religious injunction to give charity. They simultaneously built and maintained a structure of communal authority. Charity was not merely a religious injunction; it pervaded the very nature of Meknes's Jewish leadership structure. In addition, a careful study of the organization of poor relief calls into question dichotomies between "modern" and "traditional" approaches to poverty. It addresses the ways in which ideas about poverty began to change in the late nineteenth century, adding another chapter to the story of Europeans' impact on Moroccan Jews. Further studies of poverty and charity in the Moroccan context would add to these debates; my hope is that this beginning will be enhanced by further research.

Notes

1. Mordechai Amar, ed., *Taqanot of the Rabbis of Meknes* (Jerusalem: Hēvrat Ahavat Shalom, 1996) (Hebrew).

2. On the authors of these *taqanot*, see Moshe Amar, "On 'the *Taqanot* of Meknes' in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries" (Hebrew), in *Hēvrah ve-Qehilah*, ed. Avraham Haim (Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim, 1991), 41–42. Collections of responsa from Meknes include Raphael Berdugo, *Mishpatim Yesharim: She'elot u-teshuvot*, Hots'a'ah, 2d ed. (Jerusalem, 1993); Messas Sar Shalom, *Divrei Shalom* (Meknes: Sayag, 1895); Shmuel Amar, *Dvar Shmuel* (Casablanca: Razon, 1940). Archives consulted in Jerusalem include the Jewish National and University Library (JNUL), the library of the Ben-Zvi Institute (YBZ), and the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People (AHJP). In Paris I consulted the archives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) and the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (MAE).

3. I agree with Mark Cohen on this point: see Mark R. Cohen, *Poverty and Charity in the Jewish Community of Medieval Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 251.

4. Only Gabi Levi has focused on the history of the Jews of Meknes, although his work is highly problematic. See Gabi Levi, *The Jews of Meknes: Outlines of the Character of a Community in Morocco* (Tel-Aviv: Alef, 1982) (Hebrew).

5. Yaron Ben-Naeh, "Poverty, Paupers, and Poor Relief in Ottoman Jewish Society," *Revue des Etudes Juives* 163, nos. 1–2 (2004); Cohen, *Poverty and Charity*. See also S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967–1988), 2:91–143. No studies devoted to poverty and charity exist for Morocco, but see the relevant section in Jane S. Gerber, *Jewish Society in Fez, 1450–1700: Studies in Communal and Economic Life* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980).

6. On the legal history of *awqāf* in the Moroccan context, see David S. Powers, "The Maliki Family Endowment: Legal Norms and Social Practices," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 3 (1993).

7. Gerber, *Jewish Society in Fez*, 38; Amar, "On 'the *Taqanot* of Meknes,'" 38.

8. Eugène Aubin, *Le Maroc d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: A. Colin, 1904), 359–60. The number six thousand is repeated by Mme. Valadji, director of the AIU girls' school (AIU Maroc XXXII E 561, Mme. Valadji to AIU, March 13, 1902).

9. Gerber, *Jewish Society in Fez*, 97.

10. Levi, *The Jews of Meknes*, 49. Gerber records that the members of the *ma'amad* in Fez were all scholars. Gerber, *Jewish Society in Fez*, 98.

11. The *nagid* was appointed by local Muslim authorities. Gerber, *Jewish Society in Fez*, 86.

12. Many *taqanot* were in fact only signed by one or two rabbis. However, to use the term *va'ad* to refer to decisions that were not signed by all members seems inaccurate. It is my impression that the leadership structure was more fluid than this term indicates.

13. See the letter from Ben Hasin to the AIU, describing the economic state of the Jewish community of Meknes in 1900. Amar, *Taqanot*, 421.

14. A tiny percentage of wealthy Jews was common in Jewish communities elsewhere. See, e.g., Michel Abitbol, *Les commerçants du roi, Tujjar al-sultan* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1998); and Ben-Naeh, "Poverty," 153.

15. I use this term, borrowed from European historians, to avoid the more confusing alternative "middle class," which has connotations that I do not want to introduce here. By "middling" I mean neither wealthy nor very poor. According to Ben Hasin's letter, these artisans and merchants constituted 880 households (out of a total of 980)—that is, the vast majority of the population. Amar, *Taqanot*, 421.

16. Some professions were more susceptible to impoverishment than others. According to an 1824 *taqanah* about gifts to the sultan, the poorest artisans were tailors, goldsmiths, and cobblers (who were exempt from contributing to gifts for the sultan). See Amar, *Taqanot*, 179.

17. AIU Maroc II B 12–98, Community of Meknes to AIU, Tammuz 5671 (1911); AIU Maroc II B 12–98, Community of Meknes to AIU, Tevet 5653 (1903); AIU Maroc III C

10.k.1, Community of Meknes to AIU, 1 Adar 5668 (1908); AIU Maroc XXXII E 549, Moyal to AIU, June 21, 1911.

18. See Ben Hasin's letter, in which he lists 100 householders of "the elderly, religious scholars, and the weak" who received communal charity on a regular basis. Amar, *Taqanot*, 421.

19. Ibid., 421–23. Although Ben Hasin's letter dates from 1900, the similarities between the categories he uses and those of Jewish communities elsewhere make it likely that these definitions were relevant throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See Ben-Naeh, "Poverty," 154.

20. Amar, *Taqanot*, 423.

21. A *taqanah* from 1881 instructs that funds collected every six months were to be distributed to "those passing and to those staying." Ibid., 258; see also 276.

22. See Ben Hasin's letter in which he includes "the elderly, religious scholars, and the weak," all of whom received charity, in one category. Ibid., 421.

23. Hoexter, "Charity, the Poor, and Distribution of Alms in Ottoman Algiers," in *Poverty and Charity in Middle Eastern Contexts*, ed. Michael David Bonner, Mine Ener, and Amy Singer (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003), 150.

24. Ruth Roded, "Great Mosques, Zawiyas, and Neighborhood Mosques: Popular Beneficiaries of Waqf Endowments in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Aleppo," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 110, no. 1 (1990): 32–33; Amy Singer, *Constructing Ottoman Beneficence: An Imperial Soup Kitchen in Jerusalem* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 28; Eyal Ginio, "Living on the Margins of Charity," in *Poverty and Charity in Middle Eastern Contexts* (note 23 above), 169; Adam Sabra, *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam: Mamluk Egypt, 1250–1517* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 11.

25. Miriam Hoexter notes that the inclusion of learned men in the category of the poor extended to Jews and Christians in the Middle East. Hoexter, "Charity," 151. See also Ephraim Frisch, *An Historical Survey of Jewish Philanthropy: From the Earliest Times to the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Macmillan, 1924), 116–17.

26. A letter from the AIU schoolteacher sent to open the (failed) school in Meknes in 1902 claimed that of the 219 recipients of charity at least 36 were rich scholars. He enumerated another 27 relatives of scholars who were not poor but received charity anyway. AIU Maroc XXXII E 561, Valadji to AIU, January 14, 1902.

27. Hoexter, "Charity," 148. See also Sabra, *Poverty and Charity*, 174.

28. See, e.g., Powers, "The Maliki Family Endowment," 384; Singer, *Constructing Ottoman Beneficence*, 31; Hoexter, "Charity," 148. See also Sabra's chapter on *awqāf* in Mamluk Cairo: *Poverty and Charity*, chap. 4.

29. See especially Frisch's chapter on the ruling principles and ideals behind Jewish charity: Frisch, *An Historical Survey of Jewish Philanthropy*, chap. 4.

30. Ben-Naeh, "Poverty," 175–76.

31. For instance, the community referred to "the poor" (*ha-'aniyim*) as a permanent social category, such as in specifications of fines that would be donated to the poor. See Amar, *Taqanot*, 29, 85, 217, 385.

32. The history of charity in Judaism is beyond the scope of this essay. See Frisch, *An Historical Survey of Jewish Philanthropy*, and Frank M. Loewenberg, *From Charity to Social Justice: The Emergence of Communal Institutions for the Support of the Poor in Ancient Judaism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 2001).

33. Ben-Naeh, “Poverty,” 160, 164. Ben-Naeh suggests that this attitude may have been the result of European influence, as they considered the poor disgusting and dangerous (176).

34. See, e.g., the letter of recommendation sent for a poor *talmid ḥakham*, a copy of which was included among a collection of *taqanot* from eighteenth-century Meknes (JNUL F 16107: 49). See also the letter concerning a widow and her orphaned son who applied to the communal authorities for charity; although they worried that the young man would turn to alcoholism, they nonetheless found no fault with the pair for being poor (JNUL F 16107: 46).

35. See three letters encouraging Meknesi Jews to give charity from 1781 (JNUL F 16107: 54–55).

36. See Amar, *Taqanot*, 73, 93, 340, 363.

37. There are *taqanot* with instructions for people to give gifts only to the poorest of their relatives who under no circumstances would be able to reciprocate. *Ibid.*, 73.

38. AIU Maroc II B 12–98, Community of Meknes to AIU, Tammuz 5671 (1911).

39. Cohen, *Poverty and Charity*, 45–51.

40. Marcus, “Poverty and Poor Relief,” 176. See also Marcus’s observation that the Ottoman administration in eighteenth-century Aleppo did not provide social welfare, which was dealt with privately. Abraham Marcus, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 77. See also Cohen, *Poverty and Charity*, 245, and Sabra, *Poverty and Charity*, 32.

41. This comparison has not been adequately explored and is undoubtedly overly generalized. See Frisch, *An Historical Survey of Jewish Philanthropy*, 34–40, 50, and Sabra, *Poverty and Charity*, 4, 32.

42. Singer, *Constructing Ottoman Beneficence*, 27; Ginio, “Living on the Margins of Charity,” 177; Sabra, *Poverty and Charity*, 32, 140–41.

43. Abdelhamid Larguèche, *Les ombres de la ville: pauvres, marginaux, et minoritaires à Tunis, XVIIIème et XIXème siècles* (Manouba: Centre de publication universitaire, Faculté des lettres de Manouba, 1999), 117–35.

44. The communal poor box appears in the Mishna. Frisch, *An Historical Survey of Jewish Philanthropy*, 100–101.

45. Amar, *Taqanot*, 421.

46. Frisch, *An Historical Survey of Jewish Philanthropy*, 105; Levi, *The Jews of Meknes*, 70; Gerber, *Jewish Society in Fez*, 70; Ben-Naeh, “Poverty,” 186.

47. Amar, *Taqanot*, 73, 93. See also Levi, *The Jews of Meknes*, 70; Shlomo A. Deshen, *The Mellah Society: Jewish Community Life in Sherifian Morocco* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 65.

48. Kenneth L. Brown, *People of Salé: Tradition and Change in a Moroccan City, 1830–1930* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), 92–93, 97; Ben-Naeh, “Poverty,” 187; Ginio, “Living on the Margins of Charity,” 172.

49. Marcus, "Poverty and Poor Relief," 176; Ginio, "Living on the Margins of Charity," 171–72, 177.

50. Amar, *Taqanot*, 422. See also the descriptions of the distribution of funds to the poor in AIU Maroc XXXII E 561, Valadji to AIU, January 14, 1902, and May 15, 1902.

51. Levi, *The Jews of Meknes*, 71. This was also the case in the Ottoman Empire. Ben-Naeh, "Poverty," 188.

52. One *taqanah* mentions a treasurer who collected money from the synagogues every six months and distributed it to the migrant and the resident poor. See Amar, *Taqanot*, 258.

53. For instance, a soup kitchen in Jerusalem served an average of 500 people soup and bread twice a day. Singer, *Constructing Ottoman Beneficence*, 64. See also Roger Le Tourneau, *Fès avant le protectorat: étude économique et sociale d'une ville de l'occident musulman* (Rabat: Editions La Porte, 1987), 257; Ginio, "Living on the Margins of Charity," 170. Although some *awqāf* distributed money to the poor, these distributions took place two or more times weekly. Le Tourneau, *Fès avant le protectorat*, 257; Hoexter, "Charity," 156. It is likely that the unique nature of Sabbath observance among Jews prompted the practice of weekly distributions on Fridays.

54. Amar, *Taqanot*, 6.

55. I have not included a discussion of the role of confraternities in this essay due to lack of sources. See, e.g., JNUL F 16107: 32–33.

56. See Yaari, *Emissaries of Palestine*.

57. YBZ 1822: 6–7.

58. At least four *taqanot* relating to the division of funds for Palestine were enacted between 1823 and 1826. Amar, *Taqanot*, 193, 196, 197, 200.

59. In Algiers, for instance, a number of pious endowments were dedicated to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Hoexter, "Charity," 152–54.

60. Emissaries collected both individual and communal donations in all the Jewish communities they visited. Yaari, *Emissaries of Palestine*, 53.

61. Donations to Jerusalem would be made on Purim and on the seventeenth of Tammuz, as well as on the occasion of a circumcision or a wedding; to Safed on Lag be-'Omer and the first of Elul; to Tiberias on Hanukkah and the intermediate days of Pesah, as well as on the occasions of a bar mitzvah and a wedding celebration; and finally, to Hebron on Hoshanah Rabbah. See Amar, *Taqanot*, 200–201.

62. *Ibid.*, 254.

63. See the 1881 *taqanah*, which nominated a treasurer to collect taxes on kosher wine. Amar, *Taqanot*, 258.

64. Abraham ben Mordecai Ankawa, *Kerem Hemer: The Book of Ordinances from the Rabbis of Castile* (Hebrew), vol. 2 (Ashdod: Makhon Ošrot Ge'one Sefarad, 1997), no. 78. See also Gerber, *Jewish Society in Fez*, 72.

65. Ben-Naeh, "Poverty," 186.

66. Amar, *Taqanot*, 186, and Berdugo, *Mishpatim Yeshtarim: She'elot u-teshuvot*, v. 1: no. 381; v. 2: no. 172.

67. Amar, *Taqanot*, 179.

68. Amar, *Taqanot*, 91. See also the required oath of honesty upon being assessed for taxes (JNUL F 16107: 39).

69. Gerber, *Jewish Society in Fez*, 69; Ben-Naeh, “Poverty,” 186; Deshen, *The Mellah Society*, 68.

70. See Cohen, *Poverty and Charity*, 200–204, and Yaacov Lev, *Charity, Endowments, and Charitable Institutions in Medieval Islam* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 66–67.

71. Cohen suggests the influence of Islam for both the prevalence and the form of Jewish pious endowments in medieval Egypt. Cohen, *Poverty and Charity*, 202–203.

72. The first *taqanah* is dated either 1747 or 1751. See JNUL F 43691: 19. The second is from 1771. See Amar, *Taqanot*, 14. Another case of a *heqdesh* being dedicated to the poor concerns a house that was transferred to Rabbi Yosef Berdugo in order to found a yeshiva (AHJP MA/MK/28).

73. On the importance of *hazaqot* in Jewish history, see Meir Benayahu, “Legal Agreements Concerning ‘Hazaqot of Courtyards, Houses, and Stores’ in Salonika and the Rulings of Rabbi Yosef Taitatzaq,” *Michael* 9 (1985) (Hebrew).

74. JNUL F 16107: 32–33. These *taqanot* are from 1781.

75. Amar, *Taqanot*, 258.

76. YBZ 1822: 7. In 1895, its revenues yielded a donation of ten *duoros*, not a paltry sum. See Le Tourneau, *Fès avant le protectorat*, 283.

77. Amar, *Dvar Shmuel*, no. 29.

78. Amar, *Taqanot*, 217, 385.

79. The first such *taqanah* is from 1786 (*ibid.*, 29). For similar stipulations, see the nineteenth-century *taqanot* in JNUL F 44688: 2, and JNUL B 578: 1.

80. Gerber, *Jewish Society in Fez*, 70–71.

81. On traditional Jewish charity, see Eugene C. Black, *The Social Politics of Anglo-Jewry, 1880–1920* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), especially 76–78, 93, and Heinz-Dietrich Lowe, “From Charity to Social Policy: The Emergence of Jewish ‘Self-Help’ Organizations in Imperial Russia, 1800–1914,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 27, no. 2 (1997). On the Middle Eastern context, see Mine Ener, *Managing Egypt’s Poor and the Politics of Benevolence, 1800–1952* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003).

82. Edward Fram, “The Limitation of Luxuries in the Jewish Community of Krakow at the End of the Sixteenth Century and the Beginning of the Seventeenth Century,” *Gal-Ed on the History of the Jews in Poland* 18 (2002): 17–23 (Hebrew).

83. Amar, *Taqanot*: 73–74, 75–76, 85–88, 93–95, 144–46, 163, 168, 261–62, 265–69, 358–62, 363–70, 390–93.

84. See Fram, “The Limitation of Luxuries”; Jay R. Berkovitz, “Social and Religious Controls in Pre-Revolutionary France: Rethinking the Beginnings of Modernity,” *Jewish History* 15, no. 1 (2001); Jay R. Berkovitz, *Rites and Passages: The Beginnings of Modern Jewish Culture in France, 1650–1860* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 35–58; Yaron Ben-Naeh, “‘One Cup of Coffee’: Ordinances Concerning Luxuries and Recreation; A Chapter in the Cultural and Social History of the Jewish Sephardi Community of Jerusalem in the Nineteenth Century,” *Turcica* 37 (2005).

85. Fram, "The Limitation of Luxuries," 15 and 17; Berkovitz, *Rites and Passages*, 45–46. The sumptuary laws in the Ottoman Empire did not include references to class hierarchies. Ben-Naeh, "One Cup of Coffee," 167.

86. Fram, "The Limitation of Luxuries," 12–14; Berkovitz, *Rites and Passages*, 41–43; Ben-Naeh, "One Cup of Coffee," 168, 181.

87. Fram, "The Limitation of Luxuries," 16, 18–21; Berkovitz, *Rites and Passages*, 42; Ben-Naeh, "One Cup of Coffee," 169.

88. Amar, *Taqanot*, 365–66. "Do not waste" is a commandment originally found in the Bible (Deuteronomy 20: 19–20).

89. *Ibid.*, 73–74.

90. *Ibid.*, 358–62. See also a very similar *taqanah* from 1907 (*ibid.*, 363–70).

91. *Ibid.*, 73–74, 93–95, 358–70.

92. Some even include the language "whether rich or poor" to drive this point home. See *ibid.*, 358–62.

93. Fram, "The Limitation of Luxuries," 12; Ben-Naeh, "One Cup of Coffee," 181.

94. Amar, *Taqanot*, 85–88, 390–93.

95. *Ibid.*, 167, 222–24; see also 169.

96. Morocco suffered from famine in 1824–25. *Ibid.*, 421.

97. On the AIU in Morocco, see Michael M. Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Jewish Communities of Morocco, 1862–1962* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983).

98. See Joseph Kaplan, "Spanish and Portuguese Jews: Relations with Ashkenazi Jews in Amsterdam" (Hebrew), in *Changes in New Jewish History: Collection of Articles in Honor of Shmuel Ettinger* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 1988), 400–401, 411.

99. Black, *Social Politics*, 73, 93. On similar developments among French and Russian Jews, see Lowe, "From Charity to Social Policy," 57–60; Jay R. Berkovitz, *The Shaping of Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-Century France* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 88, 100–104.

100. Ener, *Managing Egypt's Poor*, chaps. 2 and 3.

101. YBZ 1847: 29. The hospital was founded between 1893 and 1901.

102. See, e.g., Sabra, *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam*, 73–80; Miri Shefer, "Charity and Hospitality: Hospitals in the Ottoman Empire in the Early Modern Period," in *Poverty and Charity in Middle Eastern Contexts*. There is also evidence that Christians in the medieval period set up hospitals in Jerusalem. Lev, *Charity*, 82.

103. Black, *Social Politics*, 85–86.

104. See, e.g., MAE CC Mogador IV, Gay to Drouyn de Lhuys, July 18, 1865; MAE CC Mogador IV, Luguau to Moustier, September 11, 1868; MAE CC Mogador V, Beaumier to De La Vallette, August 5, 1869; MAE CC Mogador VI, Cara de Vaux to de Vernouillet, April 5, 1879; MAE CC Mogador VIII, Lacoste to Ribot, November 5, 1891.

105. See Amar, *Taqanot*, 258.

106. See MAE CC Mogador IV, Drouyn de Lhuys to Gay, November 4, 1865; MAE CC Mogador VI, Cara de Vaux to de Vernouillet, November 11, 1878.

107. For letters requesting funds, see AIU Maroc II B 12–98, Community of Meknes to AIU, received January 14, 1897; Community of Meknes to AIU, Tevet 5663 (1903); AIU

Maroc III C 10.k.1, Community of Meknes to AIU, received June 27, 1887; Community of Meknes to AIU, 1 Adar 5668 (1908).

On funds received from the AIU, see AIU Maroc II B 12–98, Community of Meknes to AIU, Sivan 5658 (1898), and AIU Maroc XXXII E 549, Moyal to AIU, June 21, 1911.

108. AIU Maroc II B 12–98, Community of Meknes to AIU, Adar 5662 (1902).

109. Such controversies erupted almost everywhere that the AIU opened schools. See Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle*, chap. 3, and Susan Gilson Miller, “Saints et laïcs dans le Tanger Juif du XIXe siècle,” in *Mémoires juives d’Espagne et du Portugal*, ed. Esther Benbassa (Paris: Publisud, 1996).

110. AIU Maroc XXXII E 561, Valadji to AIU, May 15, 1902.

111. AIU Maroc II B 12–98, Community of Meknes to AIU, Adar 5662 (1902).

112. At least one prominent community member was on the AIU’s side. Mordechai Loubaton wrote to the AIU in Paris that he was committed to paying the thirty *duoros* each month. AIU Maroc VII B 8.02, Loubaton to AIU, Sivan 5662 (1902).

113. AIU Maroc XXXII E 561, Mme. Valadji to AIU, March 13, 1902.

114. AIU Maroc II B 12–98, Community of Meknes to AIU, Adar 5662 (1902).

115. Valadji reported the communal leaders saying: “Que l’Alliance nous ferme ses écoles . . . puisqu’elle ne nous envoie pas de secours pour nos pauvres.” AIU Maroc XXXII E 561, Valadji to AIU, May 15, 1902.

116. See the series of letters sent by A. Moyal, the AIU teacher in Meknes from 1911 to 1916. AIU Maroc XXXII E 549.

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